DEREK WALCOTT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A ROOTED VISION

(POETRY and DRAMA)

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Since his first publications in the late forties, Derek Walcott has made a remarkable achievement as poet and dramatist. This thesis aims to trace his development towards a native vision in the corpus. It covers Walcott's published works in poetry and drama from 1949 to 1972. Another Life (New York, 1973), the latest book of poetry which establishes Walcott as a major writer on the world scene, was published too late to be included in this investigation. It was, however, consulted as work in progress, and bears upon our analysis at several important points.

Walcott evolves towards a vision of the region as an integral cultural entity whose destiny is in a renascence of the myth-making Imagination. It must start from an elemental self-exploration to fulfil the original purpose of such a role: to arrive at self-awareness in inventing new names for its new angst and aspirations. Both the need and potential for this renascence derive from history. The dislocations and abnegations of history have left Caribbean man a reduced, isolated figure in the New World. It is a position which returns him to the primal. In dislocating the peoples of the region from their parent myths, however, history has left the vestigial traces of these myths reduced to their essentials. This combines with the closeness to the elemental to make the sense of the archetypal immanent in the New World setting.

This means in essence that Walcott sees a native rehabilitation solely in terms of a self-dependent effort. It cannot be in terms of the recovery of the spiritual heritage of any parent tradition, such as the African. The routes which the myth-making Imagination must traverse preclude any such single orientation. In "What the Twilight Says", the classic essay which prefaces Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays

(New York, 1970), he expresses it thus: ". . . the darkness must be total, and the cave should not contain a single man-made, mnemonic object" (p.5). Placing emphasis on the self-creative effort, Walcott stands mainly for a critical attitude towards the shortcomings of his society, rather than a position of protest. His words in "What the Twilight Says" show how consistent this approach is with the vision outlined above. It is not merely the debt of history, Walcott explains, which is Caribbean man's claim to the New World, but the spiritual revelation to be attained in his effort to "name" his own modes of experience (p.17).

It is through his own self-exploration that Walcott arrives at these definitions. He starts with a keen sense of the denials of history. As the young colonial artist nurtured on Western tradition, he is confounded in his effort to identify the conflict in the master's terms. Overcoming this, he moves into a period of intense self-exploration to discover the true sources of the predicament in his unique circumstances. Walcott is dependent on the elemental principles of Mind for this effort, and it gives rise to overreaching strains. But he has identified a native image in the process, and found his bearings for resolving the residual conflicts of the effort. Coming to terms with them, he is able to "name" the destiny of the region, and articulate a native myth.

The pattern of this development is parallel in the poetry and the drama, which are complementary to each other in a unified achievement. The two are dealt with separately in this work: Part I deals with the poetry, and Part II, the drama. Thus treated, the complementary pattern between them is focussed more clearly. The emphasis in Walcott is on the individual effort. What emerges in his creative self-exploration in the poetry is authenticated in the original experience of the environ-

ment featured in the drama. This pivots on one essential link between the two. Walcott's persona dominates the poetry. In the drama, his main heroes are drawn from the most deprived and representative areas of experience in the region. They represent a pattern of experience which emerges as the direct counterpart to Walcott's own in the poetry - thus showing the rootedness of the vision.

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A Note on Footnotes

Footnotes are presented at the end of each chapter.

PART I

P O E T R Y

CHAPTER I

Prelude: from 25 Poems to Green Night

At the age of 16, Derek Walcott was already writing the poems that were to appear in 25 Poems (Barbados, 1949) and Epitaph for the Young (Barbados, 1949). Epitaph was in fact the very first work to be undertaken (December 1946), though completed after 25 Poems; and both were being worked on concurrently. Walcott raised the money for publication with his mother's help. He recalls this touching situation in "Leaving School": "Some months before, when I felt that I was ready to be 'published', I had sat on the landing of the stairs and asked my mother, who was sewing at the window, for two hundred dollars to put out a booklet of poems. She did not have that kind of money, and that fact made her weep but she found it, the book was printed, and I had hawked it myself on street corners, a dollar a copy, and made the money back".[1] He had, at that time, just completed his secondary school career. Such an early start is in itself remarkable, and when we examine these works it becomes, in fact, astonishing. A third volume of poetry, Poems (Jamaica, 1952) appeared during the second year of his undergraduate career at the University College of the West Indies.

These three volumes, produced between the ages of 16 and 21, together comprise the juvenilia. They were small editions and very soon went out of print. It is not surprising therefore that Walcott's literary biography is usually dated from his first international publication, In a Green Night (1962). But no true appreciation of the mature Walcott and his peculiar development as a Caribbean artist, can be made without a close look at the experience of these first three volumes and their relationship to In a Green Night. Like all juvenilia, they are strongly

autobiographical in content; additionally in his case, a record of the highly dramatic initiation into the craft of poetry of an adolescent in a small colonial island.

In a Green Night spans the period between the first poetic exercises in the late 40's and the beginning of Walcott's residence in Trinidad in the early 60's. By that time Walcott had completed his university career, gone through his first marriage, won a Rockefeller award to study theatre in America, and had just returned to the Caribbean to settle into a full-time artistic career - more than a decade of important developments and activities. The poems in the collection reflect these activities and movements, but Green Night remains a product of the earliest poetic awakening. Its spirit and aspirations evolve closely out of 25 Poems, Epitaph for the Young, and Poems. In fact, together these four volumes define a single phase in his literary career, and constitute a prelude to the whole endeavour.

Walcott himself showed a sense of the essential unity of this period not only by including poems from 25 Poems and Poems in the collection In a Green Night, but by prefacing the collection with one of his earliest poems, "I With Legs Crossed Along the Daylight Watch" (25 Poems).[2] The poem is entitled, significantly, "Prelude" in Green Night. It is significant for defining the basic attitudes and expectations that prevail during this first period, as we shall see later. It is also significant for the way it dramatises the specific conditions of Walcott's first entry into the art of poetry. Walcott, like his island, lies inert in the benighted conditions of a colonial outpost. Only the discovery of art, with its powerful though strenuous generative force, is able to arouse him out of this state:

I, with legs crossed along the daylight, watch
The variegated fists of clouds that gather over
The uncouth features of this, my prone island.

. . . .

Until from all I turn to think how
In the middle of the journey through my life
O how I came upon you, my
Reluctant leopard of the slow eyes.
(11.1-3, 23-26)

The image of art as the "reluctant leopard" suggests the qualities which Thoreau describes in his comparison of Nature to a leopard: "Here is this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; . . ." [3] The poetry of the earliest years does share in many of the qualities and attributes of Thoreau's leopard. There are the rhetorical postures in which Walcott howls against failure and negation. At the same time he is very fascinated by the power of the Word and seeks protection in its timeless solaces. These attitudes to art, however, are traditional, and might apply to the portrait of any artist as a young man. What makes them especially significant in his case is their close and vital relationship to the actual circumstances of his life. For if the juvenilia are, characteristically, very literary and imitative, their second main characteristic is their strong autobiographical content. The relationship between the two is fundamental at this stage. It is, in fact, organic. The particular areas and nature of the imitation are closely determined by the personal circumstances of his life. It is this sense of close personal experience which prevents us from saying that the imitativeness is fraudulent.

An Inevitable Vocation

In "Leaving School", the article earlier cited, Walcott gives an account of the conditions of life in his small community at that time.

For the young man leaving school, there were virtually no opportunities of pursuing a career, and the only alternative was the barren prospect of a life in the Civil Service. The ambitious ones who missed their one chance of escape through the annual Island Scholarship faced nothing but this frustrating prospect. He dwells on how, under these conditions, he came to develop the need to commit himself to an artistic vocation. Two main factors were responsible for his choice. The most original of these was Walcott's keen awareness of the example his own father had set. Warwick Walcott (1897-1931) died when Walcott and his twin brother, Roderick, were only one year old, his older sister Pamela three. His sudden death at such an early age had been a tragic one. Walcott honoured his memory in "In My Eighteenth Year" (25 Poems), entitled "Elegy" in Green Night. The maturity of its thought is impressive in a youth of eighteen:

> Having measured the years today by the calendar
> That tells your seventeenth death, I stayed until
> It was the honest hour to remember
> How the house has lived with and without you well.
> And I do not chide death's hand,
> Nor can I hurl death taunts or tantrums
> Because the washing faiths my father walked are no more light,
> And all the gulls that were tall as his dreams
> Are one with his light rotting in the sand.
>
> . . . .
>
> But greater than most is death's gift, that can
> Behind the bright dust that was the skeleton,
> (Who drank the wine and believed the blessed bread)
> Can make us see the forgotten price of man
> Shine from the perverse beauty of the dead.
> (11.1-17)

Warwick Walcott had been a fairly prominent member of his small community, a Civil Servant, and well-known as the leading light of a small cultural group. More importantly, he had been a draughtsman and painter of some merit, under whom Harold Simmons, the man who exerted the most lasting influence on Walcott's entire career, had studied. His memory was kept

alive for Walcott throughout his boyhood by what remained as testimony of his rare vocation: a few water colours, sketches, and a small library of books about his craft. One of the paintings to which Walcott refers, a copy of Millet's The Gleaners is now in the archives of the St. Lucia Archaeological and Historical Society. It has something of that delicacy of talent which Walcott hints at in the article. These objects inspired Walcott with a pious veneration for the man who had managed to entertain such ideals and practise them in a society where art was so foreign. For him the memory of his father was that of a talent unfulfilled. It aroused in him a passionate desire to carry on from where his father left off. He expresses the significance of this for his early dedication to a life of art: "These objects had established my vocation, and made it as inevitable as that of any craftsman's son, for I felt that my father's work, however minor, was unfinished."[4] He comes back to it again in "Meanings" , an article in which Walcott traces his artistic development. Speaking of the small group led by his father, which was responsible for the only cultural life the country could boast, he says: "I have an immense respect, in fact, an awe, for that kind of spiritual strength; I mean here was this circle of self-civilising, courteous people in a poverty-ridden, cruelly ignored colony living by their own certainties. So to begin as a poet was, for me, a direct inheritance. It was natural. I feel I have simply continued where my father left off." [5] A number of such small cultural groups seemed to provide original stimulus for quite a few of our artists in the various islands. C.L.R. James, the well known West Indian historian, and Michael Anthony the novelist, ascribe a similar role to such groups in the development of their writing careers.[6]

If his father's example instilled this early ambition in Walcott, it was Harold Simmons who was mainly responsible for nurturing

and helping it realise itself. Harold Simmons (1915-1966), who remains little known outside St. Lucia, is a figure emblematic and important in his own right, as we hope to show later. The extent of his influence on Walcott, however, would be alone enough to indicate his stature and make him of lasting interest. The part he played in strengthening Walcott's determination, providing him with intellectual stimulation, and influencing his early ideas about art and life cannot be overestimated. It is an important background to the first few years of creative vitality. Simmons was born in St. Lucia in 1915, of one of the better-educated middle-class families in the island. He was, as described in his obituary, "a man of many parts" [7] - a professional painter (water-colorist), Civil Servant, anthropologist, archaeologist, lepidopterist. Such talent and wide range of interests made him something of a prodigy in the St. Lucia of those times. His name is relatively unknown outside the island, but he was certainly among the first West Indian intellectuals of the 40's, and deserves to be known. In his ideas, work and cultural interests, he was one of the first to see the area in terms of a regional culture. In this respect he was probably well in advance of some of his contemporaries in the more developed islands. J.E. Clare McFarlane, for example, Poet Laureate of Jamaica during the early 50's, was still responding to the Jamaican landscape in Wordsworthian terms: "It is to nature, and to the intelligence that resides in nature, that we owe that refinement of the sensibilities which increases our enjoyment of life . . . This is the high argument of Wordsworth's poetry, and it is endorsed by every lover of nature blessed with a voice to proclaim it." [8] Simmons, in St. Lucia, was already engaged not only in painting the naked landscape and humble life of his island, but also in investigating its folklore and customs.[9] He pursued these interests as a member of the local archaeological society,

researching into the Amerindian remains in the island. Simmons also made attempts, despite the relative isolation of the islands from each other, to maintain some kind of communication with other artists in the region. Walcott comments on this in his "Tribute to a Master" at the time of his death: "He travelled widely throughout the archipelago, and was a federalist before the politicians made it an issue, helping to create a community of writers and painters among whom were Sybil Atteck and the late Edgar Mittelholzer." [10]

His main interest was, however, painting, which he chose as his profession. He was in fact a very fine water-colorist, and a number of water-colours depicting the land- and seascape of the island, native figures, remain as testimony of this talent. It required an intensity of dedication and rare sense of purpose to make a profession of painting in such a deprived community; and called for rare resources of character to counter the odds. Painting could only be, at best, a self-indulgent and self-supporting pastime. Simmons was totally committed to the ideal, and had the peculiar resources of an independent intellect necessary to pursue them. It was his example that urged Walcott to pursue his own vocation, and his encouragement helped to foster and make the ambition a reality in that early period. He served as patron and art tutor to Walcott and a few of his contemporaries interested in painting. Among them was St. Lucian Dunstan St. Omer, who is now one of the leading painters on the Caribbean scene. Walcott pays tribute to Simmons for his influence as mentor and tutor in a number of his earliest poems. He recalls the sessions when Simmons taught them to paint - "days of instruction at the soft villa" ("To a Painter in England", Green Night). The recently published Another Life (New York, 1973), begun a few years before Simmons' death, contains his greatest tribute to a master. [11] The book should bring Simmons the

lasting recognition he deserves. There Walcott explains the true value of Simmons' original vision as a pioneer of regional culture, which was one of the most formative influences on his pupils. He was the first to "see" and dedicate his talent to the native forms of the landscape. This gift of "seeing" and dedicating their art to the landscape was one major lesson his pupils learnt from him. Simmons also shared with them his wider experience of art and life: he had lived in England for some time while following a course in social work at the I.C.A. For them, as Walcott puts it, he was "a walking museum that contained knowledge of all styles".[12] As a free-thinker he stood out in a small religious community and he influenced their ideas of intellectual independence and self-sufficiency.

It was the absolute necessity of a selfless surrender to talent, however, which remained the first important lesson for his pupils. Simmons' own life bore out this necessity, though in the end it yielded to the hardships of the environment, and both the man and his art were defeated. His own interests and artistic temperament made it impossible for him to retain a job. He passed from a prominent post in the Civil Service to one as editor of the local newspaper, impatient with all organized means of earning a living which got in the way of his several cultural interests - painting, folklore, archaeology. But there was very little to sustain such interests. In the course of some ten to fifteen years of effort, Simmons began to yield to the frustrating conditions of the society. His gift, which had had very little chance of developing there, began to deteriorate. He grew more and more erratic and shiftless, and lost his will to work. In due course his artistic powers failed. He had stopped painting for a few years when he decided to give up life in society, and retreated to

a deserted rustic district called Piaille, some distance away from his native town. By then he faced total failure. He was penniless, a confirmed alchoholic, and had literally given away most of his work to various members of the community to get money for the next meal or drink. In Piaille he lived under conditions of acute poverty in an earthen-floored hut. Walcott, who once visited him there, was of the opinion that he was probably trying to start painting again.[13] This he never did. He committed suicide in May 1966 at Piaille. He was found with his wrists slashed and a suicide note. No one knows what finally took him over the edge. But that the failure of an intensely conceived vision, determined to dedicate itself to a "cruelly ignored" and ignoring island lay at the root of his tragedy, is immediately clear. As George Odlum, a St. Lucian contemporary of Walcott's, observed, the society was not yet ready for him.[14] His name is little remembered now, but for Walcott's tributes throughout the corpus, and a number of paintings in the homes of relatives and friends in St. Lucia. He has also left copious notes on his other cultural interests.[15] These are well worth investigating, and Simmons' achievement does need to be recognised.

This then was the man who provided the greatest stimulus to the early Walcott, beginning at the spirit of his initial selfless devotion to talent. Walcott recalls the importance of the latter in "Leaving School". Having failed to get a scholarship to get away from the island, he knew what lay ahead. Like all the others he would get a job in the Civil Service, followed by "brief periods of protest with idleness or drink, then /settle/ desperately into . . . early marriage, a large family, debt and heavy drinking".[16] Against these odds he made his choice: ". . . but since our apprentice days on Barnard's Hill, Dunstan and I knew what our professions were. We would be what we could

do, what we loved best. Mr. Simmons had set up that example."[17] Under these circumstances Walcott's initial commitment to art was bound to be intense, and the intensity has never flagged through a period of more than twenty years. Here too Simmons was responsible for another important influence. His own tenacious grasp on the landscape, cruel though it was to prove, came from the passionate love of a man who was truly rooted. Walcott himself, remaining in the West Indies throughout his entire career, shows something of the same tenacity. This, as will emerge, is one of the greatest strengths underlying his total achievement as a West Indian artist. He seems to have perceived something of its significance in Simmons' case from the very beginning. Writing as art critic for _Public Opinion_ in 1957, he has Simmons in mind when he says: "I do not think that there is any minority in the entire archipelago with more pride in the islands, with a deeper love for their own roots, with a more anguished sense of a people's suffering and progress, than the old men and their younger inheritors, who think that they write for themselves, who long for the metropolitan centres of civilization, temporarily conquer them, and then yearn for more than the sunlight, and the sea. They know where they are planted, and know where they should like to die."[18] Walcott himself was to go a long way before he reconciled his simultaneous love and anguish of landscape for something truly rooted.

It has been necessary to dwell on these major factors influencing Walcott's early choice, because they account in large measure for the intensity which characterises the first few years of creative activity. The intensity is manifested in a variety of ways. The very size of the output for an eighteen-year-old in his circumstances is evidence. In a couple of years, Walcott produced the volume of _25 Poems_, _Epitaph for the Young_ - an epic in twelve cantos - and was engaged in writing an auto-

biographical novel, which he later discarded. One other feature is immediately striking, even before we begin to analyse the contents of the juvenilia. He has read a prodigious amount of Western literature by this time. The range and depth of his reading seem almost precocious. The voices of Eliot, Joyce, Baudelaire, Dylan Thomas, Auden, Pound, the Greek classicists, Shakespeare are immediately recognisable. It is remarkable that Walcott even had access to these books. George Odlum, the St. Lucian contemporary of Walcott's referred to earlier, remembered their single and poorly-stocked local library, and wondered how Walcott had come by such material. Literary works came to the island mainly via the sixth form syllabuses, and were limited to basic things like Shakespeare and the classics. There were, however, a number of private individuals who came from larger and more progressive cultural centres, willing to encourage the enthusiasm of one who showed such rare interest in the arts. Walcott himself acknowledges a number of such benefactors in his writings. Apart from Harry Simmons, there was the Irish Presentation Brother who taught him at secondary school. He introduced him to the works of Joyce, who, along with Eliot, dominates the themes and style of Epitaph for the Young. His brother, himself an important Caribbean dramatist, recalls some of the individuals that supplied Walcott with these books. He writes: ". . . people such as Harry Simmons, James Rodway, one-time Inspector of Schools from Guyana, who introduced him to the English moderns such as Thomas, Spender, Auden, and Eliot . . . also people like Keith Alleyne, one-time Crown Attorney of St. Lucia, Lucille Mathurin-Mair, and a few others, mainly English expatriates."[19] Of these opportunities, Walcott made the greatest possible use. The immersion was thorough, and the intelligence with which he was able to absorb and penetrate the material is impressive.

Literary Apprenticeship

The effects of this prodigious absorption are immediately obvious in the juvenilia. They are highly imitative and literary, revealing all the typical weaknesses of literary apprenticeship. In Walcott's case, however, the imitation is not merely a matter of juvenile precocity. It bears very definite relationships to his individual situation. It is first of all, part of a serious, very self-conscious attempt to identify his role as an artist. At the same time, Walcott is striving to relate this role to the circumstances of the environment which affect him most closely.

The main themes in all three volumes deal with these two major preoccupations. There is a pervasive preoccupation with the artist in his capacity to suffer ("The Gay Plague", "Elegies", "In a Year", Private Journal" - all in 25 Poems). There is a keen concern with social conditions in the environment ("Montego Bay - Travelogue 11", "Margaret Verlieu Dies", "The North Coast at Night", "The Sunny Caribbean", all in Poems). In the Epitaph, however, written concurrently with 25 Poems (see page two), he sets out to bring these two together, and it is here that the various aspects of Walcott's effort are centralised. It is, therefore, a most convenient place to start.

In this work Walcott, as a representative quest figure, embarks upon an epic journey into experience on behalf of the doomed youth of his country. The journey progresses, or regresses, through the successive stages of life in twelve cantos: from boyhood and innocence, into adolescence and love, ambition, art and religion. Each new stage ends in negation and disillusionment, necessitating a fresh attempt to "fare forward". It is closely patterned on those of the major exponents of the modern odyssey: Joyce and Eliot. Walcott is himself the colonial

version of Stephen Daedalus, whom he describes in "Leaving School" as his "current hero".[20] Like Stephen he is disillusioned, iconoclastic, blasphemous and above all, highly conscious of his own persona as an artist. Eliot's shifting levels of expression in Four Quartets (1944) is his stylistic model, and he adopts from him as well the basic motifs of a destitute landscape.

The scale of this imitation is obvious from the outset. In the opening lines of Canto 1, Walcott follows Eliot closely in trying to evoke the image of his own burnt city, half of which was destroyed in the fire of 1948.[21] That fire, occurring in the same year that saw his birth as a poet, was an emblematic event in his life. He has immortalised it in "A City's Death by Fire" (Green Night), and returns to its significance in Another Life. Here however, the physical features of the burnt landscape are approximated to Eliot's heap of broken, spectral images:

> Howl o gate, cry o city.
> Bent forms poking among charred bankruptcies,
> Weeping smoke. The city bled papers next day, all night
> The clappertongued wind was manned with fire . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> Walk now where are
> Shards of houses in the dust blown streets,
> Empty faces in the ashen wind
> Rattling like signs near an abandoned lot.
>
> (Canto 1, 11.12-24)

When he passes from this to the social scene, we hear the mockery of a Stephen Daedalus as he describes these typical abuses:

> Ten zebra-clothed niggers in a palm cafe
> Beat on happy drums, their basic savagery.
> Black reckless waist of a dishwashing princess.
> 'Where is your culture?" Prejudice is white
> As the spittle from an estaminet.
>
> (Canto IV,11.1-5)

These are features and concerns in the landscape to which he is keenly responsive, and they form the background to his frustrated

attempts to "fare forward". So far, however, it is the virtuosity with which he has accommodated them to the rhythms and perspectives of his models that is most striking. As he penetrates further into the quest, withdrawing from the external and into the spiritual intensities of art and religion, the strains of this accommodating effort begin to appear. In these stages, Walcott as quest figure becomes totally identified with Stephen. To follow the progress of this total identification is to watch him drawing further and further away from the local suffering as he gets embroiled in reproducing the mythical ritual of Stephen's archetypal agony. In Canto IX, for example, he enters into an infernal experience in which Baudelaire's vision of corruption, Eliot and Joyce converge. The experience is explored in similar mythological allusions:

> Shall I be dragged by a wave to the bitter chambers,
> Where the wave like a sailor knocks all the nymphs,
> Vile kiss of the salt when the wind blows the spray
>
> . . . .
>
> Wrapping the unholy woman in my arms?
> The spasm of the moon is not worth the moon's white
> haired regret,
> Siren's seduction of adolescent Ulysses,
> Walking along the stomach of the sea, sea wrack, stone birds,
> carved figure-heads.
>
> (Canto IX,11.43-50)

Many of Walcott's sallies into the perplexities of art and belief lead him to such rhetorical postures in which the imagery is much more literary and directly transposed from his originals. But the effort has more than rhetorical significance. The postures of a Stephen Daedalus have original seductions for him. Like Stephen, he is the young man trying to find an asylum in art as he flees the frustrations of a barren community. Like Stephen, Walcott starts from an intense awareness of religion. In "Leaving School" he explains how, as a Methodist and outsider in a small community completely dominated by Catholicism, he developed a keen

sensitivity towards it. These are authentic parallels and they stimulate his effort to try and explore his own suffering through Stephen's modes of awareness. But Stephen's anguish has to do with a cultural and moral decadence at several removes from the peculiar emptiness of Walcott's own landscape. The rhetoric of his decadent myths remains unrelated. The approximation thus becomes merely literary and a matter of technique and dexterity. When, for example, he follows the archetypal progress of the journey, and enters the search for spiritual fatherhood, we admire the virtuosity with which Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare and Joyce are brought together:

> I made out as I were dreaming, my father's spirit in arms.
> And when the old mystery had ascertained that it
> Was he whose face I sought through life,
> And whom no filial memory could aid me by I said
> Bending my face to his
> "Are you here, Ser Brunetto?"
>
> (Canto VIII,11.73-78)

At such points, as in the earlier example, he has strayed far from the original sources of his anguish.

Walcott himself seems aware of the shortcomings of the situation, though perhaps not yet fully. He expresses some sense of disturbance at the discrepancy between his mode of suffering and the naked reality of the landscape from which he received his original impulses:

> A classical alas,
> For naked pickanninies, pygmies, pigs and poverty,
> Veiling your inheritance you kneel before
> The sessile invocation of the thrush, the sibilant yew trees,
> By broken and flaked languages, near a drying river,
> You practise the pieties of your conquerors,
>
> (Canto IV,11.36-41)

This expresses succinctly what is happening in the <u>Epitaph</u>. Keith Alleyne in an early review of the poem puts it thus: "The sources of West Indian language sometimes are at conflict with the sources of West Indian emotion."[22] Walcott is to feel the burden of this gap between

the language and the emotion more intensely much later. At this stage he is still primarily engaged in finding some point of contact between his own urge to suffer and its very real sources in the pain of his landscape. Within the Epitaph, there remains a cleavage between the two. We have seen how his efforts to approximate to classical modes lead him into rhetorical abstractions. At the other pole, there are expressions of bitter social protest. Eliot's flexible pattern in Four Quartets, which he closely adheres to, allows him to pass from the more reflective and allusive overtures, to more dramatic and factual modes of self-expression. The latter allows him scope to present the kind of social concerns and concrete factors that have provoked the original pain. At such points, Walcott gives vent to his feelings about the destitution of his "cruelly ignored colony", about race, and what it means to be a colonial Stephen Daedalus. Canto IV, for example, is devoted to an analysis of the colonial conditions responsible for cultural poverty in the region: "There is not a West Indian Literature". In this Canto he recreates the scene which he described in "Leaving School", a small colonial city in which all ambitions end in the cul-de-sac of the Civil Service, its victims transformed into mimic-men and eccentrics:

> They left school and soon became,
> Magna cum laude,
> Companions of inanity, knights of the order of rotgut,
>
> . . . .
>
> Died most as Suppressor of His Majesty's Conscience in the Colonies,
> Inspector of Civil Service lavatories.
> Vulgar, respectable, horrid at home, in the Forum, blest
> As fathers of their countries.
> Voucher and Report undid them, dulce indecorum est -
> Attachè to the Assistant Attachè.
> Requiescat in papier.
>
> (Canto IV,11.73-89)

In such satirical thrusts the bitterness is raw and unadulterated, and

it is obvious that these are original sources of acute anguish for him. The problems of race and colour arouse equal bitterness. He shows a keen sensitivity towards their social and cultural stigmas, and is very conscious of how these affect his own position in aspiring to the language of the master. This finds expression in a curiously inverted narcissism of skin - Walcott himself uses the phrase "Narcissus in his skin" in "Notebooks of Ruin" (Poems). The attitude emerges in a number of phrases which creep in every so often in the Cantos. For example:

> . . . and the will numbs remembering
> The paralysis of complexion.
>
> (Canto IV,ll.69-70)

and

> O cursed worst is this hospital of skin and groan
>
> (Canto X,l.96)

and finally, the line which was to incite Lamming to entitle his first novel In the Castle of My Skin (1953).[23]

> Why your complexion should have held you from me
> You in the castle of your skin, I the swineherd.
>
> (Canto III,ll.39-40)

Within the Epitaph, then, he fails to achieve a genuine rapprochement between these two aspects of his portrait as a young artist - the Walcott of classical suffering and the Walcott of local grievances. In the individual pieces in the other two volumes, except for the minority that survive into Green Night, the cleavage becomes more apparent. It manifests itself first of all, in a clear distinction between the poems that fall into a more reflective category, and those of a more public kind. The reflective group is represented by things like "A Letter to a Sailor", "Saint Judas", "The Yellow Cemetery", (all in 25 Poems); and "The Absolute Sea", "The Cracked Playground", "Ex Ore Infantum" (in Poems). The public

group include "Travelogue" (25 Poems), "Montego Bay - Travelogue 11", "Kingston by Daylight", "The North Coast at Night", "The Sunny Caribbean", (all in Poems). In both these groups very much the same themes preoccupy him as in the Epitaph.

In the reflective group he dwells on the themes of disillusionment, finitude, artistic martyrdom and the solace the artist finds in "the authority of despair" (1.163, "The Cracked Playground", Poems). The same authentic impulses do inform most of these themes, and they are propelled into similar types of internalisations. (In the plays of this period, Henri Christophe (Barbados, 1950), and Harry Dernier (Barbados, 1951), the same propensity predominates, as we shall see in Part II.) In a poem like "Saint Judas", Walcott finds in the paradox of Judas' fate an occasion to pursue his preoccupation with the theme of man reacting against cosmic despair. He sees Judas' betrayal as a symbolic act of divinity, through which the sinner transcended his sin to attain sainthood: so that his very damnation had been the condition of his salvation. Judas, outraged at the insuperable principle of human defeat which he foresaw in the destiny of the Master, had acted out of profound love to forestall fate itself. Walcott dramatises the dialectic in a manner reminiscent of the "brilliance of /Stephen's/ reasoning" in the Epitaph:

> Death is the guest of the bone, and the running ribs
> Pace for a while, but doom is patient, a glory
> To God's legend was timely the red crime I did:
> Stays on the hill of the three trees as foul side of the story,
> But I graced no less Gods's will by my cradleborn crime.
> For deep in the night of bread in the speaking hush of the wine,
> I hated the thorns he foretold; . . .
>
> (11.15-21)

The poem is most striking for Walcott's handling of imagery, in which the influence of Dylan Thomas is immediately apparent. It is a very close reproduction of Thomas' startling combinations of metaphors, which

transfuse religious experience into organic physical processes: "running ribs", "hush of the wine", "the silver blood", "walking corn". At such points imitation is sheer aesthetic exercise. The effects are in fact weaker than in the Epitaph. In the latter he found in Stephen a figure through whose consciousness he could try to reenact his own metaphysical concerns. In such individual pieces, Walcott is without this kind of prop, and these concerns become much more generic and intangible, finding substance only in verbal texture. He is engaged in a similar exercise when, taking his cue from the apocalyptic Whitman, he celebrates the conquest of Death through the continuity of Nature ("The Yellow Cemetery", 25 Poems). This prodigious talent for manipulating metaphor is to remain one of the lasting characteristics of Walcott's style. We get a hint of its value for him at this stage in these words from an elegy on Hart Crane: " . . . he had/Already seen complexity go mad/In the asylum, metaphor" (11.23-25, "Hart Crane", Poems). The important point here however, is that he draws further away from any authentic impulses and modes of communication in such generic themes, and must fall back on sheer literary performance. At the other extreme, he becomes engaged in self-indulgent and sentimental concern with his own pain, and degenerates into traditional versification of the worst kind. In these lines from "The Cracked Playground" (Poems) he resorts to such stock and lifeless imagery:

> Where is the crack that founders boyish hulls,
> There is no wreck, only a leaking theme.
> The moral is the single skeletal autumn,
> The plot is Time, silence and brown rust edge . . .
>
> (11.48-51)

The tone and substance of the poems in the public group are remarkably different from those we have just been considering. They show, in number as well as in sentiment, an equally strong pull towards the social grievances expressed in the Epitaph. One is therefore struck by the

fact that these concerns are kept so separate from the more reflective group - that there is such a sharp divergence between the metaphysical overtures of a piece like "Saint Judas" and the bald protest of a representative poem like "Montego Bay - Travelogue 11" (Poems). Here again is evidence of two voices awaiting some kind of rapprochement. The following lines from the latter poem are typical of his tone and attitude in that group:

> Encourage the false grin for the Woman's Magazine,
> Dress all the waiters to blend with the tropic scene,
> Irrigate the shy scholar's dry pedantic tongue
> Make the grey actress young.
>
> (11.9-12)

And again, in "The North Coast at Night" (Poems):

> Whom travel may appoint
> As visitors to islands,
> Now may forget the blunt
> Betrayal of Europe; . . .
>
> (11.13-16)

Walcott is most consistently engaged in denouncing the distortions of the tourist image of the island paradise. He attacks the metropolitan visitors for so attempting to gloss over the abject conditions that are largely a result of their colonial abuses. He attacks the natives as well for their own complicity in helping the visitors perpetuate these deceptions, and is contemptuous of the petty greed and self-prostitution behind it. These accusations are very emotional in tone. Later on, as he gained more control over his feelings and his medium, he was able to distance himself enough from these grievances and treat them with more circumspection. In those early years of intellectual arousal, these abuses provoked a keen sense of outrage. The latter was in fact inseparable from his own personal frustration with the conditions that threatened to leave his own ambitions unfulfilled, like those of so many others in the region. These

sentiments are perhaps at their most naked in the Epitaph, where he mocks the reception his first published book of poems had received in social circles:

> By 25 gestures of a lame mind,
> The privately prejudiced pretended to be tamed,
> Conjured abstractions seem to have succeeded
> Where direct application would have failed,
> Minutely bloated to a fair proportion,
> They fawned over the fact my mind was maimed
> Dissected at each tea-party the surprising abortion
> Of my contradicting colour . . .
>
> (Canto X,11.41-48)

His reactions against the tourist image of the islands are in the same vein, though the animus is not as energetic. In the poems being considered, Walcott combines a much more facile sarcasm with a heavy didactic attitude, for which he often summons Death as the great leveller, to avenge all abuses. The gesture is one of helplessness, suggesting that he is not yet able to handle such emotional issues. It is reflected as much in the awkward insistence of the language as in its burden:

> . . . . nothing will teach
> The islands of flesh, the umbrellas on the beach,
> But death, like a smiling croupier, fixing the wheel
> For the blonde in sunglasses and the expensive shoes
> And the fisherman crushing a season under his heel.
>
> ("The Sunny Caribbean", 11.26-30)

In his efforts to explore his personal anguish within an artistic medium, Walcott has moved between archetypal and local concerns, with these resultant weaknesses. In the Epitaph there is a dramatic though unsuccessful attempt to bridge this gap; while, in the majority of the poems in the other two volumes, he fluctuates between reflective and public themes closely informed by his own sense of defeat and frustration. He strays, in these directions, into various types of literary performance in which the genuine feeling is unrealised because too rhetorical or

hysterical. Professor R.J. Owens, reviewing a Bim anthology of Caribbean poetry, identifies this failing in Walcott's early poetry and expresses it thus: "At present he still lacks an integrating grasp on his material, a lack deriving - the poetry itself is the warrant for the suggestion - from some deeper personal frustration. . . . One has a sense that this experience is as yet intractable, unresolved, and that to it is due that unconvincingly insistent element in his poetry, an attitude willed rather than felt, an 'ought to feel' rather than 'do feel'."[24] It is only when Walcott does anchor his personal anguish as a frustrated young artist in the concrete experience from which it arises that the feeling becomes realised, freed from the rhetoric of imitation and literary insistence. Among the few poems in which he achieves this integrity, "I With Legs Crossed Along the Daylight Watch" is a striking example. In this poem, Walcott succeeds in grasping his own predicament as one with that of his landscape, and this at-onement is graphically realised from the opening image:

> I with legs crossed along the daylight watch
> The variegated fists of clouds that gather over
> The uncouth features of this my prone island.
>
> Meanwhile the steamers that disturb our lost horizons
> prove
> Us lost.
>
> (11.1-5)

The posture is one of abandonment, and the 'uncouth features' of the landscape and languid glare of daylight, convey a disturbing sense of vacancy that is as much Walcott's as that of his island's. His own mood blends so intimately with that of the landscape that the "I" of the opening line moves naturally to the forceful clarity of 'Us lost" in line 5. It is the same concern that provided his heavy attacks on the false image of the island paradise, but here the experience of abandonment is imaginatively and sensitively captured from the island's own

distant perspective:

> Us lost.
> Found only
> In tourist booklets, behind ardent binoculars;
> Found in the pale reflection of eyes
> That know cities, and think us here happy.
>
> (11.5-9)

Through this total empathy Walcott has achieved a sincerity of utterance at once subdued and dramatic. When he turns his gaze from the landscape to contemplate his own prospects, it is a natural transition, and the desire to stir himself out of a prostrate condition arises out of needs that are as much his own as his island's. There seems, however, very little chance of breaking out of it. His own poetic aspirations are a long way from being realised, and he is far too young to assume the postures of cynicism. The only prospects for action lie in repeating the empty gestures of approaching manhood. Walcott goes through this mock exercise with Prufrock-like inertia:

> I go of course through all the isolated acts,
> Make a holiday of situations;
> Straighten my tie and fix important jaws;
>
> (11.18-20)

These gestures are, of course, static, meaningless. So that the sudden arrival of the "reluctant leopard", art, slowly forcing its way through the monotony, is greeted with a note of quiet rapture:

> O how I came upon you, my
> Reluctant leopard of the slow eyes.
>
> (11.25-26)

In this poem, Walcott captures the genuine rhythms of his experience, and finds a voice purged of all the excesses occurring in the poems so far considered. The integrity it achieves is part of the clarity with which he discovers what are to prove the most original bearings of the early poetry. "I With Legs Crossed . . ." dramatises Walcott's

sudden awakening to the promise of poetry, and focuses on the close relationship between this and his poignant experience of the landscape in which it was aroused. The promise of his craft is the promise of an awakening for himself as well as his landscape. It involves an implicit pledge of his talent to the experience of the landscape, and is representative of the spirit of the other poems in the juvenilia which survive into the Green Night collection. The majority of them occur in 25 Poems: "As John to Patmos", "Letter to a Painter in England", "A City's Death by Fire", "The Fishermen Rowing Homeward" (see note 2). In all these poems, Walcott discovers a similarly authentic voice in expressing some aspect or other of this dual pledge to craft and landscape. The most direct expression of the spirit of this pledge is in the well-known "As John to Patmos", where it takes the form of an exultant panegyric:

> As John to Patmos, among each love-leaping air,
> O slave, soldier, worker under red trees sleeping, hear
> What I swear now, as John did,
> To praise lovelong the living and the brown dead.
>
> (11.15-18)

Or in an anguished appeal to Harry Simmons, the man who was so influential in fostering its spirit:

> Where you rot under the strict, grey industry
> Of cities of fog and winter fevers, I
> Send this to remind you of personal islands
> For which Gauguins sicken, and to explain
> How I have grown to learn your passionate
> Talent with its wild love of landscape.
>
> (11.1-6)

These pledges and aspirations were being made in some of the earliest individual pieces, written in 1948 even while Walcott was more deeply involved in appropriating his literary, rhetorical modes of suffering in the Epitaph. They represent his most fresh, spontaneous responses to the call of poetry. The classical apprenticeship, related as it was to his

personal situation, was to leave an important and lasting element in his work: an innate sense of archetypes, which is of fundamental value in his final vision. It is, however, to this spontaneous group that Walcott returns when, thirteen years later, he makes his selection for In a Green Night. We will see how closely he follows their essential bearings in the poetry of the next decade, as a result of which the whole period from 1948 to the publication of Green Night forms a single prelude to the development of his vision.

In A Green Night

Between the prolific output of the first three volumes and the publication of Green Night ten years later, Walcott was well embarked upon his literary career, and had broadened the scope of his experience considerably. While at U.C.W.I. he turned his attention to drama seriously, and a number of important plays were written about the same time as Poems, among which was Sea at Dauphin (Trinidad, 1966). He married Jamaican-born Faye Moyston in 1953. They had a son, Peter, in 1956, and were divorced by 1957. Drums and Colours (Jamaica, 1961), a play commissioned for the inauguration of the first Federal Parliament of the newly federated West Indies, was written in 1957, and won him a Rockefeller award to study theatre in America in 1958. He returned to Trinidad in 1959 and founded the Little Carib Theatre Workshop during that year.

During those years he established his reputation as the leading poet in the West Indies, both at home and abroad. On the local scene his poems appeared regularly in Bim, Caribbean Quarterly and Kyk-over-al, the three main periodicals of the region. On the international scene, his poems were broadcast on Henry Swanzy's B.B.C. programme,

"Caribbean Voices". Walcott also contributed regularly, from the late 50's, to English and American periodicals - among the English ones, London Magazine and Encounter. By 1960, Alan Ross, editor of London Magazine was assuring Walcott that he could get him published in England. In 1961, Ross submitted the manuscript to Jonathan Cape, and In a Green Night was published by mid-year 1962.

Walcott arranged the poems in chronological and thematic sequence, the two usually coinciding in his collections. The first group are six poems from 25 Poems, which have already been cited: "I With Legs Crossed . . . ", here entitled "Prelude" as already observed; "As John to Patmos"; "In My Eighteenth Year", here entitled "Elegy"; "A City's Death by Fire"; "To a Painter in England", and "The Fishermen Rowing Homeward", here entitled "The Harbour". The second group, written during his period in Jamaica, include important poems like "Ruins of a Great House" and "Tales of the Islands". Next come a number of poems written during the year in America, with things like "A Letter from Brooklyn", followed by those written between this and the publication of the volume. Throughout this sequence there is an essential unity in the spirit of the poetry from the 25 Poems group to the later pieces. This will emerge more fully later, but it can be seen from a cursory glance at the earliest and later poems. There is the same quality of involvement with landscape in the six poems heading the collection, as in a group of poems first appearing in London Magazine[25] in 1960. These are "A Sea-Chantey", "A Map of the Antilles", "En Mi-Careme", and "Pays Natal". In "As John to Patmos" Walcott pledged his craft to the service of his islands: "To praise lovelong the living and brown dead". In "A Sea-Chantey" - which won a Guiness award in 1961 - Walcott's modes of celebration are far more skilful, but he is engaged

in a similarly joyful and lyrical expression of this love of landscape:

Anguilla, Adina,
Antigua, Cannelles,
Andreuille, all the l's,
Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles,
The names tremble like needles
Of anchored frigates,
Yachts tranquil as lilies,
In ports of calm coral,

(11.1-8)

These are among the opening and closing notes of the collection - affirmative celebrations of such aspects of his landscape. Between them the less exotic and more painful lineaments also enter. But the affirmative spirit of these celebrations bears important relationships to Walcott's basic approach and attitudes throughout the period.

The poems in In a Green Night fall into two major groups - those in which he is engaged in capturing the concrete aspects of his landscape, human and physical; and those in which he engages in moral reflections on the nature of reality and his own struggles with the problems of belief. To take the most outstanding ones, the former group is represented by his sonnet sequence "Tales of the Islands"; and the latter by the title poem, "In a Green Night". The title itself, taken from Marvell's "Bermudas", serves as a unifying motif for these two main strains in the volume. There is first, Walcott's awareness of the greenness of his world, fresh, unexplored, and with its unique possibilities shining through its sad aspects. Secondly, the "green night" image serves as a metaphysical symbol in Marvell's sense, through which the comprehending heart can embrace the conflicting aspects of reality.

These two main groups are not of course strictly separate from each other. There are important links between them both

thematically and technically, and they share the same voice and rhythms. It is immediately obvious, however, that the majority of the poems belong in the first group in recreating the physical, human and social aspects of the scene. Most of the reviewers of Green Night, foreign and local, responded to the strongly realised presence of the Caribbean in the poems. The English reviewer tended to respond to it more in terms of exotica. Charles Causeley of the Birmingham Post expresses it thus: "The imagery and colouring of many of his poems are West Indian in origin and may at first be thought to captivate merely by their unfamiliar and exotic qualities. But if these properties are removed, the core of poetry remains, as in the closing lines of a moving poem on Africa."[26] C.L.R. James, as a native of the Caribbean, sees its more concrete significance: "What is the world that he is seeing? It is the West Indies, islands, the sea that surrounds them, and the people, noticeably often, fishermen. . . . I have a curious feeling that much of what he will have to say will be found in these waters. Here he is at home and at ease, a rare achievement among our public figures."[27] There are a number of poems that are devoted to capturing exotic aspects of the landscape, but the substance of much of what he presents, as James recognised, goes much deeper than this. He deals with its human condition extensively in a sequence like "Tales of the Islands" and "A Country Club Romance" (entitled "Margaret Verlieu Dies" in Poems); with social and racial issues in such well-known poems as "A Far Cry From Africa" and "Ruins of a Great House". His most serious and sustained focus on the environment is in "Tales of the Islands". In this sequence of ten sonnets Walcott journeys through the landscape observing various scenes in the lives of its people. Most of these are scenes of individual defeat, and turn on moral and tragic ironies, some of which are

closely related to the perverse effects of a colonial aftermath. He examines these conditons in the cases of a few sad derelicts, most of them, incidentally, authentic personalities in his own island. In Chapter II, Cosimo de Chretien is a white French Creole who can still trace his lineage to the French nobility once ruling the island. He finds himself displaced now in a black community, and becomes an oddity as he clings to the illusions of past splendour in trying to maintain the purity of his blood. He ends a curiously wasted victim of these delusions as he "/peers/ from balconies for his tragic twist". Miss Rossignol of Chapter III clings to similar illusions of race and past splendour, which leave her in the withered condition of "a tattered saint", her life defined by her role as the cathedral crone. He presents another type of victim in the figure of old Le Brun, the local werewolf who suffers a mysteriously evil death when a strange dog is struck a blow - thus illustrating the tragic intensity of superstitious beliefs in a small community. He moves to a more urban setting in Chapter IV, presenting a permissive scene devoid of any sense of moral responsibility. Throughout these varying portraits of the local scene Walcott is mainly concerned in showing how inherent human weaknesses, responding to conditions peculiar to the society, bring its people to the universal experience of defeat. His approach is essentially humanistic.

It is the particular form in which these tragic twists are enacted, however, that make these portraits so effective, and expressive of the nature of his main interests and purposes in the whole sequence. He shows great originality in adapting the sonnet form for a tight narrative and descriptive mode somewhat foreign to its traditionally lyrical and reflective purposes. He achieves, in fact, an

interesting blend between the narrative style of the ballad and the moral dialectic of the sonnet. The two are combined through a skilful ironic technique. Walcott follows the pattern of the sonnet closely enough, though he does not adhere rigidly to the structural scheme of an octet and sestet. In the tale of Cosimo de Chretien, for example, the first ten lines correspond to the octet and the last four to the sestet of the traditional sonnet. Cosimo's situation is dramatised in what corresponds to the octet: the scene is set with an economy of narrative description which gives us the picture of Cosimo in the faded splendour of his distant lineage:

> . . . . Upstairs, the family sword,
> The rusting ikon of a withered race,
> Like the first angel's kept its pride of place,
> Reminding the bald count to keep his word
> Never to bring the lineage to disgrace.
>
> (11.6-10)

The narrative advances in this ironic presentation of Cosimo's pride. The "tragic twist" follows hard on it, corresponding to the moral reversal of the sestet. It rises to the more powerful strains of a finality of insight, opening with the line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 19:

> Devouring Time, which blunts the Lion's claws,
> Kept Cosimo, count of curios fairly chaste,
> For Mama's sake, for hair oil, and for whist;
> Peering from balconies for his tragic twist.
>
> (11.11-14)

If poetic pattern allows Walcott to achieve these moral resonances, it is the strongly localized effects of the narration which make his achievement more remarkable. He succeeds in dramatising the concrete features, the idiom and personality of these local scenes with what seems like great narrative ease. The famous opening lines of

Chapter VI are most typical of this kind of accomplishment:

> Poopa, da' was a fete! I mean it had
> Free rum free whisky and some fellars beating
> Pan from one of them band in Trinidad
> (11.1-3)

These effects were not achieved overnight, but were the result of several years of patient labour. Walcott himself stated this in a prefatory note to the editor when he submitted an earlier version of the "Tales" to Bim.[28] "What I have been trying to do with them over the last five years is to get a certain factual, biographical plainness about them. I suppose the idea is to do away with the prerogative of modern prose in narration. Also to dislocate the traditional idea of the sonnet as a fourteen-line piece of music. The idea is the same as in prose; dispassionate observation."[29] The movement towards prose - it becomes much stronger in his work later on - is of vital significance for Walcott's purposes in the "Tales". It avails him of the techniques of capturing the living accent, style and personality of the landscape, as he does in "Poopa, da' was a fete . . .". The "Tales" are more intensively revised in Green Night, and most of the emendations show Walcott striving further to reproduce indigenous features and the local idiom. They all show evidence of this intensive revision, but it will suffice to look at Chapter VI, as space does not permit further illustrations. Moreover, the emendations are most thorough in this poem, and representative of the general drift. Both the Bim and Green Night versions will be quoted in full, and the emendations indicated by underlines in each version:

1) Bim version

Chapter 6

"my country 'tis of thee"

Garcon, that was fete - I mean they had
Free whisky and they had some fellows beating

Steel from one of the bands in Trinidad,
And everywhere you turn people was eating
Or drinking and so on and I think 5
They catch two guys with his wife on the bench,
But 'there will be nothing like Keats, each
Generation has its angst, and we have none,"
And he wouldn't let a comma in edgewise
(Black writer, you know, one of them Oxford guys), 10
And it was next day in the papers that the heart
Of a young child was torn from it alive
By two practitioners of the native art.
But that was far away from all the jump and jive.

2) Green Night version

Chapter VI

Poopa, da' was a fete! I mean it had
Free rum free whisky and some fellars beating
Pan from one of them band in Trinidad
And everywhere you turn was people eating
And drinking and don't name me but I think 5
They catch his wife with two tests up the beach
While he drunk quoting Shelley with "Each
Generation has its *angst*, but we has none"
And wouldn't let a comma in edgewise.
(Black writer chap, one of them Oxbridge guys.) 10
And it was round this part once that the heart
Of a young child was torn from it alive
By two practitioners of native art,
But that was long before this jump and jive.

The changes from the Bim to the Green Night version are all working towards a more vernacular style, which becomes effective in dramatising both the tone and spirit of a peculiarly West Indian occasion. There are several kinds of changes that help to achieve these effects. In line 1, there are changes from standard to dialect usages, for example that → da, and they had → it had. In some cases standard usages are replaced by colloquial terms, such as fellows → fellars in line 2, steel → pan in line 3, and guys → tests in line 6. Walcott also alters some details of the narration for greater dramatic and rhythmic effects, as in line 2, where Free whisky and they had becomes Free rum free whisky and. The change captures the non-stop pace of the drinking and feting quite smoothly. Most effective for conveying both the spirit

of the occasion and its local character is the complete change from formal grammatical expression to an idiomatic style in lines 7 and 8. While he drunk in line 7 immediately introduces a typically West Indian posture, and sets the tone for the supremely eloquent change from we have none to we has none in line 8. The grammatical lapse is not only typical of the West Indian vernacular, but draws attention to a pseudo-intellectual tone that suits well with the spirit of the fete. To achieve such thorough effects - and Chapter VI is typical - Walcott returned to the "Tales" again and again between 1952 when they were first written, and their final appearance in this form in 1962.

What we see in "Tales of the Islands" is Walcott exploiting his craft to the full in order to reproduce the living accent and condition of the landscape. When we look at the other poems dealing with landscape we see a remarkable versatility in the variety of forms he adapts, and a similar competence in the handling of these forms. In "A Country Club Romance", among the better poems in the collection, Walcott deals with a theme similar to those encountered in the "Tales" - Miss Gautier, a white socialite, comes to a tragic end when she marries a black Barbadian and is ostracized from her society. Here Walcott follows Auden's modern adaptation of the ballad form for ironic purposes. Yet another form is adapted for the nostalgic evocation of the haunting beauty of its land- and seascape in "Pays Natal": here the Elizabethan love lyric blends with the pastoral. As with the sonnet form in the "Tales" he seems quite free in adapting them for his own purposes. This is obviously a period in which he is mainly engaged in exploiting his talent as a practitioner, experimenting with different forms and exercising his control over the medium. It is an expression of the vitality which has come with the discovery of his

"reluctant leopard of the slow eyes". He is moreover, fulfilling the pledge implicit in the prelude and expressed in "As John to Patmos" - to exercise his craft in the service of his region. "Tales of the Islands", in subject-matter and technical concentration, is the classic realisation of these promises. In "Roots", one of the later poems, he states again the major purposes that inform the character and attitudes of In a Green Night:

> May this make without pomp, without stone acanthus,
> In our time, in the time of this phrase, a "flowering
> of islands",
> The hard coral light which breaks on the coast, near
> Vieuxfort, as lucent as verse should be written;
> Make the rice fields and guinea-corn waving,
>
> (11.11-15)

Here again, it is the dedication of craft to capturing the naked features of the landscape.

The spirit of these pledges and intentions are, as we have seen, essentially affirmative. It is consistent with Walcott's prevailing attitudes and predispositions at this stage. We have already seen how the lyrical joy of "As John to Patmos" survives into the later pieces like "A Sea-Chantey". Even where he is evoking the pathos of its beauty, the positive aspects of this lyrical attachment come through. In these lines from "Pays Natal", there is a keen sensuousness at once poignant and erotic:

> I might . . .
> I might have gathered those senses in my arms,
> As weary fishermen their honest seines.
>
> (11.24-25)

The breathless suspension of the first line, the authentic correspondence between "senses" and "seines", and the original sincerity of the simile - all these combine to convey the depth of his attachment. There

is, however, very real pain in his concern with the serious problems of the region. Yet his treatment of these problems in the "Tales" reveals a moral outlook that is related in important respects to the affirmative approach of the more lyrical poems. Walcott's humanistic treatment of the "tragic twists" in the lives of his characters is far removed from the rhetorical bitterness of the juvenilia. There is now a delicate poise between irony and pathos, as in the stories of Cosimo de Chretien and Miss Rossignol; now a sensitive portrayal of the dementia of Franklin, the expatriate whose nervous attachment to a foreign landscape proves near-destructive. He resorts to trenchant irony in things like "Poopa, da' was a fete! . . .", where the lack of values in a hedonistic society is bitterly decried. His ultimate concern in these changing portraits is with the susceptibilities and failings that define their generic human condition. In the letter to Bim, Walcott speaks of his effort to achieve the perspective of the "detached observer" in the "Tales".[30] Through the balance between irony and pathos - the technique of the humanist - he has attained this distance. It is the distance between the bitterness of his grievances in the juvenilia, and his ability to capture the pathos as well as the beauty of the landscape as he sees it. Through that marriage of craft and love of landscape which now preoccupies him, Walcott has found new purpose and confidence, as a result of which the personal frustration of the juvenilia has been distanced. It is this which accounts for the lull we now find in this volume, a lull after the unaccommodated grief of the earlier poetry. It comes through in the calmer, more circumspect humanism of the "Tales", and is most remarkable in his treatment of such sensitive issues as race and colour, as we shall see in "Ruins of a Great House" and "A Far Cry from Africa". This lull is to be a temporary one: the conflicts and tensions are to be

resumed in The Castaway (1965), with a lucidity which gives the suffering a true intensity. At this point, however, the calm and confidence expressed in the spirit of the "Prelude" do prevail, imparting a more sober, positive predisposition.

This outlook emerges clearly in the reflective poems, where he is directly engaged in defining his attitudes to race and history, and expressing his philosophical bearings. The title poem "In a Green Night" is the culminating and most articulate expression of this positive outlook. Its significance as a unifying theme becomes clearer at this point. Walcott has a strong propensity to dwell on the cosmic dimensions of his moral concerns. It is part of what he describes in "Steersman, My Brother" (Green Night) as his "mastery of argument with God". A propensity left from the early days of his identification with Joyce's hero, it survives through his entire development. Here he takes his cue from Marvell to expound his own vision of the "comprehending heart" which can, in its wisdom, embrace both the positive and negative aspects of existence. Marvell's "Bermudas" is a eulogistic sea-chantey, celebrating God's plenty in a region of "eternal spring". The spiritual burden is implicit in its lyrical praise. Walcott finds the kernel of his idea in these lines:

> He gave us this eternal spring,
> Which here enamels everything,
>
> . . . .
>
> He hangs in shades the orange bright,
> Like golden lamps in a green night,
>
> (11.13-18)

The strongly visualised image of the bright orange tree in shadowy surroundings serves as Walcott's emblematic metaphor, and he takes it as a point of departure for developing his moral argument. The argument

proceeds with the classical balance and precision typical of the metaphysical style. The emblematic significance of the image lies in its "various light", the simultaneous effects of light and dark. In an earlier version of the poem published in <u>New Statesman</u>, the phrase reads "varying light".[31] The change to "various light" in <u>Green Night</u> emphasises the importance of the idea of simultaneity for his meaning. It symbolises the coexistence of the dual aspects of reality in which youth and age, promise and decay are simultaneously continuous, which is a manifestation of the one organic ryhthm of life. (This is the kernel of an important idea which develops much later in Walcott's career - his concept of a view of Time in which all reality is simultaneous, and which he finds best expressed in the works of Jorge Luis Borges). This simultaneous process points to dimensions of reality far nearer to the truth than Marvell's single "eternal spring" -"Zones truer than the tropical". For him the image of the orange tree, at once bright and shadowy, green and ageing, is a fable of the cosmic balance between promise and failure, fulfilment and negation. He expresses its personal significance:

> Or if Time's fires seem to blight
> The nature ripening into art,
> Not the fierce noon or lampless night
> Can quail the comprehending heart.
>
> (11.25-28)

Through these insights Walcott calmly affirms the kind of moral strength to which he aspires - an acceptance which will enable him to embrace the conflicting aspects of reality, and especially as they might beset his own experience as man and artist. The poem itself attains this "ripeness" in the fullness of its expression:

> The orange tree, in various light
> Proclaims that fable perfect now
> That her last season's summer height
> Bends from each over-burdened bough.
>
> (11.29-32)

The spirit behind such affirmations is a positive one, and comes from a state of relative calm and confidence. It is, finally, the expression of Walcott's own sense of a hold on things.

The moral tone is characteristic of the speculative pieces in the volume. It finds expression, as in the above poem, in a classical approach to the order and balance in things, typical of Renaissance literature. Walcott was immersed in the Renaissance period by this time. There are references to such thinkers as Thomas Traherne, Sir Thomas Browne; and more extensively, the thought and style of the metaphysicals, for example, Donne in "Ruins of a Great House". Walcott came into contact with this literature as an undergraduate, and the influence of this period has now superseded that of the moderns. It is no mere slavish imitation. As with Eliot and Joyce, he responds to affinities in them according to his prevailing cast of mind. These are expressed, as in the case of Marvell's poem, in his own terms. He is drawn mainly to the spirit of their moral affirmations and humanistic thought during this period.

The perspective exists at more than just the metaphysical level of "In a Green Night". It is responsible for the remarkable change in his attitude towards race and history earlier suggested, as is clearly illustrated in "Ruins of a Great House". The poem was hailed by many critics as a most mature comment on the colonial grievance. In this poem, Walcott shows how the bitterness of these grievances is overcome when the "comprehending heart" sees the experience within the context of universal human suffering. He examines the issue

in relation to Donne's timeless definition of the brotherhood of man in the Devotions.

Walcott starts out observing the site of one of the Great Houses which flourished during the days of slavery. As he contemplates its ruins, the stench and decay of the scene are external features reeking of "the leprosy of Empire". It provokes the old sense of outrage expressed in the juvenilia, and he reflects bitterly on the perversions and guilt of those leading European explorers and seamen responsible for initiating the whole experience. Confronted with such violations, he sees Donne's words as mere mockery, and is doubly provoked by its rhetoric. The relevant passage from "For whom the bell tolls" reads: "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe: every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, . . . as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any man's death diminishes me, . . ."[32] Walcott's anger gives way to compassion, however, as he reflects on the intrinsic truth of these words. England too like his own region has suffered her own violations and betrayals, and they are all part of universal human experience. The argument comes to a close in pointing to the fundamental analogy between Donne's 'Mannor of thy friends" and the ruins of the Great House. The poem is in fact more impressive for the development of this dialectic and an argument well rounded off than for any genuinely realised conflict and resolution. The conflict and rage which the ruins provoke are predetermined to serve this balanced conclusion, and are not genuinely felt. This comes through in the insincerity of the language. Walcott relies on some rather crude affective metaphors to convey a sense of intense reaction to the corruption:

> The world's green age then was a rotting lime
> Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.
> The rot remains with us, the men are gone.
>
> (11.35-37)

The heavy reliance on the image of rot is typical of the coarse gestures he uses for emotional heightening throughout the description of the scene. The change from anger to compassion is effected in a few lines where Walcott merely states the conversion in similarly affective images. Here he invests heavily in the image of a burning coal to convey the movement of his feelings:

> My eyes burned from the ashen prose of Donne.
>
> Ablaze with rage, I thought
> Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,
> And still the coal of my compassion fought:
>
> (11.40-43)

These effects suggest that Walcott is less concerned with the experience of anger and reaction than with the humanistic resolutions of the "comprehending heart" at the end of the poem. The whole has been devised to lead to this balanced conclusion, expressive of a humanistic calm. Now that the raw bitterness of the juvenilia has been assuaged, Walcott is more predisposed to resolve such issues.

This is not to say, however, that the problems of race and history no longer disturb him enough to arouse sensitive concern. "A Far Cry from Africa" shows that he is still very much susceptible to these issues. The poem has become famous as an epigrammatic expression of the cultural dilemma of a colonial people, caught between Africa and Western culture. Most of the poem consists of the rhetoric and bombast with which Walcott tries to evoke the image of a ravaged Africa:

> A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
> Of Africa, Kikuyu, quick as flies [33]
> Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
>
> (11.1-3)

Amid this overly sensational effort, the main strength of the poem lies in this direct articulation of the crisis of dual heritage:

> I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
>
> (11.26-30)

This involves an issue of personal immediacy to Walcott. He is indeed a far cry from Africa in his love of the English tongue, particularly strong at this stage. An authentic sense of uneasiness about the Europe-Africa conflict does come through, inevitable in a period which saw great political strife between the two. But Walcott is still merely skimming the surface of the conflicts at this stage, and their deeper strains and tensions are yet to be explored. The themes of race and history are to be intensely resumed in The Castaway, where Walcott penetrates their tensions and privations to levels of profound spiritual and mythic significance. For the time being, their abrasions are temporarily distanced in the kind of moral outlook we found in "Ruins of a Great House".

Poems like "Ruins of a Great House" and "A Far Cry from Africa" however, are not among the more strongly realised things in the collection. They are primarily important for what they reveal, as suggested above, of his prevailing cast of mind at the time of In a Green Night. Above all, they confirm the positive spirit in which Walcott embarks on the task of his newly-discovered mission: to employ his craft in serving his 'green' world. This we see fully realised in "Tales of the Islands", "A Country Club Romance" and a number of other poems capturing now the joy, now the sadness of the landscape. It is the spirit and promise of the "Prelude" being enacted. There is, in

the calmer rhythms of this volume, the same poise between elation and sobriety with which he greeted the "reluctant leopard". Walcott reflects on the quality of this calm in an early poem, "The Harbour":

> The fishermen rowing homeward in the dusk,
> Do not consider the stillness through which they move,
>
> . . . .
>
> Yet others who now watch my progress outward
> On a sea which is crueller than any word
> Of love, may see in me the calm my passage makes,
> Braving new water in an antique hoax;
>
> (11.1-12)

This calmness, after the turbulence of the Epitaph, is the prevailing spirit of In a Green Night - a prelude to the intensities which are to follow in the later works. There are ripples of disturbance, but they are essentially faint. "Return to D'Ennery, Rain", which returns to a keen sense of the artistic frustration we saw in the juvenilia, is the one serious note of agitation in these calmer rhythms. A very important poem, it signals the conflicts of The Castaway, and belongs in spirit to that phase. Walcott experiences frustration at the sense of the impotence of his suffering as artist, in the face of the suffering of the environment - one of the crucial misgivings of the castaway phase:

> Where is that passionate hatred that would help
> The black, the despairing, the poor, by speech alone?
> The fury shakes like wet leaves in the wind,
> The rain beats on a brain hardened to stone.
>
> (11.29-32)

These signs of agitation are, however, submerged beneath the predominantly calmer rhythms of a confident beginning.

Footnotes

1. Walcott, "Leaving School", London Magazine Vol.6 No.5 (September 1965), p.12.

2. The following are the poems from 25 Poems and Poems included in Green Night. From 25 Poems: "As John to Patmos", "Letter to a Painter in England", "In my Eighteenth Year", "A City's Death by Fire", "I With Legs Crossed Along the Daylight Watch", "The Fishermen Rowing Homeward". From Poems: "Margaret Verlieu Dies".

3. Henry Thoreau, "Walking", The Portable Thoreau (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p.621.

4. Walcott, "Leaving School", London Magazine Vol.6 No.5 (September 1965), p.9.

5. Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou No.2 (September 1970), p.45.

6. C.L.R. James and Michael Anthony, "Discovering Literature in Trinidad: Two Experiences" 1. C.L.R. James, "The Nineteen-Thirties"; 2. Michael Anthony, "Growing Up in Writing", Journal of Commonwealth Literature No.7 (July 1969), pp.73-87.

7. "An Appreciation, Harold Simmons", Voice of St. Lucia, May 18, 1966, p.3.

8. J.E. Clare McFarlane, A Literature in the Making (Jamaica: Pioneer Press, 1956), p.31.

9. See his article "Notes on Folklore in St. Lucia", Iouanaloa ed. Edward Brathwaite (St. Lucia: Dept. of Extra-Mural Studies, 1963), pp.41-49.

10. Walcott, "Tribute to a Master", Sunday Guardian, May 15, 1966, p.9.

11. The following is a section on Simmons from this work, published before the latter appeared: "For Harry Simmons", Savacou Nos. 3-4 (December 1970 - March 1971), pp.122-3.

12. Walcott, "Tribute to a Master", Sunday Guardian, May 15, 1966, p.9.

13. In an interview with the writer on July 8, 1974.

14. In conversation with the writer on December 6, 1972.

15. His brother, Ira Simmons, now Governor of St. Lucia, has a collection of his notes on these cultural interests.

16. Walcott, "Leaving School", p.10.

17. Ibid., p.10.

18. Walcott, "Society and the Artist", Public Opinion, May 4, 1957, p.7.

19. In correspondence with the writer, dated November 27, 1972.

20. Walcott, "Leaving School", p.13.

21. See "The Great Castries Fire . . ." in Rev. C. Jesse's Outlines of St. Lucia's History (St. Lucia: The St. Lucia Archaeological and Historical Society, 1970), p.51ff.

22. Keith Alleyne, review of Epitaph for the Young, Bim Vol.3 No.11 (December 1949), p.268.

23. See Lamming's comments in The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p.228.

24. R.J. Owens, "West Indian Poetry", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.7 No.3 (December 1961), p.125.

25. Walcott, "Four Poems", London Magazine Vol.7 No.8 (August 1960), pp.11-15.

26. Charles Causeley, "Despite the Blurbs", Birmingham Post, May 15, 1962, p.4.

27. C.L.R. James, review of In a Green Night, Sunday Guardian, May 6, 1962, p.5.

28. Walcott, "Tales of the Islands", Bim Vol.7 No.26 (January - June 1958), pp.67-70.

29. Cited in editor's "Notebook", Bim Vol.7 No.26 (January - June 1958), p.65.

30. Loc. cit.

31. Walcott, "In a Green Night", New Statesman, LX No. 1539 (September 10, 1960), p.341.

32. John Donne, "Devotion 7", Selected Prose ed. Evelyn Simpson (London: O.U.P., 1967), p.101.

33. The line is an adaption of Hart Crane's image in "The Black Tambourine": "And in Africa, a carcass quick with flies".

CHAPTER 2

The Castaway - Within 'the Mind's Dark Cave'

i) Taking up the Position of the Castaway

In a Green Night was the product of a calm and confident beginning, and, on the whole, a modest achievement. The Castaway (1965), published a few years later, is poetry of a far higher standard, and Walcott gained international stature with its publication.[1] The volume won him a Royal Society of Literature award. This advance is more than a matter of greater craftsmanship. The nature of the themes in The Castaway and their peculiar intensity indicate a serious change of direction, and an awareness quite different from the "green" enthusiasm of the early phase. Walcott is no longer merely the enamoured craftsman capturing various postures of his "virginal" island. There is now a strong preoccupation with his own consciousness as artist and a much more hermetic approach towards his concerns as a Caribbean poet. There is, underlying this withdrawal into the artistic Self, a strong element of personal schizophrenia which finds expression in the very first poem:

> The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut
> Hatching
> Its babel of sea-lice, sandfly and maggot,
>
> (11.26-28)

These are self-destructive impulses missing from the sober rhythms of Green Night, and expressive of a dramatic change of sensibility in what is a new phase of his development.

This change, which reverts to conflicts already present in the juvenilia, has its sources in a complex of factors of crucial import. One factor is significant before we enter into an analysis of these sources. The change coincides with Walcott's settling down fully to his

task as Caribbean writer. Towards the end of the Green Night phase, as we saw, Walcott had returned to Trinidad to make that island his base. He married Trinidadian Margaret Maillard, a social worker, in 1961, and started a successful family life. He settled into an active part in the cultural life of Trinidad as art critic of the Trinidad Guardian. His primary commitment, however, was to his work as an artist: he devoted much of his energy to the Little Carib Theatre Workshop, which was to be launched in 1966, and concentrated on his writing. He worked on his dramatic masterpiece, Dream on Monkey Mountain (New York, 1970) during that period, and The Castaway appeared within six years of this new beginning.

Much of the intensity characterising this change is a measure of Walcott's response to the serious challenge of settling down to his role as Caribbean artist. The concentrated effort confronts him again with the difficulties and intractables in the environment. Walcott's response is dramatic and complex. He becomes, first of all, intensely aware of his separate identity as artist vis-a-vis the community. The castaway crisis begins from this sense of isolation, which remains most acute at the level of his personal situation as artist. It is, however, the very crises of the environment that have presaged his suffering and isolation. There are thus two vitally interrelated aspects to the predicament. It is the castaway self of the artist forced to retreat into its own isolation; and, presaged into it by the predicament of the environment, his castaway self as representative of the crisis of a castaway people. Walcott makes a conscious and meaningful withdrawal into the isolation to take up this burden. He does this with a symbolic gesture: he assumes the mask of a Crusoe, and withdraws into the position of the lonely, shipwrecked figure.

The donning of the Crusoe mask is a gesture whose significance encompasses all the vital aspects of this change. It is important to stress here the significance of actually assuming the mask. Walcott is not merely seeing his predicament as identical with that of Defoe's Crusoe. In the Yeatsian sense the mask becomes, not his identical self, but an opposite medium through which he is to discover his true face. Moreover, the Crusoe-complex thus confronted is especially relevant for this purpose in his Caribbean context - it carries both the plight of Crusoe as universal shipwrecked man, and the colonial complex of his relationship with Friday. This crucial combination makes for sharp differences between Walcott's figure and the individual we meet in Defoe. We referred above to the dual burden of Walcott's sense of isolation. It represents one further difference between himself and the original Crusoe. His situation differs from that of the prototype in that he is the castaway <u>in</u> and <u>of</u> his own setting. His exile is precipitated by an involvement with an environment which is itself in exile.

