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**West Indian Theatre: Derek Walcott and the Infinite Rehearsal**

**by**

**Teresa Bailach**

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This thesis analyses three of Derek Walcott's plays in the light of Wilson Harris's ideas of 'infinite rehearsal' and 'unfinished genesis.' The purpose of this thesis is to explore Walcott's definition of the artist and his relation to society in the context of decolonisation. Throughout the thesis the struggle against nihilism appears as a constant underlying goal that both writers relate to the essence of the Caribbean, as a symbol of survival and regeneration. The first part of the thesis offers a deep analysis of Harrisian concepts of literature and its connection to reality, and an exploration of the links between Harris's ideas and the theatrical genre in the context of Walcott's early theatrical endeavours. The second part of the thesis presents a reading of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and *Pantomime*, that highlights the development of Walcott's notions of the artist in relation to his society and to the world. The unresolved conflicts of the pre-1970 period give way to a coherent and grounded set of principles that offer an example of one Caribbean artist's attempt at restoring the pieces of his fragmented identity. Reading Derek Walcott's plays in a Harrisian context throws new light into his theatrical production, and brings to the surface elements that had remained hidden and overlooked. The use of Wilson Harris as a theoretical background responds to two main aspects of these writers' work. On the one hand, the scope of Wilson Harris's philosophical world draws links with manifold cultures and literary traditions. More importantly, Wilson Harris proposes a fluid environment in which Walcott's divided self can find a suitable malleable ground.

## Introduction

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A reading of three of Derek Walcott's plays through Harrisian eyes seems to suggest that, as a premise, there exists a complete and coherent set of theories that make up a finished philosophical stance in Wilson Harris's work. This introduction is an attempt to undermine such a premise. A theoretical arena informed by Wilson Harris's essays becomes a fluid environment of simultaneity and paradox. Language and history, literature and life coexist in an overlapping palimpsest of terms and concepts that combine in new ways and produce original and open definitions. Similarly, this thesis re-reads three of Walcott's plays with the purpose of discovering new shapes of meaning in the light of the author's metaphysical optimism. In their continuing faith in art both writers set an important common ground from which to start.

Paula Burnett demonstrates the commonalities and points of contact between these two Caribbean writers, and highlights the fact that they 'have an increasingly urgent sense of the world's failure to make progress, in any real sense, towards justice, and [they] experience the painful recognition, familiar to the ageing, that youthful hope had imagined that more would have been achieved by now.' (Burnett 'Opening New Doors. A Glimpse of Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott' 79) Burnett includes both writers' conception of the artist as bearing a collective responsibility, and the important aspect of their engagement with the problems of their societies and of the world today. It seems to me that Burnett's reference to an apparent old-age disappointment captures the extent to which these two writers are shaped by and involved in the realities of the Caribbean, and of the world. Many critics regard Harris as existing at a different plane from reality,

whereas Walcott has been regarded as a writer of the classical tradition, distanced from 'the people.' This thesis is an attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the realities of the Caribbean shape, give sense, teach, and modify Walcott's understanding of himself as a Caribbean artist. In parallel to the decolonisation of the region, Walcott undergoes an inner journey throughout the 60s and the 70s, in which he struggles with deeply entrenched notions of the figure of the artist. His theatrical experience provides him with the necessary inspiration, opposition, and mirror in which to see reflected the truths of his artistic position. Using Harris as a guide, this thesis aspires to draw links between the Guyanese writer's extreme abstract considerations, and the prosaic realities encountered when the artist steps into his society in order to put up a performance. The lack of synchronicity between the discursive and the real, the artist and his society, transforms the former in the midst of his active engagement, and determines the pace and rhythm of his poetic song. If the world does not progress into a better society, which these two writers had envisioned, it is still the world that shapes them, and in which they interact.

This introduction outlines the basic Harrisian notions of time, space, language, and the Arts. Part one deals with the key coordinates that constitute the instruments for the survey of Walcott's plays: unfinished genesis, and the infinite rehearsal. In addition, the second chapter analyses Walcott's theatre years until 1970, a major turning point in his career, and it pinpoints the correlations between Harris's language and ideas, and the realm of theatre that nurtured Walcott at the time. The use of Antonin Artaud as a linking medium highlights the crucial meeting point between Walcott and Harris: their rejection of nihilism. Part two analyses three of Walcott's plays: *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on*

*Monkey Mountain*, both written and performed before 1970, and *Pantomime*, written and performed after this date. The choice of plays responds to an attempt to concentrate on the development of Walcott's notion of the artist, and of his role as playwright and theatre director in the Caribbean. The first two plays show an early but self-assured Walcott, who writes *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* abroad, certain of his need to return to his native land and to engage in the oral tradition. In turn, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is proof of Walcott's artistic involvement in the complex process of decolonisation that the Caribbean goes through at the time. The turning point, around 1970, is marked by his essays 'What the Twilight Says,' and "The Muse of History,' both of which include the desperation, anger, hope and triumph that his artistic work combines. *Pantomime* is relevant because it rehearses the figure of Robinson Crusoe, Walcott's metaphor of the isolated artist, and thus hints at the possibilities of resolution of his conflicting divided self. Chapters three to five pose questions about the nature of the artist in relation to his society, about the problematic use of language as an instrument to achieve true freedom, and about the processes undergone by the artist in his own development as a divided and fragmented self. This thesis proposes that a reading of Walcott's plays guided by the openness and instability of Harrisian concepts results in an illuminating coherency of thought present in Walcott's work, but generally discriminated, at times even by himself, as either European or African. The Harrisian outlook provides a ground of possibility that liberates the analysis of the plays from a one-sided view that would limit the chapters in terms of interpretation. Furthermore, the reading of these three plays combined together offers a perspective of Walcott's work which, although chronological and thus problematic, emphasises the malleability of his considerations on the role of the

artist. When in 1965 Derek Walcott presents the figure of Robinson Crusoe as a metaphor of the artist, it is the picture of a changing metaphor, a changing Crusoe that reappears in *Pantomime* and is there rehearsed as a new metaphor. The chronological position of the exploration of Walcott's plays follows the metaphor in its metamorphosis.

The Caribbean speaks to Man, not only to the man of the periphery; or perhaps only to the man of the periphery, because, as Octavio Paz writes, 'we have all become peripheric beings, even Europeans and Northamericans. We are all in the margins because there is no centre any more.' (my translation of Paz 316) Thus, the specificity of the Caribbean plays a paramount role in the development of issues of identity formation. The 'schizophrenic' condition of the archipelago provides an endless source of inspiration. In his 1986 essay 'Creative Schizophrenia,' Michael Gilkes presents heterogeneity as the source of a new type of creative endeavour. The notion of an invisible chaotic thread encompassing the Caribbean, introduced by Benítez-Rojo, follows a similar understanding of fragmentation as a new creative and chaotic order. Together with Glissant, Harris presents a cross-cultural identity for the Caribbean that is never wholly resolved, never fully stable.

C. L. R. James relates Wilson Harris's philosophy to Heidegger's concept of language as the means 'to live an authentic life', to his notion of temporality as distinct from conventional chronological time, and to the 'dread' of existence. (James 'On Wilson Harris' 161-162) James also connects Harris's ideas with Jaspers' concept of the 'extreme boundary situation', an extreme context in which Man finds out who he really is, and links both to Sartre's introduction of authenticity in terms of political situations, and to how he tries to convey his

existentialist philosophy through his literary writings. James argues that Harris is the perfect example of transference of philosophy to literature, a philosophy that breaks with fixed European assumptions about politics and the world, through a different experience. The experience that provides another shape to the ordering of the world finds a parallel in language, the instrument of authenticity.

Language and literature are at the core of this philosophical reshaping of the world. The schizophrenic condition found in the Caribbean relates to Derrida's analysis of the rupture with the concentric notion of structure in the Humanities. According to Derrida, the concept of a centred structure defends the subject from the anxiety caused by being at risk, by a lack of certitude. A structure that organises its parts around a centre provides a fixed order that, applied to history, explains the present according to a static past, and since it follows a logical configuration of its parts, anticipates the future.

The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play ... on the basis of this certitude anxiety can be mastered, for anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset. (Derrida 279)

Derrida explains that the rupture with this concentric notion of structure takes place at a moment when 'European culture ... had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference.' (Derrida 282) A Eurocentric conception of the world fails when the diaspora, parts of the structure, prove the notion of centred structure invalid. The Caribbean experience offers a new sensibility, a new restructuring of the world.

Derrida's lecture presents two possible reactions to the new conception of structure. Both alternatives try to solve the problem of borrowing the terms from a heritage that is being challenged. The first option is to deconstruct the whole discourse of metaphysics in order to create a new and original template that suits a non-centric structure. Because such borrowing is unavoidable, the second choice accepts the use of terms taken as tools, deprived of their former value. The new discourse will take the form of its object, and, because totalization is not possible, any field will be 'a field of infinite substitutions', (Derrida 289) a field of *play*. As a result, history and time are neutralised, and moments in history come in brackets, without reference to the past. A moment that is *present* is no longer a result of a moment that is *past*, but its substitute: there is no linearity, no chronology. Two are the resulting reactions that arise from this new notion of structure and language: the negative view ends up in frustration, a 'Rousseauistic' thought, nostalgic and guilty, whereas affirmation takes the subject to a complete absence of adequate tools for analysis, and constitutes a Nietzschean joyous freedom of interpretation (Derrida 292). The mechanisms of power remain untouched in either view. According to Robert Young, Derrida's deconstruction of centralization serves the purpose of building up a resistance against domination: '[Deconstruction] represents a strategic alternative to the passivity of dependency theory or the nationalism of the return-to-the-authentic-tradition-untrammelled-by-the-West of fundamentalist parties that respond to the present by seeking to deny the past.' (Young 195) However, the two paths that Derrida describes, negation or affirmation, are not the only ones. The former shows an inherent belief in the previous set of values, while the latter offers a complete lack

of values to resort to. As will be shown in this thesis, Walcott considers both to be variants of the same longing for innocence. As a result, a nihilistic mood prevails.

The Caribbean offers an extraordinary experience of identity formations during and after colonialism. As Edouard Glissant explains, the post-colonial world cannot abide by one unique theory. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the specificities of each type of colonisation, decolonisation, and the development thereof. The main difference, according to Glissant, is between a people who are displaced but keep their identity, and a people who are displaced and lose their roots:

I feel that what makes this difference between a people that survives elsewhere, *that maintains its original nature*, and a population that is transformed elsewhere *into another people* (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other) and that thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization (of relationship, of relativity), is that the latter has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practiced before being uprooted. These methods leave only dim traces or survive in the form of spontaneous impulses. This is what distinguishes, besides the persecution of one and the enslavement of the other, the Jewish Diaspora from the African slave trade. (Glissant 15)

As a first reaction, the negritude movement seeks identity in the lost African past. However, this return proves impossible for the 'transplanted population': the search for a single origin becomes a nonsensical effort, when identity has already been modified, and the memory of the 'ancestral country' mixes with a new memory: that of the Atlantic passage, and the imposition of a different culture and world order. In addition, the identity formation goes through multiple colonisers,



and through a displacement not only in terms of geographical transposition, but also a displacement of the psyche: centuries of enslavement, centuries of ideological imposition of a racial hierarchy. Glissant describes the subsequent reaction as an obsessive imitation, that proves the only means of adaptation: 'the impulse to revert will recede little by little with the need to come to terms with the new land. ... the obsession with imitation will appear.' (Glissant 18) The Martiniquan Glissant explains this mimetic process as tragically leading the people to a traumatic paralysis, a lack of a challenging drive. However, each island has a different history of colonisation and decolonisation, and their interactions prove fruitful. Despite being separate countries, there is a common ground, a 'subterranean convergence' (Glissant 66) that comes from the shared experience of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic. The experience of the voyage across the ocean and the mutation suffered by their identity becomes a shared root, a root that is mobile, it is not localised in a specific geographical spot, but extends 'in all directions in our world through its network branches. ... We, thereby, live, we have the good fortune of living, this shared process of cultural mutation, this convergence that frees us from uniformity.' (Glissant 67)

Mutation, extreme situations, a language permeated by an unfinished philosophy and a decentred and thus unstable world order constitute the starting point in Wilson Harris's work. Harris engages not only in a new creative endeavour in the field of literature, but also in the production of a new discourse and sensibility in the world at a philosophical level. The resulting redefinition of identity goes beyond Derrida's cul-de-sac, where the only possibilities are a complete paralysis, or a complete lack of definitions. Harris's contribution brings forth a true new dimension to the process of meaning and signification. Instability

is at the core of Harris's constant discursive restructuring. 'A naked jar sings in a hollow body, sings to be restored, re-filled with the blood of the imagination. The jar sleeps yet sings.' (Harris 'The Music of Living Landscapes' 77)

Perhaps the most important aspect in Harris's work, and the starting point for an accurate analysis of his contribution, is his definition of 'literacy.' Reading in a uniform way means that the individual adapts to a given role in a society governed by relations of power. This lack of imagination is the malaise that maintains the status quo intact. The cause for the society's illiteracy of the imagination needs to be sought in the powerful institutions that control, organise, and direct the roles of the individuals. These entities set themselves as centres of a static, stable, unchanging structure. The effect matches the cause: literacy fails to envision the variation of that centre, and the outcome is an unchanging social structure, an unchanging vision of the world. The vicious circle acts as a kind of mould that prevents any insight into a different dimension of things.

Harris suggests that there exist two types of vision: one that sees reality, and another one, that sees a different dimension of things. Quoted from his novel Palace of the Peacock, the following metaphor explains the double vision: 'I dreamed I awoke with one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye.' (Harris 1960: 19) Harris expands on this metaphor in his essay 'Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk': 'The living, closed eye is a threshold into tradition, lost traditions – it's living, but it's closed.' (Harris 'Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk 86) In turn, the dead, seeing eye would be that of reality, the vision that dwells in a given organisation of society. Tradition as the creative, imaginative sphere within ourselves is the key to redefine identity. Through imagination, we

access a tradition that destabilises the given mould of society. At this point, Harris charges against society's praise of stability as a desired condition.

we want stable societies. But what do we mean by stable societies? If by stable societies we mean we want people who are locked within block functions, uniform functions, then what does that society serve? What purpose does it serve? Perhaps a little bit of instability in such a context might have creative consequences. ... we have seen violence erupt out of block societies. We have seen dreadful things happen, and therefore we know that sometimes societies run amok and it becomes necessary to probe much more deeply into the kind of world we inhabit. (Harris 'Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk' 77)

According to Harris, the stability sought by block function societies is inefficient in preventing outbursts of violence. Fanaticism and extremisms emerge from this type of society where a complete and unilateral vision of the world is given, and any doubt is banned through an imposition of a unique notion of normality and identity. The instability Harris writes about offers a step out of that society. Where Derrida offers the idea of a 'play' of elements, Harris is building, in a sense, the 'playground.' Hence, the element of a creative imagination that acts through tradition, language, and literature finds a convenient context to develop into a new dimension of signification.

The scope of a word like 'imagination' is unlimited. In his essay 'The Fabric of the Imagination,' Wilson Harris gives the clues for understanding its meaning. He focuses on the 'genesis' of the imagination. A wrong conception of genesis, he explains, gives way to concepts of 'invariant identity' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 18) in the cultural discourse of politics. Exploring levels of being and identity formation that are discarded and taken for granted

becomes necessary in order to avoid paralysis: 'Such distance from a penetrative and complex vision settles in the universal unconscious and gnaws at the heart of cultures, to breed nihilism and mass media escapism in the arts of the world.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 19) By revisiting history in an imaginative enterprise, new edges appear that change the picture of the past. The genesis of our present moves, it varies, it becomes alive again, and acquires the power to alter present notions of the world. Harris calls these 'numinous proportions': 'There are hidden numinous proportions within the mechanisms of colonialism and post-colonialism. Such numinous proportions throw a different, inner light on the mould of accident to which some sociologists or historians may cling.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 20) The relevance of these lies in the fact that they provide a certain 'memory that seems to belong to the future, as though the genesis of the imagination is ceaselessly unfinished'. (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 20) The concept of an unfinished genesis of the imagination makes it possible to endlessly redefine a present situation. While Derrida's deconstruction emphasises the inappropriateness of a linear conception of time, Harris focuses on the possibilities emerging from a past that is active and alive. In Derrida, the 'neutralization of time and history' that comes about in Lévi-Strauss's work explains a moment in history without reference to the past, the 'history between brackets.' (Derrida 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' 291) The brackets separate that moment from what comes before and after in time. Harris brings forth a neutralization of time and history where there is a constant fluidity through which present and past coexist in between those brackets. Because the past is simultaneous with the present, it is alive and active, and it can vary.

The cross-cultural imagination that causes the breach on the mould of a block function society brings forth questions of 'otherness' as opposed to 'oneness.' Octavio Paz defines Man as solitude; a solitude that comes into being with self-consciousness, when he feels the lack of the 'other.' 'Man is the only being that feels lonely, and the only one that is a search for the other. ... Man is longing and search for communion. For that reason, every time Man acknowledges himself, he does so as lack of other, as solitude.' (my translation from Paz 341) For Harris's cross-cultural imagination to develop, this opposition of one/other must be made malleable. The 'other' constitutes what the western rational philosophy rejects as the norm. It is the 'one,' meaning the rule, the conception of normality, of centre, that represents reality. The 'other' can never share the status of origin, core, and central position that the 'one' enjoys. For the block society to function, the 'other' must cease to exist, which Harris finds an absurd premise. Harris advocates a structure of multiple 'others,' of 'diminutive poles,' in order to succeed in revisiting the unfinished past. 'It is the life of 'diminutives' that may offer a peculiar key to the cross-cultural imagination.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 22) This new concept of 'diminutives' represents the step from multi-culturalism to cross-culturalism. We now stand at a different level, a new understanding of being. By changing from an illiterate, completed imagination that plays a given role, to a literate, multitudinous, and cross-cultural imagination, a new configuration of history comes into play. However, the anxiety caused by the acceptance of the 'other' and the subsequent doubt of the 'one' as stable self is a complicated position to hold. Nevertheless, the unstable thread that we walk on 'may also bring resources to alter or change

the fabric of the imagination in the direction of a therapeutic, ceaselessly unfinished genesis.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 25-26)

Harris extends on the need for a fertile instability, the acknowledgement of the 'other,' the conception of a past that still lives and can vary. Another term he uses for this concept of instability is 'asymmetry', which seems necessary in order to avoid an imposed, sterile, apparent symmetry or order of things. 'The stranger beauty of asymmetry lies in its subtle transformations of phenomena bound or tamed within a mask of universality and within patterns of elegant tautology – sometimes within patterns of unconscious parody of the past.' (Harris 'The Schizophrenic Sea' 101) The difference between an elegant tautology and reality runs parallel to that between an English garden (or tamed nature), and the rainforest in Guyana (untamed nature), what Glissant calls '[t]he shapeless yielding to the shapely.' (Glissant 52) The 'paranoia' and 'stress' that come about with this new understanding of a shapeless reality are lesser evils in a vital endless discovery.

Its gifts to the human imagination, its corollaries of ongoing and ceaselessly unfinished explorations in the arts and sciences, are rewarding beyond measure. It confirms the necessity for a complex mutuality between cultures. It offers, in my judgement, the only doorway into a conception of genuine breakthrough from tragedy. It has become a cliché to speak of the death of tragedy, but the growth of nihilism, the growth of ideologies that make pawns of humanity, the end-of-the-world syndrome in which we live, would all seem to be motivated by stoic lust or conviction, stoic intellectuality, the inverse nobility of tragedy. (Harris 'The Schizophrenic Sea' 101)

Paradoxically, one of the aspects that hold Harris's worldview together is precisely this instability. Like an acrobat, he stumbles on the thread, but instead of resorting to the safety of a concentric, block function society, or to the lack of involvement of a nihilistic vision, he somehow manages to keep an equilibrium. The basis for his coherence lies in his resorting to the reality of the postcolonial world as well as to the creative production that stems from it. Constant references to the American postcolonial psyche and its literature draw a link between the intellectual and the man, creative art and social context, language and reality.

Language for Harris becomes a valuable tool and a defence against mass ruling. Being articulate means having a freedom of imagination. Harris's conception of a creative language as tool does not imply, however, that it should follow a radical political or social instruction: 'it seems to me vital ... to break away from the conception so many people entertain that literature is an extension of a social order or a political platform.' (Harris 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' 150) According to Harris, the role of literature is to take up the task of immersing deeply into the 'experimental nature of the arts and the sciences.' (Harris 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' 150) Clearly enough, language is not a mere translator of ideas, but, looking both into its conscious and unconscious spheres, it becomes a vehicle towards a higher level of understanding life and the world. Language provides layers of communication that remain unnoticed. The schism between sign and signified brings forth a mistrust of language as an inaccurate mirror of reality. However, such view enhances the premise of the existence of a reality to be described. The definition of language and sign as unable to depict the signified introduces *per se* the notion of a signified that exists. This point of view measures language's value according to its

ability to express the objective, real thing. The focus on the sign and the process of meaning is shared by Harris, who plays with the flexibility of the sign and the consequences of this linguistic breakthrough in perceptions of history/time and reality. However, Harris stands at a different angle, throwing new light into the issue of language. Faith in a free and imaginative language is a premise in Harris's work. As a result, the status of reality and our understanding of it becomes the variable in an equation where the sign takes a life of itself through tradition and the creative arts. The sign is not a flawed, arbitrary, subjective element of deceit. Rather, the sign is a compound of multiple cross-cultural traditions that link us to nature and to other human beings. Imaginative language and communication play a role that goes beyond an arbitrary designation of things. Literature links our language capacity to our life experience, and other purely objective theories miss inherent aspects of language. Harris's work constitutes an enormous effort to understand, express, and communicate those aspects.

The mechanisms of language are essential in order to breach the given mould of a block function society. As seen above, violence and radical political or social patterns prove sterile efforts in that respect. Harris proposes a deeper understanding of language, and suggests, as prelude, an act of liberation of speech. First and foremost, we must turn to nature and the landscape in order to hear their music, their language. This music is like a book that teaches about a seemingly erased memory. In 'The Music of Living Landscapes,' Harris advocates a 'profound necessity in the life of the imagination to visualize links between technology and living landscapes in continuously new ways that took nothing for granted in an increasingly violent and materialistic world.' (Harris



‘The Music of Living Landscapes’ 43) The noises of our technological world prevent us from hearing the inner dialogue with nature. This particular essay constitutes a dive into the mysterious aspect of language, through its connection to nature and our inner imaginative capacity:

Consciousness of self in others, consciousness of diversity that breaks the mould of prejudice, remains a mystery to science.

In mystery lie orchestrations of comedy that fuel the imagination to release itself from one-sided dogma whether in science or in religion. ... One awakes at times to one’s frailty in the cradle of the mind in particles that settle on one’s brow or hand or skin, sailing particles from distant mountains and valleys that seek their mysterious parentage in all substance or in the alchemy of sound in a rainbow.

Such, I believe, is the implicit orchestra, of living landscapes when consciousness sings, through variegated fabrics and alternations of mood, consonance as well as dissonance, unfathomable age and youth, unfathomable kinships. (Harris ‘The Music of Living Landscapes’ 44)

The interconnection between creative language and time constitutes a key element in Harris’s thought. In 1974, Harris delivered his lecture ‘Fossil and Psyche’ in Austin, Texas, where he explores this link, and poses some of the problems that arise from standing on unstable ground. The genesis of time becomes an ‘ancestral aboriginal capacity’, (Harris ‘Fossil and Psyche’ 68) a potential that has developed into a grotesque copy of what should have emerged. Using the metaphor of a pregnant body, Harris believes that the body of society is hollow, its womb is not pregnant, but inflated. He refers to this emptiness in ‘The Music of Living Landscapes’ as the ‘hollow jar’ that needs the blood of the imagination to become pregnant again. Now a body is a space where birth-wish and death-

wish coexist: 'the borderline between a pregnant body and an all-consuming enlarged body subsists upon a distortion so complex one scarcely dwells upon it at all. ... A pregnant body is an envelope of coming birth and of otherness.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 68) What should have developed into birth-wish has become the death-wish that we inhabit now. The element of pregnancy provides the image of otherness as self, but life has developed into an organism that consumes for itself alone. Already in 1950, Mexican Octavio Paz describes the death-wish path that Harris observes. In El Laberinto de la Soledad, Paz analyses Man's diverse approaches to death. Whereas in the Aztec religion death was a collective doorway into a harmonious melting away with the cosmos, Christianity introduced the element of individual salvation, with death becoming a doorway that each person crossed alone, in order to achieve this personal salvation. In modern times, when Christian values have vanished, the element of individualism, however, remains, and death becomes synonymous with 'the end,' an inevitable void. Harris's description of the death-wish echoes Paz's words on modern death: 'But death, no longer transition, but a big empty mouth that cannot be satisfied, is present in everything we do.' (my translation of Paz 193) Death as a mouth that endlessly consumes for itself, death no longer as beginning (or pregnancy) of anything other than a void, this death Harris calls life: a life of death-wish.

However, the hollow womb still bears a fertility that Harris tries to awaken. Creative language comes into the scene as the engine that makes it possible to revisit the genesis where this capacity for birth-wish dwells. Genesis, according to Harris, is a place of potential pregnancy, of a human capacity for giving birth to otherness. The journey through time to this genesis unveils the grotesque nature of life as we know it, in distinctions that are parallel to the binary

birth-wish/death-wish. The notion of time disappears at the genesis, because this genesis is 'a distant golden age when the sexuality of time was so harmonious time seemed almost not to exist at all.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 69) Harris describes this genesis as unfinished and ceaseless, hence making it possible to relive the capacity through imagination and language. Time seemed not to exist at all because there was no polarization of past-present-future; these notions that Man has created are the result of a mistaken path, they are notions that emerge from a death-wish that is blind to fertility. The 'sexuality of time' refers to a state of pre-pregnancy, a state of potentiality. This is a state of harmony where temporal distinctions do not apply. Genesis, therefore, is not a lost past, but a capacity that remains in time, because it is the definition of time itself. In this golden age, '[t]ime was identified with the conquest of transparency itself, the conquest of non-temporality itself. A line which ran through birth into peaceful death.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 69) In contrast, the chosen path replaces 'fossil prepossessions of conquest' with 'the transparency of time', a time that bears no child, nothing other than itself. The harmony of a transparent time turns into a fear of birth and death, a paralysing fear that is blind to the possibilities that genesis offers. (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 69)

Childhood, in a parallel metaphor, appears as a time of double play, a moment of inherent capacity and 'de-activation' of the death-wish path through imagination and fantasy. Thus, Harris sees his early years as 'half-transparent, half-opaque body intent.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 70) Notions of time come as pressures or 'exterior limits,' and the progress of time becomes a 'deadly arrow': an arrow because the idea of linear temporality enters the child's consciousness,

and a deadly one, because it follows the path of death-wish. However, an automatic defence emerges from the inner organism:

The physical arrow recedes ... a psychical arrow comes into play and infuses my subjective premises with physical/psychical targets of parallel extremity. ... a curious 'interior' body takes over and sets out to erase a build-up of suffocating 'exterior' limits – to revise the canvas of physical community through a psychical parallel or intuitive expedition back into the past or through the burdensome present into the future. (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 70)

The psychical arrow relates to language, and in the child, the nature of language has not yet undergone the shaping processes and limitations that it is subject to through the mechanisms of a systematic, block function education. Octavio Paz illustrates the effects of a child-like approach to language on the notion of reality. According to Paz's El Laberinto de la Soledad, the child uses affection and play for the purpose of creating in reality the harmonious environment that he found in the womb. The role of the child becomes active, he recognises imagination, fantasy and language as the instruments to recreate life in harmony. The nature of language, at this stage, is magical, and there is no gap between language and reality: the world *is* the thing itself. (Paz 350) Faith in language has not yet disappeared. At the stage of childhood, therefore, birth-wish is the natural choice. The conflict reappears with self-consciousness, and – in Harris – with a system of block function institutions that act as moulds on the imaginative capacity. Nevertheless, the reversibility of this process is possible through a psychical arrow that uncovers an inherent creative and imaginative potential. Harris's diagram in 'Fossil and Psyche' explains the birth-wish/death-wish binary, and the concept of 'dream expedition.' The psychical arrow becomes a parallel regression

in time that liberates us from the deadly arrow that imposes limits and pressures. The intuitive expedition/dream expedition/psychical arrow evades static notions of time, and flows throughout time to take the path of birth-wish, and create a new order of community. Harris calls for a spiritual revolution that takes place inside the intuitive realm of the individual and the community in order to cancel block function prerogatives. However, the automatic inner defence needs an organism that hears and understands this message. The subjective imagination offers a parallel psychical arrow that might remain unseen or misinterpreted. Therefore, a philosophical critique is fundamental to help analyse the creative and imaginative language.

The creative imagination seeks to communicate, its main characteristic being a desire for establishing a dialogue. That dialogue constitutes the potentiality for revising the path into a pregnant organism and a birth-wish that will be in harmony with the existence of the 'other' as self. When Harris calls this dialogue a potentiality, he implies that the warning about the deadly arrow, and the means of breaching the mould of limits imposed by the block function society can be understood. Moreover, the potentiality for dialogue is synonymous with the potentiality 'for the miracle of roots': (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 71) language and time are bound together, and it becomes feasible to erase the limits of static time notions, and thus fulfil the dream expedition through creative language. The role of imaginative literature is 'to wrestle with categories and to visualize the birth of community as other than the animism of fate.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 71)

The general tendency of the creative arts in the twentieth century assumes that there is a historical progress, a technological and sociological achievement

that proves the existence of an overall improvement. However, Harris equates this unwanted past of lack of freedom to our present moment, where wars, poverty and injustice exist in a different context. Harris asks, 'in what degree is it likely that the innate life of the word as *mental visualization* may in itself resist ready-made patterns of exploitation, may in itself resist predetermined objects or biases of truth?' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 77) Harris's answer to these problems is a strong faith in the inherent capacity of language to resist exploitation by the block function institutions' tendency towards paralysis, and an inner constant questioning in our imaginations that, like genesis itself, is unfinished and in ceaseless movement. Language becomes an inner arrow, a dream expedition into our mental landscape, which is 'a field of authentic discovery', (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 78) a sleeping revolution to rid community of a centralised mould. According to Harris, the death-wish co-exists with the birth-wish in a constant inner flux that, although it makes the ground unstable and difficult, it also makes the breaching of the mould possible. An interesting consequence, as Harris points out, is the realisation that, if creative language bears an inherent revolutionary potential, then the psychical arrow might be present in all imaginative creations. The 'pressure to revise the limits' of a mould society becomes ever-present, and therefore, 'the further back one goes in time the stranger becomes the density of parallel expeditions upon a canvas of relief.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 78) At this point in the analysis of the role and revolutionary capacity of imaginative language, time is neutralised:

There is, in this sense, no determined beginning, no determined ending to the manifold fossil of psyche and this unpredictability is the enigmatic birth-wish/death-wish that haunts the imagination and ensures, perhaps, the authenticity of discovery and of ceaseless

expedition forwards and backwards in place and time. (Harris  
'Fossil and Psyche' 79)

The phrase 'manifold fossil of psyche' refers to an eclectic, non-centralised entity that communicates itself through tradition and the arts. Although the term Harris chooses is 'fossil,' he characterises it as a 'manifold fossil.' Fossil carries a connotation of genesis, of first imprint, and yet this one is numerous and varied, it is a cross-cultural fossil. Such is the configuration of our psyche, says Harris, since genesis is unfinished and in ceaseless metamorphosis.

The revolution of imaginative language faces yet another difficulty. Harris finds a complex problem in the balance between grasping the breaching elements in language through a close technical study, while at the same time keeping an intuition and unconscious openness to unseen manoeuvres in the imaginative arts. Moreover, the purpose of this psychical arrow is not to discover an absolute hidden truth. In fact, the desired revolution lies in the search for certain potentialities that exist in reality and in the mind, which find their way through imaginative language. These potentialities build up a warning '*signalling us towards a third perhaps nameless revolutionary dimension of sensibility* other than given material or given spiritual consensus.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 81) In other words, the revolution is a constant questioning of absolute notions of reality.

The actual application of Harris's philosophical concepts is a complex process of drawing links between conscious and unconscious levels of signification. Given that the psychical arrow appears through the hidden potentialities in the imaginative language to breach exterior limits or pressures imposed by the mould of a block function society, the first task is to find an

example of how that potentiality remains generally unseen. Harris's essay 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' is an attempt 'to make clear the kind of historical stasis which has afflicted the Caribbean ... for many generations.' (Harris 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' 152) Bearing in mind that the potentiality for creative fertility is a constant underlying possibility, Harris turns his attention to J. Thomas's answer to the nineteenth century historian Froude. According to Froude, colonial society provided stability and proved to be harmonious and, as a consequence, perfectly valid. By the end of the nineteenth century, Thomas tries to shake the grounds of imperialist ordeal. While this intellectual stance might seem to show a breach of the imperialist mould, Harris explains that it fails to escape the block function signification. Thomas shared a suspicion of primitive manifestations of traditions that constituted the other from the British point of view, thus showing a similar interest in maintaining the apparent stability of unchanging order. Thomas's intellectual denial of a subconscious, inward-looking closed eye prevents him from escaping a paralysed world order. The intended psychological arrow in this case stays hidden, and it becomes now Harris's task as critic to resume the search. Harris goes back and analyses the particles left unseen by the two former historians. Focusing on two kinds of myths from the Caribbean that relate to certain African traditions, Harris recuperates one of the various components of the 'manifold fossil of psyche.' However, this task does not entail a simple description of the rites and stories that build up those myths. Instead, his essay is a profound analysis of the implications and meaning of those traditions in the context of colonisation and enslavement, and a study of the breaching capacity of that creative and imaginary language in relation to the present moment.



The first myth refers to the limbo dancing, that is associated with the spider trickster 'Anancy,' through the physical similitude between the position of the dancer's body and the spider's legs. This dance is said to have originated in the slave ships, where the bodies of slaves were contorted to fit in such small space. Harris describes this myth as the 'spider metamorphosis,' undergone in the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, a gateway between Africa and the Caribbean. 'Those waves of migration ... have, at various times, possessed the stamp of the spider metamorphosis.' (Harris 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' 157) The myth of limbo, therefore, draws a bridge between migrants of the past, and those of the present, in a shared experience of a journey across the ocean. In addition, the development of the myth connects to Caribbean identity today: the phantom limb present in contemporary West Indian theatre, or the link between man and god, all share 'archetypal resonances' with other religious myths belonging to Christianity or Hinduism. (Harris 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' 158) The eclectic character of the Caribbean psyche is present in this myth that Harris presents as being disregarded by apparently anti-imperialist historians like Thomas. The art of the imagination, the reading of limbo as a myth relating to the 'reassembly of the god or gods' (gods because it relates to various religions), and therefore to the manifold fossil of the psyche, links literature and tradition, creating a new philosophy of history. (Harris 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' 158)

Of the second myth, Haitian vodun, Harris gives a definition that relates this religion as myth to the act of writing: the dancer in vodun reveals the inner truth, although it is hidden from him because of the state of trance the dancer undergoes. In this mythical tradition, the gods re-assemble in the dance of the man

in trance. In turn, the imaginative writer might contribute to the psychical arrow that breaches the mould of society through his creative language, even though this might remain hidden from him. The community that watches the dancer in trance constitute the target in a communication process that takes place by means of tradition. In this way, they are able to rid themselves of the paralysing mould of society through a subconscious recognition of their identity in the re-assembly of gods. Live representations of myths in the form of rituals provide a new and rich type of creative language and communication.

Harris's philosophy of time, language, and the process of signification, his concepts of the creative imagination and the manifold fossil of psyche find a way, through creative literature and literary analysis, to connect with the reality of a present emergent from the past. His language and his careful and enlightened application of ideas to actual works of the imagination escape the block function of classical interpretation, where the author's conscious intention was searched, while his philosophy does not stand loose as post-modern interpretations that seem to spring out of the critic's political agenda, another form of 'minority' block function. Harris does not give the answer to the question of where the dream expedition will reach its destination. His work becomes a search for particles that trigger imaginative genesis, a breach in the nihilistic frustration of endless repetition. 'Cross-culturalism needs to breach nihilism', he prays. And afterwards he repeats, 'CROSS-CULTURALISM NEEDS TO BREACH NIHILISM.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 29) Harris's endeavour seeks to ceaselessly find parcels of a 'higher dimension of understanding' that take us back to the unfinished genesis of the imagination. In short, Harris's work stands outside a system of rules, his object of study is a 'dream expedition' to an

‘unfinished and ceaseless genesis,’ through ‘creative’ language. As a result, theories of reality become prescriptive, and paradoxes become viable, in contrast to the block function world order, where paradoxes are considered as exceptions to otherwise universal, objective and truthful rules. The relevance of Harrisian cross-culturalism extends beyond the interpenetration of literary artefacts and myths, it reaches the realm of history, sociology, anthropology, and even science, in order to connect harmoniously the real world, the dead, seeing eye, with the subconscious experience, the living, closed eye.

Wilson Harris opens a path towards a new understanding of reality, and of time. Through the creative imagination, myths provide the tool to follow a truly cross-cultural direction. The task of the writer, and the critic turns into a quest for the hidden possibilities in imaginative literature to reach the golden age of time, and recognise a human capacity for birth-wish and creation. Harris’s redefinition of identity and time, or more specifically the concept of the golden age of time in his essays, has a bearing on the role and significance of theatre in the Caribbean, as a genre that becomes a collective ritualistic instrument to follow the path opened by Harris.

The golden age of time, in Harrisian terminology, is described as a capacity for birth-wish, a prenatal age of time, where the womb bears the fertility that makes birth possible. This golden age is a paradox of timeless time, a time that has not begun yet. The golden age is not in the past, it is not a beginning moment in the past when life starts. Instead, the golden age of time refers to an inherent capability that we bear in ourselves, the music that comes from our interior space. Interestingly, Octavio Paz gives a very similar description of this same concept: ‘There was a time when time was not a succession or transition, but

a continuous flux of a fixed present that included all times, past and future.’ (my translation of Paz 357) Man creates a conception of time that is unnatural: chronology and linearity separate Man from reality. Paz explains the resulting division as an opposition between ‘chronometric time’ and ‘mythical time.’ (Paz 358) The similarity between Paz and Harris lies in the conception and understanding of time as a creation, a mistaken artificial convention of Man, that distances him/her from his/her inner reality. Harris reacts to this problem by identifying a different path through tradition, myths, and creative language. In a parallel way, Paz resorts to the myths that relate to time in the Aztec calendar. According to Paz, celebrations of the holidays do not mimic a past event, but rather, they recreate it in the sense that the event takes place again in the present. In such a way, the chronological time is breached, and the mythical time comes into being.

For the Aztecs, time was linked to space and each day to one of the cardinal points. The same could be said about any religious calendar. The celebration [Fiesta] is more than a date or an anniversary. It does not celebrate, but it reproduces an event: it opens up the chronometric time so that, for a few immense hours, the eternal present prevails. The celebration [Fiesta] makes of time a creative entity. Repetition becomes conception. Time conceives. The golden age comes back. (my translation of Paz 358)

The dichotomy between the chronological time and the mythical time runs parallel to the binary death-wish/birth-wish in the Harrisian configuration of time frames. The language and nature of myth, therefore, becomes the tool through which to breach the mould of a block function conception of time. Myth breaches chronometric time. Paz goes on to explain that theatre and epic are two examples of this type of breakthrough ceremonies. Ordinary time stops in the staging of a

play, and a more subjective time, the mythical time, becomes the reality for the duration of the performance. Through the experience of this golden age of time in the form of recreations of ritualistic ceremonies and celebrations, modern Man will be able to 'dream again with closed eyes.' (my translation of Paz 361) Curiously enough, a similar conception of the golden age of time in Harris and Paz leads to an almost identical metaphor regarding the type of vision of the world and its connection to time and reality: Paz writes that Man trusts a rational way of thinking in order to understand the reality around. However, Paz continues, we will 'find out that we had slept with opened eyes.' (my translation of Paz 361) In Harris's metaphor, the dead seeing eye of rationality is opposed to the living closed eye of the dream expedition in a parallel configuration of time, Man, and reality. For Paz, the sleeping open eye of rationality stands in opposition with the closed dreaming eye of communion and the golden age of time. It seems to me that the connection is strong enough to link Paz's considerations about the dramatic genre with Harris's philosophical thought.

The mythical or psychical definition of time as introduced by Octavio Paz and Wilson Harris relates to the Aztec mythology, situated in the Caribbean mainland. The correlation of Harris's philosophy of the creative imagination to an insular playwright and director who moves from his native St Lucia to another island, Trinidad, is a choice that responds to an understanding of both Harris and Walcott as advocates of a universalism through the metaphysical aspect of language and literature. Wilson Harris comes from Guyana, his ideas stem from a very specific landscape, the Guyanese rainforest, and his mythology is informed by Amerindian, Aztec and Mayan mythologies and history of colonisation and massacre. On the other hand, Walcott comes from a small island where English is

the official language of education, where French patois is spoken by the majority, and where the sea has an omnipresence difficult to avoid. Moreover, Walcott founded his Theatre Workshop in Trinidad, an island with its own idiosyncrasies, with a multicultural population, a cosmopolitan capital, and where Walcott struggled with his own personal divisions. The relevance of a Harrisian outlook for the analysis of Walcott's plays lies precisely in the latter's duality, his mixed nature, which transcends into his poetic and theatrical work, and determines his ideas and position as an artist. The paradox of being a divided self accommodates easily in a philosophical view like Harris's, that allows for opposing concepts to coexist and even to overlap. The malleability and flexibility of a world view based on instability proves the perfect environment in which to reconsider some of Walcott's plays, especially those that deal with decolonisation and the position of the artist. The metaphysical link goes hand in hand with Walcott's admiration of Harris's literature, and of the power and creative force of his language. Early in his career, Walcott's poem 'Guyana' follows Harris into the Guyanese rainforest, fascinated by the way the artist is made to belong to his landscape in Harris's literature. At a complex moment when Walcott's doubts were still fresh and unresolved, the figure of Harris as a landscape and spiritual surveyor appeals to him as a Caribbean literary model to follow. Many of their concepts are strikingly similar, like Walcott's second Adam in relation to cyclical conceptions of time and doubling of lives in Harris, but the main point of contact that arises from this thesis is both writers' faith in language, the weight and importance of belief in the power of imaginative language in order to reach a fertility and creativity in order to alter the mood of nihilism that the world seems to be paralysed in. In this sense, their concept of the writer in relation to his/her society, and in relation to the

world in general is a notion of responsibility, of honesty, and of faith in language. The power bestowed upon words by faith appears throughout this thesis as the essence of their life endeavours, the clue to their interior journey.