Walcott's sense of himself as an isolated figure starts, therefore, from no mere defensive reaction. It is not a reaction to the predicament of the artist in a provincial setting. The issues are much deeper than this. It originates, first of all, in a recognition of the impotence of his pledge to "serve lovelong the living and brown dead". We saw signs of the transition from the earlier calm and confidence to these misgivings in "Return to D'Ennery, Rain", misgivings which also surfaced in "The Banyan Tree, Old Year's Night". In both poems he returns to a scene of deprivation which provokes the old pain and disillusionment of the juvenilia. In "Return to D'Ennery . . ." he reflects on the impotence of the charity of words, and the promises of the passionate exiles to alter these conditions. He comes to a deep sense

of frustration at the futility of his own "bitter devotion to home". The disillusionment provokes a quality of despair which assumes its generic proportions within the consciousness of the artist. Walcott perceives how the pain, arising from the landscape, begins to transcend the immediate landscape itself to leave the artist curiously estranged from the spirit of his people. It is the heightened reaches of his despair that thus estrange him. He finds himself excluded from their accesses to a simple faith and, ironically, they are better able to cope with reality than he:

> Why blame the faith you have lost. Heaven remains
> Where it is, in the hearts of these people,
>
> . . . .
>
> You are less than they are, for your truth
> Consists of a general passion, a personal need,
>
> (11.47-52)

What starts out as a genuine concern with the pain of landscape leaves him with the oppressive sense of his intellectual isolation. Walcott explains exactly this predicament when he looks back in "What the Twilight Says" at the various stages of his creative development: "Years ago, watching them, and suffering as you watched, you proffered silently the charity of a language which they could not speak, until your suffering, like the language, felt superior, estranged."[2] The full significance of this estrangement will emerge later, and Walcott was to realise its shortcomings during the period. By the end of the prelude, however, the old anguish had begun to reappear, leaving him with this consciousness of his separate suffering as artist. He expresses it in "Return to D'Ennery . . .":

> Yet in you it still seeps, blurring each boast
> Your craft has made, obscuring words and features,

Nor have you changed from all of the known ways
To leave the mind's dark cave, the most
Accursed of God's self-pitying creatures.

(11.59-63)

The position of the castaway is based, ultimately, on this withdrawal into "the mind's dark cave". It is within its hermetic recesses that the burden he takes up with the Crusoe mask is to be explored. The burden comes to assume cosmic proportions, and Walcott reverts into a more intense preoccupation with the archetypal questions of negation and defeat. He resumes the old argument with God begun in the juvenilia. There the predicament had been blurred, his own spiritual needs unidentified and confounded with the search for a medium. Here the predicament becomes more lucid, and engages Walcott in a profoundly creative exploration. The effort is explicitly identified by Walcott himself in an important long poem entitled "Origins", which appears in the American selection[3] of poems from the Green Night and Castaway periods. The poem is modelled on Césaire's Return to my Native Land (Harmondsworth, 1969) and tries to combine lyrical and protest modes as in the latter. Walcott's attempt is not very successful. But the poem is important for this articulation of the significance of his withdrawal into mind, an effort whose moral purpose underlies the whole nature of Walcott's achievement:

The mind, among sea-wrack sees its mythopoeic coast,
Seeks like the polyp, to take root in itself.
Here, in the rattle of receding shoal,
Among these shallows I seek my own name and a man.

(11.76-79)

Walcott takes up this position from the outset. In the opening poem, "The Castaway", he is man alone in the vastness and emptiness of seascape. It is a setting in which man is brought into direct confrontation with the elemental, and forced into contemplation of the cosmos.

On the furthest spiritual level it thus becomes the battleground of man in direct struggle with infinity-God. It is from this kind of spiritual confrontation that the fundamental significance of Defoe's Crusoe begins for Walcott. As a figure cast away in an elemental, empty setting he commits himself to a contemplative exile. This analysis of Crusoe's spiritual burden as a figure in exile occurs in Walcott's Notebooks: "Now at my age, if I could burrow through that long dark emptiness of his mind, a darkness that is wise enough to anticipate night, madness and incoherence would destroy me before I emerged on the other side of myself, accepting myself as Crusoe, as a craftsman figure bored by God, on a high desert island, one which has become both hell and home. . . . Of course Crusoe has by now gone mad. He has already shouted to God, probably all sorts of half-terrified obscenities, and was saved for a time by the consolation of another voice than his own."[4] These are responses evoked in the contemplative confrontation between Self and Cosmos. Walcott's own exile into the elemental scene turns on this kind of confrontation, and arouses feelings which veer similarly between cosmic inertia and schizophrenic responses to the sense of chaos. In "The Castaway" his contemplation is an exercise in spiritual inertia: he becomes transfixed in the sense of sterility as he observes the unregenerate phenomena of the scene:

> Pleasures of an old man:
> Morning: contemplative evacuation, considering
> The dried leaf, nature's plan.
>
> (11.13-15)

As his gaze shifts from one natural feature to the other, from sand, to surf, to saltgreen vine - their inert presence conveys an oppressive sense of nothingness, whose chafing influences are schizophrenic:

> Nothing: the rage with which the sandfly's head is filled.
>
> (1.12)

These are manifestations of a curious absence of cosmic energy, or, rather, some perversion of its creative principles. They are influences emanating from an inner sense of disintegration, the burden with which the mind reverted to this scene. For there are intimations of some elemental creative principle at work if he suspends his own consciousness and listens:

> If I listen I can hear the polyp build,
> The silence thwanged by two waves of the sea.
>
> (11.20-21)

What occurs here is of utmost significance: this discernment of a pure creative principle is a signal to the creative effort which must counter the negation. We are encountering from the outset these two related strains of the castaway's spiritual purpose in exile. The classic definition of this occurred in the lines from "Origins": the exploration of the oppressive "seawrack", principles of disintegration, to be countered by a fresh and elemental creation of self, like the function of the building polyp. Walcott's reaction to this creative intimation is dramatic, and a highly significant climax. He is immediately moved to assume something of this elemental force and become his own god:

> Cracking a sea-louse, I make thunder split.
>
> Godlike, annihilating godhead, art
> And self, I abandon
> Dead metaphors: . . . . .
>
> (11.22-25)

The desire to assume godhead, thus defiantly affirmed, is the expression of a need to be free of the unregenerate influences of dead metaphors: the latter bearing the effects of the disintegrating gods that are part of the colonial heritage. It is in fact the need to recover a pure elemental reality. In "Crusoe's Island" Walcott expresses more starkly this need for an elemental purging:

> We came here for the cure
> Of quiet in the whelk's centre,
>
> . . . .
>
> To be, like beast or natural object, pure.
>
> (11.52-53, 60)

There is an intense quality of determination in these resolutions which must demand the over-reaching god-like strengths he aspires to in the poem. They are to give rise to strains which will have to be tempered before Walcott can find true fulfilment in his creative effort. At this point, however, the creative opening signalled by the building polyp remains overwhelmed by the oppressive weight of dead metaphors. They remain as concrete symbols of a world of disintegrating values. In an isolated setting they assume menacing proportions, and breed frenzy in his mind as they threaten with dissolution:

> The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut
> Hatching
> Its babel of sea-lice, sandfly and maggot,
>
> That green wine bottle's gospel choked with sand,
> Labelled, a wrecked ship,
> Clenched seawood nailed and white as a man's hand.
>
> (11.26-31)

This opening poem sets the scene for most of the action taking place within the mind's dark cave. Walcott has withdrawn from the human scene into the contemplative exile of a Crusoe. The withdrawal is motivated by a powerful desire to rid himself of the sense of an uncreative world, and to find some means of reviving a pure relationship with it. The mind remains heavily burdened, however, by the frustrations with which he retreats into its seclusions. The whole effort is purely spiritual in orientation, dealing with the apprehension of absence or presence of godhead. Walcott moves between the two in a large number of poems. There are poems directly engaged in the experience of despiritualization and negation, for example, "The Swamp", "Missing the Sea".

There are poems which attempt to find some point of contact between man and God, as in "A Tropical Bestiary". There are poems which enact various aspects of the schizophrenic relationship between the two, for example, "Dogstar", "The Prince".

In exploring these modes of awareness, Walcott remains confined to the setting of an isolated Crusoe to a large extent. The configuration of the castaway is seascape and physical Nature: as he puts it in "Crusoe's Journal" he is "perched between ocean and green, churning forest", which is a graphic description of the Caribbean configuration. Most of the poems are sited in such physical surroundings and deal with the observation of natural phenomena. "The Swamp", "Missing the Sea", "Coral", "The Almond Trees" are all enacted near sea- or forest-scape. Seascape comprises the widest expanses of physical Nature in the island setting. It represents a most integral geographical setting here, as in the total body of Walcott's work. The authentic presence of the sea in Walcott's work begins from the physical, naturalistic factor, to embrace far-reaching cultural and symbolic values. His involvement with sea and seascape, moreover, dates from the earliest period and is closely operative in the total pattern of his development. In a very fundamental sense, his vision evolves closely in terms of the nature of his involvement with the sea. This can emerge fully only when the entire course of this development has been traced.

The moral significance of the sea for Walcott begins from the physical aspect itself. In the Caribbean setting, the sea both sets the boundaries of the island's world, and conveys the sense of limitless space. From the earliest stages of his career Walcott is sensitive to both these aspects of its presence. The former is representative of the sense of isolation, marking the exclusion of the islands from the rest

of the world. This is the aspect which comes through in "Prelude". It is with the mythic significance of the sea that Walcott's imagination is most vitally engaged. As a symbol of infinity it comes to hold archetypal significances for him; and his precipitant confrontation with the cosmic and elemental are part of the imminence of sea in his setting. But his preoccupation with these mythic significances comes from something deeply instinctual and rooted in native exigency, like all true mythic impulse. Its sources lie deep within a historical and cultural consciousness. In an interview with the writer,[5] Walcott gave this very meaningful explanation. From the physical reality of the sea begins the reality of our historical separation from Africa. This physical phenomenon extends to the furthest spiritual reaches of the separation from Africa. No West Indian, Walcott stated, has a true awareness of Africa; and similarly, Africans have no true sense of us as belonging to Africa. The sea is that which marks the position of the Caribbean between these two poles. The above reproduces Walcott's words as closely as possible. In this light, then, the sea represents the hiatus of the Caribbean position. It thus becomes the cosmic phenomenon, enforcing a naked confrontation with the elemental matter from which to create, and engenders the peculiar aspirations and strains of this naked effort.

Walcott thus addresses himself consciously to this mythic involvement with sea: it becomes, as he puts it in "Origins", the mythopoeic coast from which he purposes an elemental self-creation. This spiritual purpose defines his particular vision of the Caribbean promise. The metaphysical intensities of Walcott's involvement with the sea have their deeper sources in this cultural consciousness. Dominating the pattern of his vision, this involvement becomes both burden and source of enlightenment. Walcott's effort gives rise to overreaching impulses

which he must renounce. They are renounced by the time of The Gulf (1969) when he gives up the sea's mythology for a "landfall going" ("Landfall, Grenada"). But it is what he has forged on this "mythopoeic coast" which gives him truest moral direction for his final self-discovery.

This involvement is concentrated in The Castaway, where he remains situated on seascape. Most of the poems enacted in this setting dramatise processes of mind in direct contact with matter. It accounts for the mythic modes predominating in this volume, which contrast with the social medium we find in The Gulf. Most of the poems which do not deal with this elemental scene are treated from the metaphysical, reflective viewpoint of the castaway. The castaway viewpoint also underlies Walcott's excursions into the social scene, and his preoccupations with the themes of race and history. There are integral relationships between these and the seascape poems, implicit in the historico-cultural sources of the involvement with sea discussed above. Their concerns and aspirations interpenetrate each other.

ii) Chaos and Order

In the contemplative group of poems, Walcott is directly engaged in exploring the dual conditions he faced in taking up his position in "The Castaway" - the sense of chaos, the fleeting perception of an elemental order. In poems like "The Swamp", "Missing the Sea", he explores the consciousness of spiritual negation. He makes a sustained effort to discover some cosmic pattern that will enable him to cope with its chaos in the outstanding sequence, "A Tropical Bestiary". In "The Swamp" he is plunged into an experience of negation similar to that of the opening poem. As in that poem he is responding to a natural feature

that is part of his native setting. Mind and landscape interact in a manic experience of despiritualization. The swamp is a physical embodiment of a stagnant and uncreating process in Nature. Its vegetation is a sign of perverted life, prolific in its putrescence. The effects are those of a malignant proliferation of decay, conveying principles of menace and the absurd:

> Fearful, original sinuosities! Each mangrove sapling
> Serpentlike, its roots obscene
> As a six-fingered hand,
>
> Conceals within its clutch the mossbacked toad,
>
> (11.13-16)

These are manifestations of some kind of cosmic disintegration. As in "The Castaway" it is the inner experience of irreality empathising with the external. Walcott recalls the vision of Hemingway in this context. The latter's hero sought the physical setting that would allow for some clarity of vision. He sought thereby to avoid the depths of uncreation which Walcott sees mirrored in the aboriginal effects of the swamp:

> Its horrors held Hemingway's hero rooted
> To sure, clear shallows.
>
> (11.8-9)

Walcott's meets Hemingway's vision of cosmic anarchy at these heightened reaches of the consciousness of the artist. But this sense of cosmic anarchy does have its original sources in the native landscape. It arises from Walcott's sense of an amnesiac history, producing this quality of destitution in the landscape. We shall return to the complex of causes behind this amnesia later. Here the physical ravages reflect the traumas of this uncreating principle in which the human shares:

> It begins nothing. Limbo of cracker convicts, Negroes.
> Its black mood
> Each sunset takes a smear of your life's blood.
>
> (11.10-12)

These ennervating and destructive effects are those of the psyche of a people abandoned, like the elemental, to this condition. For the artist suffering these effects on a heightened level, it signifies the total foundering of reality. Walcott tries to convey the experience in a climactic reversion to preternatural Chaos. The image has resonances of Pope's concluding vision of cosmic anarchy in The Dunciad, as plant, animal and man are engulfed by darkness:

> In the fast-filling night, note
> How the last bird drinks darkness with its throat,
> How the wild saplings slip
>
> Backward to darkness, go black
> With widening amnesia, . . .
>
> Limb, tongue and sinew into a knot
> Like chaos, like the road
> Ahead.
>
> (11.25-33)

The experience involves a keen sense of psychological violence, revealed in the strenuous attempt with which he passes from the lyrically evoked extinction of Nature to the physical constriction of man himself. It is the strain of the amnesiac experience which remains most insistent, and Walcott's confrontation with the elemental is closely influenced by its self-destructive conflicts.

The vision of chaos is an integral part of the experience of The Castaway, and the psychological dynamic of a poem like "Swamp", its very hysteria, is part of its urgency. But Walcott is just as seriously engaged in an effort to come to terms with it. "A Tropical Bestiary" reveals the earnestness of his effort to order the chaos. "A Tropical Bestiary", like all Walcott's sequences, contains some of the most fully realised poems of the collection. They represent Walcott's sustained effort to find an order against the chaos, to be realised in an elemental

purity. In each of the seven poems Walcott observes some pattern or act of physical Nature that illustrates a fixed law of existence. These patterns are expressive of truths which put into perspective his own sense of an anarchic and meaningless universe. He sees in the natural law to which bird and beast function a fixed order and balance between plenitude and depletion, life's rising and failing powers. The contradictions which give rise to man's sense of an anarchic universe follow the same elemental law - the conflicts between desire and negation, what seems absurd in human suffering, the inevitable weakening of man's powers. This elemental law reveals a higher fixed Order which resolves these contradictions and cancels out the sense of an anarchic universe. Walcott is purposing a moral acceptance of these contradictions. But this kind of aspiration means a certain amount of stoic endurance. Ultimately, the effort involves this deeper, unconscious thrust: in trying to submit to a higher inexplicable law he is trying to assume, to be equal to its cosmic force. It amounts to a desire to arrogate its powers. Walcott, trying to fix his metaphysical limits, veers between a genuine impulse towards humility and this god-like stoicism. The latter remains the stronger force, expressive of the overreaching strains which pervade this phase of his career. His effort, despite these strains, represents a genuinely positive movement. Here he begins to pursue his purpose to find a self-creating order out of chaos.

Walcott adopts the idea of the bestiary from Ted Hughes. The creatures of Hughes' bestiary serve as symbols in his analysis of the spiritual anatomy of unaccommodated, 'animal man'. The creatures of Walcott's bestiary are allowed to enact their own natural functions. Man - he has similarly to find his own natural function within an elemental habitat - is merely the observer who has come to learn how to be "like

beast or natural object, pure". In "Octopus" for example, Walcott's observation is intense and the controlling intelligence behind it almost imperceptible:

> The eight limbs loosen, like tentacles in water,
> Like the slow tendrils of
> The octopus.
>   Fathoms down
> They drift, numbed by the shock
> Of an electric charge, drown
> Vague as lidless fishes, separate
> Like the anemone from rock
>
> (11.2-9)

The movement of the octopus, dislodged from its rock by the powerful thrust of the sea, is graphically presented. We watch this most tenacious of animals gradually loosen its hold, become limp and impotent as it yields to the superior force of the sea. It is the manifestation of an inevitable fact of Nature to which man is also subject: the depletion which must take its course after the powerful thrust of his own element, desire. The fact of loss itself is being enacted. The rhythms of its aftermath are equally organic. The depleted octopus still sustains the painful throbbings of the sea's "electric charge":

> Pulse of the sea in the locked, heaving side.
>
> (1.12)

Man himself continues to sustain the powerful pulsations of desire even as he suffers its loss. Walcott attempts through the observation, to grasp the organic necessity of these rhythms of experience. In this kind of acceptance we see how unconsciously the stoic attitude enters. Walcott is not consciously advocating stoicism, which always carries a defiant thrust. He is concentrating strenuously on the need to overcome a schizophrenic, disruptive response in the light of what is an elemental principle of existence. This, however, must involve stoic

resources; and, mere human - in this context both more and less than "beast or natural object" - it is upon these resources he must fall back to maintain such submission. But these are tensions which remain vitally creative: his conscious purpose to resist the sense of schizophrenia and anarchy begins a valuable creative exploration.

The earnestness of this search for a cosmic order is concentrated in the intensity of the form itself. Though his presence remains that of the observer, his own feelings are transmitted through the rhythms of the octopus' movements. The one passes into the other in a single opening gesture. The human posture in the physical enaction of desire, sex, metamorphoses visually into the loosening tentacles of the octopus:

> Post coitum, omne animal . . . from love
> The eight limbs loosen, like tentacles in water,
> Like the slow tendrils of
> The octopus.
>
> (11.1-4)

The analogy becomes organic and draws to a conclusion that is both man's and animal's. The painful throbbings of the drowning octopus have the same charge as the pulsations of man's post-coitum. Human and animal function fuse into what is "no moral but the fact" of existence, as he puts it in "Ibis".

Most of the other creatures in Walcott's bestiary enact similar facts of existence, pointing to an irreversible cosmic order which man should not seek to resist. In "Lizard" he compares his own unnatural action in trying to rescue a beetle "floundering in urine" to the natural function of the lizard ready to pounce on the midge. It leads him to reflect on the futility and presumption of man's attempt to adjust what he considers perverse in Nature. Such attempts may be a travesty of cosmic providence and the true source of the absurd. It belongs more in

the scheme of things that the lizard should prey on the midge, that death should be the release of the "aged, flailing their claws / On flowery coverlets" - and man's blind attempts to intervene are disrupting:

> Rightening a beetle damns creation.
> It may have felt more terror on its back
> When my delivering fingers, huge as hell,
> Shadowed the stiffening victim with their jaws
> Than the brown lizard, Galapagos-large,
> Waggling its horny tail at morning's morsel
> Held for the midge.
>
> (11.12-18)

Again Walcott's main purpose is not to advocate a passive endurance of suffering. He is intent rather on recognising the limits of man's knowledge. The implications of this seem to reflect ironically on the purpose stated in "The Castaway" - to become godlike and annihilate godhead. The contradiction is more apparent than real. The obverse side of this submission is an attempt to arrive at the moral eminence which will comprehend all these existential contradictions, a position of divine circumspection.

Walcott seems to be engaged in counteracting this very tendency in "Man O' War Bird". There he is directly engaged in fixing his own metaphysical limits. But the effort, like those examined so far, carries twofold strains - a creatively motivated acceptance, and the unconscious strains of godlike aspiration. Walcott sets out in the poem to explore the nature of his own participation in the metaphysical process. Hughes' image of the hawk looking down from its vantage point ("Hawk Roosting"[6]) provides him with a point of departure. Walcott considers his own position on earth in relation to that of the hawk moving in the heavens. The hawk serves as a symbol of a moving, unfixed cosmos. The bird's fluctuating, erratic movements allow for a variety of changing perspectives. Walcott shows how the individual arrives at

his changing visions of reality according to which perspective he arbitrarily chooses:

> The easy wings
> Depend upon the stress I give such things
> As my importance to its piercing height, the peace
> Of its slow, ravening circuit of a speck
> Upon a beach prey to its beak
> Like any predatory tern it seizes.
>
> (11.6-11)

It is the individual making his own fluctuating, "unfixed" eye the measure of all truth, and the instability and erratic course of his interpretations are a natural result. In the end his unstable apprehensions of a hostile or genial universe are truly egoistic, and irrelevant to the fixed pattern of things:

> In that blue wildfire somewhere is an Eye
> That weighs this world exactly as it pleases.
>
> (11.12-13)

Walcott appropriates an image from Hughes' poem to point the moral. Hughes' line reads: "My eye has permitted no change." The adaptation is a classic example of the originality with which he treats his borrowings. Here a powerful visual emblem helps to focus his own efforts as a thinker. The Eye holds sway over an impenetrable fixed Order. But, rejecting the erratic susceptibilities of man's earthly eyes, it is the position of the one omniscient Eye and its unearthly circumspection which he would assume. These implications we have been considering reveal both the strengths and susceptibilities in Walcott's attempt to order his sense of chaos. They reveal, most importantly, the vital interpenetration of the two. In aspiring to this elemental purity he is pursuing the self-creative purpose of his mythopoeic coast. It must be forged within the mind and, for Walcott, devolves upon the autonomy of mind. Its demands engage the mind as sheer force; the mind functioning as the pure essence of matter;

attempting to appropriate, ultimately, the godlike prerogative.

(iii) Sources of the Chaos in his Caribbean Predicament

In the explorations of the contemplative poems, Walcott is completely isolated within the realm of mind in pure contact with matter. His metaphysical preoccupations with chaos and order seem to derive mainly from his own hermetic needs as artist-thinker, and their relationships to the experience of the environment seem, if not remote, intermittent and tenuous. Yet, what withdraws into these private recesses originates entirely in his situation as Caribbean castaway, and his efforts are efforts to fulfil its needs. The Caribbean Crusoe takes up his position in an empty landscape, as in "The Castaway", with a legacy of "dead metaphors" - the fragments, "sea-wrack", of broken gods and cultural disintegration. The relationship of the Caribbean castaway to these dead gods is extremely complex. Because of the peculiar circumstances of history, he has, first of all, been nurtured on them as Friday. The gods brought with Western colonization were an imposition, and totally alien to him. The imposition meant acute, doubly aggravated violations for Friday. He was forced into unnatural bondage to a system totally foreign to his habitat. They were gods which severed him from a natural state in which he might have engendered his own mythic potential. A further, more vexing injury was the fact that these gods were exploited by the colonial master to keep him in servitude.

But the ties of these gods, because of their central role in this history of violation, continue to bind him. In the contemporary situation the disintegration and death of these gods resound in Friday's world, and become a greater cause for his bitterness and recrimination. The burden of these dead gods, in fact, continues to involve him - their

fragments remain as part of his despoiled landscape. For these reasons the dead gods are an unavoidable concern and, as Friday, Walcott faces the need to come to terms with them. Ironically, both colonised Friday and former master now come to share in this struggle, the latter facing dispossession in his foundering world. Walcott expresses the complexity of this situation in "Crusoe's Journal", as he reflects on his efforts to bring the Word afresh to his people:

> like Christofer he bears
> in speech mnemonic as a missionary's
> the Word to savages,
> its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
> whose sprinkling alters us
> into good Fridays who recite His praise,
> parroting our master's
> style and voice, we make his language ours,
> converted cannibals
> we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ.
>
> (11.16-25)

The situation reflects ironically on both the former master and converted Friday. But Walcott is earnestly concerned in appraising the nature of the struggle entailed in this fresh creative purpose of bringing the Word anew to his people. It is a task which is crucially involved with these ironic conditions. In setting out to create a fresh reality, the only tool available to Friday is that left by the master - a language that must be purged and forged anew to serve his own purpose. To be engaged in this forging of the master's language is to be engaged in a confrontation with the Word it bears. Friday was converted to gods which have proved, in the twentieth century, effete and irreal. Making a greater mockery of Friday's conversion,the situation returns the master himself back to the "cannibal" state. The Western master now finds himself engaged in a savage, blasphemous struggle with his failed gods. "Learning to make his language ours", Friday reverts with him to this

more dire, "cannibal" violation, characterised by the corrosive experiences of despiritualization resulting from the failure of Western Christianity. The burden must, however, be faced before any true recreation can be purposed. Walcott is appraising dispassionately the ironic factors which compact his own involvement in the crisis of the master. It is this burden that harries him as he faces the decomposed remains of a sterile Christianity at the end of "The Castaway". He responds to absurd influences in its disintegrating images in that poem: "that green wine bottle's gospel choked with sand"; "Clenched seawood nailed and white as a man's hand", behind which hovers the image of the dismembered, crucified Christ.

This colonial legacy then, is one of the prime sources of the chaos. There are deeper, more organic sources of a native destitution which it mainly serves to aggravate. But it remains an important aspect of the total malaise that must be reckoned with. Walcott is conscious of this involvement in the spiritual crisis of the master as early as the juvenilia. He becomes all the more sensitive to it because of the very nature and extent of his own immersion in the language of the master. He is still sensitive to its burden in "Twilight" where it provokes this harsh reproach: " . . . for the God who is offered to slaves must be served dead, or He may change His chosen people".[7] It is through that prime agent of conversion, language, that Friday's experience of this God was compacted. The importance of language in effecting this bond between master and converted cannibal is one of George Lamming's major preoccupations in The Pleasures of Exile (1960). Language is what Prospero depends on, ultimately, in his attempt to recreate Caliban in his own image. Lamming writes: "The gift of language is the deepest and most delicate bond of involvement."[8] Lamming goes on to stress the necessity of christening language anew if Caribbean man is to free himself of the

unnatural and constricting bondage to the master's concepts. Walcott starts out with a recognition of this involvement, and responds to its disrupting effects in Friday's world. In a landscape devoid of its own native gods, their lingering emblems are especially oppressive, and their weight that of dead metaphors.

These unregenerate metaphors, then, are very much part of an abandoned landscape. In The Chosen Tongue (1969) Gerald Moore appraises the position of Walcott as a castaway figure and comments on these metaphors: "Crusoe is seen ironically as a missionary, bringer of a word which is the English tongue, a tongue now forced to begin afresh the mastery of a green untamed world which refuses its metaphors."[9] Moore is basically right about Walcott's position as "the new Adam, begin[ning] afresh the mastery of a green untamed world". In the spiritual aspirations of The Castaway, however, it is not merely that the green world refuses these metaphors. Walcott has to struggle against their dead influences in order to see the purity of a virgin landscape. The dramatic situation in "The Castaway" again, reveals this dilemma. Walcott's glimpse of a pure natural function - "If I listen I can hear the polyp build" - is immediately overwhelmed by the distracting images of spiritual decay already discussed. This, incidentally, is relevant to his assimilation of Robert Lowell's techniques in the volume. A. Alvarez, reviewing the volume in The Observer, comments on Lowell's influence: "He has matured as an artist; thickened, toughened, grown into his own strength. The catalyst seems to have been Robert Lowell. But since Walcott is a West Indian, his preoccupations are very different from Lowell's and the results are his own."[10] Walcott can assimilate Lowell's techniques to convey the psychological processes of despiritualization, because he too is involved in "eating the flesh of Christ". His efforts to come to terms

with it in the "Bestiary" show that they are more than just a matter of craft.

But the influences of dead gods are not the main source of the dearth which afflicts the landscape. Its deeper sources are in a sense of chaos and amnesia arising from a destitution native to the landscape. It is a landscape found barren of gods, and devoid of spiritual presences. For Walcott this void is original because all traces of the indigenous Amerindian tribes were obliterated, sucked back into oblivion with their extinction. This finds expression in "Air" (The Gulf) and a number of other places in his work. The negation of the broken gods of an imposed tradition merely serves to aggravate and render more schizophrenic this profound source of amnesia. The prevailing spiritual atmosphere of The Castaway consists in this quality of amnesia, and the term recurs throughout the work. Walcott treats of this spiritual void most explicitly in "Laventville".[11] In this poem he makes an excursion into the social scene and observes the continuing effects of the middle-passage experience in one of Trinidad's slums. The poem stands out as a striking description of the curiously sited Laventille, a slum straddling uphill above the city of Port-of-Spain: "the height of poverty/for the desperate and black". It is significant that Walcott is in Laventille to attend a christening ceremony. He is there to serve as godfather to the "unnamed" child. He observes the scene with heavy mockery. The "brown curate" who now replaces the colonial missionary perpetrates an even greater act of betrayal of his own people. He performs the baptismal rites powerless to save the victims of the middle passage:

> Which of us cares to walk
> even if God wished
> those retching waters where our souls were fished
>
> (11.64-66)

Walcott places the scene within close range of the "patient tombs", reverting to the old question of the ultimate meaning of human destiny. The concern is with some form of belief which can provide man with his spiritual bearings. There is no answer provided in the effete Christianity of the priest, their brown "God-father since the middle passage". The greater denial and lack of access to a meaningful answer consist in the ultimate deprivation for which the middle passage was responsible - the obliteration of some order or tradition of belief, which should have been their rightful heritage.

> some open passage that has cleft the brain,
> some deep, amnesiac blow. We left
> somewhere a life we never found,
>
> customs and gods that are not born again,
> some crib, some grill of light
> clanged shut on us in bondage, and withheld
>
> us from that world below us and beyond,
> and in its swaddling cerements we're still bound.
>
> (11.82-89)

The lines are an eloquent articulation of the cultural predicament of the Caribbean people, and have the timeless quality of his famous passage in "A Far Cry from Africa". They closely echo the burden of McKay's poem, "Outcast".[12] In that poem McKay mourns his condition as a strangeling born out of place and time, severed from the African heritage he cannot recapture, and an alien in the Western world he must inhabit. Walcott's expression of an irreparable loss repeats McKay's burden:

> Something in me is lost, forever lost,
> Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
>
> (11.9-10)

Walcott's image of the still-born bound in "swaddling cerements" expresses the finality of this loss with apocalyptic intensity. For him the spiritual heritage of Africa, violently severed in bondage

is forever lost to the descendants of the middle passage. This conviction marks the radical difference between his position and that of Edward Brathwaite, the other major Caribbean poet. The latter sees in the creolised folk vestiges of Africa surviving in the region, the potential and need for a full recovery of the spiritual heritage of Africa. For Walcott, Caribbean man is not only uprooted and set astray on new soil but man in a spiritual vacuum, without memory of past mythology. The anomaly of the situation is rendered more disturbing because of the unnatural circumstances that robbed him of what should have been his by birthright. He starts without even the race memory of a Caliban, contrary to Lamming's premises in <u>The Pleasures of Exile</u> (1960); and Walcott also discounts the notion of a primal cosmic memory posited in Wilson Harris' vision ("The Voyage up River"). The most original experience of Caribbean man is of lack and abnegation.

Walcott dedicates the poem to Naipaul, and the gesture begins from a recognition of the latter's sense of the cultural void in the region. As the burden of the epigraph suggests, Walcott is beginning from this recognition of Naipaul's sense of the middle-passage crisis to ultimately transcend it: "To find the Western Path/Through the Gates of Wrath". The poem is finally pointing to the limitations in Naipaul's reaction to this void. It is exploring the deeper spiritual conflict beneath what Naipaul gives up as the futility and hopelessness of the society. To explore these reaches is to confront the necessity of forging a native recovery through these spiritual turmoils. An entry in Walcott's Notebooks gives the gist of this response to Naipaul: "Naipaul's contention is that the West Indian can only be capable of irony, a cynicism about history, but this is tragic ground. We must stare that in the face and be transformed. Transfixed by that reflection and ennobling it, be possibly transformed. Any further wandering

is futile."[13] Walcott does also recognise the angst in Naipaul's irony, provoked by a society which perpetuates the destitution in its mimic attitudes. He is provoked to this kind of social disgust in the poem:

> . . . made me look on with hopelessness and rage
> at their new apish habits, their excess
> and fear, the possessed, the self-possessed.
>
> (11.50-52)

Beneath this lie the absence and void at which he begins the identification with Naipaul to go an altogether different way - a spiritual confrontation whose purpose is creative. There is the same dialectic behind Walcott's use of the notorious passage from Froude as the epigraph to "Air". It is the same passage which heads Naipaul's The Middle Passage (1962): "There has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws. The natural graces of life do not show themselves under such conditions. . . . There are no true people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own."[14] These responses of Naipaul, and of Froude in his far more limited way, are to original intuitions of what is some organic spiritual lack. It is the lack of a landscape without mythology.

In "The Voyage Up River", Walcott is reacting from this consciousness of a spiritual vacuum when he rejects Harris' moral premises in Palace of the Peacock (1968). The journey of Harris' crew up river is a rediscovery of an eternal consciousness outside Space and Time, in which they recover the true freedom of creative being. The crew attain this spiritual integration in their second death. They have suffered their first mortal death, because of their misguided, destructive desire for a measure that would enable them to fix and lay hold of the mortal universe. In their second death they go beyond this material consciousness, and are reborn into an unearthly, immaterial consciousness of

of spiritual continuity. The access to this _anima_ presumes an immanent sense of mythic memory, the World soul of the Jungian Unconscious, indwelling throughout Nature and Man. Sharing in it, man possesses this mythic Memory as an inherent birthright. In exploiting it consciously he arrives at the fullest creative harmony with the _anima_. This is the mythic burden behind the journey. The penetration up river into the depths of the interior is a penetration into the primordial and living origins of this indwelling Memory. Its primal truth is vested in the Amerindian woman who serves as their guide. She is the embodiment of these origins, and the immaterial freedom of essence is symbolised in her presence:

> This cross she had forgiven and forgotten
> in an earlier dream of distant centuries
> and a returning to the Siberian unconscious
> pilgrimage in the straits where life had
> possessed and abandoned at the same time the
> apprehension of a facile beginning and ending.
> . . . It was a vanishing and yet a starting
> race in which long eternal malice and wrinkled
> self-defence were turning into universal pro-
> tection and intuition and that harmonious
> rounded miracle of spirit which the world of
> appearances had never truly known.15

For Walcott, man regains no such Memory in the rencounter with primordial origins. There is no immanent mythic memory which allows for these spiritual harmonies. To return to these origins is to know aboriginal fear, to encounter the wildness and untamed state of Nature, chaos before the act of creation. Walcott thus rejects Harris' terms and entire conception of this rebirth. He does so with antithetical force. The destiny of Harris' crew is not identifiable with that of Caribbean man, because the mythic memory which he posits is not available to him. Far from possessing it by any inherent birthright, man in the Caribbean was born to oblivion. The peculiar circumstances of his history wiped out

all possibilities of real access to memory in severing him from his roots. The truths of Harris' crew are thus not applicable to the native situation. In this context, in fact, Harris' truth is unrealised and abortive - "still-born":

> On that vague expedition did their souls
> Spawn, vaporous as butterflies, in resurrection,
>
> Or the small terrors multiply like tadpoles
> Below a mangrove root or a headstone?
>
> Stillborn in death, their memory is not ours,
> In whom the spasm of birth
>
> Gendered oblivion. . . . .
>
> (11.9-15)

This refutation of Harris is of utmost importance, because these very divergences involve crucial relationships between the two writers, relationships important in their outlook on the region. Walcott does, in fact, see in Harris' myth of exploration the most original and vital approach to the creation of a native awareness. In the subsequent and culminating phase of his development, he creates a New World myth which develops through vital affinities with Harris. So crucial are the relationships that he retraces Harris' routes in adopting the basic model of the journey into the interior, the symbolic purpose of which is their common point of departure. It is with Harris' metaphysical position that he takes issue, and the differences between them remain radical at this level. Both begin, however, from a recognition of the incidence of primordial origins in the landscape; and the final differences between them rests on their different conceptions of the ways in which this engages the functions of the Imagination. To Walcott the phenomenon means chaos and the aboriginal fear of extinction. It is the individual act of the mind, engaged in a strenuous self-creation, that must bring

genesis to this void. To Harris, the void appears as chaos only when man is blind (in his material eye), his Imagination imprisoned, to the divine essence that binds all creation together. This truth, importantly, can only be fully realised in the recovery of unity with the primal through the journey into the interior. Both are envisaging, in these different processes, the role of the Imagination in a mythic genesis. Walcott's belief in the autonomous mind places emphasis on a self-creation which must involve strife and struggle; while Harris' Imagination comprehends a universal love in an essentially mystical otherness. But the affinities between them are the fundamental basis of a regional myth - it is their common vision of a genesis to be accomplished through the primal accesses incident in the region.

iv) The Task of the New Adam

The oblivion of his condition thus imposes an absolute responsibility upon man in the Caribbean: that of beginning to forge his own reality in a virgin landscape, in a creative emergence from the chaos of elemental origins. The idea is most explicitly articulated in "What the Twilight Says", where Walcott describes his concept of the native actor as a quest figure who must record the anguish of the race: "To do this, they must return through a darkness whose terminus is amnesia. The darkness which yawns before them is terrifying. It is the journey back from man to ape. Every actor should make this journey to articulate his origins, but for these who have been called not men but mimics, the darkness must be total, and the cave should not contain a single man-made, mnemonic object. . . ."[16] These are precisely the explorations being undertaken in Dream, which is begun during this period.

The necessity of starting from elemental origins, then, arises directly out of his dual and complex predicament: from the failure of the beliefs he inherits as Friday, and the lack of a native spiritual heritage. We have seen how Walcott attempts to purify his mind of the former in "A Tropical Bestiary". The whole effort of beginning a new existence is nothing short of a new genesis, and the aspiration stated from the outset in this allusion: "We end in earth, from earth began/ In our own entrails, genesis." ("The Castaway"). Walcott's role as Crusoe thus encompasses that of the second Adam. The situation of the second Adam involves, as we have seen, both the innocence of Nature and the corruption of experience; but it is above all creative in function. Finally, it is this creative purpose of the second Adam which gives direction to The Castaway. Even where Walcott explores the negative aspects of the Caribbean condition most despairingly, he is finding his bearings for this new beginning. His spiritual purpose is far too profound to stop merely at the bitterness of history, as his reaction to Naipaul shows. Gerald Moore's appreciation again, defines this aspect of Walcott's position: "Thus he is both a spokesman for a generation endeavouring to throw off racial and colonial inhibitions in the search for a distinctly West Indian existence, and the great reminder of the loneliness imposed upon them by space and time. It is their very loneliness, their exclusion, which forces self-discovery upon them. . . ."[17]

Walcott's modes of pursuing this task, as we have seen, remain locked in and urgently involved with his individual consciousness. His modes of exploration are essentially introspective, and his metaphysical overtures largely those of the "superior" withdrawn mind. It is, accordingly, through his own self-discovery that he gropes towards these meanings and begins the "search for a distinctly West Indian existence".

In the process he performs a task similar to that of his old hero, Stephen Daedalus: that of "forging in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race".[18] The resemblances are in fact fundamental. It has been necessary to withdraw into the private soul for the discoveries that will help him to create the conscience of his race. But, as with Stephen in the Portrait, this must eventually leave him alienated in a superior, estranged suffering.

The effort is represented by a number of poems where he is engaged in direct self-dramatisation. The outstanding example is "Goats and Monkeys". The latter is on a fundamental level the poetic counterpart to the climactic theme being explored in Dream. There it is done through his most representative folk hero, the ape-figure Makak. Here Walcott re-enacts the tragedy of Othello. His purpose is to show that the latter's crime was not prompted by "panther-black revenge" but arose out of his fear of "the corruption of an absolute". As in Shakespeare, his motives originate from profound spiritual sources. Othello and Desdemona represent opposite states of being, in both of which exist deeply embedded instincts towards each other. The states of beasthood and godhead, ape and virgin, dark and light. The instinctual gravitation of the one towards the other is part of their fundamental coexistence in reality. This very coexistence is the fact of cosmic duality, the source of man's existential perplexity, but ineluctable:

> Virgin and ape, maid and malevolent Moor,
> their immoral coupling still halves our world.
>
> (11.20-21)

This represents a fundamental philosophical idea in Walcott, and reappears in Dream. Within the elemental/darkness of Othello there is instinctual gravitation towards spiritual purity. Within the state of purity/whiteness

that Desdemona represents the inevitable pull towards the elemental/ darkness. In the dramatic context, then, Desdemona is symbolic of a dream of otherness, a state of perfection towards which Othello is propelled; and she is herself naturally drawn towards him. His dream of otherness matches the elemental proportions of his need. Under the presiding genius of that dream, Moon/Imagination, exerting her perennial seductions towards otherness, Othello's ambition is total and absolute. So that when the perfection of that dream is threatened it is Imagination, the very faculty of dream, that he would confound - that, even more than the dream itself. His violence is thus directed at Moon, cosmos itself - "Chaos is come again" - and Desdemona herself is engulfed in this huge passion. She almost pales into insignificance:

> 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,
>
> . . . .
>
> And so he barbarously arraigns the moon
> for all she has beheld since time began
> for his own night-long lechery, ambition,
> while barren innocence whimpers for pardon.
>
> And it is still the moon, she silvers love,
> limns lechery and stares at our disgrace.
> Only annihilation can resolve
> the pure corruption in her dreaming face.
>
> (11.29-39)

It is the elemental/bestial measure of his ambition, then, that propels him into an act of such tragic folly: to kill "what, like the clear moon, cannot abhor/ her element, night". To kill in fact what is a part of himself, and bring back the chaos in which he himself is destroyed. In the folly of this final violation lies the supreme comedy of human destiny. The comedy exists in the ultimate irony of man's existential

duality. So that Othello's archetypal comic agony was prefigured in his destiny as man - "prophetically stitched". And the errors of his bestiality are proof of his condition and susceptibility as man. Blackness - that elemental/bestial condition, from which he commits the follies of arch-dreamer - defines his humanity. In this sense it is a universal condition:

> this mythical, horned beast who's no more
> monstrous for being black.
>
> (11.49-50)

Blackness and whiteness for Walcott, then, are symbolic of truths that transcend merely racial issues. In "Goats and Monkeys" he takes the social context of race and sex as his starting point, but leaves this far behind as he pushes his concerns to their utmost frontiers on the metaphysical. On these levels, blackness is the elemental condition from which man starts, in his dream of otherness, to aspire to a higher reality. The condition is as old as man himself, but it has its specific relevance to the situation of Caribbean man. Caribbean man starts to dream and create himself from the blackness of lack and deprivation - conditions that return him to the elemental. The blackness of race and history in the Caribbean is thus more than just an ethnic phenomenon of social relevance: it has these profound cultural and spiritual implications. The relationship between Caribbean man and dream, ape and virgin, are fully explored in Dream on Monkey Mountain where Walcott's own poetic persona fuses with that of the folk-dreamer, Makak. In "Goats and Monkeys" the urgency of the theme is conveyed in his thorough identification with Shakespeare's hero. The intensity with which Othello's boundless ambition is conveyed is a measure of the precipitate force of Walcott's own dream: it arises out of a lack that is Walcott's own. It comes through in the huge appetite of his images:

> . . . . couldn't she have known
> like Pasiphäe, poor girl, she'd breed horned monsters?
> That like Eurydice, her flesh a flare
> travelling the hellish labyrinth of his mind
> his soul would swallow hers?
>
> (11.14-18)

There is something of an overreaching dynamic in the quality of these metaphors, as in a number of other poems, such as "The Prince". Walcott himself expresses its significance in the play Henri Christophe, when Dessalines says: "Every slave dreams in extremes".[19] In The Castaway, as in most of the works, the extreme dreams of his protagonists are his own. Denis Donoghue wrote perceptively of this overreaching compulsion, emerging in the tone of "Goats and Monkeys": "We have the feeling that Mr. Walcott is impatient to assume the world, he will not wait for the just word."[20]

Yet, if Walcott overreaches in the impatience of his dream to assume the world, he arrives in the process at a self-knowledge vital to his understanding of the destiny of Caribbean man. Through such explorations of his own situation as Caribbean dreamer, he gains insight into the creative potential of a new people; and the type of awareness and the kind of sensibility with which they must start to forge their own soul, realise their potential for a higher reality. Like all the most fundamental insights, it is at once universal and particular. Caribbean man is universal as man beginning on new earth and therefore close to earth. This is the relevance of Walcott's archetypal contexts. The very fact of his having to begin anew is, at the same time a unique and particular situation - the result of specific historical circumstances. It is his particular history, and the role played by race in that history, that have created the need for a new beginning. What is most important, however, is that he sees race and history within the context of this new

beginning, and understands how his moral needs far transcend the bitterness and stigmas of the past. To do this is to recognise the necessity of "shak[ing] off colonial and racial inhibitions",[21] to quote Gerald Moore again. For this reason Walcott stresses the irrelevance of "racial, panther-black revenge" to Othello's moral conflicts. Walcott does realise that the bitterness is not so easily overcome. He himself started with a keen sensitivity and bitter rancour towards these stigmas, as we have seen in the juvenilia. His "Othello 1950" (Poems) is very different in outlook from his Othello of the sixties. In the former poem, he mocks the ideas behind the taboo on sexual relations between black and white, that give rise to such atrocities in the American South:

> Lady, on trees
> Quaint crucifixions, out of less
> Liaisons happen, say, in Missouri.
> From tenderness
> Lamppoles have budded niggers in Mississippi.
>
> (ll.16-20)

Walcott has struggled through his own concern with these themes to arrive at the emphases of "Goats and Monkeys". In very important respects the struggle against bitterness is a necessary part of the whole effort.

Conscious of the profound lack and outrage from which he himself started, Walcott is fully aware of the intensity the effort requires. Through this he arrives at a symbolic appreciation of blackness - which defines his plight - as a positive condition in the Caribbean sensibility. The idea is expressed in two important poems: "The Almond Trees" and "Veranda". The poems are important for his appreciation of the nature of Africa's, ("The Almond Trees") and Europe's survival ("Veranda") in the Caribbean race. Walcott is acutely conscious of the hybrid character of the West Indian people, and it is treated on several levels in his work. He touched on one important aspect of this in "A Far Cry from Africa". It

is a matter of pressing urgency to him because he is himself a mulatto, a "mixed son". What he considers in both these poems is the nature of the transformation both these races underwent in the new environment, and how its character survives in the Caribbean sensibility. In both poems, blackness is a state attained through the intensity of suffering and endurance, an experience to which Africa, and Europe in its own way, were exposed in an alien territory. Ultimately, Walcott is concerned with history as the crucible in which the Caribbean creole, of African and European descent, and by implication of all the other races that converge in the area, was forged.

Walcott's eyes are fixed on the native landscape to observe the experience. In "The Almond Trees" he watches a beach scene in which a coppery stand of almond trees provides shelter for girls who have been "toasting their flesh" in the sun. His meaning turns, typically, on the analogy between the coppery colour of the almond trees and the sun-tanned flesh of the girls. "Aged trees and oiled limbs share a common colour!" The significance of this shared colour is expressed in his description of the kind of exposure that has darkened these trees. With his forceful capacity for sustaining metaphor, he interprets the 'natural' history of these trees in terms of the human experience of slavery. Like the Africans transplanted to a foreign soil, the trees were deprived of their native names, had classical ones imposed on them by European culture. This was one source of violation. The greatest ravage was in the exposure to the violence which stripped them naked, as the brutalities of slavery completely dehumanised its victims. The fierceness of these brutalities is expressed in these elemental terms:

> Welded in one flame,
> huddling naked, stripped of their name,
> for Greek or Roman tags, they were lashed

> raw by wind, washed
> out with salt and fire-dried,
> bitterly nourished where their branches died,
>
> (11.34-39)

Walcott extends the metaphor to the rawness of the wind blowing through these trees, which he compares to the broad coarse dialect of the Caribbean. It is through the endurance of this fierce experience that they were transformed, their temper intensified. Theirs was no smooth, classical metamorphosis:

> Not as some running hamadryad's cries
> rooted, broke slowly into leaf
> her nipples peaking to smooth, wooden boles
>
> (11.43-45)

In Western culture, these 'metamorphoses' were natural and effortless because rooted in tradition. Here these trees and their human counterparts, uprooted in the ways already described, were "bitterly nourished where their branches died". Walcott crowds all his ideas and symbols of these historical brutalities into the controlling metaphor. It is the image of burning, the fierceness of flame and fire, that expresses the final character of their indigenous metamorphosis:

> Their grief
> howls seaward through charred, ravaged holes.
>
> (11.46-47)

The image of the burnt tree, blackened to coal, is one of the most important emblems in Walcott's total vision of Caribbean man, and he defines something of its fundamental significance in this poem. "The Almond Trees" is finally a poem most effective on this level of explication. In the end, he underscores an authentically drawn analogy between the human and the physical landscape:

> One sunburnt body now acknowledges
> that past and its own metamorphosis
>
> (11.48-49)

But Walcott has uttered a strongly felt insight into the intensity of the historical experience in which the soul of a new people, infused with these principles of violence, was tempered - a people who must continue to "endure their furnace" as they forge their existence in the privations of the environment. This bears directly on Walcott's views of an indigenous creole culture. His beach is a further shore of Africa, but it is an Africa uprooted, "blackened" and transformed into a unique species.

"Veranda" is a vision of the more luminous properties of this blackness. The seasoned timber of trees that have endured their furnace, burnt into coal, awaits the alchemical process: "Like pressured trees brought diamonds out of coals." In this archetypal image Walcott symbolises the ultimate beauty attainable through the very intensity of the experience suffered. It is a poetic expression of the fullness of potential inherent in a people who have been "seasoned" in that way: left with the need and capacity to attain that level of intensity. Walcott is speaking from the depths of his own personal aspirations, but he is at the same time making a prophetic hope for the self-realisation of a people who share his experience. The poem is of much greater personal significance than "Almond Trees", and these avowals even more insistent. The insistence is necessary. Walcott is stressing the transformation of Europe itself in the West Indian "race". He is moreover, dealing with his own family history. He evokes the ghost of his white grandfather, along with those of the host of expatriates who came to the region during the days of Empire. The gesture is a meaningful one, and has nothing to do with a sentimental attachment to the romance of Empire. He starts from a sensitive recognition of the searing experience they themselves must have endured, as individuals facing the unknown in a new territory, and making it their home in the search for personal fulfilment. This is the period

during which Franklin (unpublished), a play in which he deals with this theme, is started.

Walcott had expressed the idea of the community of suffering of black and white, colonised and coloniser, in "Ruins of a Great House"; but here it is no humanistic resolution that informs his sympathy. It arises out of a strong personal conviction, fundamental to his basic ideas about the creolised sensibility of the races which make up the West Indian people. The situation to which Walcott alludes in relation to his grandfather is authentic. The latter was a white creole from Barbados who actually shut himself in his house and set fire to it. Walcott sees his fate as expressive of some intensity of suffering, some desperation of circumstances, that forced him to a heroic end:

> Uprooted from some rainy English shire,
> you sought your Roman
>
> End in suicide by fire.
> (11.17-19)

The images of charred, blackened trees, repeat the same positive significance as in "The Almond Trees"; he too endured his furnace, was toughened, blackened, in the experience which forged this heroic temper. His blackened remains, both literally and figuratively, are the material emblems of this seasoned character. These are the remains that Walcott inherits, himself exposed to similar intense conditions as he sets out to forge his own soul. It is not his "Englishness" that his mixed son inherits, since that itself was transformed, but the qualities of a metamorphosed, creolised product. With his special gift for the lucid interplay between concrete metaphor and idea, Walcott symbolises the process through which these qualities were passed from father to son:

> Your mixed son gathered your charred, blackened bones,
> in a child's coffin.

And buried them himself on a strange coast.

(11.20-22)

The child's coffin conjures up again the image of the still-born, which reappears very frequently in his work during this period, in the drama as well as the poetry. Here, as in Ti-Jean and His Brothers, it is the possibilities of its birth that are being considered. In Ti-Jean (1970), the impulses towards life are desperate and powerful in the still-born. Here these impulses become possibilities. The possibilities are especially intense because it is out of this seasoned substance, the 'blackened bones', that life will evolve. Walcott is himself the buried son, undergoing his own birth in an experience similar in quality to that of his father. The action of burying the coffin himself suggests the conscious effort to create himself, bring about his own birth, in enduring like his father the privations of a "strange coast":

I am the man my father loved and was.

(1.34)

Such discoveries have the perennial significance of the quest for spiritual fatherhood, and this quality of awareness survives from Walcott's earliest forays with Joyce into the archetypal patterns of myth in the juvenilia. But the discoveries are firmly rooted in his own earth and circumstances. His final burden is of the high moral fibre and creative capacity of a people born to endurance and strong desires. On an important level, it is Walcott's vision of what makes for the beauty of blackness. But it is, above all, of personal urgency to Walcott as Caribbean artist, committed to the ideal, and suffering within the private soul the anguish of this ideal:

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.

(11.29-32)

The ideal remains locked within the spiritual intensities of the artist's consciousness, as he strives towards the wisdom of a higher awareness. It is a ripeness he must attain in his individual soul before he returns, as quest-figure, to earth and the tribe. From this arises both the strength and the limitation of the vision. The strength derives from the integrity and depth of Walcott's insights into his personal aspirations as a member of the tribe. At the same time it leads Walcott, the hermetic artist, into the archetypal intensities of a search for twilight - a search where he fails, contrary to what Louis James' title, "In Solitude for Company",[22] suggests, to find company in solitude.

v) Estrangement

We have charted the course of a dynamic phase, during which Walcott pushes in several complex, exploratory directions. There is, as we have seen, an underlying unity of purpose behind these directions. He starts from the sense of an oppressive lack, and the need to discover some creative purpose ("The Castaway"). The need is complex because it involves both the failure of the values he has inherited as Friday and the lack of a native mythology ("Laventille", and "The Voyage Up River"). These create the necessity for some independent attempt to orient himself towards an elemental and 'pure' reality. He tries to do so on one level in "A "Tropical Bestiary". But most urgently it involves him in a profound awareness of the various aspects of his condition as new man, embarked upon a native and independent type of existence. He explores the condition within its more archetypal reaches, and finds insight into the aspirations and sensibility of Caribbean man as a creature emerging from the chaos of

origins ("Goats and Monkeys"). He moves into a historical context to consider the nature of his potential as a beginner, the character that has been forged out of a unique experience. It is through this very character that he can attain his highest creative possibilities. All these explorations and discoveries, as we have stressed, have the urgency of Walcott's most private aspirations. As Alvarez points out in the review earlier cited, Walcott is, overwhelmingly, the hero, martyr and victim of his poems[23] - a relationship that reappears in the crucial fusion between Walcott's persona and the hero in the plays.

This fact of selfhood is of vital significance in the final moral pattern of Walcott's achievement in The Castaway. The comparison to the Portrait, described earlier on, becomes even more relevant at this point. Selfhood is inseparable from the metaphysical perspective of the artist as "young" man, as he sets out to explore his own suffering. He is, before a member of the tribe, the artist: the man engaged in a private search for God. His gaze is intensely focussed on the spiritual dimension of reality. We saw in the opening section how Walcott's withdrawal into the mind's dark cave was presaged by the sense of the separateness of his suffering from that of the community. This is an original motive behind his position as outcast, as in the case of Stephen. In the end, the self-involved artist is isolated within the mind's cave; he has withdrawn from the humanity about him in the hermetic search for heaven. Stephen has arrived at exactly this predicament by the end of the Portrait. Joyce draws attention to its significance in the very last entrance in Stephen's diary: "April 26. 'Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels.'"[24] It is the truth of the heart, the knowledge of humanity, that Stephen now needs for his final

integration. This will be realised in his encounter with Bloom in <u>Ulysses</u> (1936).

Walcott too faces this predicament and the need to return to humanity at the end of this phase. But the nature of this need and the particular routes via which he must find reintegration are different from Stephen's. They are peculiar to the type of explorations that have engaged him in <u>The Castaway</u>. His own estrangement comes from the god-like propensities to which he approximated in his desire to be "like beast or natural object, pure". This, as emerged in "A Tropical Bestiary", was in the end too stoical. The aspiration leaves him bound within a rigorous "mind" effort trying to transcend human susceptibilities, and gives rise to tensions and schizophrenic principles that pervade the volume. Intent on sustaining the ideal above these susceptibilities, he ends up estranged from humanity and its flow in the tribe. Walcott himself, ever self-vigilant, comes to identify this predicament and his need. He recognises it with keen misgivings. In the Crusoe poems where he takes stock of his own moral development, this is the main burden. It is expressed in "Crusoe's Island":

> Upon this rock the bearded hermit built
> His Eden:
> . . . .
> Bible for sabbath, all the joys
> But one
> Which sent him howling for a human voice.
> Exiled by a flaming sun
> The rotting nut, bowled in the surf
> Became his own brain rotting from the guilt
> Of heaven without his kind,
>
> (11.30-39)

and again:

> Craftsman and castaway
> All heaven in his head,
> He watched his shadow pray
> Not for God's love but human love instead.
>
> (11.48-51)

He considers its disturbing influences on the psyche of the artist. Reflecting ironically on the delusion of the artist - that the search for heaven is a pledge of his compassion - he describes its disorienting effects, which visit human forms and features with sinister, surreal influences:

> That fabled, occupational
> Compassion, supposedly inherited with the gift
> Of poetry had fed
> With a rat's thrift on faith, shifted
> Its trust to corners, hoarded
> Its mania like bread,
> Its brain a white, nocturnal bloom
> That in a drunken, moonlit room
> Saw my son's head
> Swaddled in sheets
> Like a lopped nut, lolling in foam.
>
> (11.61-71)

This curious loss of touch with humanity involves other failings. For Walcott it means - and here his position is more critical than that of Stephen - an estrangement from the living language of that particular humanity. His hermetic explorations have engaged an intellectual "superior" medium. He faces the gap between the language of intellect and native forms of expression, which becomes more critical in the West Indian linguistic context. It is not, however, just a matter of the gap between standard English and the native dialect. It is the gap between heightened literary metaphor and the native idiom of immediate experience. The nature of the need will emerge more fully in The Gulf where in overcoming the one he arrives at the other.

Footnotes

1. The following are a few of the favourable reviews the volume received:

   (i) A. Alvarez, review of The Castaway, Observer, October 24, 1965, p.27.

   (ii) Graham Martin, review of The Castaway, The Listener, March 10, 1965, p.359.

   (iii) Richard Kell, "A Region Below Intelligence", The Guardian, December 10, 1965, p.6.

2. Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture", in Dream on Monkey Mountain (New York: Farrar, Straus ; 1970), p.4.

3. Walcott, Selected Poems (New York: Farrar, Straus ; 1964).

4. Walcott, Notebooks, March 28, 1966 - July 10, 1966.

5. In an interview with the writer, April 8, 1974.

6. In Lupercal (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p.26.

7. Walcott, "What the Twilight Says . . .", p.6.

8. George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p.109.

9. Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (London: Longmans, 1969), p.20.

10. A. Alvarez, review of The Castaway, Observer, October 24, 1965, p.27.

11. The authentic spelling is "Laventille".

12. Claude McKay, Selected Poems (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953).

13. Walcott, Notebooks.

14. J.A. Froude, The English in The West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses (London: Longmans, 1888), p.306.

15. Wilson Harris, Palace of the Peacock (London: Faber Editions, 1968), p.72. This edition used throughout the present work.

16. Walcott, "What the Twilight Says . . .", p.5.

17. Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue, p.20.

18. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), p.253.

19. Walcott, Henri Christophe (Barbados, 1950),p.18.

20. Denis Donoghue, "Waiting for the End", New York Review of Books XVI (May 6, 1971), p.27.

21. See n.17.

22. Louis James, "In Solitude for Company", The Islands in Between (London: O.U.P., 1968).

23. See n.17.

24. James Joyce, Portrait, p.253.

CHAPTER 3

Landfall

(i) Introductory: Basic Aspects of the Movement from Castaway Position to Landfall

(a) Outwards to an integration into Humanity

In The Gulf (1969) there are important new directions which signify another major phase in Walcott's development. This new phase starts from a basic shift from the position of the castaway. The latter involves, importantly, an advance in which Walcott's moral vision and his consciousness as a Caribbean artist arrive at a final realisation and integration.

The aspects of these changes in the volume are several and their interrelations complex; but basically the new direction is represented by two main features. There is, firstly, a greater 'outwardness', in terms of actual engagement with the cultural scene, than we found in The Castaway. Secondly, there is the withdrawal from the castaway position - which Walcott calls a renunciation of "the sea's mythology" - operating as an implicit principle behind his outlook in the volume. The two are fundamentally related in the pattern of a profound moral change. Talking about new directions in his work in an interview entitled "Walcott on Walcott", he suggests the underlying connection between them and its deeper significance. He explains a change from his style in The Castaway: it is a movement from the hermetic locked-in style of the poet to the outwardly-orientated novelistic approach. The passage is a crucial one and worth quoting in full:

> I think one of the finest poets in the world - one of the finest poets not in the world, but one of the poets who has had one of the subtlest influences in terms of the content of anyone's work, has been Thomas Hardy; and you know, if you look at the intensity and the

> closeness and the privacy of Hardy's poetry as compared to some of the loudest statements made by some of the other kinds of poets, the more locked in hermetic kind of statements made by other poets, Hardy becomes every year I think, a greater poet, simply because of the age, the kind of a prose age; the content of Hardy's poetry is so strong that everybody knows now that poets have to learn from novelists. I have been influenced now, and I hope that, I am glad that, I am still open to influence not by writers abroad but by West Indian writers.[1]
>
> (underline mine)

Walcott is defining here a kind of novelistic poetic whose implications are far from straightforward. The novel form, classically, enters into the external social setting (as against the hermetic closed world of pure poetry), to dramatise actual experience. In doing so, however, it is the inner processes of human experience within the actual it succeeds in capturing. It is thus the form most retentive of the privacy and closeness of human content. The outwardness of the form then, works towards an interiorization of this more meaningful human content. It is this Walcott sees as most original in the poetry of Hardy.

The principle of this 'novelistic poetic' has subtle and far-reaching implications, and embraces many complex features in the volume. These will emerge fully as we proceed. We need to begin at this original point: the movement from the hermetic to the novelistic technique accounts for the direct engagement with the cultural and social scene at which the basic distinction between the two forms begins. This kind of engagement is immediately reflected in the volume. In The Castaway natural phenomena, as in "A Tropical Bestiary", and literary motifs, as in "Goats and Monkeys" had provided the mythic settings of most of the poems. In The Gulf the poems deal extensively with the communal experience: the title poem looks at the political and racial scene in America; he presents portraits of the revolutionary scene in the Caribbean ("Junta") and cultural features

like carnival ("Mass Man"). But it is not merely from a stylistic objective that this outwardness derives, as the above analysis suggests; nor is it, definitively, Walcott's adoption of a public, committed, approach. It originates from a movement of vital moral import - the withdrawal from the isolated, abstract confines of the castaway position. The terms "locked-in" and "hermetic" apply directly to the peculiar aspects of Walcott's confinement "within the mind's dark cave". The fact of this withdrawal is understood when Walcott states, later in the same interview, that he has given up the Crusoe mask.[2]

It is in the context of this shift from the deeper meanings of the castaway position that the pattern of changes, and Walcott's final perspective and achievement during this phase can be understood. We saw in The Castaway that the isolation within the mind's dark cave meant a period of metaphysical inwardness, which was the value of his preoccupation with a "mythopoeic coast". An important motif running through the volume describes this shift as a withdrawal from the "mythopoeic coast" to find "land". It is articulated in "Landfall, Grenada", for example, where Walcott expresses his aspiration to renounce "the sea's mythology" and accept instead the "strenuous ease" of a "landfall going". The movement is enacted in "Ebb", which, like all Walcott's opening poems, gives the essential bearings of the period. The title "Ebb" suggests the recession of ocean. Walcott traces a symbolic journey from sea towards land, and fixes the philosophical goal towards which he is moving in this phase. We will follow the course of this journey.

In Walcott's progress upshore, ocean and shoreline recede as the suburban landscape expands. The movement develops subtly as a gradual reclamation of the land from these shorelines, proceeding apace with the expanding development of its pioneer industry - its factories and yellow

Caterpillar tractors. Walcott is penetrating deeper into a tawdry built-up scene. The moral significance of the movement unfolds in the process. With the receding ocean, Walcott is yielding transcendent, "rainbow" aspirations. They are now sullied and expressive of disillusionment, incapable of being sustained against the pressing demands of the actual. Some shape of illusion, however, still continues to appear through the narrowing possibilities of the land - luring him on to some possible sanctuary and realisation within the actual. It is always elusive, changing its faces with the changing faces of the land.

> but, blessedly, it narrows
>
> through a dark aisle
> of fountaining, gold coconuts, an oasis
> marked for the yellow Caterpillar tractor.
>
> We'll watch this shovelled too, but as we file
> through its swift-wickered shade there always is
> some island schooner netted in its weave
>
> (11.9-15)

It is the recognition of the inescapable, unyielding lure of vision and its elusive pattern. The recognition brings Walcott to a climactic perception central to his thought in <u>The Gulf</u>. The search for an ideal other remains inherent in man's nature as part of a heritage forever partially possessed; thus diminished, always excluded from its full realisation, he is forever bound to his perpetual pursuit. It is therefore, not only the burden of human destiny, but the very fulfilment of that destiny, that he should forever follow this perpetual pursuit - what Walcott describes as a "circling" destiny:

> it races the horizon
> with us, railed to one law,
>
> ruled, like the washed-up moon
> to circle her lost zone,
> her radiance thinned.
>
> (11.20-24)

Walcott thus renounces an ocean which was the lure of the impossible desire to transcend this burden - to escape the conflicts and negations of the actual and "leave this world", as he puts it in Dream. He now arrives on land to accept that circling destiny, ultimately present in the most familiar and banal rhythms of actual experience. They are rhythms which evoke an awe and terror as intense as that previously associated with the infinite. It is to them therefore that we owe spiritual vigilance. It is within this everyday, habitual experience that Walcott seeks to orient himself and find integration.

> For safety, each sunfall,
> the wildest of us all
> mortgages life to fear.
>
> And why not? From this car
> there's terror enough in the habitual,
> miracle enough in the familiar. Sure . . .
>
> (11.34-39)

Before we can appreciate how deeply authentic and meaningful is this awareness for Walcott, we need to look again at some of the specific conditions and values of the castaway involvement with ocean. It was a period, to cite from "Origins" again, of the mind's reversion into its "mythopoeic coast" to "take root in itself". As quest-figure, Walcott had made important discoveries about the destiny of the race. They continue to inform his perspectives in The Gulf, as we shall see later. In the private search for heaven, however, the driving motive for Walcott as individual poet became the attempt to transcend the frustrations of actual circumstances, by the sheer god-like capacities of mind. The spirit of this found expression in this defiant gesture in "Crusoe's Island":

> Fanned by the furnace blast
> Of heaven, may the mind
> Catch fire till it cleaves
> Its mould of clay at last.
>
> (11.99-102)

Walcott came to face the futility of the effort and its unnaturalness; its strains were aggravated by the problem of estrangement he identified at the end of The Castaway. From here originates the need, psychological as well as moral, to reorient himself towards the actual. But the very intensity of Walcott's insight into the condition at the root of this over-reaching crisis, is what gives direction to and shapes his orientation towards reality. These insights were gained - and this is of crucial importance - from his mythopoeic explorations. The movement from the castaway position, in other words, is not only a negative reaction, but carries forward a fundamental positive. Walcott had entered into an awareness of the polarities of beasthood and godhead, their destructive conflicts ("Goats and Monkeys"), of desire and function ("A Tropical Bestiary") at the most metaphysical levels. It is this consciousness, in fact, which gives rise to his underlying perception of the ultimate existential "gulf". The gulf is the obverse of man's circling destiny, and stands as an awesome witness to its truth. His present focus on the gulf is the effort to confront it and to find means of closing with reality.

It is important to grasp this two-fold value of the gulf motif which gives the volume its title. The motif does not represent a pessimistic outlook. It signifies first a need for fear in the recognition of this condition, from which to arrive at an inner consciousness of the directions of our desires, and self-knowledge. Thus, in the volume, the negative aspects of non-awareness exist side by side with the affirmations of a creative consciousness of the gulf. The negative finds expression in the strains of ironic rancour and disillusionment which persist in the volume, contrasting with the mood of poems like "Ebb". This is concentrated in the "Metamorphoses" sequence where we get portraits of ideals surprised by the bitter back-lash of reality. The title is in fact ironic -

the metamorphoses are bitterly inverted. A number of poems, especially those which dramatise public situations, end on this note of ironic deflation. The burden of the gulf is essentially creative and religiously informed - it urges the recognition of the one eternal principle of duality, extending from man's mythic origins to all spheres of experience.

The burden of the gulf is thus carried over from Walcott's most vital crises and discoveries during the castaway phase. The final nature of his moral advance in this phase rests on how actual human experience comes to acquire a creative order in terms of this consciousness of the gulf. The humblest objects and gestures of familiar experience are signatures infused with the most intense, instinctual content of human needs and aspirations, and, by the same token human susceptibilities and apprehensions. They, like the basic pattern of human experience which they 'substantiate' carry the burden of the gulf, and are epiphanies of the rising and falling rhythms between love and non-fulfilment, life and death. In the title poem, the poet leaves "Love Field" with mementos of his stay in America. These burn with a "skeletal candour" to become translucent of the truth that we are destined to be dispossessed of all love - "those we love are objects we return". Beyond its earthly measure man's love earns no further inheritance; there is no 'other' beyond finitude in which it finds a higher justification. So that only in the conscious surrender to the difficult course of its fluctuating measure, expecting nothing of the nothing beyond, is its true essence fully realised.

But these revelations, though acutely poignant, are not a manifestation of futility or cause for despair. It means rather that humanity finds its fullest fruition in these rising and falling rhythms which engage the depths of our human allegiance. It urges the necessity for a full immersion into their flux with a moral awe religious in intensity,

alert to their moments of grace and accesses of danger - "terror enough in the habitual, / miracle enough in the familiar". It is the acceptance of a destiny predicting nothing but its rhythmic end - predictions that "do not disappoint but bring us nearer" ("A Georgetown Journal"). Man finds his creative level in conscious submissiveness to "a landfall going". Walcott is spiralling back to an acceptance of an inescapable destiny. It is no simple compromise, fatalistic or stoical in spirit. It engages the active tensions of the Imagination, consciously contained to attain a "strenuous ease". These then, represent Walcott's vision of access to a final creative humanism. The integrity of this vision and the subtlety of its far-reaching implications emerge fully when we see how it informs Walcott's treatment of reality during this phase. Its inner necessity grows organically out of the particular confrontations through which it is discovered - classically, as we shall see, in the "Guyana" sequence.

(b) Discovery of a New World Myth

The above introduces the reaches of Walcott's moral advance in terms of the shift from the castaway position. What is, however, most significant about the awareness it represents - and it is on this that his final achievement rests - is that it evolves closely and organically out of a rooted consciousness. Walcott's achievement during this phase consists in this: he discovers these landfall bearings through an innate and concrete engagement with the regional condition; and succeeds, in the process, in defining the particular sensibility which gives the region its unique access to a creative archetypal truth. It amounts to the formation of an indigenous myth. Through his own representative suffering during the castaway phase, Walcott had confronted the burden of an aboriginal condition native to the environment and consequent on its history. This led

him to the realisation that the necessity of its peoples was a return to elemental beginnings to the recreative role of the New Adam. In The Cast-away these instinctual cognitions were apprehended and conceived on 'abstract' metaphysical levels. Now these conditions and necessities are concretely located in the native experience. The pattern becomes crystallised, so that the particular modes and exigencies of this creative necessity are "named" in the total experience of the environment - the complex of historical, political, racial and domestic factors which comprise this experience. Here Walcott arrives at and articulates a New World awareness. This is concentrated in the Guyana sequence, which dramatises a symbolic journey through the Guyanese interior. The journey is a quest to exploit and "measure" the uncivilized, primordial lands of the New World; and the forested interior of Guyana, which is the original setting of a similar quest in the novels of Wilson Harris, is symbolic of this elemental configuration. This configuration is as much a historico-cultural reality as a topographical. The journey through the interior thus becomes, as in Harris' novels, the process of a genesis into an archetypal pattern of existence. The quester is born to a higher consciousness of an eternal creative Order in humanity's dual allegiance between the earthly-natural and the divine-creative. The peculiar access to this Order is the New World heritage. It is within this Order, as we shall see when we trace the journey in section (iii) of this chapter, that Walcott identifies and "names" the creative principles of man's circling destiny.

In identifying a New World vision, Walcott is, most importantly, discovering fundamental links with major New World writers. The perspectives of these writers all turn, in their various ways, upon the burden of a renascence of the Adamic Imagination - a renascence which derives

from the unique cultural configuration of the environment. This configuration begins, as we have seen, with the primordial phenomenon. The incidence of vestiges and icons of the old myths, themselves an integral part of the complex of historical factors which have 'reproduced' the primordial, remain as part of that configuration. This constitutes the reassembly and novel juxtaposition of old archetypes in the new setting. Renascence occurs in the New World recovery of the archetypal origins of all the old myths. Walcott affirms these links with both Caribbean and Latin American writers - Wilson Harris, the Caribbean novelist; Carpentier and Borges, both Latin American. In an art review written during this period, Walcott distinguishes these writers as the major exponents of a New World outlook most vital to the region:

> The paintings of Carlisle Chang [Trinidadian painter] are the only ones that admit that we share that New World sensibility, that our past and promise are those of countries in the same zone. In the novel, Wilson Harris is the first to explore the truth.
>
> In poetry there is no recognition of the comradeship of Guillen, Borges and Neruda. . . . Borges has much more to offer us than Burroughs or Saul Bellow. A great novel like Alejo Carpentier's 'The Lost Steps' [sic] remains unknown, unread.[3]

The fundamental nature of these affinities is explicitly identified in the Guyana sequence, explored in relation to Harris and Borges in particular. Walcott's journey into the interior closely reconstructs several of the contexts of Harris' Guyana Quartet.[4] He starts ("Guyana I") with the surveyor whose task is to measure the interior (Harris' The Secret Ladder); penetrates into the interior until the arrival at "The Falls" (Harris' Palace of the Peacock). From there the journey takes Walcott into the territory of Borges, the lexicographer in close proximity with the Rupunini ("A Map of the Continent"). Harris' journey into the interior, as discussed in the preceding chapter (see p.71ff.), brings

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him to a philosophical resting point quite different from Walcott's: a mystical apprehension of unity of being through Time and Space, an anima binding both man and elemental creation. This contrasts with Walcott's acceptance of a strenuous landfall. But they share a common point of departure integral in the context of the New World "past and promise". Here the affinities are much more important than the differences. For both Walcott and Harris, the rencounter with an aboriginal presence, symbolically "present" in an unexplored landscape, is the necessary battleground for discovering the depth of our human allegiance in the pattern of creation. It enforces, to cite Harris' term, a renascence of the Arts of the Imagination.[5] We need to emphasize again that this renascence into original mythic patterns is informed by the knowledge of traditions and their archetypal patterns. Harris' interior worlds become a crucible of myths, Western and Eastern. Walcott's world retains deposits of traditions which have filtered through the language of the master, as well as native creolised folk survivals entering mainly in the drama. In both, it is important to note, these traditions include the African elements surviving in native folk-forms. This incidence of traditions means, not the recovery of any single tradition, but a distillation of the essence of all myth to the basic laws of existence out of which they arise; and with this, a genuine revitalization of consciousness. It is this reduction of traditions which Walcott sees operating behind Borges' portrayals of the repetitious circlings of the Imagination through the ages and cultures, and as the basis of his position in the New World legacy.

Carpentier's journey into the interior in The Lost Steps (Harmondsworth, 1956) affirms these fundamental possibilities of the New World past and promise. In this novel, the exhausted European Imagination returns to the primal Amerindian setting of the New World, and finds a fresh genesis into

an awesome creative Order. Here also, a synthesis between the aboriginal presence and the knowledge of traditions is involved.

These processes and conditions, then, define Walcott's concept of a New World legacy. The concept represents his definitive position on the cultural identity and destiny of the region. It stands for belief in an indigenous access to self-discovery, inherent in the fragmented and hybrid situation history has produced. The position differs markedly from that of Edward Brathwaite. The latter believes that the course of reintegration must be through parent myths, for the black man that of Africa, the severed links of which survive in our folk tradition. Walcott's discovery of kinship with other New World writers consolidates and gives validity to the cultural myth embodied in his outlook.

(c) <u>The Relevance and Functions of a Novelistic Poetic</u>

All these new developments traced so far are closely linked to each other under the one overarching movement described in "Ebb" - the symbolic movement from sea to land. We saw that Walcott's movement from the castaway position involved at the outset a change in style - a shift from the hermetic to a novelistic poetic. This novelistic technique which accounts for new strengths in his language, is organically linked to the moral principles operating through the phase. The function and significance of the technique were suggested in the opening passage on Hardy. The novelistic technique moves outward into the scene of actual experience, but for an interiorisation of this more meaningful content in actual human experience. Ultimately, it functions to capture the inner drama of "terror enough in the habitual, / miracle enough in the familiar". The movement outward into the social setting, which is its necessary medium, is primarily geared towards exploring the inner drama; to present it, as in

the novel, in an exposition of the psychological, emotional and spiritual forces at work. When Walcott presents individual human experience within the public scene, it is primarily this inner drama that is being deployed. He uses this mode for all his most important incursions into the public scene during this phase. He presents individual human experiences of public issues and collective situations in the local scene. In outstanding examples like "Junta" we get the individual drama in revolutionary politics and carnival in the Caribbean; in "Blues", the individual encounter with the scene of violence in America. Walcott's position on such public concerns emerges in the process; he is actively engaged in a critique of their directions - and this is important. But neither his purpose nor his approach is polemical. The same principle is operating in the drama, in plays like Ti-Jean and Dream, where the social viewpoint is consequent on, and secondary to an inner perspective.

The aesthetic behind this is a synthesis between innermost spiritual forces and the outer circumstances, producing a pattern in which the concrete, living experience defines its own metaphysical and mythic contours. The pattern is best typified in a symbolic sequence like "Guyana", where, like Harris, Walcott dramatises a concrete experience whose mythic content is intrinsic and immediate. The journey into the interior dramatises the concrete experience, purposes and needs of the protagonist in traversing the forest; it traces at the same time the symbolic dimensions contained in these factors. Thus, Walcott's novelistic treatment of poetic content answers to Harris' 'poetic' treatment of the novel form: though Walcott's style has nothing in common with Harris' unique 'experimental' modes. This pattern of development in Walcott's style is apparent in important distinctions between the modes of things like "Laventville" and "The Journey Up River" in The Castaway, and that of the sequence. In the Castaway poems Walcott is present as reflective, reacting observer; in "Guyana" as protagonist.

The deeper sources of this change in style are also the basis of a new poetic credo which finds expression in the volume. It is Walcott's new purpose to see life purged, "cured" of literature ("A Change of Skin"). So that "If the poem begins to shrivel/I no longer distend my heart" ("A Georgetown Journal"). The expression recurs wherever Walcott is directly preoccupied with his private burden and progress as a poet. He sees himself as undergoing an inverted metamorphosis which plunges him back from an imagined ideal into the actual; from there he must find a reintegration into its familiar and habitual intensities. It is the various aspects of this purpose that the new technique serves.

We have tried above to identify the main developments during this phase, and to trace the connections between them. We will proceed to explore these developments fully in the succeeding sections of this chapter. Section (ii) looks at Walcott's engagement with the social scene, in a number of poems which define his position on current social and political trends in the region. Our main object in this section will be to see how this inner perspective, carried forward from the castaway phase, informs and makes his position meaningful. The latter pivots mainly on the consciousness of the gulf, in terms of which Walcott appraises the misdirections of society. In addition, the function of the novelistic technique in serving this movement outward is most clearly defined in these "public" contexts. Consequently, we will focus on the stylistic aspect of Walcott's development in this section, and attempt to show the relationship between the latter and the kind of social commentary being made in these poems.

We move in section (iii) to the Guyana sequence, where the central achievement is concentrated - the final integration enacted in the journey through the interior towards landfall. Walcott's route, as

earlier observed, takes him through the territories of Harris and Borges. We will trace his route through the worlds of these two writers to fix the exact cultural links he establishes with them, in moving towards his own affirmation of landfall.

(ii) Engagement with the Social Scene

One of the distinguishing features of this volume is a greater involvement with current political and social issues both in the Caribbean and on the international scene. Walcott is concerned with the general effort towards liberation which gained momentum throughout the Third World in the sixties: he deals with the revolutionary ethos on the local scene ("Junta"), racial violence in America ("The Gulf"), civil strife in Nigeria ("Negatives"). He is making important moral critiques of public issues that signal radical changes in the structure of universal culture, too pervasive to be ignored. Their public urgencies begin at the most personal and individual levels of experience. To a large extent, they represent an important part of the pressure of actual exigencies which made the introspective exile of The Castaway no longer tenable. He makes a positive recognition of this arousal of revolutionary spirit in his tribute to Che Guevara (1928-1967):

> But the old choice of running, howling, wounded
> wolf-deep in her woods,
> while the white papers snow on
> genocide is gone;
> no face can hide
> its public, private pain,
> wincing, already statued.
>
> ("Elegy", 11.10-16)

When the revolutionary consciousness was just beginning to stir up in the region, Walcott seemed to view the new hysteria with a certain measure of sceptical detachment. "I cannot right new wrongs" (underline mine), he

says in an earlier version of the bitter "Codicil",[6] written towards the end of the castaway phase. It is revised to "old wrongs" in the later version, where the note of world weariness holds a greater measure of concern. He is viewing oppression as a perpetual outrage, old as man's inhuman struggle against his fellowman. With increasing developments, however, these new-old wrongs have liberated a vision whose urgencies can no longer be denied.

But Walcott's engagement with this new consciousness is not public: he is not viewing it in terms of its communal, collective implications in the way that "committed literature" does. His focus is turned exclusively inward to see how these new aspirations and efforts are generated by complex moral energies, rooted and archetypal in human nature, through which they must find or fall short of realisation. From this approach a meaningful position on the character of liberation in the region emerges; it is vitally consequent on this inward perspective. His most typical mode in dealing with these social concerns is to present the individual in personal pursuit of the promise of the revolution, the emphasis being on the private drama. With the exception of "The Gulf" and "Negatives", where he retains the role of reflective observer, all the other poems dealing with the social scene are dramatising the individual encounter with its active, militant struggles. In "Blues", for example, we get the individual encounter with violence in the American hoodlum scene; in "Junta", the classic example, the private drama of the carnival player turned revolutionary.

This presentation of the private drama within a public situation is where we see most clearly how the resources of the novelistic technique serve Walcott's purpose, and how effectively they are adapted. Walcott is able to dramatise the interplay between character and situation, as we

shall see in our analysis of "Junta", and penetrate at the same time, the inner forces of human nature responding to the conditions of environment. He captures therefore the kind of psychological realism peculiar to the novel form. The central achievement of this adaptation, as discussed in section (ic), is the synthesis between poetic and novelistic. In "Junta" dramatic narration attains this psychological realism, while visionary strains are embedded within it to sound the deepest burden. The method is far from original or unique in Walcott; as he observes in the passage on Hardy's influence, it has become quite traditional since poets realised that they had to learn from novelists. Walcott's efforts are parallel, for example, to those of Lowell in <u>Life Studies</u> (1959). Boris Ford, in defining the achievement of the Victorian novel at its peak, describes an interaction which gives the essential character of this synthesis: "The development of the novel was towards a more inward or more 'philosophic' analysis of the implications of a situation and a more careful and 'poetic' rendering of experience."[7] In addition to this central achievement, the method performs another function of vital importance to Walcott's art. In dramatising experience in its particularised, native setting, it captures the idiom and speech-rhythms, and with this, the life-style and personality of the environment. This makes for important changes in Walcott's language. It acquires a much more flexible range, can accommodate native modes of expression, and draws nearer to capturing the true accent of the region, as he does classically in the drama. These related developments are new strengths Walcott gains from the movement into a concrete engagement with actuality.

The poem "Junta" contains all these elements we have been identifying so far, and is the consummate example of Walcott's mode of engagement with the social scene. The poem presents the story of the typical

underprivileged Caribbean man pursuing self-realisation as a revolutionary leader. It shows both the characteristics of Walcott's inward approach, and the concerns that underlie his most essential position on the revolutionary issue.

"Junta" dramatises the progress of Vercingetorix's political career from its sources in his triumphant role in a carnival parade, to its climax in the coup which brings him defeat. The narrative unfolds a close interaction between character and situation to give insight into the inmost psychological processes that direct this progress, and shows inherent susceptibilities in interplay with the concrete conditions native to his environment. Walcott's revolutionary starts out on his campaigns in a spirit of heroic conquest, which is to remain the motivating force behind his political activity. It lies at the heart of the kind of personal apotheosis he seeks in this role, blinding him to the reality of true political commitment. From the outset, the narrative succinctly traces this heroic motivation to its sources in his role as the victorious leader of a carnival band. For this role he had won the coveted prize "Individual of the Year":

> The sun's brass clamp electrifies a skull
> kept shone since he won Individual
> of the Year, their first year on the road,
> as Vercingetorix And His Barbarous Horde;
>
> (11.1-4)

This deft tracing of the progress from carnival player to revolutionary, roots Vercingetorix's case in a powerfully authentic, localised context. Carnival is the main traditional form of cultural expression in most of the islands, especially in Trinidad, where it is celebrated on the greatest scale. In the latter island it is integral to the very life-style of the people and involves far-reaching, complex psychological and sociolog-

ical implications. The authenticity of Walcott's context is based on these factors.

It is necessary to fix this context before we can enter properly into Vercingetorix's situation. In Trinidad, where it especially belongs, carnival is an annual national festival which excels the traditional role of Christmas. The festival consists of "playing mas", as the local term goes, in masked disguises and fancy costumes, weeks of general merrymaking and entertainment, during which the native calypso and steelband music thrive. The highlight of the festival is the parade of costumed bands through the streets on Shrove Monday and Tuesday. These bands, which compete for a number of prizes, depict a variety of themes: historical, legendary, topical, as well as a number of traditional masques dating back to the beginnings of carnival. The themes are drawn from a variety of wide-ranging sources - Western and Oriental, classical as well as scenes nearer home. They are scenes which usually allow for artistic splendour and colour on a big scale - from the annals of Roman history, to African war tribes, Mexican Aztecs, oriental legends such as "A Thousand and One Nights", to the lighter-hearted jollity of sailors holidaying on shore. The elaborate scale on which these are mounted has made the Trinidad carnival internationally famous. Great skill and artistry goes into the creation of costumes, designed to portray and dramatise skilfully devised roles. It is an especially remarkable feature of the whole effort that individuals from the poorer ranks of the society can invest up to a thousand dollars in these costumes. The whole thing becomes a veritable "theatre of the streets" as Errol Hill, the Trinidadian dramatist and scholar, puts it in The Trinidad Carnival (Texas, 1972). Errol Hill's book gives a full description of all aspects of carnival in Trinidad, as well as its historical sources.

What is, however, especially important is the significance of the whole effort in the lives of the people. That carnival is a complex phenomenon which cannot be taken as an unqualified success - a well integrated form of cultural expression - is generally recognised. There are many common views about the negative aspects of the festival: that its therapeutic value is exploited as a political safety valve, that it is mere commercial triumph. Whatever the truth, there is no doubt that the fantasy entertained in these extravagant roles does play a vital role in the total effects of carnival on the psyche of the people. The effects begin at very personal and private levels. Illusion and fantasy are commensurate to the magnificence of these roles, the phenomenon which Walcott describes in "Mass Man" as "coruscating, mincing fantasies". Shiva Naipaul, in an article surveying Trinidadian culture, looks at the curious role of fantasy in the carnival psyche. He presents a portrait which is in fact the prototype of Walcott's Vercingetorix:

> Is it not strange that a man who earns relatively little in a year should scrimp and put aside month after month to enable him to be Julius Caesar for a few hours? The costume might cost him hundreds of dollars. But in Trinidad we take our fantasy seriously. It is no laughing matter with us. Julius Caesar is imperial and austere when he is carried through the streets. He does not smile. He does not joke. He suffers visibly in the heat. Is he the same creature whom one has seen lounging on street corners shouting obscenities at the top of his voice and ogling the girls? . . . Decked in his resplendent finery, the man is altered beyond recognition. He hardly seems to be enjoying himself; and yet this is supposed to be the prime purpose of the exercise. His enjoyment is peculiar and intensely private.[8]

It is from the psychological truth of this intense personal significance that the heroic spirit of Vercingetorix's pursuit has its original starting point. The carry-over from the transcendent illusions of carnival fantasy to that of the revolutionary, far from being factitious, is authentic and penetrating. Walcott is not concerned with

debunking a carnival mentality: he is not saying that the carnival mentality is what misguides us in our more serious efforts, or prevents any real ideals from ever being seriously entertained. He begins, implicitly, by penetrating to the very sources of the susceptibility to fantasy: in an experience such as carnival inherent needs are engaged to realise themselves in taking make-believe so seriously. They are the same susceptibilities to personal transcendence which can precipitate and dominate our more real efforts - especially when, like Vercingetorix, we are so accustomed to the habit of fantasy. Winning the much-coveted prize "Individual of the Year" brought a heady illusion of heroic transcendence to Vercingetorix, and it is this same momentum that propels him into his political overtures. Walcott uses a few spare details to show how naturally the one passes into the other: the delirious charge from the carnival head-piece, symbol of his conquering role, passes into a head seized by the illusions of power. This explosive delirium, bordering on madness, seems further intensified by the elemental heat of the tropical sun itself. It is this momentum which infuses and gives Vercingetorix's campaigns its style. He times and paces out his verbal offensives against the city with frenetic heroics. From these rhetorical heights the features of the city become totally diminutive - ant-sized to Vercingetorix's 'god', a motif which reappears in a crucial context in "Guyana 1":

> lurching from lounge to air-conditioned lounge
> with the crazed soldier ant's logistic skill
> of pause as capture, he stirs again to plunge,
> his brain's antennae on fire through the black ants
> milling and mulling through each city fissure;
>
> (11.5-9)

At the same time the idiosyncratic style of Vercingetorix shows up more starkly against the actual lineaments of the city. Walcott is capturing, in the process, the graphic image of the typical Caribbean city,

its pace, mood, postures and personality. The pace of banlon-cool limers, shop-girls, civil-servants who comprise the urban scene is the lackadaisical West Indian pace, its easy-going attitude - the attitude of an audience who will respond to Vercingetorix's oratory with amused indulgence. His political style retains the extravagant, incongruous flair of the carnival player, and a Trinidadian canaille, well tuned-in to its pitch, respond to it in this key. Their innate genius for the serio-comic, which can become cruelly insensitive in its intransigence, receives the whole thing as a mock-heroic performance. Vercingetorix is heckled in true West Indian style. His performance calls forth the native flair for witty, rhetorical puns. His frenetic expression of patriotic fervour earns him the title "Julius Seizure". It is laughed off as the epileptic excesses of a fantasising Caesar. They greet his megalomaniac fury with the Nazi siegheil, saluting him as a latter-day Hitler. Original effects of the West Indian personality, its accent and idiom enter with these gestures:

> 'Caesar', the hecklers siegheil, 'Julius Seizure!'
> He fakes an epileptic, clenched salute,
> taking their tone, is no use getting vex,
>
> (11.11-13)

Vercingetorix, in response to these jeers, takes up a position which is very much in character and psychologically consistent. He knows that there is no getting past the spirit of the 'bacchanal'[9] to show how serious he is, so he deliberately plays up to the mimicry and exaggeration. He now plays up the style which had emerged unconsciously before, knowing, in the local idiom - its grammatical lapse is most effective - that "is no use getting vex".

But if it forces him to put on this external facade, the reception serves mainly to add fuel to the fire and intensifies his egomania. It becomes more urgent with the need to prove himself in defiance

of these jeers, the defiance taking on a vindictive attitude to the people themselves. The ironies widen at this point, ironies for the people who will waken to the seriousness of his intention as "that day bursts", but especially in Vercingetorix's own dilemma. The gap between his egomaniac intention and real political commitment widens with this defiant motivation, and he is even more unaware of the gulf between the two - which is the crux of his dilemma. His gaze becomes all the more rigidly focussed on the individual apotheosis, and his vision of vendetta its victorious glorification:

> some day those brains will squelch below his boot
> as sheaves of swords hoist Vercingetorix!
>
> (11.14-15)

In this spirit Vercingetorix's revolutionary career moves to its dramatic climax in the coup. Violence and destructiveness match the delirious reaches of his ambition, the sound and fury echoing the strains of martial triumphs:

> So that day bursts to bugling cocks, the sun's gong
> clangs the coup, a church, a bank explodes
> and, bullet-headed with his cow-horned gang
> Of marabunta hordes, he hits the road.
> Dust powders the white dead in Woodford Square;
>
> (11.16-20)

The illusions explode in the rout, as the stark realities of militant action now confront him. They call for genuine political commitment and its pragmatic responsibility - from which his egocentric compulsions had been altogether remote. He finds himself jolted into the gulf between the two, as the burden of serious political responsibility presages. It marks the beginning of a self-awareness to be dearly won. In an attempt to close with this gap and assume real political purpose, or at least keep up appearances, he tries to conjure up genuine patriotic passion. For

this he falls back on the rhetorical gestures of his earlier style. It is a bitterly ironic reversal that he now has to force gestures which had come so naturally before, and to rely so desperately on play-acting. Now, however, they resound most hollow and empty, ineffectual in the face of real crisis. Vercingetorix is left in stark confrontation with the harshness of the situation. Like his classical namesake in the battle with Julius Caesar, he faces sure defeat. We feel his isolation in this dawning awareness:

> . . . He clears his gorge and feels the bile
> of rhetoric rising. Enraged that every clause
> 'por la patria, la muerte' resounds
> the same, he fakes a frothing fit and shows his wounds,
>
> (11.27-30)

The heavy cost of this unconscious blunder glares from the widening smile of the "bush-haired convict", in which is mirrored his own fate - the reality of a prison sentence:

> While, as the cold sheaves heighten, his eyes fix
> on one black, bush-haired convict's widening smile.
>
> (11.31-32)

The dramatic reversal from illusory apotheosis to this fate has a sharp ironic twist, which is a pervasive leitmotif throughout the volume, especially in the "Metamorphoses" sequence. This ironic twist carries both critical thrust and pathos. There is bitter irony in the fact that his heedless, irresponsible pursuit should rebound to enforce self-awareness at such cost. There is pathos at the same time in the very unconsciousness - Vercingetorix has been driven to blunder into this situation by deep-seated susceptibilities surfacing and enticed into reality "unawares". Having watched these unfold we are sensitive to the surprise, its desperation and defencelessness, with which he wakens to reality. The convict's widening smile engages more of our response to this vulnerable plight than

our derision. We have entered so closely into the psychological drama that it is this defencelessness we are most aware of at the end.

Walcott's revolutionary is, like the political leaders in Naipaul's The Mimic Men (Harmondsworth, 1967), a mimic one. Walcott is penetrating into the conflicts which misdirect the ambition, and exploring their connections with social conditions in a manner similar to Naipaul's. The distorted objectives of Naipaul's mimic politicians, however, derive solely from the ills of West Indian society, and begin and end with these ills. Walcott penetrates beyond social precipitants to principles, which, though ignited by these factors, begin at the existential dynamic of human desire. As in "Laventville" he adds a further universalising and mythic dimension - which is why the classical allusion is so unobtrusively absorbed - and strikes deeper chords of understanding. The irony is just as searching as Naipaul's, but because of this further dimension it offers possibilities of awareness where Naipaul arrives at unmitigated pessimism.

It is on these final reaches of insight that Walcott's internalised approach is based, to make for our two-fold moral response to Vercingetorix's story - our sympathy and critical judgement. The two interact to deepen our perspective. Walcott is not merely debunking all political idealists as victims of megalomania or egomania. Vercingetorix does not set out to be deliberately self-seeking: he does not set out consciously to exploit political ideals for his personal ends. It is his very unconsciousness about the levels at which this personal motivation enters that constitutes his predicament. It is rather a kind of innocence which proves fatal, so that the nemesis which overtakes him is all the more harsh. It is precisely because of this inbuilt susceptibility in human nature that alertness and self-awareness become necessary for survival. This is

Walcott's real moral focus in the poem. His central purpose is to point out the pitfalls of non-consciousness of this inbuilt susceptibility, and to show the need for a self-awareness which will guard against misdirection. The irony zeroes in on this final message. This emphasis on awareness and caution is particularly Walcottian, arising out of an obsessive preoccupation with the overreaching forces at work in human ambition. It is a preoccupation which lies at the heart of his own angst. Its principles underlie the conflicts of all Walcott's dream-maddened heroes in both the poetry and the drama, where it is more clear-cut. Vercingetorix shares this dilemma with personas like Othello ("Goats and Monkeys") in the poetry, and in the plays, with Christophe right through to the mad charcoal-burner. They are all subject to ambitions which generate the same kind of delirious, near-annihilating momentum. Ultimately, it arises from the inwardness of Walcott's most lived conflict - the burden of ambitions provoked to overreaching proportions in a destitute setting.

This is the quality of concern that informs Walcott's critique of Vercingetorix's revolutionary effort, and it is the final basis of his critical viewpoint on the revolutionary struggle in the region. Walcott is constantly engaged in exposing the misdirections, and precipitant blunders which beset its movement rather than in giving it unconditional support through a medium of protest. This puts him outside the mainstream of current "committed" literature. The approach, which has even been criticised as reactionary, is, definitively, not conservative. Far from being unsympathetic or opposed to the need for change, he is keenly committed to the vision of a people freed from the imprisonment of the past, economic as well as cultural, and he believes in the need for self-determinism. These positives were being expressed in the play Ti-Jean (first version) as early as 1958. In 1967 Walcott was making this kind of affirmation of

the need for action and decrying West Indian complacency:

> There may be, in all of us, the guilt that independence was placidly achieved. Not even achieved but bestowed. The surface tameness of West Indian history, from an emancipation fought for elsewhere and delivered almost from exasperation, to a confused federal union and the tentative flourishes of freedom, may embarrass most of us. We look at the horrors and grandeurs of other revolts, in Algeria, Cuba, old Haiti, with some shame at our complacency, as if the final insult were our dependency on the goodwill of others, on the proverbial goodwill of Britain, the largesse of the U.S.A. and on the comradeship of Canada.[10]

In times when the revolutionary fever has caught on, however, the prime necessity is to point out the moral imperatives which must give liberation a true direction, and ask for an alertness to the fundamental human contradictions that can confound the effort. Through this line of exploration, Walcott is in fact engaged in promoting the most positive grounds for revolutionary achievement. This is his main preoccupation in Ti-Jean, which shows the interrelation between inner spiritual and outer necessity as the only basis of true liberation. These complex dimensions are denied by the strictly economic and political terms in which the issue is viewed; Walcott is especially critical of the one-dimensional simplifications this tendency represents, and attacks the false solutions of politico-economic panaceas again and again. His essential position is summed up in the following statement, made in an address to a group of graduating teachers in St. Lucia. The address is entitled "Moeurs",[11] and in it Walcott affirms the need for a true progress to be mobilised by freedom from the simplifications of the conservative and the radical alike: "We should refuse to simplify ourselves, for the simple reason that our sources are complex, and one of the easiest simplifications is bitterness. We are in a time of threat to our customs: we are in an era of simplicities defined by the politician and the economist, both the radical and the conservative, and

it is again the duty of the teacher to reject these simplifications, and to make the understanding of ourselves increasingly difficult, for that is a sign of energy."[12]

Walcott maintains this essential critical approach in viewing various crises of change and collective trends current throughout the revolutionary world. From one setting to another he sees the failings which make these movements misfire. Violence and militancy, for example, instead of serving the positive objectives for which they were intended, tend to be retrogressive. In "Blues" he moves into the scene of the black brotherhood in America to show how far from the ideal is the reality. It is no negative predisposition which leads Walcott to these harsh exposures, but a genuine concern with the naked reality. If Vercingetorix seems fictionalised by the very fantasy of his role, it is an accurate reproduction of the delinquent crime-ridden streets of New York we get in "Blues". The poem presents a vivid encounter with a career of violence in a depressed area of New York, where coloureds, no less than whites, become targets - a situation that mocks the whole notion of brotherhood in a united struggle against racial oppression. The experience is presented in the narrative, dramatised mode of "Junta". Walcott as protagonist enters these streets and finds that his colour - "not too bright/for a nigger, and not too dark" - affords him no protection against a group of hoodlums, who comprise brothers from the depressed races of America. He is viciously attacked. He gets his 'black blues' alright, bitterly literal blues from the harsh bruises he receives at the hands of the black brothers. They are 'blues' from which all the song is drained:

> I figured we were all
> one, wop, nigger, jew,
> besides, this wasn't Central Park.
> I'm coming on too strong? You figure
> right! They beat this yellow nigger
> black and blue.
>
> (11.12-17)

Walcott is capturing the hard facts of a common everyday occurrence, and the 'cool' style of the American idiom is effectively employed to convey the slick tone and mood of this kind of setting. As in "Junta" these effects are available through the dramatic novelistic mode.

But Walcott is not merely engaged in blowing the myth of brotherhood, or a total denunciation of violence. He is making rather, an insight into the "mixed-up" psyche which causes young America to thrive on violence and "playing rough". It is from inmost drives which totally displace and bypass the collective ideal of violence that the action is triggered off. Watching them "fight[ing] each other, really", one understands how violence becomes an outlet for their turned-in conflicts. They are, of course, conflicts provoked by the ills of American society. One kid's mother calls off the fight casually with, "that's enough". It suggests just as casually that:

> It's nothing, really.
> They don't get enough love.
>
> (11.35-36)

This allusion to lack of love does penetrate the crux of their predicament, and the true reaches of Walcott's concern with the issue. The denials and frustrations behind the struggle reach back and clutch at this root existential desire for creative being. So tenacious and unyielding is the inner hold of this need, that it can be perverted into such destructive channels and fall back upon itself in the face of the repressive factors rife in American society. The encounter is, above all, giving Walcott insight into the moral imperatives behind this contradictory phenomenon of men fighting themselves. Ultimately, the poem is soliciting an alertness to these final levels of human susceptibility. It counsels caution in increasing our understanding of the forces behind the failure of ideals. Walcott

rounds off with a philosophical conclusion: this picture of love defeating itself is a manifestation of one level of the gulf between desire and fulfilment. The tough gesture of dismissal at the end is more a grievance about the ironies of existence than a sceptical rejection of brotherhood. If, in man's imperfect world, human desire and effort can end up so divided against itself, then it seems not worth the while. But this gesture of cosmic defiance is not nihilistic. Its burden is, rather, dialectical: the obverse side is his belief in the need for fear and caution. Walcott expresses it in one of those blunt, prosaic statements which show the kind of flexibility his language has attained by this time:

> Still, it taught me something
> about love. If it's so tough,
> forget it.
>
> (11.40-42)

The stress on inner moral fear and caution is especially necessary in the West Indian environment. It becomes pertinent because moral irresponsibility is a failing to which the West Indian people are congenitally prone. The failing inheres in original traits which have given rise to the stereotypes -- their hedonistic attitudes, excitability and precipitancy. Walcott identifies behind these tendencies what amounts to an abeyance of the faculty of mind. In Dream he designates this as their cardinal failing, and explores its shortcomings most thoroughly (see p. 367). It is the source of a spiritual prostitution which he acutely and persistently decries. He did this as early as "Poopa, da' was a fete!" (Ch.VI, "Tales of the Islands"). Implicated in the basic failings of social and political effort in the region, it also characterises their traditional modes of cultural expression. It is at its most representative in carnival. Walcott explores this in "Mass-Man". The spirit and integrity of Walcott's criticism here, as elsewhere, is expressed in

"Fellowship", an article earlier quoted: "We decry spiritual prostitution, and that is why West Indian poetry has centred more on self-abhorrence than on militancy. The poetry of Roach, of Basil MacFarlaine, even of such a great poet as Césaire itches with this social disgust. Its alternative is visionary rhetoric. The poet as seer. But the poet, looking ahead, can only see more self-debasement, more surrendering of imagined values."[13]

It is something of this spiritual prostitution he sees in the thorough abandon to merriment and extravaganza which is carnival. Carnival can engage the private fantasies of its participants in the mode of a Vercingetorix; but the total exuberance of mass-participation is another major characteristic just as pertinent. Rather than the life-asserting vitality it seems to represent, Walcott sees it as a heedless, frenetic performance. The gaiety appears as sheer mass-hysteria, and betrays schizophrenic strains. But the mass-men remain stubbornly oblivious of this. What one sees is an inordinate prostitution of themselves to 'feting', which leaves them impervious to these disturbing intimations. This is a source of acute frustration for the poet, who, looking in from the outside, is sensitive to the malaise behind it. The fact that the players are unaware of it makes the whole show all the more frightening. He responds to the spectacle with a dumb bewilderment which has its own type of frenzy:

> But I am dancing, look, from an old gibbet
> my bull-whipped body swings, a metronome!
> like a fruit-bat dropped in the silk cotton's shade
> my mania, my mania is a terrible calm.
>
> (11.13-16)

This contrast between seeing poet and oblivious merrymakers is the burden which weighs heavily upon Walcott in the poem. Walcott takes up this burden with sharp rancour and reproach, hurled as much at the society as at an intransigent situation:

> Upon your penitential morning,
> some skull must rub its memory with ashes,
> some mind must squat down howling in your dust,
> some hand must crawl and recollect your rubbish,
> someone must write your poems.
>
> (11.17-21)

This kind of vehemence seems to be an outright rejection of carnival. The poem is generally regarded as the crudest example of Walcott's lack of sympathy with the customs of the society, and his alienation from its creative spirit. In a review article, Gordon Rohlehr enters his discussion of the poem with a reference to "the vexed question of Walcott's stature as a sensitive commentator on the West Indian scene".[14] But though Walcott's emphasis in the poem does tend to make carnival into a more surreal affair than it is, he is uncovering authentic aspects of its psyche, and his psychological penetration does involve genuine human empathy.

Walcott looks at the parade of extravagant roles being played by the town's most 'invisible' class of citizens. Petty clerks and layabouts play roaring lions, mock-Cleopatras, bejewelled roles, all executed in the lavish, dramatic style of the Trinidad carnival. They present the image of enormously inflated fantasies, incongruous attempts to make up for the 'diminished', diminutive men obscured and hidden behind them (which is an original visual impression). This psychological effect is succinctly defined in Walcott's double-entente: "<u>withholds</u> the man". These fantasies are, in fact, functioning as modes of compensation; they serve as instant substitute measures of fulfilment, into which, accordingly, men "escape". Ultimately they are answering to missing measures in much the same way as Vercingetorix's heroic role did, and have the same painfully comic earnestness. It is the strains of this which come through in the incongruous image they present: principles of schizophrenia emerge in "coruscating, mincing fantasies". Walcott takes us into these strains in a graphic

reproduction of the masks - a live presentation of the decor, its witty style, of which the idiomatic "making style" ("putting on airs") is an especially felicitous touch:

> Through a great lion's head clouded by mange
> a black clerk growls.
> Next, a gold-wired peacock withholds a man,
> a fan, flaunting its oval, jewelled eyes,
> What metaphors!
> What coruscating, mincing fantasies!
>
> Hector Mannix, water-works clerk San Juan,
> has entered a lion,
> Boysie, two golden mangoes bobbing for breast-plates, barges
> like Cleopatra down her river, making style.
>
> (11.1-9)

That these fantasies involve some element of schizophrenia, whatever therapeutic possibilities they might also have, becomes quite apparent. Present-day carnival, especially in Trinidad where it thrives on such a large scale, is a complex social phenomenon. Its sociological implications, some of which we have already looked at, are multiple and many-faceted. What are its potentially positive attributes exist side by side with its negative aspects, and to extricate them from each other and locate its precise value is difficult. That it functions as an opiate for the ills of society, as earlier pointed out, is true to a large extent. That it is a tremendous concentration of energy and talent, indicative of some indigenous creative spirit is also true. At the same time it seems equally true that whatever creativity is latent in it is stifled: ending in waste, it seems geared solely towards a superficial pleasure, which is, to use Walcott's phrase, mainly "commercial elation".[15] Perhaps the most common view is that carnival is sheer commercial triumph. What does emerge from all this is that, as a communal celebration, it is without an identifiable purposive direction. The schizophrenic tendencies Walcott perceives, beginning at a level of private fantasy no doubt aggravated by these

conflicting strains, remain the most real buried level. The spectacle arouses his moral repugnance because that easy prostitution to pleasure continues to prevent an awareness of this, and perpetuates the malaise. Some consciousness of these inner strains might give the celebration an exorcising function - approach, in fact, the cultic therapy of Jamaican pocomania. But it remains mainly spiritual prostitution. Walcott is thus much nearer the truth than Gordon Rohlehr, who, criticising Walcott's position in the poem writes: "The Dionysiac masquerader knows, perhaps better than the Appolonian poet, that Carnival is a dance of death."[16] There can be no true Dionysiac ritual purpose, no dance of death, where the attitudes preclude a consciousness of dearth.

Walcott pinpoints this very lack by a deft allusion to the difference between carnival in the past and in the present. The allusion evokes the historical origins of West Indian carnival in slavery. It began, for the slaves, as a ritual celebration to combat and defy the desolation of the experience, from where it came to acquire political functions (it served as a meeting ground for inciting and planning rebellion).[17] The image of a "fruit-bat dropped in the silk cotton's shade" recreates the context of that past succinctly. Slaves were hung from the silk cotton tree, as a result of which it became associated with superstitious practices which survive to this day.[18] The whole thing is rendered more sinister by the image of the bat, a traditional feature of Trinidad 'Ole Mas'. The point is that the traumas of that history are still implicated in the present malaise but the consciousness of desolation, at the moral reaches which gave rise to a ritual celebration, has been lost. In Islands (1969) Brathwaite also has misgivings about carnival. He finds cause for misgiving in the Ash Wednesday dearth that defeats the creative possibilities of carnival. He presents the plight of his mass-man Tizzic:

. . . . He walked so far
on stilts of song, of masqueraded story; stars

were near. Doors of St. Peter's heaven were ajar.
. . . .

. . . In such bright swinging company

he could no longer feel the cramp
of poverty's confinement, spirit's damp;

. . . .
. . . But the good stilts splinter-

ed, wood legs broke, calypso steel pan
rhythm faltered. The midnight church

bell fell across the glow, the lurch-
ing cardboard crosses. Behind the masks, grave

Lenten sorrows waited: Ash-
Wednesday, ashes, darkness, death.

After the *bambalula bambulai*
he was a slave again.

("Tizzic", 11.55-57, 60-70)

To Brathwaite, it is the imposition and travesties of Christian values, alien to the native spirit, which constrict its creative possibilities. Tizzic finds himself "a slave again". For Walcott the violation lies in the spiritual prostitution, the failure to find its creative possibilities through an inner awareness.

Walcott's stringent critical attitudes towards the shortcomings of the society are based on profound moral values, consistent with his early belief in a liberation that must overcome the traumas of history. It insists on the need to assume a native moral responsibility for self-liberation - an effort that cannot be one-dimensional, as the fashionable blueprints of "radical and conservative" alike suggest. Hence his scepticism about the external gestures which are considered the marks of progress in the region. He decries and exposes them as impostures again and again, most bluntly in "Twilight":

> No, for the colonial artist the enemy was not the people, . . . but the enemy was those who had elected themselves as protectors of the people, frauds who cried out against indignities done to the people, who urged them to acquire pride which meant abandoning their individual dignity, who cried out that black was beautiful like transmitters from a different revolution without explaining what they meant by beauty, all of these had emerged from nowhere, suddenly, a different, startling "canaille". . . . We had come from an older, wiser, sadder world that had already exorcised those devils, but these were calling out the old devils to political use. Witchdoctors of the new left with imported totems. The people were ready to be betrayed again.[19]

Walcott is uncompromising in his rejection of these artificials - the native crop of radicals in dashikis, newly-discovered ideologies of the people, parasitic politicians. In "Hic Jacet" Walcott disclaims them and answers the key question relating to his commitment to the region. The rejection is informed by a fundamental human concern, a deeper level of engagement of which his contempt is a necessary converse. This gives the true answer to "the vexed question of Walcott's stature as a sensitive commentator on the West Indian scene":

> They'll keep on asking, why did you remain?
> Not for the applauding rain
> Of hoarse and hungry thousands at whose centre
> the politician opens like a poisonous flower,
> not for the homecoming lecturer
> gripping his lectern like a witness, ready to explain
> the root's fixation with earth,
> nor for that new race of dung beetles, frock-coated,
> iridescent
> crawling over the people.
> Before the people became popular
> he loved them.
>
> . . . .
>
> but for something rooted, unwritten
> that gave us its benediction
> its particular pain,
>
> (11.1-9, 14-16)

This, in a poem which Walcott places as his final testament to the volume, is a summation of his position, and expresses the necessary interrelation

between the social disgust and the insoluble bond of love for its own sake.

(iii) The Journey through the Interior:

(a) Harris and Landfall

In "Guyana", a sequence of six poems, Walcott makes a symbolic journey through the interior to emerge back into human society. He is following the original model of Wilson Harris' journey into the interior in the Guyana quartet. The greater part of the journey is developed in fact through Harrisian territory - from "Guyana 1" to "Guyana IV" he is adapting and reconstructing the contexts of Harris' novels, especially The Secret Ladder (1973) and Palace of the Peacock (1968). After this Harrisian leg, where the journey reaches its climax in "The Falls" ("Guyana IV"), Walcott moves into the territory of Borges in "A Map of the Continent" ("Guyana V") to fix his own philosophical bearings towards human reality. We will deal with the Harris leg in this part of the section, and proceed to the second in the next part, "Borges and Landfall".

In this journey through the interior, the Guyanese landscape, by virtue of both its natural and human conditions, is symbolically representative of the cultural situation of the entire region - as in Wilson Harris. The principle behind Walcott's movement into a concrete engagement with the cultural situation is concentrated in this rencounter with the 'land' of Guyana: the configuration of 'land' in the sequence is a direct counterpart to that of 'sea' in the "Tropical Bestiary" sequence. Walcott's land, we must remember, comprehends the interiorised dimension discovered during the 'sea' phase.

The essential concerns from which this engagement with the interior begins are the same in Walcott and Harris. They are the basis of

their common outlook on the origins of a New World destiny in the region. One needs to begin at the outset by acknowledging the sharp contrasts between the philosophical positions at which they arrive. The contrasts are so sharp and immediately apparent as to blur this important common ground. Harris finds recreation into a moral freedom in a mystical emptying of Self; Walcott settles for a humanistic submission to the creative tension between mortal and divine in man's earthly destiny. The common ground they share begins from this: the interior is a native phenomenon which, naturalistically as well as spiritually, stands for a condition and destiny that is peculiar to the region. It signifies a primal condition which has arisen again, so to speak, on unknown soil as a result of the dislocations of history. The middle passage experience has been responsible for bringing together a number of peoples severed from their parent traditions. This incidence of absent gods and cosmogonies, of their fragmentation in an alien region, is what constitutes the primal, and carries the possibilities for a new, unique, genesis. Harris places emphasis on the creative reaches of a genesis based on the coincidence of these vestiges. We shall see how when we explore the particular affinities between the two writers as they emerge in the poems. Walcott, remaining more sensitive to the absence and abnegation, is responsive more to the aboriginal. His emphasis is thus on a New World return to an original Adamic function: that is, to begin from origins the primal task of naming a world. But this return to origins must, and does in Walcott, engage and work through the old vestiges. So that genesis consists in a naming of the old anew.[20] Though the emphases are different, then, the recognition is essentially the same as Harris'. Their common point of departure - as against, for example, Brathwaite's idea of a recovery of the full mythic context of African survivals - means a common acceptance of indigenous creative needs and resources, based on indigenous circumstances. It is the

basis of a common outlook which is finally more important than their philosophical differences.

In Harris' quartet the journey is the donnee, the exploration of the interior a concrete necessity, and the experience the process of a recreative self-discovery. The progress through the forest is thus the progress of a mythic quest and the interior becomes, as Harris describes it, a "battleground of spirit". Confrontation with the primeval raises the main challenge: a disorienting discovery of the complex allegiance between the human and the primeval. This gives rise to the dire struggles through which the quester arrives at a realisation of the creative pattern of this allegiance. This is also the basic pattern underlying Walcott's quest in "Guyana". An introductory survey of the Harrisian contexts reconstructed in the poems will reveal this similar artistic purpose.

Walcott's surveyor in "Guyana 1" is the counterpart of the surveyor in The Secret Ladder, who is carrying out a project for the reclamation of the interior. Harris' surveyor comes into confrontation with Poseidon, the primeval proprietor of the land, and the predicament becomes that of coming to terms with Poseidon in order to accomplish his project. Walcott's surveyor must also come to terms with the primeval before he can arrive at his objective. In "The Bush" the gradual surrender to the force of a cleansing darkness is a necessary sequel to the struggle set in motion by the initial confrontation. The poem draws upon leitmotifs present in both Palace and The Secret Ladder: essentially, a purgative experience found in surrendering to the void in creation. "The Falls" corresponds to the climactic stage arrived at by Harris' crew in Palace - their arrival at the waterfall, symbolic of the desire for transcendence, and where the final enlightenment occurs. While this Harrisian pattern remains

integral in Walcott's sequence however, there is a significant difference. Walcott is, unlike Harris, intent on relating the discoveries of the interior back to the actual life of the city outside. In "The White Town", the reverberations of the interior on a Georgetown which is never far away are considered, and it is into this scene he emerges in the end for an integration into human reality. Harris' novels do comprehend, in their own symbolic mode, essential elements of the human coast, and they are crucially involved in the kind of integration he envisions. But Walcott's direct concern to ply between inhabited town and interior points to his interest in finding his bearings towards the everyday business of living. It points to the different philosophical orientations of the two writers. Walcott seeks to orient himself to the impingements of the Other in the earthly-finite, as against Harris' vision of the absorption of the finite in the Other. It is the difference between Harris' mystical resolutions and Walcott's humanistic level of engagement, as will emerge fully in our examination of the poems. We will trace Walcott's course through the sequence to watch the full implications of the correspondences with Harris, and the differences in his own emphases, unfold themselves.

Walcott's surveyor enters the forest to carry out a survey for a Government development project, and is confronted by an order of reality which forces him to discover new perspectives. The situation in which he is presented has its detailed parallel in this specific context in The Secret Ladder:

> Fenwick set up his spirit-level midway between the new gauge and the permanent bench-mark.
> "I wonder whether it'll be safe to leave this gauge here until tomorrow?" he thought, his eye glued to the inverting telescope of his level as he checked his reading on the bench mark. The staff suddenly pitched and vanished, and Fenwick's astonished sight beheld instead the accusing image of Poseidon, eyes inverted, brow pointing down. Fenwick shot up, and the old man straightened his bent back (upon which the sky revolved).
>
> (The Secret Ladder, p.180)

This describes a jolting inversion of perspective for the surveyor, an inversion which confronts him with the unexpected figure of the primitive proprietor of the territory, Poseidon. The incident is a dramatic prefiguration of the whole conflict. It is with this unexpected figure of Poseidon, all that he represents, that Fenwick must contend in pursuing his project in the interior. It involves a conflict which changes his conception and estimation of the task of reclaiming the interior.

Poseidon is the descendant of a runaway African slave who had evaded capture by fleeing into the forest. Making it his home, he had become in due course "a wild cannibal man in the swamps" (The Secret Ladder, p. 154). Poseidon thus represents the original slave ancestor, and retains this primeval sub-human state. He is, in fact, the embodiment of the primordial untamed forest condition, which is the authentic basis of his role as proprietor. Fenwick discovers an organic but conflicting kinship with this original ancestor. The confrontation turns on the complex nature of the struggle to reclaim the territory in the face of the unexpected resistance of Poseidon. The moral significance of the confrontation is this. The recognition of the aboriginal reversion of Poseidon is the recognition of the bondage of life to this aboriginal state. It is a recognition which reveals to Fenwick man's covenant and responsibility to free himself from subservience to that degenerate condition, and discover the real level of his kinship in a transcendent access of reality beyond the material-mortal. The process is dual and paradoxically integrated: it is in discovering the nature of his allegiance to the primordial that both the need to transcend it, and the means of transcending it - through the perils of the true void it represents - become accessible. Fenwick has initially to resist the lure of accepting the peculiar potency vested in Poseidon's primeval status as ultimate. He must resist the

dangers of idolising him as a god, and find an arduous new dimension between the simultaneous potency and impotence of his degenerate condition:

> ("Maybe that is why Poseidon is a god, after all." . . .
> "He teaches us the terrifying depth of our human allegiance, our guilt in the face of humanity, our subservience to the human condition. But he cannot force us, surely, to make an idol of this present degrading form - crawl on our bellies in order to make ourselves less than he is, tie ourselves into knots in order to enslave ourselves deeper than he is. . . . "
>
> (The Secret Ladder, p.183)

The confrontation thus creates a complex bond between the surveyor and Poseidon as aboriginal presence. He becomes strung unto Poseidon as to "a secret ladder of conscience", through the rungs of which he must gain a new dimension of creative freedom.

Walcott's adaption of this specific context discussed above focusses on a similar inversion of perspective, which overtakes the surveyor at about the same point in his scientific exploration. He likewise undergoes a loss of perspective, and finds himself disoriented. What brings this on - the sudden confrontation with an elemental void - is not embodied in a dramatic entity like Harris' Poseidon, who carries the particular emphases from which Harris starts. In the conception of Poseidon, Harris is starting from a dialectical focus on native possibilities of true freedom not exploited after emancipation. They have become abortive, "wild and woolly", and reverted to the primordial (but the very principles through which a creative freedom must transcend the subservience are latent in this primordial condition). Walcott does not start from this dialectical viewpoint. His presentation is in medias res and plunges straight into the void whose historical sources in the amnesiac, headless past he has explored in The Castaway.

The confrontation with the aboriginal void begins at a powerful psychic level for Walcott's surveyor. It is experienced emotively and

intuitionally in the concrete, physical exigencies of the setting. His response to the disturbing intimations of the forest is rendered with great psychological realism, again a result of Walcott's novelistic exposition. Settling down to his work in the unknown depths of the forest, he experiences a sudden access of fear as he straightens from the theodolite to read the spirit-level on his measure. The term spirit-level immediately loses its scientific meaning to assume disturbing supernatural connotations, and conjures up hallucinations of alien, threatening forces. These hallucinations are manifested and magnified through the lineaments of the instrument itself:

> 'Spirit-level', he scrawls, and instantly
> the ciphers staggering down their columns
> are soldier ants, their panic radiating in the shadow
> of a new god arriving over Aztec anthills.
>
> (11.2-5)

The spirit-level conceit is typically Walcottian. Starting from what is a perfectly credible response on the part of the surveyor, it describes at the same time the central experience of an inverting perspective. Its practical scientific usage is suddenly displaced (counterpart to Harris' "staff suddenly pitched and vanished"), and it becomes the medium of new disorientating perspectives. The hallucinations emanate from a sudden access of supernal, mysterious fear,and the sense of dark unknown forces overpowering him. The surveyor falls prey to distracting superstitions, loses a sense of his own solidity, of a hold on reality - at which point he begins to feel how vulnerable he is to nothingness. Walcott's images convey the quality and impressions of this unnerving experience very effectively. A reaction of frenzied distraction is reflected in the image of soldier ants, creatures whose movements convey the sense of a frenzied loss of direction (they are sometimes called "mad ants"). The panic

spreads under the growing premonitions of some dread annihilating force: as if, the image develops, these mad soldier ants were so many Aztec worlds being visited by yet another dread elemental deity, whose huge proportions reduced his subjects to mere ants; as if towering Aztec civilizations were being reduced to mere mounds (ant-hills). It is a strong imaginative reconstruction of the terrifying inner vortex into which the surveyor disappears with his growing sense of subjection to some dumb elemental power. This is the confrontation with the aboriginal terror bringing him to a sense of elemental nothingness. He has arrived at its organic truth through an experience of psychological, visceral immediacy:

> The sun has sucked his brain pith-dry.
> His vision whirls with dervishes, he is dust.
>
> (11.6-7)

Totally disoriented by these disturbing intimations, the surveyor now faces the task of finding his bearings anew. The necessity is to find fresh measurements in an aboriginal world, and it amounts to no less than the primal, archetypal act of genesis out of chaos, realised in the search for a creative Order. (In Fenwick's case this consists in transcending the degeneracy of matter and chaos embodied in Poseidon). Walcott's drama has this inbuilt allegorical framework and carries the mythic coefficients as in Harris. The surveyor thus returns to the original Adamic function of measuring his unknown "new continent", which is the finding of his own measure as man in relation to cosmos. Taking up this task, he reverts to the aboriginal 'animal' posture: "crouching". This repeats a motif expressive of Walcott's fundamental concern with the journey back from man to ape, the theme of his climactic play Dream on Monkey Mountain. The surveyor is, in this posture, back in the primordial darkness - "hooded in shade". Walcott finds a metaphor which encapsulates

the full mythic significance of the surveyor's new position in this effort. Going back to the theodolite, he is "screw[ing] a continent to his eye" (he finds his map of the continent in "Guyana V"). The activity resembles that of an archaic photographer - it has the same primitive ritualistic mystique as that of the photographer of earlier times, similarly engaged in descrying an image. "Archaic" underscores the primal 'ancientness' of the act, an element which is important in Walcott's concept of a New World renascence of the old, to which we will return later.

His purpose thus redirected, his strenuous gaze now discovers complex new dimensions and relationships between the forms of the Cosmos. These reveal dimensions of Space and Time at variance with the scientific preconceptions with which he had entered the forest. The symbolic inversion through which this is perceived continues to be graphically 'fixed' in the telescope image. The foreshortening effect of the instrument gives a view of immensity juxtaposed with the infinitesimal, the macrocosm with the microcosm. The latter becomes the basis of these new perspectives. "The vault . . . balances on a grass blade" - counterpart to the sky revolv[ing] on Poseidon's bent back. This reveals the immensity of Space comprised of the infinitesimal minutiae of existence, and thus suspended, upheld by these minutiae - a phenomenon which also depicts the timeless motion of Eternity. It implies the organic relationship of man, as mere minutia, to Cosmos-Eternity, and is a perspective on the strenuous organic link between fearful elemental god and frightened diminutive ant, earlier recorded in the god-ant simile. This revelation of man's form as part of the infinitesimal design of Time and Space, is a manifestation of his bond and authorship in that infinity - his heritage of godhead. At the same time the very nature of this relationship leaves him subject to his bondage to matter, the finite earth. The latter remains pressingly close, the

corrosive effects of a destiny of decay asserting its claims - "the nerve-cracked ground too close for the word 'measureless'" - claims which will not allow him to reach total infinity-essence. The bondage to earth, in effect, will not allow him to attain the "measureless" dimensions perceived in the link with infinity. Thus the necessity of measuring his world, finding his own existential medium, cannot be averted; it is now rendered all the more complex and urgent by his discovery of these dual, polarised levels of being.

The surveyor has arrived here at the more critical dilemma, and a true understanding of the enormity of the task he faces: to find between these conflicting poles, where the previous "concept, 'man'" is now displaced, the true measure of human reality. If before he was threatened by the sense of oblivion, he is now plunged into its existential perplexity, and burdened by the struggle to rediscover this "lost" measure. Strung between the polarities of beasthood and godhead, he must traverse the agony of their corrosive struggles within himself in order to find this measure. He must suffer, in Walcott's words, the "tread[ing] of himself"; a suffering which carries the typical schizophrenic, 'mad' principles of Walcottian strife. Walcott gives his visionary expression of the ultimate nature of this burden in the play <u>Malcochon</u> (Trinidad, 1966):

> Like the staining of clear springs the mind of man,
> . . . .
> Like mist that rises from a muddy stream
> Between beasthood and Godhead groping in a dream.
>
> (660 - 3)

The theme is fully explored within its historico-social context in the figure of the ape-cum-charcoal burner of the plays. Here it defines the surveyor's quest:

> Ant-sized to God, god to an ant's eyes,
> shouldering science he begins to tread
> himself, a world that must be measured in three days.
>
> (11.15-17)

The mythic allusion, "three days", describes the archetypal route to be traversed: from taking up the burden, through Gethsemane to regeneration. Walcott's emphasis is, characteristically, on the individual effort. It is an end which each man must realise through the independent resources of self. This is, in fact, the principle to which he most relates in the myth of the historical Jesus, and the one level on which Christianity remains meaningful for him. The pattern of this religious quest is thus evoked through the figure of Christ shouldering his Cross (the surveyor's own cross being the burden of science, progress). It is, however, the universal pattern of all mythic quests, like that of Christ itself, that is being invoked - from burden, through suffering to resurrection. Walcott's quester awakens to the nature and extent of this struggle in his own medium. Before him lies the prospect of an endless monotony of trial, near-tiring of its goal ("the forest so distant that it tires of blue"), the distracting influences of "green" vision never seeming to arrive at fruition. In enduring these trials, however, some shape and measure of truth begins to emerge.

> The frothing shallows of the river,
> the forest so distant that it tires of blue,
> the merciless idiocy of green, green . . .
>
> a shape dilates towards him through the haze.
>
> (11.18-21)

Walcott's surveyor has taken up the burden of the interior.

Important relationships between Walcott and Harris emerge at this point. For both Harris' surveyor encountering Poseidon, and Walcott's surveyor encountering the elemental void, the confrontation means recovering the burden of an archetypal renascence. The primeval, fearful life of the forest is more powerfully dramatised in Harris, whose forest is a more living reality (he was once a surveyor in his native Guyana). Its

flora and fauna, its rivers are literally embodied in Poseidon and the Amerindian woman of Palace. But in both writers, emotive and psychic principles work in similar ways to communicate its mythic principles and reveal the primordial void. They do differ, however, in the creative routes via which they seek regeneration from the void: which is, to stress an earlier point, a difference in metaphysical rather than cultural viewpoint. This difference means from the outset that they see the void differently. In Harris, it is the vacuum which opens when man, discovering his constitution as one with elemental matter, sees himself susceptible to total corruption and degradation as mere matter, a susceptibility which seems to negate his very being. But the vacuum of matter is only the reverse of the no-thingness of essence that sustains existence through all matter. It becomes a vacuum only when perversely, falsely viewed by men. For Harris then, the struggle becomes the attempt to escape the imprisoning bondage of matter which this false view imposes. Harris describes the failing as man's obsessive urge to find "a material nexus to bind the universe together". This is, for him, man's cardinal error. To gain freedom from its negating bonds is to be reborn into an immaterial, deathless spirituality. This release and creative triumph over the material involves the most intense, violent expiations. They are experienced, especially in Palace, through cycles of reincarnation resembling those of the Buddhist karmic wheel. This shows Harris' leanings towards archetypal patterns operative in Eastern mysticism. Walcott, however, who is more strongly oriented within Western/ Christian archetypes is led through the void to discover the inextricable bond between matter and spirit. He sees matter as too close ever to release its hold, and the struggle becomes that of finding a creative, viable tension between the two poles of human reality.

The crucial relationship is this, however: both the Harrisian

and the Walcottian route devolve on the renewal of the moral life of the Imagination, and affirm its generative function as the sole and ultimate reality. It is important to distinguish this from the preoccupation with the autonomy of the Imagination in contemporary literature, which returns, in several important respects, to the Romanticist assertion. Rather, this new affirmation of the Imagination has its integrity in their recognition of the renewal of the ancient in the new, and is a reactivation of an ageless questing covenant in a new place. What gives them access to this particular truth comes from a combination of factors unique to the region. It is defined by Harris, who conceptualises it and takes it as a major point of departure in the novels. The reassembly of vestiges of ancient cultures, Harris believes, makes possible the discovery of the one unifying link between the old cultures. It gives access to the discovery of the mythic icon connecting the old "variables of myths". Their fragmentation means that they are now free from the confining systems of their parent traditions. As a result, the fundamental link between them is freed to become the gateway to the one primal image of man, transcending but spanning individual traditions on the most vital level. This is Harris' theory of a "gateway complex", defined extensively in his article "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas". Here the principle is defined as Harris analyses the character of limbo as a creolised African vestige:

> For limbo (one cannot emphasise this too much) is not the total recall of an African past since that African past in terms of tribal sovereignty or sovereignties was modified or traumatically eclipsed with the Middle Passage and within generations of change that followed. Limbo was rather the renascence of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures. For example - the theme of the phantom limb - the re-assembly of dismembered man or god - possesses archetypal resonances that embrace Egyptian Osiris, the resurrected Christ and the many-armed deity of India.[21]

And, the implications of this for a unique New World achievement, based on the resurgence of the primal in these vestiges:

> In a sense it is the revitalised fauna and flora of legend, in an age of renascence when perspectives into the past reopen afresh, which invoke the strangest ironical overlap between apparently irreconcilable ages or cultures.[22]

Harris is not merely positing the notion of a melting pot of traditions, which is a common misrepresentation of his theory. Rather, he is positing the realisation of the one universal law which links them, and seeing in it the crystallisation of the most essential image of Man's mythic destiny. This is to be attained, it is a definitive premise in Harris, by the activation of the synthesising powers of the Imagination. It is an important point demonstrated in the treatment of the folk in his work. Writing of the significance of the aborigine in Harris, Kenneth Ramchand says: "For it follows from the author's conviction of the unity of all men that the ancestors may be discovered in any race, and that to restrict them to any one race, as is fashionable in some West Indian writing, is to reduce man's complex heritage."[23] Ramchand is pointing out an important idea central in Harris' theory: that to envisage a mythic revival in terms of any one race in the region is limiting and inadequate. But it is not merely that the ancestors - in whom a creative Memory subsists - can be found in any race. In Palace the Amerindian woman who directs the crew up river embodies Memory as a Pre-existent Law. As such she is free, in her ancientness, of the distinguishing props of any tradition or system. It is by virtue of this freedom that she serves a catalytic function, and the multiple races of the crew find the true common ancestor in her. The pre-existent principle she embodies is defined in a crucial passage earlier cited:

> This cross she had forgiven and forgotten in an earlier dream of distant centuries and a returning to the Siberian unconscious pilgrimage in the straits where life had possessed and abandoned at the same time the apprehension of

> a facile beginning and ending. An unearthly pointlessness was her true manner, . . . It was a vanishing and yet a starting race in which long eternal malice and wrinkled self-defence and the cruel pursuit of the folk were turning into universal protection and intuition and that harmonious rounded miracle of spirit which the world of appearances had never truly known.
>
> (Palace, p.72)

Guiding them up river then, she is the one reductive image they all carry potentially within themselves - to be realised in common when they reach her inviolable essence backwards through the ancient trials of Imagination. It is thus the unifying image, synthesised from "all the spiritual ages" rather than through any one race, that is being realised. Denis Williams is grasping much the same principle when he speaks of a catalyst process at work between the different "headless" traditions in the region.

Walcott's own efforts are also geared towards discovering an archetypal image, and in doing so, he is following a principle which draws similarly upon this coincidence of traditions. He identifies this principle in the mulatto phenomenon, which is articulated in that classic essay, "Twilight". There he dubs himself the "mulatto of style",[24] provocatively stated but carrying this meaningful assertion. The principle is the definitive basis of the similar outlook he shares with Harris. Walcott does not make explicit emphasis on the icon phenomenon (as Harris does in his analysis of limbo, for example); he is not preoccupied with it as conceptually or dialectically as Harris is. But, instinctively, he is synthesising that archetypal image from the inwardness of traditions and their original juxtapositions, authentic in his own situation. This inwardness of archetypes is present in the poetry mainly from his immersion in literatures, coming via the West as a result of the colonial encounter. He sees this, in fact, as one positive legacy of the colonial experience; and it

is implied in a statement in "Meanings":

> Yet I feel absolutely no shame in having endured the colonial experience. . . .
>
> Those who sneer at what they call an awe of tradition forget how old the West Indian experience is. I think that precisely because of their limitations our early education must have ranked with the finest in the world. The grounding was rigid - Latin, Greek and the essential masterpieces, but there was this elation of discovery. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Horace, Vergil - these writers weren't jaded but immediate experiences. . . .
>
> It was cruel, but it created our literature.[25]

In the drama, the principle of synthesising traditions is concretely enacted and more clearly defined: it is present in his unique combination of old Western, and Eastern, archetypes with creolised folk survivals, especially African. The unifying link thus crystallised consists of seminal principles that are the same: a focus on the antinomies of essence and matter, infinity and finitude, as the eternal basis of man's creative function and his history. The moral imperatives of this image are summed up by Denis Williams, who, journeying through the interior "mulatto divide" between Europe and Africa, identifies it thus: "Looking back to the vertical, sideways to the horizontal. Backwards to the old mastery, sideways to the timeless mystery. Back to will and back to willing - ai - sideways to the calling, the crucifying, the unspeakable-of, the reed shaken by the wind."[26] These are imperatives to be met by nothing less than the individual artistic experiment - both Harris and Walcott stress this, whatever modes of crucifixion the Imagination chooses. They are modes to the recovery of commitment to an eternal Order at once ancient and new, Walcott intuited this 'ancient newness' as early as Green Night, where he speaks of the "green age" of the world (1.35 "Ruins of a Great House"). This ancient newness is exactly where he discovers the relevance of, and unity with Borges and other Latin American writers. It involves a renascence

which derives from the unique past of the region. Its affirmations are those of the New World legacy - an awareness, as Harris envisages it, "original to us yet capable of universal application".[27]

These then, comprise the ultimate cultural relevance of the new dimensions discovered, and the process of regeneration initiated in the first stage of the journey through the interior. Responding to its calling means a deeper penetration into the trials of the interior; and the journey progresses through Walcott's particular modes of suffering, towards his own type of integration. The next stage of the journey, "Guyana II", is a conscious submission to the stronger elemental flow within the interior. The surveyor is now making a new creative response to the elemental forces. Now that he is, as a result of his closer scrutiny, past the initial fear of "Guyana I", his relationship to these elemental forces is no longer anarchic. Though they remain perplexing, they no longer threaten with annihilation. He sees them now as part of the stronger flux along whose currents he must be borne. Yielding to these non-resistible currents is like entering into a growing, superior darkness. This is a middle phase into which all Harris' questers move, and "The Bush" is broadly parallel to a number of Harrisian situations. In The Secret Ladder, for example, the parallel occurs in Fenwick's sojourn into the heart of the forest to find the abode of Poseidon, accompanied by the Gorgon-headed Jordan. We see Walcott's quest-figure ("they" in the poem represent the false thoughts and misguided conceptions with which he entered the forest) being gradually enveloped in darkness as he penetrates the bush. It is a gradual becoming of one with darkness, which is presented as a climbing force, and seems to grow organically from his knees to his head. This is not the darkness of oblivion, and what we are witnessing is not an act of abnegation. It is a conscious act of acquiescence to the cosmic-elemental

flux, in which the principles of his own being are absorbed. It is dark, and requires submission because it is the pre-existent awesome reality of which he is not author, something therefore over which he cannot wield control. This act of acquiescence, it is important to note, is not Harris' mystical arrival at oneness with essence. In Harris, the corresponding phase is where his figures, alerted to the nothingness of matter, yield to the terrors of the void to arrive at its true spiritual obverse.

The darkness of "The Bush" becomes a purifying, cleansing darkness and marks an advance in the process of mythic self-discovery. Thus, when the surveyor starts walking there are strains of putrescent thoughts still clinging to an unregenerate head. This is symbolised by the fly-catching, fake birds pinned to the thicknesses of bush, which is the "bush" of man's hair/head - the single, skilfully deployed metaphor being that of man as form of tree-forest. The birds' beaks aiming at "the clotting sun", "tight/with the tension of arrows" are emblems of stifled, irreal aspirations, remaining unregenerate in falsely straining upwards against the flux, and exerting traumatic influences. As the darkness climbs upwards these are being dissolved, and finally eclipsed. The picture presented is of these dead thoughts yielding to the current, mowed down like so many dead leaves. The quester is in fact being freed of their tyrannic, corrupting influences (just as Fenwick is to be freed from the Gorgon-headed Jordan). So that in the end he finds his way in merely following, giving up these constricting aspirations.

Walcott's images are graphically and precisely fixed in the setting, and pierce straight to the metaphysical crux of this crisis and its resolution: the oppressive strain of misdirected aspirations, the freedom of merely following. Corruption and tyranny survive in the misguided desire to attain that cosmic eminence, (the sun's position) where one can

transcend, know the secret of, and wield power over the flux. This is the desire to dominate existence which is, in Walcott's canon, man's most fatal susceptibility. In Harris the counterpart is man's obsessive desire to find "a material nexus to bind the universe together". It is a life-draining desire, its own latent paralysis reflected in the image of the "clotting sun". This is the false lure to arrive at possession of pure light, like Makak's lust for the white goddess in Dream. This is, at the same time, Walcott's own inevitable approach to the struggle against flux. It reiterates essential aspects of his most pressing metaphysical need to be free of the strains of overreaching aspirations. They have the same oppressive quality as the "dead metaphors" of "The Castaway", and their strains and tensions are as visceral as the "nerve-cracked ground" of "Guyana I":

> Together they walked through a thickness pinned with birds
> silent as rags, grackles and flycatchers mostly,
> shaking words from their heads.
>
> their beaks aimed at one target, the clotting sun.
> Tight, with the tension of arrows.
>
> Dark climbed their knees until their heads were dark,
>
> (11.1-6)

He is freed of their hindrance in surrendering to the non-resistible rhythm of the flux. It is no easy surrender, however, as its generative process carries simultaneously the rhythms of mortality - the mysterious continuum of living and dying, infinity and finitude:

> The wind, wave-muscled, kept its steady mowing.
> Thoughts fell from him like leaves.
>
> (11.7-8)

With this surrender, the quester now finds fresh purpose and direction: to submit totally to the movement of the flux, to "fol[low], that[is]all". He is finding the only direction in which he can truly

advance. He is renouncing the more confounding traumas of defiant questionings, to accept the mysteriously organic flow of this "wave-muscled . . . steady mowing". Following, however, is not blind subservience: the mind, consciousness, is always "one step behind", perceiving and exercising the vigilance in which submission finds true integrity. This act of discovery becomes representative of the creative act of producing the poem, as the specific references in the poem suggest. It is the poem as an act of discovery, attaining oneness with experience, rather than as reflective, interpretive gesture. "Shaking words from [his] head" the poet is now at one with the Word. The mind takes second place "one step behind", but in close alertness to its directions. This is, in fact, a full expression of Walcott's new aesthetic credo in this phase, and the poem shows how fundamentally it is informed by a new moral orientation. These profound ideas are expressed with a striking economy, the result of Walcott's ingenious handling of metaphor. They unfold through one graphic image, emblematic in his vision. It is the image of man as tree, rooted in the matter of earth. The life-force of this matter starts from there upwards, climbing from knees to reach consciousness at the top, his head.