This thesis focuses on three of Walcott's plays because of the scope of its theme. However, Walcott's theatrical production delves into issues relating to women in the Caribbean, to the notion of a pan-American literary stance, to the relevance of music in Caribbean history, to economic dependency, modernisation, ecology, to mention but a few. This thesis narrows the topic under analysis to Walcott's development of an artistic stance through his theatrical production before and immediately after 1970. Although *Pantomime* was written late in the seventies, it is a play that gives an answer to many of the issues that remained problematic for him until 1970, and it was written in the first pause to reflect after the growing tensions within the workshop exploded and caused his resignation in 1976. I have chosen to analyse Walcott's plays in isolation from the theatrical scene in the Caribbean for two reasons. First, Walcott himself showed little interest in producing other Caribbean plays in his own workshop. Second, it seems to me that a first close analysis of his plays is necessary before a comparing ground is set, in order to reconsider some of the interpretations that arise from these plays. This thesis demonstrates that some of the readings of Walcott's plays miss key points and overlook elements in them that are relevant to the overall understanding of the play, and its importance in relation to Walcott's ideas. Further scholarly work on Walcott's other plays is urgently needed, given his continuing work in this field: his latest play, *Steel*, is being performed at present.

### Chapter 1

#### Unfinished Genesis and Infinite Rehearsal

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Harris shares with other West Indian writers a 'concern for the genetic and cultural relationship to the ancestor.' (Gilkes xxvii) This interest, in the case of Harris, takes a specific form, with an emphasis on suggested meanings, original links between mythologies, a visionary rather than an intellectual or naturalistic discourse. Scenes are often repeated at different points in the novels, so that the build-up of imageries and implied meanings renders the second instalment of the scene illuminating and suddenly open with new and original meanings and implications. Harris's discourse in the novel is thus one that goes backwards and forwards, lighting up scenes and words with a new glow, so that all the chapters speak to the reader permanently and simultaneously.

Pivotal to the understanding of Harris's work, the simultaneity of times past, present and future creates a new conception of the role of the arts. The goal of this new sensibility is the search of a special type of wholeness, a changing, live wholeness that is never complete, never finished. In the 1979 essay 'Fossil and Psyche', the analysis of time and its origins results in a division into time frames that constitutes a constant premise in all of Harris's production. Harris's definition of time as *capacity* points to a configuration of reality as dual. The world we live in, driven by greed, ambition and a technology that pollutes and dehumanises is the product of time in an inflating role. Described as a continuous



potential for creativity, the pregnant role of time points to a different reality, whose grotesque reflection constitutes our world today.

Harris's concern for current issues regarding war, violence, ecology and globalisation inform his writings at all times, and his body of work constitutes an enormous attempt to assign the arts a post of responsibility in the state of affairs. Through the use of creative imagination and originality, the artist's position in society becomes that of a shamanic priest, who brings together tradition, the past and the future into our present reality. Harris writes with a clear goal: to breach nihilism. (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 29) With this in mind, he proceeds to undermine secure and static ideologies, seemingly stable notions of reality and technological and scientific progress. According to Harris, a healthy society is one that remains open to mutation, open to change. A little instability, he says, might be the path to a creative world, as opposed to the destructive one we inhabit (Harris 'Literacy and the Imagination' 77). In areas vulnerable to earthquakes, for instance, houses need to be flexible enough to incorporate the movements of the ground into their structure, in order not to collapse. Harris equates this type of architecture to his own writing:

Through the eyes of my own fiction I see transitive chords, implicit music, instilled or orchestrated into a building. When the earthquake comes, the building releases its transitive chords, there is hidden music in the cells of the building, a concert is created between the mind of architecture and the primordial instinct in the quake, the sailing plates in the earth. (Harris 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition' 187)

The key to breach the mould of an apparently stable society – but one which in practice protrudes with violence at every turn – is change, mutability: birth, death, and rebirth. In literature, this process is realised through myth. According to Harris, it is possible for an artist to use ancient myths that slip into his writing – in the case of literature – unnoticed. The unconscious stores archetypes that are expressed in the form of these myths, which then come back to life and speak to society, through the artist. (Harris ‘Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk’ 80) Language is, in a way, akin to landscape. The landscape in Harris is a living organism that functions with its own hidden and invisible patterns, its own templates. In a similar way, language carries invisible patterns and templates that are alive. The use of the word ‘myth’ in Harris is a complex one. He combines Greek myths with rituals of possession in Haitian vodun, in order to develop his idea of the artist and society. Amerindian myths function in present-day plots to express their immortal nature. This use of myth requires a time frame malleable enough to avoid long-standing and entrenched representations of a chronology that would render these myths quiescent and futile.

Harris’s novel *Carnival* illustrates the author’s conception of time in relation to myth, as well as to reality: ‘One lives in and out of Carnival time since each element that masks us sustains time as its original medium of sacrifice within creation. Not only that. Original medium of theatre.’ (Harris 1993: 7) *Carnival time* implies that a special time frame, with its own rules, embraces the characters, the plot, and the myths that become alive in the novel. As Bakhtin has pointed out, ‘[d]uring carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.’ (Bakhtin 217) Moreover, carnival involves a sense of show, spectacle, akin to theatre and the use of masks.

Harris presents an extended definition of theatre, so that street festivals and dancing fall into the category as well. (Harris 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas' 157-158) Al Creighton identifies the theatrical in Wilson Harris's *Carnival* as an interchange of masks by the narrator, and a rehearsal of sacrifice, birth and death throughout the novel. The result is a more profound omniscience than the narrator in the naturalistic novel (Creighton 194). It is, in a way, a shared omniscience, one that emerges from the very acting of the characters, as well as from the narrator himself.

According to Bakhtin, Carnival 'has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.' (Bakhtin 217) The combination of a carnival frame that seems to be cosmic, encompassing the whole world, the whole of life itself, and the cycle of birth and death, the cycle of renewal, is of paramount importance in Harris's work. Harris has written on the need to confront deep-seated notions of man and the world in general. Every object, every meaning of a word, every account of the past bears 'a vulnerable centre, an original frailty' that is forgotten and masked (Harris 'Reflection and Vision' 84). This vulnerability, parallel to the malleability of Harris's timeframe, encompasses change, accommodates mutability. Man's fear of instability prevents the process of renewal to take place, making the problems of the present seemingly unavoidable. This *eclipse*, as Harris describes it, buries the terrifying reality, transforming life into a doomed tragedy. Harris finds reality driven by nihilism or escapism, a society of block functions (Harris 'Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk' 77). Stable as these societies may seem, violence increases at all levels. For Harris, texts hide a potential to revise rigid notions of reality. For example, the definition of identity as invariant, as complete and

finished is challenged by a reality of partial origins (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 18-20). Texts hide a potential for confronting any definition that might seem complete and absolute. By unravelling the thread of possibility in those texts, the imaginative writer escapes tragic fate, 'one reads apparently unbearable events as bearable art, bearable translation of impending events for which one is – in some degree – curiously prepared.' (Harris 'The Fabric of the Imagination' 22) In society, Carnival plays an important part in relation to stability, violence, and change, because it provides a social frame for mutability.

In the context of the Caribbean, Carnival presents certain specificities. The open nature of this festival allows for an indiscriminate inclusion of cultural forms, while its ritualistic character brings a renewal of folk culture in a communal activity whose essence is to question stability and express dissidence to the authorities (Gilbert and Tompkins 78). One role of Carnival has been to allow a controlled expression of conflict and opposition in vertical hierarchies in order to re-establish the status quo. This was the case, for example, in the official Carnival festivals in the Middle Ages. (Bakhtin 218) In this example, Carnival's dismembering of hierarchical social structures is a way of resetting this same order, because conflict and dissonance are defined according to precisely the same principles of order versus chaos. In this case, the expressions of chaos in a communal festival are treated as 'transitory delusions, forms of error and spiritual darkness', (Bristol 213) which disappear with the return of the same order. The Caribbean historical background, however, presents a different picture. As a paradigmatic form of this festival in the region, Trinidadian Carnival is an example of a genuine and effective manifestation of a challenge to the existing social order. The development of Trinidadian Carnival runs parallel to a history of

colonialism and enslavement<sup>1</sup>, and its subversive nature was used as a weapon that inspired rioting in the 1880s. (Gilbert and Tompkins 78-80) In cases like this, where Carnival becomes the medium for a process of change beyond the limits of spectacle, a process of change in the reality of social configuration, the ruling classes exert their power by means of bans and prohibitions. However, as in the case of Trinidad, the spirit of protest, the essence of Carnival, remains, it takes a different form, and continues with the struggle.

The invention of the steel band evolved from the banning of African drums that took place in 1883.

In search of substitute percussive instruments, masqueraders initially resorted to the shack shack (a calabash rattle), then devised an orchestra of bamboo sticks, before finally settling on discarded oil drums (pans) which they tempered and tuned to make original music. (Gilbert and Tompkins 80)

The development of the steel band, stick fighting, and calypso shows a type of Carnival that genuinely challenges social hierarchies. Therefore, in the Caribbean, Carnival bears a meaning of protest and non-conformity to those colonial hierarchies. It is both a show or spectacle, and a ritual that modifies reality.

Performance theory differentiates between theatre as attraction, show, bourgeoisie commodity, and a theatre that bears a seed for change, a theatre closer to ritual. The latter emerges as an expression of instability. If there is a social imbalance, this type of theatre, a more underground, radical and spontaneous type, arises. 'But when a threshold of visibility and "stability" is crossed, the neighbourhood freezes in a new form, becomes an "attraction" ... and the crease

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<sup>1</sup> I use *enslavement* following Earl Lovelace's explanation that the people who were enslaved did not accept their definition as slaves, and struggled against it. (Lovelace 'Carnival Folk Culture within the process of modernisation' 26)

is smoothed out.’ (Schechner 184) The impact of the tourist industry on Carnival in the Caribbean has a similar effect: it incorporates its forms to create a desired stability. But the essence of protest finds other forms, as happened with the steel band: ‘artists ... follow along, or create, a new fault [in the Earth’s crust].’ (Schechner 184)

The debate about the political effectiveness of Carnival is an important issue in the Caribbean today that this festival is criticised for being merely a spectacle. Poet and playwright Derek Walcott has condemned the type of carnival that has succumbed to the commercial wheel of art as a tourist industry. (Walcott ‘What the Twilight Says’ 7) In a process similar to the normalization of radical underground theatre into a middle-class object of merchandise, African gods would become hollow, inert. In a different tone, novelist and playwright Earl Lovelace brings our attention to an element of Carnival that is normally ignored: ‘the waste, the mammoth waste’. (Lovelace ‘Carnival 1968’ 23) Taking this detail as the factor that all the population, from all cultural backgrounds, share in, Lovelace draws a connection between the waste in Carnival, and the human waste in Trinidad’s colonial past: ‘Slavery and colonialism are the systems under which the most elaborate waste of human beings can be envisaged. And accompanying the human waste there has been in this system a waste of material resources.’ (Lovelace ‘Carnival 1968’ 24) In his criticism, Lovelace identifies a unifying element in Trinidadian Carnival, and unveils its connection to the country’s waste of material and artistic resources. The juxtaposition of the grotesque image of *mammoth waste* against Carnival’s colourful feathers runs parallel to Harris’s thoughts about time as a pregnant body, and time as a self-consuming hollow

womb. Unveiling the grotesque truth under consumerism and greed in the world today and confronting this truth constitutes Harris's attempt to breach nihilism.

Carnival's potential to address and make use of the collective imagination is activated through its own special use of space/place (Gilbert and Tompkins 84). The blurring of limits between stage and the streets, between actors and public, makes of Carnival a meeting ground, a framework for the challenging of standing notions of reality, for the challenging of static and sterile conventions that prevent creativity and ultimately create waste. Carnival is, therefore, a gateway to a fertile future, one where neither talent nor resources are wasted. Mutability and rebirth are the essence of that gateway.

Wilson Harris enters the gateway of Carnival with the help of a guide: Everyman Masters. Masters is a Virgil figure, as Harris himself explains in his introduction, because *Carnival* is a modern *Divine Comedy*, a twentieth-century descent into Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso. Dante's *Divine Comedy* was modelled on Virgil's *Aeneid*, but the latter's pagan vision is converted through religious morality, so that Man enters the Paradiso <sup>2</sup>. Harris's revisiting of the *Divine Comedy* follows a similar purpose: to modify a previous vision, to update our journey through birth and death, because both Science and Art are different now. The thirteenth-century poet was ignorant of the 'abyss of space and time' (Harris 1993: ix) of the twentieth century, so that, with Harris, a new type of comedy comes to existence: the 'light-year comedy'. (Harris 1993: ix)

But Everyman Masters is not only a Virgil figure. He is also a theatre director, arranging the scenes, providing stage directions, and even directing

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<sup>2</sup> "the *Comedy* addresses itself directly to the historical actualities of the period in which it was written. Nor is this to say that Dante merely mirrors his own age; rather, he intends this poem to change it. Dante is not only a philosopher but also a controversialist and moral teacher; he is a mystic – capable of detachment from the world – but also an exile, defending as well as he can in the words of a poem the rights and prestige that his native city has denied him." (Kirkpatrick 2)

Jonathan's act of writing, as if Harris himself were receiving guidelines and suggestions from Virgil and Dante:

your book should point, I am sure, within its multiple perspectives to an overlapping context of spirit and nature that reveals without dogma the essence of love and love's imperial malaise, love's imperial tribulations within the plantation, institution, metropolis, factory, everywhere. (Harris 1993: 32)

As Maes-Jelinek points out, *Carnival* revises Dante's *Divine Comedy*, while at the same time it reshapes the literary genres in the Western world. (Maes-Jelinek 1979: 149)

In the first chapter, *Everyman Masters* tells of a past death, his first death, and announces his second one, in the summer of 1982, at the time the story is written. Jonathan Weyl, the writer, appears in the second chapter. He is forty years younger, and he is the Dantesque figure in charge of the completion of *Masters'* spiritual biography. The tone of *Masters'* demand is a paradox of 'deadly serious fun', (Harris 1993: 12) which inaugurates the journey as a blurring of genres: comedy, tragedy and drama overlap in a narrative frame that modifies the template of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Unlike Dante, Harris does not wish for an absolute, an unchanging, permanent concept of wholeness. Such a quest can only lead to a world driven by greed and ambition. (Maes-Jelinek 1979: 149) Even though Dante's *Paradiso* accounts for Man's limitations, or for the constraints of rationality, the idea of God is an absolute concept. Ultimate knowledge rests on God alone, and the Crucifixion epitomises divine justice, divine law. (Maes-Jelinek 1979: 149) Harris's characters, 'as if they were characters in a play', (Harris 1993: 6) set out on this spiritual journey. The principle of divine law,



categories of salvation/damnation, notions of fate, sacrifice and justice, are at the core of Jonathan's immersion into the Carnival logic of time.

The first chapter sets out Everyman Masters' mission as guide. The year is 1982, in London, but the characters wear the mask of the past, 1957, in New Forest, South America. Imitating ancient signs from the sky, that year witnessed another kind of sign, a technological one – the launching of the first rocket into space, the Sputnik, which signals the entry into the Inferno, as well as Masters' move to England from South America. The memory of that year is triggered by the image of Jane Fisher, who reminds him of the woman who stabbed him to death, his first death.

The conjunction of both episodes, the one in London and the New Forest scene, is made possible by a combination of alcoholic intoxication and a Carnival setting of interchanging masks. The scene bears sexual undertones as well as an imagery of sacrifice, with 'wine' and 'female water' juxtaposed in a reference to the Crucifixion of Christ and the rebirth that such sacrifice entails. (Harris 1993: 9) Jane Fisher's first action in the scene is to smile at him: 'A needle seemed to stitch a spirit on to her lips. Red wine for thread.' (Harris 1993: 5) The smiling mask of comedy merges with an image of bleeding lips, of a sacrifice of blood that is later on connected to the wounds of Christ on the Cross, by referring to 'a kiss like a scar', (Harris 1993: 8) and the mouth's utterance, the word, as a wound. As in a ritual, Man relives this theatrical scene of symbolism and meanings through Carnival. Masters and Fisher exchange masks and infect each other in a scene impregnated with birth (Master's birthday, and Fisher's 'female water') and sacrifice ('a dagger of wine in god's side'). (Harris 1993: 9)

The first chapter is also marked by death, a double death that brings echoes of a previous conversation with Jonathan Weyl, when he asks him to write his biography, in a tone of *deadly serious fun*. However, death is not fulfilled in the first chapter. It is only when we get to the first sentence of the second chapter that Masters' death is actualised in the novel, through the mortal wound of Weyl's written word: 'News of the death of Everyman Masters in the summer of 1982'. (Harris 1993: 11) The whole of the first chapter takes place in a timeless frame, a Carnival frame, where a first death is recovered and accounted for, and a second death is performed, as in a play, with a description of the characters and actors wearing masks. In Masters' conversation with Weyl, the former mentions Jane Fisher immediately after Weyl thinks of the mentioned *deadly serious fun*, as if he were unconsciously foreseeing the scene of Masters' death. The reader, however, only finds out on the second chapter, through Weyl's writing, once Masters' death has been completed – a death by word – and the spiritual journey has begun.

Harris has written about the need to analyse and study the way in which cultures interact with each other. (Harris 'Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View' 138) Carnival cultures in the Third-World, he says, may undertake a development of allegory into a 'capacity to bear the 'unbearable' quest for profoundest justice.' (Harris 'Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View' 139) This new type of allegory seems to act as a template in *Carnival's* creation scene in the third chapter. Sacred images and myths are then seen in a new light, so that nothing appears as absolute, and the reader is ultimately involved with a 'paradox of forces'. (Harris 'Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View' 139)

The journey begins when Amaryllis summons Everyman Masters to come back and guide Jonathan 'into the Inferno and the Purgatory of the twentieth century world.' (Harris 1993: 11) She does so by ascending 'above the stage of Carnival'. (Harris 1993: 11) Set on the muddy shores of Guyana, the next scene is a scene of creation, of beginnings. Masters gives the year of his birth, 1917, and directs Jonathan Weyl's attention to 'the button in the eye of the fish' (Harris 1993: 14), which then becomes a wheel that will lead the biographer. At that moment, it is Jonathan himself who is lifted up, and watches him from above: 'I saw him far below me now like a ghost in space whose light years reached me nevertheless across fictional time.' (Harris 1993: 15) Jonathan sees Masters as a child in the 1920s, but he is also seeing the scene as original relics from the past. Masters is surrounded by crabs, and a tree suddenly sprouts and becomes a bridge between the underworld and the sky. Masters bears the masks of king, of fish, of mud head, of ancient relic. The author reflects upon 'the eye of the fish in the hanged fisherman upon a wasteland tree', (Harris 1993: 15) and he is addressed by this eye, by the shell of each crab, his attention directed towards the tree, a glorious tree that seems, at the same time, to be about to collapse. He then realises that the child Masters has cut himself with a bone, and in this episode, identifies the origin of uncertainty: 'it was a new beginning overshadowed by uncertainty'. (Harris 1993: 16) Jonathan then reaches down, and, masked as Doubting Thomas, tries to help, but tears Masters' rag instead.

References to Amerindian myths, to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, to T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, and to Christianity intermingle in this episode of creation to inaugurate a new type of modern allegory that will help Jonathan, the reader, and Harris himself to access Purgatory and find passages into Paradiso. As the

author explains in his introduction, 'the dead/living king (that Everyman Masters is) bears the penalty of the Inferno in order to make of every erasure of pagan labour's claim to the *paradise* a fracture or subtle abyss in the story line of the *paradiso*.' (Harris 1993: ix)

In one of the major Amerindian myths, *The Tree and The Sea*, the origin of the sea (and sometimes the Amazon River) is accounted for<sup>3</sup>. Sibú wishes to create Earth, so he sends Sea, a beautiful woman, to summon Thunder in order to consult him. During her mission, Sea gets pregnant and later dies, bitten by a snake. Once dead, she starts to swell and pops up into the air as a tree. The tree pushes upwards piercing the sky (Sibú's house), so Sibú orders two birds to bend the tree, and when the two ends meet, the tree turns into water, the nests on the tree become turtles, and the leaves turn into crabs. (Bierhorst 84-85)

In the Popol Vuh, the text that collects the Quiché Maya mythology, the first human body is made out of clay, but being too soft, the gods destroy it. Then they make people out of wood, but they don't have anything in their minds, and they end up as monkeys in the forest. The story then turns to the twin hero-gods Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The first twin defeats a family of tricksters; the second descends to the underworld and defeats the lord of death. The twin brothers then become the Moon and the Sun. After that, the gods make humans out of corn and water, and that is the origin of Man. (Bierhorst 175-180)

In the Aztec account of creation, collected in the Legend of the Suns, several creation cycles are repeated. The people from the First Sun Era are eaten by jaguars. After the Second Sun, people become monkeys. After the end of the Third Sun, people turn into turkeys, and after the Fourth Sun, into fish. The god

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<sup>3</sup> Northwestern area of South America, and Cabécar and Bribri tribes. (Bierhorst 84)

Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror) is involved in the last part of the Fourth Sun Era. He warns a couple called Tata and Nene of a coming flood, and gives them corn seeds that they must keep. But Tata and Nene eat them, and when the flood ends, they have to catch fish, which they roast by making fire. The gods smell the smoke and punish them by turning them into dogs. Before the final creation, the story tells of another pair, as in the Popol Vuh. The gods multiply to create a council of spirits. One of the forms they take is the couple Quetzalcoatl-Titlacahuan (another name for Tezcatlipoca, the Smoking Mirror). Quetzalcoatl is then sent to the underworld, to fetch the bones of the ancients. He first needs to outwit the Lord of Death, which he does with the help of several forest creatures, and by means of disobedience. However, Quetzalcoatl cannot prevent the birds from biting the bones, and they are ruined. Still, he carries them with him to the sky, where they are made into powder. The gods shed blood to mix with the bone-powder, and they make the first man, who will eat the corn kernels that Quetzalcoatl brings from Food Mountain. A spirit is then sent to become the sun and survey the sky and the earth, but after it comes out on the east, the sun refuses to move: he wants a sacrifice of blood. The gods then decide to sacrifice themselves and shed their own blood, and the story then moves on to episodes of men fleeing sacrifice and tales of fights and wars. Both the Popol Vuh and the Legend of the Suns start with a mythological account that turns afterwards into a historical document in the last episodes. (Bierhorst 182-186)

The parallels between the character of Amaryllis and the beautiful woman sent to the sky in the myth of *The Tree and The Sea* are subtle. Amaryllis ascends to summon Masters, and minutes after, in the first moments of the scene, a tree sprouts and ascends to the sky. This tree 'existed within a capacity to fade or

vanish', (Harris 1993: 15) which happens in the myth, when the tree collapses and becomes the sea. Later, when Doubting Thomas flees, he will do so into a seawood, searching for a crab. The myth tells us that the leaves of the tree turn into crabs.

Crabs, however, are present in the scene even before the tree appears, and, in addressing Weyl, they are linked to the eye of the fish, that leads the author in this scene. In this case, the shell of the crab shares in the symbolism of the conch shell. Representing birth, it also bears in its spiral the record of its own growth. The conch shell contains all times of a cycle in a single drawing, so that it symbolises both the permanence of time, and the end and beginning of a new cycle. 'The shell can also be the outer covering of hard matter within which the spirit is enclosed'. (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 219) The crab's shell, therefore, is seen in this scene as a relic of the past, a living fossil that speaks in the present about the original moment of creation. It directs the author's attention towards the tree, which is a gateway between the earth and the sky.

Masters wears the mask of king and fish, in a reference to the Fisher King in Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Masters, whom we have seen wounded in the first chapter, is the symbol of the land, of the suffering, wounded land. The Fisher King identifies with the land in that he embodies 'the principle of Life and Fertility.' (Weston 114) The Fisher King, as Masters, is wounded, already dead at times. The hero – the writer in this case – comes to bring him back to life from the underworld (as Dante does with Virgil). In a way, to replace him. The fish, however, is a symbol that is present in numerous mythologies; it appears as a sacred animal in Chinese, Buddhist, Indian, Christian, and other cultures. (Weston 123-136) It appears again in the Legend of the Suns, when the men are turned into

fish at the end of the Fourth Sun. The elements of mud and wood, present in the Popol Vuh as the first attempts at making the human body, are also present in this chapter. Young Masters is described not only as the Fisher King, but also as the mud head. Later on, when Masters gets injured by a bone, the author sees what he identifies as the shaman's axe, cutting the tree.

Mud, wood, bone and blood all combine in a cross-referential chapter, making of Masters the human version of a living fossil, because he is enacting all moments of creation at once, he is performing all mythologies in a timeless primal scene that combines elements from different cultures, to be brought from the underworld and direct Jonathan Weyl through the twentieth-century. In the same way as the tree in the myth of *The Sea and The Tree* pushes the sky upwards and becomes a bridge between the sky and the earth, the tree in this scene carries a similar symbolism, growing doubly into 'the underworld and the overworld of the cosmos', (Harris 1993: 18) with 'aerial roots and earthen branches'. (Harris 1993: 19)

Harris has commented on the nature of the shaman's axe. In this scene, Young Masters remembers the 'legends of the golden man Eldorado, who was sculpted, it was said, from the wood of a cherry tree'. (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 50) This recollection appears when he is wounded by the bone – which brings into play a symbolism of genesis. However, Harris focuses then on a second blow of the axe, by the false shaman, which imitates the first one, but this time it brings a fascination for violence. (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 51-52) In a way, the scene of genesis in Carnival is a scene of death, a double legend of beginning and destruction.

The moment Masters cuts himself with the bone, Doubting Thomas, his cousin, appears. His role in Carnival is to prove 'that royalty or glory ... is other than mere fallacy or privilege'. (Harris 1993: 17) Doubting Thomas is therefore a figure that is searching for an absolute, and he bears the mask of the saint, the robes of absolute goodness. Thomas asks Masters to stop the game, and then the biographer sees the correlation between the bone (genesis) and the false shaman's axe (violence/greed). When they stop, Thomas disappears, and a man suddenly reappears, and he invites Masters to go for a walk.

The turning point brought about by the wound, the appearance of Thomas, the stopping of the game, and Thomas's crawling away, gives way to a temptation, or a vision into fate. Masters runs away, but the man's offer appeals to him as if the man were granting him a god-like power: 'offering him the precision of a godlike puppet to place his finger on the button of collective, explosive rape'. (Harris 1993: 21) The man could have been a rapist that appeared on the papers at the time, and Masters, fearful and scared of his offering, runs back home. The scene juxtaposes the stranger's eye, which is a button, to the eye of the fish during the game. Again, the scene is presenting a double genesis: the fish symbol of fertility and genesis bears a shadow of rape, which is, in a way, an *evil* fertility. In his recollection of the scene, Masters reflects on whether the seed of rape/conquest is still a present shadow in him.

Young Masters' flight takes him back to his mother's womb, a pre-natal existence, through memory, and he learns about his mother's contemplation of abortion. The fear of rape mixes then with the fear of dying before birth, but the tears on the mirror are those of Masters' mother. He then learns that his father is not his real father, and that his real father was white. His mother's decision not to



have an abortion results in a child that bears within both the potential for abortion, the psychology of rape/conquest/ambition, but also a 'spirit of care, the innermost spirit of Sex, the spirit of brooding creativity'. (Harris 1993: 26)

The link between Masters and his mother, the woman he sees on the mirror, the *glass woman*, draws parallels between their respective feelings of humiliation, one in the context of rape, the other one, we learn afterwards, in a context of adultery. However, the scene itself incorporates only the threat of rape, and the threat of abortion. Because Masters' fear is externalised through his mother's tears, a link is established between the rape potentially suffered by Masters, and the woman's grief. If Everyman Masters stands for every man, and the reference to abortion in 1917 bears in it the disappearance of millions in war, (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 49) then the intercourse between Masters' mother and the white man, so subtly interwoven with a scene of fear of rape, appears to represent the colonial conquest, the raping of the landscape, the destruction of a race. As Harris explains,

*Carnival* does not declare that Everyman's mother was raped ... But the ambiguities of intercourse between men and women, the wounds which women have endured – and which are reflected in a way on Everyman's body since time began – occupy the rhythms of carnival fictionality. (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 50)

As a human living fossil, Masters is enacting a genesis scene that reflects all cycles, including both creation and destruction. He is the conch shell, showing all moments of creation in one spiralling drawing. Masters' scene of genesis, therefore, becomes a scene of the end of an era and beginning of a different race of men.

Following the pattern of the Aztec Legend of the Suns, each new beginning emerges from the destruction of a previous race. Masters inaugurates a beginning that emerges from colonialism, conquest, and a violent mixing of cultures and peoples, but a beginning that bears the seed of creativity nonetheless. 'The threat of extinction', says Harris, 'overshadows the future as much as the past, unborn generations as much as the victims of polarised Mankind within past centuries whose silent lament remains.' (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 47) The myth put forward in this chapter is one of transformation, as opposed to absolute beginnings, and the womb bears a freedom that contains the seed of creativity, but also the possibility of violence. Masters guides Weyl into a new era of the Inferno, and their task will be to identify the breaches into Paradiso. The book's first three chapters set out to undermine any absolute notion of the Inferno, to facilitate and inaugurate their spiritual journey.

The author ends this genesis chapter 'intrigued at the origins of such conversion of humiliation into the genius of love that differed from the natural impact of humiliation upon the material body. I was at a loss to understand it all, though I had glimpsed again the transfigurative wound'. (Harris 1993: 26) At this point, the author's reaction mirrors man's reaction in the face of sacrifice. The humiliated body that becomes love is a reference to sacrifice; the sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice of Virgil (who is not allowed into Paradiso), and, in Harris's novel, the sacrifice of Weyl's father and of Masters himself. As Harris points out, however, religious references in this novel become fiction. No mythical reference in *Carnival* follows a certain dogma or creed. (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 46) The intention is to challenge the elements of sacrifice

and fate as fixed premises, and bring about a 'numinous diversity'. (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 50)

The setting shows a genesis that finds origin in transformation, and a medium that intermingles myths. Everything mutates and nothing is absolute. The only threads uniting all the scenes are Masters, the guide, and Weyl, the author. The fourth chapter opens with a description of both of them as co-actors and co-writers of the journey and biography of spirit. This double nature that unites all the episodes, together with the transformative character of the space/time setting (marked by Carnival), suggests a link to the figure of Quetzalcoatl. The Fifth Sun, under which the gods take the form of Quetzalcoatl in order to recover the bones of the ancients to create man, is "the sun of movement." (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 217) The movement or transformation requires dualities: light-dark, day-night, fire-water, sky-earth. The shape and form chosen by the gods, the form of the Quetzalcoatl, is a duality in itself: he is the Plumed Serpent, uniting sky and earth. Under this sun, matter needs to transform itself: the bird needs to fly, while at the same time, the serpent returns to the earth. Quetzalcoatl is not a pure god, but "a god in the making", (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 219) who needs to descend into the underworld and transform himself in order to fly back to the sky with the bones of the ancients. In relation to *Carnival*, Harris explains that Quetzalcoatl looks into the Smoking Mirror and feels terror, he sees a terrible prophecy. The symbolic image that he sees, one that causes him to feel guilt, is an incestuous scene: "He had contemplated – if not actually performed – incest with his royal sister." (Harris "Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition" 184) The Smoking Mirror is a veil between oneself and the creator; it is a bridge that can take the form of a tree, or any natural object.

(Harris "Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition" 184) This is the second time, after the myth of creation that Quetzalcoatl descends into the underworld, before he can come back into the sky again. Quetzalcoatl's incestuous intercourse with his sister explains the descent of Venus, which is then swallowed by the sun. This ritual that takes place everyday is an episode of sacrifice on the part of the semi-god. Quetzalcoatl takes the form of Venus, and has to descend and purge himself of his sin through suffering in the underworld, before he creates Venus again, as a ritualistic copy of his own image. This myth resolves the sun's requirement of sacrifice in the Legend of the Suns, when the new sun refuses to move (and thus facilitate transformation) until a purgatory blood sacrifice is made. (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 219)

In Harris's novel, *Masters*' first scene is a scene of sexual intercourse that takes place with both characters intoxicated by wine. The scene is described as 'unusual, even perverse'. (Harris 1993: 8) The elements of drunkenness and perversion are present in both scene and myth, and the two of them open up a path of purging and cleansing that will allow the characters to move into Purgatory, and Paradise. Paradoxically, then, this sinful act becomes an unveiling of a possibility of breaching the Inferno.

Quetzalcoatl is the paradoxical god in Aztec mythology, and his counterpart is Tezcatlipoca, which means Smoking Mirror. Both form an ambiguous unity:

he presides like the wind over all space. He is the soul taking wings to heaven, and he is matter descending to earth as the crawling snake; he is virtue rising, and he is the blind force pulling man down; he is waking and dream, angel and demon ... He represents daylight and also, when he journeys to the underworld, night. He is

love with its transmuting power, and carnal desire that wears chains. (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 211)

The duality of the Quetzalcoatl-Tezcatlipoca god(s) explains the meaning of death in carnival. Inasmuch as carnival facilitates a sharing of masks, it explains man as descendant of both victor and victim. (Harris 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition' 188-189) The conquest of this death has been sought through sacrifice and resurrection. In Weyl's journey through Inferno, guided by Masters, he bears the mask of Doubting Thomas. The fourth chapter returns to the theme of Carnival, with the scene taking place in the Market-place. This episode brings about a certain notion of freedom, a freedom that 'is grounded in perceptions of originality that see *through* absolute fate.' (Harris 1993: 28)

The context of the marketplace as setting for festivals like carnival has been explained as a setting that left out all manner of social conventions and rules. The marketplace is a popular setting, where 'a special form of free and familiar contact [reigns] among people who [are] usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age.' (Bakhtin 218) As Bakhtin explains, speech and gesture would undergo a transformation, erasing distances and freeing language of rules and norms. 'A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed'. (Bakhtin 219)

In *Carnival*'s marketplace scene, the lack of rules accounts for a freedom of hierarchies, and beyond hierarchies, it represents a freedom of absolutes. In the same way as speech is liberated from its constraints, myth in the novel is equally liberated from its cultural context. Thus, as explained before, religious motifs become fiction, they mean outside their regular environment. The fourth chapter

acts as an exorcism over all myths alive in the novel, and it switches them on in a new light, a new logic: the logic of Carnival.

The whole scene emphasizes its theatrical element. Weyl, wearing the mask of Doubting Thomas, witnesses and partakes of the scene as a staged episode, with an element of exaggeration to it. A small incident, an accident where he bumps into a big woman carrying a basket of eggs, becomes an enormous disaster, an accident that leaves him 'feeling that he had exposed, rather than inflicted, an injury.' (Harris 1993: 31) Like in a theatrical representation, the actions are not happening in reality, they are shown to the audience. In his role as actor, Weyl reproduces an event; he bumps into the woman and breaks the eggs. As a witness from above who has a direct insight into the scene, he finds it exaggerated, like a hyper-reality, where the events are staged, instead of happening naturally. That is the essence of Carnival. The injury is shown, rather than inflicted.

In the following lines, Weyl/Thomas is more deeply aware of the theatrical nature of his actions. He *knows* he cannot run, as if he suddenly remembers the script. Even though the woman is holding him by the shoulder, there is a certain *understanding* between them, and when she lets him loose, he stays to finish the act. He realises then that he has exposed 'the hand-to-mouth existence'. (Harris 1993: 32) The correlation between actions done by the hand and the speech uttered by the mouth takes us back to the first chapter, where the binary Word/Wound first appears. Carnival is recreating, through a play of masquerade, through a staging of the actors, a scene that exposes an injury.

In a conversation with Masters where Weyl describes this scene as 'this complicated theatre', (Harris 1993: 32) Masters explains that Carnival is

dramatising the 'collision of worlds' that took place in colonial times. The eggs she carries point to her fertility, and the collision destroys them, in a scene that foresees and dramatises the contemplation of abortion by Masters' mother and the end of a race and beginning of a different era, the colonial era, in New Forest. At the same time, the scene relates to the coming economic depression of the 1920s, as the author himself suggests. In both interpretations of the breaking of the eggs, a cycle of rebirth is stopped, and the scene therefore acts as a kind of prophecy. In the Legend of the Suns, the fifth sun stopped and refused to continue his role as transformative force until he was given a sacrifice of blood. The connection between the need for a sacrifice and the coming economic depression becomes the next stage in this new era that starts with the violent encounter between two worlds. This is the time to stage a resolution of the sun's requirement for sacrifice.

In the legend, it is the gods, in the form of Quetzalcoatl, that descend into the underworld. However, Quetzalcoatl bears two different masks: the virtuous aerial bird Quetzal, and the demonic earth-snake, Tezcatlipoca. Weyl will have to descend into the underworld if he is to bring about movement and transformation, if he is to breach the fate of economic depression that the scene prophesises.

The biographer Weyl then sees the sun, or rather, the staging of the sun falling 'a notch or two deeper than I had previously calculated'. (Harris 1993: 33) The setting of the sun in this case does not refer to a recovery of movement and transformation. Rather, because it is a *dream-clock*, a theatrical representation of the sun, it recalls the ritualistic swallowing of Venus every sunset. Venus being another name and shape for Quetzalcoatl, this sentence refers to the need for the god to descend into the underworld and come back triumphantly as a bird, with the seeds of genesis for a new Venus, a new creation. Weyl will have to follow

that journey into the Inferno as a purging sacrifice in order to bring new life, a new balance to the world.

The collision of worlds between Doubting Thomas and the marble woman triggers the memory of Masters' intercourse with Alice Bartleby, who is 'everybody's ancient purgatorial relative'. (Harris 1993: 34) She was also described at that time as a fraud, a colonial sterile fraud, the antithesis of fertility and genesis. For the author, however, she was 'a mystery that ran deeper than proof or parody of the evolution of limbo into heaven.' (Harris 1993: 38) In a reference to Quetzalcoatl's triumphant flight from the underworld up to the sky/heaven, Alice bears, in the underworld of economic poverty, the possibility of flight and new genesis, original creation.

The character-actors Thomas/Weyl and the marble woman/Alice walk towards the Crocodile Bridge before they witness the scene between the market woman and the czar of Carnival, Flatfoot Johnny. The narrator exchanges masks and tells, in the first person, of Masters' sexual intercourse with Alice. In an account where he appears as a puppet of the gods, but in which he confesses to feeling guilty, the connection between money (because he pays her) and fertility (or the lack thereof, as Alice is supposed to be sterile) appears again. It is at that point that the two character-actors arrive at the Crocodile Bridge.

At this moment, however, Masters guides the author into witnessing the scene again from an open perspective, so that he can see and act, so that he can narrate, not only the staging of the events, but also the possibilities which the staging entails: matter burns so imperceptibly, that we take it for solid, when it is still malleable. In other words, fate might seem irreversible, but the prophecy hides in itself the possibility of redemption. However, '[t]he fire that consumes



the dead beast resembles the fire that regenerates or fertilizes the life of the imagination, but they are not the same.' (Harris 1993: 40) In this sentence, Masters advises Weyl to go with caution: sacrificing the beast might appear as the necessary ritual to bring regeneration, but that is not the case, because it entails that good and evil are understood as solid, as absolutes. Instead, a duality of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, a transformation and new genesis is required, but Weyl needs to be careful and not take things for what they appear to be. Before they go back again and meet Thomas and the marble woman in the bridge, they must 'sense in paradoxes of light the extended and multilayered luminosities of the cosmos.' (Harris 1993: 41) As Harris explains, we do not know which of the stars we see are already extinct, (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 48) and Weyl will have to take this into account. In this way, Masters is reminding the biographer Weyl that this is a different age from Dante. 'Dante's vision of space differed from ours. He saw the stars as fixed.' (Harris 'Intuition, Myth, Imagination, Memory' 48) Dante's judgement of Virgil, who is denied entry into Paradiso, follows a vision of burning fire as solid, a vision of good and evil as solid. This, Masters reveals, might not be the answer to the mystery. Fate might not be overcome through a judgement according to an unmoveable creed. In *Carnival*, religious references become fiction, events become a theatre staging, time is relative (slow motion, simultaneity), and the freedom that this entails is of paramount importance to undergo transformation and turn into the triumphant bird that flies out of the Inferno of the underworld into the sky.