The next phase of the journey is a backward glance into the human society left behind in the white town, Guyana's Georgetown. Walcott's journey plies between the unreclaimed interior and the civilized society (in the Caribbean setting the two are never far from each other). As earlier observed, this is a focal point of his difference from Harris. It is to this human scene that the whole effort is oriented, and its bonds continue to press upon the quester right through the journey into the interior. The total pattern of Walcott's journey is ultimately concerned with the interinvolvement of the two, so that later the life of the town is absorbed in, becomes identical with that of the waterfall ("The Falls").

At "The White Town" therefore, the journey calls a halt to give a close-up of the interpenetration of the civilising effort and the pre-civilised frontiers between which New World-Caribbean man is 'placed'. We see how the forces of the interior impinge on and determine the peculiar tensions and crises of the society. This gives insight into the effects of its deeply-embedded strains on the malaise of the society. For this, Walcott takes a look at the Guyana of the mid-sixties, at the happenings, general character and atmosphere of its society. What he sees is the image of an entire community caught in the vice of some dumb disturbing force, as if waiting for an explosive release. It seems like some deeply buried schizophrenia, surfacing in the violent distempered gestures, the strange contradictions typical of the Guyana of the period. The opening line gives the impact of this situation in blunt colloquial style, reproducing the living West Indian rhythms we find throughout The Gulf:

> 'Man, all the men in that damned country mad!'
>
> (1.1)

Speaking about the sequence some ten years after it was written, Walcott remembered "Guyana" mainly as "a poem about mad people".[28] Madness seems to be the one pervasive principle of a congenital malaise afflicting a country in transition, infecting its artists, intellectuals, philistines and miscreants alike:

> There was the joke on W. and Mayakovsky.
> There was the charred bush of a man found in the morning,
> there was the burgher's glare of white-washed houses
> out-staring guilt,
> . . . .
> there was the poet howling in vines of syntax
> and the surveyor
> dumbstruck by a stone;
>
> (11.2-4, 10-12)

"W. and Mayakovsky", "the charred bush of a man. . ." are references to two of Guyana's best known artists, Wilson Harris and Edgar Mittelholzer

respectively. Walcott is citing original 'case-histories' in these two. Walcott recounts an anecdote about Harris, which he heard during a visit to Guyana.[29] According to this anecdote, Harris disappeared for some time during one of his surveying expeditions in the interior. When he eventually reappeared, he was asked by the authorities, who had launched a search party, about the experience. He advised them, apparently in all seriousness, to go to Mayakovsky, the dead Russian writer, for the answer. Harris appears as the mad visionary. The novelist Mittelholzer, struggling morbidly with the mulatto schizophrenia all his life, burnt himself to death in an English field in 1965. These are both representative in their own ways of the native Guyanese schizophrenia. Walcott gives insight into the real, subconscious sources of their distemper in the psyche of the whole country. He finds its dynamic repeated in all spheres of the country's cultural efforts and attitudes, shared by anthropologist, burgher, and artist alike. Basically, it is precipitated by the drives and desires of an emergent people unleashing an elemental momentum, in the face of whose unguessed forces men are left petrified. They are drives which precipitate men into collision with the old savagery, the violent charges of which rebound to transfix them into a kind of constricted psyche. Each sphere of activity manifests its own form of petrified posture, its own form of violation: a kind of imprisonment within its own tense eruptive forces, which is the true anatomy of schizophrenia. This lies behind the manic behaviour and attitudes visible at all levels in the society.

This moral predicament which Walcott finds so starkly featured in Georgetown is the crisis of an emergent territory, common to the entire region. He is diagnosing a sensibility original to emergent Caribbean man, and penetrating the sources of its peculiar angst. As always in Walcott, it is one which he shares acutely, and he recognises it from a true

inwardness - "there was the poet howling in vines of syntax". He shows, moreover, how authentically the character of this angst relates to the burden of the interior - how, in other words, the resurgence of the primal is immanent within emergent man, as it is configured in the geophysical interior in the immediate setting. An emergent need and condition are the sources of inner disruptive energies, and these are commensurate with untamed, primitive forces configured in the natural landscape. It is a rediscovery of the true immanence of the 'external' interior within - which is what makes the journey through the interior a vital necessity. Anthropologist, poet, surveyor all embark, well versed in the rules of their trades, on the task of exploring the new territory. They are all disoriented as they stumble upon the depths and distracting closeness of its forces - which they set out to measure to rule - within themselves. The anthropologist for example, setting out to research the roots of customs and lore, is astounded to find how readily he slips back into the pre-articulate and pre-human. Walcott renders the process of this reversion with the hysteria of howling metaphor, reminiscent of things like "Goats and Monkeys". Far from being merely his own manic indulgence, it is especially effective in the context:

> there was the anthropologist
> dropping on soft pads from the thorn branches
> to the first stance hearing the vowels
> fur in his throat the hoarse
> pebbles of consonants rattling his parched gullet,
>
> (11.5-9)

This, then, is the image of a civilisation undergoing its birthpangs. But the scene, despite its desolation, is not one of dearth. The poem is not a pessimistic apocalypse. Walcott is concerned to uncover the existential plight at the root of the malaise. Rather than a sign of dearth, it is the burden of a nascent vision opening up the old

impasse. Ultimately all these signs of schizophrenia are signs of the need for some access to a yet unknown, withheld real. So that men in the white town, whether blind to this principle, or distressed by its dawning consciousness, are really all waiting for some release into the real. Walcott is asking for full consciousness of this creative need at the root of the crisis. While all are caught in this similar plight of waiting, the strains take their perverted courses in those devoid of this consciousness, as in the burghers "outstaring guilt". It proves disruptive, even breaks those sensitive to its frictions. In burrowing that far beneath the surface, Walcott is not losing sight of the social ills that fuel the crisis; but he is pointing out how inadequate are merely social solutions uninformed by this moral awareness. What he is seeing, then, is the greater need for moral fear of the contradictions that beset men at the thresholds of self-discovery. The white town finally presents the picture of men straining at the brink against a vacancy, waiting to break through into some dimension of ultimate fulfilment: "A fist should smash the glare of skylight open." The real feel of this vacancy is conveyed through a pervasive quality of whiteness, glaring from the literal whiteness of Georgetown. It is the colour of vacancy, the colour of a blinding, unnatural absence. In "Negatives", white is the inverse of black negatives, and has the same associations in Walcott's insight into the spiritual complex behind the plight of the Ibos. The Ibos present the image of "flare-lit . . . /prisoners of some drumhead tribunal". They are "sun-wrapped bodies on the white road", entering, seeking a similar real, for whose unknown name Walcott calls, in a striking pun, on Christ the arch-searcher:

> that central city, Christ, what is its name?
>
> (1.22)

Throughout the phase white is the recurring colour of this disturbing vacancy. Earlier on, the whiteness of snow had been a sinister vacancy hounding him to "lon[g] for darkness, evil that was warm" (1.19 "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen", The Castaway). These associations, while they are archetypal, have a psychic immediacy: white is the 'colour' of what remains an incomprehensible, vacant 'other' to a race whose element is darkness. The whiteness of this emergent malaise reflects both the glare of desire for the unnameable lost city, and the violent principle of something prowling and ready to spring - and the necessary interaction between the two. It is the blanched inverse of the darkness within, and it forces men to find a creative way out because of the vital presence of this very darkness. These are moral necessities to be identified only through the symbolic journey into the interior.

"The Falls" marks the climax of the journey, and the realisation of the mythic quest begun in "Guyana I". It is the archetypal resurrection into a true spiritual Order. Walcott finds and orients himself to the creative pattern which has been dilating towards him through the haze. This is the pattern which leads him to the philosophical resolutions of landfall, and his final integration into humanity. So far, he has been tracing the course of the journey through a questing protagonist, and employing a fictional approach for this. Here he moves into the next stage in the progress of his protagonist's experience. Back in the interior from the excursus into the white town, he is now at the falls (Guyana's famous Kaieteur Falls), and is contemplating a fearless leap down the waterfall to a transcendent death:

> Their barrelling roar would open like a white oven
> for him,
> who was a spirit now, who could not burn or drown.
>
> (11.1-3)

Literally he is a man contemplating suicide in a distempered state, caught from the infectious madness of the white town. It is this madness which begets the illusion of being "spirit now" - a sheer force beyond elemental harm. The nature of this madness is complex and far-reaching. Its desperation arises from a dynamic which is far from negative. Where Vercingetorix' egomaniac madness became a travesty because of non-consciousness, this is madness born of the extremes of consciousness, uncontained. It is visionary madness in the fullest sense of the term. Rather than being negative, it is active and purposive in that it comes at the stage when man feels the illimitable powers of pure essence within his reach, and yearns to know, become pure power free from all mortal restraints. It marks the final limits of imaginative risk. The principle recurs in Walcott's metaphysic as the distracting yearning to become god, which he names, in Dream, the desire "to leave this world". Walcott's quester has thus been carried to his madness along positive currents - in yielding to the darkness ("The Bush"), along which he is brought to the white glare of an unarriving central city ("The White Town"), at whose barriers the lure of being pure spirit and desire for release are one and the same madness.

Walcott's mad protagonist is thus at the final portals of discovery, and the brink of greatest error and threat before salvation. This is the counterpart to Donne's arrival at the falls in Palace, and the essentials of Harris' situation reappear here. This passage in Harris marks the exact parallel: "They were exhausted after a long while, and they leaned in a doorway of the night hammering in blindness and frustration with the fist of the waterfall. They had been able to lay hold upon nothing after all. It was finished and they fell." (Palace, p.141). In both Harris and Walcott the characters are desperately seeking access through and beyond the waterfall into some realm of pure being. There are important differences in what the realm beyond the waterfall means for each, based again

on the different philosophical approaches of the two writers. Harris' Donne wants to find and lay hold of a mechanism behind the divine workmanship visible through the waterfall (it is the "piece-bright paling" which "shuts the spouse/Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows). His particular error is his compulsion to find a tangible formula for the spiritual authorship that upholds existence; to hold materially the nexus that binds the universe together. To be saved therefore, he must release himself from this desire for a material hold on the <u>anima</u>, whose very principle is "a divine alienation of all flesh". To be released from this desire is to find true creative harmony with the <u>anima</u>. The waterfall opens a window on this through the terrifying and miraculous revelations he encounters there; and with the surrender to "lay[ing] hold on nothing", he falls to his own form of resurrection. For Walcott's protagonist the aspiration is to escape the bonds of matter into a realm of pure essence. While for Harris the existential angst consists in mis-appropriating essence to earthly desires, Walcott locates it in the inescapable contradictions of corrupting mortality and incorruptible essence comprehended within man's being. In Harris' concept what seem the bonds of matter are negated, its contradictions resolved in a transcendent spirituality - a view which leans towards the Eastern outlook. Walcott's view belongs more in the Western Christian concept. In the Christian concept, transcendence consists in a spiritual transmutation into the pure essence of matter, where, paradoxically, it is the life of matter itself that is preserved, indestructible, to affirm eternal life. While these major metaphysical differences separate them, for both the questers the aspiration inculcates some form of triumph over mortal perplexities; and the waterfall stands for a mystical, mythic threshold of discovery.

Walcott's dramatisation is very effective. He gives us, with an economy typical of the entire sequence, a concrete and realistic experience. Every concrete detail of the presentation is a profoundly symbolic signature of this mythic experience. The waterfall is an archetypal symbol of the cosmic flux, and the alchemical principle at work in it. It is the natural phenomenon which best manifests the laws of motion produced by the cyclic transmutation of the four elements - earth, fire, air and water. An actualisation of the Heracletian flux, it is a graphic manifestation of the alchemical principle which produces the flux, to become source of the one cosmic energy that sustains existence. The waterfall manifests this in the powerful combination of force-energy with water, which signifies the alchemical reconciliation of the most polarised elements, fire and water, into one. This is the ultimate mystical significance which has earned it the emblematic title Walcott cites: the "smoke that thundered". The metaphor does describe its visual, immediate impact: the sheer vaporous spray of the waterfall creates the effect of smoke, while the impact of its thundering waters seems contained in the vapour itself - a combined image which signifies the miraculous co-existence of fire and water. The waterfall thus symbolises the state of pure essence at which life is beyond the threat of separate, conflicting elements. This is the promise of safety beyond threat of burning or drowning which it holds for the quester: to die into pure being that transcends the threat of mortality. His aspiration to be "spirit now, who could not burn or drown" rediscovers mystical associations with the old biblical archetype: the Old Testament prophets, God's elect, had emerged from Nebuchadnezzar's fire unharmed. They were men who had attained that state of pure spiritual being, God's elect in possession of the central city, and beyond the threat and fear of mortality. This - the archetypal associations are powerfully and

unobtrusively condensed in the poem - is his own mythic expectation. The ritual death through which this is to be attained is at the chafing, gut level most typical of Walcott's suffering. It comes through in the rawness of the images. The quality of his holy fire is that of a "white oven", and the fearsome power of the thunder is experienced as a "barrelling roar". This is in striking contrast to the lyrically evoked, mystical transformations that startle and arouse Donne's awe at the waterfall.

But, yearning for transcendence, he finds himself denied this mystical access to the Absolute. The difficulty of finding that door into the waterfall intensifies his desperation and danger, as he remains clinging precariously to this desire. The single word "surely" conveys the urgency of his situation:

> Surely in that 'smoke that thundered' there was a door -
>
> (1.4)

And the punctuation conveys the sense of his arrival at an impasse, the gulf. It is the cosmic dilemma of Harris' crew "hammering in blindness . . . with the fist of the waterfall", like the earlier desperation for a fist "to smash the glare of skylight open" in "The White Town". But here, at the limits of the crisis, he arrives at an insight into reality which marks the dramatic turning point of his rebirth into a true Order. He arrives at a perception of the creative medium of humanity in that Order, which renders vain the desire for an impossible mystical transcendence. The discovery comes with this dramatic turn of events: the sounds of the human traffic of the white town, not too far from the interior, overtake him and become one with that of the waterfall:

> but the noise boiled to the traffic of a white town
> of bicycles, pigeons, bells, smoke, trains at the rush hour
>
> revolving to this roar.
>
> (11.5-7)

The motion of Life in the town, consisting in the sum total of humanity's everyday business, gathers a force and vital Energy indistinguishable from that of the waterfall. This suddenly clarifies the truth: that the human traffic works to the same organic process and principles as the Cosmic - the activation of one creative flux producing the cyclic continuum of Life. Moreover, it is not merely that the human motion measures to the elemental. They come from the same indivisible principle operating through Nature and Man, the pattern of the cosmic macrocosm being repeated in the microcosm of town. Thus, the essence of the waterfall is the essence of the white town, and waterfall and town merge in the most fundamental way. The moral implications of this phenomenon are extremely subtle and complex, and responsible for a change in orientation. All these mundane, domestic activities in the human traffic are generated by the most vital impulses of Life. They are gestures, responses and efforts ministering to the exercise of one single Desire - Desire, which is the motive impulse of life, taking its protean, conflicting courses. They, all these conflicting forces, feed into and swell the volume of the flux. Every banal detail of the scene reaching the waterfall becomes almost an epiphany of this profound process. Bicycles riding to the fulfilment of some purpose; trains at the rush hour answering, both literally and figuratively, to the acceleration of desire in times of urgency; the rising and falling rhythms of bells of annunciation and tolling bells, which echo the pattern of human aspiration; the flight of the pigeon describing the curve of man's own destiny. Together their dynamic comprehends - importantly - both the vicissitudes of Desire and its realisations. It has a diversity in which rising and falling rhythms bear the conflicting properties of Good and Evil. In this very diversity is the plenitude of the flux, where all conflicting elements are transmuted, as the four elements of the waterfall, to make for the one

non-destroying Essence of Life. The pivotal point of Walcott's insight is to see this at work in the most tenacious, intimate and everyday experience of humanity.

The nature of Essence, then, is one in which the principles of his own being are vitally involved. Since it is the very element of his world, the world of his human traffic, it becomes both impossible and unnecessary for him to leave the earth, and attain a sphere of pure essence imagined, erroneously, to be beyond earth and mortality. To get the essential emphasis in Walcott's apprehension, we will return to a comparison with Harris. The latter's <u>anima</u> involves the alchemical reconciliation of diverse conflicting elements as is implicit in Walcott's vision of flux. In Harris, however, once that <u>anima</u> is realised, man exists beyond the reach of the fears and alarms of earth's desires. He is, like the crew in <u>Palace</u> arriving at this realisation, "buoyed up and supported above dreams by the undivided soul and anima in the universe . . . his true alien spiritual love without cruelty and confusion in the blindness and frustration of desire" (<u>Palace</u>, p.152). For Walcott, man can never be free of the bonds of earthbound desires which feed into the great flux. They remain an organic part of the process producing the ultimate Essence, his own medium, but independently, impersonally stronger than his single self. In the fixed pattern of its creative Order, his own struggle with the antinomies of matter and spirit, desire which plies between perfection and imperfection, remains vital. Walcott's is the perception of a creative harmony which comprehends and leaves man with his paradoxical destiny. It is a higher Order in which this paradoxical destiny has a meaningful, organic symmetry - one which cancels out the sense of existentialist absurdity.

The perception of these complex aspects of man's relationship

to the flux - that he remains subject to his paradoxical destiny, that this destiny has a creative symmetry - leads Walcott to a religious submission and awe in accepting the destiny of earth. For what this Order finally reveals is that the Absolute Essence which contains him yet remains stronger than his single lesser proportion does not threaten with annihilation or negate his being. A miraculous cosmic balance allows the lesser to find an integral viable form within the stronger Absolute which takes all in its flow. Walcott sees the pattern of this creative balance between stronger totality and lesser individual form in a graphic image on the elemental scene. It is the graphic image of flower existing affirmatively above the tremendous force of the waterfall. Waterfall and flower become a literal emblem declaring this truth, and the realisation comes with an impact as immediate as the discovery of the organic oneness of waterfall and human traffic. The balance is perceived in the relationship between the frailty of the flower and the tremendous force of the falls, the one in striking contrast to the other. The force of the waterfall poses no threat to the frailty of the flower. Rather, this frailty, which is an essential property of the creative entity "flower", makes for the law of its own creative adjustment to the great flux. Frail and delicate above the waterfall, the flower sustains its own integrated form and organic poise within the current of the flux. It is borne up along, not confounded or engulfed within, the tremendous flow of Essence. Sustaining itself in this position, it is not Essence but something out of Essence - an efflorescence. It is something realising its own completeness of form out of Essence to affirm its creative truth in the unique wholeness of flower. Borne along in this creative balance, it follows the movement of the flux to the falling rhythm, the downward cycle organically worked into the total continuum. It thus moves towards its inevitable passage downwards,

the falling rhythm of its single life-span. There is the same organic balance in this passage downward - its frailty remains at once the cause and the principle of its creative adjustment to this end. Thus, it finds its passage downward with the same rhythmic balance, towards death and finitude, which become a form of completion. These emblematic significations are just as much a graphic, scientific reality - the fading flower follows a natural course down the waterfall, and it is not destroyed or disintegrated in the process. Its form is preserved by its very weightlessness above the stronger current, to reach a "safe" landfall and end in earth.

The nature of man's being within the flux is like that of the flower. Lesser than the totality, he attains in his frailty a completion of form which bears the same creative balance to the stronger flux. In that form is the fullness of his humanity. He follows the course of his passage downward with the same rhythmic balance, his "weightless" humanity not negated, but organically adjusted to affirm the integral rightness of this process. Thus this passage downward, this "landfall going", becomes a movement onward to the ultimate fulfilment of his humanity. This is the climactic realisation at which Walcott's quester arrives:

> He was a flower,
> weightless. He would float down.
>
> (11.8-9)

It is the renunciation of his original desire to be "spirit", above the reach of the conflicts and susceptibilities of his human frailty. With this final insight into its creative pattern, he now accepts the destiny of earth. This new vision identifies man's creative being, not in essence, but in a veritable efflorescence. This is the philosophical significance of Walcott's acceptance of earth and "a landfall going" in which he arrives at a true reconciliation of his most fundamental conflicts - his argument

against God and Cosmos precipitated by the negations of history. It marks the integration of his awareness, and is the most profound basis of his works since The Gulf.

But the kind of moral resolution this integration entails is by no means one of final calm or static wisdom. Landfall, the acceptance of earth, is an acceptance of suffering, death, and of the rising and falling rhythms of desire. This does not mean, on the other hand, that he is settling for the kind of stoic endurance which is a gesture of heroic defiance arising from cosmic pessimism, like that of Camus' Sisyphus. Walcott's endurance turns on a living awe towards the rising and falling rhythms of life - the accesses of suffering and failure, the disappointments as well as the very real moments of fruition and benediction. They continue to invest humanity's everyday experience with "terror enough in the habitual, miracle enough in the familiar". An angst continues to be its living stimulus, but it is not an angst of despair. Its true element is a tension kept alive between elation and pain by the energies of a renascent Imagination. The spirit of this acceptance is expressed by Makak, the arch-hero of the drama, where he arrives at a parallel realisation:

> I wanted to leave this world. But if the moon is
> earth's friend, eh, Tigre, how can we leave the earth.
>
> (II,2,11.393-5)

Here the acceptance of earth is charged with more poignancy than elation, but it is the source of the living tension which continues to generate Walcott's creative struggle. In the subsequent section, we turn to the next two poems of the sequence, where the fullest implications of this vision are defined and the integration enacted to show its liveable modes in human experience.

(b) Borges and Landfall

In the next two poems of the sequence, Walcott is engaged in appraising the full philosophical implications of the pattern dramatically encountered at "The Falls", and in the final act of orienting himself to it. From "Guyana IV" he moves in "Guyana V" to fix the universal shape of this vision, which becomes best crystallised for him in the position of Borges; he proceeds from there to close with its truths in human reality, on emerging from the interior back into human society ("Guyana VI"). Together the two comprise the end of the journey and the final stage of homecoming. In "Guyana V" the burden of the falls finds the firm universal outlines of an ultimate reality: it is the shape, map of the continent being drawn within the boundaries of Borges' world. Then the quester, conscious now of his own measure within these dimensions, moves into human society to orient himself in the light of its truth.

The fixing of these dimensions within the context of Borges' vision is of singular importance. The perspective is being both expanded and intensified. But, far more significantly, important correspondences between these realisations and the position of Borges are being discovered. Walcott is uncovering in these correspondences as in those with Harris earlier, the fundamental principles of a New World awareness. They represent levels at which Borges meets both Walcott and Harris.

In "A Map of the Continent" Walcott surveys the South American landscape stretching between two representative poles. At one end is Borges, custodian of the letters and traditions of old civilizations; at the other end is the naked buck in his habitat, the precivilised, primal interior. These are boundaries representative of both the geographical and cultural aspects of the South American continent. The poem is to show how these poles, existing in close proximity in a new continent converge

to reveal one universal mythic pattern - a pattern which spans ages and traditions to affirm "the one age of the world". In fixing this pattern, Walcott is not merely using Borges as an external marker. It is not only Borges' personal situation as a librarian and writer - these also appear, in fact, as original motifs in his fictions - that is important to Walcott. He is invoking the very essentials of Borges' vision, and these essentials are the fundamental basis of the truths arrived at in the poem. So that the quester becomes a compound of Walcott's persona and that of the Argentinian writer. We need, therefore, to begin with a look at the achievement of Borges in order to get a true appreciation of the meaning of what lies "between the Rupunini and Borges", and to see how it serves to crystallise Walcott's own discoveries so far. More accurately, we need to look at what specific aspects of his achievement are most meaningful to Walcott.

It is not easy to abstract any one readily translatable philosophy from the multiple enigmas and involutions of Borges' fictional labyrinths. We will, however, try to give a brief outline of his main preoccupations, and proceed straight to Walcott's own point of entry into his meanings. Amidst all the permutations and riddling significations of his ingeniously constructed labyrinths, one persistent preoccupation does emerge from the fictions. He is preoccupied with men's various attempts throughout the ages and climes to provide metaphysical explanations for the universe, and he shows how all these are defeated in the face of an unchanging, irreducible reality. While he recognises that these efforts are answering to instinctual drives in the Imagination, Borges sees in man's obsessive pursuit of these metaphysical solutions only the creation of labyrinths. He adjudges them self-defeating labyrinths made by and designed to be deciphered by men.[30] Space does not permit us to reconstruct Borges' labyrinths at this point, but we will be looking at a few of his fictions in

our discussion below. What needs to be noted at this point, however, is that this concern with an irreducible universe is essentially a concern with the issue of Time and continuity. Borges sees in these exercises of the Imagination a sinister and nightmarish reduplication. His main image for this is an endless perpetuation of mirrors and corridors. This statement from one of his most representative stories describes the effect in typically enigmatic vein: "mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they increase the number of men."[31] The image is in fact the dialectical reflection of Borges' peculiar view of Time, his sense of an indivisible infinity. The concern with Time, then,is central to Borges' complex explorations. He returns to an explicit treatment of the theme in a number of his essays. This concern with Time is exactly what centres Walcott's interest in Borges, and his direct point of entry into the latter's works. This is the aspect of his vision that is being deployed in the poem, where Borges emerges as a veritable genius of the "one age of the world".

Walcott's own words are definitive on this. In an interview with the writer,[32] Walcott stated that the strength and relevance of Borges consisted in his original view of Time, and went on to explain the nature and significance of that concept of Time. His explanation, in the writer's opinion, is the most authentic evaluation of the importance of Borges on a universal scale; and helps to account for the awe in which he holds the latter. He has described him as: "this old man . . . who almost convinced me that literature is a reality superior to life."[33]

Walcott took a dialectical viewpoint to define the character and significance of Borges' vision of Time. He contrasted the concept of Time peculiar to Temperate Nature (his own term), with the accesses to a different concept of Time potential in non-Temperate Nature. The one is the

Old World concept, and the other that potential in the equatorial world of Borges, in whose works the potential is, for Walcott, fully realised. In Temperate Nature, Walcott explained, man's concept of Time is based on the seasonal cycle of death and rebirth, and reality seen as regulated to the cyclic pattern of death and renewal. Thus, in the older civilisations of the Temperate Zone man interprets the external signs of change as a process of the dearth and resurgence of his traditions. He thus comes to conceive of history as a process of the cyclic revolutions of tradition in Time. In this view, the dynamic of Eternity works through divisible, successive phases, and consequently reality is seen in terms of different ages and times, each distinguishable from the other. The non-Temperate vision of Time in Borges, Walcott thought, was directly opposed to this, and was the truer, more profound reality. Time is not seen in terms of successive cycles of decay and renewal, but as an indivisible continuum in which all reality is simultaneous and instantaneous. The changing faces of reality which seem to result from a system of revolutions, are but heraldic manifestations of one undiminishing burden, persistent with the deepest continuum of the earth. The incidence of this heraldic phenomenon is fundamental in Borges' work. The sense of the heraldic is what characterises his projections of the different forms of the Imagination's bondage through the ages, and suffuses the curious imaginative atmosphere of his work. These forms do not signal the changes of a seasonal flux, but are, to use a recurrent term in Borges, "avatars" of one eternal condition. Walcott stressed this heraldic element in Borges' work, which seemed the aspect of the latter's art to have made the strongest impact on him. In final illustration of the contrast between the views of a seasonal cyclic Time and an eternal heraldic Time Walcott made the following point. In contemporary literature, certain types of race writing, the incidence

of surrealism, are not merely signals of a period of dearth eliciting anarchic response. Their 'revolutionary' thrust is not a demarcation of a different, downward phase in the cycles of civilization. It is a heraldic manifestation of one unchanging condition. It is from the consciousness of that dimension of Time, he concluded, organic with the deeper rhythms of the continuum of the earth, that the deepest acts of creation come.

We need to take a look at the ways in which this vision finds expression in the works of Borges. This is necessary before we can properly appreciate what makes it authentic to the position of Borges - to see ultimately, how it derives from principles original to his position as a New World writer, and which place him in the New World "past and promise". Borges' major theme, as already observed, is man's creation of nightmarish labyrinths in his attempts to define an irreducible universe. All his fictions are finally some variation on this theme. Borges uses oblique methods to project the various guises of a reality pointing back to this central phenomenon. He reveals thereby the implications for man's position in relation to Time, Space,and his basic aspirations. In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", one of his most famous short stories, men try to regulate life to an intricately devised theory of the universe. Reality is seen as a series of independent acts, temporal and successive, so that the notion of space is discounted, and the practice of naming things and objects altogether eliminated. Inconsistencies and grotesqueries abound in what becomes a veritable labyrinth. Tlön's only destination is a consequent dependence on the chance reward, the terms of which have been factitiously pre-arranged to conform to their metaphysic. Borges calls it the hrön. When this reward does "materialise" and intrudes into the real world, it signifies men's subjection to the desire for the irreal, unidentifiable, chance reward, which finally disorients and destroys them. In 'Death and the

Compass", Borges moves from the philosophical to the sphere of crime and detection. The detective Lönnrot, who is instinctively sceptical about the simple straightforward solution, works through a meticulously constructed labyrinth to solve a crime. He plays straight into the hands of a criminal intent on vengeance. The latter, knowing of his metaphysical bent had deliberately left the kind of clues that would set Lönnrot in pursuit of a learned explanation. Borges glances at all the philosophical systems, ranging from Plato to contemporary times; he spans East and West, Persian and Chinese labyrinths being encountered on Latin-American soil. Similarly, he visits all spheres of cultural activity to descry this phenomenon: literature, the domestic scene and crime-detection alike.

This preoccupation of Borges reaches towards the truth through a paradoxical approach. It is reached via dual, opposite perspectives. There is the negative burden, usually uppermost, exposing man's folly in perpetrating the labyrinths in which he gets enmeshed. There is the reverse, implicit in and interacting with the former, which aims at apprehending the awesome truth of the very phenomenon which baffles men into such folly. It is the fact that the universe has always had an Order, but one beyond, and mysteriously superior to human reach and control - as Borges puts it cryptically: ". . . reality is also orderly. Perhaps it is, but in accordance with divine laws - I translate: inhuman laws - which we never quite grasp."[34] These implications are sometimes explored in situations dealing directly with the pattern of man's destiny in Time. Among the major fictions which do this are "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", "The Zahir", "The God's Script", along with a discursive piece entitled "A New Refutation of Time". "Pierre Menard . . .", to which Walcott made special reference in the interview, tells the story of a contemporary writer who set out to recreate the original text of the Quixote. Borges uses his

scrupulous, mathematical logic to show how Menard accomplishes this objective. Menard succeeds in reproducing the text word for word, only the biographical accounts in the original being left out. Despite the six hundred years between the two writers, an essential form of reality was available intact. Borges proves this point to draw the conclusion that "there is no exercise of the intellect which is not, in the final analysis, useless".[35] Borges is not, of course, working on a facetious level; nor is the argument merely cleverly contrived. He is careful to make the emphases that give the paradox its serious significance. The hero's plan was not to write a contemporary version of the Quixote, but "to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard".[36] Only surface interpretations distinguish the identical text reproduced - and Borges cites an original passage from the Quixote - as peculiar to his age rather than that of Cervantes. From the contemporary remove the same words in Cervantes seem archaic, a simplistic adulation of history peculiar to the seventeenth century; while Menard's reads as the twentieth century's controversial perspective on history. The differences are, Borges contends, mere ideological and aesthetic niceties, while the essential content remains the same, preserving an unyielding form of reality.

This is Borges' dramatic formula for an apprehension of a root reality instantaneous through Time, a reality in which all barriers between ages and climes collapse and appear as artificial. It shows these barriers as artificial superstructures erecting themselves over the eternal. They are products of man's congenital restiveness, and give rise to a false notion of the successive process of history. This phenomenon of instantaneity, so difficult of access, means for Borges a negation of particularity and individuality. It leads him to the final perception that everything, always present, happens to all men; all men are each other, and ultimately to the sense of nothingness of each individual man. It is a view of man as a paradoxical compound of "everything and nothing",

for which Shakespeare becomes his chief mentor. He returns to this riddling concept of everything and nothing again and again: it forms the crux of his argument in "A New Refutation of Time". Yet man's experiential bondage to the particular becomes all the more acute and lucid for Borges because of this very grasp on the infinite. Borges' sensibility does inculcate a sense of the irascible conflict between the two. It is in fact his point of entry into the sense of existential crisis. His very real humanistic strength derives from this, however obliquely it finds expression. This is the collision that gives rise to the nightmarish reduplications perpetrated through the harrying labyrinths he reproduces.

When the illusory barriers dissolve, then, the different visages reality assumes from one period to another, from one clime to another, are seen in their true guise. They are avatars whose exterior trappings are heraldic of an eternal condition, and their processes are essentially epiphanic. "The Zahir", another of Borges' major fictions, is an exposition of this heraldic phenomenon. The hero encounters his Zahir in an ancient coin which exercises an uncanny and tyrannic fascination on him. The coin, it is discovered, is but one of the faces this uncanny obsession has taken in different places and times, visiting the same quality of fear and restiveness on its victims - the dynamic, in various forms, of the hound of heaven. He learns of the various avatars of the zahir:

> "He was informed that the reference was to a magic tiger which was the ruin of whoever beheld it, even from far away, since the beholder continued to think about it to the end of his days. . . . This Tiger was composed of many tigers in the most vertiginous fashion: it was traversed by tigers, scored by tigers and it contained seas and Himalayas and armies which seemed to reveal still other tigers. . . . Taylor told the story to Mohammed Al-Yemeni, of Fort William; Mohammed informed him that there was no created thing in this world which could not take on the properties of Zaheer, but that the All-Merciful does not allow two things to be it at the same time, since one alone is able to fascinate multitudes. He said that there is always a

> Zahir; that in the Age of Innocence it was an idol named Yaúq; and later, a prophet of Jorasán who used to wear a veil embroidered with stones, or a golden mask."[37]

These are all heraldic forms manifesting an eternal, single bondage. Through them the universe is being refracted in a third dimension, in which neither Time nor Space exist as separate entities. They are, as such, paradoxically cancelled out to reveal one indivisible continuity. For Borges the recognition is both frightful and awesome.

In "A Map of the Continent" Walcott is finding a cosmological design for the discoveries of the interior within these dimensions of Time and continuity. The question which arises at this juncture is: what is the precise connection between the burden of the interior and these perspectives of Borges? The correspondences are far from obvious since Borges' modes, approaches, and frame of reference in no way resemble those of Walcott or Harris, and he shows no preoccupation with the 'interior' motif. In Harris and Walcott, as seen in section (iiia), the journey into the interior means the reengagement of a primal creative quest. The quest leads both to a recovery of man's archetypal mythic function, perceived as his true creative purpose in an affirmative Order. There are fundamental points at which the vision of Borges meets that common ground shared by the two Caribbean writers. We have identified the various processes and signals which manifest for Borges the truth of an instantaneous, indivisible Time - the horrors of a reduplicating Imagination, and the heraldic principle in what appear to be signs of mutability. At the core of all this is an instinctual sense of agelessness; the curious sense of the archaic permeating his work is distilled from just this. The "ageless" in the consciousness of Borges is, innately, a consciousness of the primal and archetypal. (It is the agelessness derived from "traditionlessness",

in a setting where traditions are free of their monolithic systems, as will be developed later). Borges' is thus a grasp of the one perennial order of the universe, and the one perennial image of Man in the ancient presence of that Order. He is engaged in rediscovering the one pristine function in which reality infinitely coheres, and is therefore discerning a creative, though inscrutable Order. Like that of Harris and Walcott, his is thus an affirmative recognition, and an annunciation running counter to the absurdist concept of Orderlessness. Implicit in his affirmation of a primal creative Order is the cognition of man's Adamic purpose and the sacral trust of the Imagination.

The recovery of belief in a primal, cosmic Order shared by these writers derives from conditions common to their New World situation, and the particular relationships to the 'Old' World resulting from history. History, as considered in the section on Walcott and Harris, is responsible for the state of "traditionlessness" incident in the New World. The dialectic behind this is the same as defined in Harris's theory. Harris saw its promise in an access to the eternal through all the spiritual ages that have ever been. "Traditionlessness" in the New World, however, consists in the coincidence of vestiges of traditions withdrawn from their monolithic structures. Harris saw in this the kind of coincidence that offered the possibilities of a gateway into the one spiritual age of the world. It is this principle which is operative in Borges. He too is arriving at the ageless via a similar coincidence of traditions. They are vestigial in that their monolithic systems are "missing" in his New World setting, leaving only their imprints. Borges' art bears the strongest concentration of such "traditions", to the extent that the root principle might even be blurred by its rhetorical overlay - his subject matter is largely confined to old traditions and literatures. Borges is working through the gamut of

all the old literatures and traditions, Western and Eastern, to distil the heraldic and archetypal. So that his traditionlessness carries the inevitable corollary of a preoccupation with traditions. Thus Walcott described Borges as a "fastidious traditionalist",[38] and seemed to perceive an organic connection between this aspect of his art and his sense of the timeless. Borges himself makes a comment about the nature and value of his interest in traditions outside which he remains. The comment is relevant to our rationale: " . . . many of those illustrious Irishmen (Shaw, Berkeley, Swift) were the descendants of Englishmen, were people who had no Celtic blood; however, it was sufficient for them to feel Irish, to feel different, in order to be innovators in English culture. I believe that we Argentines, we South Americans in general, are in an analogous situation; we can handle all European themes, handle them without superstition, with an irreverence which can have, and already does have, fortunate consequences."[39]

In both the Caribbean and Latin America, then, history has made for these kinds of access through old traditions in new territory. This makes the region one common cultural entity at a fundamental level. The geographical reality of an unexplored new landscape has an integral relationship to this historico-cultural situation, as we saw in Harris and Walcott. In the work of Borges, there is none of the elemental, aboriginal content from which Harris and Walcott start. But it is an imaginative corollary implicit in his burden of ancientness. Ultimately, unique circumstances common to Latin America and the Caribbean make for the rediscovery of the archetypal anew. This is the original inheritance of the New World - a regenerative role engaging the renascence of the Imagination of Adamic man. It is an ancient covenant perpetually new, manifesting itself in the "green age" aspect of the New World. The term, as earlier

observed, occurs in Walcott as early as Green Night. It is an emblem which bears both the naturalistic and mythic physiognomy of the setting: the unexplored forest combines the greenness of mythic origins, with the seasonless greenness which represents their ancientness. Harris' own apprehension of the phenomenon inspired him to use this image as title of his early poem: Eternity to Season (Georgetown, 1954). Borges' philosophical emphasis develops this fundamental dimension of both Walcott and Harris, though crucial differences remain in their modes of taking up the burden. Harris perceives in the archetypal pattern a transcendent anima with which fellowship is possible. He opts for a resolution sharply divergent from Walcott and Borges. The latter two draw closer to each other. They submit to its heraldic burden with an awe and humility which engage the active tensions of a vigilant Imagination.

All these ideas are remarkably condensed in Walcott's poem, which becomes in effect, an evaluation of the relevance of Borges in a New World context. Setting out to draw the map of the South American continent between two extremities - the situation of Borges and that of the primitive buck - the poem is doing several complex, related things. It defines the pattern of the New World mythic configuration and draws out its universal proportions. At the same time, all the moral contours of the journey brought to culmination at "The Falls", are being reaffirmed and fixed in this universal design. The poem begins by placing Borges, who has for many years served as librarian in Argentina, in his biographical context. He is the lexicographer in his cell. As lexicographer, he is the custodian of letters, engaged in classifying and identifying their traditions. This gives straightaway a perspective on Borges' main preoccupations in his fictions. Borges is thus receiving the various cumulative records of civilizations, and as such he is at the utmost

extreme of what is representative of the cultured, civilized zone of the continent. Not too far from this is the naked aborigine in the pre-civilised Rupunini, at the farthest remove from civilization, "the edge of the world", which is the other extreme. Their worlds appear to be in striking contrast to each other.

Beneath these apparent contrasts fundamental parallels are in fact operating. Walcott presents and explores these with the skilful metaphorical interplay which is a special strength of his genius. He delineates the graphic links and continuities which ultimately interlock into the one unified pattern existing between them. This is done with consummate economy. The lexicographer's pen serves a function in his own occupation which directly corresponds to that of the buck's spear in his own setting. They are both in use, "heft" for activities which bear fundamental correspondences. The pen is being used for the artist-thinker's imaginative exploration of the records of living worlds, now dead, preserved in the books. It is an instrument heft in the act of perceiving a shape of reality through these cumulative imaginative efforts - the act in fact of "naming" his world. The buck's spear, heft to exploit the resources of his untamed world, aims at a purpose which reaches the same cosmic significance. In serving to exploit the resources of his untamed habitat, it is employed in the act of discovering the nature of the buck's dominion over this untamed world - which is the finding of his relationship to it; and therefore, a process of "naming", knowing, his world.

There is the same kind of crucial correspondence between the particular settings in which each activity takes place. The lexicographer's books represent worlds already named. They contain variants,through the ages and climes, of the act of naming already accomplished - the act of naming which the aborigine faces. Borges in turn is engaged in exploring

their worlds. Walcott presents the actual details of their respective scenes which bear these correspondences. The literal-graphic aspects and the symbolic significance of these features fuse organically. Borges' library consists of "shelves forested with titles"; while in the buck's wild jungle setting, the trees are yet unidentified and untamed. They are "trunks that wait for names-". Walcott's terms are echoing Carpentier closely. The latter, journeying through the interior in The Lost Steps (Harmondsworth, 1968) arrives at a realisation of its mythic value. It is expressed in this particular passage, which Walcott entered and underscored in his Notebooks.[40] ". . . they would return, with vacant eyes, all initiative gone, without heart to set themselves to the only task appropriate to the milieu that was slowly revealing to me the nature of its values: Adam's task of giving things their names."[41] The interplay of ideas between "shelves forested with titles", and "trunks that wait for names - ", is exploring the one continuous process of naming that links Borges and the buck.

> between them curls a map,
> between them curl the vigorous, rotting leaves,
>
> shelves forested with titles, trunks that wait for names-
>
> (11.4-6)

In the territory which stretches between jungle and civilized institutions of culture, the organic processes of Nature in which man thus participates are continuous throughout. The vigorous, organic processes of Nature are at work in the prolific jungle - "the vigorous . . . leaves". It is the vigorous living process in which the spear-thrusting buck participates. The process stretches continuous right through to the shelves of Borges, where the literal leaves (pages) of his books are leaves containing the processes of life, produced in the exercise of the Imagination. Borges' leaves hold living processes enacted in past, already-accomplished efforts

of "naming". These named worlds now timeworn and relegated to the shelves of Borges, they are leaves, trees of man in the process of decay. Walcott is not however merely associating living (vigorous) with unnamed, and dying (rotting) with worlds already named. He is stressing the incidence and simultaneity of living and dying processes in both the jungle and on Borges' shelves. This is important for the thoroughness of the organic continuities he is unfolding between them. His deft combination of "vigorous and rotting", which applies at once to jungle and library shelves, expresses this feature. In Borges' books the pages re-enact the living efforts of the Imagination, even while they are, now relegated to mere records, rotting. In the buck's setting the simultaneous process is reflected in the naturalistic phenomenon. The processes of Man and Nature, Man in Nature, are thus totally continuous from jungle to civilization. The continuity defines one unbroken, undivided configuration, thus forming one map of the continent between them. So far, however, only the external contours of the map have been discovered. It remains "curled" because the mythic image it enfolds remains to be descried.

At the same time that these external contours are being charted, a dramatic experience is being deployed. It is through this dramatic action that the inner design is reached, and the map of the continent uncurled. The "hefted" spear of the buck has now been thrown, emitting the "spear-flash" we now witness - at the end of the poem both the spear-head and the correspondent pen-tip of Borges have fallen to signify the single act of discovery accomplished. A dramatic interchange between the situation of Borges and that of the buck is being plied, and it bears full balance and logic. Borges stays put in the interiorised task of descrying acts of naming already accomplished; while the concrete action is being performed by the buck in his as yet unnamed territory. They are so positioned that

the pattern described by the buck's action is refracted and crystallised in what Borges perceives in his own literary sphere. Illumination is reached through a mutual process between the two, Borges functioning as a recipient and medium of the form. The action figured in the thrust spear describes this form in a flash of illumination:

> it pierces knowledge, the spear-flash!
> the fish thrashing green air
> on a pen's hook,
>
> (11.7-9)

The action is representative of man's effort to find his measure over earth (like the original Adam), and the form it attains describes his true posture within his earthly sphere. It gives the imprint of human destiny in the Cosmos. The pattern becomes lucid in the emblem that follows: "the fish thrashing green air/on a pen's hook". This features the struggle of a catch - man himself - on the spear's point, which figuratively merges with Borges' pen-tip to become the hook on which the struggle takes place. The struggle consists of "thrashing green air", while above, "the falls reciting its single flower" serves as a crowning detail. These together constitute a pictorial emblem expressing the total image of man's existential posture. There is a complex, profound network of relationships between these spare details. In following the instinctual effort to conquer and name his world - the thrust of Imagination - man is constantly thrust into a struggle with Essence, the unreachable, unknown quantity. His position in this struggle is like that of a bewildered fish out of its element, fighting with the "green" nothingness of air. (Fish evokes the mythic connotations of fishing man, man as fisher). He is out of his element fighting with the divinely ordered nothingness of Essence - which perplexes him into resistance - because of, as Harris puts it, his wish to lay hold on something tangible and finding "nothing after all". That

"thrashing of green air" produced in pursuit of an instinctual need, is an inevitable course of his destiny. It takes part in the process which produces the great flux, as apprehended in "Guyana IV". Its burden is borne in the very tools of his effort - the emblematic pen-spear which become both goading spur and staff, representing the forces of the Imagination as demon and enlightening Muse. The falls above recite the integral Order this form ultimately attains. Like the perfection of the delicate flower within the stronger current, he finds his own completion in the tenuity of his humanity, miraculously adjusted for its safe passage down the great flux.

Of utmost importance is the fact that this pattern is identical in the worlds of Borges and the buck. What we finally witness is how this single identity manifests itself in the vision of Borges. We see the process via which Borges comes into possession of the form. In dramatic terms, he is recapturing the primal reality of the buck, which bears its original imprint. The rationale behind this drama is that of a subtle two-way movement. It is the entry of the primal form into the civilised realm of Borges, as it returns through the cumulative efforts preserved in the books into his needle eyes. At the same time it is Borges' return through cumulative history and civilisation into aeons of Time to the ancient, primal setting. The climax is reached via these simultaneous routes: the one primal pattern persistent through times and civilisations, between new and old worlds is realised. It is the map of the continent uncurled:

> The lexicographer's lizard eyes are curled
> in sleep. The Amazonian Indian enters them.
>
> (11.11-12)

Borges becomes, in this highly mysterious image, an ancient presence who has acquired a kind of static repose - an ageless immobility as pre-historic as the aeons of time through which he returns. His "lizard eyes are curled/

in sleep". The consciousness of one changeless, uniform pattern of reality from ancient times endows him with this mysterious repose. It is a quality of repose incarnate in the prehistoric lizard, an archetype of the archaic and heraldic. (The poem "Lizard" in The Castaway shows Walcott's early fascination with the "heraldic lizard"). For Walcott, Borges is an embodiment of this lizard property, and becomes a veritable incarnation of the archaic and heraldic epiphanies in his own works. It is interesting to note in this respect, Walcott's reaction to the actual presence of the man. His personality and demeanour hold the same archaic mystique for Walcott. Years after the poem was written, this very impression was reproduced when he met Borges at a Conference of Latin American Writers.[42] This emerges in an essay Walcott wrote about an incident which took place at the Conference:

> Borges sat facing us, lizard-lidded, face with the sags of a monk's cowl, really there . . . but looking more vulnerable than his photographs and only a little less immobile. . . . The face, if it turned slightly would stun, you too would be stone. It cannot see itself, so we who look at him, the other Borges of his own description, have a double duty as mirrors. I said he looked vulnerable, he couldn't scuttle if he had to, like a lizard, but any pain, or startling noise or vulgar thought, would have to be endured by mantling the lids, by going more stone, by adding deafness, by simulating the death-mask, until whatever disturbed the quietness passed. . . .[43]

Borges then, by virtue of his role in the drama, has been imbued with this archaic, primal repose. This is the state in which his vision arrives at an at-onement with the primal reality of the buck. In dramatic terms, the Amazonian Indian enters his "lizard eyes", which is symbolic of Borges' penetration into the primal, uniform "one age of the world". The concluding epithets reiterate the creative dynamic affirming the Order of this "one age of the world". Its energies thunder through the great flux; it is enriched, "thickens", through the cumulative efforts of generations, the surface changes of which cause this world to shimmer, like the multiple effects of a single clear crystal:

Between the Rupunini and Borges,
between the fallen pen-tip and the spear-head
thunders, thickens and shimmers the one age of the world.

(11.13-15)

Having thus apprehended this Order of reality in the widest universal context, Walcott proceeds to orient himself to it on his reemergence into society in'Guyana VI". This poem is his act of integration into the pattern of human destiny affirmed in that Order, and a finding of points of an imaginative anchor in human reality. Each artist finally settles for his own means of closing with the reality he discovers, and Walcott's own integration bears its individual stamp. Thus he is continuing from the affinities shared with the New World writers, diverging sharply from Harris, to find his own modes of integration. Authentic to the pattern discovered in the journey, it consists in an imaginative submission to the burden of earth. In this, he is identifying the most intimate levels of experience in which humanity fulfils itself, and making the necessary moral resolutions towards them. Walcott fulfils his own special needs in this kind of acceptance: he finds an original reconciliation of the estranging struggle against earth. It is the resolution of the most essential visionary struggle throughout his career, his personal closing with reality, and his finding of earth.

He is therefore "circling back" in "Guyana VI", and the poem, in a sense, reproduces the full circuit of the journey into the interior, and indeed the journey of his entire career. The human scene into which he reemerges in the white Georgetown presents sad, disquieting aspects. It is fraught with the frustrations of unfulfilled purposes, disappointments, anxieties and misgivings both public and private. The tensions and contradictions of 'The White Town'[s]" emergent society continue to disturb the scene - the schizophrenia of its artists, the misdemeanours of the

bourgeois. The scene confronts him with the old fundamental questions - about the destiny of a new nation and its people. These very questions formed part of the complex of causes necessitating the journey into the interior; and remain the occasion of an unending quest of which each poem, the present poem, is an expression:

> Begun, with a brown heron,
> like the one I named for an actor,
> its emblem answering a question with a question:
> 'What bird is that,
> whose is that woman,
> what will become of their country?'
>
> (11.7-12)

These questions represent needs to be fulfilled in the only and truest fruition open to humanity. Walcott is entering an alertness to the profound, subterranean processes in which this consists, and accordingly, the imaginative and moral resources it requires. The principles which activate it are pervasive in the multiple everyday traffic, the domestic round going on amid these larger questions. The most essential dynamic of human destiny is at work in these familiar activities of daily traffic - the sounds of the white town which reached him at the waterfall. They are at work to produce the great flux in which humanity finds its fruition. Walcott responds to intimations of this process of flux, revealing an organic balance in the rising and falling rhythms of the details of the scene:

> The girl waits in the wings, heron still;
> she will rise to the roar of the playhouse
> its applauding cataract,
>
> and the train rusts, travelling to a few sad sparks,
>
> (11.48-51)

The one is symbolic of the soaring thrust of desire in its plenitude; the other of the inevitable "fall" and surrender of its weakening powers. If that is all humanity's truth consists in - the totality of the rising and

falling rhythms of desire that sustain, in all their variety, the flux; if that is where the question of humanity is answered - then all the truth we must serve to arrive at fruition is contained within these rhythms, rhythms which minister at the most familiar levels. There is no further truth beyond this.

The recognition calls for acceptance of man's fluctuating lot - his hopes, achievements, vicissitudes, fears, disappointments. But this acceptance is far removed from a tired surrender. Walcott is affirming the need for an alertness to the profound spiritual charges which mobilise our every action at the most intimate, unconscious level, and in consequence, the serious moral implications which they bear. Man matures only in the active consciousness of these spiritual rhythms, alert to signals of the maleficent, signals of the beneficent - terror and grace - within himself. Of equal importance is the fact that they are at their most tenacious in the familiar processes of his concrete, living experience. Walcott thus discovers the ministry of these processes in the epiphanies of familiar, domestic experience. Worked into the pattern and very texture of these everyday activities, their sounds and gestures, are tenacious spiritual charges whose tracings lie unnoticed because etched into such familiar, habitual features. The very objects and gestures through which they are "substantiated" are translucent of what is humanity's true essence: the realities of love, hope, disillusionment and the tensions of their fluctuating intercourse in time:

> for I know how profound is the folding of a napkin
> by a woman whose hair will go white,
> age, that says more than an ocean,
> I know how final is the straightening of a sheet
> between lovers who have never lain, the heart-breaking curve
> of a woman, her back bent, concerned
> with the finical precisions of farewell.
>
> (11.87-93)

It is within this consciousness that Walcott seeks anchor, and it represents the final basis of his integration into humanity. It calls for a creative attention to experience at the most private level - an attention which must engage a religious fear and awe of "terror enough in the habitual,/ miracle enough in the familiar" ("Ebb"). Man finds fruition in the vital response to these signals of terror and miracle: he comes to know, and to find fruition in a harmony with the knowing of his destiny. No heightened overtures towards otherness can bring him to this realisation as these signals can. Thus:

> All these predictions do not disappoint but bring us nearer.
> They uphold history like a glass of water.
>
> . . . .
>
> age, that says more than an ocean,
>
> (11.83-84, 89)

Walcott is, moreover, arriving at a form of art in tune with the truth of the fluctuating rhythms of terror and miracle in habitual experience:

> If the poem begins to shrivel
> I no longer distend my heart,
>
> (11.85-86)

This is the moral position whose dynamic continues to inform his art. The demands these resolutions make on the Imagination are those of an active tension - "the strenuous ease" of a "landfall going". There is nothing of the defiance of promethean stoicism in this acceptance: its true attitude is much closer to humility. Perhaps the tensions of a "strenuous ease" threaten to erupt every now and again, but they are creatively suspended by this imaginative vigilance.

The vision is rounded-off at the end of the poem, as Walcott draws all these implications together to pronounce the finding of "earth". This is deployed in a powerfully conceived metaphor - that of the heron

circling back to earth, which is the poem's question answered:

> The age will know its own name when it comes,
>
> . . . .
>
> with the same care, the precise exhilaration
> with which the heron's foot pronounces 'earth'.
>
> What if, impulsive, delicate bird,
> one instinct made you rise
> out of this life, into another's,
> then from another's circling to your own?
>
> (11.99, 102-7)

The arc which the bird defines is Walcott's own, the arc of his own career - he rose in search of "another life", and is now circling back to earth out of the same, single instinctual impulse. The fulfilment realised in this course is defined in this highly condensed emblem:

> You are folded in my eyes,
> Whose irises will open
> to a white sky with bird and woman gone.
>
> (11.108-10)

The image is of Walcott's eyes as flower. The flower grows out of the infolded bird, so that bird is being transmuted into flower. The folded bird being transmuted into flower, efflorescence, finds fruition in the process of opening - it opens into irises. The opening of irises (flower) is the opening of the irises of Walcott's own eyes, signifying the fulfilment of a vision in awakening to the truth. This subtle network of relationships defines the process of fulfilment gained in the arc. The only true fulfilment lies in a conscious containment of this experience of circling, beyond which is the clear nothing ("white sky with bird and woman gone") that <u>is</u>. The containment is signified in the "fold[ing]" of the bird's course. Man flowers out of that folded experience, as is signified in the image of bird transmuted into flower. He finds completion in opening to the integrity of the nothingness beyond experience. It means the acceptance of the total-

ity of his earthly destiny, in which the vacancy of white sky becomes an integral truth, the truth of finitude, - not the barrier to something withheld ("The White Town"). It is in fulfilment of this vision that Walcott moves to recover, in Another Life, the experience folded in the circle of his development as an artist. In that work he traces the one instinct from the roots of his artistic awakening in St. Lucia, into the higher aspiration, and back to the finding of home. Another Life is a natural culmination of The Gulf. These lines from a draft version of Another Life[44] express his moral goals in the poem. They repeat the concluding burden of "Guyana VI".

> Grant me, O Lord, the economy of Borges, of Babel,
> in work that is the realisation of my life,
> My life a crystal of ambiguities,
> in which what is called nothingness refracts
> the prisms and varieties of days
> so I can pass from nothingness to nothingness
> telling these tales.

Footnotes

1. "Walcott on Walcott", interviewed by Dennis Scott, Caribbean Quarterly Vol.14 Nos. 1&2 (March-June 1968), p.79.

2. Ibid., p.82.

3. Walcott, "West Indian Art Today", Sunday Guardian Magazine, May 8, 1966, p.8.

4. Wilson Harris' Guyana Quartet consist of the following:

   (i) Palace of the Peacock (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).

   (ii) The Far Journey of Oudin (London: Faber & Faber, 1961).

   (iii) The Secret Ladder (London: Faber & Faber, 1963).

   (iv) Heartland (London: Faber & Faber, 1964).

5. Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.16 No.2 (June 1970).

6. Version entitled "Postcard", London Magazine Vol.4 No.7 (October 1964), p.5.

7. Boris Ford ed., A Guide to English Literature: From Dickens to Hardy, (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1963), p.104.

8. Shiva Naipaul, "The Writer Without a Society", in Common Wealth (Denmark, University of Aarhus, 1971), p.117. (Papers delivered at the Conference of Commonwealth Literature, Aarhus University, April 26-30, 1971).

9. In Trinidadian vernacular the term means "wild, boisterous merriment", and is usually applied to carnival.

10. Walcott, "Fellowship", Sunday Guardian Magazine, January 15, 1969,p.9.

11. In St. Lucian patois (French-based dialect) the word means "courtesy", "good manners".

12. Walcott, "Moeurs" (An Address to graduating teachers at the Teachers' Training College, Saint Lucia, July 11, 1971). On file at the Ministry of Education, St. Lucia.

13. Walcott, "Fellowship", p.9.

14. Gordon Rohlehr, "Withering into Truth", Trinidad Guardian, December 13, 1969, p.8.

15. Walcott, "Twilight", p.27.

16. Gordon Rohlehr, "Withering into Truth", p.8.

17. See Errol Hill's account of the historical sources of carnival in The Trinidad Carnival (Texas: University of Texas, 1972).

18. Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1967), p.205.

19. Walcott, "Twilight", p.35.

20. Ibid., pp.10, 11.

21. Harris, "History, Fable and Myth . . .", p.8.

22. Ibid., p.32.

23. Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and its Background (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p.169.

24. Walcott, "Twilight", p.9.

25. Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou No.2 (September 1970), p.51.

26. Denis Williams, Other Leopards (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p.209.

27. Harris, "History, Fable and Myth . . .", p.29.

28. In an interview with the writer, July 8, 1974.

29. Recounted to the writer in the same interview, July 8, 1974.

30. Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", Labyrinths (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.42.

31. Ibid., p.27.

32. In interview, July 8, 1974.

33. Walcott, "An Incident, an Epiphany" (essay written on a Borges incident which took place at a Conference of Latin American Writers, 1972). To be published by Harper's New Monthly Magazine, New York.

34. Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", Labyrinths, p.42.

35. Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote", Labyrinths, p.69.

36. Ibid., p.66.

37. Borges, "The Zahir", Labyrinths, pp.195-6.

38. In interview, April 8, 1974.

39. Borges, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition", Labyrinths, p.218.

40. Walcott, Notebooks, March 28, 1966 - July 10, 1966.

41. Alejo Carpentier, The Lost Steps (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p.66.

42. See n.33.

43. Walcott, "An Incident, an Epiphany".

44. Permission to use this quotation was given to the writer by Walcott, July 8, 1974.

PART II

D R A M A

CHAPTER 4

A Concurrent Development Complementary to the Poetry

Introductory:

The first international publication of his plays, Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (New York, 1970) drew attention to Walcott's drama. The launching of his Theatre Workshop a few years earlier also contributed to this. But Walcott's activities in the field of drama date as early as the juvenilia, and have engaged his efforts as intensely as the poetry right through his career. We will trace the course of his development in this chapter.

This development is important in itself, but the pattern is best seen in relation to the poetry, with which it forms a unit. Running current with the development of the poetry, it evolves very closely along the same directions. There are generic differences between the two forms. They become the basis of a complementary interaction between the two in Walcott's total achievement as poet and dramatist. We will outline these relationships in the second part of this chapter, after looking at the historical progress of his dramatic career in part one.

i) The Development of Walcott's Career as a Dramatist

Before we proceed to a historical account, it is useful to note the size of the dramatic output, which has been somewhat overlooked up to this. As far as this writer has been able to establish, Walcott has produced seventeen pieces of dramatic writing between 1950 and 1972. Errol Hill makes reference to twenty-two plays[1]. Most of these probably include early exercises prior to 1950 - the date of his first important play, Christophe, and very little trace of them remains. Among the number recorded by this writer, the four major ones appear in Dream, and relatively

few of the others are well-known. A number of these were published locally by the Extra-Mural Department of the University of the West Indies, and some of them are now out of print. A few are yet unpublished, and four of our seventeen not extant. In the table which follows (see p.192 for table) the plays are listed and these details indicated. The table aims especially at establishing a chronology of the plays. The emphasis falls on the periods during which they were written, since exact dates cannot be ascertained for most of the plays. These periods correspond generally to important stages in his career, and become relevant when we examine the plays themselves in the succeeding chapters.

Both the basic pattern of Walcott's progress as a dramatist and that of his growing involvement in theatre roughly follows the historical sequence outlined in the table. The period from 1950 to 1957, prior to his Rockefeller award, falls into one phase, and during this phase Walcott is primarily engaged in amateur theatre. This is followed by the period of his training in professional theatre in America, from which he returns to found his own professional company, the Theatre Workshop. We now turn to examine the progress of this career.

The Amateur Phase: The St. Lucia Arts Guild

Walcott began his dramatic career about the same time as _25 Poems_ and _Epitaph_ were being written. In 1950 he wrote his first published play, _Henri Christophe_ (Barbados, 1950) at the suggestion of his twin brother, Roderick Walcott. In "Meanings" he dates his dramatic career from this event: "I really became involved in theatre when my brother suggested I write a play about the Haitian revolution. He had read a book about it and gotten excited. So I said, all right, I'll try one, and I wrote a play, _Henri Christophe_."[5] This event soon inspired the formation of the St. Lucia

CHRONOLOGY OF PLAYS

Period	Plays	Published, unpublished, not extant
1950: St. Lucian phase	Henri Christophe	Published (Barbados: Advocate Co., 1950)
	Harry Dernier	Published (Barbados: Advocate Co., 1951)
	Paolo and Francesca[2]	Unpublished. Not extant.
	Three Assassins[2]	-do-
1950-54: Undergraduate phase	The Sea at Dauphin	Published (Trinidad: U.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., 1966)
	Wine of the Country	Published (Jamaica, n.d.)
	Soso's Wake[3]	Unpublished. Not extant.
	Crossroads	-do-
1957: Postgraduate phase	Ione	Published (Jamaica: U.C.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., 1957)
	Ti-Jean and His Brothers	Published (Jamaica: U.C.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., n.d.)
	Drums and Colours	Published (Trinidad: Caribbean Quarterly, 1961)
1958: Period of Rockefeller award in America	Journard	Published (n.p., n. pub., n.d.)
	Malcochon	Published (Trinidad: U.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., 1966)
From 1959: Theatre Workshop period	The Charlatan	Published (Trinidad: U.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., [196-?]
	Dream on Monkey Mountain	Published (New York: Farrar, Straus; 1970)
	Franklin	Unpublished (MS completed 1968[4])
	In a Fine Castle	Unpublished (MS completed 1970)

Arts Guild, which was to play a key role in fostering and sustaining his interest in drama. The nature of this role can be best appreciated in an account of the Guild's achievement, which merits attention in its own right.

The idea of forming a Guild was originally suggested to Walcott by Maurice Mason, a fellow St. Lucian (later a prominent lawyer and politician in the island). Walcott and Mason became co-founders of the organisation, which was inaugurated on 30th April, 1950. Its aims were to promote all forms of creative art in the island - painting, music, drama, creative writing, and its fifteen members had one or other of these cultural interests. Walcott himself served as the first President of the organization.

From its inception up to the late sixties - when it became absorbed into other cultural bodies in the island - the Guild pursued these cultural objectives. The main emphasis was, however, on drama. It made its debut with the production of Walcott's Henri Christophe, along with an exhibition of paintings by Walcott and Dunstan St. Omer. This took place a few months after its inception. The play was directed and designed by Walcott, and staged at the Methodist Infant School, where his mother taught and produced the popular school "concerts" for which she was well-known in the community.

By September of that year Walcott left St. Lucia for U.C.W.I., and his brother took over as President of the Guild. Through his single-minded commitment and competent direction the Guild was kept going for almost two decades. The cultural life of the community revolved around it. The range and quality of its activities were remarkable, especially in view of the limitations of its provincial circumstances. It was one of the few organisations of this kind supporting the arts in the islands.

At the end of the first decade Roderick Walcott reviewed the

creative achievement of the Guild in an article entitled "A Decade of St. Lucian Creative Writing"[6]. It was an impressive achievement, centred mainly on its work in the field of drama, its most active field. No less than twenty-two plays had been performed, eighteen of them West Indian. It is immediately clear in the article that this dramatic activity was dominated by the work of the Walcott brothers. The production of Walcott's plays was the main feature on the Guild's programme for the greater part of the period. They were soon joined by those of Roderick Walcott who started writing his own plays about the middle of the decade. During the whole period there was a vital partnership between Walcott as playwright in absentia and Roderick as director, and it continued to operate strongly even after Roderick became involved in his own writing. Many St. Lucians are of the opinion that Roderick's role in the partnership involved some sacrifice of his own talent as a writer. But the partnership was of mutual benefit to each, in the event. The two brothers shared the same ideas about a regional theatre and folk-drama. They both believed that the true spirit of the people was preserved in their creole legends and folklores, and that this was the material upon which they should draw for their subject-matter. At the same time they thought there was a lot to be learnt from the classics and masterpieces of world drama. This was the basis of a joint effort in which Walcott found great support, long before the concept of a West Indian drama began to emerge. Roderick Walcott thus served with enthusiasm and resourcefulness, and Walcott found in the Guild a valuable testing ground for most of his plays. All of his best things, before the Theatre Workshop was actually started, were virtually written for the Guild. This served, in turn, as the most original stimulus to the Guild's own development. The Guild found its vigour and sustenance in the supply of native material. It was Walcott's contribution that inspired Roderick himself, and a few other members of the Guild, to turn to original creative work.

These basic aspects of Walcott's involvement with the Guild emerge in Roderick's year-to-year account of their activities earlier cited. The first West Indian play produced by the Guild after Christophe was The Sea at Dauphin (Trinidad, 1966), which proved a milestone in Caribbean drama. This important play - subsequently performed throughout the Caribbean and on international stages such as The Royal Court (1960) - was first performed to an audience of fifty in St. Lucia (1954). The next important play before Drums and Colours (Jamaica, 1961) was Ti-Jean and His Brothers. The play, written in 1957, was immediately sent to the Guild, which performed it for the first time in a ballet version. Two plays written while Walcott was on the Rockefeller award in America were sent to Roderick for the Guild's first tour of the Caribbean. The plays were Jourmard (Jamaica, 196-?) and Malcochon (Trinidad, 1966). The tour, which took place in Trinidad in 1959, stood out for its remarkable programme of six one-act plays: Walcott's two and four of Roderick's own plays.

From 1956 Roderick had started writing his own plays and they formed a substantial part of the Guild's productions. He wrote about eight plays during this period, among which were the well-known ones performed in the Trinidad tour: A Flight of Sparrows (1966), The One-Eye is King (1966), Shrove Tuesday March (1966) and The Trouble with Albino Joe (1966). A few plays show the influence of Walcott, for example, Malfinis (1967) and The Harrowing of Bengy (1966). They were all published in Trinidad by the Extra-Mural Department of the University of the West Indies. Together the Walcott brothers made a substantial contribution to West Indian drama and this was largely a result of their partnership in the Guild. Roderick makes an accurate assessment of the size and significance of this contribution in the review: "No other unit in these Antilles can boast of such wealth of dramatic writing for the past decade, and with certainly more

work to come, St. Lucia is slowly building a literature not only for its own enlightenment, but also for the edification of the entire West Indies."[7]

Several important aspects of Walcott's interests in drama were served through the partnership, again reflecting the shared ideas between the two brothers. Although the Guild concentrated on West Indian drama, it showed a keen interest in classical, Elizabethan and modern theatre. Their foreign productions ranged from Sophocles, to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, to such modern masters as Brecht, Lorca, Pirandello, Anouilh, O'Neill - which is representative of the assimilativeness we find in Walcott's drama no less than in the poetry. The earliest plays are heavily influenced by Elizabethan and classical drama, the effects of which remain most pervasive. This is paralleled by the preponderance of Elizabethan and classical plays in the Guild's earliest phase. One of its main aesthetic objectives was the revival of verse drama in the theatre, and this is closely related to these early preferences and their influence on Walcott's own dramatic style.

For the nine years prior to his professional development, Walcott's involvement with amateur theatre centred mainly on this working relationship with the Guild. Apart from serving his dramatic efforts in the ways we have seen, it was also of value as a period of apprenticeship on the technical level. It afforded Walcott the opportunity of developing basic theatrical and technical approaches in the writing of his plays. The very limitations of such a small amateur body as the Guild made for one important advantage: it was bound to develop a high degree of resourcefulness in the business of theatre. It had to be versatile in exploiting all the skills and talents which combine in the theatre: writing, directing, designing, acting, painting, lighting. Roderick Walcott himself, as writer and director, acquired a great deal of proficiency in many of these skills. (He is now completing a course in Professional Theatre at the University of York in Canada).

Walcott had only a brief spell of such practical experience with the Guild - the first few months after its inception, when he designed and directed Christophe. But from then on most of the plays are written with a strong eye on actual production, and conceived in terms of the practical reality of the Guild to a great extent. This strong technical sense is a basic prerequisite for every dramatist, but it operates remarkably even in the earliest plays, despite all their dramatic weaknesses. The approach of the director is highly operative in the best plays of the period. In Dauphin, Ti-Jean, and Malcochon he pays close attention to design, casting, and several practical details of production. He draws upon his own resources as a painter to design his graphically envisaged scenes; his knowledge of the Guild's actors helps to mould the features of many of his characters; he pays meticulous attention to details of costuming, and a number of effects which belong essentially to the realm of the director. In the plays just mentioned Walcott is writing especially for the stage, as a director to a director with whom he has a strong working relationship. He sends the scripts of Ti-Jean and Malcochon to Roderick Walcott complete with paintings of the settings and costuming, as well as notes on casting. The sketches of the bamboo forest in Malcochon, done in the Hokusai style referred to in "Meanings" (page 48), are sent with the play. The production designs of both Ti-Jean and Malcochon were donated to the St. Lucia Historical and Archaeological Society by Roderick, and are now lodged in the cultural archives of the society. In the costume designs for Malcochon, again, Walcott takes care to note that the coat worn by Chantal - who is one of the "six in the rain" - should not be a rain-cloak.

All these features are expressive of the vital connection between Walcott's drama and the live concern with theatre. It continued to develop during his period in Jamaica and later in America, and came to a climax in

his achievement as director of the Theatre Workshop. But its most original impetus came from his early involvement with the Guild.

The Professional Phase:

The Year in America

Walcott's professional period really begins, as earlier observed, with the Rockefeller award to study theatre in America. During his undergraduate days in Jamaica, from where he maintained vital links with the Guild, he had emerged as the most important dramatic talent in the region as a result of his activities in the field. He had written a number of the early and transitional plays there, and produced them for the university's dramatic society which he himself helped to found. Among these were Sea at Dauphin, written during his first years at university, and plays like Wine of the Country, Crossroads, Soso's Wake; and, on his return to work in Jamaica in 1957, Ione (Jamaica,1957). As a result of this very active role he was commissioned to write Drums and Colours (Jamaica,1961), an epic "depicting the four hundred years of West Indian history", for the inauguration of the first Federal Parliament in 1958. He won the award on the strength of his remarkable achievement in this play.