The scene on the bridge is a scene of fire and water. The bridge is built over Crocodile Canal, which is described also as a swamp, but the bridge becomes also the Market-place as a burnt vessel. Weyl stands on this vessel, and while it

burns, he descends with it and becomes at the same time both master and servant. Masters and czar Johnny create one irregular portrait, they are two masks creating a partial image, so that the bridge scene becomes, in a way, a stage in which transformation, the malleability that fire produces at the minimal level, becomes visible for the narrator. 'All images are partial but may masquerade for an age as absolute or sovereign.' (Harris 1993: 44) Masters then guides Weyl into seeing the Market-place in this new light. If at first sight it looks as a setting for honest trade and harmonic competition, this new perspective unveils the greed that it hides underneath, which might not be visible, but which is latent within its burning fire. We then see the Market-place as a new type of wholeness brought about by a vision powerful enough to discern its malleability, the possibilities for transformation.

The scene between Thomas and the marble woman is then rehearsed in this Market-place that is a different and the same stage. The characters exchange masks, and Thomas's hidden voice is then heard: he falls for the marble woman, and the scene takes place within a new wholeness. 'Wholeness is a third dimension in which every mask suffers the kinship of exchange, the kinship of glory, the kinship of humiliation.' (Harris 1993: 45)

Thomas and the marble woman walk towards the bridge, in this three-dimensional narrative of constant exchange of masks, constant burning and malleability. At this point, the woman takes out a lipstick bar from her bag and paints her lips. Weyl's vision, however, is witnessing every hidden counterpart in each of her movements.

The woman delved into an antiquated Carnival basket, pulled out an antiquated torch, pressed the switch to replicate the long arm of

Carnival. A beam shot forth and played upon the canal. Everything was black. And then the play of light caught something. Two miniature fires gleamed suddenly like lit coals or stars in the underworld sky and the darkness under the Bridge. (Harris 1993: 53)

Her gesture lights the crocodile's eyes, and triggers Weyl's understanding of the Inferno of the twentieth century. The line of red lipstick on the woman's mouth refers back to the first scene in the book, where Masters sees Jane Fisher's smile as a bleeding wound. The first scene was then recovered through the myth of Quetzalcoatl, who sees the incestuous intercourse with his sister through the Smoking Mirror. Now, through a free interchange of images, Weyl (wearing Thomas's mask) sees his sin in the eyes of the crocodile, who is the god of Carnival: 'The god of Carnival had slipped off the crab and the fish to don a dinosaur rocket resembling cannon as much as crocodile.' (Harris 1993: 54) The god of Carnival is now a crocodile, but a crocodile that is linked to the crab, to the fish, to a dinosaur, and to a rocket. The crab's shell is a repository of all times, as is the skin of the crocodile. The fish bears the symbolism of fertility and life. The dinosaur brings images of bones that constitute our ancestor in the twentieth-century scientific theory of evolution. The rocket makes reference to the Sputnik, which becomes, at the beginning of the book, a prophetic signal of the Inferno. Like Quetzalcoatl, Weyl/Thomas looks into the eye of the god of Carnival, and sees a prophecy, in the form of his own sinful sexual intercourse.

In the same way as the god of Carnival takes the shape of a crocodile, he also resembles a cannon, which points to the subsequent sacrifice through suffering, economic depression, and war. However, the author asks himself

whether every cycle of fertility requires a sacrifice or whether the suffering comes with the borrowed shape and form of a fertility cycle, and one visualizes this sacrifice as inevitable and necessary: 'Did the greenness of god mask a terrible age or was it a terrible age that had built into itself the reflexes of fertility?' (Harris 1993: 54) His doubt, like Thomas's doubt, unveils a wound that opens up possibilities. The god of Carnival does not only offer a prophecy (with sacrifice as a consequence), but it also uncovers the mask of reality. The vision of a grotesque reality underneath the apparent stable state of affairs brings about uncertainty, and this uncertainty is here applied first to the present reality, but also to the prophecy of doom, the necessity for sacrifice. The wound Weyl writes about has not only shown a 'rotting garden' – the wound that seems healed but is infected underneath – but it also bears 'reflexes of a puppet, the reflexes of fertility', which eclipse its 'transfigurative potential'. (Harris 1993: 55)

In Harris's novel, the duality between the fake reality, and the grotesque infected reality underneath is developed in part through the image of the crocodile as ancient fossil (in its sharing of crab-shell qualities), but also as a symbol of consumerism, and hiding place for the fake mask: the crocodile is both the god of Carnival, and Charlotte's bag, which is made out of crocodile skin. (Harris 1993: 57, 59) The crocodile can also be the 'festering disease', with its hard skin not as repository of ancient times, but an accumulation of cover-ups, of layers of fake fertility cycles that result in 'Carnival callouses (sic) across generations'; (Harris 1993: 55) calluses that eclipse the potential for mutability and change.

The sex scene between Masters and the woman appears to the reader in these three possible dimensions: a terrible reality, a sacrifice brought about by a false creed, and finally, a repository of malleability and mutating possibilities.

Masters penetrates her 'with scarcely a thought for unseen companions'. (Harris 1993: 56) The scene, however, is staged for the author and for himself (in the form of Thomas, described here as his shadow). Masters represents faith, a blind faith that acts, runs, performs. His double is Thomas, the personification of doubt and misgiving, who witnesses Masters' performance from the bridge. When the story moves to Thomas's own performance in the bridge, coming from the market where he has dropped the marble woman's basket of eggs, he becomes 'a dangerous rebel'. (Harris 1993: 58) The scene develops inside Charlotte's bag, inside the god of Carnival as consumerism. The prize of the crocodile bags (fake god of Carnival) is half that of the eggs (fertility, possibility of birth), and the scene is resolved through violence. Harris's argument that violence springs from societies immersed in block functions, societies that are stuck and unable to accommodate change, is here realised through the murder of Flatfoot Johnny by the woman from the marketplace. In a context of fake ritual, Thomas turns into a rebel, and while trying to defend the woman from rape, he possesses her, and kills Johnny.

The author stresses the fact that the blood is real, that the violence is true, that the scene is not staged for an audience, but outside of the safety of Carnival ritual. The suffering is real, but the sacrifice is not performed, it is not part of the ritual of rebirth. 'The transfigurative wound or revolution came within an ace of realization but in his immaturity, her immaturity, my immaturity – in the way we were locked into self-perpetuating order and primitive habit – the revolution eluded us again.' (Harris 1993: 63) Later on, in the scene of the school sport competitions, the author reflects that revolution requires a deep understanding of 'the tyrant's blood as native to oneself'. (Harris 1993: 67)

In the myth of Quetzalcoatl, there is a certain tribe called the Pochtecas, who are a community of nomadic traders. The purpose of their commercial activities was material gain, but they were also 'carriers of ideas' and moral principles that were as important to them. Humbleness was exercised, and if the economic gain was too much, they would organise rituals where they would get rid of the excess. (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 220) Their role was decisive and influential to other tribes:

They were mysterious people in the ancient world, exercising their influence silently, behind the scenes, but acting as a thread binding the whole pattern of Nahua-Maya culture together and using coastal towns as centres from which to radiate their varied influences. (Burland, Nicholson and Osborne 221)

The story of the Pochtecas is relevant for the bridge scene in Harris's novel because it provides it with yet a fourth dimension. The scene's grotesque consumerism, with the affordability of crocodile bags, contrasts with the commercial ethics of the Pochtecas, for whom ideas and principles are as valuable as material goods. In the bridge scene, the crocodile hides the lipstick that draws the smile at the beginning of the book, and that draws the blood Thomas paints in his wounds before killing Johnny, in a scene driven by fear. It is not the first time the combination of wound and lipstick appears. In the first chapter, the wound and blood are interwoven with the word and the red lipstick. Blood is then connected to wine, and to the Crucifixion of Christ. The combination of wound and word through lipstick seems parallel to the Pochtecas' conflation of commercial goods and ideas. Moreover, they constitute a link, a bridge between cultures, providing a harmony of ideas that is materialised in a balanced and unassuming market behaviour. In contrast to the biographer Weyl, who relates the failure of

revolution to a lack of understanding of the tyrant psyche in oneself, the Pochtecas are able to recognise greed in themselves, and resort to a ritualistic banquet to remedy the situation, ultimately keeping an unwanted evil away.

The ideological element in the activities of the Pochtecas points to a balance in moral principles, through speech. The uttered word represents the ideas they carry as a message across cultures. If in Harris the pair wound/word works combined to offer a ritualistic rebirth through a narration of sacrifice, then the trial of the Amerindian in the novel acts as a scene of sacrifice, of Purgatory, to regain balance and leap or fly out of the Inferno. Weyl's father is the defendant and the receiver of the punishment by an accidental death after the sentence is passed. His argument, that colonial law cannot be implemented onto a society that 'we judge as savages, who judge us nevertheless as blind to the enormity of the moribund absolutes', explains the author's thoughts about Christ, and Harris's perspective on Dante's condemnation of Virgil. (Harris 1993: 108) The Amerindian, Christ, and Virgil (in Dante's *Divine Comedy*) are judged and condemned. They are sacrificed in what seems a necessary ritual of suffering in order to access Paradise through divine law. Following the case of the Amerindian, who should not have been judged according to the colonial law, the author concludes that Christ cannot be understood as a necessary sacrifice within Christianity, because he lived in the pre-Christian era. Christ was considered pagan, and was judged and sacrificed as such. (Harris 1993: 103) Harris makes a similar observation about Virgil, unfairly treated by Dante, who leaves him out of the Paradiso: 'He was deemed a pagan because his address lay in a pre-Christian age. How one-sided is such a paradise?' (Harris 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition' 192) The common denominator in these three examples of sacrifice

(seen as sacrifice by a one-sided vision) is paganism. They were punished for their pagan ideas, and – as Weyl reflects – for ‘opening themselves to a profound game between creator and creature, parent and child, governor and governed, culture and culture, age and age, civilization and civilization, science and art.’ (Harris 1993: 103) Their paganism relates to Carnival as a marketplace festival erasing hierarchies, it relates to the Pochtecas as bridging civilizations, and it relates to the link between the material world and the arts, the wound and word in the stage of Carnival. This paganism embodies a rift in ‘the sovereignty of hell no man dares breach, the sovereignty of heaven no man dares breach’. (Harris 1993: 103) It is the real leap into Paradiso, the flight by Quetzalcoatl from the underworld to the sky, so that the sun and the stars, the whole cosmos begins to move again, and brings back the cycle of life.

There is a final and decisive intervention by Quetzalcoatl in the myth, as Ehecatl, ‘the Wind’, who breathes wind across the earth. ‘The transmission of breath or the act of speech constituted phases in a creation process, just like sacrifice or self-sacrifice, acts with which they had very close relationships’. (Olivier 12) The gods exercise self-sacrifice with their own blood during creation, they breathe into humans to bring life, and in return, humans are required to sing and pray to the gods, and to ‘express their gratefulness by reproducing the primal sacrifice.’ (Olivier 13)

In the myth of Quetzalcoatl, before he takes the bones of the ancients with him, he is required to blow into a conch that is blocked. Quetzalcoatl needs the help of worms – earth creatures – to pierce the conch, and bees – air creatures – to create sound inside the conch. The marine conch is thus ‘a communication bridge between various cosmic levels [as Quetzalcoatl himself is].’ (Olivier 21) Breath,



speech, self-sacrifice of blood, all contribute in the myth of creation. The myth's emphasis on speech as sacrifice is illustrated by their requirement that humans fulfil rituals imitating the gods' sacrifice of their own blood (ejaculated by Quetzalcoatl through his member in some versions, or by shedding blood from the gods' tongues in others.) (Olivier 22) This use of ritual sacrifice through speech is present in Harris's novel, where Masters' deaths – past and present – appear in the first chapter, but are not realised until the second chapter, as the author begins his biography of spirit and announces Master's death: a death by word. Masters' death is then not only an actual death, but a staged ritual of sacrifice that will enable Weyl to communicate with the divine, and breach the mould of Inferno in the twentieth century.

Harris's epigraph to *Carnival* follows a similar line. A dead man arrives at the entrance of a cave, where a terrible crab awaits him. At the entrance of the cave, the man finds a maze-like design that the crab has partially erased. The dead man's task is then to redraw the missing part of the whole design, through the initiation rites that he has learnt in life, in order to cross the threshold of the cave into rebirth. In a way, Harris is redrawing the design through a literature that is a ritual of speech, a ritual of rebirth.

The position of the arts, therefore, encompasses reality, affects reality. Following Carnival logic, literature for Harris is a ritualistic practice that bears an effect on society and the world. In *Carnival*, literature – in the form of a biography – is almost a worldview, a three-dimensional vision into life, death, and history. In Carnival as festival, a similar structure comes into play. Carnival is not seen only as spectacle, because everybody, actors and audience, participates. 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it ... While carnival

lasts, there is no other life outside it.' (Bakhtin 217) In fact, Carnival is not an artistic form in the traditional sense, but rather, it is located in 'the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play.' (Bakhtin 217)

Harris's novel offers a story within the parameters of Carnival, but it also reflects upon the role of the writer, and of literature, through the use of the biographer *of spirit* Jonathan Weyl. The biography inside the novel and the novel itself intermingle through the use of masks, and, as Creighton suggests, democracy in the narration provides a new insight into the nature of carnival and literature. Harris's novel provides a commentary on life and reality as much as on literary genres and art, and the character of Jonathan undergoes rebirth as much as the cosmos itself experiences a new genesis inside the biography of spirit: '*The love that moves the sun and the other stars* moves us now, my dearest husband, my dearest Jonathan'. (Harris 1993: 168) It is only then, in the last paragraph, that the reader hears the biographer's name, in an act of naming that marks the genesis and birth of Man. The wheel turns, the cosmos moves, and the naming breath of Amaryllis brings life into the character/writer. The writing process, the biography of spirit, acts as a kind of Quetzalcoatl myth in order to bring life into the cosmos. Like a shaman, the writer uses ritual (literature within carnival) to reach the realm of the divine and breach the culture of fatalism and doom of the twentieth century Inferno.

The role of the author is similar to that of the dead man, who has to find his way through the existing paths that will lead him to draw the erased part of the maze. Rituals become the key to regeneration. Harris has written about the role of the writer as a vodun dancer. (Harris 'The Writer and Society' 48-64) The vodun

dancer undergoes a trance, and comes into contact with the gods, who will thus speak to the community through the person under possession. The dancer's body becomes a spatial void for the supernatural to manifest itself. The dancer loses his/her individuality to a mythical figure that belongs to the folkloric tradition of the community. In Carnival the ritual encompasses all present, including the audience; in the same way, the ritual of possession in Haitian vodun is never an individual event. Vodun ceremonies involve the whole community, sometimes drumming, dancing, singing, which bring about the state of physical dissociation through kinaesthetic stimulation. 'During dissociation, normal consciousness and behaviour are replaced by some hidden part of the personality which in normal circumstances is unexpressed.' (Agosto-Muñoz 7-8) This process of accessing what is hidden in unconscious layers of the personality is found as well in pathologies of the mind or in dreams. The process in possession is very different, because it is a process that has been provoked, and the movements and actions are learned and stored unconsciously in previous initiation rituals. The ritualistic access of these layers makes it possible to bring the person back to a fully conscious state with no pathology involved.

[T]he difference between the pathological state and ritual possession is that the latter is the outcome of a process of learning by which the behaviour patterns which represent the gods are ritually learned, coming out automatically during the physical dissociation which has been deliberately created for possession to occur. In a pathological state, on the other hand, the individual is not protected by the ritual apparatus, nor by the conscious elements involved in the process of learning that exists in Voodoo. Ritual

possession is expected and controllable; the repressed behaviour and attitudes which are potentially dangerous are rendered harmless by being projected into the conception of the gods. (Agosto-Muñoz 8-9)

The function of this ritual, then, is to make the suppressed levels of the mind 'social,' and thus prevent conflict between the individual and the community, ultimately cancelling out eruptions of violence. Initiation monitors the externalization of those layers by providing certain structures of meaning for the person undergoing possession. The initiate will learn certain symbols and their association with the rites, which then become subconscious reflexes that are expressed in the trance.

As developed in his novel, the act of writing for Harris turns into a ritualistic practice in order to access unconscious, hidden truths and possibilities of being which liberate the community from fate, from nihilism. If possession triggers an unconscious reflex learnt through initiation rituals, the figure of the writer as vodun dancer is strikingly similar to the role of the dead man in the novel's epigraph, where he is supposed to draw the missing half of the maze by means of unconscious elements learned through initiation rituals.

The mechanism of intuition in the act of writing is of paramount importance for Harris's development of literature as ritual. Andrew Bundy gives a definition of the concept of intuition in Harris's essays: intuition is the 'bringing of gestures from the future into the actions of the present' or the 'memory of the past one will unwittingly store in the future'. (Bundy 5) This means that intuition is a form of knowledge that could stem from something past, something that has been stored in the unconscious, which could be, in a way, *switched on* by some

premonition of a future in situations that repeat patterns from the past. Harris exercises this interaction between times past, present and future in his novel, where all chapters seem to be speaking to the reader simultaneously, and episodes are lit up on numerous occasions throughout the novel, with new meanings and implications.

Intuition seems to suggest a spontaneous, unexplained knowledge of something. An intuition is a hypothesis that is then either confirmed or refuted. The pattern it follows is the same as an action that is prophesized by the oracle in an ancient myth, for example, and then not confirmed until its factual completion. In *Carnival* the characters see the prophecy in the eye of the crocodile, and then there is a gap between that moment of prophecy and its completion: fate. In Harris, intuition is the prophetic tool, a space where possibilities lie hidden. Re-reading one's manuscripts, according to Harris, is a process of revival: in the repetition of the text, one creates other texts. By repeating myths, by using ritual, we are recreating the gap between the prophecy and the completion of fate. In the case of the vodun dancer, the community repeats certain practices that bring about possession, and then the dancer repeats certain patterns that (s)he keeps stored in the unconscious, learnt in initiation rites. Harris uses mythical patterns in his novel; he repeats them in order to bring the text back to life in new ways, as a kind of rebirth of the whole world, but also of literature. Repetition, Harris's infinite rehearsal, involves a process where the outcome is known, it is expected, but always in repetition, hidden elements come to life. The possibilities that are present before the completion of the prophecy, before the completion of fate, are Harris's goal. In *Carnival*, mythical images of sacrifice are repeated to bring new life into them, to free them of the block function meaning they have acquired.

The responsibility of escaping block functions in society is not only located in the writer. If Wilson Harris's writing is a ritualistic process similar to the dancer in Haitian Vodun, then the reader becomes a very important part of the ritual. We have seen how the audience participates in Carnival. Similarly, the vodun dancer is an element within a community: Haitian Vodun is a communal ritualistic practice. The process of initiation on the part of everybody in the ritual is very important. Learning, then, is essential for the ritualistic practice to come alive. For Harris, learning to read is a matter of the greatest importance, related ultimately to outbursts of violence in society. He talks about literacy in society, but a different type of literacy to the one we normally refer to. He is not content with statistics that show how many people can read and write. He refers to a literacy of the imagination. According to Harris, '[t]here are many levels of society in which it appears that people are quite competent – they read with a uniform kind of frame. But their imaginations might be illiterate.' (Harris 'Literacy and the Imagination – A Talk' 77) The result is what he calls a society stuck in block functions, that results in an impossibility for change. The block function society, where roles are categorised and executed with skill, is a stable society, which might seem a positive trait, but which hides the inability to change, to move in any direction. This society suffers from the same malaise as the world in the *Legend of the Suns*, where the sun and the stars refuse to move. The lack of movement brings about a stability that prevents the cycle of life. This stability would be like the imposed order of agricultural planning of the landscape, which ends up in flooding and a restitution of an invisible order of the landscape itself. In the same way, Harris says that block function societies strive to maintain an order that produces outbursts of violence, because there is no space for instability,

for change, or for creation. Instability is a requirement for genesis, but a controlled instability, a movement monitored by unconscious reflexes learnt through initiation. The dead man will then redraw the missing half of the maze, the vodun dancer will come back from his trance safely, and fate will give way to rebirth.

The malleability and flexibility of Harris's writing acts as a medium where unconscious reflexes follow an invisible line that breaches nihilism, with the writer as a shamanic figure, a guide that takes us safely across unstable ground. Through a pattern of Carnival logic, the writer takes the community across through a literary ritual that, like in the case of vodun, accesses the elements of conflict and confronts them, deals with them in a safe environment, to finally take us back to reality through rebirth, into a healthy present devoid of madness and trauma.

In so far as Harris's fiction acts as a kind of ritual for the community of the world, it shares role and characteristics with theatre. Apart from the explicit theatrical elements in *Carnival*, Harris's whole conception of literature bears a resemblance with the ritualistic type of 'theatre' that Schechner identifies as opposed to theatre as show.<sup>4</sup> Seen as the most ritualistic type of theatre, shamanism follows a structure which is similar to Dante's travels with Virgil through the Christian and other worlds. (Schechner 34) Through the repetition of rituals, the original moment of creation, the first ritual performed by the gods, is brought to life again. In Harris's novel, because the ritual takes place within a Carnival environment – which encompasses reality and art – the actualization of

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<sup>4</sup> See p. 40 in this chapter

the ritual is accomplished: literature is not just escapist or fatalistic literature; it is a ritual of passage and a spiritual journey through the Inferno into Paradiso.