In New York, Walcott went to The Circle in the Square to attend José Quintero's classes, and also frequented the Phoenix Theatre. Primarily, the award availed him of the opportunity of observing Off-Broadway Theatre, writing, and meeting people in the theatre. As it happened, Walcott left the American scene before one year had expired, finding very little opportunity there for developing his own interests. He explains this situation in "Meanings": "I was very tired and was feeling very depressed about New York theatre and about any chance I might have of ever doing anything there. Plus, of course, at that time in '58, plays about the West Indies

or black actors - well, there wasn't much of a chance of getting anything going."[8] But what Walcott had absorbed during this short period, both in terms of method and international theatre, was of great value in helping him to shape and realise the concept of the Theatre Workshop. The acting methods he had learnt were indispensable for the training of the Workshop. He was later able to adapt many of the features of modern experimental theatre for his own needs. The single most important discovery was that of the Japanese classical theatre and general artistic style. It was responsible for helping Walcott arrive at his own concept of a native West Indian style of theatre.

In "Meanings", Walcott describes extensively the importance of this discovery in helping him to evolve his own professional style. Its influence underlies many of the techniques developed in the Workshop, as well as important elements in his dramatic style. It is necessary to examine the nature of this influence in some detail. Classical Japanese plays, both Noh and Kabuki, are highly stylised, mimetic performances in which rhythmic movement and static gesture are the main modes of communication. The famous Japanese mie, a superbly sustained dance step used to mark emotive and thematic climaxes, characterises the style. It is essentially that of dance-drama, especially in the case of Noh. It is thus based on a total exploration of Japanese resources of physical expressiveness. This suggested to Walcott the possibility of exploiting similar resources in the West Indian to create a native theatrical style. There was great potential for this in the West Indian. The dance element in his temperament was a traditional trait expressive of this kind of potential.

Walcott was not, of course, conceiving of anything so artificial as a West Indian or, as he puts it elsewhere, Black version of Noh or Kabuki. The character and pace of Japanese rhythms are essentially diff-

erent from those of the West Indian. Restraint is the underlying principle of Japanese movement. The Noh dance, for example, is "a series of stately posturings, in which the principle of restraint is employed for the exquisite performance of every gesture, and static attitudes are far more expressive than movement".[9] Walcott was very appreciative of the dramatic value of static arrest, and it was one of the features he tried to accommodate. But the basic principle of restraint is quite different from the vigorous, energetic style which characterises the West Indian dance. These were the rhythms from which a native style could evolve, and he identified them in a number of traditional West Indian dances, for example the bongo, kalinda, and shango. These dances survive from what were originally martial or dances of challenge in African tradition.[10] In the bongo especially he saw the elements from which the style might evolve: "The bongo is a wake dance, a spiritual celebration at death of the triumph over death. . . . It is a very foot-asserting, earth-asserting, life-asserting dance in contradiction of the grief that has happened through the death. In that dance, when the legs are crossed, and the dancer is arrested for a second, there is all the male strength that I think has been absent for a long time in Western theatre. The emphasis is on virility."[11]

The discovery of Japanese dance-drama then, was of great value in directing Walcott's attention back to the artistic potential in these native dances. Their elements could be adapted for a native style of mimetic art with the same primitive power which attracted Artaud to Oriental theatre. Walcott, before he actually put it to the test, aspired to a purely mimetic style of drama based on these principles, eschewing the reliance on the verbal, as in Noh and Kabuki. He explains this as one of his aims in writing Malcochon which was done during that year, and modelled on Noh drama: "What I wanted to do was reduce the play almost to an in-

articulateness of language. . . . ."[12] In the event, he discovered that this kind of 'purity' was not viable in his work. His own immersion in literary tradition, in itself a reflection of the verbal exuberance native in the West Indian, must also come into play. He realised that he should work instead towards a creative fusion between the mimetic power of gesture and movement, and the verbal exuberance true to the West Indian temperament. It is essentially what he achieves in Dream, and he describes the significance of the fusion in this way: "In Dream on Monkey Mountain, I tried to fuse them, but I am still after a kind of play that is essential and spare the same way woodcuts are clean, that dances are clean, and that Japanese cinema is so compressed that gesture does the same thing as speech. That is where our kind of conflict is rich. I think the pressure of those two conflicts is going to create a verbally rich literature, as well as a mimetic style. This happens in Wole Soyinka. It happens as well in the kind of plays that we are writing at home."[13]

Walcott discovered in Japanese theatre, another significant parallel, vitally related to the central role of dance we have been considering. The Japanese language of movement and gesture is the fundamental part of a stylised presentation whose basic pattern is ritualistic - which is the true essence of mimetic art. All its dramatic methods and technical elements are symbolic rather than representative - choric narration, masks, thematic music. The orchestration of these various features makes for a highly ritualised art. The mythic awareness behind such ritualised expression was that of a people still close to the 'primitive'. Walcott perceived in this the highly developed folk-sense of an island people, and it intensified his own belief in the power of the folk lore native to the islands. His drama had already begun to move in this direction. In Ti-Jean, written in 1957, he had explored creole folk-lore and superstition. Masks,

chants and various symbolic devices are major elements in the play. The correspondences between the mythic sense of the Japanese and that potential in the folk elements of his own region were authentic. It meant that the basic pattern of their drama, brought to a pitch of such technical excellence, could be effectively adapted for his own dramatic themes. This is the aesthetic motivation behind his imitation of Noh drama in Malcochon. In "Meanings" Walcott discusses how the imitation led him to discover further original relationships between the mythical atmosphere of the two regions: "This was a deliberate imitation, but it was one of those informing imitations that gave me a direction because I could see in the linear shapes, in the geography, in the sort of myth and superstition of the Japanese, correspondences to our own forests and mythology. I also wanted to use the same type of figure found in this material, a type essential to our own mythology. A woodcutter or a charcoal burner."[14] In an article entitled "The Kabuki", following on a carnival presentation in Trinidad, Walcott describes the mythical parallels more fully: "What it parallels in our folk-lore and dance is its primitive mythology, its devils, thief-heroes, old men and witch-figures, and most strikingly of all its masks. . . . Older figures like papa bois, douane, soucouyant, etc. are as recognisable and exist in the ancient classical theatre of the Noh. The old man, the wood-demon, and Papa Bois are staples in our folk-lore and they are beginning to appear on our stage."[15]

The discovery of all these relevant aspects of Japanese theatre had a substantial influence on Walcott's dramaturgy. They helped to reinforce his orientation towards the stylised treatment of folk-themes, and gave him some idea of the ways in which he could exploit their native resources. These elements find their fullest expression in Dream. As in the case of dance, they also influenced the techniques and theatrical modes developed in the Theatre Workshop.

The Theatre Workshop

It was out of the total experience of that year in America, then, that the concept of a professional theatre company began to take shape. Walcott returned to Trinidad in 1959, and soon affiliated himself with Beryl McBurnie's Little Carib Theatre. The latter was one of the innovators of a local dance drama based on creole and folk forms native to the region. This was with a view to working on his plan for a company "who would be both dancers and actors . . . a dance company mixed with an acting company."[16] Walcott separated from Beryl McBurnie's dance-troupe after some time, and with a group - comprised of a few experienced in amateur theatre as well as total new-comers - proceeded to form the Theatre Workshop, and pursue his own training programme independently. For the seven years between this and their first appearance in 1966, the Workshop underwent a patient and rigorous training. During that period Walcott received his second Rockefeller award (1962-1965) which enabled him to pursue his work in developing the Workshop. In that seven-year period the Workshop concentrated on acquiring the discipline of acting methods, particularly necessary for an untutored group of this sort. One of Walcott's basic training techniques was to allow the actors to explore their own native resources, mainly through improvisation. These techniques were especially effective in enabling them to exploit their potential for physical expressiveness, fundamental to Walcott's concept of a native style. The training also involved large-scale experimentation with local material as well as classical and modern plays. Walcott's policy was geared towards this objective: "So I was after . . . and am still after . . . a theatre where someone can do Shakespeare or sing calypso with equal conviction."[17]

The Theatre Workshop was launched at The Basement Theatre in 1966 with the performance of Edward Albee's The Zoo Story (1962) and Walcott's Dauphin. The Basement Theatre, which served as their quarters for some three years, was a small converted bar with an audience capacity of about seventy. The Workshop has emerged from this modest beginning as a repertory company of international standard. Essentially a touring company, the equipment and design of its repertory plays have an economy in keeping with this role. So far its tours have been mainly within the Caribbean region, and this is consistent with Walcott's main goals: to provide the region with its own professional company. It has also performed in Canada and America, and Walcott maintains important contact with the Off-Broadway scene there.

The company consists of twenty-nine members - twenty-four actors, three dancers and two drummers (figures for 1973). It operates on regular financial policy. Each member makes a monthly subscription of $2 TT, and the performers in any production are paid on a pro-rata basis after expenses have been settled. Walcott is especially vocal about the need for State support of such cultural ventures in the region - without much success.

The Workshop's performances consist mainly of West Indian plays, concentrating of course on Walcott's own stuff, and a number of modern, avant-garde plays. It set out to build a repertory consisting of both types from the start, stating this as its artistic policy. Walcott follows his basic goals in this policy: to build a regional theatre which must serve primarily as a means of cultural expression, and which must also bring all that is best in international theatre to the region. The following is a list of its repertory plays from 1966 to 1972.

WEST INDIAN	FOREIGN
Belle Fanto (Eric Roach, 1967)	The Blacks (Genet, 1960)
Moon on a Rainbow Shawl (Errol John, 1958)	The Road (Wole Soyinka, 1965)
Dream on Monkey Mountain (Walcott, 1970)	
Ti-Jean (Walcott, 1970)	
The Charlatan (Walcott, [196-?])	
Malcochon (Walcott, 1966)	
In A Fine Castle (Walcott, unpublished)	
Franklin (Walcott, unpublished)	

The Workshop has also performed a number of other modern playwrights, such as Ionesco, Pinter, and John Pepper Clark. But the important foreign plays in its repertory, The Blacks and The Road, are plays of immediate "relevance" to the West Indian experience. Both of these have been great artistic successes, rivalling some of Walcott's own plays in popularity. Lawrence Goldstraw, who keeps the company's records, comments on this feature: "In a Fine Castle although a Caribbean play, got a sort of luke-warm reception, but Wole Soyinka's The Road was very popular."[18]

There is a significant pattern behind the selection of plays in Walcott's repertory, both West Indian and foreign. Apart from Walcott's own things, which constitute the majority, West Indian plays are limited to Belle Fanto and Moon on a Rainbow Shawl. Most Caribbean drama is realistic social drama, dealing with the moral conditions of life in the backyard, slum,or domestic settings peculiar to the environment. Walcott's dramatic focus is essentially non-naturalistic - the quality of concern informing his social themes is of spiritual immediacy, and his design always metaphorical. The two West Indian plays in question are among the few

which approach the dimensions on which he operates. In Eric Roach's Belle Fanto the desperation of peasant conflict results in a tragic irony of poetic intensity, and the heroine's situation has a lot in common with that of Walcott's Ione. This level of awareness, which reverberates in Errol John's thematic motif - moon on a rainbow shawl - is comprehended within the pattern of frustrated hopes and aspirations in that play. In an article on the Theatre Workshop Walcott indicates why few of the other Caribbean plays have been handled by the company: " . . . what still remains to be created is a steady source of West Indian plays equal in power to the foreign plays we have performed."[19] The power of most of the foreign plays produced inheres in their thematic and metaphorical design, as is the case in Walcott's own plays. There is this kind of design in the absurd fantasy of The Blacks, for example, and in the ceremonial action of The Road. The plays, each in its different way, are formally ritualised in presentation. As observed in our discussion of the Japanese influence, many of the techniques and theatrical elements of the Workshop have developed along these directions.

In "Twilight" Walcott appraises the significance of the Workshop as a cultural entity. Its members are united with him in his most original endeavour as Caribbean artist - he describes them as "extensions of [his] sensibility".[20] They represent much more than a group filling a cultural void in the region. He sees in their private efforts, prophetic fulfilments of racial destiny. Although this is rhetorically affirmed, it is expressive of the serious moral vision which gives the Workshop its particular directions. In pursuing their role as actors, the members are engaging in powerful rituals of self-discovery: " . . . if there is still nothing around us, darkness still preserves the awe of self-enactment as the sect gathers for its self-extinguishing, self-discovering rites. In

that aboriginal darkness the first principles are still sacred, the grammar and movement of the body, the shock of the domesticated voice startling itself in a scream."[21] There is self-discovery at these primal reaches, but it also takes place on more immediate levels. Their psyche and spiritual temper as a people are clarified in performances like The Blacks and The Road - as much for Walcott as for the performers themselves. The performance of The Blacks showed how far their kind of comedy was from the absurdist comedy of Genet's dance of death. Walcott perceived both what was meaningful and non-meaningful to them in the experience of the play: "They catch, sidewise in the mirror of another's face, images of what they have feared, projections of their own caricatures. But their genius is not violent, it is comic. The play becomes less a satire and more a Carnival. Their joy is its root. The madness of surrealism means nothing to their sensibility, and this lack is not a question of culture, . . . It is not that they do not understand the absurd, but that they cannot enjoy its mincing catamite dances of death."[22] In The Road the nature of the West Indian's estrangement from the African sensibility was significantly revealed: "When we produced Soyinka's masterpiece The Road, one truth, like the murderous headlamps of his mammy-wagons, transfixed us, and this was that our frenzy goes by another name, that it is this naming, ironically enough, which weakens our effort at being African. We tried, in the words of his Professor, to 'hold the god captive', but for us, Afro-Christians, the naming of the god estranged him."[23]

Walcott is thus aware of an intimate interaction between himself and his company in the realisation of a Caribbean identity. The interaction is dynamic and creative. In "What the Twilight Says" he gives a full account of the struggles of self-imposed martyrdom he had to undergo before this kind of relationship could be achieved. The achievement is of

ultimate value to him: it is through them that his vision is extended to the community, out of the final privacy of literature. In this he fulfils what has always been a powerful urge - to communicate directly with his people in his work. Their own actors make real the burden of "chants, jokes, folk-songs and fables" in which he has recreated the image of a people. By virtue of this very function, the creative intimacy it involves, Walcott's actors are as much effective in creating his plays as his own vision helps them to discover themselves. Some of his most important dramatic roles have developed around outstanding actors in the troupe. The figure of Makak in Dream thus took shape around the powerful physique and energetic style of Errol Jones, one of the leading actors in the company. Louis James, lecturer at the University of Kent, has had the opportunity of witnessing a Workshop session, and compares the relationship between Walcott and Jones to the famous one between Shakespeare and Burbage. Walcott himself gives the classic example of the way in which his actors can help to create his work. He describes how Dream, which he had begun in the States, took its final form:

> We were going on tour; we had just completed our first repertory season and needed a new play . . . Now a strange thing happened: I had a prepared text, but there was one figure at the back of my mind, a death figure from Haitian mythology, that wasn't written in. There was an actor, Albert La Veau, who had just finished doing The Zoo Story and Dauphin. We were going on tour, but there was no part in it for him. So I worked in the figure from the centre of the play's design, and the part radiated through the whole text - the part of Basil. I think that this figure tightened, webbed its structure. It is one of the beautiful accidents that can happen when you have a good company.[24]

This kind of creative rapport with his actors is a measure of Walcott's success in the Theatre Workshop, and marks the summit of his development as a dramatist.

ii) Basic Relationships between the Drama and the Poetry

The drama then, has been developing concurrently with the poetry. There are integral relationships between the two. Fundamentally, they are complementary to each other in the development of a single vision. As observed in the opening remarks to this chapter, the relationship begins at the generic functions peculiar to each form: the poetry is introspective, and the drama externalises the vision through action. It is the poetic awareness which determines the essentially visionary themes of Walcott's drama, and the symbolic patterns through which they are enacted. At the same time the dramatic form itself provides the concrete action in which the vision is anchored, and where it finds "a local habitation and a name". It is in the convergence of these two features that they become complementary.

The moral perspectives in the drama take their essential bearings from the same preoccupations which occur in the poetry. They are centred around the figures of the heroes, who from Christophe to Makak, are conceived in terms of Walcott's awareness of the polarities of beasthood and godhead; of the complexity of man's simultaneous potential for divinity and corruption; of the cosmic contradictions between human ambitions and limitations. The ironies of their circumstances approach these metaphysical frontiers, and they assume their heroic proportions from these levels of awareness. Most of them are, in fact, embodiments of Walcott's own poetic persona "naturalized" in their native settings. Thus Othello in "Goats and Monkeys" who is the most dramatic reflection of Walcott's metaphysical angst in the poetry - is naturalised in the climactic figure of Makak in the drama. There are of course important differences between the two. But they start from fundamental correspondences. Othello's dream of otherness-whiteness, Desdemona, is translated into

Makak's dream of the white woman. The main motif of the poem, "Goats and Monkeys", centralises Makak's root crisis in Dream, the lust (goats) of the ape-figure for the white goddess. It is the inwardness of Walcott's most vital concern that bridges the gap between Shakespeare's romantic and the charcoal burner from Monkey Mountain. What unites as well as separates them is the classic illustration of the complementary dynamic between the two forms. In the poem Walcott is reflective and exploratory and Othello's situation is a metaphor serving this purpose. In the play the insights and conflicts discovered in this metaphorical exploration take their empirical form in Makak's concrete situation. So that we get the social and historical anatomy of blackness, seeing at the same time how authentically these spiritual imperatives are involved in the empirical. They inhere in Makak's original circumstances, and the metaphorical pattern, which repeats the symbolic motifs of moon, ape, white virgin, becomes a means of interpreting their deeper significances.

It is the poetic perspective which leads Walcott instinctively into the specific areas of the indigenous experience featuring in his work. There are no scenes of domestic interiors, slum or backyard life in his work, portraying the conflicts of social situation on two-dimensional levels. In Cecil Gray's classification of West Indian drama, most of Walcott's plays come under the heading of "Plays of Peasant and Rural Folk Life".[25] Walcott penetrates into the most naked, primitive reaches of folk and peasant life - the final areas of deprivation and degradation, which mark the extreme limits of the regional experience. In their representative patterns both the root socio-cultural plight of the region and the archetypal inhere. Apart from historical figures like Christophe whose tragic destiny turns on similar extremes in human destiny, all his main heroes belong in these settings - Ione, Afa, Chantal, Makak. The ultimate

hardships of life in Dauphin, a poor fishing village forced to combat the hardships of a difficult coastline, are concrete social reality, the nakedness of which approaches the cosmic. In Malcochon he penetrates into more remote uncivilized reaches for a situation at once concrete and symbolic. The meeting of the five labourers with the outcast convict in the forest is a naked experience whose primitive power encompasses the mythical. Walcott exploits this mythical potential:

> Old Man: In the life of a man, all his darkness, all his sins
> Can meet in one place, in the middle of a forest . . .
>
> (183-4)

It is with the folk-hero that Walcott enters into territory where the concrete and archetypal converge in these ways. This is the fundamental significance of the folk-hero, who evolves from more 'intellectual' literary conceptions like Christophe into the arch folk-figure of the charcoal burner. Walcott's comments on the charcoal burner allude to these levels of the folk-hero's significance: "To me, this figure represented the most isolated, most reduced, race-containing symbol."[26]

His allegorical and metaphorical modes of presentation grow out of the dual pattern of these types of contexts. Even in the less overtly symbolic plays, there is some level of interplay between the naturalistic and the magical - in which their poetry resides. This is effected through a number of devices. At the most elementary level the magical is abstracted from the realistic by the use of a conventional chorus, or, for example, by the figure of the seer-sorceress in Ione, mediating between the natural and the supernatural. These methods are typical of the early plays. As Walcott's style and vision matures, magical strains are counterpointed with realistic through much more subtle devices, and this is effected in performance rather than verbal utterance. Through such features as the conteur

in Malcochon, folk chants, mime, and the revival dance in Dream, choric functions are powerfully enacted. The magical and realistic interact on a bigger scale in the fabular structure of Ti-Jean, and the dream-allegory convention in Dream allows Walcott the fullest scope for this.

If the poetic focus leads Walcott to particular areas of indigenous experience yielding the significances we have been considering, it is through the dramatic effort that he is able to enter fully into the life of the environment in the first place. We have seen in the preceding chapters, how he comes to accommodate the communal experience into the poetry. In the drama the environment - both its social and physical configuration - enters inevitably. Thus, the drama can deal with the immediate issues of the society at first hand, in depicting, for example, the hardships of life in peasant or fishing communities in the region. Many, responding to these characteristics, see Walcott's drama as more relevant than his poetry. Gordon Rohlehr sees a positive advance from the self-involved dryness of the poet to the committed dramatist of a play like Ti-Jean, where he is dealing directly with the issue of rebellion and liberation.[27] This cultural issue is invaluable in the Caribbean context of the play - it is the major trial native to his own situation, through which the folk-hero must undergo his own conquest of self. As such it is both particular and universal, and transcends the merely cultural. In many ways, Walcott as poet and Walcott as dramatist are inextricable from each other, and it is somewhat limiting to see the strengths of the one as separate from the other. It is because his poetic awareness is so authentically inspired by the indigenous experience that it reaches back instinctively into the actual environment. This is the original impulse behind the dramatic effort.

Thus, the scenes he returns to are mainly those of the particular

locality in which his imaginative instincts were engendered. It is for this reason that the St. Lucian landscape, the early scene of his experience, features so prominently in his most characteristic drama. All his major plays are set there, and vividly recreate its physical and human landscape. Walcott explains how his imagination had been nurtured on the very physical contours and atmosphere of the region from childhood:

> There is another strange thing for me about the island of Saint Lucia; its whole topography is weird - very conical, with volcanic mountains and such - giving rise to all sorts of superstitions. Rather like what Ireland was for Yeats and the early Irish poets - another insular culture.
>
> Whether you wanted to accept them or not, the earth emanated influences which you could either put down as folk superstition or, as a poet, accept as a possible truth. I think that is why a lot of my plays remain set in Saint Lucia, because there is a mystery there that is with me from childhood, that surrounds the whole feeling of the island. There was, for example, a mountain covered with mist and low clouds to which we gave the name of La Socière, the witch.[28]

This landscape distils influences intimately involved with the sensibility of the folk, and it forms an integral part of the communal scenes in which he presents their human drama. As Walcott puts it in Another Life: "One step behind the city was the bush." This is one aspect of the closeness with which Walcott reproduces all the factors, social and otherwise, that define their total experience as a people. With this he captures their character intact - their idiom and inflections, their comic genius, their characteristic personality traits. Most of these are strongly localised effects, native to the St. Lucian setting in which he remains, as for example, their curious French patois. But Walcott shows how these diverse strains are subsumed in the essential unity of the Caribbean experience - both St. Lucian and Trinidadian rhythms exist side by side in the plays. In Dream this is the same principle behind the flexibility with which the rural St. Lucian market, where Makak sells his coals, is expanded into the active revolutionary scene, more typical of urban Trinidad.

Both the poetic and the dramatic, then, interact in the plays to root the vision in a local habitation and a name. This makes for a singular advantage for Walcott as regional poet. He arrives at the kind of integration in which the vision is more directly communicable to the region. As we saw in chapter three, in moving towards an integration, Walcott was better able to enter into the communal experience and capture its native inflections. He thus overcame the estrangement of a superior language and suffering, concentrated in The Castaway. He achieves this on a more effective scale in the drama, on the levels we have been considering. But this - and it is the significant point in the development of the drama - is far from immediately achieved in the plays. The vision moves gradually towards a meaningful integration into the communal experience. The progression is largely parallel to that of the poetry, and points back to the significance of their concurrent development, showing the one artistic effort behind the two. The development centres round the evolution of the hero. In the early plays the hero is literary in conception and his native experience remains extrinsic. This corresponds to Walcott's effort in the early poetry: to accommodate his native anguish to a classical awareness. In the middle plays the regional experience becomes more intrinsic as Walcott discovers the folk-hero. The movement culminates in Dream where Walcott achieves full integration as folk-poet in fusing his own persona as poet with that of the folk-hero. We turn to the following chapters to trace this development.

Footnotes

1. Errol Hill, "The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.18 No.4 (December 1972), p.33.

2. According to Roderick Walcott's list, "The Arts Guild Productions (1950-1954)", these two One-Act plays were performed by the Guild in 1951.

3. Roderick Walcott gave the following information about the play in correspondence with the writer: ". . . one that was completely lost after being freshly written - a comedy with a Sea at Dauphin setting entitled Soso's Wake, based on two fishermen . . ."

4. Franklin won the Barbados Arts Council Prize ($200 EC) in May 1968.

5. Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou No.2 (September 1970), p.45.

6. Roderick Walcott, "A Decade of St. Lucian Creative Writing (1950-1960)", unpublished. On file in the cultural archives of the University Centre, St. Lucia.

7. Ibid., p.7.

8. Walcott, "Meanings", p.46.

9. Francis Haar, Japanese Theatre in Highlight: A Pictorial Commentary, text by Earle Ernst (Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1952), p.10.

10. See Errol Hill's discussion of calinda in "Canboulay" and "Calypso Drama"; shango in "Rise of the Steel Band", in The Trinidad Carnival (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1972).

11. Walcott, "Meanings", p.49.

12. Ibid., p.48.

13. Loc. cit.

14. Loc. cit.

15. Walcott, "The Kabuki", Sunday Guardian Magazine, February 16, 1964, p.14.

16. Walcott, "Meanings", p.46.

17. Ibid., p.47.

18. Comments made in answer to a questionnaire on the Theatre Workshop.

19. Walcott, "The Theatre Workshop at the Crossroads", Sunday Guardian Magazine, September 29, 1968, p.11.

20. Walcott, "Twilight", p.24.

21. Ibid., pp.4-5.

22. Ibid., pp.24-25.

23. Ibid., p.8.

24. Walcott, "Meanings", p.47.

25. Cecil Gray, "Folk Themes in West Indian Drama", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.14 Nos. 1&2 (March - June 1968), p.103.

26. Walcott, "Meanings", p.48.

27. Gordon Rohlehr, footnote to "Islands: a Review", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.16 No.4 (December 1970), p.35. (Rohlehr, however, fails to realise that Ti-Jean was written about 8 years before The Gulf).

28. Walcott, "Meanings", p.50.

CHAPTER 5

Walcott's Literary Heroes:

Christophe, Dernier, Drums, Ione

These four plays with the exception of Dauphin, represent the published, extant material of the amateur phase (see table on p.192). Generally speaking, the plays - from Christophe and Dernier written in the early fifties to Ione and Drums in 1957 - span a period of dramatic apprenticeship. The characteristics of the period are centred around the figure of the hero, who dominates the scene from the outset. He remains mainly literary in conception until he evolves into the folk-figure of the middle plays, Ti-Jean and Malcochon. There is, however, some development during the period and the literary approach is far from uninterrupted: Walcott made a major breakthrough into original territory in Dauphin, written as early as 1952. Yet he returns to a classical treatment in Ione towards the end of the phase, setting the folk-form, as Roderick Walcott puts it, "one pace backward".[1] The period is, in fact, one of fluctuation, but the literary treatment of the hero remains predominant. Dauphin thus stands out during the period, and is closer to the plays showing the emergence of the folk-hero. For this reason, it has been grouped with Ti-Jean and Malcochon in the middle phase.

The heroes of the four plays are united through the one moral viewpoint behind Walcott's artistic approach. They are all tragic figures of destiny brought in the extremity of despair to a final cosmic awareness. As such, they serve mainly as mouthpieces for Walcott's early preoccupation with these generic concerns. The situation is the same as we saw in the juvenilia. While this metaphysical orientation arises from conditions in their native experience, it assumes the 'classical' proportions that leave

the concrete, local experience quite distanced. So that in Walcott's treatment of their predicaments the external circumstances largely subserve this reflective purpose. The important aspects of the regional experience with which they deal - such as history and race in Christophe - are abstracted onto these levels. The net result of this is that the concrete context remains extrinsic to a greater or lesser extent.

This basic pattern is modified in each play, as the dramatic context varies from one to the other. It emerges differently in the historical plays like Christophe and Drums where Walcott is already provided with a dramatic context, by comparison with Dernier and Ione where he has to devise an original action. In a play like Drums, the public purpose of a commissioned work influences the extent to which the communal experience is intrinsic. The relationship between the inward-turned hero and his external circumstances thus varies from one play to the other. A play like Ione is most important for showing Walcott's developing attempts to find a means of integrating native material into this generic perspective. Because of these modifications from one play to the other, it is best to deal with each separately.

Henri Christophe

Walcott's first play is written about one of the heroes of the Haitian Revolution. As he states in the article cited in the last chapter, he was directed to this historical theme by his brother, who "had read a book about it and gotten excited".[2] The Haitian Revolution (1792-1803) was the first successful attempt of the slaves in the New World to gain their freedom. To begin with this theme was a most fitting and original initiation into drama. Walcott found in it both the elements of a highly dramatic situation, and one of crucial relevance to the total experience of the West Indian people.

Many French and Haitian historians have recounted the epoch-making struggle through which the slaves of the old French colony won liberation and independence from France. In The Black Jacobins (New York, 1963) C.L.R. James, the prominent West Indian political theorist and man of letters, gave the first detailed account of that struggle in English. This was the book from which Walcott drew his inspiration. Between 1792 and 1803 the black slaves of Haiti rose from a few disorganized revolts into a powerful fighting force, to win and maintain their freedom against the strongest armies of Republican France. They found initial support under the banner of revolutionary France, but as the currents changed the fight progressed through a number of critical confrontations between negroes and colonists, further complicated by the quarrel with the mulattos over supremacy. It was a history of great bloodshed and destruction, with impressive feats of political and military triumph by the blacks. By the time of Napoleon they already held authority in the island, and they won their final victory in the early nineteenth century, when Napoleon made one final attempt to reinstate slavery and lost the former French colony for all time.

A few outstanding leaders among them were responsible for this phenomenal achievement - Toussaint L'Ouverture and later, two of his generals, Dessalines and Christophe. Toussaint L'Ouverture rose from the position of house-slave to become the main force behind the revolution, as military and political leader. He organised a major fighting force out of a few scattered revolts in a few years and protected their freedom against the inroads of French, British and Spanish with great political skill. He and the two ex-slave generals, Dessalines and Christophe, who distinguished themselves in his army, were figures who played a key role in altering the course of history.

There is drama in the rise of men like Toussaint who set the whole emancipation struggle in motion. There is drama of tragic intensity in the irony of circumstances through which all these leaders fell victim to their efforts and role in that history. Toussaint was betrayed into the hands of Napoleon by Christophe and Dessalines. These two, succeeding each other as kings of Haiti, destroyed both themselves and their country in despotic rule. The most acute and affecting irony was that of Toussaint. Toussaint had always been strongly motivated by ideals of cultural and social progress for Haiti, for which he looked to France. He foresaw the difficulties a young nation of newly-emancipated slaves would face without skills and education. Thus, even as he fought fiercely for freedom, he sought to maintain links with France. It was the very ambivalence of this position that led to his betrayal. Dessalines, who wanted mainly to get rid of the French, saw Toussaint as an obstacle to that goal; while for Christophe, who wanted peace, Toussaint also represented danger. Betrayed ultimately by the very ideals for which he fought, he died in 1803 after a short period of exile in the Jura mountains where Napoleon had him imprisoned. C.L.R. James' words are a sensitive appraisal of his tragic destiny:

> Yet what is lost by the imaginative freedom and creative logic of great dramatists is to some degree atoned for by the historical actuality of his dilemma. It would therefore be a mistake to see him merely as a political figure in a remote West Indian island. If his story does not approach the greater dramatic creations, in its social significance and human appeal it far exceeds the last days at St. Helena and that apotheosis of accumulation and degradation, the suicide in the Wilhelmstrasse.[3]

The other two were not victims of an ideal as Toussaint was, but their respective circumstances each had its own irony. Dessalines who actually led the country to Independence, became Emperor in 1805. Dessalines' genius was limited to that of the soldier, and unequal to the

task of rebuilding a ravaged Haiti. He employed the methods of the soldier to rule his country. This found expression in a ruthless despotism against which the Haitian people soon revolted. He was ambushed by a group of insurgents in 1806. His failure was that of a man who, having known the worse brutalities of slavery as a field slave, remained limited to a belief in savage force. There was pathos in his situation, but Christophe's dilemma was the more tragic. Christophe was like Toussaint committed to the ideal of cultural and social progress for Haiti. He had served as Second-in-Command to Dessalines. After the latter's death he became king of the North in 1811. Once he had assumed total authority, he instituted a system of rigid force to drive Haiti towards prosperity. His system became more and more despotic during his nine years of rule, and the Haitian people were virtually enslaved again. Two monuments, La Ferriére the fort, and his palace Sans Souci, which still stand as symbols of his cultural interests, were built by totally ruthless means. Like Dessalines, his excesses also provoked the resistance of the country. When forces from the South came to attack him in 1820, Christophe was deserted by his army. Rendered helpless by a paralytic stroke he had suffered earlier on, he committed suicide as the enemy approached.

Of the three leaders, Christophe's dilemma was in fact the most complex and expressive of internal conflicts. Toussaint's tragedy, great though it was, was one of political choice, and largely presaged by external necessity. In Christophe's tragedy there was a dramatic relationship between creative potential and corrupted purpose. One historian sees these dual aspects of Christophe's career reflected in the monuments which he built:

> The shape these monuments took corresponded accurately with the two phases of Christophe's rule. Sans Souci, a magnificent palace of brick and mortar against the

> rising foothills back of Milot, symbolized the early effort of the benevolent monarch to provide primitive Haiti with a lasting emblem of cultural leisure and good living. The Citadelle, on a peak of the range behind it, characterized the tyrant into whom Christophe grew.[4]

The strains and conflicts of this schizophrenia were responsible to some extent for the apoplexy which left him paralysed. There was complexity both of character and situation in his history, and elements which lent themselves to creative and moral interpretation. Historians are especially fascinated with the figure of Toussaint, but the two artistic portraits so far have both been of Christophe: Walcott's, and that of Césaire in La Tragedie du Roi Christophe (Paris, 1963).

The Haitian Revolution and its heroes have been presented in some detail for several reasons. Firstly the description helps to give some idea of the dramatic power and relevance of the material with which Walcott is dealing. More importantly, it is against this background that we can best appreciate Walcott's imaginative interpretation of Christophe's history, and the significances behind his particular approach.

Walcott's play deals with the rise and fall of Christophe as king. The play, which he calls a chronicle in seven scenes, falls into two parts corresponding to this. In the first part he shows how Christophe's personal ambition and Dessalines' corrupt regime combine to lead the former to kingship: the second part shows Christophe plunged into his own corrupt rule and his eventual defeat. It is the personal character and destiny of Christophe as king which centres his dramatic presentation. The particular significance of this focus is sounded early in the play by Dessalines. In an exchange between the two, Dessalines penetrates the secret ambitions which they both share:

> Dessa: Every slave dreams in extremes,
> And we were both, Henri.
> You think I am tricking you? I am your friend.
>
> (I.iii.134-6)

Again the more open Dessalines gives direct expression to the burden of Walcott's concern with their destiny as kings:

> Dessa: I who was a slave, am now a king,
> And being a king, remember I was slave;
> What shall I live as now, a slave or king?
>
> (I.iii.142-4)

The slave-king antithesis is very much Walcott's point of entry into Christophe's drama. It contrasts significantly with that of Césaire. In Césaire's portrait kingship represents political authority, and he deals with the tragedy of Christophe's social vision rather than with the theme of personal ambition, central to Walcott's concern with the slave-king antithesis. We will return to the differences between Walcott's interpretation and that of Césaire later, but Walcott's moral bias is already clear from the comparison. Whereas Césaire is interested in the crisis of Christophe's social idealism, Walcott's focus is on the personal idealism of his situation.

The theme of personal ambition is an authentic aspect of Christophe's tragedy, and the approach does help to penetrate important aspects of the private predicament. If Walcott found scope for this moral interpretation in Christophe's situation, however, he had to adapt history in devising an action which would enable him to develop his particular interest in this theme. Basically, history is reshuffled a great deal to show Christophe as the clever politician, masking his purposes, but ruthlessly plotting his way towards kingship. Several historical facts are retained and accommodated into this plot. History is adapted at the outset to show Christophe as having rival claims to the throne during Dessalines' reign. He retains authentic factors such as Dessalines' destructive policies, and exploits them to give Christophe further motivation for plotting to get rid of him. So that Christophe can bluntly challenge Dessalines' authority on the grounds of these abuses:

Chris: You have decided to assume a monarchy
Before Toussaint's breath faded from the glass of history;

. . . .
In this rule there is an end
Of democracy, only a long exploitation
And a bitter harvest, an expiration
Of the breath of decency, financial depression;
And I was never asked to give my impression.

(I.iii.109-17)

Christophe advances towards his goal mainly through methods of political intrigue. It is from Shakespeare's political villains in the history plays, the Elizabethan and Jacobean repertoire in general, that Walcott finds his models for these intrigues. He is surrounded by a group of clergymen and generals - all of whom played significant roles in Haitian history - and shrewdly wins them over to his side while he bides his time as Dessalines' Commissioner. The plot is set in motion in Scene 3, where he draws Pétion aside to plan the assassination of Dessalines. Walcott takes a bold liberty with history for this manoeuvre. Pétion, the mulatto leader from the South, may have supported the plot to ambush Dessalines, but Christophe was not involved in it. Walcott invests heavily in this piece of political dexterity on Christophe's part for revealing his character as a man of ambition, as well as to advance the action. He appears as something of a Macbeth inciting the murderers to get rid of Banquo. In Pétion he finds a man with a grievance - Dessalines was notorious for intolerance of both whites and mulattos. Like a Macbeth working on the grievances of his murderers Christophe exploits the situation. While he is the first to insinuate it, he is cautious in allowing Pétion to make the decision. Thus he affects to be the reasonable man giving the devil his due, while Pétion, a man with integrity and a genuine grievance, is already decided:

Chris: [Slyly] You are thinking of treason and anarchy.
Has he not good reason to adopt a monarchy?

Pétion: Because he fought to protect his country,
Does he think he has bought its soul and its duty?
For my part I do not care who rules,
As long as he loves his country and rules
Well. But he commands a tyranny of fools,
Who spell wounds, not words, their sabres
their schools;
I will not be one and stain
The memory of Toussaint's intention;
I will resist tyranny on pain of expulsion.

(I.iii.200-8)

Once Christophe has this kind of confirmation from Pétion, he loses no time in arranging the details of the murder. He makes doubly sure of his accomplice with this cunning reminder:

Chris: . . . Pétion, you must go south
To avoid suspicion; please do not mistake my purpose.
Besides, he swears that he will deal with the mulattos
After he slaughters the whites;

(I.iii.245-8)

Christophe uses the unscrupulous methods and duplicity of Richard III to manoeuvre Dessalines into their trap. The latter, ineffectual in his decadence, is a mere tool in Christophe's hands. Christophe pretends to be sympathetic towards the dilemma which has driven Dessalines into his blood-lust, and discloses an earlier intention to join Pétion in a plan to assassinate him. He leads Dessalines to believe, however, that he had since decided against it, and urges him to go South to deal with Pétion's insurgents. Thus he directs Dessalines straight into their ambush.

Walcott does get a viable action from this characterisation of Christophe. He shows resourcefulness in exploiting the elements of a dramatic situation to present him in the traditional guise of Shakespeare's ambitious villains. But the device is rather transparent and facile as dramaturgy. His attempts to suggest the deeper motivations behind

Christophe's manoeuvres are also very transparent and ready-to-hand. Most of the characters, even those who have little personal contact with Christophe, have insight into his deepest secrets - which gives rise to a great deal of undramatic introspection. Thus, when we first meet Christophe responding to the news of Toussaint's death, one of his generals unveils the deeper Christophe rather precipitately:

> 1st Gen: Christophe is a two-sided mirror; under
> His easy surface, ripples of dark
> Strive with the light, or like a coin's two sides,
> Or like the world half-blind when moons are absent,
>
> (I.ii.143-6)

The whole attempt to fit the theme of ambition into a traditional mould, and the facile effects attendant on it are in fact the makeshift devices of the apprentice. But if Walcott's dramatic framework is factitious, he starts from an original grasp of the atmosphere of heroic corruption in Haitian history - what he refers to as its Manichaean conflicts.[5] Its atmosphere answered to that of Elizabethan-Jacobean tradition in which he was drenched, and he proceeded to draw his stylistic models from there. The significant point, however, is that dramatic execution remained secondary to this poetic apprehension of its moral quality. In "What the Twilight Says" he recaptures the quality of this imaginative response as he retraces his dramatic career. He describes the moral stature of his first heroes, the only ones before Dauphin to whom he returns: "But they seemed to him, then, those slave-kings, Dessalines and Christophe, men who had structured their own despair. Their tragic bulk was massive as a citadel at twilight. They were our only noble ruins."[6] The models provided Walcott with the machinery through which his hero could be brought to the tragic bulk of his kingship. This tragic bulk - comprehending both the

ambitious ideals and the corruption of the historical Christophe - is the exclusive centre of Walcott's involvement with his hero. It is in the second part of the play, where Christophe has reached the pinnacle of his ambition as king, that this involvement is concentrated.

Kingship means more than the achievement of absolute political authority to Christophe. It involves a self-apotheosis which comprehends but transcends the purely material. Césaire's portrait is again relevant for pointing out its significance. Kingship for Césaire's Christophe means the absolute political power through which he can drive a sluggish and deprived people towards progress. The tragic conflict is thus centered outside him between his will and the spirit of his people. The dilemma is expressed in these words:

> Chris: S'il y a une chose qui . . . m'irrite,
> c'est d'entendre nos philantrophes clamer . . .
> que tout les hommes sont des hommes et qu'il
> n' y a ni Blancs ni Noirs. . . . Et voilà
> pourquoi il faut en demander aux negres plus
> qu'aux autres: plus de travail, plus de foi,
> plus d'enthousiasme, un pas, un autre pas et,
> tenir gagné chaque pas! C'est d'une remontée
> jamais vue que je parle, Messieurs, et malheur
> à celui dont le pied flanche!
>
> (I.vii. 147-77)

Césaire - his artistic treatment is more fully realised - approaches his hero from a revolutionary, socialist viewpoint, and the focus is thus shifted totally away from internal conflict. Walcott, on the other hand, presents nothing of Christophe's public commitment. We see very little of his dealings with his people and the conflicts are all turned inwards.

The meaning of kingship for Christophe, its relationship to the reaches of his personal ambition are intimated in the ordination scene. In an earlier scene patterned on the campaign in Richard III Christophe is already sensitive to the spiritual weight which the responsibility would

entail, as the people hesitate to invest absolute power in him. Here, Brelle's ceremonial observances repeat the burden of the divine right of kings. Walcott is again in Elizabethan territory, but the generic significances of the convention are relevant to his theme. Brelle, penetrating the moral implications of Christophe's designs, warns him of the existential danger latent in his desire for absolute power. He may be lured to abuse this power beyond his mortal limits, and come to the final abyss of such license:

> Brelle: With this for signatures, you can
> Break the built bone, make the eyes
> drink the dark.
> Why do you hesitate? This halt is dangerous -
> . . . .
> Does temptation make you tremble, or is it
> ambition creeping
> Through lymph and vein like snakes to eat
> this offer?
> That hesitation . . .
>
> (II.v.155-63)

Brelle continues his warning with a reflection on man's precariousness in a world poised on the brink of chaos. This is declaimed in the portentous rhetoric typical of the early Walcott. It is the style of "classical alas" which characterizes Walcott's language throughout this, as well as the other plays of the literary phase. Walcott is in fact plying strictly between the heightened utterance of Shakespearean tragedy for such philosophical overtures - and the dramatic blank verse of the history plays for his political action. Here and throughout the play he is reproducing the syntactic style and rhythms of the verse drama of the Shakespearean period very closely. The effects of this mannered style leave the ex-slave leaders quite absent from the scene:

> Brelle: I too doubted that only temporal
> triumphed.
> This world is like a teardrop poised
> In the eyelid of eternity, then dropping
> down the dark,

> Round as a bubble, pricked by accident.
> Accept this harm, master
> The death of summer opening in the petal,
> The evil threatening your light:
> To be president is enough.
>
> (II.v.198-205)

These are prophetic soundings of the self-transcending reaches of Christophe's aspirations. Walcott saw its creative expression in the cultural efforts of the historical Christophe: the Christophe who built palaces and monuments, and surrounded himself with a black nobility. Thus immediately he becomes king, Walcott's Christophe translates his creative aspirations into tangible form. He envisages the palaces, chateaux and forts he will build in rhapsodic images, now as a lyrical challenge to Nature itself, now in exotic splendour outdoing the romance of a Tamburlaine. The verse is a blend of Shakespearean lyricism, echoing closely Banquo's evocation of the felicities of Macbeth's castle in its natural setting, and the rhapsodic rhythms of Marlowe's _Tamburlaine_:

> Chris: I shall build chateaux
> That shall obstruct the strongest season,
> So high the hawk shall giddy in its gyre
> Before it settles on the carved turrets.
> . . . .
> 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,
> . . . .
> I who was slave am now a king.
>
> (II.v.363-77)

The spirit of this rhetorical fantasy - though it somewhat obscures the human figure - touches on an authentic aspect of the value these monuments must have represented to Christophe: the heights he had scaled

from slave to king. Erected through ruthlessness and savage force, the incongruousness of these heights stood out all the more poignantly.

Walcott's king, encompassing both the creative and the corrupt, is immediately precipitated into his role as a noble ruin. We see him as a figure immersed in despair: he has degenerated in a despotic reign which saw the defeat of all his purposes. There is nothing of the action which brings him to this pass. The experience of the corrupted and defeated Christophe is enacted mainly through a self-reflective role, or in confrontations of conscience between himself and the other characters. The Christophe we see is a figure whose over-reaching aspirations have brought him to disaster, giving him insight into the ironic connection between the two. From this on, the play is turned inward to probe the polarities of this awareness. This becomes the source of a great deal of visionary overtures. Thus Christophe, brought within reach of the cathedral music in Scene 6, is inspired to a poetic reflection on the tragic fact of man's susceptibility to the divine, and the existential deception that confounds it. The declamation, here as throughout the play, is enhanced by a metaphorical vitality which is perhaps the most distinctive element of Christophe. (It is especially remarkable when one considers that it was being written at nineteen):

Chris: That chapelle music -
The architectural arabesque halts, spreads,
builds
In vision; when I hear madrigals, requiems,
It is so much like constructing citadels,
chateaux,
Or, sometimes, Vastey, in the labyrinth brain,
The theme runs out its threads, like, who was it -
Theseus,
That book you read me, descending down the
spirals of the ear;
Then, listen, a crash, crescendo comes, like urge,
like knock of light

. . . .
Like glare of sun, or like a minotaur;
Then hear it dying, the thread lost, the light
broken, the metal leaf
Rusted with time; . . .

(II.vi.62-73)

It is precisely this kind of cosmic awareness on which Christophe's despair comes to rest. Time itself, and the eternal law of defeat in man's dual condition, lie at the root of his failure. His own experience has burdened him with the knowledge. Dramatically, this is rather precipitate and unrealised. Walcott's own hand is heavily present. Responding to the basic pattern in the remarkable ironies of Christophe's history, Walcott has abstracted it on to this generic level - and fashioned a role which culminates in this cosmic argument. Christophe thus serves, in the reflective role of the noble ruin, mainly as a vehicle for Walcott's early preoccupation with the themes of time and defeat - repeating the obsessions of the Epitaph. In this part of the play, as in the passage just quoted, he becomes a poetic presence, woven out of a language in whose rhetoric there is the "classical alas" of the Epitaph. Walcott does try to flesh out this presence with some semblance of an action, but mainly to keep the plot going. Thus in Scene 6 even as he rails against fate, Christophe is "in blood stepped in so far", that he murders Brelle gratuitously on the most flimsy evidence of treachery. The encounter between the two, however, is more of an occasion for a lengthy introspection into each other's conscience. Christophe finds another opportunity to speak "in the authority of despair", and he mocks Brelle's ideals with this argument:

Chris: Your life, Brelle, is nothing more
Than candle-stubs, or incense dying with a
sigh in censers

. . . .

> We men are helpless, accident our religion,
> Birth, death, and life are accident . . .
> . . . .
> Time is the god that breaks us on his knees,
> learning
> Our ruin and repeating epitaphs
> Like a dull pupil; . . . .
>
> (II.vi.139-59)

The burden is similar to that which Brelle expressed in the earlier scene.

Walcott finds scope for fusing several types of awareness into this abstracted entity. Thus, at the nadir of his despair in the last scene, Christophe is the remorseful Macbeth asking for herbs of forgetfulness. Several ritualistic features are present on the scene to minister to both his physical - he is now paralysed - and spiritual condition. The witch doctor introduces a touch of Haitian Vodun; this is, however, soon dismissed and the skull and incense remain to become the cue for a Hamletian reflection on death:

> Chris: [Addresses the skull]
> Skull, when your smile wore flesh around its teeth,
> Time like a pulse was knocking in the eyelid,
> The worm was mining in the bone for metal.
>
> (II.vii. 207-9)

Allusions to his particular circumstances are accommodated into this kind of awareness, just as Walcott's local grievances are generically interpreted in the Epitaph:

> Chris: History, breaking the stalk she grew herself,
> Kills us like flies, wings torn, held up to light,
> Burning biographies like rubbish.
>
> (II.vii.203-5)

In fact most of the particular aspects of Christophe's situation enter thus tenuously into the consciousness of the play. They are not concrete factors moulding an identifiable sensibility. This is true of the slave-king antithesis which is the kernel of Walcott's theme. There are

tentative attempts to find psychological motivation for this awareness in the actualities of race and history, but these are unintegrated. The slave-king context remains most pressingly a paradigm for the extremes within which the hero's crisis reaches these cosmic dimensions. On this metaphorical level race itself is not intrinsic. In "Twilight" Walcott ascribes a key role to the theme of race in the play, and claims that the tragic blunder of his heroes was the presumption of aspiring beyond the boundaries of their race as kings. While it is out of an intuitive grasp of this dramatic issue that he rushes to his generic burden, he does not succeed in making it a real experience in the play. He says: "He believed then that the moral of tragedy could only be Christian, that their fate was the debt exacted by the sin of pride, that they were punished by a white God as masters punished servants for presumption. He saw history as a hierarchy and to him these heroes, despite their meteoric passages, were damned to the old darkness because they had challenged an ordered universe. He was in awe of their blasphemy, he rounded off their fate with the proper penitence, . . ."[7] Yet, there is nothing of this dialectic in the burden of despair we have been considering. Where race enters as a concrete issue it tends to serve the plot rather perfunctorily - as an emotive issue provoking the characters to action. Thus, in Scene 7, Christophe gets the final spur to his violence and murders Brelle when the latter mocks him as a black king.

Henri Christophe is not an artistic success but it is an important first play for several reasons. Most of the fundamental bearings of Walcott's thematic and stylistic approach are already present within the very weaknesses we have been considering. The failures themselves are thus indicative of these bearings. Walcott has yet to develop control over the visionary and find its particular terms in a concrete

experience. But this visionary approach, responsible for the function of the hero as a poetic mouthpiece, is a most integral bearing in his drama. The main shortcoming at the root of his weakness in the play is that he is caught within the introspective modes of the early poet of the juvenilia. Within these recesses he is dependent on the style and rhetoric of the English masters: the effects are more glaring in the drama. But the very theme which Walcott thus abstracts is original and meaningful. He starts - and this is of vital importance - from an immediate intuition and mature response to the significance of Christophe's destiny from slave to king. He recognised it instinctively as the prototype of a pattern of necessity which was that of the entire region. He empathised with something of its cosmic schizophrenia - predictions of the strains of his own creative efforts. This statement from "Twilight", which is finally his truest summation of what is happening in Christophe, focusses on the vital meaning of this empathy: "There was only one noble ruin in the archipelago: Christophe's massive citadel at La Ferrière. It was a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach God's height. It was the summit of the slave's emergence from bondage. Even if the slave had surrendered one Egyptian darkness for another, that darkness was his will, that structure an image of the inaccessible achieved."[8] The slave-king antithesis was to remain a powerful theme, undergoing various permutations until he returns to it full circle in Makak's symbolic situation as ape-king. Walcott's first hero thus holds a preeminent position. He is, for this reason, very real, and provides Walcott with an original entry into drama.

Harry Dernier

This is a short, one-act radio play written soon after Christophe. The play is too heavily philosophical in content to be of much dramatic merit, but it is important for what it reveals of Walcott's early dramatic bearings. The pattern we identified in Christophe is at once transparent in Dernier: the hero, the single character in the play, has a thoroughly introspective role, and the experience is very literary in texture.

Walcott found a dramatic situation intact in the story of Christophe. He has to invent one for Harry Dernier, his first original creation. His interests and approach become transparent in the process. Christophe's conflicts are internally centred, but they arise from a realistic experience, a human encounter with the actual world. Harry Dernier's situation is non-realistic and hypothetical. Walcott starts him off with a realistic identity: he is a defrocked "whisky priest" from Walcott's native Castries (perhaps the namesake of Harry Simmons - Walcott's mentor was a freethinker and strong drinker). But this identity is mainly symbolic. He finds himself alone as the last man in a destroyed world, and his native burnt city expands into the contemporary waste land, to become ultimately the scene of destruction at the end of the world.

At the edge of despair, Christophe saw his own corrupted purpose as part of the principle of mortality and time to which all flesh is heir - "Theseus/Travelling out of light and knowledge like the bone/Complexions of the skeleton". Walcott continues the dialectic in setting Dernier's conflict within this context of the corruption of flesh. As a defrocked priest his sin was the desecration of flesh. This is intended to symbolise the primordial connection between original sin and mortality. The symbolic relationship between Harry's sin and his

particular confrontation with mortality are defined in the following verses from Dante's Inferno, which serve as the epigraph to the play. Walcott's theme, the dynamic of his action, as well as the name of his hero, Harry, are contained in the passage:

> The blast of hell that never rests from whirling
> Harries the spirits along in the sweep of its swath,
> And vexes them for ever beating and hurling.
>
> When they are borne to the rim of the ruinous path,
> With cry and wail and shriek they are caught by the gust,
> Railing and cursing the power of the Lord's wrath.
>
> Into this torment carnal sinners are thrust,
> So I was told - the sinners make their reason
> Bond thrall under the yoke of their lust.
>
> (Inferno, Canto V, 31-36)[9]

Harry has come to the "rim of the ruinous path" from indulging in the license of flesh. In punishment, therefore, he has to suffer the buffetings of flesh like Dante's carnal sinners. He is marooned in a scene where every detail is an agent or threat of this punishment. The skull, which is to be the only other "dramatis persona", is there to tease thought; the vultures fly over a scene of decay with forebodings of his own fate; death is imminent in the elemental threat of the sea luring him on towards self-destruction. Allowed to linger and endure these buffetings, he is a consciousness "harried" by the juxtaposition of existence and mortality, and becomes a prey to their maddening perplexities. There is effective psychological action in the madness of this predicament, but the latter serves mainly to precipitate Harry into an argument with existence, to question the meaning of human existence set against the tyranny of finitude and decay. He is thus engaged primarily in a reflective experience, an interior dialogue with his own harried awareness. Very aptly, Walcott lighted upon the form of the radio play to present the internalised 'action' of a reflective, non-visual play, and his use of it

is quite effective. The natural sounds of the sea, wind and birds are the only remaining signs of life in his coastal burnt city. They are employed to evoke both the mood and visual reality of the scene, and to convey the emotive strains of Harry's turmoil.

Harry's first utterance sets up man's arch-philosophical position:

> Harry Dernier: Who am I? Who daren't explore
> The fringes of my hand? . . . .
>
> (1-2)

Immediately after he encounters the skull which, as the symbol of finitude, introduces the other pole of the dialectic. The skull - it is later to inspire his hallucination of the woman-temptress, Lily - transfixes him. It now mocks the form of beauty which once tenanted it, exposing the perverse law to which all beauty is subject. He responds to it with morbid humour:

> Harry Dernier: Some withered Cleopatra's brain,
> A withered honeycomb. The buzzing tenants
> Have vacated it. . . . .
> . . . .
> There are two hollow jokes your sockets
> Are telling. Ahhh . . . that's a
> sickening sight. . .
>
> (20-25)

Harry faces a burnt, barren landscape and he must begin, like unaccommodated man, to fend for himself. He lights a fire with the matches salvaged from the burnt city. As the vultures fly threateningly overhead, his situation parodies that of Prometheus. Here is another kind of negation of human purpose: the quest for a knowledge to illuminate and vitalize his world leaves man exposed to cosmic maleficence. Harry registers this grievance in a vein of comic self-mockery; the parody of Prometheus is explicit and makes the point effectively:

Harry Dernier: Prometheus . . . You'd better sleep;
The vultures think about your liver nightly,
Harry,
Cocking a red eye at your obesity;
Fatten the carrion crows . . .
Ask the great question, Dernier, why was
I born?

(79-83)

The threats he encounters all manifest one aspect or another of this existential contradiction, evoking various archetypes, as in the cases of Cleopatra and Prometheus. He responds with the same quality of defiant and frenetic mockery, in which all the archetypal examples of man's dealings with the gods are brought to a reductio ad absurdum: the "burning" of St. Augustine, Noah's ark, Jonah's ride.

His frustration and madness increase as the images multiply, and Harry arrives at the need to find some means of counteracting their unsettling effects. He must find some means of ordering his world again. He contemplates creating Quant, his alter ego/echo, who will serve as the Do Not faculty of Reason. He rejects the idea, however; the Do Not faculty will be ineffectual to reorder an intractable pattern of futility and anarchy. To create Quant would be to "perpetrate humanity" and perpetuate this fate. Harry, outraged at the idea, is man who must defy God and take the prerogative of deciding for or against existence. Rejecting Quant, he must also destroy himself, and he is driven close to suicide.

At the edge of committing this act of despair, he is visited by the hallucination of the woman, Lily. Lily has "blossomed", as he reflects later on, like Isaiah's desert, in the moment of final drought and desolation. Lily's prototype is Lilith, the demon-goddess, and she represents both temptress and progenitor - symbolic of the complex combination of the corrupt and creative in human desire. Harry's first

reaction is to resist her wiles and seductions as a temptress. She proposes, however, a procreative union between them. She soon vanishes, hallucination as she was, and Harry is left facing the skull. But the vision has brought him wisdom in his moment of direst need. Desire is what continues to sustain human existence, and Harry has perceived the inextricable levels of this desire as the source of human perplexity and the challenge it bears:

> Harry Dernier: I love you, Lily,
> But you're another house
> Of the primordial sin. Now with you alive, the three loves come again,
> The desert blossoming like the rose. Isaiah.
> God, Sensual, and self love.
> We must be cautious, although God and man
> Are not on speaking terms.
>
> (275-80)

Although the perplexities still hound him and he reverts to the state of a mad Hieronimo, Harry comes to accept this truth: existence is not "resolved" by finitude and man is still left with the purpose of working out a relationship with God:

> Harry Dernier: If I wrecked worlds, and knew all, even I die,
> Two things are left, things indestructibly,
> More than death, germ and sky,
> You, God, and I. . . .
>
> (317-20)

Harry ranges through the whole gamut of mythic archetypes in undergoing this philosophical experience - which is an expression of the strong influence of Joyce and Eliot in this period of Walcott's work (see chapter one). He ranges through the biblical, classical, legendary, as in the examples cited earlier. Walcott aims to comprehend the whole universal experience into his cosmic argument via these archetypes. It is the burden of this universal knowledge which gives Harry's frenzy its momentum. This is the source of great verbal energy in the play. The

latter derives from the agility of the wit with which he parodies these archetypes. Prometheus, St. Augustine, Jonah, Moby Dick, Troilus, the Duchess of Malfi are evoked with blasphemous and earthy humour. Much of this is the virtuosity of the early Walcott, indulging in precocious literary pun, but they are on the whole effectively appropriated. One outstanding example occurs as Harry reflects on the significance of Lily:

> Harry Dernier: . . . When Adam had morals and a lisp,
> Consider the Lilith of the field . . .
>
> (300-1)

There is cleverness in Harry's "mad" reference to Adam's lisp, which slips into Lilith, the demon-goddess. In Rabbinical literature she was the first wife of Adam, and later dispossessed by Eve. The combination of Adam's "morals and a lisp" alludes to her dual character. Adam's divine aspirations (his morals), and his imperfection (the lisp) were combined in his union with the demon-goddess, Lilith. The recognition of these paradoxical aspects of his own Lily/Lilith is crucial for Harry's final awareness, as we have seen.

Harry's introspective and dialectical role is enacted through these modes of recognition and response. He defines this role, at one point in the play, when he describes the world he interprets as "a bibliography of metaphor/With evil at the root" (11.175-6). Harry is Walcott's arch-bibliographer, and his literary hero par excellence. Walcott has created a symbolic persona as a means of engaging directly in his visionary preoccupations, and a context in which he can draw upon the whole literary tradition to explore them. The form he chooses, the drama of consciousness, is well suited to the conception and role of his hero. The radio medium is skilfully exploited to convey the sense of dramatised conflict. The alternating voices of Harry's various

moods, the echoes of his laughter, the sounds of sea, wind, and birds - all help to give the play some dramatic vitality. But Harry is even more of a disembodied entity than Christophe. The universality of his role quite engulfs any particular details which might give him a concrete identity. In creating this first original hero Walcott has reverted further away from the dramatic. But as in the case of Christophe the effort is important for showing, explicitly, the visionary interests from which he starts. Also, although these features are dwarfed by his abstract proportions, important aspects of the folk-hero are already there in embryo. His defrocked priest is an outcast figure, lonely "come down from the mountains" into a destitute world. The lonely mountain-hero, Makak, is already prefigured, and Lily/Lilith is to reappear in the shape of Makak's white goddess.

Drums and Colours

Between the two first plays just examined and Drums there are about seven years. During the period Walcott has taken a major step forward into the concrete, localised action of Dauphin. This stands out, however, as a local achievement and Dauphin, as already explained, has been shifted to the next chapter. But the trend is followed in the things written after Dauphin: basically a movement away from a literary framework towards a regional setting capable of containing his themes. In both the plays to be dealt with subsequently, Drums and Ione, there are signs that the localising effort is not yet fully realised. In these plays the pattern discovered in the earlier plays still predominates.

Drums presents a special case. Commissioned to deal with a historical and public theme, Walcott was already provided with a concrete framework, which accordingly determined his themes and treatment. The

communal experience enters inevitably, and his involvement with it is serious and sensitive. But the incidence of this feature is largely a result of the purpose of the play, and within the total structure of Drums the pattern we have been considering is still integral. Chronologically, the play comes after Ione. It was written within a year of the latter. Ione has been shifted last, however, because, as "original" material it best illustrates the transitional aspects of the localising effort.

Walcott was commissioned to depict the four hundred years of West Indian history for the inaugural Festival of the Federation in 1958. The forms and objectives envisaged for the play are discussed by Noel Vaz, a well-known figure in Jamaican theatre, who directed the Festival production: "Should the piece be a history lesson told in a series of tableaux with commentary - a pageant, in fact, colourful and shifting, but at best a facile convention with little real significance? Or might it be conceived as a dramatic text with a linked sequence, a saga told by a poet with concern and insight?"[10] The latter was decided on and Walcott chosen for the purpose.

Walcott presented the four hundred years in epic form, following the general pattern of discovery, conquest, exploitation, rebellion and constitutional advancement: from Columbus and the Spanish conquest; to the middle passage and exploitation of the slaves; to the Haitian rebellion, and the final fight for constitutional advancement by the emancipated slaves. The major facts of history are preserved in the sequence. His moral concern, however, is what guides the selection and depiction of events throughout, and succeeds in giving the whole its dramatic unity. It originates from Walcott's universal interpretation of history and is oriented towards the public message of the play: history

shows man's progress through "revolutions of despair and love", in the words of the Chorus. This calls for a moral appreciation of the high price of freedom, and the necessity of sacrifice to maintain that freedom. The focus on man's "revolutions of despair and love" exhorts the need for the deeper understanding which will free history of bitterness and revenge. These realisations, Walcott's treatment further stresses, must be the basis of united effort on the part of all the races that make up the West Indian people, as they continue to strive towards progress.

Walcott selects and structures his material to develop these moral themes as far as possible. From each phase he takes one litigious hero who played a key role in the period, a role which influenced or was reflected in the larger currents of history. His four litigious heroes are Columbus, Raleigh, Toussaint and George William Gordon. The scene of discovery and conquest opens with Columbus being sent home in disgrace, against the background of Spanish greed and destruction of the native Indians. Raleigh enters during the period of exploitation: his search for El Dorado is part of the imperial venture. The age of rebellion is fittingly introduced by Toussaint's role in the Haitian revolution, and George William Gordon (1820 - 1865) incites the fight for constitutional reform in emancipated Jamaica.

In each phase, therefore, the presentation of his litigious hero takes place within the context of, or is paralleled by the collective drama. There is thus the individual and the public action - the heroic and the communal situation. This division - it is of crucial significance for other reasons - allows Walcott to unfold the various aspects of his universal interpretation of history. His heroes are all tragic figures defeated by irony of "cause or circumstance". The individual failure or sacrifice of each serves as a moral backdrop to the collective action.

Columbus' high ideals in discovering the New World were foiled by human greed, and Walcott preaches the universal moral in the figure of Paco, the native who inherits the corruption from his former oppressors. Raleigh's tragedy, as a victim of his own ambitions, gives another insight into man's universal history. In the sacrifice and ironic fate of Toussaint and George William Gordon, there is the lesson of the high price of freedom. It finds its parallel in the sacrifice of the communal hero, Pompey, the revolutionary black who dies in the fight for constitutional reform.

The total design of the play turns on this dual presentation, the separation into heroic and communal corresponding to a higher and lower action. The Chorus defines the pattern in formal, classical terms from the outset:

> Chorus: Before our actors praise his triumph, Time
> Shows his twin faces, farce and tragedy;
> Before they march with drums and colours by
> He sends me, his mace-bearer, Memory.
> To show the lives of four litigious men,
> . . . .
> This barren height towards which the steps ascend
> Is that fixed point round which some issue wheeled,
> There our four heroes meet their common end,
> There in harsh light, each age must be revealed.
>
> Below them, on the level of the stage
> The spokes of normal action turn their course,
> . . . .
> Each sphere within the other leaves its mark
> As one man's dying represents the race.
>
> (I. Prol.57-78)

The separation into "twin faces, farce and tragedy" is imaginatively devised and is, in fact, what makes for the theatrical power of Drums. Walcott ingeniously introduced his play as part of a Carnival pageant. His group of local heroes, led by Mano and Pompey, decide to waylay a carnival band and change "this confusion . . . to a serious play". The epic thus becomes a kind of local play within a play. Walcott exploits this in various ways. He can move from the level of sustained, artistic

illusion to return to the immediacy of the communal event. This allows for full audience participation on the popular level. He can retain the illusion of carnival visually as his "large action" presents the slaves in middle passage, being drilled to the performance of limbo. The confrontation between the mock-army of General Mano and the enemy, while carrying its serious political message, is exaggerated burlesque close to the spirit of carnival. Walcott manages in fact, to retain a lot of the spectacle and pageantry of a festive play while presenting the serious action of history.

The structure was of more fundamental value to Walcott's artistic purposes. He exploited it to explore his heroic themes on the higher level, while the lower action availed him of his popular figures for direct communication on the communal level. As we have seen, "each sphere within the other leaves its mark" to convey his moral vision of history. But when we examine each more closely, they are seen to serve different artistic purposes. His visionary interests are pursued in the presentation of his tragic heroes, while the popular figures serve as a direct means of communicating his public message. These distinctions do point to the fact that the visionary approach of the early plays still predominates, the local experience remaining 'incidental'.

His tragic heroes are all men who made history through idealism of endeavour, and met their "common end" through "irony of cause and circumstance". The cause and circumstance vary in the case of each hero but the existential scale of the irony puts them straight on to the plane of a Christophe. Walcott's treatment reveals this quality of moral engagement. Situations like those of Raleigh and Toussaint allow for a more realistic exposition. Walcott finds little scope for this kind of

entry into Columbus' crisis, and the presentation of this first hero is abstract and symbolic. Columbus is being expelled for mismanagement of the Indies; Walcott allows him to suffer his degradation as a dispossessed god, grieved at the betrayal of his vision by "hypocrites and malefactors". The corruption, in which he was implicated historically, surrounds him, but Walcott glosses over history to elevate him to his position of despair. From this position he recalls the vision for which he "achieves his degradation". There is some attempt to give this a dramatic framework. He recalls the vision to satisfy the curiosity of Paco, the half-Indian boy. But it is the cue for Columbus to launch into a declamation about his defeated vision. He emerges as the original "Christofer" whose ideals were "to [bear] Christ to the West" (see "Crusoe's Journal"), sounding the spiritual reaches of his aspiration. These significances are expressed in the following lines as he recalls the historic sighting of land. They evoke something of a beatific vision:

> Columbus: O all the cruel patience of the long years,
> The fawning humiliation before great princes,
> The fears and terrors of the whale threshed seas
> Broke through my cloud now, with this cry of light!
>
> (I, Prol.401-4)

This messianic apprehension of Columbus' mission is the expression of Walcott's identification with his hero. Here he is referring to the original religious motivation of the Spanish conquest, but it is less the historical Columbus than Walcott himself, rehearsing the prophetic role which he later defined in "Crusoe's Journal" (The Castaway): "Christopher, [who bore]/the Word to savages". Columbus, remaining abstract, is another vehicle for this poetic communication.

Raleigh's individual drama offered scope for greater artistic development. The portrait of the tragic hero, the nature of Walcott's

moral engagement with him, thus emerges more fully. The larger action of the phase is the exploitation of the slave trade and middle passage experience. Raleigh's search for El Dorado, though part of the imperial venture, does not bear directly on this. But Walcott could not resist the heroic proportions of such a tragic destiny as Raleigh's. El Dorado held the same idealistic significance as Christophe's monuments and palaces. Raleigh's ideal had been perverted in the material pursuit. Walcott saw the same pattern of corrupted and self-destroying ambition in his destiny as in that of Christophe. His final distraction and execution in the tower had the same kind of dramatic implications as Christophe's distraction and suicide. There were elements of psychological and emotive power in the search for El Dorado - the death of Raleigh's son, the accusation of Captain Keymis and the latter's suicide when the expedition failed. Walcott found material for a number of effective confrontations between Raleigh and Keymis, for example, and the psychological delineation of Raleigh's character as the irascible, distempered man of genius. On the whole, the presentation of Raleigh is, like that of Toussaint and his generals, quite successfully handled as moral drama.

When we meet Raleigh he is fevered and tired out by his frustrated attempts to find El Dorado, but driven on by the desire to fulfil his ambition. His moral attitudes are complex and conflicting. He is aware of the futility of the search for personal fame, but he retains a relentless passion to pursue his goal. Unable to lead the expedition because of illness, he looks to his son's part in it for the fulfilment of his purpose. When his son returns dead he is filled with remorse. The sacrifice of his son is a harsh mockery of his ambition, but it is above all the mockery of time and the futility of human purpose. He too sees the principle of cosmic negation reflected in his failure:

Raleigh: O death that takes a little piece of me,
When one man dies, the only empire is yours,
All mockery carved in that marble stiffness
Wrapped in the reputation of a shroud,
A mirror clouded by the breath of time.
A broken sword laid at the foot of war,
A cold meat for the whimsy of a king . . .

(I.VI.263-9)

His own despair finds dramatic expression in the insane accusation of Keymis for his son's death. But Raleigh ends as a man whose fate has brought him to a final vision of human destiny. The Chorus bridges the gap and takes us to the scene of his execution for this epitaph:

Raleigh: I'll tell you this, father, although my hermit's voice
Will be drowned in the roar of wars and politics,
The only wisdom, whether of single man or nation
Is to study the brevity of this life and love it,
That's the poor wisdom I bequeath to soldiers,
If I sound unreasonable sir, it is because again,
I have lost my head.

(I.VI.398-404)

Walcott's next tragic hero is a regional figure, and he is dealing with historical material of direct relevance to the political message of the play. As earlier stated, the presentation of Toussaint and the Haitian Revolution does carry its public message. But the angle from which he approaches Toussaint's private dilemma focusses on the ironic circumstances of the man of ideals. In Toussaint's case, the ironies are built into his political role. To realise his ideals he must make use of a ruthless force, which, leaving Haiti itself despoiled, threatens to defeat the very ideals for which he fights. He introduces Toussaint's story against the background of the scene of battle. His generals Dessalines and Christophe, are already plotting his betrayal - which heightens the irony of Toussaint's situation. But the greater part of the action consists of the personal encounter between Toussaint and his master, the white planter Calixte (in history, Bayou de Libertas) whose

mulatto son, Anton, was murdered at the outbreak of rebellion. Calixte, accusing Toussaint for the death of his son, charges him with the guilt of his country's destruction. They engage in mutual reproaches and recriminations, but the encounter is designed to bring out the human pathos of Toussaint's situation. The story of Toussaint's close relationship with his master is recounted in history. Left in charge of his master's wife at the outbreak of rebellion, he made sure of her safety before joining the fight. When many of the emigré planters were returning to a quieter Haiti towards the end of the fight, Toussaint nonetheless stood firm by his political commitment, and would not recall his master from America. In the present scene, political necessity demands that Toussaint be unscrupulous and command Calixte's death. When Dessalines, notorious for his hatred of the whites, discovers Calixte, he is a member of the enemy and must be killed. Toussaint as leader sees no choice but to observe his duty and responsibility and deals with Calixte impersonally. Before this final act of 'inhuman' choice, the confrontation is one between two who are close enough to express their misgivings and fears to each other. It is an occasion for Toussaint to unburden his conscience:

> Calixte [weeping]: Toussaint, what is all this?
> What is happening to the world, to Haiti?
>
> Toussaint: O God, I do not know, Monsieur Calixte. I do not know,
> I am pushed forward, lifted on the crest of the wave,
> Then I am abandoned among the wreckage, while
> The mass of guilty men say, oh Toussaint, he is gentle, good,
> Leave him to clean it.
>
> (II.xii.172-8)

A sharper dramatic focus, as in the cases of Toussaint and Raleigh, helps to moderate the tone of their preoccupations with destiny. But Walcott's tragic heroes still reveal the reflective orientation: their tragic circumstances bring them into confrontation with the generic.

The West Indian epic, moreover, might have eschewed this kind of engagement with the destiny of Columbus or Raleigh, but this viewpoint gravitated him towards these heroes. The engagement with the lower action and its folk-figures is altogether different. There is no such moral and artistic inwardness at work. Walcott employs a theatrical, comic style to exploit his folk-figures for their one exclusive role: that of presenting the public message of his Federal play. The combination is effectively handled.

The presentation of the folk-figures is concentrated in the final sequences where the masses continue the fight for reform, following on the sacrifice of George William Gordon - the Jamaican political hero who promoted the cause of political reform. Missionary groups engage in revolutionary activities, and active combat is being carried out by local maroon forces in the mountains. In the former, the police raid a missionary gathering to search for one of their members, Pompey the shoemaker. He has been engaging in active revolutionary work - "scattering pamphlets/ Bout emancipation, and riots . . .". Walcott stages a rich pantomime. Pompey is being apprehended to the burden of a gospel hymn. The hymn parodies the action and serves as a seriocomic counterpoint to the proceedings, evoking the ritualistic and sacrificial significance of Pompey's fate. This method of combining comic and choric effects is one of Walcott's special theatrical skills, and becomes most accomplished later on, as in the treatment of folk-comedy in Ti-Jean. Pompey is being chased:

Slaves [feebly]: But all through the mountains, thunder riven,
And up through the rocky steep,
There arose a cry from the gate of heaven,

[Sergeant spots Pompey]

Sergeant: There's the black sheep we're looking for!
Hold him!

Slaves [loudly]: Rejoice I have found my sheep
And the angels echoed around the throne,
Rejoice for the Lord brings back his own,
Rejoice for the Lord brings back his own.

[Pompey is held, struggles, is clubbed]

(II.xiii.75-82)

The sacrificial resonances of Pompey's revolutionary role are a fundamental part of Walcott's public message. Walcott is not meeting the demands of his play with any superficial exhortations of revolutionary zeal. He reveals its deeper moral significances in this symbolic treatment. But the whole scene, the part that Pompey and the slaves play in it, serve mainly to enact this message.

Walcott's handling of the folk-figures emerges fully in the final, climactic scene. They are assembled as a local maroon force in the mountains. Mano, the negro leader, and his generals are all drawn from the ranks of the "common" West Indian. Each of the other races is represented. There are Ram, the Indian; General Yu, the Chinese; and the ex-planter Calico, the white creole. Each, representing their stereotypes in West Indian society, contributes typical 'resources' in Mano's army. Mano himself and the black shoemaker Pompey take their place in leading the fight; the Chinaman is the army cook, the Indian plays the role of army tactician, while the white ex-planter supplies the capital he once monopolised. Together they constitute a mock-army - a group of rustics, uninitiated in warfare and army discipline. This - it combines with Walcott's serious purpose - is a source of rich burlesque. Their rustic traits and unsophisticated style find expression in self-caricature as they go about their preparations. In this way the dialect, their humourous personality as West Indian "calypsoldiers", enters originally.

Walcott is very much at home in handling the native experience in this comic vein: its broad, vigorous rhythms are to be integrated into the "serious" substance of the later plays. Ram's response to Mano, who thinks he hears the war bugle blowing, captures the typical tone of the presentation:

> Ram: Is only your belly crying. You only getting nervous. Is the bad food we eating, General. Now how we going make rum? We best go back to slavery. At least you could drink. Napoleon used to drink good before war.
>
> (II.xv.53-4)

This tone stands out starkly beside the elevated Shakespearean verse of the higher action. The two remain clearly separate in Drums, which points back to their distinct purposes.

The farcical approach is, however, of value to Walcott's serious message. They are, as a group of unsophisticated rustics, a people who share a common image and condition, united in a common cause. The message of brotherhood and freedom from racial hatred and prejudice is preached in bringing the races together. One or two confrontations between them provide the opportunity for this. Pompey, the ardent militant, still nurses grievances against Calico for the abuses done to his race. Ram preaches the moral as he tries to appease him:

> Ram: Pompey, history not a judge, not a prophet, not a priest and not a executioner. This man never hurt, and he ain't no more responsible for the past to his father, than for the future to his son. Don't grudge, don't remember, eat.
>
> (II.xvi.127-9)

Walcott's moral is made explicit as Pompey dies for the cause. The sacrifice of the shoemaker is symbolic of the price of freedom, which must be won by heroes drawn from the masses. Pompey's dying exhortations bear the final message to a new emergent nation. The group gather around him to receive it:

Pompey: I want all you boys stick together, you hear? All you stick together and don't hate nobody for what they is or what they do. This is all we land, all we country, and let we live in peace. I want all you hold hands there near me, and live like brothers, Calico, don't buse coolie, and Coolie don't buse Mano, and Mano, give the boys a break sometimes, because this is confusion time. [Dies]

(II.xvi.262-6)

Paying his final tribute to Pompey, Ram describes their cultural image as a people. It is an expression of Walcott's serious vision of the Caribbean as one cultural entity. It is eloquently stated in Ram's native brogue:

Ram: We only a poor barefoot nation, small, a sprinkling of islands, with a canoe navy, a John Crow air force, and a fetefather philosophy, but in the past we was forged, Mano . . .

(Epilogue, 362-4)

Walcott's message is all the more meaningful and immediate because he has presented them in this guise - he speaks through their humble conditions and their language. But it is solely this public function which has created and defines their presence in the play. The portrayal shows how thoroughly immersed he is in the personality of the region: but his local heroes have no dramatic existence outside this public context. They are not yet the centre of any moral or imaginative exploration such as takes place in the later plays. Their role is effective within the total scheme of the play, but it is still clear that he gravitates towards the tragic, speculative hero.

Ione

Drums revealed Walcott's surviving interests in the tragic perspective, centred around a classically conceived, speculative hero.

In Ione Walcott makes an attempt to find a local hero who can carry the burden of this perspective in an authentic native experience. As in Dernier his purposes are clear because he has to invent an original action. In Dernier, the kernel of a local situation was completely overwhelmed by the visionary pattern. Here there is a conscious attempt to accommodate a concrete local situation into the pattern. The latter, however, dominates in such a way as to leave glaring strains between the two. Ione fails because of this. But the failure is interesting. Walcott is, in fact, at a dramatic crossroads in the play. He is still caught within the non-dramatic fastnesses of the reflective approach, but the areas of the local experience to which it leads him, instinctively, are very significant.

Roderick Walcott, in "A Decade of St. Lucian Creative Writing" gives the sum of what is happening in Ione: "The play proved to be a 'classic failure' and remains Walcott's most unsuccessful work. . . . The writer's attempt at making primitive warriors pose with Grecian shields did not enhance the previous success of Dauphin, but rather produced a pseudo-classicism that set the folk-form one pace backwards by making rustic chieftains speak grand-manner poetry."[11] Walcott had already made a successful move towards the localised folk-figure in Dauphin, written in 1952. In the figure of Ione, the tragic heroine around whom his large action is centred, Walcott presents a St. Lucian peasant girl as a classical figure of destiny. Ione belongs to a hill tribe in the island of St. Lucia. Her father's, the legitimate Victorin tribe, is in conflict with the tribe of his illegitimate brother, Alexandre, over litigation of land. Ione stands for moral pride in the values of her pure lineage. She suffers its tragic dispossession with courage when it comes to destruction in a final confrontation between the tribes. This has been

triggered off by an affair between her beautiful wayward sister, Helene, and a member of the bastard tribe of Alexandre. Her own personal crisis is set against this larger background. After the loss of her husband she had met an American working in the island, who became her lover. He has left with a promise of returning to her. She awaits word from her "golden-haired" lover, whose child she bears secretly. When he abandons her - she receives the news simultaneously with the defeat of her tribe - she reacts with the pride and courage typical of her lineage and commits suicide.

Walcott's heroine originated from a local conte about a woman left sorrowing for a foreign lover who never returned. The elegiac strains of the folk-tale sung the burden of fate and the tragic dignity of its heroine. Ione took her image from there. He kept the skeleton of the tale, and proceeded to create an action which would allow him to develop this image in scale and stature. Her dignity and moral strength are given their background in her strong tribal lineage; and the heroic stature she attains is forged out of the scale of the tribal conflicts in which she is involved.

Walcott keeps the racial and ethnic in view in setting them up as African tribes. It is a framework which can accommodate particular features of the West Indian social setting - peasant groups in conflict over litigation of land, such factors as illegitimacy. These features make the West Indian setting of his tribal factions readily identifiable. But the tribal pattern is of primary importance for introducing the values of kinship and tradition. It is clear from the outset that this is made to converge with the classical tradition of kinship and lineage in the royal houses. The terms of reference are classical; the codes

and values observed by the tribes also belong in the classical tradition. In the very first scene Ione appears as an Antigone figure resisting any indignities to her house. She rebukes Helene, the sensual sister, who has just returned from sleeping in the canes with a member of the Alexandre tribe. Walcott attempts to keep the inflections of the native St. Lucian patois (see pp.287-8) in describing the peasant situations. But the sentiment is classical, and there are lyrical strains which try to heighten Ione's speech on to this level:

> Ione: To think that you will bring destruction
> on both house, to make a woman more for
> fighting than the gully of a river. Men
> really stupid. Which man was it, now,
> down by the canes last night?
>
> (I.112-5)

Helene has her own share of the Victorin pride but her natural endowments must not be constrained: "[her] body is [hers]". Ione admonishes her in the name of the preservation and pride of their lineage:

> Ione: Poor little Helene. You look down in the dust
> and see a mirror. You think the sun is gold
> only for you, and the cold river only to wash
> your eyes. But every Victorin have more than
> that. Our father have no son, except the child
> you have, son of Achille.
>
> (I.142-6)

Several classical features uphold the tradition of the Victorin house. The tribe, living under the terror of God, maintain a blind seer, the local equivalent of Tiresias. She mediates between them and the supernatural, and they depend on her to regulate their affairs and avert disaster. Thus Victorin must consult her to know what each day augurs for his labours in the field and what the higher forces hold in store. When he is warned of the curse that threatens his house, he contemplates,

like an Oedipus, means of forestalling fate. There are classical echoes in the response:

> Victorin: If I split open a rock, and hide my people in it,
> Or lock my two daughters and grandson in their houses,
> Or make my contrition before my mad brother?
>
> (I.521-3)

Later, when the fateful Helene has brought disaster - her husband murders her Alexandre lover - he must conform to a classical code and order her extradition. Victorin "pronounces her going" in a formal scene which evokes the passing of the classical Helen:

> Victorin: Say farewell to your people, Helene. For your uncle,
> And all the men of both tribes are of accord
> That you must go. And I pronounce that going.
> Go, my daughter, and your father loves you.
> Forgive your father and your father's people.
>
> (II.502-6)

While the African-native material is Walcott's naturalistic setting, it is this classical content which sets the tone of the sensibility of the play. In bringing them together, however, Walcott is continually trying to find emotive and spiritual points of contact between the classical and the native. The most palpable example of this occurs in the presentation of Theresine, the blind seer. Her role is prominent in an action where fate is the main antagonist. She dominates the first half of the play "foresuffering" the disaster - while the action itself begins only in the second part. Ione, especially, and her father, are engaged in the experience of foresuffering with her as they consult her powers; the other characters, going about their labours, all respond to her presence. The prominence of her role is expressive of their close belief in fate and the supernatural. In the play, it is at once the Greek religious sense and the superstitious fear of the unknown in a peasant people. There are authentic points of contact between them. The close

sense of higher forces controlling the natural world underlies both spiritual attitudes - it is what informs the mythic world of the Greeks and it is the original source of peasant belief in the supernatural. Starting from this essential correspondence, Walcott combines the classical Tiresias and the local sorceress in the figure of Theresine. Concretely, she retains the features of the local sorceress, but the awareness of a classical Tiresias is imposed on the native. There is - since the classical sense of fate and that of the native peasant are each codified in its own cultural terms - an obvious cleavage between the two. This is especially glaring in the language - there is a striking discordance in the classical, heightened diction he tries to blend with native rhythms and inflections.

Walcott's mode of handling this fusion emerges clearly in the scene where Theresine employs her powers to divine the future. He veers between both images of Theresine in the scene. In some of the more realistic exchanges between herself and Ione, the solid peasant figure is kept well in view. Here, for example, she refers contemptuously to the sexual life of the younger woman. She "cusses" her in the native spirit, using the coarse idiom of St. Lucian patois:

> Theresine: Us! Jamette, what us? What is this us now suddenly?
> It was not us when the white man come up here,
>
> (I.253-4)

("Jamette" is a St. Lucian French patois word meaning "whore".) More pertinently, many of her observances are those of the folk sorceress. She has to "bake [her] wrinkles on the stones" to enter into her trance, and her dealings with the supernatural are like those of the local <u>diablesse</u> communicating with the devil. Their images and atmosphere - she recounts her usual experiences to Ione - consist mainly of the

abominations and horrors of primitive devil lore: "children boiling in the canary of little devils . . . spiders talking . . . And I once see the mother of the devil . . ." When she employs her powers in this scene, however, it is as the prophetic sibyl that she apprehends the vision. The folk motifs still provide the imagery, but they are strenuously transfused into the higher rhetoric of prophetic apocalypse. The blend between the two results in this type of utterance:

Theresine: For a small time now, the sun will turn black,
The crickets and spiders will have hair like women,
. . . .
And now we are entering the Kingdom of the dead . . .
Here them moan, here them moaning, moaning,
It is I, Theresine, not dead, and not living,
It is I, Theresine, the crooked black sibyl,
Bending over the smoke from the mouth of the rotting,
I have come to know what is in the groin of the future,
Ah Damballa, adore na pié Damballa,
Aie, il prend moin, il prend moin
Aie, aie, aie, Marassa. . . .

(I.328-53)

The image of the local sorceress returns with the African and French patois invocations. The latter, being mainly emotive and non-verbal in character, fit in with the rhythmic spirit of the utterance. But the formal rhetoric is that of the prophetic sibyl rather than that of the peasant sorceress. There are elements of both aspects of Theresine in the passage, but it is the sibyl which predominates. Walcott veers between them, trying awkwardly to bring the tones together every now and then. He has started from an awareness of authentic correspondences between them, but the attempt to superimpose the one on the other fails.

The image of the classical Ione is concentrated in the tragic experience of the second part of the play. In this scene between herself and Theresine both aspects of Ione are already being brought into

play. The points of contact between the peasant and the classical images are being forged, and the nature of the fusion is also apparent. Her image as a peasant girl is formally declaimed in Theresine's words:

> Theresine: And you,
> You never go to school, the only school you know
> Is when the leaves are spinning red and yellow
> When April comes with dryness, and when
> Is time to fish, and time to breed.
>
> (I.246-50)

Walcott thus stresses her condition as a solid daughter of the soil; but the lyrical emphases point to the qualities which Walcott intends to relate to her classical stature. "Unaccommodated", Ione still lives within the organic rhythms of Nature, and knows only its language. She shares accordingly in something of its wholeness and pristine strength. Walcott passes naturally from there to the violence with which she threatens Theresine:

> Ione: You are lying, old woman.
> I am a Victorin, I will skin you alive,
> And nail your dry skin on my father's house.
>
> (I.234-7)

The spirit is that of the native Ione brought close to the forcefulness of the Greek heroines. The expression is in the heroic mould: at such emotive levels there is some harmony between the two tones. From this point of contact between them, Ione moves to her classical stature in defying the gods. Here she tries to strengthen her disconsolate father:

> Ione: Nothing will not happen. Not to a Victorin,
> There have death and that only, go to your people.
> God cannot touch us.
>
> (I.568-70)

Walcott continually keeps in view the specific aspects of the native experience from which he approximates to his classical parallels. The role of Theresine, as we have seen, points to the truth

and significance of superstition in their lives; and Ione is a product of her primitive, natural condition. These features, and their correspondences to the Greeks are poetically intimated. The language returns every now and again to their condition as a people exposed to the elemental character of peasant existence. The pattern of their lives is dominated by natural forces of the landscape: drought, flood and hurricane, the threat of the sea. These are the basis of an intrinsic mythic relationship with earth. The spirit of this relationship is intimated every so often. Here for example, it is alluded to in the significance of Theresine's duties. Ione reminds her of her obligations:

> Ione: My father give you this ground and the house
> To tell him when the weather will make good,
> When the storm coming, and what course he must take
>
> (I.391-5)

It is also contained in the lyrical description of Ione earlier cited. In Ione's elegiac reminiscence of past hardships, it is poignantly related to the details of village life in the island:

> Ione: Aie, that year was a hard year, was the drought,
> I had to walk nearly Dennery for water,
> And all the cane was dry and turning brown,
> He was a good husband, and he liked the sea,
> But if he went, it was to get us fish. To eat.
>
> (I.189-93)

This pattern of life is, to Walcott, the background of a stark humanism - from it arises their elegiac sense of reality, as well as the primitive power of their character and sentiments. Ione, a play with music, is suffused with the mood of local folk-songs and chants which are to become central elements in Walcott's later dramaturgy. The labourers work in the fields to the rhythms of folk-songs and *contes*. They are mainly French creole folk-songs dating "from the days of Josephine" (St. Lucia shares much of this French creole lore with the

neighbouring island of Martinique). The "Adieu Madras", the creole folk-song from which Walcott got the tale of his "sorrowing woman", serves as Walcott's musical theme. The madras and foulard are the headdress and necktie of the traditional creole costume. They are symbolic, in the conte, of days of happiness and splendour. Bidding farewell to them, the woman says "adieu" to the good life and a love that will never return. There are also strains of local wake songs, and the mood of lament suffuses the play. They are all in the native French patois, and the creole atmosphere of St. Lucia is powerfully present. The primitive character of the landscape, a background to the violent action of the play, is also evoked. Walcott sets his hill tribes near the rugged, windswept coastline of the eastern part of the island - showing the relationship between the spirit of his play and its concrete setting. Significantly, he dedicated the play to Harold Simmons, whose interest in the folk and the physical landscape, helped him to discover "more of my own island than I could find alone". It is the spirit of this stark humanism that he relates poetically to that of the Greeks. These correspondences function lyrically: thus the group of native washerwomen perform their elegiac, choric function, as counterpart of the Greek Chorus. The peasant poetry thus remains a lyrical backdrop, while the tragic awareness realises itself on the classical level. There are also, as we have seen, the strains of his efforts to merge the two.

The various aspects of the relationship between them are finally explained by the particular bias of Walcott's theme. Walcott's comments on the play make the emphases. One critic thought that his attempt at a classical play failed, because he had not, like the Greeks, a myth to work with. In answer to this criticism Walcott rejected the idea of the need for a formal myth, or for that matter, that his play was

classical: "There has been only one myth, in several disguises, and that is the pride of man and the pride of God, depending on the kind of pessimism of your own time . . ."[12] And again: "But while these playwrights differ, the facts about the human soul, and the opinions on the passage of man towards some form of eternity remain the abiding questions."[13] It is because his focus is on these generic dimensions that Ione's tragic context must be approximated to the scale of the Sophoclean or Aeschylan play, capable of encompassing a direct dialogue with these eternals. From this classic conception he reaches towards the native Ione. The native image and its realistic framework, subserving this purpose, remain, accordingly, unintegrated.

The large action, cumbersome in parts, has been working towards Ione's tragic consummation. The tribes are now preparing for warfare. Her father broken in spirit, Helene banished, Ione bears the burden of the fall of her house. She faces her desperate situation with courage, and looks more fiercely towards her one hope: the love she bears the "golden-haired stranger", and the "strong mixed seed growing in her body". Out of these she must make a fresh beginning - tantamount to creating a new race (it is an expression of Walcott's concept of a new creole synthesis, born out of a new vision, which we have encountered in the poetry). Fate plays its final deception when this hope is denied. The letter brings news that her lover has abandoned her and the child. Ione's pride and hope are the measure of her despair. Like all Walcott's heroes it propels her into a vision of cosmic negation. Her suffering finds expression in reflections on human destiny. Thus, contemplating her fate to the strains of Diogene's wake, where mournful rhythms and drunken mirth intermingle, she reacts with this burden:

Ione: I call them pigs, but they are right to drink,
What right they have to be more than the animals,
Black, white, or shining with their yellow hair,
We fool ourselves to think we make like God,
And beauty is a mirror, that mean nothing.

(III.263-9)

And, the climactic expression of her cosmic wisdom:

Ione: The letter is nothing, the cruelty is nothing,
My sister stoned, my father crying peace,
The insult to my son, not born, makes nothing,
The breaking of the green and rounded world
Like a great gourd, in half, Theresine, nothing
What is the wrong insult, is the long hope
Man putting in a next man, and himself.
They can tie up the wagon of the world
To the big, burning beast that is the sun
And the white rain cry heavy on the canes,
But they will make the same stupidity.

(III.279-89)

Here again there are the strains of the effort to translate native imagery and rhythms into a visionary rhetoric, giving rise to the gauche literary effects of the last few lines. But the core of her experience has raised her to this universal perspective: human defeat is "the long hope/Man putting in a next man and himself". The knowledge imparts the strength of soul which transcends despair - it is still the position of the Walcott of the Epitaph - and going out to meet death, she passes towards her own type of eternity as "the cold rock, Ione".

The Phase in General

The common role of all these heroes helps to explain the characteristic features and weaknesses of the early drama. In recognising the a priori metaphysical principle of action, it is the centrality of action that Aristotle stresses - which must precede and contain the metaphysical form[14]. Walcott is not yet the dramatist whose action precedes

and contains his meaning. He starts from the philosophical viewpoint of the early poet to appropriate an action. Approached in this way, the dramaturgy becomes more or less factitious and literary in execution. This is integrally related to the way in which he handles the native experience. To begin with an action would be to grasp an intrinsic localised experience intact; but Walcott appropriates the locale to serve his reflective purposes, leaving it extrinsic in the ways we have seen. Yet - and this is most important - the concerns which are abstracted on these reflective levels have their sources in his local experience, as was the case in the juvenilia. So that many of the fundamental themes and elements, to be crystallised in the mature drama, are already present. Among these are the slave-king antithesis, the mytho-poeic elements of folk-life; while the isolated outcast hero, representing Walcott's own role as poet, is to retain his basic position as protagonist of the mature plays.

Footnotes

1. Roderick Walcott, "A Decade of St. Lucian Creative Writing (1950-1960)" (unpublished), p.3. On file in the cultural archives of the University Centre, St. Lucia.

2. Walcott, "Meanings", p.45.

3. C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins, 2nd ed. (1939: rpt. New York: Vintage Knopf, 1963), pp.291-2.

4. Selden Rodman, Haiti: The Black Republic (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1961), p.18.

5. Walcott, "Twilight", p.11.

6. Ibid., p.12.

7. Loc. cit.

8. Ibid., p.14.

9. Dante, Inferno trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968).

10. Noel Vaz, in Foreword to Drums and Colours (Jamaica: Caribbean Quarterly Special Issue, March - June 1961), p.1.

11. Roderick Walcott, "A Decade of St. Lucian Creative Writing", p.3.

12. Walcott, "Modern Theatre", Daily Gleaner (Jamaica), March 25, 1957, p.12.

13. Loc. cit.

14. Aristotle, Poetics, VI, 2-14.

CHAPTER 6

Discovering the Folk-Hero: Dauphin, Ti-Jean, Malcochon

There are four extant plays covering the middle period of Walcott's dramatic work, which falls roughly between the apprentice phase and the professional period beginning with the Theatre Workshop and Dream. They are Ti-Jean, written a little earlier than Drums, Malcochon, Jourmard, and The Charlatan. Dauphin, for the reasons discussed in chapter five, has been included in this group. The period sees the development of an original drama, free of the literary patterns that dominated the earlier plays. The replacement of the literary hero by the folk-hero signals this change. Instead of the Shakespearean Christophe and the classical Ione, the heroes of the middle group are, like the fisherman of Dauphin, all folk-figures: the creole hero of the folk-tale in Ti-Jean; the woodcutter of Malcochon; the vagrants of Jourmard; the group of local hucksters comprising calypsonians and charlatan magician in The Charlatan.

Walcott's achievement in the middle plays centres on the role of the folk-hero, as with his literary forerunners in the early plays. It is with him, first of all, that the regional experience becomes intrinsic - the feature fundamental to Walcott's discovery of an original drama. The areas of the regional experience which enter with the folk-hero are also of vital significance. In Dauphin we get the typical West Indian fishing village; in Ti-Jean, its rustic setting; and in Malcochon, the community of labourers living near to the plantation. The essential aspects of the role of the hero are concentrated in the major plays of the group: Dauphin, Ti-Jean and Malcochon. In examining this role we will deal with these three plays, which are Walcott's most characteristic and

accomplished dramas prior to Dream. Representing his best work of the period, they appear in the first collection together with Dream. The other two plays, Jourmard and The Charlatan, are minor works. In both plays Walcott is mainly engaged in a serio-comic exposition of the values, manners and mores of West Indian society. Jourmard or A Comedy till the Last Minute is a black-comedy debunking the hypocrisy and travesties of blind subservience to religion in provincial West Indian life. Jourmard, a vagrant poet, decides to enact the resurrection scene for the day's earnings one Easter morning. He is left trapped in a coffin as an oblivious crowd get caught up in the pageantry of the Easter procession. In The Charlatan Walcott surveys a society which thrives on charlatanism - magicians, medicine-men, socialites and calypsonians are all charlatans. Charlatanism emerges as the common leveller, giving the society its characteristic comic genius. It is capable, however, of attaining a true, vital purpose by the redeeming power of love.[1] Both plays are effective, but, aimed at these broader overviews of the society, eschew the deeper spiritual action and internalised focus of the other plays. They do not therefore attain the characteristic depth of Walcott's moral explorations in the works to be considered.

In the three plays to be examined, Walcott's folk-figures share common features. They are all drawn from rustic and primitive settings - the fishing village of Dauphin, the native forest of the legendary Ti-Jean, the labouring community just outside the forest in Malcochon. These are areas where the human and natural landscape are juxtaposed. The latter represents a fundamental phenomenon in the plays. We find the local habitation of Walcott's folk-figures in this elemental configuration, which, as we have seen, engages him so vitally in the poetry. Walcott himself alluded to the central importance of this feature in a comment to

the writer. He pointed out that the four plays in the Dream collection were each based on one natural element. Dauphin is based on the sea; Ti-Jean, the forest; Malcochon, the rain (as part of the rain-forest setting of the islands); and Dream, on the mountain.[2] The four 'elements' together describe the basic geography of the Caribbean islands. The elemental setting becomes the locale of a mythic level of engagement. But the fundamental importance of these settings, what in fact gives authenticity to the mythic, is this: they are original, realistic scenes of experience, which constitute the levels of subsistence in the region. By this very token they represent its most original, root conditions of life. The integrity of Walcott's folk-figures is founded on this factor. It is the true basis of their definition as "folk" in Walcott's work - figures representative of the race by virtue of coming from the root, subsistent areas of experience in the region. Walcott's folk-figures, moreover, have unique positions in their settings. They are all outstanding figures in their community in one way or another. In Dauphin, Afa is the fisherman on whom the village depends; Ti-Jean is the legendary hero representing the ideals of a rustic way of life; while the woodcutter of Malcochon bears a special relationship to the community as its most degraded, uncivilized member outcast into the forest.

The pivotal point of the hero's representative role is indicated in Walcott's comments on the significance of the charcoal burner in "Meanings". The charcoal burner, Walcott says, "represented the most isolated, most reduced, race-containing symbol" (page 48). Definitive of the woodcutter/charcoal burner, where the folk-hero attains his fullest properties, Walcott's comment applies generally to their common role. As archetypes of their reduced areas of existence they become the centre of Walcott's moral engagement with the regional experience at its most basic

and unaccommodated levels. In his concretely recreated circumstances, each serves as the medium through which Walcott explores various aspects of the predicament and moral destiny of the West Indian race. There are, for example, Afa's moral resilience in the face of the privations of Dauphin life; Ti-Jean's quest for the 'natural' Caribbean man born out of his own cultural experience; while the charcoal burner, exiled into the darkness of forest, and living in an organic relationship with Nature by virtue of his task, embodies the origins of an indigenous myth.

The concrete and the symbolic thus converge in their position as archetypes, and it is with this vital relationship that Walcott is concerned. The quality of his involvement with the folk-hero, the dramatic style that evolves from it, turns on just this interplay between the realistic and the spiritual. The folk-hero is thus present in his own identity as fisherman or charcoal burner, while serving as the original medium for exploring its symbolic aspects. At this symbolic level, the persona of Walcott as poet is accommodated into his role. The fact of this union is itself crucial - for showing the rootedness of the vision of the poet, and, at the same time, communicating it directly in its regional image. Its aspects as an original union are important. There is no longer the total imposition of a rhetorical visionary on the hero, such as we saw in the early plays. Rather, the moral preoccupation of the poet is anchored in and finds its name in the native visage and circumstances of the folk-hero. There is, however, progression from one play to another in respect of this feature, based on the degree to which the presence of Walcott as poet becomes implicit. The less obtrusive is Walcott's presence, the more authentic is the fusion, and the more fully the folk-hero bodies forth the cultural experience. In _Dauphin_, Afa's renunciation of land and commitment to sea is primarily the expression of Walcott's

own dedication to vision, and the angst of the poet tends to sublimate the regional concern. Ti-Jean is an exceptional case - as an original legendary hero he bodies forth the native experience independently, while the poetic mission fits readily into its mythic pattern. Chantal the wood-cutter is the hero most disengaged from a poetic mission, and the most fully naturalised archetype. In his case the vision is fully articulated in its native terms.

We turn to the individual plays to examine the role of the folk-hero in unfolding the various aspects of Walcott's engagement with the regional experience, and its developing pattern.

The Sea at Dauphin

Dauphin was one of the important plays heralding the birth of a Caribbean drama in the early fifties. It was appropriately dedicated to Errol Hill, the West Indian dramatist and scholar most active in promoting the growth of a regional drama at the time. Along with those of Hill, it was one of the plays which helped to establish the directions in which a regional drama might develop. A successful one-acter, the play was well received and performed throughout the Caribbean. Apart from the Guild's maiden performance earlier mentioned, there was Hill's production in 1954, and the Theatre Workshop made its debut with the play. Dauphin also made history as one of the first plays to represent West Indian drama on an international stage, being performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1960 along with Malcochon.

Walcott dealt in Dauphin with conditions of life basic to the region. The small fishing village, its life dominated by poverty and religion, was a typical setting in earlier times, especially in the smaller islands. Its social conditions were common to the general

suburban scene in the region. Walcott's subject, the tragedy of its fisherfolk, bore obvious resemblances to Synge's Riders to the Sea (Oxford, 1962), and some critics regard the play as too derivative from Synge to be totally effective. The resemblances are in fact superficial. Synge's play obviously directed Walcott's attention to similar aspects of his own landscape, but the spirit and moral awareness of Dauphin are those of Walcott's realistic and readily identifiable regional setting.

Walcott deals with the tragic conditions of life in Dauphin in a compact plot. Afa, the local fisherman, gets ready to set out to sea on a very rough day, ignoring the efforts of his mate and other fishermen of the district to dissuade him. His mates for the day include an old man, Hounakin, whom Afa had previously agreed to give employment in his boat. Hounakin has recently lost his wife and is grief-stricken. Afa and Augustin persuade the old man to stay behind, promising to bring him something from their catch. They return to find that Hounakin has been found dead at the foot of the cliffs. It is the moral position of Afa vis-a-vis these events which constitutes the real action of the play. Afa is the enraged fisherman, railing against the destitute conditions responsible for such tragic experience in the life of Dauphin. In provoking his resistance, they have intensified his determination to pursue the task on which Dauphin depends.

The moral attitudes of Afa are shown to be native to his situation as fisherman, especially in a community virtually dependent on the sea. Much of the effectiveness of the play derives from the characterization of Afa. His rage and determination are strongly motivated by the exigencies of his role as fisherman. The qualities on which his moral position is founded are qualities natural in his circumstances - hardihood, independence, the imposing figure he cuts as breadwinner of

the village. The play opens with Afa showing the sense of responsibility and intolerant attitude typical of the fisherman facing a vital and exacting task. Thus he is extremely irritated at having to wait for the old man. Walcott uses Afa's local idiom, the admixture of French and English patois native to the island (see p.287-8) to capture the raw, earthy spirit of this irritation. Here Afa responds to the pleas of Augustin, his mate, on the old man's behalf:

> Afa: Well, today I feel to say *non*. *Non!* Last night did drunk. Everybody drunk, you ask me when I did drunk. This morning I have sense and so is *non, non!*
> (59-61)

The stoic attitude with which he is to face the sea on a particularly dangerous day is part of the hardihood and resilience which are the norm in the fisherman's way of life. Afa presents an image in the village which has similarly been moulded from features native to his role. The fisherman of a village like Dauphin is an outstanding figure in his community. Afa is a very severe figure in this position. The independence and intolerance, intensified in his case, are in character. Augustin, describing his unpopularity in the village, puts the image in its realistic context. He uses the term "always enrage" to sum up the image. Transposed from the French patois 'enragé ' it conveys the sense of a raw, pathological anger:

> Augustin: Don't have no woman only? You don't have no love, no time . . . that is why Dauphin fraid you, because you always enrage, and nobody will give you help of the hand . . .
>
> (88-92)

Afa's basic attitudes and demeanour are thus those of the native product. They take their heroic proportions in the play from the extreme conditions of life in Dauphin and the extent to which the burden of these conditions devolves upon the fisherman. Walcott's action,

remarkably succinct, is designed to bring out these features. It captures in one spare situation the entire predicament of Dauphin, fixing the involvements which make the fisherman especially sensitive to it. Before the discovery of Hounakin's tragedy, with which it concludes, the greater part of the action consists of the preparation to go to sea. As Afa and the other men who are to make the journey stay put on shore for these preparations, all the essential features of life in Dauphin actively surround and confront the fisherman. It is the configuration of both the physical and social reality of Dauphin. There is the sea, Afa's immediate business, the prime physical reality of Dauphin's setting; with Hounakin's importunity enters the whole character of the land, its means and social condition; the communal atmosphere (it features graphically when the tragedy is discovered) is brought in as the fishermen engage in various exchanges.

Their peculiar aspects, all Afa's concern in this situation, mark the level of life in Dauphin. Dauphin sea, now in one of its roughest spells, is difficult to ply on the calmest of days. Walcott has taken the original Dauphin coastline of his island for his setting.[3] Set on the windward side of the island, it is a rugged and windswept inlet which has spelt disaster to many a fisherman. Retaining this character in the play, it is at best a precarious means of livelihood. The level of need and hardship to which the people of Dauphin are exposed is represented in their dependence on that sea. Characteristically, it is the source both of nourishment and village tragedy, and takes its toll of every one of their most hardy fishermen. As Afa gets ready to sail the Daily Bread - the practice of naming boats in this fashion is common in such villages[4] - he is constantly in mind of the fate of his predecessors. Their fate has become part of the lore of the village, signifying the

tragic necessity which binds it to the sea:

> Afa: Since Bolo drown. Everybody say Boileau would never drown. And Habal, Habal drowning there last year. And in September is not Annelles, Gacia brother they find two mile behind Dennery, . . . and when he finish it was Annelles, drown like what, like Raphael, and Boileau.
>
> (216-23)

These aspects of Dauphin's hardships are represented by the sea which Afa is about to confront. The reduced conditions under which Dauphin actually lives are represented in the figure of Hounakin, who comes to Afa for relief from his predicament. Hounakin is old and decrepit - a dramatic incongruity beside the sea at Dauphin, on which he would like to work with Afa. Destitute and griefstricken by the loss of his wife, Hounakin is the embodiment of the privations of the land. Both the natural and social effects of the Dauphin community are etched in his physiognomy. He becomes an emblem of the total condition. The stage direction presents him as: "an old East Indian, wrapped in almost rags, . . . is barefooted and walks painfully, squinting through narrow gummed eyes set in a face worn and cracked with heat. . . . He is suffering from cataract and a cramp has stiffened one hand." Hounakin is at the extreme end of a poverty common to Dauphin - a community bereft of both social and natural means. Its soil, rugged and parched, does not allow a Hounakin a chance of wresting a living from the land. The destitution has been responsible for the death of his wife, for whom he had been unable to procure medicine. In this tragic loss, agedness and indigence, Hounakin's plight reaches the extremity of the cosmic. The preoccupation with the cosmic reaches of deprivation, typical of Walcott's approach, is introduced, and the argument with fate strongly articulated through Hounakin. But the extremes in Hounakin's plight are not superfluous to

the concern with the local predicament of Dauphin. Walcott's focus is on the starkness of the privations which returns the experience to the nakedness of existence. Hounakin is symbolic of this: his identity as the aged East Indian, evoking suggestions of an aboriginal tenant, intensifies this significance.

In highlighting the destitution of the land, Hounakin's case asserts the necessity of Dauphin's dependence on the sea - which is the pivotal point of the plot. It is the sea, fraught with its own hardships, which must bear the burden of the land, placing the onus on the fishermen of Dauphin. Together then, the sea and the land on either side of Afa who must mediate between them, define the village's reduced pattern of existence - the level of deprivation which exposes them to fatality. Its social character is featured as well, again made concrete in Hounakin's presence. The reek of poverty and distress finding consolation in rum, is, to Afa, repugnant in the old man. The central place of the rumshop in such settings is a characteristic feature throughout the region, and recurs throughout the drama. It is the sole centre of social life in Dauphin, as revealed in the incidental conversation between the fishermen. The other factor which dominates Dauphin's social landscape, religion, enters with the priest when Hounakin's tragedy is discovered. Its impress is never far from the scene. Thus Afa persuades Hounakin to give up the idea of fighting the sea and return to the solaces which the land has to offer: grazing sheep, and the comforts of religion.

The scene which brings these conditions to bear upon the situation of the fisherman is quite workaday. Dauphin is, in fact, Walcott's most naturalistic play. Equally naturally, it shows how the position of the fisherman makes him most sensitive to them. The burden which devolves upon him brings the totality of the plight of Dauphin

under his gaze. It is especially so for the fisherman who takes his responsibility seriously. His own direct experience of the sea makes him more acutely sensitive to these conditions. His penetration into the root crises of Dauphin is thus inevitable. Afa's consciousness takes its proportions in relation to the extremes of Dauphin life. The rage and bitterness which they provoke, partly defensive, are commensurate. It is rendered with a psychological realism well in tune with the concrete situation of the fisherman. His attitude to Hounakin is very effective in this respect. Both the latter and the sea are the bone of contention between him and Augustin. Afa begins with an aggressive, unsympathetic approach towards the old man, which provokes Augustin's reaction against his lack of compassion. He accosts Hounakin for his late arrival, for example, with this cruel allusion to his dead wife: the remark attains its deeper moral resonances while the tone and imagery are those of the fisherman:

> Afa: *Vieux corps*! Sea is waiting for nobody, old not old. You know how many *canot* gone? Sunrise is sun lying down when fisherman late. You know early you go early you come back, and fish must sell quick quick or fish rotten fast, faster than old woman dead.
>
> (166-70)

This is the occasion for a physical confrontation between Afa and Augustin who is outraged at Afa's cruelty. The violence, its spirit and expression, is again strongly localised:

> Augustin: [Rushes at him] Afa, *Sacré Salop*!
>
> Afa: [Facing him] *Vini, vini, 'ti cooyon*! Come!
>
> [They stand facing each other, Augustin with a stone]
>
> (171-3)

Afa's reaction to the sea on a day when even "fish must be hiding" is similarly effective. He intensifies his resolve and

determination against it in constantly harking back to the brave fishermen before him. He swears by their example again and again:

> Afa: . . . You never go down on your two knees and thank the Virgin you never work this sea by Maingot side? Where is Habal, Raphael, Annelles, Boileau? Sun breaking, papa, talk fast. Where Boileau used to pull *canot* with his one hand? . . . The onliest fisherman better than Boileau was Saint Pierre, both of them dead.
>
> (287-94)

The inwardness of his insight into Dauphin's fatality sets the tone of Afa's grievances. It puts him in the position of the arch-sufferer of his community, as he takes on with his role the burden of Dauphin's despair. Reacting "in the authority of despair" original in the experience, Afa sees Dauphin as victim of a curse. His quarrel is with all that negates existence in the region. The exposure to natural hardships, their social privations, their degradation as a race, are all related in the complex of factors which make for Dauphin's benighted plight. Rebuked for his lack of compassion towards Hounakin in the beginning, Afa defends his position. He inveighs against these combined factors. They amount to a final cosmic outrage against which his own representative efforts, like those of Dauphin, are powerless:

> Afa: 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. . . . Every day sweat, sun, and salt, and night is salt and sleep, and all the dead days pack away and stink, is Dauphin life. Not I who make it!
>
> (124-36)

Afa describes a misery reduced to the elemental. Its ravages, moral and visceral, are captured live in the stark, literal images of the actual

experience. This is the crux of his argument with existence. He moves naturally from there to direct blasphemy against the idea of a God, and rejects the concept of a Providence which could allow any one race of men to be so negated as those of Dauphin. In Dauphin, rather, it is the dealings of an actively perverse God that humanity endures:

> Afa: God is a white man. The sky is his blue eye,
> His spit on Dauphin people is the sea.
> Don't ask me why a man must work so hard
> To eat for worm to get more fat. Maybe I bewitch.
>
> (267-70)

This description of Dauphin's fate in terms of racial oppression is felicitous and meaningful. The simile is a strikingly rooted one - making an observation quite typical of a setting like Dauphin, where people are resigned to misery as the necessary lot of black people. At the same time, its moral significance in Afa's interpretation of the destiny of Dauphin is subtle. Racial oppression is a root-factor implicated in the geography as well as the sociology of Dauphin. It has played its part in placing them at the mercy of the elements; it continues to combine with these factors in aggravating their plight. Race is thus the appropriate image of their total condition. There is a forceful dialectic in the bitterly ironic conceit. Historically, the black man's being, his *raison d'être*, has been fixed in terms of the white man's. The concept of God belongs to the white man, on whose side Providence is. Conversely, the black man's disfavour with God is conceived in terms of the white man's oppression and contempt.

Race, then, is a central factor raising far-reaching issues in Afa's concern with the predicament of Dauphin. Afa's protest against the priest, the institution that feeds on Dauphin's poverty, follows the same principles. The presence of the white man's institution is a

further pretext for exploitation. Afa's attack on the priest is concerned with this, but even more with debunking the hoax of this religion, the deception of its effete values. These grievances are involved in what is a quarrel with existence itself. Afa has just returned from sea to hear of Hounakin's death. The young priest is in attendance to offer consolation and spiritual exhortation. To Afa, the very presence of the pale young Frenchman is an insult. In the words of Synge's Maurya about the priest in her own community: "It's little the like of him knows of the sea"; or of the misery of a Hounakin. It is the cue for Afa's outburst when he alludes to the God who could have allayed Hounakin's distress. Afa's blasphemy reaches its climax. There is nothing of the rhetorical or portentous about the response. It attains genuine philosophical force from language and imagery immediate to the experience:

> Afa: 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!
>
> (502-7)

Protesting against these violations, Afa becomes at the same time the severe critic of the villagers' attitudes and values. He expresses his intolerance of their mindless ease and blind acceptance of misery in the same spirit. The role is what alienates him from the village. He mocks, for example, their token lament for the death of Hounakin. They are all, in the native patois, fools and whores:

> Afa: *Sacrés cooyons! Sacrés jamettes saintes!* All you can do is what, sing way! way! Hounakin dead and Bolo dead, is all mouth! mouth!
>
> (507-10)

The awareness of Afa as sufferer of his village has been firmly rooted in his native circumstances. The position encompasses his

messianic role in the predicament of Dauphin, carrying the symbolic resonances that mark this significance. The burden of the folk fisherman evokes the archetypal parallel of the first "fishers of men." The young priest makes an explicit allusion as he tries to appease Afa's rage:

> P. Lavoisier: You fishermen are a hard race. You think we cannot help you? You are wrong. It is a sacred profession, Afa, the first saints followed your profession, Saint Pierre, Saint Jean. They were hard-headed men too . . .
>
> (529-32)

It is at this symbolic level that Walcott's own messianic commitment and persona as poet fuse with that of his folk-hero. This crucial relationship is alluded to in "Twilight" where Walcott, tracing his own moral progress through the drama, makes this implicit identification with his folk-hero: "And the fishermen, those whom Jesus first drew to his net, they were the most blasphemous and bitter."[5] Beginning with this integral blasphemy - and Dauphin, though much more mature, is close to the period of the juvenilia - the fusion becomes more explicit in Afa's resolution and efforts to come to terms with the harsh realities of life in Dauphin.

Afa is resolved to meet the challenge of his particular piece of coast with bravery and determination. This stoic purpose is commensurate with his pessimism. For Afa it signifies individual fulfilment, the assertion of his manhood. It is only as this moral force - his representative position affirms - that Dauphin can realise manhood. He comes to hold this belief by very reason of his experience of deprivation. These meanings are present in Afa's expression of his stoic attitude towards his task:

> Afa: This brave I have it come from many years,
> Many years of sea, many years dolour.

> That crack my face, and make my heart so hard.
> If none going, then I will go alone.
>
> (261-4)

and in his advice to the young lad who wants to pursue the craft of fisherman at the end of the play:

> Afa: . . . Ask him if he remember Habal, and then Bolo. If he say yes, tell him he must brave like Hounakin, from young he is. Brave like Habal to fight sea at Dauphin. This piece of coast is make for men like that.
>
> (545-9)

This is the spirit of the early Walcott, the quality of moral resilience which became concentrated in The Castaway. In Dauphin these resolutions are part of Afa's commitment to his task as fisherman of the village. It is the expression of Walcott's own pledge to find moral realisation for the race in pursuit of his craft. The commitment of the fisherman to his business with the sea is thus congruent with that of the poet towards his craft - the sea being the central dramatic symbol linking Walcott with his hero. There are, however, specific emphases in the significance of the sea for Afa-Walcott which express both the original nature of the fusion and the predominance of Walcott the visionary. Afa sends the old man away with a promise to bring him something of their catch - a promise to go to work for him. This is expressive of Afa's symbolic purpose of bringing life to the land. He returns with one bonito and a shell for the wife's grave. Both the material and the creative, the contribution of the fisherman and poet respectively, are necessary, and united in the sacred purpose of sustaining and affirming life. There is a positive and original convergence of the role of the fisherman with that of the poet at this level.

Afa's individual involvement with the sea, as distinct from this

communal purpose, is an even stronger element in the play; and it is here that Walcott the visionary predominates. Afa has virtually renounced the land to dedicate himself to his business with the sea. He has given up women, denies himself all such comforts to ply his "pasture" as he terms it. He justifies his position with these words:

> Afa: . . . This basin men call sea
> Never get red for men blood it have. My turn is next.
> I cannot sleep on land, like Gacia.
> The land is hard, this Dauphin land have stone
> Where it should have some heart. The sea
> It have compassion in the end.
>
> (272-7)

The statement is morally charged. The sea - the compulsions towards which derive from the deeply intuited sense of history discussed in The Castaway (see pp.54-55) - represents total moral challenge and engagement. In this pure moral exercise, the spiritual reaches and possibilities available through it, Afa looks to find refuge against the cruelties of the land. He cannot like his fellow fisherman Gacia, for whom the sea takes second place, try to assuage them with rum and women. He believes that man finds release from the pressures of the actual, in the end, through the pursuit of the spiritual absolutes and infinite reality of which the sea is symbolic. This is the significance of Afa's line: "The sea it have compassion in the end"; and of the Euripedean epigraph: "The sea doth wash away all human ills". The theme is basic to the whole conception of Dauphin. It is affirmed by the sea versus land antithesis running throughout the play. Thus Hounakin, the personification of the ills of the land, wants to go to sea as much to avoid starvation as to find solace against his wife's death. He leaves with these words as Afa and Augustin send him back home, appealing to him not to "do nothing to [himself]":

Hounakin: Houna will not kill himself. This sea have many navels, many waves, and I did feel to die in Dauphin sea, so I could born. Au'voir cousin . . .

(432-4)

The manner of his death is a fulfilment of this. Hounakin is killed by the land - he has possibly committed suicide or fallen off the cliffs in his distracted state - and taken away by the sea. This is symbolic of a tragic consummation. Hounakin's ills have been washed away by the sea and in this consummation it is the sea that triumphs.

The perspective of Walcott the visionary prevails, being carried by the folk-hero. It is the image of Walcott pledging his craft to the service of his region, and looking to the fulfilment of this pledge in the exercise of pure vision. It bears the residual ambience of the early Walcott, dedicated to facing the moral challenge of his environment, yet unconsciously distancing it as he finds sublimation in the visionary exercise. Although this lends depth to the moral resolution of Afa in the play, the image is more of Walcott the artist than that of the fisherman. If the fusion is not integral at this level, however, Walcott has succeeded in showing how his own artistic predilections originate in the native experience. The directions he takes are informed by his keen responsiveness to this experience. But the integral level of the fusion between the consciousness of Walcott and his hero remains very real in the play, and constitutes the central achievement of Dauphin. It is realised in the strongly dramatised experience of Afa in his environment, the truth of his rage and determination in relation to the concrete experience of the region. It is here that the sensibility and awareness of the poet are at one with that of the folk-figure, showing the sources of Walcott's early despair and outrage in the basic experience of the region. These

removes of the native experience, representative of its condition, show up the background to the angst he defines in "Twilight": "To be born on a small island, a colonial backwater, meant a precocious resignation to fate."[6] As these sentiments become firmly rooted in his piece of coast, they find their local habitation and name in the actual lineaments and features of the setting. The stubborn routine of an existential poverty, acclimatized to frequent death, mitigated by the narcotic comforts of the rumshop and religion, defines its own morale and atmosphere. It makes moral demands in which Walcott shares most urgently: reduced by a complex of natural and social circumstances, nigger must, in the words of Afa, work hard. The moral resources affirmed through Afa, his determination and resilience, take their spirit from the rawness and hardihood of a rooted sensibility.

Finally, the very contrasts between the spirit of Synge's play and Walcott's serve to underscore this local awareness of Dauphin. Riders to the Sea is of course the greater play. The two plays approach their common subject altogether differently. In Synge, the loss of her men folk at sea brings Maurya to a deeper understanding and acceptance of the tragic necessity which invests life with awe and mystery. In Dauphin Afa accepts the necessity of death, but tragic experience such as that of Hounakin serves above all to reveal their plight as the wretched of the earth. It calls for stoic defiance and moral resilience on the part of Afa. There are specific parallels between the two plays which pinpoint the difference in sensibility and perspective. The spirit of Maurya's tragic acceptance is revealed in her reverent concern with the burial of her sons: "if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning . . ., for it's a deep grave we'll make him, by the grace of God" (73-76). There is, on

the other hand, revulsion and horror when the corpses are discovered in Dauphin: "And . . . one afternoon a boy catching crab, walking, see him on sand . . . his body swell, and the boy turn this thing with his foot and when he finish it was Annelles, . . . " (217-23). The contrasts between the positions of the two protagonists are also significant. Maurya is the old who is left to grieve for the young: "in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old." (163-65) In Walcott the old Hounakin is the victim while the "young" survive to continue to fight the sea and bring life. It is expressive of the whole assertive drive in the moral outlook of Dauphin.

Walcott recognised and was positively influenced, however, by one distinctive element in Synge's folk-tragedy: his exploitation of the resources of a rustic idiom for the poetic expression of serious folk experience. The influence starts, in fact, from original affinities: the inherence of these poetic resources in the sensibility of the folk. What Synge did with the Anglo-Irish idiom therefore, Walcott attempts with the native dialect of his own island. He mines its metaphorical and rhythmic patterns to reproduce the poetic content preserved in their characteristic folk-expression. This poetic content is the authentic result of their familiarity with and exposure to root conditions and natural processes. Walcott exploits these elements in the rustic idiom of Afa and Hounakin in an attempt to make it the medium of serious thematic expression. We get an example in this speech of Hounakin's:

> Hounakin: 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 your hand,
>
> (370-4)

The effects of Walcott's experiment are based on the particular resources of the idiom he uses - itself an outstanding feature in Dauphin. It is an admixture of the French patois peculiar to St. Lucia and an English idiom based on it, the latter predominating for purposes of communication. The French patois, which is still the main dialect of the island, survives from the period of French rule (St. Lucia was a French colony for the greater part of the last two centuries, and saw development under the French). The dialect bears very little resemblance to the original French of course, and has developed its own phonetic and grammatical patterns. The idiomatic English spoken in the island has been strongly influenced by these patterns, as reproduced in the play. L.D. Carrington has done a linguistic study of the patois in a doctoral thesis entitled "St. Lucian Creole - a Descriptive Analysis of its Phonology and Morpho-Syntax".[7] Walcott's handling of the medium is effective in the play. In employing it for his serious theme, he manages to preserve most of its essential features, while making a remote insular form quite viable as a means of communication. His treatment is geared towards meeting this requirement while retaining its tone and spirit. The syntactical patterns of the English idiom, as already noticed, are those of the French patois, carrying the effects of its inflection and accent; there are also the basic dialect features of a syncopated grammar, such as the dropping of auxiliaries, contracted declensions and simplified tenses. Patois words occur in the English passages, usually nouns, wherever the meaning is recognisable in the context. Most of these features are present in a typical passage like the following:

> Afa: Bien! So is for that you doing you don't know what season sea have now, as if is not September pass that Bolo drown, there self, so close you can hear scissor bird cutting the wind, you can hear gaulin feather fall on rock. Forty years, *quarante*, I work this

water, and this is one bitch wind on Dauphin side today!

(66-70)

The passage also illustrates how lyrical strains are made to fit in with the rhythms and dialect, here far more effectively than in Ione, because the expression is pared of all rhetorical elements. One or two exchanges are rendered in the French patois. Its incidence in the play is generally effective. While the English idiom is used for expository and reflective purposes, the French patois occurs in purely emotive and non-verbal situations. The classic example is the physical confrontation between Afa and Augustin earlier cited, where they resort naturally to their patois expletives:

Augustin [Rushes at him]: Afa, *Sacré salop!*

Afa [Facing him] : *Vini, vini, 'ti cooyon!* Come!

(171-3)

The physical context is self-expressive, the dialect serving mainly to distil the peculiar temper of the violence. The dramatic power of the folk dirge "La Mer Pwend Bolo" is likewise emotive, and its local atmosphere and sentiments are singularly preserved in the original patois, an English gloss being provided.

Walcott shows resourcefulness and imagination in this handling of the dialect, and it is one of the main factors contributing to the atmosphere and sensibility of a localised action. However, while the usage marks a major advance from the Elizabethan and classical diction of the plays in chapter five, the patois-based idiom retains limitations. Anomalous, and restricted to a couple of islands in the region, it is not a viable medium for wider communication. Dauphin is the only play where Walcott attempts it extensively. By Ti-Jean Walcott is exploiting the

broad bases of the English dialect common to the region, especially forms native to Trinidad. Within the context of Dauphin, the patois-based idiom is successfully exploited, and is an important index of his achievement in a regional play.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers

Ti-Jean and His Brothers, though it does not approach the artistic maturity of Dream, is Walcott's next greatest theatrical success, and perhaps more popular than the latter. According to Walcott its first performance was that of the Little Carib Theatre in 1958 (the first amateur production being that of the Guild). The play has been widely performed by the Workshop throughout the Caribbean, and won distinction as the first non-Shakespearean play to take part in the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1972. It received sixteen performances at Delacorte and in the five boroughs of New York during the Festival. In the Caribbean the play was even more popular than Dream but the New York reviewers were not, on the whole, impressed. The reasons for this will emerge later in our consideration of the play.

The play is a fable based on a creole legend of his native island, St. Lucia. Written as early as 1957, it was one of those spontaneous things in which he struck gold from the start. Walcott claims to have written the play in five days during his first visit to New York, keeping within doors from fear of the city.[8] He was at the time waiting for his divorce from Faye Moyston to come through. The very spontaneity of the play was probably responsible for its success. Errol Hill considers it, because the freest of influences, Walcott's best play.[9] Walcott has revised the play three times for the final version appearing in the Dream collection. But all the essential features of the 1957 version, apart

from the introduction of songs and greater stylisation, remain the same.

Walcott recreates the comic folk fable in a stylised play with music. Ti-Jean and his two older brothers, Gros and Mi-Jean have been challenged to a contest with the Devil. Whoever succeeds in making the Devil angry will be rewarded with half his possessions; he will be eaten by the Devil if the latter succeeds in angering him. The three brothers set out in turn to engage in this contest. Gros Jean, who relies on physical strength, the power of his "iron arm", is soon eaten. Mi-Jean, confident of his sense, the power of intellect, is similarly shortlived. Ti-Jean, who sets out without any particular weapons, succeeds in defeating the devil by following his natural instincts. This - and Walcott follows the original tale closely - is one of the many conquests of the legendary Ti-Jean, the most popular hero of creole lore in the island. In the tales, Ti-Jean wins his victories through a resourceful use of wit and cunning. He appears as something of the wily trickster outsmarting the devil. This is expressive both of the farcical sense of the folk, and, as with the Jamaican Anancy figure, the trickster element native to the creole slave psyche. More importantly, Ti-Jean is the hero who, by virtue of his constant triumphs over the devil, succeeds in bringing the good life to his people. He has been rewarded for this by being raised to his preeminent position in the moon, where he continues to serve as their guiding light. According to legend, the shadowy patch in the moon describes the figure of Ti-Jean carrying his bundle of sticks. The image is alluded to in the Frog's epilogue in the play:

> Frog: And so it was that Ti-Jean, a fool like all heroes, passed through the tangled opinions of this life, loosening the rotting faggots of knowledge from old men to bear them safely on his shoulder, brother met

> brother on his way, that God made him the clarity
> of the moon to lighten the doubt of all travellers
> through the shadowy wood of life.
>
> (iii.582-8)

Before turning to Walcott's treatment, it is necessary to discuss the origins of the Ti-Jean legend, and to consider its significance as a mythic expression of creole experience in its locality. As Walcott states in an interview,[10] the Ti-Jean legend also appears in Louisiana and Canada, which are areas, like St. Lucia, with a background of creole French culture. Basic features in the St. Lucian variant reflect this French origin. The devil figure with whom Ti-Jean invariably has his trysts is identified, in the native French patois, as "Lou-wah". The term is obviously a corruption of the original French "Le Roi". In French culture where the legend originated, Ti-Jean must have been a folk-creation holding a similar position in the experience of the peasant. The identity of the devil as Le Roi is of crucial significance. It is expressive of the universal psyche of myth - man creating his myths out of his cultural experience, and interpreting the archetypal in terms of his sociological experience. Le Roi, in feudal society, was the figure of authority who embodied superior force; his worldly prosperity meant their own poverty. "Le Roi" was thus a pivotal figure around whom their earthly misfortunes revolved. The rest follows the psyche of legend. Evil is most manifest in what constitutes man's immediate earthly trials. The latter becomes the original symbol of his experience of all that is stronger and hostile in reality. The Devil thus comes to wear the features of Le Roi in the French legend.

In the creolisation of the legend in slave society, the significance of Le Roi converged authentically with that of the white planter. In the context of slavery, the white planter embodied their social crisis

all the more definitively; their relationship with him was what ruled their existence. The creolisation also involved the reinforcement and modification of the legend by several Neo-African elements. It became absorbed into a stronger sense of the primitive and the reality of the Devil peculiar to the creole African descendants. Several African-derived elements were built into it and altered its atmosphere. The Devil, Louwah, was also "Papa Bois". The latter is the offspring of an African devil figure, and survives in carnival masquerades in most of the islands. (A picture of Papa Bois as masquerade figure appears in Errol Hill's book, The Trinidad Carnival).[11] Papa Bois wears primitive, monstrous looking features, and was originally a personification of dark evil forces whose abode was the forest - the Old Man of the Woods aspect of Walcott's Devil. He also appeared in another guise - a similar primitive masquerade figure known as Papa D'Jab. In an article entitled "The White Devil", Walcott recalls the rites associated with Papa D'Jab in St. Lucian masquerades and their preservation of these dark, primitive elements: "It reminded us of barbarism, of fetish and dark ceremonies, and it was disturbing in the season of goodwill, that it should harrow us with the thought of hell and black-magic. . . ."[12] It is from this masquerade, incidentally, that Walcott gets the refrain which is sung at the Devil's victory over the brothers: "Bai Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille,/Un, deux, trois ti mamaille!"

Creolised in these ways, the legend of Ti-Jean bore its integral relationship to the cultural experience of the early folk - contained in the associations between Le Roi-Planter-Devil we have attempted to define. Built on the French base, it centralised a social experience common to the creole slaves of the entire region; and, as such, it was a myth relevant to the whole region in its essentials. As a mythic

interpretation of reality in terms of their immediate social and natural environment, the Ti-Jean group of legends was probably one of the most fundamental to survive in the region. The threefold pattern of the particular tale on which the play is based represents the quest of the folk to come to terms with their world. Like all quests, its profound spiritual intention approaches the universal through the particulars of this world. Walcott's play is based on these very principles. It aims at a spiritual definition that centres on and bears a similar relationship to the cultural situation of the region. It is, in fact, the inherence of the native experience in the features of Ti-Jean as a historical archetype on which this is based. This is Walcott's fundamental point of departure, as will emerge in our discussion of the play.

The threefold pattern of the comic fable thus provides the framework for a quest which is specifically that of Caribbean man, Ti-Jean's two brothers being stages of his "progress". Ti-Jean's main trials are those of the cultural crisis peculiar to the environment; they are to be undergone, at the same time, in terms of his universal weaknesses as man. The Arch-Evil which he confronts in the forest bears the same relationship to "Lou-wah" as in the folk-tale. It shows its earthly face in the features of the planter, the embodiment of the surviving issues of race and oppression. But as in the tale, while it symbolises his greatest challenge, it embraces all the other stronger forces to which he is susceptible as universal man. He is subjected to temptations of lust and intellect designed to test his total manhood; and it is in the measure that he is able to cope with these that he is able to deal with the major cultural issues in dispossessing the planter.

The relationship between the cultural and the archetypal unfolds in the relationships between the stages of the quest. It is

signified in the nature of Ti-Jean's eventual success versus the failure of his brothers in handling the trials which the Devil imposes: the tying of the lecherous goat, and the labours in the fields. From reliance on brute force, to reliance on "sense", to the resourcefulness of the man of instinct, the three brothers advance towards greater challenges. In the course of this advance the cultural issue is dwelt on exclusively at certain points. The Gros Jean episode, for example, is relegated to the labours in the fields; while Mi-Jean's special trial is that of chasing the lustful goat, the labours in the field are also realistically focussed in his case. Ti-Jean, of course, also faces both these trials; but Ti-Jean's Devil is a more complex combination of the natural and the supernatural, as we shall see later. For Gros Jean, and to a lesser extent, Mi-Jean, the challenge is most confined to the earthly and material. The socio-political crisis is thus concretely isolated and fully treated in the cases of these two brothers. We will deal with their experiences first, in examining the significance of this crisis in the total scheme of the fable.

Although reviewers have found the play pedantic and heavy-going, a great deal of the strength of Ti-Jean derives from the lightness of touch with which it is handled. Walcott keeps close to the modes of comic fantasy in the original tale for a strong serio-comic style. This is skilfully controlled in the presentation of the encounter between Gros Jean and the Devil. The presentation is one-dimensional; Gros Jean and the Devil confront each other strictly in terms of the realistic social issue, as the native labourer and the planter. As the labourer confident of his brute strength, Gros Jean is an immediately recognisable prototype. The rustic fool of the fable has been approximated to his contemporary counterpart and given common features of the West Indian personality, his

style and particular brand of humour. The native planter also answers to his type. The forceful dramatisation of these recognisable types makes for an effective communication of the social theme.

Gros Jean's iron arm has been almost strained after an incredible amount of field labour but he vaunts his sheer doggedness in coping with it:

> Gros Jean: You think I stupid? I strong, I have some sense and my name not Gros Jean for nothing. That was two days ago. Well, Jesus, a man ain't rest since then! The first job I had, I had was to stand up in a sugar-cane field and count all the leaves of the cane. That take me up till four o'clock. I count all the leaves and then divide by the number of stalks. . . .
>
> (i.130-6)

The Devil-Planter enters for the scene which is to test this doggedness to explosion point. It is one of the most concretely dramatised scenes in the play, and recreates the relationship between planter and labourer faithfully. The planter is the materialistic white boss ready to exploit his work-happy nigger to death. Gros Jean is the willing menial, falling back on the stereotype attitudes of the easy-going, goodnatured negro in order to keep up his end of the bargain. He affects a casual bravado and bonhomie with the boss, both strongly captured aspects of the West Indian 'style' in this kind of situation:

> Gros Jean: Boss [smiling] you really impatianate, yes. Ha-ha! I mean I don't follow you, chief. After I count and carry all the cane leaves for you, ain't I, and look - when the wind blow them wrong side I ain't say nothing, and I'm smiling ain't I? [Relaxes his expression, then resumes]
>
> (i.198-202)

Walcott exaggerates the stereotype relationship for rich comic effects. Gros Jean's servility is exploited for sheer burlesque as he continues to

switch on and off his mechanical grin. The tension mounts in this comic spirit as the planter, true to his contemptuous and patronising attitudes, wears Gros Jean's patience down by addressing him by a variety of names. Gros Jean's iron arm is not proof against this 'mental' strategy and he finally explodes in anger.

The confrontation is sustained on this realistic plane, and the larger moral significances of Gros Jean's trial do not obtrude but are deftly suggested. The context of racial and economic oppression immediately introduced embraces the total cultural predicament; the vital issues of liberation and progress. Deft allusions and references to Gros Jean's iron-arm policy are worked in to suggest this wider frame of reference. Gros Jean's is thus the material approach of the economist: "I count all the leaves and then divide by the number of stalks" (i.135-6). The Devil refers to him later as a "sort of politician". Gros Jean's iron arm policy represents the approach of the politician-economist towards the cultural situation, and his case is finally a comment on the inadequacy of the material vision of progress. This level of concern is reflected here and there in the exchanges between the Devil and Gros Jean. The former admits to the insecurity which makes it important for him to continue amassing wealth: "Other people want what I have. . ." (i.176). It is one aspect of the limitation of the materialistic approach, reflecting on Gros Jean's case as well. Gros Jean finally gives up with a gesture of exasperation, which is the frustration of the politician-economist at his failure to achieve the cultural milennium. He gives up the whole "damn country": "Jesus Christ, what this damn country coming to . . . " (i.222-3). Walcott developed the theme again in "Guyana 1" (see pp.136-7), the pitfalls of this one-dimensional vision of progress. Here too it is the denial of the faculty of mind, moral perspective, which is the final

travesty. The man who puts all his trust in the iron arm, sees only in terms of power and force, inevitably suppresses this faculty. Thus Gros Jean remains mentally enslaved, continuing to accept his subservient position in his dealings with the planter. He never entertains any serious thought of questioning the position, and is mainly concerned to measure up to its demands. Walcott stresses this in making "mindlessness" the keynote of the dramatisation of Gros Jean. The Jamaican poet Mervyn Morris, commenting on a Jamaican production of the play, was struck by the expression of this feature on stage: Gros Jean's frustration at his inability to use his "sense" to cope with the Devil's taunts found physical expression.[13]

Walcott is preoccupied with an equally important aspect of the cultural issue in the case of Mi-Jean. If the material approach has these shortcomings, the attitude of wise passiveness which refuses to come to terms with it is just as limited. Mi-Jean's policy of "silence and a smile" represents this attitude. His total dependence on sense-intellect signifies the denial of susceptibility to the actual, to flesh. His trials are thus more generic and morally complex than those of Gros Jean, but Walcott dwells intently on the implications of this for the cultural issue. Again the farcical mode of the fable is preserved, and the portrait of Mi-Jean as the man of intellect is done in comic-strip sketch. He is the fisherman with the net, bespectacled, constantly perusing a book he cannot quite fathom. He is drawn to the model of an original species in the native setting - the village 'philosophe' or 'bush-lawyer' who thrives on argument and dialectic. One critic dismissed him as a pseudo-intellectual.[14] This is exactly Walcott's point, on a very fundamental level. Mi-Jean's abstract notion of "sense" is altogether wide of the mark. He does not see that the function of "sense" lies in a natural

interaction between man's instinctual needs and his powers of thinking. His "sense" is a mere mockery of the real thing, and the intellectual parody with which he is presented emphasizes his uninformed pretensions to make the point. Thus we get Mi-Jean's comic bewilderment in checking up on the devil's cow-foot "in the section call religion, and tropical superstition":

> Mi-Jean: This book is Latin mainly.
> It have *bos*, meaning cow,
> and *pes*, meaning foot,
> Boss' foot, *bospes*, cow-heel perhaps,
> It have plenty recipe
> But it don't give the source! [Sighs loudly] So!
> Yes, apart from wisdom, I have no vices.
>
> (ii.82-88)

Plunged into the abstract, Mi-Jean finds the lecherous goat completely outside his control. Attempting to insulate himself against, and suppress the bestial in him, it is this trial which finally undoes him. His is the dilemma of the man who attempts to isolate himself in mind, and thinking himself above the weaknesses of flesh, comes up short when they overtake him. Flesh, man's condition as matter, enters into an insoluble union with Spirit in the bond of Desire - and as such is the source of a natural frailty and susceptibility to Evil. This was the central theme in Harry Dernier: "Our sin is flesh". There is no true wisdom without this awareness and man leaves himself defenceless against the inroads of the trials of his world by trying to insulate himself against them. The social crises which overtake Mi-Jean are among the most pressing actual conditions he must experience, and a necessity which bears this moral challenge. He proves as servile and open to persecution as Gros Jean. If the Gros Jean position is retrogressive from the start, that of Mi-Jean is totally self-defeating. His own "Song of Silence" reflects ironically on the shortcomings of his position vis-a-vis the

cultural issue:

> Mi-Jean: The third set of instruction
> This self-said book declares
> Is that the wise man's function
> Is how to shut his ears
> Against riot and ruction
> That try to climb upstairs.
>
> (ii.137-42)

Yet Mi-Jean's position of 'wise-passiveness' represents a true stage in the development of the psyche of the black man emerging from a history of inferiority and self-repudiation. It is the critical stage of intellectual detachment and circumspection towards the political and economic struggles that surround him - a tendency to which many of our intellectuals, especially in the earlier phases of revolutionary strife, have yielded. Mi-Jean's case puts this in its psychological context. Once the black man, historically conditioned, is past the Gros Jean stage of measuring his worth strictly in terms of physical prowess, he gets caught up in the discovery of his intellectual capacity. In the earlier stage this was regarded as the prerogative and monopoly of the white man. Not only does he become fascinated with himself in that role, but he begins to slight and withhold the whole realm of the "physical" as immaterial. This is a kind of compensation. It also harbours the unconscious motive to be his master's peer. The Devil-Planter sums up the complex after the intellectual duel between himself and Mi-Jean:

> Planter: [Embracing him] Descendant of the ape, how eloquent you have become! How assured in logic! How marvellous in invention! And yet, poor shaving monkey, the animal in you is still in evidence, that goat . . .
>
> (ii.258-261)

Mi-Jean's obsessive reliance on "sense" reflects this deep-seated complex. His case affirms the necessity of coming to terms with

"riot and ruction" and shows up the paralysis of his would-be stoic policy of silence. Walcott may well be taking a self-critical look back at his own predilections, implicit in his position in Dauphin - his predilections to turn his back on "land" in pursuit of "sea".