The kind of theatre that follows the patterns of shamanism is a performative theatre that springs from an 'impulse toward collectivity, groupness, identification with others', (Schechner 103) that results in experimental performances (where the audience is an integral part of the performance), political theatre (for conflict resolution or to bring about change), and performance psychotherapies (similar to the function of Haitian vodun.) (Schechner 133) The post-World War II avant-garde theatre is an example of an attempt akin to Harris's own goal of finding the human place in rapidly changing societies amid an industrial growth. This type of theatre, that considers the audience as participants and treats the performance as a whole community celebration, is a 'contemporary tendency [that] originated in the experimental theater as a movement toward ritual.' (Schechner 155-156) Wilson Harris's literary production follows a similar stream, taking literature back to a ritualistic function, a performative function that places the arts in a position of responsibility towards the community, towards the present situation. In doing so, Harris is empowering the arts, and more importantly, empowering the reader as participant.



## Chapter 2

### Genesis and the avant-garde: Derek Walcott's apprenticeship

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Since the formation of the West Indian Federation in 1958, Walcott shared the growing enthusiasm for the beginning of a new historical period in the Caribbean. He moved to Port of Spain, the capital of the federation, where he found a cosmopolitan but also small city with a mixture of races, religions, cultures and architecture that appealed to him. He found his place within the bohemian artistic circle and set out to create 'not merely a play, but a theatre, and not merely a theatre, but its environment' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says': 6). The role of building a whole theatre scene in the Caribbean involved finding a building for the company, finding actors, stage designers, costume designers, lighting technicians, the writing of plays, developing a Caribbean style of acting, touring within and outside the Caribbean, 'creating' an audience for the plays, involving the newspapers and critics. Moreover, the context for such an enterprise was decolonisation, and the profusion of views and definitions for a Caribbean identity. Even for a genius, this task would prove an almost impossible mission that resulted in the mood of disillusionment and almost hopelessness he portrays in his 1970 essay, 'What the Twilight Says.' However, this essay is not the only result, and the value of his vision, seemingly truncated and non-viable, lies, as he suggests in 1970, in the struggle, the effort and the development of the company, and not merely on the performances themselves.

Walcott already had a reputation as a poet, was well connected, and received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation to study drama in New York in

1958/9. There, he came into contact with the avant-garde theatre movements, with Brecht, with the Oriental theatre, and with Japanese film. When he came back to Trinidad, he started an actors' studio at Beryl McBurnie's Little Carib Theatre, with the idea of creating a company lead by a director and playwright, like Brecht's Berlin Ensemble. Walcott wanted to create a new theatre in the West Indies. He started writing for the *Trinidad Guardian* to make a living, and after 1960 he wrote regularly for the *London Magazine*. While continuing his career as a poet, playwright and journalist, he was in contact with the Rockefeller Foundation, who were interested in helping to create a West Indian theatre. The account of Walcott's efforts to find financial support<sup>5</sup> provide a picture of the amount of constant exertion driven by a strong visionary determination, but they also offer a picture of an economic dependency that would inevitably affect the direction of the theatre company.

The exhaustion caused by this undertaking surfaced in 1970, but it is the inevitable dejection of a poetic and literary vision tried and tested against a complex reality. In 1970, Derek Walcott had created a company that had toured in the Caribbean, America, and Canada, receiving praise everywhere, he had refined his vision by rehearsing and learning about the specific problems the Caribbean faced in order to create its own theatre style. In 1968, in the midst of a mood of pessimism, he felt he had stretched his utopian vision to the maximum, and wrote down his essay on the conflicts and problems that he interiorised and analysed as his own responsibility, looking back, looking West, and finally looking inward, to identify the crisis, and remain, as always, brutally honest.

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<sup>5</sup> See King 1995.

The publication of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, along with 'What the Twilight Says', has been generally used as a dividing line for Walcott's work as a playwright. In Stewart Brown's The Art of Derek Walcott, two essays deal with Walcott's 'early drama' and 'later plays' respectively. Judy Stone's chapter on Walcott divides his plays chronologically in decades, but the first decade of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop is sealed by his reflections in 'What the Twilight Says' in a tone that suggests a decade of apprenticeship and adjustment to the realities of the region and its historical moment. The Black Power revolution of 1970 also marks this as a turning point. As Stone points out, this event provided a much-needed fresh start for the handling of a topic that was fundamental to Walcott: 'the validity in the West Indies of European culture, and the rightful place, if any, of the colonial descendants' (Stone 115). Aside from the Black Power revolution, 1970 is a landmark in Walcott's career as a playwright and director because of the new direction his plays take. Laurence A. Breiner relates his early plays – from *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954) until *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (published in 1970 but started in 1959) – to a period of rootlessness in West Indian writers in general: 'the apparent lack of an eventful and dramatic history, seems to frustrate nearly all West Indian writers at the point early in their careers when they seek a subject large enough for their ambition' (Breiner 74). His early plays resort to folklore, to the Haitian revolution, and to St Lucia. Tackling the question of liberation from the oppressor through local folklore and people, Walcott does not, however, venture yet into his own conflict of finding a position and a voice within the Caribbean as a divided 'mulatto of style'. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* paves the way towards the analysis of race and of cultural inheritance. The play is, as Breiner and Stone show, very much dictated by a

Christian imagery, and the visual staging makes very explicit references to the Spanish character of Don Quixote, with Makak as a black quixotic figure holding a lance/stick, and Moustique as a Sancho-turned-trickster, but loyal in the end. The figure of Lestrade, a comment on the metaphorical change of skin of a part of the population at the time, brings the focus into the contemporary issues of the Caribbean. Walcott began writing *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in New York, where he felt estranged and where he was learning about foreign theatre styles while thinking of and planning to develop a West Indian theatre. Bruce King suggests it was there that he most strongly felt that he belonged to the Caribbean, and throughout the next decade he worked on and matured his ideas about race and identity through the rewriting and staging of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. This reworking took place side by side with the pragmatic pressures of building a theatre, as well as with Walcott's own personal search for his own voice within a society in turmoil. Thus, 'What the Twilight Says' became a text of paramount importance in that it represents a halt and an accounting for his experience so far, a rekindling of a truthfulness and honesty that he somehow felt was fading within the raw practicalities of producing theatre. In this context, the ambiguity of the play's denouement and the nature of the white apparition, a conundrum for critics who offer widely diverse readings of the play, seems to suggest an expression of Walcott's own ambiguity and lack of answers at the time.

As a poet, Walcott expressed the same search and crisis, but poetry is a medium that does not have the external pressures and problems that theatre encounters. Therefore, analysing some of his poems of that time can shed light into the types of ideas he was dealing with as an artist. The Gulf, published in 1970, is part of a 'quest for an alternative which will directly answer to the need

to overcome the amnesia and the void of landscape, and the legacy of dead metaphors compounded in that crisis' (Ismond 'Landscape and Possibility: Derek Walcott's Guyana': 236). This is a phase of negation, of 'abandoning dead metaphors', as Ismond explains. The crisis is represented as a desolate landscape. Unburdening nature from the 'dead weight of imperial metaphors' (Ismond 2001: 61), Walcott enters a phase of exploration and search for words, heritage, and his own reflection as an artist.

Walcott belongs to a generation of writers who were publishing at the time, but unlike most of them, he stayed in the Caribbean. Kamau Brathwaite wrote in 1970 that '[n]o writer could live in that stifling atmosphere of middle class materialism and philistinism' (Brathwaite 346). George Lamming had written extensively on the writer's exile, and Walcott himself writes, in 1970, that 'It is almost death to the spirit to try to survive as an artist under colonial conditions which haven't really changed with our independent governments' (Walcott 'Meanings': 290). The underlying problem seems to be the distance between the people and the artist. The region had embarked on the enterprise of 'being a region for itself, with the sovereign right to define its own reality and order its own priorities' (Lamming 9). With most writers on 'chosen exile', most of the critical writing within the Caribbean, mainly from the university, followed the guidelines of English criticism. The distance between the exiled writer and the society is thus widened by a body of critics that, according to Sylvia Wynter, replaced the writer in society. Following what she called the 'cultural myth of Europe', these critics pretend to be unmediated, objective, to affirm their critical authority. The writer on exile witnesses the reality of Europe, very different from the imperial construction of the 'cultural myth of Europe', and comes back to a

body of criticism that is blinded by this myth from the reality of its people. The university, Wynter argued, was exiled from itself. In this atmosphere of exile, frustration, colonial minds and uprooted writers, Africa offered for many the alternative heritage. Brathwaite, for instance, went to Ghana and came back with a renewed communal definition of identity, but faced the problem of communicating to the people something that they had not undergone themselves: 'How can a writer speak about 'the people', when, as George Lamming dramatizes in *The Castle of My Skin* [sic] ... , those to whom he refers have no such concept of themselves?' (Brathwaite 347). Walcott's poem 'Hic Jacet', according to Brathwaite, does not solve the question of communal against the individual, and the Barbadian poet concludes that, without material roots in the Caribbean, two sources of identity are available: Africa, and, through Harris, the Amerindians.

Walcott's poem 'Hic Jacet' (Walcott: 1992) is ambivalent in that it bears a tone of assurance, while at the same time it blurs the identity of the poet, of the people, and of the different 'messengers' of a Caribbean identity. As a messenger answering the question that everybody is asking, he is assertive only about confusion, the 'dance of doubt' that he mentions in 'What the Twilight Says.' Rather than placing the individual against the community, in Brathwaite's terms, throughout the poem he questions the very content of the phrase 'the people'. 'Hic Jacet' is a statement, a final answer. It opens with a question posed by 'they', which suggests an alienated and isolated artist position, but the poem on the whole undermines this notion. The question is one of the main debates in Caribbean literature at that time: the choice between exile or staying, with a large number of artists and critics arguing that there was actually no such choice. This concern is

not a debate that the poet poses himself, but it comes from outside, which implies that the 'I' never had a doubt that it was there he was to be. Walcott's debate was rather with language, with history and tradition, but he stubbornly sought to root himself in the Caribbean, because he *is* Caribbean.

The first three negations in the poem concern three 'types' of that period: the politicians, the exiled artists, and the 'Lestrade' type: the poet is not placed in the centre of the crowd to be applauded (= politician), he is not placed behind a lectern to explain to the crowds how to belong (= distanced intellectual), and he is not placed over the crowds keeping them below, nourishing from their 'dung', changing colours (skin/ideology) depending on convenience (= Lestrade type). The last sentence places the poet in the third-person, distanced in time as well: 'Before the people became popular / he loved them'. The poet's choice of provincialism is not a trend, it is not a decision to stay that he takes now. The decision, his preference of provincialism was not such a choice, it was his natural inclination even before the question was asked. The first stanza begins and ends with 'they', suggesting that 'the people' does not only mean the crowd, the 'hoarse and hungry thousands', but those asking the questions too, and also the three 'types' that he is not. Walcott is defining 'they' as encompassing all. But there is another twist to the last sentence: 'he loved them' is in the past. As we will see, the poet undergoes a transformation, and perhaps the all-encompassing love is something he has left behind, an innocence that was originally what prevented him from even asking the question that they are asking now, and will ask in the future. For him, the Caribbean started independence with that same innocence. He loved those three types, he had an overall love *before* the downfall, *before* the disillusionment and the realization that politicians were 'poisonous',

that exiles would come back to teach people how to belong, that some people's jobs would be to benefit from keeping the people down. That innocent love was *before* the people became popular, and the love was an innocent Adamic love.

The next stanza insists on another rejection, another negation: he did not stay to irritate 'some winter-bitten novelist'. Aside from who this novelist might be, the general message is that he did not find his place in the Caribbean to oppose those who went on exile. Then he moves on to give the answer, which he offers in indefinite terms ('something'), without a clear definition ('unwritten'), but which is, at the same time, certain ('rooted'). This undefined, unworded 'something' he knows because *it* provides benediction and pain. Like a religion, the poet feels a certain faith in something that has no definition, that is still to be discovered. And there he is united with everybody else in the first-person plural 'us': he stayed because he shared this benediction and pain, this faith in what was yet to be written. This indefinite 'something' he sees as potentially able to clear the sky, to see clearly, to bring in the form of fiction a type of rain that will turn towards 'a newer sea', a rebirth of the Caribbean. This, and none of the above, is the faith that 'he', 'us' shared, and the reason why he stayed.

The second part is formed by one stanza which turns the tone painfully into irony, the cynicism caused by the pain of losing that innocence, the cynicism against himself as well, as we will see later on in the poem. He then equates the 'them' to the names, revealing that his love was for the names that had been imposed, like dawn on the towns, like a baptismal naming, by metal, by conquistadors, by colonialism. Driven by his love of those names, his next step should have been to write 'poems on the Thames', to dwell on that tradition, to move to England and accept the naming, the language, the definition found in



England for the Caribbean. His skin would then have become attuned with the Nordic climate. Superficially, he would have become English. But then, like a rotting log, he would have had to spit his insides (= to write poems), his true self underneath the furred and cracked surface of ice. The parallelism is with the rusting towns that receive names that he loved (in the past).

The last stanza brings the conversion, the cleansing of that past 'I'. The starting point is the basic principle that defines him as poet: 'Convinced of the power of provincialism'. As the single conviction that is definite amid the undefined context, and therefore as the only really rooted object of his faith, this statement begins his cleansing. The cleansing takes on images of a grey tub (perhaps the Thames), steaming clouds of seraphim. The poet 'boils' himself down to his own truth, ridding himself of angels (religion) and flags (nation), and turns from a distanced, elevated position of 'divine' messenger (seraphim) to an honest, human position. The last stanza brings the truth underneath his past self, which cleanses him completely, to bring a new birth to the poet. He already sinned in the past with all the sins of politicians (power), exile artist (fame, phlegm/'hermetic', explanatory/'I knew the commonweal'), and Lestrade, or maybe Moustique: he pretended to be one with the crowd. However, he is aware that his passage 'would alter their reflection'; thus, he acknowledges a certain distance, although, unlike Lestrade or Moustique, he is giving away his truth, his pretence. He has been in all these positions, he has personified each one of them, which he summarizes in a single idea: he thought of himself as responsible for all the people, he took on the responsibility to lead them, he was 'that muscle shouldering the grass / through ordinary earth', until he loses his name, until all the steam dissipates and he sinks to the bottom, to the truth of being not a divine

messenger, not a seraphim, not a politician/lecturer/profiteer, but a 'commoner'. This transformation, the unveiling of this truth becomes his second birth. If the first part answers the question, then the second and third parts give an account of the process, and the self-definition, which becomes a definition of the transformation of the whole Caribbean after independence. The steam is made of all those positions that are not the *truth*, and the truth is unveiled by the poet's baring of robes and assertion of commonality.

The personae in the poem are not strictly defined though, and the general 'they' that get the answer through the poem encompass probably all the positions he rejects. The crowds, however, don't seem to be included in that 'they' that questions, and therefore in that sense, he is positioning himself in the same angle as those he diverges from. Paradoxically, all of them, including the 'I' appear as 'us', which is made even more indeterminate by the past tense of the verb. We don't know if the 'I' is still included in the 'us' after his second birth, but we can presume he isn't, as his truth reveals his pretence at losing himself in the crowds. The three (or four) that encompass 'they' at the beginning are probably not within the 'us' after the second birth, as his own truth unveils their own truths too. As a whole, the poem tries to blow away the clouds of steam that are preventing the people from naming their greatness. The poet is not talking to the crowds – as in a lecture. He is not giving a definition of 'the people'; he is, instead, erasing the superfluous steam in him, yielding the excessive and unreal power of divinity/politics/lecturing/trickstering, to evoke the primal power of seeing the self truly, the power of honesty. Kamau Brathwaite argues that the distance between the individual and the community still exists in this poem. However, the idea of community itself is challenged in this poem. He is speaking to the 'they', to the

ones who ask the question, not to the people. He is providing for himself a different location to that which he is given by others. All the pronouns in the poem are vague, the 'I' is 'I', 'he', and 'us'; the 'they' is sometimes the ones who ask, later 'they' is the crowds. Identity is unfixed, it is mobile, unsteady, confused, behind a cloud of steam. Walcott himself is an unclear identity, divided and not really part of a definite, closed group. But the West Indies at the time, and still now, and especially Trinidad, also presents a varied identity. Embodying the crisis and conflicts in society, the poet bares himself of angels and flags, does not sign for a religion or a country, and becomes just a/the Caribbean: the name of the region itself is the name of its inhabitant, as well as the name of the sea, and that is, ultimately, his idea of community. While acknowledging that he cannot lose himself in the crowds, paradoxically his truth brings him to the position of the commoner. The idea of a people, of a community, is therefore a construct, and the Caribbean is the best example. The blurred personae in the poem belong to a period where the colonial 'they' were no longer present, or 'they' were changing colours. The 'us' was being, to a certain extent, violated and used in politics and literature, and the poor remained the poor: the hungry crowds were the same, but the people, in Walcott's poem, the Caribbean, is this conglomerate mountain behind a cloud of steam. The opening question is answered: he sank and lost his name: he *is* the Caribbean. In a way, it's the sea answering all those debates, the Caribbean itself erasing names, ridding people of superficial coverings of the truth.

The search for Walcott's own voice as an artist, and for a Caribbean identity, is also tinged with a hatred that he tries to come to terms with in this period. While in 'Hic Jacet' any cynicism evaporates with the final confession and

truthfulness, some of the poems of this period show a more desperate and hopeless pathos. 'A Change of Skin' deals with the hatred originated by the experience of slavery, with the erasure of history, and with memory. The poet accepts and welcomes this hatred as purifying, as a cure and a step towards a self-assurance which comes in the end, through literature. The release from history brought about by the end of colonialism appears to the poet as a fearful fall into an apparent void that is replaced first by memory, and then by the present urgent burning hatred. Memory is transformed in the poem into loathing and resentment through trees that burn, and through the sun as a source of heat that brings the memory of the slaves' sweat. In the last stanza, the sun reveals nevertheless its power to give shape, and what is at the start a blinding glare suddenly becomes a shade: the sun now doesn't leave room for doubt. This new beginning after colonialism, the erasure of colonial history – the obliteration of the colonizer's account – uncovers the truth, and the burning sun now brings the memory of the prickling sweat on the skin. The itching is then transferred to the earth itself, with the trees as hair, and the prickling on the scalp. The land retains, as a person beginning life with the knowledge of old age ('grey mornings'), the memory and horror of the past. The slaves are now part of the soil ('mulch of leaves'), and the air stirs this memory. The time is morning, it's the beginning of a new day, and the air is still cold. But the poet waits, knowing the sun will show the contours of this 'stranger' that is not yet defined, in a metaphor of his own, and the Caribbean identity. The last lines in the poem are enjambed – they need waiting and then their continuation for their fulfilment. Their completion comes and transforms fear into fondness, turning hatred into a healing process through literature. The frightening empty space left by the erasure of history is filled by the memories of

slavery after colonialism. The undefined stranger is the self-reflection that needs to wait for the sun to fully draw his outline. Before that, the morning brings a cold wind that stirs the trees and the land in an act of recalling the past. The grey mornings and the burning of the trees are both a reference to the burning of the cane fields in the revolts against slavery and the colonial plantations, and also in preparation for a new harvesting cycle. The morning is grey with the colour of the ashes of the past experience. Like the climate in the Caribbean, the temperature in the morning, 'now kind, now cold', will bring a determined burning sun that will define the shape of an identity which remains still vague.

Waiting for a Caribbean and a personal identity to materialise, however, requires a patience difficult to find in the midst of political corruption and the pervasiveness of a colonial mindset and attitude in the Caribbean and in Africa. 'Negatives' expresses the poet's anger at watching the black race behaving in the Nigerian-Biafra civil war in the same way as white colonials would. The theme appears again in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, and the poem makes explicit reference to the play. There's the white glare, the 'black corpses wrapped in sunlight', the black mind trapped in a white apparition that clouds his thought. The next stanza deals with yet another white glare: 'Someone who's white', and here the white person is individualised as 'someone', in contrast to 'black corpses'. This white individual person is providing light, he's giving the news, he is the mediator: 'illuminates the news behind the news'. If in the first stanza the white glare of the sunlight wraps those black corpses, it mediates and prevents them from seeing, the message the 'I' receives through the TV is also passed on by that same glare, and this white person's eyes 'flash'; the insertion of 'perhaps, pity' seems an ironic comment about the casual compassion of the cameraman.

Everything is lighted by white people, the driving force being the white glare, not the target, which is undefined and indeterminate. Added to the general frustration and vagueness, the explanation given on TV is not an analysis, but a superficial application of the Western pattern onto a different context. Again, it's the white man's light, the white man's explanation that prevents the poet from understanding what he sees. The newsman says: 'you see', and the poet: 'I try to see'. At a different level, the application of a Western explanation to the situation is how the poet is presenting the situation as well: black corpses with white minds, black people repeating a pattern from the West. 'I try to see' suggests also that the poet is himself trying to get rid of that white glare that's preventing him from seeing, and that he is making an effort to understand through the mediation of the white news, flashes and explanations. In the next line he distances himself from these minds haunted by the white glare, while at the same time he recognises their position: he 'dreamt' of it in *Dream of Monkey Mountain*, he recognises the drive, the violence, the hatred, and calls out to Christopher Okigbo, the Nigerian poet. He sees the faces of the Ibos sweating, stuttering, 'prisoners of some drumhead tribunal'. The soldiers wear helmets that could be white, in the sense that the mind is trapped in a white colonial mentality, that drives blacks to kill other blacks. '[O]n the white road' is a reference to a direction cast by the white colonial people, but also to the colonial definition of history (road=history), and the poem goes back to the direction of these black people, who again are entering what is now clear to the poet: the nightmare of hatred and violence, and 'their shame'. The newsman has chosen to mention Hitler, as an example of the white man's shame, and the reference to *Dream on Monkey Mountain* entails as well the shame of colonial nonsense. The Walcott of this period is trying to find a way out of this

general feeling of frustration, anger and impotence, while at the same time he is trying to guess the shape and contours of his own identity. The target though is not in sight yet, and, as Ismond argues, this becomes a phase of negation and void, a period of abandoning selves that are either strangled by white clouds, driven by white colonial minds, or blinded by selfish ambitions of fame and power.

'Air' (Walcott: 1992) turns to nature for an answer to this apparent emptiness, in an attempt by the poet to cleanse and start afresh. However, nature speaks to the poet about the same conflicts, about the lack of history, the wiping off of races by colonialism, and about the lack of traces to follow into one's past. Through the sea, however, the poem also gives a sense of continuity with the past, but on the whole, nature appears as an indifferent and restless destructive force where everything disappears in the rainforest. The description of the natural surroundings as a 'gross indiscriminating stomach', as having jaws, as an oven, and as erasing human pain and the past, seems a cry by the poet, who craves for a history, and is trying to give an answer to Froude's dismissal of these peoples. The process of natural destruction, however, is carried out through a vocabulary that links this void to colonialism: there are references to human pain, to genocide, to the devouring of races, to a stomach that, by dividing the word 'undiscriminating' becomes discriminating as well, so that natural erasure by the rainforest is, in a way, directed by colonialism; these jaws in the past were uttering 'the Word made flesh of God', they were the jaws of religious discrimination, and of 'advanced civilizations', as the reference to the steam suggests. But this religion and technologically advanced 'civilization' is open to genocide, it is the advanced technology of the Holocaust (in the reference to the jaws as a steaming oven of genocide). The stomach of the rainforest erases this

past, and it grinds as well 'their disavowal / of human pain'. The rainforest's jaws are responsible both for the disappearance of races and the lack of a traceable past, but also for the vanishing of the negation of that past. The colonial word, Froude's negation of the existence of a people, is also devoured into that same stomach. In this way, the stomach of the rainforest *is*, in fact, indiscriminating, and both the lack of history/speech, and the existing speech dissolve: the silenced and the articulate are levelled out by the rainforest. Yet, the rainforest does not then become the new religion for the poet. The next stanza is a negation: the noises/words of the rainforest, which speak to the poet, are not prayer, as he suggests in a description of the rainforest as a cathedral, with the ocean as the choir and the wind roaring through as prayer. This whole description is negated, it disappears into 'nothing'. The only affirmation of the poem is nothingness, lack, void, erasure. Nature is not a heavenly paradise redeeming the poet's pain. Rather, it is a nothingness that erases everything, and does not constitute a religion. The poet is confronted with emptiness. This paradox is realized syntactically by the phrase 'but nothing'. The first part of the sentence is a negation, and then the conjunction 'but', which negates the previous and is syntactically supposed to follow with an affirmation (not...but...). The syntactic position for the affirmation is then occupied by the word 'nothing', the basest negation. The forest is not converted, but *unconverted*. Everything in the poem turns and becomes its negative, terms rule each other out and even the syntactical space for affirmation brings on a negation. The air is then a cannibal, an all-eating element that acts like a blind faith without religion, a mindless insect-like all-consuming element that devours gods, Caribs, Arawaks, and leaves no trace: it forgets. There is no fossil, no fern stamped on the rock to tell about the past. The description of the Arawak



as someone 'who leaves not the slightest fern-trace' is interesting. First, once again it uses a paradoxical syntactic duality of affirmation and negation: the subject, the agent of the sentence is the Arawak, thus affirming his existence as the agent of the verb. But his action is to 'leave not', the action is an erasure itself. On another place, the reference to 'that shell-like noise / which roars like silence' suggests a fossil trace, a shell – which represents all times in its spiral – but it is a silent fossil, a fossil that does not speak. The next stanza brings the echo of a rainbird, a 'hoarse / warrior' searching for his race amid 'vaporious air'. The poet cries amid this devouring air, within this forest between the mountain and the sea, 'where the lost exodus / of corials sunk without trace'. The traces sink and are lost in the sea, like history, like the way the poet sinks in 'Hic Jacet'. The race the poet is searching for is lost in exodus, sunk and turned into coral, lost in the Middle Passage, in an image similar to that found in 'The Sea is History': 'Then there were the packed cries, / the shit, the moaning: / Exodus. / Bone soldered by coral to bone, / mosaics / mantled by the benediction of the shark's shadow' (Walcott 'The Sea is History' 237). The poet concludes: 'There is too much nothing here'. The last sentence is a striking and strong affirmation of emptiness, and closes the poem with the word 'here', a final statement of place, of location, a primal bare existence that refers to space, but also to time: the 'here' is in relation to where the poet stands now, and 'here' is the rainforest and it is the sea. The whole poem is a constant syntactical affirmation: 'not merely...but...', 'those...jaws', 'that...stomach', 'that...noise', 'this mountain ridge', 'there is too much'. It is filled with definite articles, possessives and powerful and strong action verbs (devour, allow, grind, roar, eat, leave) which, even while they carry an object that constitutes a lack, a negation, they are still affirming that object. The poem is an

ironical paraphrasing of Froude's affirmation that there are no people there: 'There is too much nothing *here*' (my emphasis).

The theme of nature and the rainforest finds a continuation in a set of poems entitled 'Guyana', which refer to Wilson Harris, whom Walcott was reading at the time. As Ismond has argued, 'Guyana' is an inward exploration through the metaphorical journey into the interior, into the bush. Walcott and Harris, she argues, share a view of the landscape as a mythical ground of epic possibility: 'this New World possibility has to do with the reawakened creative imagination reclaiming a primary spiritual kinship with the wider universe' (Ismond 'Landscape and Possibility: Derek Walcott's Guyana' 238). The difference comes in Harris's climatic transcendence, which in Walcott becomes acceptance of his condition as mortal. Ismond argues that Walcott's rejection of apotheosis is the seed of his revolutionary phase of abandoning Western principles, and explains that the idea of transcendence seems to him to relate to a hierarchial and imperial order. This refusal 'is directly informed by his concern with the muse of man in history contained in the western European tradition of metaphors, a concern which begins to develop during this widely exploratory phase of his career.' (Ismond 'Landscape and Possibility: Derek Walcott's Guyana' 239). In 'Guyana', Walcott's journey transforms into an apprenticeship. Harris acts as an inspiration and a master of how to transform his landscape into a mythical place, a truthful and fertile poetic world that then becomes words and literature. 'To fly over Guyana is to have a concept of bush, savannah and river that is more Harris than Guyana. This poet has translated the banality of Guyana-bush, wilderness and river into an area which we enter as reverently as we would the temple of a different religion to ours; that awe is commanded by the sense that

something is always about to be revealed' (Walcott quoted in Collier 191-192). Through Harris, Walcott finds the opportunity to conceive a dialogue between the bush and the city, and between science and the spiritual. The poem is divided into six parts, the last one being the longer written journal after the apprenticeship of watching the surveyor. The surveyor appears at the beginning, taking measures of the land. He straightens from the theodolite: from the shape of 'spread-legged' (theodolite), he becomes a human being, in a reference to the Middle Passage, as a limbo dance, that one straightens up from. After colonialism, man is born again. He scrawls, attempts to write. There is an instant transformation of ciphers (science) into insects that crawl down from the surveyor's legs, or from the theodolite itself. The walking is 'staggering', learning to walk. All suggests a new birth: straightens, scrawls, staggering. The surveyor's pith has been sucked by the sun, in the same way as the rainforest erases and devours all, and then forgets, in 'Air': this new race has no past history, it has been deprived of its backbone pith. The surveyor/new god/new race moves with the cosmos, as stardust, in a move back to basics. He is defining and shaping the continent with his eyes, the spiralling eye of the cosmos. Through his theodolite he sees a vault over the landscape, which could be a metaphorical arch between continents, a kind of Middle Passage. The phrases 'too close' and 'too slow' denote an immediacy and an urgency in this part of the poem that suggests a survey indifferent to the enormity of the task. The nerve-cracked ground is a ground of rivers (Guyana), and it's also the imprint of the past, the land marked by the passing of time/tides. The land is thus not measureless, it gradually, like Harris's fiction, begins to take its shape. His watch, though, goes fast, it is impatient, and the surveyor, a god and a man, 'begins to tread / himself', through science. The next stanza presents the

immense difficulty of dealing with such a landscape. Three colours come into play: 'frothing shallows of the river', blue skies, and green everywhere. Translating this landscape into words seems impossible; but then, 'a shape dilates towards him through the haze': out of a seemingly shapeless landscape, forms begin to emerge. Part II is 'The Bush', and in the bush, he becomes a double figure, a poet following his poem. The image is that of silent, tense, tight birds aiming at a 'clotting sun' with their beaks. It is an image of stillness, of being stuck. The sun clots, the birds are silent and in a tense pose, nothing seems to move, like in the Legend of the Suns, where Quetzalcoatl descends to the underworld and flies up triumphantly afterwards, to bring back movement, life, another cycle, another race to the world. The surveyor and his companion then undergo a transformation: their legs are buried in the dark, maybe by the ground, as if they were rooting themselves in the landscape. They are not walking now. The following reference to thoughts as leaves gives the clue to this line: 'Dark climbed their knees until their heads were dark'. Their feet go into the ground as roots, and their whole bodies metamorphose into trees. The syntax resembles the tree as well, the tree that is the bridge between heaven and earth, where roots and branches are symmetrical, as in the verse: 'Dark ... dark'. The wind then mows the leaves as thoughts, and he writes the poem, he creates the word. The last stanza presents the surveyor as following his mind, as if his mind were a separate entity, not entirely his, with a direction and a pace of its own. The third part is the return to the white town, where he turns into an anthropologist, a surveyor replaying the vowels and the consonants. Facing the falls in the next part, the surveyor/poet is now a spirit that 'could not burn or drown', and, turning into a flower, floats down. This image resembles the metaphor of Caribs like petals

being devoured by nature that appears in 'Air'. The surveyor goes back to the town as an anthropologist, while the spirit transforms into a flower that is not devoured, but floats. He is then a lexicographer in part V, 'A Map of the Continent': he creates a map of the language, a dictionary for the continent, and he catches words with his pen like fish caught with a bone spear. He is then possessed by the Amazonian Indian, and the rainforest becomes the library of this new world.

The final part VI, the journal, introduces the poet as 'I'. Once the voice and the language have been found, the poet can write this journal of Georgetown. The articulate profusion of images in part VI gives expression to a phase of self-acceptance as a Caliban figure, an exhaustion of the self that is all-consuming. The reference to the debates emerging out of rootlessness suggests that the measurement of the falls and the continent are a metaphoric parallel to the search for self-definition and identity. Part one of the journal ends with a feeling of immobility, of a cul-de-sac surrounded by decay: 'and the muck, and the tins, and the sogged placards choke / the sad, motionless green of the canals' (Walcott 1992: 120). The experience, though, brings a certain valuable knowledge, a sadness that comes with age. With the tides, the dried and motionless canals will flow again, like the poem. 'If the poem begins to shrivel / I no longer distend my heart' (Walcott 1992: 121): he knows now the rhythm, the pace of words, the profundity of a simple act repeated again and again. The last stanzas of part VI show the poet entering an 'old age' phase, looking back and naming earlier stages, seeing them as steps in the same way as 'the heron's foot pronounces 'earth'' (Walcott 1992: 122).

The whole journey moves from a close-up and present moment through a process of creating a language, to a vision of a future beyond the seemingly static environment. The poet had 'unimagined time', his vision had not foreseen the necessary stages in the process of building an identity, the required time (hence the feeling of urgency at the beginning of the poem, when the surveyor is too close to see the immeasurability of the landscape). His drive was that of the lovers who have not yet lain together, and he now understands how final each act is, how definite and permanent the vision is, his vision was.

In 'Guyana', Walcott recognises the blind determination of his vision, his impatience when, ready to build a whole theatre scene in the Caribbean, he cut short his stay in New York, and came back to Trinidad. The poem allows him to look back, to see his own impatience from a perspective of a cyclical world. Like the surveyor, he splits into two. One Walcott lives the present, follows a vision that bears the determination of a final act. The other Walcott becomes aware, through the poem, of his own mortality within a cosmic infinity, and this allows him to understand his frustration in the context of an impatient, fresh, live moment of experience.

As a bridge between the inward journey expressed in his poems and the reality linked to theatre that he was living during this time, 'What the Twilight Says' gives clues about the context and painful development of these apprenticeship years. Walcott's theatrical experience in Trinidad meant that the poet who came from the English literary tradition had to filter and squeeze his principles through the physical reality of the actors' bodies and voices, and that he had to translate his literary ideas into a truthful West Indian art. The poetic mind learnt the craft through testing and failing, but it was the actuality, the materiality

of the experience that would transmute his vision into a mature poetic honesty. This process of self-observation through acting would mould the language and transform it into a West Indian sovereign realm of expression.

The duality of a poetic mind against a reality in motion, identified in 'Guyana' as a retrospective realization of a lost innocence unknowingly doomed from the beginning appears as well in 'What the Twilight Says', where Walcott concludes that '[i]t was always the fate of the West Indian to meet himself coming back' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 27)<sup>6</sup>. The polarity between the Walcott engaged in the living present and the Walcott looking back is not a clear-cut change in the poet, but a process that begins with the divided child: 'In that simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 4). Walcott's theatrical enterprise in Trinidad would provide his outward experience of action and dialect, something that, as he recounts in 'What the Twilight Says,' would turn into a fake, self-blinded assertion of presence. But this awareness comes gradually, first covered by patient hope, by stubborn madness, then uncovered in his reminiscing twilight of 1970.

The pessimism that resounds in Walcott's account of his theatrical experience can be now understood as a relatively early reaction to his youthful urgency, his early mature stubborn endeavour against a very complex set of problems in the Caribbean at the time. By 1970, Walcott is writing about absolute failure. While this failure is rather a hindrance coincidental with a climax of

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<sup>6</sup> Even now this tendency reappears, in particular in Geroje Lamming, whose 'The Sovereignty of the Imagination' (2004) recovers the autobiographical narrative of the early years of decolonization, and then retrieves the basic economic, cultural, political and educational principles that were supposed to create an independent, solvent and sovereign Caribbean, but which, in part through corruption, resulted in a neo-colonial society. Even his quote of Argentinian Ezequiel Estrada is the same exact paragraph that Sylvia Wynter reproduces in her 1968-9 essay, still relevant today. Lamming's retrospective, though, bears a much more optimistic tone than that expressed by Walcott around 1970.

tension in the region and in his life as well, the apocalyptic hue of his essay is total:

If, twenty years later, that vision has not been built, so that at every dusk one ignites a city in the mind above the same sad fences where the poor revolve, the theatre still an architectural fantasy, 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 (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 4-5)

In 'Guyana', he similarly writes:

If the neck of the heron is condemned to its question,  
if the woman is silent,  
and if, at the most appropriate hour  
of a rose-scrim twilight budding with onion domes  
like the gaze of clerkish guerrillas hazed by an epoch,  
if nothing comes,  
if no one ever escapes,  
if the shoreline longs for spires,  
there is nothing left for us  
but to make these coarse lilies lotuses,  
for filth to contemplate its own reflection (Walcott 1992: 119)

Even though the essay does state that this empty madness is still itself a type of vision, and that he does not regret the process because madness is better than a numb existence, the general atmosphere is one of schizophrenic angst, swaying from relative calmness, painful nostalgia and serene retrospection, to fierce anger, troubled confessions of guilt, self-hate, and utter disgust. Paradoxically, the blind innocent vision of the beginning, driven by an insatiable urgency, had, in *just* twenty years, explored the raw insides of his Caribbean



mind, with the starkness and the stormy fierceness of a rushing painful maturation. 'What the Twilight Says' is a striking essay not only because its tone swings between anguished pessimism and serene introspection, but also because, in the midst of desperation and madness, Walcott's poetic prose constitutes in itself an antidote to defeat. The richness and intensity of the language counterbalances the content, and even at its most ironic – like when he talks about culture degraded to tourist attraction as 'the art of the brochure', (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 37) the sheer originality of the phrase overruns its cynicism. Thus, while what the twilight is literally saying might seem a hopeless lament, its literary message remains a powerful and lucid statement of self-reflection.

Walcott's ideas about literature and theatre were being moulded and shaped by experience during this period, so that, as Sylvia Wynter put it then: 'The creative reality will give him a complex, if painful, mirror in which to reassemble all the divided fragments of his still indeterminate identity' (Wynter 312). More recently George Lamming concludes that '[c]reative conflict is the dynamic which drives the Caribbean imagination' (Lamming 36), and he recovers Walcott's Nobel speech, where the poet presents the Caribbean conglomerate as restored by a stronger love than its original wholesome symmetry, and the archipelago of islands, 'pieces broken off from the original continent' (Walcott 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory' 69), bound together by art, as by the sea, to restore their history. Walcott would learn to mould his language by setting it against the conflicts of the Caribbean. His apprenticeship recalls Harris's image of buildings whose structures take in the shaking of an earthquake: like these buildings, Walcott's language would change, to accommodate the 'shaking' of a society in (com)motion.

Walcott's process of reshaping forms within his theatrical production is the basis of Paula Burnett's analysis of Walcott's concept of epic drama. Starting off from Brecht's definition of epic, she draws parallels between both playwrights, and analyses Walcott's own polished Caribbean form of epic. Burnett begins with an overview of the similarities and differences between Brecht and Walcott. Both take an anti-mimetic, dialectical stance, with a strong emphasis on their theatre's connection with history, and a more political and social interest, rather than focusing on the psychology of the individual character. However, while Brecht's backdrop is the strict materialism of scientific rationalism, Walcott's symbolism and metaphysical strategy create a different concept of theatre. Walcott identified closely with Brecht's ideas on theatre in two main aspects, which he deemed fundamental for the creation of a Caribbean theatre. First, Brecht used dialect and diversity in the language, in order to loosen up the speech used on the stage. Walcott was trying to achieve the same kind of mix between the formality of the English tradition, and the orality of creole. Second, the street was to be the origin of Brecht's new concept of epic theatre. Similarly, Walcott would draw from the streets for his plays, but his perspective is very different. Brecht trusted the streets for their practical and simple character. The type of political and social theatre that Brecht wanted relied on a rational simplicity found in the streets, and it aspired to appeal to the intellect of its audience, and not to their emotion. Regarding street life, Walcott embraced it as the foundation of a Caribbean theatre, but, as Burnett explains, 'that street life in Walcott's experience was from the outset not just earthly but myth-inflected, bound up with his community's expression of spirituality' (Burnett 'The Theatre of Our Lives: Founding an Epic Drama' 156). Walcott's streets are full of storytelling, festivals, and ritual. Burnett

argues that Walcott chose theatre as a genre because of its immediacy, its popular and communal character, and also because it involves all the arts (visual, textual, auditive), and she adds that his drama was epic in the Brechtian sense because it followed political ends using a non-mimetic form; and it was epic in the poetic sense, as it would provide a sense of history and collective identity to the Caribbean.