The cultural concern thus takes a prominent place in the Gros and Mi-Jean phases of the quest. Its full significance in the total scheme emerges in the Ti-Jean phase of the journey. In triumphing over all the trials set by the Devil, Ti-Jean defines the moral resources through which the ideal can be achieved. Ti-Jean stands for the whole man, in whom is combined both of the unnaturally isolated aspects of Gros and Mi-Jean - flesh and mind. Their combined trials are intensified in his case. The moral resources through which he overcomes the uncontrollable goat are the same which prompt his revolutionary action against the planter. This brings out the true relationship between the two, the archetypal and the cultural, in the vision of the play.

The allegorical meaning of Ti-Jean's duel with the Devil is distanced, as with the two older brothers, by fantasy and comedy. Ti-Jean lives up to his image in the tales. He is the cunning rascal who steals a march on the Devil. Here he achieves his victories with forwardness and daring. Before the Old Man of the Woods has changed his mask for that of the planter, Ti-Jean makes a bold move to find out if he is the Devil. He lifts up the hem of his skirt in search of the cloven hoof, earning this reproof:

> Old Man: What did you hope to find, but an old man's weary feet?
> You're a forward little fool!. . .
>
> (iii.156-7)

He handles the Devil's orders with the same daring: he castrates the wild goat in order to keep it from running wild and avoid chasing it all night;

he burns down the Devil's canefields and property to spare himself a herculean labour beyond his physical capacity. Ti-Jean's methods have been criticised as entertaining but facile, and accordingly inadequate for his victory over the Devil-Planter. But, within the fabular modes of the play, they do have integrity and moral cohesion. Moreover, the very quality of naivete is an integral part of these principles. As in the tale, Ti-Jean is the young greenhorn of the family who sets out without any preconceived ideas about how to beat the Devil. He has only the instinctual knowledge that the enemy is strong. From the start, the naturalness of the instincts which are to guide him are signified in the bond between himself and his mother, symbolic of his bond with Mother Earth. This harmony is later expressed in his good faith with the creatures of the forest, the frog, cricket, and bird. Significantly, he is first tried by the fundamental frailty which covers all his weaknesses as man - the license of lust, symbolised by the goat. Instinct is the guiding principle behind his comic exploits with the frisky goat. Manipulated by the Devil, the wild goat refuses to stay put, and Ti-Jean is not at all in control of the situation, as his brothers thought they were to begin with. The devil exults gleefully and is confident that the young fool will not last long. Thus:

> Ti-Jean: Where the hell is this goat?
>
> Old Man: Over there by the . . . wait.
> The fool has run off.
> He won't last very long.
>
> [Exit Ti-Jean. The Old Man sits down, rocking back and forth with laughter. Ti-Jean runs back].
>
> (iii.225-8)

Ti-Jean confesses to bewilderment and frustration:

> Ti-Jean: I tied the damn thing up.
> Something is wrong here.
> I tied the thing up properly.
>
> (iii.235-7)

Yielding to the dilemma in this way, Ti-Jean is in fact expressing his natural susceptibility to these weaknesses. The reaction contrasts with that of his brothers. Their policies were designed to refute these susceptibilities; their confidence made them oblivious of the dangers. Ti-Jean's experience is the discovery and recognition of these weaknesses, as a result of which he can size up the situation and take action.

> Ti-Jean: I tied the damn thing.
> Then made it a eunuch.
>
> (iii.243-4)

This signifies the conquest of lust, the archetypal root of all earthly error; and as such,a perennial reality immediate in his own world. The standards he has set in contending with this problem are those with which he will meet each individual crisis of his world. The trials of the goat thus stand logically ahead of his social problems.

It is important to appreciate the integrity of Ti-Jean's virtues as the man of instinct. Walcott posits in him the ideals of "manwit" or "conscience". Walcott's man of instinct is far removed from the concept of the noble savage. Characteristically, though he is too discursive at certain points, the thought is profound and subtly developed in the allegory. To find oneself through instinct is to be in harmony with one's natural, earthly element, sensitive to its genial and hostile influences. While the journey into the forest is to be developed later - the period in which Dream and The Gulf are parallel - and approached from the aboriginal angle, Walcott has already met in the Ti-Jean myth the obverse of its initial terror: an organic harmony with the elemental. This is what Ti-Jean's instinctual strength signifies. It is poetically expressed in Ti-Jean's relationship to the creatures of the forest. Ti-Jean's kindness to the creatures of the forest and their protectiveness towards him are together symbolic of his kinship with them. This is, in turn, a sign of his harmony with the natural world.

The idea is similarly portrayed in the folk fable. It was an awareness which grew out of the early folk's close experience of Nature, and an original expression of folk-wisdom. Walcott's reproduction of this early idea is a crucial aspect of the relevance of the legend to his definitions in the play. The concept of regional beginnings and closeness to the primal, fundamental to his vision, is authenticated in this correspondence with the creole fable. Walcott's allegory draws full metaphysical significance out of native folk wisdom. The harmony with the external world is organically linked with man's internal harmony with his natural condition - his innate sensible-ness to both the material and the non-material which comprise this condition. This is the state of wholeness through which he finds his own reality within the balance of these forces - his arrival at the "conscience" of himself. "Conscience" or "manwit", is, by virtue of this very wholeness and balance, his natural element. The truth is dialectically stated in the contrast between the ideal Ti-Jean and the limitations of his two brothers. Gros Jean is "un-natural" because he has suppressed that element of man's sensibility which responds to the spiritual; Mi-Jean equally un-natural in trying to abnegate the material world through mind. This moral dialectic is not overstressed; it is very much present in the classic simplicity of the fable. The Mi-Jean position probably had personal significance for Walcott at the time - the man of intellect who sensed his own guilt and responsibility as he faced the breakdown of his first marriage. The latter must have been one of the original impulses behind the writing of <u>Ti-Jean</u> and significantly Walcott dedicated the play to the son of that first marriage, Peter Walcott.

It is within this context that the final action which brings Ti-Jean success must be interpreted. The resources of manwit were responsible for his triumph over the trials of the goat; the same qualities prompt his revolutionary action against the planter. The full significance of the cultural issue emerges here. Several of the New York reviewers thought Ti-Jean's action rather inadequate as a revolutionary programme. One reviewer dubbed the devil "debilitated debbil" and commented thus: "but as the white oppressor he seems so simple-minded and overthrowable that he makes revolution look ridiculously easy, and centuries of subjugation seem stupidly self-inflicted."[15] But Ti-Jean's resources unfold through a fabular rationale to which this kind of criticism does not strictly apply. Oppression - surviving from its position in the creole myth - still poses the greatest worldly challenge for Ti-Jean as a modern Caribbean quest-figure. It is the ultimate feature through which Evil manifests itself in his setting, threatening defeat and denial of his manhood. Thus crucial in itself, it is also a paradigm of all the stronger forces against which he must find himself - at once particular and archetypal. Ti-Jean's victory is thus a self-emancipation in which both dimensions are integral. Walcott presents the revolutionary episode to convey these dual levels. It is a powerfully lyrical presentation, at once particularised and evocative of the archetypal:

> Ti-Jean: [Cups his hands]
> Hey all you niggers sweating there in the canes!
> Hey all you people working hard in the fields!
>
> Voices: [Far off]
> 'Ayti?[16] What happen? What you calling us for?
>
> Ti-Jean: You are poor damned souls working for the Devil?
>
> (iii.285-8)

The burning of the canes is celebrated in the same vein:

[Drums. Cries. Caneburners' chorus]

Ti-Jean: The man say Burn, burn, burn de cane!

Chorus: Burn, burn, burn de cane!

Ti-Jean: You tired work for de man in vain!

Chorus: Burn, burn, burn de cane!

(iii.294-7)

It is one of the most skilful pieces of stylisation in the play. This kind of stylisation is a major strength of the play. Here Walcott uses popular work-song rhythms for the choral presentation of climactic action, orchestrating the realistic and symbolic with an artistry that looks forward to Dream. The Voices of the labourers in the canes serve the conventional device of presenting action off-stage, while their distant effects convey the impression of an unearthly dimension. The allusion to poor damned souls, coupled with the associations of burning, conjure up the image of a local inferno in action. "Burn de cane" is a song of rebellion reminiscent of Boukman and the first Haitian uprisings. The choral presentation imbues the native calypso rhythms with spiritual resonances.

Walcott's own comments best define the interaction of these dual levels of the cultural crisis in Ti-Jean's symbolic quest. Introducing the play in a performance programme, Walcott writes: "Our culture needs both preservation and resurgence; our crises need an epiphany, a spiritual definition, and an art can emerge from our poverty, creating its own elation."[17] The cultural crisis attains this spiritual definition in the re-enaction of Ti-Jean's mythic quest. It attains an epiphany which succeeds in revealing the profoundly moral purpose that informs our most "public", collective needs.

Ti-Jean's role as spiritual quester involves the ultimate mission of winning life for his people, a role which embraces Walcott's own messianic purpose as poet. This regenerative aspect is emblematised in his deliverance of the Bolom, the foetus strangled at birth who is eager to be born. Walcott gets the figure from local superstition in the island: the Bolom was regarded as a sort of child-devil, a maleficent imp who wailed at night whenever the local _diablesses_ of the district had business with the Devil. It was probably a creolised feature surviving from supernatural associations attached to the child in African lore. His condition as foetus in the play is symbolic of the unborn, strangled Caribbean man. This idea of Caribbean man as a strangeling awaiting a new genesis is central to Walcott's vision, and is a major theme in _The Castaway_. Here, the Ti-Jean ideal suggests the moral possibilities which can bring about this new birth. Ti-Jean's rescue of the Bolom signifies this: "Manwit", originating from what Walcott calls a "radical innocence" is part of the potential of Caribbean man for self-realisation; potential in his emergence from beginnings. This level of moral definition is all of a piece, but its expression in the play is somewhat clumsy. At such points of epiphany, the metaphysical voice of Walcott the poet obtrudes, and leaves jarring effects in the mouths of his rustic characters. Thus, as the Bolom argues with the Devil for life, it is a philosophical disquisition on the paradox of the joy of "suffering" life:

> Devil: Be grateful, you would have amounted to nothing,
> child, a man. You would have suffered and
> returned to dirt.
>
> Bolom: No, I would have known life, rain on my skin,
> sunlight on my forehead. Master, you have lost.
> Pay him! Reward him!
>
> (iii.486-90)

- and a little more unhappily as Walcott tries to "West Indian-ise" its tone:

> Bolom: Ask him for my life!
> O God, I want all this
> To happen to me!
>
> (iii.539-41)

Such awkward overtures, obtruding every now and again, mar an otherwise perfectly sustained balance between comic fantasy and serious meaning. It is what earned him this kind of criticism from metropolitan reviewers: "For all its flickering appeal, "Ti-Jean" is at bottom an annoyingly pedantic and pretentious bit of theatre."[18] The criticism is harsh but there are quite a few such pieces of catechism, even more rife in the first version, which merit this kind of stricture. It is, in fact, Walcott the poet expanding his theme to indulge his own visionary speculations.

Ti-Jean's triumph must involve a coming to terms with death, the ultimate evil and cause of existential despair. Walcott's metaphysical preoccupations with the theme enter at this point. Ti-Jean sees his mother transfigured in death, a realm in which the Devil himself has no power. This is the symbolic expression of the theme explored in the title-poem of The Gulf. The acceptance of the natural rhythm of things brings a true wisdom towards the burden of finitude: ". . . those we love are objects we return." (The germ of this theme was already present in the early version of the play, but Walcott has intensified it in the later version written after The Gulf). This is the occasion for a great deal of philosophising on the part of the Devil and Ti-Jean. However, although artistically inept, it is important for showing the basic rapport between the wisdom of the folk - in the tale Ti-Jean's mother dies despite his victory - and Walcott's visionary interpretation

of it. The awareness which has become so "epiphanised" in the play is a strongly rooted one. It shows how instinctively the truly rooted consciousness of the artist reaches back into the experience of its folk to recreate it.

An American reviewer, commenting on this feature, responded to what are the essential merits of the play: "But the virtues of folk-art are important. . . . This is where the play strikes another cord that resounds in Shakespeare. The elements he added, the subtleties, the complexities, the soaring language lifted them to another realm, but the other was always there. Popular theatre sets up the heroes and villains in clear terms; its theatricality always has a direct appeal to the senses. This is why it has endured and why people identify so strongly with it."[19] These popular features, as we have seen, are an integral part of the comic folk-form. They are the source of its theatrical power, and at the same time, effective in conveying the spirit and moral atmosphere of the play. The intellectual profundities, though important, are less immediate, and it is through these features that Ti-Jean communicates most strongly. The use of calypso and folk-spiritual forms; native masquerade elements for the presentation of the Devil and his dealings with the mortals; the West Indian style of humour in the portraits of the three brothers - these make the strongest impact in the play. The stylised treatment of most of these popular elements is highly sophisticated. They are ritualised to fit in with the allegorical framework. The Papa D'Jab masquerade described in "The White Devil" provides the model for the primitive encounter with Evil, while calypso and folk-spiritual are adapted as choric recitative interpreting the moral action.

The treatment makes for a subtle achievement and a pattern fundamental to Walcott's development of a native style. It plumbs the

deeper origins of these popular modes in the folk-experience. At the same time, it exploits the original cathartic value of the comedy in folk expression - its distancing of serious and awesome experience. Both these principles are at work in his treatment of the Papa D'Jab cult. The Old Man of the forest changes into a Devil's mask which has the same primitive features as the masquerade figure, and devours his victims to the refrain cited in "The White Devil". It is chanted by the chorus of devils:

> Devil's Voices Off: Bai Diable-lá manger un'ti mamaille,
> Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!
> Bai Diable-lá manger un 'ti mamaille,
> Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille.
>
> (iii.1-4)

Adapted into the moral design of the fable, the ritualistic beginnings of the cult are revived; and Papa D'Jab, debased nowadays to a bit of carnival decor, strikes responsive chords in a West Indian audience. These reverberations coexist with the comic and festive spirit of carnival, which remains immediate in the presentation. The eating of Gros and Mi-Jean illustrates the distancing effects of the comedy: the picture of the Devil licking Gros Jean's bones, surrounded by the explosion of smoke, is sheer burlesque, and the spirit of entertainment prevails.

The choric use of calypso and folk-spiritual reveals equally strongly how native strengths of the popular form are exploited to minister to Walcott's classic design. Ti-Jean sets out with a folk-spiritual whose burden is prophetic of the nature of his contest with the Devil:

> Ti-Jean: I go bring down, bring down Goliath,
> Bring down below.
> Bring down, bring down Goliath,
> Bring down below.
>
> (iii. 68-71)

The analogy codifies the significance of the "littleness" and wit of Ti-Jean, and communicates its meaning more directly than the allegorical argument, especially to a West Indian audience. The "choric" potential of all such folk songs derives from the fact that they are a repository of the moral psyche of the folk, dramatised in their native style of wit: here, the element of parody and mock-heroic attitude are native West Indian traits. Walcott's choric approach engages these features: the moral sense recorded in the parody, the cathartic effects of the parody in distancing the burden. Mi-Jean's "Song of Silence" thus renders a serious reflection in mock-heroic vein and rhetorical pun, typical of the calypso:

> Mi-Jean: In Chapter Five from para-
> Graph three, page 79,
> This book opines how Socra-
> Tes would have been better blind.
> God gave him eyes like all of we,
> But he, he had to look.
> The next thing, friends, was jail, *oui*!
> Hemlock and him lock up!
>
> (ii.128-35)

Most of the human comedy in Ti-Jean is in this "calypso" vein, and bears similar serio-comic purposes. An outstanding example is Walcott's characterisation of the Devil. The Devil takes on a human aspect as a self-dramatising rogue, bewailing his past heroic status in mocking tones. The portrait is, however, consistent with Walcott's moral objectives in the fable: it represents the humanisation of Evil whose West Indian features are identifiable in the rum-swilling, colourful degenerate he has become. (This looks forward to the rum-beast-evil motif of Malcochon). The effects are also reminiscent of the "hall-porter" in Macbeth - the style of the Shakespearean rogue and the West Indian are not in fact far removed from each other. The Devil's self-parody is akin to that of the three brothers:

Devil: [Sings]
Leaning, leaning,
Leaning on the everlasting arms . . .

To hell with dependence and the second-lieutenancy! I had a host of burnished helmets once, and a forest of soldiery waited on my cough, on my very belch. Firefly, firefly, you have a bit of hell behind you, so light me home.

(iii.347-52)

It is, finally, through the serio-comic properties of these popular modes that Ti-Jean communicates most powerfully. In the programme earlier cited, Walcott comments on the significance of the popular experience which he recaptures through his folk figures: ". . . Our resilience is our tragic joy, in the catharsis of folk-humour, our art for the time being, because it emerges from and speaks to the poor, will find its Antean renewal in folk-tale and parable."[20] Walcott's mythic theme, as we have attempted to show, is meaningfully embodied in the fable. But it is in this cathartic power that the ultimate dramatic achievement of Ti-Jean consists. Its quality is intimately West Indian, which helps to explain why the power of the play was immediately available to the West Indian audience but not to the American. Ti-Jean, whose mythic content encompasses the universal, is not a provincial play. But it remains, for the reasons considered above, Walcott's most exclusively regional work.

Malcochon or The Six in the Rain

Malcochon is Walcott's most important play before Dream, but has never had the success of things like Ti-Jean, Dream itself, or even Dauphin. Like all the better plays, however, it has received several performances, both local and international. There was the Guild

premiere in 1959, the Royal Court performance in 1960; since then the Workshop has performed it in the Caribbean as well as New York. The play has its own dramatic compactness, but there is a residual quaintness which makes it less accessible than the other major plays. This is partly due to its experimental character. Walcott attempts a dance-drama form modelled on the Japanese theatre, and adopts the basic outline of the Japanese film, Rashomon, for his action. He acknowledges this as a positive and deliberate influence: "I had written one play which was derivative of Rashomon, called Malcauchon. It was the story of a woodcutter and people gathered together under a hut. This was a deliberate imitation, but it was one of those informing imitations that gave me a direction because I could see in the linear shapes, in the geography, in the sort of myth and superstition of the Japanese, correspondences to our own forests and mythology."[21] The play is reaching towards an original mythic pattern through these experimental and derivative modes, which accounts for some of its self-enclosed aspects. But, as Walcott recognises, the discovery of this pattern was vital in laying the foundations for his culminating achievement in Dream.

The relevance of the Japanese influence to Walcott's regional discoveries will emerge in the analysis of the play, but it is clear from the outset that Walcott is not engaged in slavish imitation. The plot bears obvious resemblances to Kurosawa's Rashomon, but there are substantial differences which show how Walcott used Kurosawa as a starting point for developing a regional situation. The basic plot-line is reproduced: a meeting in the forest between characters concerned with a crime, and the key role of the woodcutter

figure in that meeting. Several particulars in the settings of the play and film correspond. The action takes place as the characters are sheltering from the rain. Kurosawa's old gate finds its counterpart in the local copra shed. But the Japanese theme is quite different from Walcott's. In Rashomon the three recount the story, as given at a trial, of a rape and murder incident which has taken place earlier. There is mystery in their contrasting versions of the crime, and this becomes the focus of a very subtle comment on man's inability to interpret reality.[22] Walcott's six, on the other hand, discover a murder which has actually been committed by one of them. The discovery of the crime is the occasion of a symbolic confrontation with their own guilt and corruption, and a moral purgation is attained through the experience.

The essentials of the action are, most importantly, regional in context. The crisis and conflicts in which the six are involved are typical ones in the local setting. The murder of the white planter by the native felon, for example, is a typical occurrence. The felon's crime finds its counterpart in the moral shortcomings of the "honest" labourers whom he meets in the shed. The conflicts of the "honest" group, though of universal significance like the murder itself, all belong in the immediate social context. The husband and wife, for example, are in bitter conflict with each other because the latter has been having an affair with the "red nigger" plantation overseer.

This regional context, integral to Walcott's theme, is the basis of a moral discovery rooted in the cultural experience. The latter is realised through a dialectic central to the action. Chantal, the ex-convict woodcutter who is thought to have committed the murder, becomes the instrument through which the "honest" couples in the shed are brought into confrontation with their own vices. This is realistically enacted

in the play: Chantal, holding them hostage when the murder is discovered, stands as the executioner and forces confession out of them. The situation is dramatically convincing; it is, at the same time, the allegorical expression of a realisation of guilt and expiation gained in a mythic rencounter. Chantal is the original medium of this mythic rencounter.

Chantal's role is based on his identity and position in their society - the central factor around which the plot is built. The Conteur's introduction points to the essentials of the image from the outset. Ex-convict and living in the forest, Chantal is the embodiment of bestiality and crime:

> Conteur: In country rumshops when the flute,
> The *shac-shac* and the *violon*
> Mix with the smoke and *malcochon*
> They say, "Sing how Chantal the brute
> Took the white planter Regis' life."
>
> (1-5)

The vital truth of Walcott's theme rests on the authenticity of the image, and the realism with which the figure is, accordingly, presented. Walcott's woodcutter is a close reproduction of the St. Lucian figure who haunted his childhood and whom he came to regard as the greatest "race-containing symbol" - the reduced, degraded figure of the charcoal burner. The full image of the charcoal burner, described in "Meanings", is recaptured by one of the characters in the play. The charcoal burner was a frightful figure who emerged from the forest into town on pay-day, inspiring terror in the children with his wild drunken roars. His way of life, physical appearance and behaviour are featured in those of Chantal. Chantal leads an "unaccommodated" life in the forest; he depends on his natural surroundings for his livelihood and his means are necessarily sparse. He lives off the breadfruits which grow in wild

state, and the odd coconuts he might filch from the nearby plantations.

This way of life, like that of the charcoal burner of Walcott's childhood, is one of the basic features which sets him apart from the organized community to which the labourers belong. The fundamental aspects of his relationship to their society begin from there. Walcott has articulated it in making him felon and outcast of the community. The position is consistent with his situation. Chantal's is the level of subsistence which knows when "nigger belly empty", as a result of which he has turned "natural" thief by occupation. His reputation as a seasoned offender has become legend. He has a forceful unrelenting character true to his type: he has served his time because he "hawked and spat/In the eyes of the magistrate", and has a standard place in jail. He describes the reaction of the magistrate to his frequent appearance:

> Chantal: . . . He only look up quickly and say "Ah yes, Chantal, you come back from vacation, we keep your place for you, nine months' hard labour," like a young wife he just married and that was that.
>
> (109-13)

Chantal the convict is more of victim than offender, and here one of Walcott's major grievances against society's institutions finds expression. Chantal appears almost defenceless against them. He leads his primitive life unprovided for by society, but is hounded by its law for making a living from the surrounding Crown Lands. The criticism is made in Chantal's self-defence:

> Chantal: They not feeding me, why they must beat me? My back from the cat with nine tails have more stripe than the tiger.
>
> (124-5)

The situation, however, leaves him outlawed from society. As such, although isolated, he holds a particular place in the community. Living away from its organized modes and systems he represents what is wild and uncivilized, by contrast with the honest working labourers whom he meets in the shed. In the eyes of his civilized fellowmen, his misdeeds and offences belong with this primitive condition. These features have, in effect, relegated him to the position of a fierceness exiled from society. Like the original charcoal burner, the villagers have dubbed him 'the tiger', a term which sums up these aspects of his relationships to society. The association of wrongdoing with the name of Chantal is legion and almost superstitious in the village. Thus, the Old Man immediately thinks of Chantal when he cannot find his money, even before the latter has made an appearance. Chantal's physical appearance, moreover, bears out the image of the primitive and untamed miscreant. Walcott drew special attention to his "crazy haphazard" attire in the costume designs,[23] and his frightful features, recreating those of the original charcoal burner who terrified Walcott as a child, are described in the play:

> Chantal: When I before the bar in petty sessions
> I try to smile, so, but the scar I get here
> in a fight once, and the fact that one eye
> smaller than the next not helping things.
> Oh, if only I wasn't so ugly, I could sin
> like a beautiful woman and nobody would hold
> it against me.
>
> (101-5)

To the civilized community outside his confines, then, Chantal is literally the frightful brute in the forest. The murder of the white planter is thus a savage criminal act which belongs with Chantal and his territory. It is part of Walcott's complex comment on shared guilt and innocence in human destiny that the murder should actually have been committed by the deaf-mute. Chantal protects and takes responsibility

for the Moumou's act. This signifies the simultaneous guilt and innocence of Chantal, since the Moumou symbolises the dumb primitive animal in Chantal himself. The crucial point here, however, is that the situation of Chantal-Moumou constitutes the reality of Evil in the forest - and here occurs Walcott's first artistic exploration of the forest-interior motif. Forced to take shelter in its depths on account of the rain, the civilized group are literally caught in the territory of the beast in the forest. The configuration unites both the realistic and symbolic. It is the territory in which they are to rencounter these aspects of their own condition. The Old Man's response on entering the forest is an intuitive and authentic recognition of this:

> Old Man: Listen, they have something on this place.
> They have many beast
> A man cannot see that hiding in a forest.
> They have bats here,
> And in this copra trash they could well
> have snakes. Listen,
> In the life of a man, all his darkness, all
> his sins
> Can meet in one place, in the middle of a
> forest. Like a beast. Yes,
> Like to meet a beast with no name in
> the track of the bamboo.
>
> (178-87)

Walcott's action is designed to bring them all to a realisation of the beast in themselves - that aspect of themselves which they have, in a very real sense, psychically transposed and exiled in the figure of Chantal. They arrive at a moral regeneration through the experience. These meanings are enacted through a skilfully controlled allegorical dialectic. It works by showing both their common bond with what Chantal represents, and by setting him up vis-a-vis them. Both the particular reversals of the plot and the prevailing motifs are effective in developing this dialectic. Although this involves a certain

amount of manipulation, these features work in such a way that the action preserves inner dramatic logic.

Walcott's either-or motifs, the rain and malcochon, are both effective in bringing out the bond between Chantal-Moumou and the other two couples in the shed. They operate both realistically and symbolically to bring out these meanings. At the bare level of plot, the rain is responsible for setting the action in motion: it leaves them trapped in Chantal's territory. The rain holds, however, a more integral dramatic function, fundamental to the interaction between the internal and external world of the play. The rainstorm is the elemental force to which they are exposed; they are naked against its power; devoid of all "civilised" protection in the forest. An authentic phenomenon in the rain-forest setting, it conjoins with the forest motif to signify the predominance of the elemental as the native background to their lives. Together forest and rain generate, in a fundamental way, the motive force of the play. The action opens with the six running for shelter from the fury and destructive force of the rain. Popo describes the terror in his coarse, colourful style:

> Husband: Well, by the time we reach there, I only hear *badow!* Force of lightning Monsieur Charlemagne. Well, *hein*, if I was Moses I would say "Yes, God, that's right," but I ain't stop to see who win who lose. Madeleine and me take off whish, and behind us we only hear the saman tree falling abbragadangabasha! . . . Never so frighten in my life before.
>
> (314-21)

Answering to this terror and naked exposure, their own moral barriers are let down and primitive fears and energies brought to the surface. The response is psychologically authentic. They lay bare their conflicts and misgivings with a wildness that echoes the force of

the elements outside. The Nephew brings out the intensity of a vengeful hatred long nursed towards his uncle, who had done his father double injury by committing adultery with his wife, and causing him to end up in prison for killing the unfaithful wife. His hatred is normally masked under an attitude of dutiful kindness; now it shows a savage sadistic thrust as he tries to torture the Old Man's conscience. The darker depths of remorse in the Old Man's conscience have also been troubled. The conflict between Popo and his wife, which takes up the greater part of this action, illustrates most fully their return to the native capacity for inhuman rage and violence. There is total bitterness between the Husband and Wife over her affair with the red-nigger overseer. They mock and savage each other in violent, abusive language. Their quarrel is about an act which is the final expression of "animality", and the animus of their jealousy and contempt for each other is similarly uncontained. The animal imagery stresses the bestiality motif:

> Wife: Look at him! . . . Look at the brave dog that putting his tail between his legs for a flash of lightning. Making jokes now and wagging his tail for men to pat him on the back and say Popo the comic; why you don't tell them how you try and kill me in the rain on the high road, ...
>
> Husband: Who you calling dog, eh? Why you don't leave your coarseness for the house? When I try to kill you? You lie! you . . .
>
> (352-63)

This captures the tone of "backyard" abuse very faithfully, and Walcott shows his usual facility with the rhythms of the West Indian idiom. In these surroundings they dispense with whatever inhibitions they might have had about exposing themselves and each other like this before strangers. The quarrel reflects all the failings that Chantal is supposed to represent: the savagery, the uncontrolled animus akin to

madness. It even drives them to the thought of killing each other, which parallels the criminal act of which Chantal is to be accused.

The "malcochon" motif is even more explicit in signing the bond between the honest four and Chantal. Malcochon is the overarching symbol: an emblem of the spiritual dialectic central to Walcott's mythic theme. Walcott starts from a relevant pun. Malcochon is a local brand of rum-spirit. The intake of rum-spirit turns men into drunken beasts; "spirit" at the same time stands for the spiritual component in human nature. Malcochon is thus the formula for the coexistence of spirit and beast in man. This meaning, crucial in the total vision of the play, is fulfilled when Chantal partakes of the rum at the climax of the play. It is a well-placed ingredient in Walcott's localised action. A coarse and unrefined rum, malcochon is a staple drink in the rural districts of the island. The local patois coinage expresses the effect of its rawness and potency - "wild pig". This gives Walcott's bestiality motif its local name. At the same time it conjures up the associations of the fate of Ulysses' crew at the hands of Circe, thus encompassing the universal. As we have seen in the preceding plays, rum appears as a recurrent ingredient in Walcott's presentation of the social life of the West Indian. In _Dauphin_ it is the narcotic of destitution; in _Ti-Jean_ the Devil wears recognisable West Indian features as a profligate drunkard. At its most potent here, rum is what returns men to the primitive, mindless condition where all moral sense is confounded. These features are reflected in the conflicts which take place in the shed. The bottle of malcochon is thus present as presiding genius on the scene from the outset. Like the rain, it also has an active function in the plot, which works to reveal the connection between Chantal and the honest labourers. It is, in fact, in their possession

rather than that of Chantal: the beast enters with them into the shed. The wife has "conceived" it in her immoral act with the overseer. Walcott's terms are well-linked to stress their possession of the beast. The bottle of malcochon has been bred - the wife is nursing it "like a baby she make" - by the "making of the beast". Similarly, the dark sin in the Old Man's past was that of "making the beast" with his brother's wife.

This common bond between Chantal and his civilized fellow-men is the basis of the allegorical function he serves when set vis-a-vis them. They have all revealed the reality of beast-evil in themselves in the forest. Walcott presents a symbolic action which works on several simultaneous levels. When Chantal confronts them at the moment of discovery - it coincides with the discovery of the murder of the planter - they are being made to face the reality of their own bestial and degenerate condition incarnate in the features of Chantal: the reality of that fearful aspect of themselves which has been, psychically, vested in the woodcutter and exiled into the forest. This is the act of self-recognition which Chantal actively enforces in making them confess their vices. This archetypal recognition must be undergone in order to arrive at absolution and regeneration. The 'reclamation' pertains as much to Chantal as to the others for whom he serves his symbolic role. Walcott's mythic theme is ultimately humanistic in focus: the bond which Chantal shares with the others makes his individual rehabilitation as important as theirs. Mutual acceptance between himself and the group is thus an important part of this moral recovery.

The confrontation scene is at once realistic and ceremonially ordered. Chantal partakes of the Wife's bottle of malcochon as "a drink from the rain". As he puts it, he is taking a drink with "the human

beast who is [his] brother". The act, convincing on the naturalistic level, compacts his brotherhood with them and signifies their return to a common shared humanity. It has a larger symbolic significance at this point: it is the ritual act which initiates his role in the mythic action. Partaking of the malcochon, Chantal receives the "spirit" that puts beast in man, a token of the coexistence of beast and spirit in human nature. The act is accompanied by a choric comment from one of the inmates of the shed.

> [Chantal takes the bottle and swallows]
>
> Husband: Is true, man and woman could act like beasts sometimes. *Bourreaux, bourreaux, betes sauvages!* God put beast and spirit in all of us, and only God know why . . .
>
> (398-400)

Chantal's features become "transubstantiated" into Evil, in fact, by the drink of malcochon. This is the dramatic actualisation of the presence of Evil. The recognition is again formally declaimed:

> Old Man: You say there is no evil any more,
> Monsieur Popo.
> Well, look at the face of a beast that is
> drunk.
> Look there and tremble, that face is the
> truth!
>
> (492-4)

The Evil in Chantal's face is a mythic manifestation at this point; it is at the same time the original aspect of the drunken, wild-looking figure whose terror remained from childhood "at the back of (Walcott's) mind."[24] As the instrument of this discovery Chantal becomes an arch-redeemer figure who suffers and bears the burden of their guilt. He thus performs, in this scene, a priestly function which encompasses both the role of celebrant and sacrificial victim, and looks forward to Makak's role as healer in <u>Dream</u>. He combines both in the course of the action.

It is in this capacity that he performs his climactic act as confessor-judge, administering penance and absolution. The incident is at the same time a highly dramatic twist in the plot - Walcott has struck upon a situation in which there is perfect correlation between the realistic and symbolic. The incident keeps a poise between the allegorical and the naturalistic tone similar to that we saw in Ti-Jean. It is convincing as the act of a drunken malefactor holding his defenceless victims captive when the crime is discovered. There is a strong earthy appeal in Chantal's style of confession. His tone is one of drunken bravado. Leaving out the Seventh Commandment from the catalogue, he uses coarse mockery to force confession out of them. He deals with the Wife:

> Chantal: [He strokes her shoulder]
> You! with the nice hair, you shaking
> in your husband face,
> And always laughing "Kill me, kill me."
> You don't like Chantal?
> The old stinking tiger with broken teeth.
> I will tell you!
> Let us go in the bamboo and he will
> show you the truth!
>
> (520-4)

The allegorical logic is further sustained: it is Chantal who must undergo expiation and attain redemption on behalf of the six in the shed. This is served by another dramatic twist in the plot. The Moumou, thinking to save the others from Chantal, deals him a fatal blow. Chantal appears as something of the innocent, sacrificial victim. It is, more importantly, the penitential wound through which absolution must be attained. Chantal's suffering, undergone both on his individual account as well as that of the others, is a pact of their common realisation of humanity. The Conteur interprets the moral significance of the wound.

Conteur: The rage of the beast is taken for granted,
Man's beauty is sharing his brother's pain;
God sends a wound where a wound is wanted,

(677-9)

Walcott condenses a complex of meanings into this final burden. The Moumou, as we have seen, is an aspect of Chantal's own nature, and the Chantal-Moumou partnership symbolic of his simultaneous guilt and innocence. Falling prey to the Moumou, Chantal is victim of an aspect of his own nature. This signifies the dual condition shared by all men which makes them subject to one universal plight. Here Walcott's theme attains the universal, and the classical perspective expressed in the Sophoclean epigraph: "Who is the slayer, who the victim? Speak!"[25]

These are universal dimensions typical of Walcott's approach, and have integrity in the context of the play. The moralistic terms of the play are perhaps too insistent, and get in the way of its dramatic immediacy. But they have afforded Walcott an entry into a mythic pattern which is concretely related to the indigenous experience - in which the central achievement of the play consists. The relevance of the Japanese influence enters at this point. The aesthetic design of <u>Malcochon</u> is its distinctive feature; both the natural setting and the human action are stylised in the Japanese mode. In his first drawings for the set Walcott reproduces the stylised bamboo setting, and the waterfall is done in the artistic style of the Japanese, with the spray creating the effect of soaring birds (a repetition of the spiritual motif).[26] The mimetic style is palpably modelled on the Japanese Noh - climactic action is presented through dance, music and recitative. These are far from being mere aesthetic decor. In the comment earlier cited, Walcott speaks of correspondences between his own island culture and that of the Japanese, based on the "sort of geography and myth" of the Japanese

people. The significant point of entry is this: the mythic content in Japanese culture has been moulded out of the relationship between the physical and human landscape, and their vital contiguity in the island setting. As a result of this human geography - which finds expression in the original interpenetration between the "civilized" and "uncivilized" world of Malcochon - the mythic sense has evolved from and retains elements of the primal. Moulded in terms of the oriental experience, it is still the source of the pre-verbal modes of perception and response which remain the basis of Japanese cultural expression. These are the deeper sources of their highly developed mimetic style: the language of gesture and chant becomes orchestrated for modes of awareness which still possess and are informed by the origins of experience.

Malcochon recreates a relationship between the natural and human world which seeks a similar access to the primal. Walcott thus engages these effects to explore its emotive and moral atmosphere. While the form is Japanese, the gestures and sounds grow out of the native terms and spirit of the play, and draw upon modes of expression that are indigenous. He follows the Japanese convention of combining mimed action with choric narration to enact the murder of the planter. In this style, it is narration itself which is performed. Chanted recitative is alternated between the Conteur and musicians, while the Conteur at the same time interprets the essential physical image of the act in patterned mime. It is the peculiar emotive and psychic rhythms of the experience that these movements are most effective in capturing. Here the principle of dumb, primitive frenzy, expressive of the deaf-mute psyche, gives these rhythms their dynamic:

> Conteur: [Getting up slowly]
> Regis. They kill Regis!
> [Dancing the action]
> He lift up the axe.

Musicians: He lift up the axe!

Conteur: [Miming the murder]
And the madness start to dance!
Hanche! Is the axe in the wood!

Musicians: Woy! Woy! They kill Regis!
Woy! Woy! They kill Regis!

[Drumming and chanting as the Conteur in a fast dance imitates a hacked man, whirls and drops . . .]

(131-7)

The primitive notes of the chant are drawn from local forms of lament and elegiac expression. "Woy" is a wail of desolation still common in the rustic districts of the island, and occurs in the wake songs as an expression of grief. Drumming and flutes heighten the emotive atmosphere distilled by these notes, the resonance of which is quite distinct from the effect of 'whining' we get in oriental chants. In exploiting these modes, Walcott is discovering for the first time patterns integral to his concept of a return to origins, and deriving their strains from the sensibility of his native characters. In "Twilight" he comments on the mythic significance of these pre-verbal modes in relation to this concept: "In that aboriginal darkness the first principles are still sacred, the grammar and movement of the body, the shock of the domesticated voice startling itself in a scream."[27] His experimental treatment of the grammar of the body and sounds of the pre-articulate voice in this play pointed the way to the ritualistic use of dance and chant in Dream. As was discussed in chapter four, these elements underlie the aesthetic which influences his techniques in the Theatre Workshop.

These discoveries all relate back to the central significance of Chantal's role in the play. It is through this role that Walcott fixes the truth of the elemental condition which necessitates, for the

moral evolution of Caribbean man, a rediscovery through the journey into the interior. Walcott returned to and developed this journey fully in The Gulf. The representative character of Chantal's situation confirms the truth of this elemental condition. Walcott's play discovers this in the concrete circumstances of the woodcutter-charcoal burner, original to those of his native type. The woodcutter is a reduced figure both by social and natural circumstance. His material deprivation and social degradation have left him a denuded figure. They are part of what has led to his organic relationship with the landscape as woodcutter, in which he returns to his 'unaccommodated' state. This is representative of beginnings, a "new" relationship with soil, characterised at the same time by the cultural privations and stigmas that have occasioned it. Both the social and phenomenal thus combine for the particular moral physiognomy which he bears. While his status as a figure of origins inculcates the archetypal, it does so strongly in terms of the particulars of his environment. Walcott's figure is native to his own island, but he has his counterpart in all who share his reduced circumstances at the lowest levels of a cultural predicament common to the region. He thus comes to represent an archetype of the experience of the region - Walcott's "race-containing symbol". He presents an image of degradation and lack which remains basic to the experience of the Caribbean race, as is his isolated and despised condition. The fact of his blackness - the all-embracing characteristic whose significance is to be developed in Dream - is the existential fact of the cultural condition of the Caribbean people. The psyche which Walcott discovers in him is a precipitate of the sensibility of the race. His wild, drunken demeanour left the impression of madness on Walcott from childhood. Walcott intuited in its quality the "inherent violence of despair",[28] the psyche of an

organic need. In this too were reflected aspects of the felons and outcasts of the society, who are all like him, representative types.

These aspects of his significance as a "race-containing symbol" make Walcott's woodcutter his most original folk-hero - the figure through whom he is to explore the more complex aspects of a Caribbean destiny in Dream. It is a measure of this significance that he is the most fully naturalised of the folk figures so far. The moral realisations of the play are most organic to his realistic situation. In Dauphin, Afa's moral position was consistent with his localised predicament, but it was the unresolved tensions of Walcott the early poet which set the final directions for the hero's moral affirmations. Ti-Jean was the medium of a meaningful cultural definition and epiphany, but as a fabular, idealised hero he could not embody a concrete experience as fully as Chantal does. Here the regional experience is unfolded, and, unlike that of Afa, its moral discoveries are not dominated by the bias of a poetic persona. Chantal's is accordingly the most naturalised and rooted role. What is deserving of attention is the nature of the resemblances he bears to Walcott's heroes as far back as Christophe. Their most typical aspects meet and are reflected in his image. There is a direct line from the madness of the slave-king Christophe, to the rage of Afa, to the wild violence of Chantal "the brute". It attests to the unified consciousness behind these figures: the one principle from which they arose, the principle of Walcott's own angst, being traced back to its roots. It finds its most naked, localised impress in that of the woodcutter. Similarly, the earlier preoccupations explored through their roles discover an ultimate name in the habitation of Chantal. Thus the preoccupation with the polarities of divinity and corruption which begin with Christophe, reappears as the beasthood-godhead theme in Malcochon.

All these features already come to the surface with the emergence of the woodcutter as arch folk-figure. Finally, Malcochon is most important for this emergence, and remains essentially a play of discovery. The allegorical role of Chantal is less important for the spiritual regeneration which is the moral centre of the play, than for setting up the context in which he bears his particular relationship to the environment as race-containing symbol. This amounts, as we have seen, to establishing him as a figure representative of regional beginnings. These are the beginnings from which the more complex aspects of a Caribbean evolution must be traced. The journey is to be explored in Dream. In discovering Chantal, Malcochon sets up the pattern and bearings for this complex exploration. Both the physical and moral contours of the woodcutter-charcoal burner's world are already established as a point of departure for Dream. The bestial condition central to the image of Chantal prefigures the reversion to the ape-man condition in Dream. The Tiger and Mongoose - Chantal and the Moumou - are to reappear as Makak and his fraternity, Moustique, Souris and Tigre. Featuring as a backdrop in this play, the woodcutter's isolated mountain dwelling, which is to come to the foreground in Dream, is also fixed. Chantal achieves a spiritual consummation in death in which the image of Makak's dream begins to take shape. As he looks towards the distant mist fading over his mountain, it is a typically Walcottian moment of epiphany - the mist being a lyrical evocation of essence, out of which Makak's white goddess is to take substance in Dream. The Conteur, interpreting its significance, heralds the theme to be amplified in Dream:

Conteur: [To slow flute and drum]

Like the staining of clear springs
the mind of man,
In blood he must end as in blood he
began
Like mist that rises from a muddy
stream
Between beasthood and Godhead groping
in a dream.

(660-3)

Footnotes

1. The Charlatan was revised in 1973, and had its world premiere in Los Angeles, California, through July 1974. The revised version, which is a musical in the style of Ti-Jean, shows an intensification of the theme of love.

2. In an interview with the writer, April 8, 1974.

3. See descriptive reference to Dauphin in Rev. C. Jesse, op.cit., pp.30-31.

4. An allusion to the custom occurs in "To a Painter in England", Green Night, 11.21-22.

5. Walcott, "Twilight", p.16.

6. Ibid., p.14.

7. L.D. Carrington, "St. Lucian Creole - a Descriptive Analysis of its Phonology and Morpho-Syntax", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the West Indies, 1967).

8. Walcott, "Meanings", p.46.

9. Errol Hill, "The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.18 No.4 (December 1972), pp.33-34.

10. Sidney Fields, "A Gift for Words", Daily News, July 20, 1972, p.68.

11. Errol Hill, The Trinidad Carnival (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1972), Black and White Plate 6.

12. Walcott, "The White Devil", Sunday Guardian Magazine, December 25, 1966, p.20.

13. In conversation with the writer, June 12, 1973.

14. John Simon, "Debilitated Debbil", New York Post, August 14, 1972, p.69.

15. Loc. cit.

16. A typical Walcottian pun. The French patois term "Ayti", a form of response meaning "What?", echoes "Haiti", where the first slave rebellions occurred.

17. Walcott, "Prologue" in a performance programme of Ti-Jean staged in Trinidad, 1970.

18. Douglas Watt,"'Ti-Jean and Brothers' Comes to Central Park", Daily News, July 28, 1972, p.57.

19. Edwin Wilson, "Giving the Devil his Due in Central Park", The Wall Street Journal, August 3, 1972, p.10.

20. Walcott, "Prologue" cited in n.17.

21. Walcott, "Meanings", p.48.

22. See analysis of film in Donald Richie, The Films of Akira Kurosawa (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), pp.71-76.

23. Set designs for Malcochon, on file in the cultural archives of the University Centre, St. Lucia.

24. Walcott, "Meanings", p.50.

25. Sophocles, Antigone, Vol.1 trans.F. Storr (1912; rpt. London: Heineman, 1956), p.405.

26. See n.23.

27. Walcott, "Twilight", p.5.

28. Walcott, "Meanings", p.48.

CHAPTER 7

From New World Origins in Pursuit of Dream: Dream on Monkey Mountain

Dream on Monkey Mountain is Walcott's culminating dramatic achievement, a magnum opus which assures him a place in posterity. Some have found it difficult to extricate the one cohesive vision behind the complex, involuted patterns of the dream-form. Errol Hill, for example, finds the play incoherent.[1] None who have witnessed the play, especially in performance, fail to respond to its imaginative power, compelling a depth of involvement however complex the design. Dream attains this power by virtue of the same essential features which give a work like Four Quartets its place in Eliot's career: it is the final orchestration of a mature vision with an aesthetic forged out of that vision.

This aspect of the play would itself require a separate essay, and falls outside our immediate scope, which is to trace the communication of the vision in a regional drama. In this context, Dream represents the culminating point of the drama as The Gulf did in the poetry: it is the direct counterpart to the final realisation arrived at in The Gulf. It charts the course of a native quest for self-discovery which comes to fruition in a "find[ing] of earth". The progress of this discovery is based on the fundamental recognitions which found full exploration in The Gulf - a return, necessitated by history, through a primordial condition to find genesis in the self-creating powers of the Imagination. In Dream this acquires wider definitions through the strengths and properties unique to drama. The exigencies of this condition are fully identified in the historico-cultural situation, as the far-reaching implications of 'blackness' become concretely explored through Walcott's race-containing

symbol, the ape-figure Makak. In charting his progress towards self-discovery Dream comprehends, as The Gulf did, the full circuit of Walcott's development.

Walcott emerged in his full stature as a dramatist with the play. It was responsible for bringing him to the attention of international theatre on the American scene. Premiered in Canada in 1967, it has been widely performed in the area since then. The Theatre Workshop made its first tour of the Caribbean with the play in 1968, and in 1971, it was performed in New York by the Negro Ensemble Company, directed Michael Schultz. It was also televised in New York (NBC), and Trinidad. The Caribbean hailed it "a landmark for local drama".[2] In New York it won an Obie award, and signed Walcott's contract with the Off-Broadway scene. This success was partly responsible for Ti-Jean's appearance in the New York Shakespeare Festival the following year.

The Play

i) The Necessity of Dream

Several moral strains combine in Walcott's dream allegory, answering to the various techniques which come together in the play. Walcott culls from quite a few areas for his treatment of the form - from Strindberg's techniques in The Dream Play (1912); from traditional features of the genre; from Genet's avant-garde modes of exploring reality through oblique modes of fantasy and illusion, as in The Blacks (1960). He adapts and welds these together for a form which is finally quite original. It is at once apocalyptic in texture, exploratory of a regional psyche, and polemical in thrust. All these strains interact for the one basic movement of the play, through the complex pattern that Hill finds incoherent. The one direction which gives coherence to the whole is readily identifiable:

Walcott is embarked upon a native quest for reality. The quest turns, as it must, upon the relationship between the universal and cultural condition of Caribbean man as New World man. It thus evolves through traditional patterns, witnessed in the large number of archetypes upon which Walcott draws (the biblical being the most pervasive). These patterns find their characteristic forms and directions in the regional experience. Walcott succeeds, in the process, in creating a regional epic.

The quest is the journey from ape to king undertaken by Walcott's arch-hero Makak. It is fundamental to Walcott's vision of a regional destiny that it should take this specific form. Walcott starts from the view that the historical and cultural dislocation of the peoples of the region has left them in a void. The deprivation and penury of the middle passage experience, felt at the most communal levels, originate from these sources. To Walcott it is the burden of an existential amnesia and abnegation. It reverts organically to the archetypal and mythic, and constitutes the return to the primordial chaos before the act of creation. Thus, for Walcott, the New World descendants of the middle passage need to face an inherent elemental condition, and to undertake an imaginative journey back to the primordial to "articulate [their] origins". The ape-motif stands, above all, for this nascent purpose, and is a positive point of departure. The innate truth of these definitions has already been discovered in the circumstances of the charcoal burner of Malcochon - it inheres in all the surviving privations that leave him unaccommodated. The identity of Walcott's hero as ape, derived from his namesake in Walcott's native island, thus embodies this creatively-oriented, evolutionary purpose. But Walcott is, just as vitally, concerned with the negative aspect of the ape-image. He is urgently concerned with the ape-man label which stereotypes the native as an uncivilized brute. The negative self-image this

colonial shibboleth has bred in the black man is endemic. It is responsible for his self-repudiation, contempt and final self-alienation. It underlies the traditional mimic-man attitudes of the native, which are powerfully exploited to give the play its characteristic theatrical pageantry (for which Walcott draws upon the modes of Genet). Makak's essential crisis as black quest-figure centres in this negative burden: an inner struggle to overcome the conflicts of this self-image which constricts his potential, and it is focussed in his relationship with the mulatto Lestrade.

These two aspects of the ape-image exist side by side to create the dramatic tension of the play. The negative stands for a self-rejection constantly frustrating a native acceptance and act of possession, which is the promise of the positive aspect.

The evolutionary purpose is most integral, and from the outset, its central role in the total pattern of the quest is defined. Man evolves from the primordial state through the instinctual desire and pursuit of transcendence - the pursuit of his dream of a higher destiny. The pursuit of the dream brings the enlightenment in which his progress consists. In defining this burden, Walcott appraises the position of a subjugated race so far delimited from this wider self-civilizing purpose:

> Corporal: In the beginning was the ape, and the ape had no name, so God call him man. Now there were various tribes of the ape, it had gorilla, baboon, orang-outan, chimpanzee, the blue-arsed monkey and the marmoset, and God looked at his handiwork and saw that it was good. For some of the apes had straighten their back-bone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. . . .
>
> (I.Prol.59-66)

There is a satirical edge, as suggested above, in this reference to the nigger's backwardness, a reflection on the ills of a civilization founded on subjugation, in which the nigger has fared worst. The nigger, however, must undertake the task of straightening his backbone. He faces the need of an emergence from all the negations of servitude, to be attained in the pursuit of his own native dream. Makak receives prophetic intimations of this when he is first visited by the dream:

> Makak: Sirs, when I hear that voice,
> Singing so sweetly,
> I feel my spine straighten,
> My hand grow strong.
>
> (I.Prol.281-4)

The necessity of the quest thus begins from a universal law. The moral and psychological exigencies which give the dream its essential character belong in Makak's specific circumstances. Before following the pursuit, we will recapture the realistic circumstances in which Makak's dream is engendered to examine these features. Makak, the old charcoal burner, leads an isolated life in his mountain forest. He is ugly, keeps away from his fellow men, is without wife or child. Ugliness, and an uncreative isolation represent what withholds him from a full realisation of his humanity. They signify, on the mythic level, deformity - formlessness and the non-generative. Makak's self-realisation must involve the discovery of a true creative form which will transform the ugliness, a form which will reveal its own generative principle. The self-image is the direct consequence of his historical experience - it is the self-repudiation of the negro surviving from the stigmas of slavery and colonisation. Only through the self-creative effort can the shortcoming be overcome, to give the race its true form and identity. This is the moral anatomy of the ugliness which disturbs Makak whenever he sees his image

in the pool outside the hut. Makak has to stir the pool and "break [his] image" before he can drink water.

Living with this disturbing image, Makak is overtaken by the illusions of a kingly destiny, its powers conferred by his vision of an access to an ultimate form of beauty. The latter is made incarnate in the Apparition of a white woman. This is an authentic psychological reaction. It begins at the instinctual conflict between ego and alter-ego. In Makak's case, it is especially critical. The epigraph from Sartre, which introduces the play, is the definitive diagnosis:

> Thus in certain psychoses the hallucinated person, tired of always being insulted by his demon, one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments: but the jeers don't stop for all that; only, from then on, they alternate with congratulations. This is a defence, but it is also the end of the story. The self is disassociated, and the patient heads for madness.[3]

Sartre, following Fanon's concerns in The Wretched of the Earth is analysing the psychological disturbances resulting from the native's self-alienation in colonial society. Estranged from himself, the native compensates by reverting to a revival of supernatural myths. The defence aggravates the alienation into a schizophrenic disassociation. The colonial experience is deeply implicated in returning Makak to the condition from which the dream takes its cosmic necessity. While it starts from this cosmic necessity, it is fraught with conflicts precipitated by similarly unnatural factors - arising from the colonial violation peculiar to Makak's environment - and involves a similar psychological crisis. The ugliness of apehood is the contemptible condition, the demon which afflicts Makak. It calls forth the complimentary angel which taunts him with kingship. The reaction is all the more complex because it is both defence and mythic need. The significant point, however, is the crisis of dissociation that ensues. Torn between the two, Makak becomes the victim of a

schizophrenic split. He thus suffers from madness and epileptic fits. The duality and concomitant schizophrenia are fundamental to the whole nature of the pursuit. They bear subtle relationships, both positive and negative, to Makak's progress. The split cuts through the metaphysical to the cultural predicament: from the conflict between dream and reality to that between whiteness and blackness. On the one hand, it is the crisis with which Makak must come to terms to realise the quest. On the other hand it is itself the source of the creative tension which will make this possible.

Like the schizophrenia, the nature of the compliments - the aspects of his angel - are peculiar to his case. Makak's demon finds its appropriate polarity. Otherness manifests itself in the form of the pure white virgin. The situation is complex: taking this form, it is important to note, what she promises is a fulfilment of his blackness, as king and lion of his race. This kingly and lion-like destiny, moreover, is envisioned in terms of a full recovery of the African heritage - race becomes synonymous with Africa. This renders the vision all the more paradoxical, and begins the pattern of ambivalences that surround the white goddess. It is important to grasp from the outset what significance this African guise holds in the promise of the white goddess. For the dispossessed Makak, Africa is the memory of a lost realm of perfection and wholeness, the exile from which is the root of his existential plight. The instinctual urge towards otherness and transcendence is existential: but it is inevitable that the black man, uprooted, should conceive of it in terms of Africa. In Makak's dream Africa thus stands, originally, for a lost visionary realm, the archetypal Eden-like state before exile, like the Western heaven, or Eastern nirvana. At the moments of most intense vision Makak apprehends it in pastoral terms, as a "sea-change":

Makak: . . . Can you hear the sea now, can you hear the
sound of suffering, we are moving back now . . .
Back into the boat, a beautiful boat, and soon,
after many moons, after many songs, we will see
Africa, the 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.

(II.ii.54-60)

It is part of the total pattern of misapprehensions to which the dream is subject, that this Africa should become 'misconceived' as a tangible cultural dominion. (The Corporal, true to his role as obscurantist, is to present it in this light). We will return to this later. Our vital point here is that Makak's white virgin promises neither 'whiteness' as a cultural absolute, nor 'Africanness' in terms of tribal sovereignty or the autonomy of a tradition. The white goddess' promise of a lion-like kingly destiny is of an apotheosis of resources and properties native to Makak's indigenous circumstances - properties answering to the fierce, combative experience of a people, out of which their peculiar temper is to be forged.

Makak's white virgin bears, however, multiple and protean significances, and remains necessarily ambivalent in the play. In order to get some idea of these multiple significances in relation to the overarching polarity, we will take a look at the form in which she manifests herself to Makak. Makak describes the vision:

Makak: I will tell you my dream. Sirs, make a white mist
In the mind; make that mist hang like 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.
. . . .

Makak: 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.

(I.Prol.229-58)

This is one of the outstanding passages in Walcott's work: we are witnessing here the native poet in an original act of mythmaking. His lyrical gifts are fully engaged to weave the myth out of the detail and substance of the island's forests; a myth which, as one reader commented, seems as if it had always been there. Its power consists in the naturalness with which these evanescent and unearthly features are evoked in terms of the charcoal burner's native habitat - its mists (an original link with the mist-covered St. Lucian mountain, La Sociére[4], symbolic of the white witch aspect of Makak's goddess); the charcoal smoke, branches, spiders and prickles of the forest. The mind and surroundings of the old, crazy charcoal burner interact for these emanations of essence, out of which his loveliest woman takes substance, ethereal like an incarnation of Moon. A thing of essence, her perfection features all that Makak lacks. Her beauty and whiteness are at ultimate poles from his own ugliness and blackness.

That whiteness is a paradoxical quality and a central attribute. Its protean significance is involved at all points in the trials through which the quest progresses. On the most immediate level it is the cultural whiteness at opposite poles from the condition his blackness represents. This is one level at which the dream is to be misconceived by Makak as the Caribbean everyman. Makak is critically implicated in the dilemma which Fanon describes in Black Skins White Masks (1970)- the conflict of the black man for whom the ideal of whiteness is realised in the possession of a white woman. Makak's susceptibility to this level of the white woman's significance is a crucial issue in the pattern of the quest.

It is the tendency to confound the existential ideal - her promise of his own transcendence - with the cultural ideal of whiteness; to confound an ideal of perfectibility with the ideal of progress that whiteness spells for the black man. This is the endemic error which threatens to betray the dream: it is signified in the tug-of-war between Makak and the Corporal-worldly Lestrade. It is a susceptibility to which Makak is especially prone because of the colonial experience. The white virgin comes to wear this 'racial' guise by reason of this weakness. It is an aspect which brings to the fore all that Makak represents historically and socially, and it finds expression in the Fanon motif running through the play: "black skin, white masks". It is as an absolute form of perfection, as suggested above, that the polarity is most meaningful. All the changing, worldly aspects of the vision are comprehended within this dimension. The qualities in which the Apparition manifests itself signify this: she is an evocation of essence, ethereal. The propensity towards these transcendent reaches, is, like the sources of the aspiration, existential. For Makak it is especially acute. The totality of his 'imperfection' sets the measure of his aspiration towards the absolute. This is a recognition implicit in Walcott's concept of origins. It is articulated in "Goats and Monkeys", the poem which serves as counterpart to Makak's dream-crisis. Makak's white virgin embodies an ideal of perfection just as Desdemona does for Othello. These were the reaches of Christophe's ambition, the destitution of the slave surviving and even more chronic in the ape. On these levels Makak is involved in the same cosmic confrontations encountered by Othello in "Goats and Monkeys". Conceived through the faculty of Imagination, the ideal provokes the conflicting intercourse between imperfection and perfection, matter and essence, the bestial and the divine. Human

nature being split between the two, the material condition and the faculty of Imagination, this interaction is inevitable, and the existential duality that "halves our world with doubt". The duality is the source of man's yearning for transcendence; at the same time it is what leaves the aspiration ever unattainable. This gives rise to the perplexity whose burden Makak seeks to escape by yielding to the temptation to make the dream tangible and earthly - the temptation to settle for a glorious racial vendetta. The principles and quality of the unattainable are akin to the otherworldliness of the Moon, its perennial cosmic emblem, and by the same token, the prevailing genius of the faculty of dream. Makak's loveliest woman possesses these qualities as an incarnation of the Moon. By very fact of the duality, her otherworldliness enmeshes principles of both the maleficent and beneficent. It bears the perplexing, enigmatic aspects of the white goddess, the final guise of Makak's Apparition. Like the traditional white goddess she thus ministers in dualistic fashion. She is both benefactor and evil genius, pure goddess and sorceress. To serve and seek to possess her absolute form is to enter into the experience of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

The metaphysical ideas represented by the white goddess are universal, and she embodies a mythic concept so rooted as to transcend all cultural barriers. It takes this name and exterior decor in Western civilization; but the interpretation of the complex relationship between the natural and supernatural world finds expression in one form or another in all cultures. In The White Goddess (1948), Robert Graves traces its metamorphoses in the myths of ancient civilization. The work gives a full explication of her identity as a procreative divinity embodying these dualistic principles and appearing in these contradictory guises. He cites the "most inspired" description of the white goddess to appear

in ancient literature. The account, bearing important resemblances to Makak's Apparition, is worth quoting:

> First, she had a great abundance of hair, flowing and curling, dispersed about her divine neck; on the crown of her head she bare many garlands interlaced with flowers, and in the middle of her forehead was a plain circlet in fashion of a mirror or rather resembling the moon by the light it gave forth, and this was borne on either side by serpents that seemed to rise from the furrows of the earth; and (which troubled my sight and spirit sore) her cloak was utterly dark, . . . Here and there upon the edge thereof and throughout its surface the stars glimpsed, and in the middle of them was placed the moon in mid-month, which shone like a flame or fire; and round about the whole length of the border of that goodly robe was a crown or garland wreathing unbroken, made with all flowers and fruits. Things quite diverse she did bear: . . .
>
> (The White Goddess, p.66)

There are subtle tracings of these diverse effects in the phantasmic beauty of Makak's apparition. They prefigure and connect with the complex pattern of Walcott's symbolism in the play. The lunar beauty already considered is common to both; the maleficent is intertwined with the purity and richness of their gifts in both cases. This is more subtly traced in Makak's goddess than in the classical (Walcott's is perhaps the more effective evocation for this reason). Thus the serpent decor is a glaring feature in the classical; the local counterpart is the subtly camouflaged "web of the spider heavy with diamonds". It is important to note that the gifts are all products of Makak's own setting. Thus its coal-diamond motif is the counterpart to the floral motifs of the classical model; the spider the equivalent of the ancient serpent. In Makak's vision the feature represents the aspiration to the purity of diamond which will absorb and transmute the evil of the spider lurking beneath. The sinister association between the two is repeated in the pattern of symbols which overarches the play: the association between the Moonlight-purity motif on the one hand and the Basil-spider-corruption on the

other. The play opens with Basil pointing towards the disc of the Moon, and the mask of the white goddess is discovered with the spider as Makak prepares to set out on his mission. In both portraits, the sexual allusion is also present to suggest the nature of the bond between votary and goddess. It is intimated in the allusion to the chastity of the classical goddess, her "garland wreathing unbroken". Makak's aspiration to break the chain of diamonds of his own goddess makes the sexual significance more explicit (Makak actually sleeps with the white virgin). This is emblematic of the immoral coupling pivotal to the conception - the "goats and monkeys" motif of Othello's case being made concrete in that of Makak.

The persona of Walcott the poet is present in these metaphysical aspects and symbolic presentation of the charcoal burner's dream. But it is not an imposition. We have seen in the preceding chapter how such a fusion is meaningful: as mythic archetype the charcoal burner's role embraces this poetic dimension. The raw concreteness of the folk figure remains unimpaired and compatible with his role as prophet and visionary. It is however, important not to lose sight of the one truth upon which this devolves - the relatedness of this cosmic dimension to the charcoal burner's dream. It begins from the fact that Makak's aspirations grow out of a necessity which is universal. The psyche of the dream, the form and "name" it takes originate in the cultural experience: its frontiers are the universal ones we have been considering. Makak's pursuit thus evolves through a complex relationship between the two, its pattern at once new and archetypal. We turn to the pursuit to trace this pattern.

ii) The Pursuit of the Quest

The Dream-Form as mode of Pursuit

The relationship between Walcott's theme and form is organic and highly sophisticated. The dream defines the moral objective and exists as a metaphysical principle in the play. At the same time it is dream operating at the psychological level: Makak's journey progresses through the unrealistic, fragmented, illogical, rapidly shifting scapes of dream. Walcott, in fact, exploits the modes of dream-experience for a form similar to Strindberg's in The Dream Play, for example. Strindberg introduces his play with a comment on the technique: "The characters split, double, multiply, vanish, blur, clarify. But one consciousness reigns above them all - that of the dreamer; . . ."[5] Walcott introduces his own play: "The play is a dream, one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of its writer, and as such, it is illogical, derivative, contradictory. . . ."[6] In Dream the given mind of writer or principal character is the one consciousness that reigns over all and undergoes the total experience. This means that any one of the characters is the sum of all the others - they are all aspects of his consciousness. This single consciousness is, however, borne in the drama by the protagonist Makak, the representative dreamer. In this context, what the dream technique really does is this: it isolates the various aspects of Makak's consciousness, and sets them in dramatic confrontation with each other. Each of the principal characters is, vitally, an aspect of the dreamer. Makak himself, Moustique, Lestrade, Tigre and Souris are together an aggregate of all the possibilities which Makak as a native everyman contains.

This pattern avails Walcott of modes very skilfully deployed for the progress of the journey. Each 'aspect' retains its separate,

independent identity as a strongly individualised character in the play. Makak comes into confrontation with each during the course of the journey - with Moustique, with Tigre and Souris (the two forming a whole), with the Corporal. The aspects to be thus confronted feature more or less prominently at specific points: they are at once indivisible and separate from the Makak entity. The encounter is realistically dramatised, but on the fundamental symbolic level, it is Makak's confrontation with his own conscience, and conflict with himself. So that Makak undergoes the trials first of Moustique, followed by the Corporal aspects of his nature, which fall into the two major phases of the quest. This technique of symbolic confrontation serves as a means of moral exploration and discovery. Makak makes his moral progress through the latter. The technique serves another valuable purpose: the realistic presentation of these encounters between Makak and these individualised aspects is the means of articulating a moral critique. It is Walcott's didactic and polemical purpose. The didactic-polemical thrust, articulating the message of the play, is prominent in Dream: it functions as something of a projection from the fundamental symbolic purpose outlined above.

The isolated aspects of Makak's consciousness represent frailties and susceptibilities with which he must come to terms in the course of his pursuit. They are frailties common to man, but he is especially prone to these particular ones because of his history and cultural circumstance. Moustique is the venal weakness, aggravated in his case because of a fatalistic deprivation, which makes him turn natural thief and parasite. Tigre and Souris (carried over from Malcochon) are the joint aggressive and defenceless principles of the elemental charcoal burner. The Corporal, representing the cultural split between whiteness and blackness, misleads into a self-alienation whose shortcomings are

ultimately spiritual. The Moustique and Corporal aspects predominate. In Moustique, Makak faces the most human and universal failing; in the Corporal, the cultural. These two appropriately determine the major phases of the quest: the Makak-Moustique phase, followed by the Makak-Corporal, corresponding to the basic structural design of the play. The two, whose sequence is like that of Ti-Jean, necessarily interpenetrate and absorb each other. We will follow Makak's progress through each of these in turn.

The Makak-Moustique Phase

The sources and reaches of the native ideal which Makak pursues are in the archetypal, and in the first stage of the journey he is tested on a primary, universal level. Makak's ideal calls for an ultimate faith: a generic human failing is the first test of this faith, and proves the first trial of the quest. It is the venal temptation to "sell the dream" and settle for lucre. This is the Moustique temptation which becomes all the more irresistible because of his peculiar destitution as a black man, and leaves him more susceptible to an existential scepticism. The spiritual reaches of the faith his aspiration calls for are signified in his role as local faith-healer, a role authentic to his own folk-setting. The role unites conclusively with all the other archetypes with whom Makak is associated - the Christ-figure, Don Quixote, the Old Testament prophet. Moustique - the "flea" whose name signifies both the parasitic and helpless creature - is the venal failing that threatens this spiritual ideal. He accompanies Makak as earthly disciple. We need to get into focus the dialectical pattern on which the Makak-Moustique partnership works for this first phase of the quest. Makak's individual role as faith-healer is the aspiration to the ideal, but it is his failure to achieve it as a result

of the Moustique weakness which constitutes the experience at this stage.

The experience here, as throughout the play, is totally rooted in Makak's indigenous setting, a feature on which a great deal of the play's strength rests. Makak the faith-healer is a full bodied folk figure in his rustic district, and Moustique his partner a close reproduction of the kind of huckstering preacher common in the islands, the St. Lucian version of whom appeared in Jourmard. Travelling down from the mountain into the settled districts, Makak-Moustique encounter a group of mourners in search of a cure for a sick man borne on a litter. Ritualistic observances are being followed in an effort to forestall death, symbolised by the presence of Basil, who is realistically present as the local carpenter-cum-coffin maker. Basil, the emissary of Death, functions as a key protagonist here and throughout the play. Walcott points to the importance of this function in a comment in 'Meanings": "So I worked in the figure from the centre of the play's design, and the part radiated through the whole text - the part of Basil. I think that this figure tightened, webbed its structure" (p.47). As death figure, Basil comprehends all the principles of dearth and darkness, and presides over all the failings whose burden means spiritual destitution. In him is vested not just the fact of mortality, but the spiritual lack from which comes the Evil of mortality - the darkness unredeemed by light. This mythic burden is suggested in the symbolic gesture with which the play opens: "The figure [Basil] rises during the lament and touches the disc of the moon." Basil bears this mythic purpose whether waiting to take his toll of Moustique, hounding Lestrade, or in the present scene, where the sickness signifies the spiritual dearth and distress of the folk - the limbo condition of a dispossessed people.

The quest is set in motion by this realistic encounter. The goal of the quester is to attain the state which will triumph over adversity, and this is implicit in the ideal of perfection in Makak's desire for kingship. Its sacredness of intent is archetypally conceived in terms of the triumph of life over death, the rescue of Lazarus from the grave. Makak's efforts on behalf of the sick man enact this aspiration. Set up vis-a-vis the group as ministering healer, the adversity he seeks to overcome is the native burden he shares with them as a representative consciousness. The entire experience coordinated between them and himself is in fact embraced by his own consciousness.

The healing scene is one of the climactic performances in the play, outstanding both as a piece of theatre and for its visionary power. Walcott sustains a perfect balance between the supernatural and the naturalistic, inbuilt into the very folk-content with which he is dealing. The group respond to their burden with ritualistic dance and chant. The dance, fashioned on a cult-dance created by Beryl Mc Burnie's (Trinidadian) dance troupe, and the folk-spiritual "Death, O Me Lord" are orchestrated for a powerful mimetic performance: as with Beryl Mc Burnie's dance itself, the whole is built upon cultist survivals, though now devoid of true religious content. Walcott is rediscovering their primal functions as sacred preverbal expressions of religious experience, in a situation to which they belong originally. The stylisation is not merely functioning as choric heightening, as in Malcochon, but is organic to the movement of the dramatic experience, a form of communication which is itself the reality. The moral value of these folk elements in Walcott's aesthetic is being fully realised here; the ceremonial pattern and function are similar to those of the primitive revival scene in The Lost Steps, where Carpentier recognises the birth of music.[7] It is the expression of their desire to

allay evil, calling for the capacity for faith vested in Makak. Makak comes to the rescue of the mourners as the prototype of the local healer, and he ministers out of similar primal resources, native to the rustic and elemental setting. Moustique introduces him as a man with intimate knowledge of the plants and herbs of the forest, the sources of the medicine-man's knowledge of the chemistry of life. The evil to be conquered is likewise organic and in character with the setting - the man is suffering from a snake-bite. These are emblematic phenomena rediscovering the link between the organic-cosmic and the mythic.

Makak waits for the full Moon, genius of the procreative, to invoke these powers. The invocation is a moment of purest belief and a prophetic conception of the moral destiny of a people. It is the moment of most unclouded perception in the play, and reiterates closely Walcott's own vision of a native creative fulfilment. Its terms closely echo those of The Castaway, repeating the motifs of "The Almond Trees" and "Veranda". The motifs take substance out of the charcoal burner's immediate surroundings. Makak suffers the experience of a burning coal in his hand and pronounces the healing:

> Makak: Like the cedars of Lebanon,
> Like the plantains of Zion,
> the hand of God plant me
> on Monkey Mountain.
> He calleth to the humble.
> And from that height
> I see you all as trees,
> like a twisted forest,
> like trees without names,
> a forest with no roots!
> By this coal in my hand,
> by this fire in my veins
> let my tongue catch fire,
> let my body, like Moses,
> be a blazing bush.
> Now sing in your darkness,
> sing out you forests,
> and Josephus will sweat,

Makak: the sick man will dance,
sing as you sing
in the belly of the boat.
You are living coals,
You are trees under pressure,
you are brilliant diamonds
In the hand of your God.

(I.ii.79-103)

The moral positives contained in Walcott's concept of origins are being fully affirmed here. The condition of forest is the primal condition possessed by virtue of all that returns "new" Caribbean man to the elemental. It is the source and need of the organic capacity for growth. "Uprooted" and "twisted" by the historical experience, his creative potential is as yet untapped: it awaits the creative experiment of the Imagination, the act of self-discovery in which it will be "named" and thus become truly rooted. The process of naming is the exploration through which man gains cognition, comes to identify his deeper needs and capacities in relation to his world - a knowledge which gives him control of his destiny. These are the same definitions being made in The Gulf, and they are being explored through the same tree-forest motif. For Caribbean man, the act must bring recognition of the moral implications his own deprivation bears in relation to the archetypal principles of his human nature. This act is to take place in Makak's journey back into the forest, parallel to the journey into the interior enacted in The Gulf. Makak's return to the forest is to be turbulent and strife-torn, characterised by principles of madness and schizophrenia such as we saw in the forest-journey of The Gulf. At this point, however, Walcott is affirming the triumphant hope and promise of this genesis. It consists in the possibilities of a fresh access to what he calls - the term recurs throughout the corpus - the tragic elation of existence, a recovery of the

sacredness and vitality of early man's creative response to the coincidence of adversity and beauty in life. The imaginative intensity of this tragic elation is the source of song and dance, such as is now being poetically invoked. The slave ancestors found this tragic intensity under the pressures of the middle passage suffering. It found expression in the ritualistic celebration of the limbo dance, which survives from these experiences undergone "in the belly of the boat". The inheritors of the middle passage retain that capacity, the temper of which is needed for the new recreative effort. The "living coal", the charcoal burner's final emblem, compounds all these meanings as it does the physical properties through which they are expressed - the organic potential of trees/forest, the intensity/heat necessary for the productive effort, the transmutation to the ideal/diamond through the alchemy of this effort.

At this point, however, the vision and the cure it effects are not so much realised as perceived by Makak. The perception is being reached by the Makak faculty, while the perversion of the ideal by the Moustique weakness is what is actually realised. The tenor and atmosphere of the scene bears this out: its movement is otherworldly and irreal by contrast with the hard, clear reality of the Moustique episode. Moustique's active involvement in the encounter also signifies the pattern. He it is who discovers the mourners and offers Makak's services to them. As Makak aspires to these spiritual powers, his voice - though it does not intrude at the moment of vision - is a running undertone petitioning for the material sustenance, producing the effect of an undercurrent of mockery. The interaction is symbolic of the weakness that already haunts Makak's conscience. It is the primary manifestation of the duality borne by the white goddess, beginning from the universal venal weakness, and the corruption of Moustique is to proceed hard on. Walcott at the same time draws

upon strong native resources of self-parody for the comic energy which characterises Moustique's take-over:

> Moustique: I see a sick man with snake bite, and a set o' damn asses using old-time medicine. I see a road paved with silver. I see the ocean multiplying with shillings. Thank God. That was good, that was good. [Mimes the healing] By this power in my hand. By this coal in my hand. You ain't playing you good, nuh. Here, take what you want.
>
> (I.ii.170-5)

The Moustique faculty thus comes to the fore as Makak-Moustique proceeds into the realistic everyday world. Taking the lead, Moustique misdirects them - the loss of direction is symbolically expressed:

> Makak: . . . All right, which way now?
>
> Moustique: [Spinning around blindly, he points] This way, master. Quatre Chemin Market.
>
> (I.ii.208-10)

Leaving the supernatural frontiers of the rustic setting, they head for the materialistic world of buying and selling. Their roles are strongly individualised for the betrayal sequence, but the interplay between the two works to maintain their unity. The Makak faculty is in abeyance as Makak-Moustique yields to the temptation to exploit the vision for material gain. Moustique thus goes into the market place and impersonates Makak as faith-healer, reaping the bright harvest of silver he foresaw. Feeding off the destitute villagers in this way, he is the typical parasitic preacher, huckstering faith as a means of livelihood - his vice both contemptible and pardonable. The scene is one of the most outstanding for sheer braggadocio and raw West Indian content, and an effective piece of comic relief after the high seriousness of Makak's vision. Moustique employs the resourcefulness of his type[8] in giving his popular religion the current tag. Under the aegis of the new black promise of Makak, he preaches the back-to-Africa cult. He does so with a rhetorical flair

which is also a stock-in-trade of the local street-preacher. He produces a masterly parody of Makak's vision:

> Moustique: . . . [A woman brings him water] Daughter of heaven, Makak will remember you. But I prefer cash, as I travelling hard. Zambesi, Congo, Niger, Limpopo, is your brown milk I drink, is your taste I remember, is the roots of your trees that is the veins in my hand, is your flowers that falling now from my tongue . . . So, children of darkness, bring what you can give, make harvest and make sacrifice . . . when all is in one bag, we shall pray. You shall fast, and I shall pray.
>
> (I.iii.177-89)

This violation, arising as it does from a generic weakness, has implications peculiar to the circumstances of Makak-Moustique. It is a travesty of the faith to which Makak had aspired, and differs importantly from that perpetrated by the Corporal in the more critical second phase of the quest. As will emerge, the Corporal's undermines the whole basis of this ideal; whereas Moustique's conscious lapse does not deny the integrity of the ideal, but is rather a failure to measure up to it. It shows his inability to rise to the effort it requires in the face of his more immediate material destitution. It is all the more difficult for him to measure up to this belief, ultimately a belief in his own potential, because of his cultural conditioning: the colonial experience has institutionalised the image of the inferior native and the corresponding belief in a white millenium. Makak-Moustique is to recognise these shortcomings in the moment of reckoning, when the quester is overtaken by the consequences of his sin and arrives at awareness through the experience. Makak-Moustique travel this very course as a result of the violation. The quest figure suffers the discovery of the reality and nature of his sin through the experience of corruption. This marks his advance towards self-discovery.

Accordingly, Makak-Moustique is overtaken by the consequences of corruption. It follows the mythic pattern of punishment and confession, deployed through the interaction of realistic and symbolic levels, as also between the two faculties. Moustique meets his just but affecting deserts. The imposter is discovered and the fickle crowd deal destruction with sticks and stones, the punishment symbolic of the destructive forces of greed to which he had yielded. The failure of Moustique is the failure of the crowd itself: resorting to these primitive measures, they are themselves falling prey to their own darkness now run amok. They had accepted a false faith as readily as Moustique offered it, and the failing rebounds against them as much as against Moustique. Basil waits to take his toll, reclaiming Moustique: he had tried to strip Basil of his authority by stealing his hat and coat, trying to find a sinecure in matter, which belongs to the realm of mortality. In the extremity of his peril, Makak reenters. The spiritual faculty which had been in abeyance returns for the rencounter with conscience. The mutual confrontation and recognition between the two initiates the process of mythic discovery. The burden is appropriately confessional:

> Moustique: Pardon, Makak. Pardon. To see that this is where I must die. Here, in the market. The spider, the spider. [He shudders] . . .
>
> Makak: You will not die.
>
> Moustique: Yes, I will die. I take what you had, I take the dream you have and I come and try to sell it. I try to fool them, and they fall on me with sticks, everything, and they kill me.
>
> Makak: How you could leave me alone, Moustique? In all the yards and villages I pass, I hear people saying, Makak was here, Makak was here, and we give him so and so. If it was for the money, I didn't know.
>
> (I.iii.270-81)

As corruption takes its course and Moustique approaches annihilation, it is the experience of the abyss. Makak-Moustique penetrates the infernal and apprehends the reality of damnation. This is the first shock of the darkness whose burden he is to fully realise and come to terms with in the journey into the interior. The supernatural character of this event calls for a highly ritualistic evocation, again adroitly coordinated between the two. As the darkness of death closes over Moustique, Makak's response is a primitive cry of horror, strangely echoing that of Conrad's Kurtz in <u>The Heart of Darkness</u> and its uncanny desolation. Makak's perception is made manifest: he is encircled by demonic shapes and furies performing a horrific dance of death. Like its moral significance, the dynamic and motifs of the vision are archetypal, resembling, for example, that of Stephen Daedalus in the <u>Portrait</u>. The forms of the vision, however, materialise out of Makak's own setting, and retain an atmosphere peculiar to the region: they are conjured up out of the primitive grotesqueries of native superstition, its hobgoblins and devil-lore. Among these Makak's white goddess, now in spectral guise, is to be descried. The stage directions describe the experience:

> SD: [In the darkness the drums begin, and shapes, demons, spirits, a cleft-footed woman, a man with a goat's head, imps, whirl out of the darkness around Makak, and the figure of a woman with a white face and long black hair of the mask, all singing. They take the body on a litter.]

The realistic organisation of these happenings between Makak and Moustique as independent individuals, is a mode of highlighting the moral issues of this phase of the quest, especially in relation to the historico-cultural complex behind them. In doing so, it serves the additional purpose alluded to earlier: that of projecting the didactic and polemical

thrust of the play and articulating its message directly. Moustique, undergoing punishment for his greed as the crowd turn venomous, recognises the essential dilemma behind the failing. He has substituted a material faith for the real thing, partly because of an endemic inability to believe in a black promise. In recognising this shortcoming, Moustique penetrates how the mob is itself implicated in it; defending himself against their merciless onslaught, he gives vent to a bitter denunciation of their own guilt:

> Moustique: [Pushing Basil aside] You know who I am? You want to know who I am? Makak! Makak! or Moustique, is not the same nigger? What you want me to say? "I am the resurrection, I am the life"? "I am the green side of Jordan," or that "I am a prophet stoned by Jerusalem," or you all want me, as if this hand hold magic, to stretch it and like a flash of lightning to make you all white? God after god you change, promise after promise you believe, and you still covered with dirt; so why not believe me. All I have is this [shows the mask], black faces, white masks! I tried like you. . . .
>
> (I.iii.240-9)

This is a climactic declamation in the play, and sums up the final implications of the Moustique defect in the moral psyche of Caribbean man. In effect, the villagers are exacting vengeance because of the failure of Moustique's promise. The action signifies their own wild and self-destructive forces run amok at the failure of yet another religion to bring deliverance. The inability to believe fully in a native promise is almost congenital in the black man. A history of subjugation and denial has incapacitated him most in this area. This has given rise to the habit of self-avoidance in the black man - ultimately the avoidance of the independent, creative effort that a true faith demands. It leaves him predisposed to latch on to any illusion of ready salvation with pious

fervour. Thus the crowd is just as willing to buy, unquestioningly, as Moustique is to sell.

This is a self-avoidance which goes back to the deep-seated and continued servitude to whiteness. It is the black man's compulsive identification of the good life with the white world, and the endemic failing consequent on this - the inability and refusal of belief in a native fulfilment. Thus, success continues to be measured in terms of the achievements of the white race, withholding the native from the responsibility of an original effort. This is the complex of black skins hiding behind white masks, and the case of Moustique and the villagers is representative of the collective situation. Walcott follows the psychological and moral slant of Fanon's analysis of this complex: he is concerned finally with its character as an obstacle to true revolutionary effort, as is Fanon in the book in question, Black Skin White Masks. His analysis aims to expose the gulf between a schizophrenic dependence on revolutionary panaceas, and the purposive, self-deterministic revolutionary effort. His artistic exploration penetrates the moral urgencies all the more acutely. This does not cease to be relevant in a Black Power period: Walcott is to show in the Corporal's case how it is possible to replace the white with a black mask, and how this perpetuates the same moral obloquy.

It is important, however, to recognise Walcott's humanistic approach in exposing this failing, brought out in the sympathy with which Moustique is presented. The fact that it originates so closely from his historico-cultural experience is deserving of understanding. The Corporal's is the less pardonable offence: it is his business, as upholder of the Law, to turn a blind eye on this frailty. He is later to be accused of

Moustique's death for allowing the crowd to carry out their vendetta. Meanwhile the quest-figure, through the dangers experienced as a result of the Moustique frailty, has gained insight into the relationship of this frailty to his native dream. The Moustique burden and awareness are to be carried forward in the next major phase of the quest. Moustique survives in the Tigre-Souris frailties, involved now in a conscious and determined black pursuit. Makak is to fully realise and come to terms with its wider significances in relation to his dream in this more conscious, critical phase of the quest.

The Makak-Corporal Phase

The Makak-Corporal conflict, which follows on that of Makak-Moustique, constitutes the next phase of the quest. Within the dramatic structure of the play it is not, strictly, sequential. It takes us back to the prison scene, the one constant to which the rapidly shifting settings of the play return. The prison scene remains the donnee because of the central significance of the Makak-Corporal conflict in the drama. The Corporal's failing stands as the greatest threat and obstacle to Makak's revolutionary effort. He is the negative self-image which mocks, persecutes, effectively imprisons Makak in his higher aspirations. The jail scene thus embodies a psychic imprisonment which remains the truest battleground of Makak's struggle for self-liberation. In terms of the moral design of the play, however, the return to it at this point represents the decisive sequel to the Moustique trial. In the first phase Makak was tried by a generic weakness, discovering in the process the cultural conflict that still stood as a major obstacle to his dream. He comes now into stark confrontation with this cultural issue. The most rooted and fundamental challenge, it absorbs the universal, in the same

way that Ti-Jean's rebellion against the planter does. The experience consists of these basic movements in the second part of the play: the self-confrontation of Makak-Corporal and resistance of the Corporal's imprisonment; leading to the return to the forest; followed by the apotheosis of Makak-Corporal. These two, the return to the forest and the apotheosis, are so closely linked as to form a single movement, an indivisible process of mythic descent and resurrection. In one sense this phase overarches all the fundamental stages of the quest, the Makak-Corporal conflict having been imminent from the start. Carrying forward the Moustique burden, it embraces, in effect, the beginning, middle and end of the pursuit.

Before entering into the experience of this phase it is necessary to examine at some length the significance of the Corporal as an aspect of Makak's nature. Makak and the Corporal are the two most strongly polarised aspects of the single consciousness reigning over the play, and constitute accordingly the most dialectical unity. The situation is such that the all-embracing consciousness could be either that of the Corporal or Makak. In fact, in performance, while Makak is present as poetic phenomenon, it is the Corporal who is the more full-bodied human dramatisation. This is because the Makak-Corporal relationship is so fundamental to the pattern of the quest. The relationship starts at the basic condition of the split: the division in the colonised between his native "uncivilized" image and the adopted "civilized" image of the mother culture, the most endemic hangover of the colonial experience. The pull towards the civilized image gives rise to a schizophrenic attitude of rejection and contempt towards the native. Thus, initially, the white oriented Lestrade aspect repudiates the native Makak aspect as savage. This makes for the nervous conflict and resistance which

characterises the Makak-Corporal condition, dramatically featured in the dire antagonism between the two. The psyche of the split is defined in the Sartre passage from which Walcott continues to draw for his notes:

> Let us add, for certain other carefully selected unfortunates, that other witchery of which I have already spoken: Western culture. If I were them, you may say, I'd prefer my mumbo-jumbo to their Acropolis. Very good: you've grasped the situation. But not altogether, because you *aren't* them - or not yet. Otherwise you would know that they can't choose; they must have both. . . . each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing. The status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonised people *with their consent.*
>
> (Preface, p.17)

Sartre places emphasis on the consent of the native. In other words, it is because the native is willing to evade himself that he becomes so receptive to an illusory equation of the ideal with the alien cultures.

These are insights focal to the understanding of the Makak-Corporal complex. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that they are the predicament of Makak as quest figure, which is really the fact that Makak and the Corporal interact as one entity in the play. We have considered this in section one. The dream which creates the need for a higher reality forces him into collision with the conflicts most original to his experience. In short, the attachment to the ideal of whiteness as progress is an unavoidable obstacle with which the Caribbean everyman must come to terms in a search for fulfilment. Fanon recognises this as an empirical necessity in the evolution of colonised peoples.[9] It is inevitable therefore that Makak's Apparition should take her earthly visage and haunt him in the form of a white woman. This feature is interpreted in Fanon's classic formulation:

> Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *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.
> Her love takes me on to the noble road that leads to total realization. . .
> I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.
> When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.

(Black Skin White Masks, p.46)

The black-white complex is emblemised in Lestrade's identity as mulatto. It represents a hybridism and schizophrenia which is as much that of the race as Walcott himself - the white mask covering both the social and artistic values of the white race. The consent to servitude of the white mask is an error originating from ultimate human failings. This is brought into sharp focus, as in the case of Moustique, in the individualised portrait of the Corporal.

Corporal Lestrade, who bears the full subtlety of these explorations, is the richest piece of characterisation in the play. As villain of the piece, his genius and wit have an almost Iagian dynamic. His role is, categorically, to uphold the values and institutions of Law and Order. Before these are supplanted in an era of Black Power, they are those of the former master. He is the bourgeois middleman whom Fanon sees in The Wretched of the Earth as the greatest enemy to liberation,[10] Sartre's "enemy who betrays his brother and becomes our accomplice". Deputising for the settler, he stands opposite the black natives Makak-Moustique-Tigre-Souris, who must be controlled by Law and Order. Repudiating and persecuting their native condition, which is of course his own, his aim is to drill them into a civilized order. The Corporal despises the

stubborn bestiality of the native, which refuses the enlightenment offered by the tradition of the former master. This attitude informs his treatment of his prisoners in the drilling scenes, outstanding for their brilliant masquerade. His essential viewpoint is expressed in this speech:

> Corporal: [Infuriated] My lords, behold! . . . Behold me, flayed and dismayed by this impenetrable ignorance! This is our reward, we who have borne the high torch of justice through tortuous thickets of darkness to illuminate with vision the mind of primeval peoples, of backbiting tribes! We who have borne with us the texts of the law, the Mosaic tablets, the splendours of marble in moonlight, the affidavit and the water toilet, this stubborness and ingratitude is our reward! But let me not sway you with displays of emotion, for the law is emotionless.
>
> (I.iii.1-10)

Here and throughout the play the Corporal's speeches display great verbal energy. His fascination with the rhetoric of the tradition finds expression in the witty pastiche of the outsider, an effect which is deftly handled for Walcott's satirical purposes. Beneath the undercutting effects, the speech sums up a serious ethic. His belief in the values and achievements of white culture, though it makes him into the true mimic man, is not merely a matter of blind servitude. Misguided the Corporal certainly is, but he has a conscious objective which involves much more than a disingenuous, uninformed imitation.

The Corporal starts from a view of reality in terms of culture and anarchy. Culture is synonymous with progress. The achievements of civilization - for all intents and purposes Western Civilization - are the index of its progress, progress which means above all the conquest of and emergence from pre-civilization. Thus Civilization conceives itself, generically, as the prevalence of Order over Disorder. In accordance with this premise it erects its institutions to maintain the superstructure

of progress. The prime institution with which it purports to transcend the anarchy is that of Justice - the Law as the foundation stone of society's reality. Walcott resumes the argument against the Law begun in Malcochon. The Law's rigid structures, bent on an obliteration and denial of the anarchy, are inadequate to the needs of humanity. The limitation, in fact, is an inbuilt potential for a travesty of humanity, and Justice can become an instrument of mere suppression and vengeance.

Law and Order have this conceptual value for the Corporal, and in his case the moral shortcomings outlined above are especially acute. The pattern already established and enshrined in the master's culture becomes for him an absolute credo. He invests totally in what seems, superficially, an already 'proven' system. Sparing him the effort of a native evolution, the master's "torch of justice" provides a ready formula for progress. From this viewpoint the native condition remains eminently pre-civilised, the gap between the primitive and the enlightened yawns wide, and Law and Order must be rigidly applied to achieve these goals. The application must perforce be violent and stringent. The Corporal has thus to resort to an absolute dependence on the gun: progress has, literally, to be enforced. This involves a schizophrenic violence, which is the source of the Corporal's dismay. But the rule of the gun is the most effective means of keeping the savagery in check. When this threatens to erupt in the Market scene, it is time to reach for his gun. He explains his purposes to Inspector Pamphilion:

> Corporal: No, Market and Sanitary Inspector Pamphilion. *Mens sana in corpore sano.* The pistol is not to destroy but to protect. You will ask me, to protect who from what, or rather what from who? And my reply would be, to protect people from themselves, or to put it another way, to preserve order for the people. We are in a state of emergency.
>
> (I.iii.57-62)

As the Corporal's innuendos show, he is not unaware of the contradictory principles of this ethic. The rule of the gun operates in a social morality based on suppression, since the corporal aspect of man's nature must always be controlled in the interests of the commonweal. It is because the Law is founded on this principle of suppression that it betrays humanity's purpose and becomes a travesty of reality. There is no place for the frailty of a Moustique in the Corporal Order. The rule of the gun is patently based on falsehood, and the worldly establishment it serves accordingly irrational and absurd. Most pernicious of all is the fact that it must inevitably perpetrate corruption and falsehood to maintain this illusory ideal as the anarchy threatens every now and again, the net result being this: it exists solely to defend itself. The Corporal explains how the Law exploits its powers of suppression to this end, which is its power to change the complexion of things. He gives a classic demonstration of the latter:

> Corporal: Well, the law is complicated and people very simple. [To a vendor] Morning. That's a nice pawpaw, sir.
>
> Vendor: *Oui, mon corporal.* [They move on]
>
> Corporal: You see?
>
> Inspector: That was a melon.
>
> Corporal: I know. But in the opinion of the pistol, and for the preservation of order, and to avoid any argument, we both was satisfied it was a pawpaw.
>
> (I.iii.69-76)

What this really demonstrates is that the system can work only through the mental enslavement of society, to which both the Corporal and his victims must subscribe. This was the very enslavement which sustained the colonial empire. Adopting the ethic, the Corporal,

who is both instrument and victim, falls prey to its perversions. Lestrade's consciousness is in fact quite complex. He is tormented by this lucidity into the contradictions of the false god he serves, and expresses misgivings about them every now and again. He betrays the servant's rancour and envy towards the burden of the master, knowing that race excludes him from full autonomy in the system:

> Corporal: Don't tell me about the law. Once I loved the law. I thought the law was just, universal, a substitute for God, but the law is a whore, she will adjust her price. In some places the law does not allow you to be black, not even black, but tinged with black.
>
> (II.i.30-34)

His misgivings find an outlet in this inverted sympathy towards those with whom he shares this plight:

> Corporal: And if you know how much I would like to do for these my people, my people, you will understand even better. I would like to see them challenge the law, to show me they alive. But they paralyse with darkness. They paralyse with faith. They cannot do nothing, because they born slaves and they born tired. I could spit.
>
> (I.iii.79-84)

But the divided Lestrade looks to a bulwark against these misgivings in the authority his role confers. It is the line of least resistance. This leaves his guilt all the more intransigent.

Finally, this mental enslavement amounts to a subordination and suppression of the mind faculty in the interests of the corporal and worldly. It is the one-dimensional vision of reality decried in "Guyana 1", which is reiterated throughout the corpus as Walcott's main critical focus on the moral indirections of his society. The Corporal's position remains one-dimensional and uncreative, since, in denying mind, it denies the complex interrelationship between the corporal and spiritual. This is the crucial limitation of the worldly order he serves

in clinging to the systems of the 'proven' tradition - his goal stops fatally short of the higher, more arduous reaches of Makak's pursuit. (Here it is important to notice again that the Corporal failing is what can divert Makak from his goal, since it represents his own susceptibility to the white mask). The Corporal's basic motto, like his office, stresses this final moral significance. He exists to defend the principle: Mens sana in corpore sano. The position represents a dangerous shortcircuiting of reality, and its consequence is the inhuman self-estrangement which gives rise to the denial of Moustique in Makak-Moustique-Lestrade. The man who thus shortcircuits reality is ungrounded, and must straddle the establishments of culture like Corporal Lestrade, the straddler. In the light of this, his highly dramatic change of complexion from White to Black Law is consistent. Straddling belief in a worldly millennium, the progress he pursues can wear either white or black features, so long as it bears a workable code of Law. The two masks are interchangeable, and he defends Black tribal Law as assiduously as he does White Law before the revolution: "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. . . ." (II.iii.53-5). The whole dialectic is angled to show how the two are obverse sides of the same coin.

The characterization of Lestrade is a subtle exposition of both the psychology and morality of this truth. The one principle behind our precipitate attachment to black or white ideologies is the evasion of a creative responsibility towards our human complexity: this is what makes us latch on to black or white "visions" as ultimate panaceas. The failing, par-excellence that of the politician, has been

that of the colonial artist as well. He too has been beguiled by white culture and susceptible to the same obscurantism. The perils of this road exist for both the Walcotts and the brotherhood. In an era of progress, it is this "politician's truth" to which we are most susceptible. Our progress remains schizophrenic and stunted, since we are always overtaken by the otherness. Walcott's creative interpretation draws the full moral significance out of Sartre's emphasis on the native's consent.

It has been necessary to deal with the Corporal at some length for a full appreciation of what his defect entails. These insights are vital to an understanding of the Makak-Corporal confrontation which dominates this phase of the quest. The gravity of the Corporal error, whose burden was oppressive from the start, poses the greatest trial for the native quester - the final moral reckoning to be undergone before he can reach his goal. Archetypally, the birth of true consciousness is attained through its final straits of torment and expiation, the Walpurgisnicht (Lestrade's "night of the what's what") of the quester. The experience progresses through a complex sequence of events, but it pivots on the basic movements coordinated between Makak and Lestrade: Makak's killing of the Corporal and escape to the forest; the exploration of a native "black" experience free of the Corporal; the reappearance of the Corporal and his reconciliation with Makak, leading to the paradoxical Makak-Corporal apotheosis. The events represent basic moral necessities of the Makak-Corporal confrontation: respectively, the attempt to return to a native creative effort by freeing himself of the Corporal's traumatic white imprisonment; the process of native discovery in the forest; a climactic moral integration gained in coming to terms with the Corporal error which, now wearing another colour, still haunts him. The naturalistic presentation of these movements is

immediate on the level of social and political necessity, but the frontiers of the experience in which these are involved are on the cosmic. It is deployed, again, through a powerful interpenetration of the naturalistic and the mythic.

The peculiar Walpurgisnicht of Makak-Lestrade takes place in the forest. The trysting place of this archetypal experience differs from one culture to another. Makak-Lestrade's has its equivalent in the charcoal burner's native element: the forest and its darkness. The forest-darkness, like the tree-coal-diamond property, constitutes a mythic configuration which appertains to his own world. A brief review of this mythic significance is necessary before we enter the forest. Generically, the forest-darkness symbolises the primitive aboriginal condition of existence. Makak belongs organically to it as a figure of origins (see discussion on pp.316-7). The condition is larger than, but relates to the cultural fact of his blackness - he retains it by very reason of the "black" cultural experience. But, a cosmic condition, it transcends the merely cultural. It is the original primordial state which Lestrade abhors as savage and uncivilized. These archetypal dimensions are registered in the biblical echoes of Lestrade's own description:

> Corporal: . . . 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.
>
> (I.Prol.146-50)

This is the condition in which his aspiration towards a higher destiny must find its true genesis, and it is only through a conscious return to these sources that Makak can realise this genesis. From the rencounter with its terrors must the quester discover its truths. The whole

structuring of the forest experience is very complex, consisting of a series of involvements among the group. Between Makak on the one hand, and Tigre and Souris; between Makak and the Corporal; between Makak and the lot. On the symbolic level, these series of involvements constitute one scene of internalised conflict and discovery, while it is also important for Walcott's purposes that they remain individuals. It is with these things in mind that we must follow the complex development of the return to the forest.

Makak must free himself of the burden which the Corporal represents to return to darkness-blackness for his native pursuit. What motivates the action is significant. Tigre, the militant principle of his nature, incites him to destroy the Corporal with these words:

> Tigre: How else can you prove your name is lion, unless you do one bloody, golden, dazzling thing, eh? And who stand in your way but your dear friend Corporal Lestrade the straddler, neither one thing nor the next. . . .
>
> (II.i.94-97)

A violent freedom from the Corporal's burden is truly the only way out, but the temptation to see the deed as a "bloody, golden, dazzling thing" already introduces a betrayal of its higher purpose. The pattern is fundamental to the whole nature of the experience to be undergone in the forest. Makak's ideal to be lion of his race is to attain to the procreative essence of his own combative element, blackness. The Tigre aspect, prompting him to exploit it as worldly power, is desecrating it to earthly use. The pull between the ideal and its desecration describes the pattern of the black experience undergone in the forest - the dual movement between transcendent aspiration and worldly corruption, between essence and matter. The dynamic reflects the pattern of dualities borne

by Makak's white goddess. In effect, as Makak makes his overtures towards a transcendent purity, he is vulnerable to adversity and betrayal by his earthly weaknesses. They are seminal weaknesses especially typical of his own condition: the jungle-law aggressive principle represented by Tigre, the defenceless needy aspect by Souris. These two are inseparable from him, and inevitably accompany him in the journey.

Now that Makak has freed himself of the white yoke by escaping from the Corporal, these vulnerabilities take their colour in a native, 'black' elemental effort. Once in the forest therefore, Makak, encompassing Tigre and Souris, undergoes the fluctuation between the ideal aspiration and its mock-image in reality, the one creating the shadow. Makak envisions the fruition of his essence in a kingly dominion over his world - the mission entrusted him by the white goddess. We have seen how he apprehends this in terms of an Eden-like Africa before exile. Thus, from the beginning, he thinks to induce the state by smoking the herbs of his forest. This is an allusion to the ganga-smoking Rastafarian cult of Jamaica, just as Makak's vision of a lion-like destiny identifies with the Rastafarians' belief in the divinity of the Ethiopian king as the Lion of Judah. Makak seeks the same kind of spiritual transport in the herbs of his forest as the Rastafarians in their ganga. The life-principle of the forest is alchemised in his own "ganga". Thus he counsels:

> Makak: I know the nature of fire and wind. I will make a small fire. Here, look, you see this plant? Dry it, fire it, and your mind will cloud with a sweet, sweet-smelling smoke. Then the smoke will clear. You will not need to eat.
>
> (II.ii.9-12)

Makak's is a desire to transcend the vulnerabilities which the two represent, as is signified in his words "you will not need to eat". This very denial provokes the importunities of Tigre and Souris. Tigre, whose voice is that of the socially deprived threatening violence, mocks:

> Tigre: You crazy ganga-eating bastard, I want meat. Flesh and blood. Wet grass. Come on, come on, show us the way to Monkey Mountain. The Corporal hunting us.
>
> (II.ii.13-15)

The momentum of this desire leaves Makak oblivious, for the time being, to the pull between the spiritual and the material. The Makak seer faculty continues to aspire, carried on the pitch of the dream-madness (like that of Othello in "Goats and Monkeys"). Makak thus remains apart, contemplating the magical transformation which will release him from his "defects" - while Tigre and Souris, pursuing their material aims, are the fleshly undertow. Souris goes thieving to ward off hunger; Tigre is impatient to arrive at the earthly millenium of Monkey Mountain, and secure the power of money which will defend him from the Corporals of this world. The effect is of a vigorous undercutting, and a rich source of comic relief such as we saw in the case of Moustique. Here, for example, Tigre decides to take advantage of the entranced Makak:

> Tigre: Just do as he say. That's all. This is his forest. He could easily lose us. You didn't see how he stabbed the Corporal? . . . Ah, Africa! Ah, blessed Africa! Whose earth is a starved mother waiting for the kiss of her prodigal, for the kiss of my foot. Talk like that, you fool.
>
> (II.ii.26-32)

But the deeper function underlying this pattern of mock-heroic versus heroic prevails. It is a mythic process of the interplay between

light-ideal and shadow-corruption. These are visionary emanations which make of Makak's forest a twilit experience. Tigre's description of Makak conveys the effect: "Look at him! Half-man and half-forest, a shadow moving through the leaves". The process increases in intensity, until Makak arrives at a delirious apprehension of the fulfilment of his kingly destiny, at a sense of his kingdom come on earth. Totally hallucinated, he feels within himself the fruition of the sheer creative essence of his forest element, investing him with the divine faculty. Makak is here at the brink of divine error - significantly, the dominion it brings is one of mortal power. In his earthly sphere it can only be viable as the power to conquer and destroy, to hold sway over the mortal. In the same way, transcendence had meant a glorious vendetta for Vercingetorix. Makak's self-glorification becomes an apotheosis of mortal power, heir to the congenital error to which the transcendent thrust is most susceptible - the error reflected in the duality of the white goddess bearing gifts "most diverse". Remaining visionary at this point, it is to be translated into actuality in the mock-apotheosis on his emergence from the forest. There the Corporal faculty is to exploit it for a racial vendetta. We will return to this later. In this hallucinatory transcendence, his people, "the twisted forest with no roots" whose mission he bears, become apotheosized with him. They take form out of the "fired trees" of the forest to become his host of fighting angels. The two felons closest to him, like Christ's two thieves on Calvary, become generals of his army. The apotheosis is observed to mock ceremonial, as Souris crowns Makak with vines; and it is a moment of apocalyptic expression:

Makak: [In a thundering voice] Feed my armies!

Souris: Pardon?

Makak: Feed my armies! Look, look them there [Rises and gestures beyond the fire] They waiting for their general, their king, Makak, to tell them when to eat. Salute them. You see them where they are? . . .

Tigre: *Salute! Couillon* [Souris salutes]
. . . .

Makak: Attention, and listen. I want to speak to my men. I want to tell my armies, you can see their helmets shining like fireflies, you can see their spears as thick as bamboo leaves. I want to tell them this. That now is the time, the time of war. War. Fire, fire and destruction.

(II.ii.121-35)

This apotheosis, fraught with the dangers to which we have alluded, means for Makak the arrival at a native millenium. This has a fundamental value in the progress of the quest. It marks an advance from the obloquy and denial of the Corporal imprisonment. It is thus a necessary phase through whose perils he must pass to arrive at his own true medium. The vision of revenge thus marks a point of spiritual climax, and is a turning point for the final realisations which are to take place in the forest. It brings the creative and destructive into a moral collision, and differs importantly from the worldly vendetta to be enacted on their emergence from the forest. Here it is a divine rage illuminated by a highly spiritual purpose - Makak's vengeance takes on the dread aspect of the Old Testament divinity. On this level, Makak, remaining mortal, is exposed to the possibilities of both the good and the error. Makak is near lost at this point, but he errs at the highest possible spiritual level. These moral implications are present in Makak's earlier promise of the kingdom to Tigre:

Makak: . . . Then, when we get there, I will make you my general. . . . I will say fight with him, because he is a man, a man who know how to hate,

Makak: to whom the life of a man is like a mosquito, like a fly. [Claps his hand at an insect, and drops it in the fire. Tigre laughs] And the fire is up to God.

(II.ii.89-94)

This spiritual pitch is the point at which the climactic reconciliation with the Corporal is to take place. What has been happening so far has laid the foundation for the reconciliation with the Corporal. The pattern of moral contrasts between Makak and the two felons has been generated by Makak's increasing efforts to attain the ideal. It is the exercise of Mind/Imagination which is the generative force, and this discovery of its powers marks the beginning of Makak's self-emancipation. The process is so concentrated that the Makak seer faculty overrides the burden of Tigre and Souris. Makak's words in answer to Tigre's question about the means of their return to Africa, point to the significance of the exercise of Mind in this part of the journey. It makes explicit the final significance of the burden of Africa in Makak's vision - the recovery, as already suggested, of the lost realms of the dispossessed Memory.

Makak: Once, when Moustique asked me that, I didn't know. But I know now. What power can crawl on the bottom of the sea, or swim in the ocean of air above us? The mind, the mind. Now, come with me, the mind can bring the dead to life, it can go back, back, back, deep into time. It can make a man a king, it can make him a beast. . . .

(II.ii.49-54)

Now that Makak has been brought to these reaches of creative capacity and their dangers through the exercise of Mind, the time is opportune for the reappearance of the Corporal, whose error represents the threat to this faculty. The reappearance of the Corporal is necessary for the full

integration into the act of Mind and the acceptance of the burden it discovers. This act of Mind constitutes the knowledge of his own powers, independent of the prescribed image of the will-less, mindless negro upheld by the Corporal. The Corporal error has been the greatest danger precluding this realisation: accordingly it is upon Makak-Corporal's reconciliation that this mythic act devolves, an act which must involve expiation and suffering. On the realistic plane,the Corporal's entry is also perfectly timed. Here the moral significance and psychology of the relationship interlock. Just as Makak arrives at the violent reaches of his vision of revenge, the worldly Corporal faculty which had been merely "grazed but not scorched" returns to suppress its dangers. In keeping with its raison d'etre the Corporal reaction finds expression as counter-threat. Lestrade thus reappears as a threatening force to hunt down the natives, seeking to undermine Makak's newly discovered powers:

> Corporal: Did you feel pity for me or horror of them? Believe me, I am all right . . . But this is only what they dream of. And before things grow clearer, nearer to their dream of revenge, I must play another part. . . . So I let them escape. Let them run ahead. . . . Attempting to escape. Attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That's the most dangerous crime. It brings about revolution.
>
> (II.i.144-60)

The Makak faculty, however, which has come into its own power in native territory, prevails. To this power the Corporal faculty must succumb.

This is a forcing of the Corporal faculty to accept the truth of the darkness. The Corporal must be tried by its terrors to arrive at this truth, the experience of these trials enforcing penance and conversion. Again, the individualised presentation brings this into sharp focus. On the symbolic interiorised level it is, for Makak-Corporal, a

coordination between the spiritual and the corporal. The terrors of the forest-darkness overtake and pursue the Corporal, who, setting out to hunt, finds himself hunted. Against them his Mannlicher affords him no defence. They are like the archetypal furies clamouring for repentance. As with Makak-Moustique, they appear in native, primitive guise. The creatures of Makak-Moustique's dying vision and Basil taunt him from the shadows. The Corporal undergoes a jolting, disorienting experience similar to that of the surveyor in "Guyana 1", in his case more trying because of his particular guilt:

> Corporal: Who are you? I'm going mad, goddamit.
> Stiff upper lip. Who're you in that ridiculous
> gear? Shoot! Or I'll stop! Stop or I'll run.
> It's Basil, is it? Time up. Twilight of Empire,
> eh? Night of the what's what? . . .
>
> Basil: I am Basil, the carpenter, the charcoal seller.
> I do not exist. A figment of the Imagination,
> a banana of the mind . . .
>
> Corporal: My mind, my mind. What's happened to my mind?
>
> Basil: It was never yours, Lestrade.
>
> Corporal: Then if it's not mine, then I'm not mad.
>
> (II.ii.160-79)

The Corporal's doctrine - Mens sana in corpore sano - is being radically undermined in this experience, as a result of which he experiences a total loss of his hold on reality. He recognises the moment of moral reckoning, his "night of the what's what", but the birth of awareness must be slow and painful, the error being so deeply entrenched. Following the surviving tendency to straddle, he moves to allay these terrors by a rapid, token conversion to blackness, again misconceiving the cultural for the spiritual reality. He falls back on a "flat, accustomed, prayer" to celebrate the glories of Africa:

Corporal: [Flatly, like an accustomed prayer] All right. Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind, *sero te amavi*, to cite Saint Augustine who they say was black. I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest, at the foot of Monkey Mountain [The creatures withdraw] I kiss your foot, O Monkey Mountain. [He removes his clothes] I return to this earth, my mother. Naked, trying very hard not to weep in the dust. . . . Now I see a new light. I sing the glories of Makak! The glories of my race! What race? I have no race! Come! Come, all you splendours of imagination. Let me sing of darkness now. . . .

(II.ii.203-4)

The Corporal comes to realise, however, that race such as he conceives it, is immaterial in the forest. It is the preternatural truth of darkness which holds sway in the forest, and, disclaiming race, he summons the original faculty of Imagination to "sing of darkness". He acknowledges thereby his cosmic nakedness, and experiences the instinctual need for the cosmic act of Imagination: to sing, "create" out of the darkness. This is the climactic birth of awareness. What is being realised is an original act of Genesis, the creation of Life out of primordial Chaos through the act of Imagination, in which consists the consciousness of both the darkness and the light that are the principles of existence. The birth of this awareness is consequent on an organic taking of root in the darkness, the rooting process which the Corporal undergoes. This process of genesis is ritualistically enacted, with powerful evocations of the biblical. The experience - the integration between the two is the quester's own full initiation into its truth - is interacted between the two. The Corporal faculty, undergoing the organic process, is being ministered to by the spiritual Makak faculty, bringing enlightenment. The new genesis is thus enacted between the Corporal and Makak:

Corporal: My hands. My hands are heavy. My feet . . . [He rises, crouched] My feet grip like roots. The arteries are like rope. [He howls] Was that my voice? My voice. O God, I have become what I mocked. I always was, I always was. Makak! Makak! forgive me, old father.

. . . .

Corporal: [Looking up] Grandfather. Grandfather. Where am I? Where is this? Why am I naked?

Makak: Because like all men you were born here. Here, put this around you [He covers him with the sack] What is this?

. . . .

Makak: They reject half of you. We accept all. Rise. Take off your boots. Doesn't the floor of the forest feel cool under your foot! Don't you hear your own voice in the gibberish of the leaves? Look how the trees have opened their arms? And in the hoarseness of the rivers, don't you hear the advice of all our ancestors. When the moon is hidden, look how you sink, forgotten,into the night. The forest claims us all my son. No one needs gloves in his grave.

(II.ii.215-34)

It is here that the profound moral values contained in Walcott's concept of origins are most fully consummated, and find their clearest definition in relation to the regional situation. This genesis is, moreover, the culmination of the purpose of the journey into the interior. It marks a special advance and turning point in the quest. Now that this full act of consciousness has taken place, and the true origins of the native dream discovered in the universal condition, the quest figure is able to perceive and bear the full moral responsibility of what is engendered in his pursuit. He is now in a position to be fully alerted to the pull between the ideal and its corruptibility, between himself and the frailties which continue inseparable from him. The survival of the Corporal failing is most meaningful in this respect. It is the surviving susceptibility to a worldly one-dimensional order, now wearing the native

colour - the greatest possibility of corruption to which he is open. This is now subject to Makak's moral percipience. What Makak has gained is the faculty of moral susceptibility, that faculty through which he will be able to descry his indirections, as his frailties succumb to their human importunities, and to know when he is lost. It is because he has gained freedom from the negative self-image which had left him resigned to the degeneracy of his condition.

What ensues - from Makak's loss of direction as these various aspects come into conflict with each other to the apotheosis - is the realisation of the pursuit in terms of this awareness. With the intensification of his commitment to a native dream, all the vulnerabilities and possibilities of corruption he carries within himself come into sharp collision, the Corporal error remaining the most dire. The Corporal, now fighting for a Black Power milennium comes into conflict with Tigre's personal desire for material power, while the simple Souris fights to maintain his bettered condition on its own terms. The strife is a result of the moral indirections to which the native dream is still prone. The moral pattern is again skilfully deployed in the shared action between Makak and the brotherhood. They, each precipitant towards his own goal, take over the purpose of the dream from Makak, while he admits to being lost and tired. In this - and it is of crucial importance - Makak remains the perceiving, suffering faculty and the experiential centre of the situation. Thus, as the tug-of-war continues, Makak, almost spent, intuits the teasing but insoluble bond between corruptibility and the ideal, between beasthood and godhead. His admission to being lost and tired is no mere gesture of defeat and abandonment. It is a complex and profound cosmic insight calling for the utmost act of courage. Makak

is apprehending the burden of an inescapable destiny which must evolve through the existential interaction between dream and frailty, light and darkness, moon and shadow. Since the existence of the one is the occasion of the other - "when the Moon is hidden . . . [man] sinks, forgotten, into the night" - their interdependence is the cosmic balance to which reality revolves. The deeper metaphysical significance lodged in the enigmatic duality of the white goddess is being arrived at here. Makak responds to this in a climactic utterance. It signifies the impossibility of human perfectibility; but it is human destiny, and necessary, that the ideal be cherished while we remain sensitive to the threat of adversity and danger which are its very element. In the tension between the two are the true sources of human creativity. The burden is compressed in the parabolic allusion to the friendship of Moon and Earth, taken from the Noh quotation which serves as the epigraph to Dream:[11]

> Makak: [Holding out the mask] I was a king among shadows. Either the shadows were real, and I was no king, or it is my own kingliness that created the shadows. Either way, I am lonely, lost, an old man again. No more. I wanted to leave this world. But if the moon is earth's friend, eh, Tigre, how can we leave the earth. And the earth, self. Look down and there is nothing at our feet. We are wrapped in black air, we are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind. Soon, soon it will be morning, praise God, and the dream will rise like vapour, the shadows will be real, you will be corporal again, you will be thieves, and I an old man, drunk and disorderly, . . .
>
> (II.ii.289-300)

This is the philosophical climax of the play, and it repeats the burden of landfall contained in The Gulf. Makak has arrived at a point parallel to Walcott's progress through the interior in "Guyana IV", the true resting point of Walcott's thought.

This awareness is being gained as dream and frailty precipitate into ultimate corruption, the pursuit gathering momentum in the forest. Through the strife and indirections of his shadows (Tigre-Souris-Corporal) - which signify the experience of being lost - he is discovering the reality of evil and adversity which inhere in his destiny as dreamer. The quester is being lost to find himself again. In the concentric pattern of moral reckonings through which the quest progresses, this is the ultimate and most dire struggle. The discovery of Evil finds expression as an apocalyptic experience. Makak bears the burden of the errors being committed by the brotherhood, and moral illumination finds expression in a prophetic vision of damnation. Thus Tigre and the Corporal head for destruction as they encircle each other, the one bent on his dream of money, the other hunting down all threats to a black Order. The Corporal's is the stronger power and Tigre is destroyed. Makak pronounces the moral burden:

> Makak: 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?
>
> (II.ii.316-9)

Out of their final straits the quest figure must emerge with knowledge of the true bearings of his dream. All the stages of his progress in the journey through the forest have ripened towards this: the initial creative effort, describing its "unconscious" pattern of light and shadow, the reintegration with the Corporal, which was the true birth to a consciousness of this duality, leading to a full insight into his moral destiny in these confrontations. At this point, Makak's role as message-bearer becomes most direct, and thrusts out prominently from the deeper symbolic dimension we have been considering. The multiple aspects

of Makak the Caribbean everyman are all representative types in the community, with its hierarchy of Corporals, Tigres, and Souris. Makak's prophecy is a comment on the self-destructive nature of a black pursuit undirected by self-knowledge. It is Walcott's most urgent critique of the dangers of the current radical scene - and at the same time a backward glance at the Nigerian civil strife:

> Makak: [Over Tigre's body] The tribes! The tribes! One by one, they will be broken. One will sink, and the other will rise, like the gold and silver scales of the sun and the moon, and that is named progress.
>
> (II.ii.324-7)

The Apotheosis

The quest is to be realised in the return to earth. Makak emerges from the forest back into civilization for the purpose. His dream of a higher destiny must find fruition, but, importantly, in terms of the experience he has gained in the forest. This takes place in the apotheosis. The peculiar character of this apotheosis is all-important. It is, in fact, a non-apotheosis in which itself consists true realisation. Its pattern is antithetical. Makak, being enthroned as king and lion of his race, penetrates the delusion to see himself as a shadow king. This antithetical pattern, which is very effectively handled, is morally necessary. The whole logic behind this turns on the Makak-Corporal association. Here we must remember that the Corporal failing, now wearing a different colour, is a capacity for error to which Makak remains susceptible. Makak and the Corporal are united in this worldly endeavour for this fundamental reason: the attempt to install a native kingdom is the attempt to make the ideal a reality. This can

only mean its materialisation into a worldly order, which must inevitably depend upon the Corporal ethic described above. The ideal, as the white goddess symbol warns, is unattainable, and to attempt to reach it is to know ultimate corruption. The Corporal threat is already imminent before Makak leaves the forest. He is to dominate the action, is the power behind the throne in the institution of the statutes of Makak's black kingdom. Makak remains, however, the apprehending spiritual faculty seeing through the shadows, the hollowness of the proceedings, to the reality on which he must come to rest.

The scene, like the opening courtroom scene, is one of the consummate pieces of theatre in the play. The design, as already noticed, is necessary for the dialectical progress of the journey; at the same time it serves Walcott's polemical purpose, following the two-fold method employed throughout the play. Makak is enthroned with great pomp and ceremony. Ritualistic observances and appurtenances are a source of rich theatrical pageantry. The ceremonial and decor present an illusory masquerade in the style of Genet's The Blacks, as Makak's kingdom of revenge, administered by the Corporal, comes into its own. The illusory masquerade is the performance of a hollow dark ritual from which Makak is to be freed by his awakening perception. At the same time, it is the mask of irreality directed at the audience, expressing its controversial message much more explicitly than in Genet.

Makak is apotheosised on the transcendent heights to which he had aspired - the perfected reaches of his native destiny as king and lion of his race. The apotheosis is celebrated in African cultural splendour, Makak featuring as war king of his tribes. The masks of his tribal gods surround him, his chiefs wait on him, his tribal wives chant

his praises, and sing the glories of his conquests. The final value of the African conception of Makak's dream emerges clearly at this point. The African image and its cultural trappings predominate as the exteriorised metaphor for what Makak conceives as a lion-like destiny. We have already seen why it is psychically inevitable that Makak's dream, black as distinct from white, should hark back to this image. Walcott is to show how these African trappings, per se, are non-viable in a true native awareness and rehabilitation (it is his essential position on the radical insistence on a total African recovery).[12] It is to be exploited to serve the Corporal's racist policy. At this point in the apotheosis, it takes its integrity from the symbolic significance it holds for Makak: the transcendent ideal which he is to reject in the end. The African externals, in fact, assimilate a number of motifs from other traditions to embody Makak's delusions of an arrival at pure essence - the perennial yearning for the celestial city, in which all desire has its ultimate sources. As king of his tribes - the Corporal faculty remains subordinated for the time being - Makak is attributed overlordship over all Good and Evil, over natural and supernatural world, the power of both life and death. These attributes are celebrated in litanic and psalmic chants, the echoes being primarily of the Old Testament invocations. The Chorus of wives intone these praises:

> Chorus: Drinkers of milk from the Mountains of the Moon.
> Who has held captivity captive,
> Who has bridled the wind,
> Who has fathered the brood of the crocodile.
> Whose eye is the sun,
> Whose plate is the moon at its full,
> Whose sword is the moon at its crescent.
> Praise him!
>
> (II.iii.9-16)

Such classical allusions to the role of Penelope in the Odyssey occur side by side with the African - the true value of the convergence of several traditions in Walcott's art being telescoped here:

> Chorus: And we are his wives
> For whom the sea knits its wool,
> Robes without seam
> Who is brother to God.
>
> (II.iii.18-21)

This transcendent dimension, however, remains inaccessible. Its Makak is a poetic evocation, irreal and intangible in contrast to the active apotheosis which follows hard on. Seeking worldly realisation, Makak's ideal is seduced into the Corporal Order of Power. This Order demands the establishment of the canons of a vendetta most immediate to his native cause. Its enforcement reverts to the one-dimensional pattern which eschews the awareness of the complex duality of humanity, and perpetrates the same evils as the white code of Justice that preceded it. The Corporal's institution of Makak's kingdom is a non-viable rule of destruction reverting to total anarchy, in which light is overtaken by shadow. Its purposes are served by the arch-symbol of corruption, Basil himself. The Makak persona becomes a mere shadow in the background, nodding ineffectually at the dark sinister ceremony through which he perceives his own hollow reflection.

The Corporal takes complete control of the proceedings. The canons of native rule demand that the race be avenged on past injustices. This is necessary for the assertion and maintenance of its absolute autonomy, which ultimately amounts to an ethnic apartheid. Justice is meted out to prisoners and traitors in a dark Inquisition, where Basil is the Corporal's chief agent, in accordance with his mission to deal death and destruction. The sentences are executed to a ceremonial

burlesque. The curious character of the sentences makes for a caricature at once comic and sinister. The effects, as earlier noticed, are similar to those of Genet. The white race is of course the past enemy on which Makak's kingdom needs to be avenged, and the first set of prisoners to be despatched are especially those on whom its threatening claim to cultural superiority rests: "a drop of milk is enough to condemn them". The folly of this ethnic precept is comically exposed, as benefactors and comic-strip figures alike are picked out from the portrait gallery of white civilization. Basil presents the list:

> Basil: They are Noah, but not the son of Ham, Aristotle, I'm skipping a bit, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander of Macedon, Shakespeare . . . Sir Francis Drake, The Phantom, Mandrake the Magician. [The tribes are laughing] It's not funny, my Lords, . . . Their crime, whatever their plea, whatever extenuation of circumstances, whether of genius or geography, is, that they are indubitably, with the possible exception of Alexandre Dumas, Sr. and Jr., . . . white.
>
> (II.iii.64-78)

Walcott is getting at an implicit principle of radical black ideology, and his terms and focus are not excessive. The principle begins from the positive objective of the black ex-colonial to be rid of the mimic-man predicament. Radical extremes, however, calling for such a total denial of all white achievement, are based on a misapprehension of what real servitude consists in: the spirit of an attachment to these as an earnest of "success", giving rise to the idolatry of "marble tablets", as shown by the earlier Corporal Lestrade. As a result of this misapprehension, based on the same limited vision, universal values are given racial labels. The achievements of a Plato or a Shakespeare, whether or not they become the basis of a false claim to racial superiority, serve the universal cause of enlightenment. To confine them to

a tradition is to deny the necessity of thought and its service to the cause of progress. This is one of Walcott's most strongly held views, the principle being fundamental to his own work, where Western and Japanese elements are absorbed alike. He makes a definitive comment on it in "Twilight", where he calls it "the manic absurdity of giv[ing] up thought because it is white".[13]

This is, in fact, exactly what is taking place in the scene. Operating on the unintelligent assumption that to codify Blackness into Law is to achieve the autonomy of freedom, the Corporal's policy must resort to an annihilation of all that went before. Blackness becomes, not a creative conception, but, unhinged to thought, dependent on a principle of suppression and destruction. This is not the creative violence which Fanon advocates. It leads up a blind alley, is retrogressive. Following these implications to their final limits, the scene traces this reversion to darkness/chaos. The refusal of all appeals for forgiveness and international relations exaggerates an impossible cultural isolation; but the absurdity uncovers a latent shortcoming of such a non-conscious pursuit of revolution, and pierces the hollowness at its core. Thus, the "unanimous negative" on all offers from white institutions - the Pope, the Ku-Klux Klan, the Nobel Prize - degenerates into a farcical tearing up of paper, producing the effect of a mindless, infantile petulance. It reverts to a <u>reductio ad absurdum</u>. The entrance of Moustique at this point to trouble Makak's conscience makes the final comment on the nature of the perversion. Moustique's is the charge of inhumanity. The inhumanity consists not only in the toll of white victims. Mindless of the complexity of human nature, the new order is divided against its own humanity: it must weed out the Moustique weaknesses which threaten to betray any surviving vulnerabilities in its

absolute image. The Corporal's inaugural comments had carried its own self-critical burden:

> Corporal: 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.
>
> (II.iii.55-9)

Meanwhile Makak, a figurehead king, is a silent presence at the dark ceremonies taking place. His voice echoes dimly through the "sturm and drung" of the proceedings, like the faint stirrings of a troubled conscience from a realm submerged beyond the corporal apotheosis. As if from a slowly waking dream, it recurs in rhythmic counterpoint to the tribal triumphs:

> Makak: I am only a shadow.
>
> Corporal: Shh. Quiet my prince.
>
> Makak: A hollow God. A phantom.
>
> (II.iii.47-9)

On this submerged but most real level, it is the increasing conflicts of a troubled conscience as the corporal evil intensifies. Thus, when tribal rule has committed its worst abominations against humanity, he is harried by the ghost of the bleeding Moustique. To this he reacts defensively by strengthening the corporal resolve: "My hatred is deep, black, quiet as velvet." From then on, however, the moral struggle takes over and becomes more agonised, leaving the Makak conscience wearied and bewildered. At this point, when the burden of his attempt to realise the ideal is most oppressive, Makak has arrived at the stage where he must question destiny itself. It is the time of final confrontation with the Apparition/White Goddess/Muse, the progenitor of his dream and that

destiny:

> Makak: Who are you? Who are you? Why have you caused me all this pain? Why are you silent? Why did you choose me? O God, I was happy on Monkey Mountain.
>
> (II.iii.137-9)

The quest, both positive and negative movements, has brought Makak to this final existential question, of the perplexing bond between ideal and corruption, and it is with her who bore "things quite diverse" that he must reckon. Makak's tone is of one wearied by dream turned nightmare. The Corporal, however, is precipitate to suppress this perplexity, which signifies a dangerous counselling of conscience. He urgės destruction of the white goddess, since she is the genius of duality and source of the perplexity which will retard the rule of tribal justice. It is the temptation to total extinction of the dream: to do this would be to rest impregnable in his worldly empire, 'secure' in the anarchy/darkness which the extinction of dream/ambition means. But the troubled conscience of Makak, awakened by the journey into the interior, resists the temptation:

> Corporal: She, too, will have to die. Kill her, behead her, and you can sleep in peace.
>
> Makak: The moon sinks in the sea and rises again, no sea can extinguish it. I will never rest. Tell me please, who are you? I must do what my people want.
>
> (II.iii.141-3)

Makak resists in the awareness of the renewal of existence to the rhythmic balance of ideal/desire and shadow/despair attained in the forest. The Corporal attempt to avert it cannot prevail. Rather, it is the Corporal who must succumb to the urgencies of the Makak conscience. The moral movement - the dialectical interplay between the Corporal and Makak - becomes highly paradoxical and subtle at this point. To get it

right is to understand the crucial significance of Makak's final execution of the white goddess, in response to the importunities of the Corporal.

On the face of it, the Corporal seems to have his way when Makak finds freedom in executing the white goddess. The execution is necessary but not on the Corporal's terms. That the Makak conscience is prevailing over the Corporal is evidenced in this subtle feature - it is the Corporal who gives the analysis of the sources of Makak's burden and defines the white goddess dilemma. It is, in fact, conscience prevailing over and perceiving the earthly condition through the corporal faculty. The quest-figure is arriving at these truths from the level at which he commits and is most sensitive to corruption. The role of the two as separate individuals is also consistent with this dialectic. It is the worldly Corporal, who, guilty of the corruption, has the most intimate knowledge of its psyche (in addition to which we must remember that the Corporal, after the experience of the interior, is fully conscious of the perversion his motives involve. At the same time, the feature is an expression of the Makak-Corporal vacillation of the quest-figure). In tracing Makak's affliction to its sources, the Corporal's analysis is authentic and definitive - but his intention in counselling the destruction of the white goddess remains schizophrenically misguided and perverse:

> Corporal: She is the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape look into and find himself unbearable. She is all that is pure, all that he cannot reach. You see her statues in white stone, and you turn your face away, mixed with abhorrence and lust, with destruction and desire. She is lime, snow, marble, moonlight, lilies, cloud, foam and bleaching cream, the mother of civilization and the confounder of

Corporal: blackness. I too have longed for her. She
is the colour of the law, religion, paper, art,
and if you want peace, if you want to discover
the beautiful depth of your blackness, nigger,
chop off her head! . . . The law has spoken.

(II.iii.195-209)

Here occurs Walcott's own classic definition of the white goddess concept, and a graphic depiction of her cosmic reflection of human truth. The Corporal seizes on and pierces the essential significance of the ambiguity she stands for: the engendering of desire carries with it the taint of corruption, as a result of which perfectibility, the ideal she stands for, remains ever unattainable. This is inevitable since desire is the necessary process of matter yearning towards essence. Matter is finite, corruptible, incomplete - principles which make for the condition of lack and need; and is thus ever seeking to complete, transcend itself, which is the yearning towards otherness. All human efforts, the fruits of desire,have their profounder sources in this purpose of transcendence, from the most banal to the nobler conceptions.

Standing thus for the frustrating bond to a perfectibility unattainable, the white goddess ministers in dual ways. She can utterly confound the votary to despair, provoking him, witch-like, to consume, destroy her and revert thereby to ultimate corruption (Othello's blunder in destroying Desdemona). The danger exists side by side with what is her truly positive purpose - that of revealing, from her inaccessible heights the wisdom of man's dualistic destiny. The latter, paradoxically, can only be attained by serving in her temple, aspiring to the dream. Both of these are at issue in the final denouement. The former, which is the Corporal temptation, is not what he agrees to in executing the white goddess. Makak does, however, need to be free of the white goddess in one fundamental sense which the Corporal has diagnosed.

He needs to be free of the perplexity and confoundment which now paralyse him. This paralysis importantly, is the result of his effort to reach her and attain the transcendent state of the dream she embodies. It is aggravated in his case, as the Corporal suggests, by the root conflicts of blackness. The apotheosis is in fact the climax of this crisis, responsible for his paralysis between "imagined" kingship and "shadow" kingship. It is the ideal of perfectibility, the source of this burden, of which Makak needs to be free, and to gain his freedom of the white goddess is to renounce the apotheosis. In doing this he will accept the moral responsibility of being unable to leave the earth, accept the tension of duality. It is on this level that the execution of the white goddess, inseparable from the rejection of the apotheosis, takes place. This is emblematically enacted. Makak has to perform the execution alone. Thus after the final dialogue with the generals of his court, Makak asks to be left alone. The dismissal of the Corporal is fundamental: it signifies that the beheading of the Apparition is not on his terms, the refusal of his ethic, and conclusively, the refusal of the apotheosis he dominated. Makak left alone, removes his kingly robes, signifying the renunciation of kingship, and beheads the Apparition:

> Makak: I must, I must do it alone.
>
> Corporal: All right!
>
> [Souris, Corporal and Basil withdraw]
>
> Makak: [Removing his robe] Now, O God, now I am free.
>
> [He holds the curved sword in both hands and brings it down. The woman is beheaded]
>
> (II.iii.210-2)

The gaining of this freedom is the realisation of the pursuit. Renouncing kingship, Makak returns to earth. The reality of earth is man's destiny of ambition and frailty, ideal and disappointment. Makak has arrived at its truth through the creative return to origins which his pursuit involved. Thus, awaking from the dream within the dream, Makak returns with Moustique, symbol of his frailty, to the Mountain of aspiration. It is a spiral return to the "green beginning" from which he started: he now "knows" and accepts it in the light of the new awareness he has gained in his journey. For Makak, this new awareness means especially a purging from the negative self-image and self-rejection which alienated him from his origins: he now has the moral resources to find his creative image and true "name" in relation to them. It signifies a true reintegration and finding of roots in his own origins. Thus, it is no longer as Makak the monkey, but as Felix Hobain that he returns to his mountain, man blessed, baptised and "named" through the high seas of creative effort (Hobain being the French-derived *haut* and *bain*). His is the spiral return of which Eliot writes in Four Quartets.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our search
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
>
> ("Little Gidding", 11.241-4)

And Makak's own crystallization of its particular significance to his experience:

> Makak: . . . Lord, I have been washed from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. The branches of my fingers, the roots of my feet, could grip nothing, but now, God, they have found ground. Let me be swallowed up in mist again, and let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up, at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal of smoke, and say "Makak lives there. Makak lives where he has always lived, in the dream of his people." . . . but now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world. Come Moustique, we going home.

It is Walcott's own return to the "green beginning" from which he started. Makak's finding of earth is Walcott's own finding of landfall. Here it confirms its true roots in the local habitation and name of the environment. It makes the same affirmations we discovered in the poetry: a moral acceptance of the true tension between human ambition and human frailty in a creative awe of existence. The new Caribbean man, formerly dispossessed, is freed by the realisation into a true act of possession.

Walcott's humanism is no old-fashioned literary hangover, inadequate to the pressing issues of cultural liberation. Edward Brathwaite, his contemporary, had the following reservation about it: "The humanist poet, of course, naturally takes his inspiration from his society, and his voice is often speaking away from that society rather than speaking in towards it."[14] The complex terms and cognitions of Walcott's humanism, are, in fact, peculiar to the predicament of the region at the deepest level, as this work illustrates. They have been explored in close relationship to the moral destiny of its peoples, in the road from slave, through whiteness, to blackness. The main burden of this humanism has been traced back to the primal origins of creative effort, and the moral energies it generates in man. Walcott makes a deep, imaginative return into time and civilization through an authentic immanence of archetypes to reach and reveal its truths in his own experience of origins.

His approach, like Fanon's, turns on a close interaction between the psychological and philosophical. Walcott, moreover, brings the inwardness of his own artistic experience into these analyses. It is because he so understands the moral psyche of dream-ambition that he takes up his main position on the revolutionary issue: that of decrying

its moral indirections and urging an alertness to the pitfalls, based on true self-awareness. This is the necessity of the internal spiritual journey which must give balance to the politician's truth. Denis Solomon, reviewing a West Indian production of the play, puts it succinctly: "Abstraction is anathema to dictatorships of the proletariat, which cannot have their activism sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. Yet what if the accomplishment of the outward revolution demands an inward revolution, a struggle for self-discovery, for spiritual self-definition to give political nationalism its soul?"[15] Walcott thus takes up the controversial position of critic of the movement exposing the pitfalls of a precipitant, unintelligent commitment. The most penetrating and definitive critique of the dangers is made in the portrait of the Corporal, switching readily from white to black ethos. Walcott exposes the fundamental travesty of values this involves, and it is his focus in debunking the use to which the cult of Africa is put: "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 perpetrated by the intellectual. The result is not one's own thing but another minstrel show."[16] Fanon, expounding the need for a violent revolution, is wary of such pitfalls as the return to an "African twilight".[17] Walcott's views, here, and in the general demand for self awareness, are close to Fanon's in the most positive way. He succeeds in uncovering the pitfalls of the revolutionary consciousness even more penetratingly, through the more sensitive antennae of art. It is a measure of his earnestness that he should show this awareness of the difficulty of what he asks: "Yet this too, the haemophilic twilight said, with its sapping

of the will before rehearsals: 'Bourgeois, safe in a vague, pastoral longing, you pretend to reenter the bush, to imitate the frenzy of ancestral possession, your soul, with fetid dampness, drifts between two temples, and the track to the grove is fenced.'"[18] The truth of what he asks is confirmed in the most vital achievement of a culminating work - that of giving the dream frenzy and the struggle its name, through the faith of using the old names anew.[19]

Footnotes

1. Errol Hill, "The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies", Caribbean Quarterly Vol.18 No.4 (December, 1972), p.33.

2. John Mercer, "Landmark for Local Drama and Triumph for Workshop", Trinidad Guardian, January 29, 1968, p.11.

3. Jean Paul Sartre, Preface to The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.17.

4. Walcott, "Meanings", p.50.

5. August Strindberg, op. cit., p.24.

6. Walcott, A Note on Production, Dream.

7. Carpentier, op. cit., pp.166-7.

8. The type of street prophet also appears in Roderick Walcott's plays, as in The Harrowing of Benjy (Trinidad: U.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., 1966).

9. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, passim.

10. Ibid., pp.118-165.

11. I am indebted to Professor P.G. O'Neill of the School of Oriental and African Studies for tracing this quotation. Professor O'Neill gives this reference: Opening lines of Eguchi, in Japanese Noh Drama (Tokyo: The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, 1955), p.113. Walcott seems to have adapted the quotation. According to Professor O'Neill the lines are: "If the moon is a friend of old, where can we really be away from this world?" He writes: "Your translation seems to miss the point of this by using the word 'earth' rather than 'world' . . ."

12. Walcott, "Twilight", p.8.

13. Ibid., p.31.

14. Walcott, Brathwaite, Morris, "West Indian Poetry - A Search for Voices", typescript of seminar sponsored by U.W.I. Extra-Mural Dept., March 14, 1965, p.3.

15. Denis Solomon, "Ape and Essence", Tapia No.7 (April 19, 1970), p.6.

16. Walcott, "Twilight", p.8.

17. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, p.172 ff.

18. Walcott, "Twilight", p.26.

19. Ibid., p.10.

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NOTE: This bibliography also includes a selection from Walcott's journalism in Trinidad Guardian between 1964-1968. Although the journalism falls outside the scope of this thesis, it is worthwhile to draw attention to these pieces.

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