Burnett focuses then on Walcott's condemnation of folklore as subject to consumerism, and brings our attention to the term 'hallucination', that Walcott uses to define a type of forgery of the folk forms for political and economic ends. As in Brecht, art for Walcott needs to be revolutionary, and it must restore folklore's truthful energy. In this sense, the 'hallucination' that Walcott detects and condemns mirrors what Harris has termed 'carnival callouses' in his novel *Carnival*, which relate to the block function, static categories within a society. Breaching the mould of a block function society – Harris's goal – becomes Walcott's objective in his theatre: to counteract a block function folklore in the Caribbean. However, at the time of writing 'What the Twilight Says' Walcott feels it is already too late. Nevertheless, at the starting point signalled by the federation, Brecht's ideal of a transformative theatre was part of Walcott's own vision. Burnett explores then Walcott's development of a hero for his epic theatre. While at the beginning he focuses on a single hero, already in *Drums and Colours*, the specificities of the region require a broader picture, and Walcott, as Burnett explains, chooses to inaugurate the federation with an extended definition of the Caribbean, including 'Columbus, the discoverer, Raleigh, the conqueror, Toussaint, the rebel, and Gordon, one of the first martyrs of constitutional rights' (King 2000: 137). Of the four heroes, two are imperialists depicted in decline, one

shows the loss of integrity through revenge, and the fourth is a martyr-hero, a self-sacrificing figure. Throughout his career as a playwright, Burnett argues that Walcott's hero is the common, anti-authoritarian anti-hero individual, suspicious of imperialism, but also of Marxism. In practice, this hero is achieved through a tendency to focus on the group instead of on an individual, and here lies, according to Burnett, the Caribbean input: the strong sense of community occupies the position of heroic figure. Burnett's analysis of the Brechtian influence on Walcott's theatre moves on to the role of the artist, where she identifies a Brechtian element in the introduction of the figure of the artist within the play itself, but considers that Walcott's concern about the artist is Romantic. She refers to Walcott's self-portrayal in 'What the Twilight Says' as a new Adam, a sacrificial god-like figure, and presents him as participating of both the individual and the collective sphere. Even though, in 'What the Twilight Says', Walcott does present himself as artist in a sacrificial light, his stance is a critical self-observation, and he ironically comments that he developed a Christ-complex. Regarding his participation in the collective, Walcott wishes to become one with the group, with the community. On an ideal level, his portrayal of the artist requires that he be part of his community. In a certain way, he is very much, as Burnett says, part of his community, in the sense that he is Caribbean, he has a strong and honest feeling of belonging in the region, and he is, by virtue of his activity as playwright and director, part of a certain collective as well. However, his essay also talks about alienation from the people, from the folklore, and even from the revolutionary heroes of Haiti. The gap that separates him from them is sometimes race, socio-economic position, religion, sometimes all of them at the same time. Moreover, Walcott had been misinterpreted by some as opposing

folklore, and Burnett rightly undoes the error by criticising Kole Omotoso's extreme misreading of Walcott's theatre.<sup>7</sup> Walcott's preoccupation with folklore, as Burnett says, is a complex one, and his conflict regarding truthfulness to folklore, to the people, and to himself as artist, are equally problematic. As artist, Walcott does not automatically participate of the collective, and it is with envy and longing that he witnesses the collective rituals that he can't be part of. Being a 'mulatto' and loving the English language, he also comments on his image as a traitor, an outsider within his own community. It could be argued that he is presenting a situation where he is seen as a traitor by the real true traitors of society, by the ones that use folklore for politico-economic goals. And, to an extent, he is making that case, and providing his vision as the one true to the people. However, if one considers his poetry at the time, Walcott's scepticism and anger at the forgers of society brings up more questions than answers concerning his own feeling of belonging to a collective. The analysis of 'Hic Jacet', for example, which begins with an accusation directed towards all fake-types in society, moves on to a confession, and he specifically says that he also 'pretended' to become one with the crowd. By means of renouncing his role as divine messenger, he becomes a commoner, but it is with the landscape that he merges, rather than with the crowds. Similarly in 'What the Twilight Says', he vehemently condemns the forgers of folklore, but confesses to a certain surrender to the urgent needs of the company, which he saw as necessary at the time, and by which he is always haunted – hence the self-sacrifice. The closing paragraphs of 'What the Twilight Says' contain a reflection on whether anybody is really a traitor: 'All their betrayals are quarrels with the self, their pardonable desertions

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<sup>7</sup> 'The story of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop is that of transplanting theatre as it is understood in the West into the Caribbean.' (Omotoso 52)

the inevitable problem of all island artists: the choice of home or exile, self-realisation or spiritual betrayal of one's country' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 39). Anger fades and the twilight turns melodramatic. Burnett finishes by demonstrating how Walcott succeeds at undermining the Western nihilistic scepticism, expressed through tragedy. By writing open-ended epics charged with comedy, he is reversing the tragic pattern: 'Several of his plays present a mythic action, of apparent death followed by a return to life. In such refusals of tragic closure, Walcott is most conspicuously at odds with mainstream metropolitan tradition' (Burnett 'The Theatre of Our Lives: Founding an Epic Drama' 168), and she terms this reversal, Walcott's 'metaphysical optimism', which is based on the playwright's faith in the power of myth and of language to communicate with the unconscious. A very Harrisian stance, this idea positions Walcott no longer as a martyr, self-sacrificial figure, but as a shaman-guide to his community. In 1970, however, Walcott's view was not yet optimistic, and the struggle was with finding truth in rituals that were still too raw and lacked the right type of language to be the artistic expression of the folk.

At the outset of 'the true vision', as he calls it (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 40), Walcott went to New York, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, to study theatre. As King summarises, '[t]his was the time of the Beats, Grove Press, *Evergreen Review*, Brecht, the Theatre of the Absurd, loft theatres, Zen, reading poetry to jazz, Indian clothes, coffee houses, the Limelight Café, life on the road, and going to San Francisco' (King 2000: 150). In New York, Walcott met José Quintero – one of the most important directors in New York during the fifties – and learnt from him about acting techniques, and how to achieve a controlled, stylised acting, full of symbolism, and focused on gesture, slow motion, and

silences. Quintero was one of the founders of the Circle in the Square, a small theatre with the audience sitting at tables around the stage, which Walcott later used as a model in the Basement theatre. In New York, he also came into contact with Japanese theatre and film. King relates Walcott's use of the white apparition in the form of a woman to Kenji Mizoguchi's film *Ugetsu* (1953). The film is modelled in Noh drama, with a lyrical atmosphere and rich symbolism. Liberation from the character's obsession comes with the beheading of the woman, and the film makes use of myths, and mixes the living and the dead. As King explains, Mizoguchi's film contained 'many of the features that interested him in Japanese art and Brecht's theories as a possible way to create a West Indian theatre' (King 2000: 154). Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* also appears as a precedent for Walcott's *Malcochon*, with several characters telling their stories from different perspectives. King explains that, in Oriental theatre, Walcott found a minimalist, stylised theatre that required only a small budget in terms of scenery and props, as it relied on symbolism, gesture, costumes and lighting for meaning. Parting with a more Western realistic model of theatre also gave Walcott a freedom to insert more action and abrupt changes in emotion and speech, without the constraints of a naturalistic, mimetic theatre. King also mentions the avant-garde theatres of Brook and Grotowski, with an emphasis on music, dancing and storytelling, as an influence on Walcott. Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski are the main heirs of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Like Brecht, Artaud was also interested in Oriental theatre, a general trend of the avant-garde. This intercultural influence was reciprocal, and in the 1920s, the Shingeki theatre was formed in Japan, which adopted Western realistic drama as a way of moving away from a classical theatrical scene that was considered sterile and static. 'Both sides sought to give a

new impulse to their own culture by adopting what had been, till then, wholly foreign theatre traditions' (Fischer-Lichte 31). This type of *global creolisation* involved lending and borrowing forms, techniques, and myths, so that the act of decontextualising the form becomes, as in Harris, a technique in itself. Different tendencies arise from this 'method' of decontextualising a theatre from its culture. In some cases, juxtaposing and accumulating elements from diverse cultures results in a disruption of the process of communication through lack of coherent meaning. In the case of Peter Brook, he decontextualises elements from other cultures by choosing those myths or forms that can signify in different contexts. In the light of these developments in theatre, Harris's statement that myths in *Carnival* do not follow any creed connects him once again to the avant-garde theatres. In his case, the accumulation of myths shares in both tendencies: Harris wants to get rid of the mould that defines the mythic sign in a given religious, political or social context, but he is not aiming at meaninglessness; rather, the metaphysical aspect of his worldview relies on the archetypal, universal aspect of myths to disrupt the conventional signification, and to access a different level of communication.

While Europe and America were engaging in the avant-garde, theatre in Japan was taking a new turn. The Shingeki theatre re-emerged after the Second World War, but was soon rejected as a symbol of the Westernisation of Japan. The 'Little Theatre Movement' then turned back again to the classical Noh and Kabuki theatres, but they were open to Western influence, so that, interestingly enough, by the seventies Japanese theatre was merging Noh and Kabuki with Greek tragedy. Suzuki, one of the most important directors at the time, tried to create a new theatre by merging the more physically-focused Japanese theatre,



with a Western form of theatre that was much more based on linguistic expression. Suzuki developed a theatre that would ease the strict and compact signification of classical forms in Japanese theatre. Fisher-Lichte rightly argues that, even though superficially, it is easy to find a striking similarity between this tendency in Japanese theatre and theatres in the Third World, the latter following the same trend as part of a process of decolonization; after this process, she argues, 'the imposed foreign traditions will be gradually eliminated' (Fischer-Lichte 35), and she analyses several of Soyinka's plays as an example of how African traditions appear in opposition to European culture. While it is important, as Fischer-Lichte argues, to understand interculturalism in the case of post-colonial countries as a completely different process to the tendencies of the avant-garde and of Japanese theatre, it becomes equally necessary to understand that the post-colonial world presents very different modes of 'decolonization'. The Caribbean, in this sense, represents a very special case. First, unlike most ex-colonies, its population is not – for the most part – indigenous to the region. It is mainly a displaced population. Second, it is not a homogeneous displaced population bound together by a solid cultural and social structure, but a combination of very diverse displaced populations with, in many cases, no home country to look back to. Moreover, the term 'Caribbean' refers to both the islands and the mainland, to Spanish, French, British, and Dutch ex-colonies, thus making the process of decolonization extremely varied, and in some instances, not even complete (the French Departments, for example, are part of the European Union). The argument that interculturality in the post-colonial world is limited to a transient stage in the process of decolonization is based on a simplistic view of the decolonising process as a return to an unaffected original native culture, which is

problematic from any perspective. In the Caribbean, after independence the search for an identity becomes a tricky search for origins through a language that is the coloniser's. Looking back to Africa from the Caribbean raises problems that a playwright like Soyinka does not face. Furthermore, if in the light of interculturality it is more accurate to look at individual directors/companies rather than at regions, then the case of Walcott is even more clearly unlike Soyinka's case, because he finds it equally problematic to perform the Theatre of the Absurd as he finds to perform Soyinka – however closer he might be to the latter.

Considering Walcott in the context of intercultural theatre brings the focus to the process of borrowing from other cultures, instead of looking at the same process as a search for a wholesome origin. Walcott's free merging of traditions rejects simplistic unidirectional origins, and he thus baptises himself as the mulatto of style. The fact that he rejects one unique tradition as his own, in Manichean opposition to the other, places him side by side with Suzuki's open Japanese theatre, free to rekindle the genre by putting it in contact with something apparently opposite. Moreover, the requirement of decontextualising borrowed myths appears explicitly in the Caribbean through Harris's fiction, making the parallels even more accurate, at least as a 'method'. It is true that the decolonising process generally borrows from Western culture as a way of asserting a native identity through opposition to the West. However, that entails a mythification and conceptualization of Western culture that, especially in twentieth century Western theatre, is not unproblematic. Besides, Walcott does not fall into this category. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that, unlike Suzuki, Walcott is not borrowing from a foreign culture to rework his own. But he is not using a 'cultural myth of Europe', to use Sylvia Wynter's term, to define his own identity either. In

this sense, he could be seen to be closer to a theatre engaged in the act of being reborn, than to a theatre focused on recovering a pre-colonial ideal that is already wholly defined. For Walcott, the direction is forward, and looking back means turning towards England as much as towards Africa.

The debate of interculturality in the theatrical sphere has been taken up by Patrice Pavis, who attempts a definition and delimitation of a new tentative field, 'intercultural performance'. However, theatre, as Schechner argues, is an ambivalent genre, closer to ritual, belonging to the literary through the text, linked to festivals within the community, and bearing the essence of change and renewal. To undertake the task of categorising something like 'intercultural theatre' becomes a post-structuralist cul-de-sac. Pavis starts by differentiating between *intercultural*, *intracultural*, *transcultural*, *ultracultural*, *precultural*, *postcultural*, and *metacultural*, to arrive at the six varieties that comprise 'intercultural theatre'. These are: *intercultural theatre* (hybridization with the erasure of distinguishable original forms), *multicultural theatre* (cross-influences in multicultural societies, where meaning arises from the clash between cultures), *cultural collage* (indiscriminate cultural accumulation to erase contexts of meaning), *syncretic theatre* (term coined by Chris Balme, referring to the 'creative reinterpretation of heterogeneous cultural material, resulting in the formation of new configurations' (Pavis 9)), *postcolonial theatre* (a return to an 'indigenous perspective' (Pavis 9-10)), and *Theatre of the Fourth World* (theatre created by populations that were colonised and are now a minority within their own countries, like the Aborigines in Australia). Even though these categorizations are useful as a debate that brings the attention to any theatre today as a complex recreation of influences and cultural communions, the search for an ultimate classification of theatres and

intercultural relations clashes from the start with the very essence of the mobile object it tries to isolate. This is made even more evident when he mentions, as examples of syncretic theatre, Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott. Two problems arise from this specific categorization. First, they are listed under one type of theatre *and not* under the others, leaving them outside the scope of postcolonial theatre – which is, in fact, extremely reduced in his definition. Moreover, placing them in one category reduces their production to an alarming extent, limiting the playwright's repertoire to one type of play, automatically ruling out the growth and development of those theatres, something intrinsic in the very genre, given its communal, live and immediate character. The second problem arises from categorising Soyinka and Walcott under the same label, especially since Walcott writes about not the difficulty, but the impossibility of performing Soyinka's *The Road*, because 'Ogun was an exotic for us, not a force' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 8). Pavis is aware of the problems of dealing with clear-cut divisions, but, although his classification appears open and all-encompassing, it is based on the Manichean dualism of one/other. The concept of 'native' and 'foreign' cultures are a premise in his approach to interculturality. From the perspective of both Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, this composition does not apply. Adopting, decontextualising, using, and transforming aspects of cultures is, in Harris's work, not a way of enriching his own culture, but rather, an expression of the self as both self and other. There is no foreign entity, but an act of freeing categories, terms, block functions. The realm Pavis attempts to categorise is driven by theatre's essential and intrinsic challenge of categorizations. Walcott's theatre represents an example of an equal process where the theatre itself challenges his original vision. It is pertinent to attempt a reading of Walcott's

plays through a Harrisian view, given that Walcott's stand is a complex non-compliance with absolute categories, and also because both escape categorizations even within their own regions. Harris's technique, explained in *Carnival*, of decontextualising myths, of accumulating myths devoid of creed, appears as an appropriate stance to take when looking at a writer who does not experience the English language as colonial, finds African folklore exotic, but still remains deeply entrenched in the Caribbean. Simplistic readings of his work – that see Walcott as maybe less Caribbean because of his love of English – are a consequence of a perspective that retains the Manichean premise of self/other, coloniser/colonised. Thus, a writer like Harris offers a coherent arena in which to consider Walcott's development and conclusions.

Looking at Walcott from a Harrisian perspective emphasizes the more ritualistic theatres' influence on Walcott. Harris's approach to the arts, as explained in chapter two, leans towards a more ritualistic understanding of the role of literature and the artist in society. Within the avant-garde theatres that Walcott would draw from, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty shares of many of Harris's ideas regarding the role of the arts, the need to wake up a society that does not 'see' properly, and the importance of the subconscious as a medium through which to bring about revolution. Furthermore, a comparative approach between Harris's attitudes towards literature and Artaud's theatrical engagement with parallel principles brings about an interesting formalization – in the sense of taking a shape or form within a real space – of their respective abstract thoughts. In this respect, Artaud can be analysed as a partial translator of ideas rendered through language in Harris, into a stage language. Moreover, Walcott shares with Artaud the preoccupation with producing a truthful affecting theatre, a concept of

the genre as a ritualistic revival of a primal act whose meaning lies in every aspect of the communication process (visual, kinaesthetic, auditive, communal). In addition to this, considering Artaud as a bridge between Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott emphasises Walcott's struggle with language in the theatre. Artaud shows a strong suspicion of language as a medium on stage, and places all the other 'forgotten' means of communication at the centre of the process of rendering meaning. At a stage when Walcott was searching for a voice and facing the difficulties of using the coloniser's own language, theatre offered him a learning space in which to develop a Caribbean aesthetic that would be both partially free of the constraints of language, but that would also bring to the surface other modes of expressing Caribbean identity – which would, in turn, mould the language itself. Artaud's emphasis on what he calls the 'spatial language' of theatre is thus a relevant element in a Harrisian reading of Walcott's plays.

Wilson Harris and Antonin Artaud both set out to bring a revolution to the novel and to the theatre respectively. Harris has called for a new architecture of the world, a revisioning of literature and the arts in general, in order to uncover the potentiality for rebirth, and breach the institutional mould that imposes a sterile position for the individual in the world. Artaud's theatre tries to stir society into acknowledging the hidden truths of reality. Both start from the premise that the apparent stability and progress within societies is an illusion, and that our planet is 'at risk' – as Harris puts it (Harris 'In The Name of Liberty' 215), or, in Artaud's words, that 'the sky can still fall on our heads' (Artaud 2001: 60). The constant presence of danger conveys the two artists' attempts to remind a dormant society/audience of the potential for change, of the principle of constant mutation intrinsic to life and creation; ultimately, to affect the illusion of a stable reality. In

this sense, theatre for Artaud is the 'double' of what we consider reality, and it unveils its hidden truths. The arts, for Harris, bear an intuitive capacity to, within this illusory mindset, achieve an understanding of 'the flux of authentic change through and beyond what is given to us and what we accept, without further thought, as objective appearances.' (Harris 'Fossil and Psyche' 65) The reality unveiled by the arts and the theatre is seen as a decadent, rotting, grotesque image; we live, according to Harris, in an Inferno that society takes as the only possible reality, in a nihilistic acceptance of fate. In fact, societies consider our present reality as a scientific progression in the sense of improvement, and we are blind, Harris argues, to the real emptiness and sterility that prevails and brings about violence. Fake fertility symbols cover up the rotting reality underneath the surface, as carnival calluses that offer an image of birth and growth where there is only self-consumption. Artaud used the metaphor of the plague to present a similar picture, and he gives theatre the same role that the arts in general have for Harris:

the question we must now ask ourselves is to know whether in this world that is slipping away, committing suicide without realising it, a nucleus of men can be found to impress this higher idea of theatre on the world, to bring back to all of us a natural, occult equivalent of the dogma we no longer believe. (Artaud 2001: 22)

Theatre relates to the plague at a social as well as at an individual level. On the scale of the community as a whole, the plague automatically and completely erases all social conventions and order. The plague brings on a radical and sudden instability that is total. The normal social order is then replaced by 'pointless absurd acts' (Artaud 2001: 15), useless actions that are brought about by the

disruption of seemingly permanent conventions, a disruption of apparent stability.

As an example, he describes the attire adopted:

Over the thick, bloody, noxious streaming gutters, the colour of anguish and opium, spurting from the corpses, strange men clothed in wax, with noses a mile long and glass eyes, mounted on kinds of Japanese sandals made up of a double arrangement of wooden slabs, a horizontal one in the form of a sole, with the uprights isolating them from the infected liquids, pass by chanting absurd litanies. (Artaud 2001: 15)

The plague acts as a destabilising force that brings society into rediscovering a primary instant of birth and destruction. Harris has written about the benefits of instability in societies, in order to exorcise them of their violence. Similarly, Artaud calls for a theatre that, like the plague, will recreate that disrupted environment to act as an exorcising ritual for a society that is sick. In addition to this, Artaud observes as well the workings of the plague at an individual level, in order to develop an acting system for the actor. He thus analyses the way the plague evolves within the body. After a gruesome description of the evolution of the illness in the victim, Artaud focuses on the fact that the mortal process occurs without loss or destruction of matter in the body. Apparently, nothing has changed; but within the surface, the body has been transformed into a lifeless solid black substance. Just like the plague, theatre enacts a certain ritual, and even while it may seem that everything stays unaffected, the effects take place at a deep level in the audience. Artaud aims at a transformative theatre, a revelation that purges the underlying sickness of our society: 'It seems as though colossal abscess, ethical as much as social, is drained by the plague. And like the plague, theatre is collectively made to drain abscess.' (Artaud 2001: 21-22) The image of an apparently healthy body that is lifeless within resembles Harris's contrasting



images of the hollow, inflated womb against the pregnant womb, or the metaphor of the living closed eye, against the dead seeing eye. These are illustrations that share a view of society as sick, blind to their sickness, and a definition of the arts as the necessary medium to bring the hidden reality to the surface. Both Harris and Artaud rely on the subconscious for their effect, they advocate a new concept of comic seriousness, or serious comedy, where danger comes alive. By bringing up the possibility of death, art also brings back to life the possibility of birth. Like Harris, Artaud's theatre of cruelty tries to put our sensibility 'into a deeper, subtler state of perception.' (Artaud 2001: 70).

Even though the type of art that Harris delineates contains links with Artaud's theatrical proposal, the means and extent of their radicalism differ in a fundamental way. Paradoxically, a similar direction for the arts develops into extremely opposite views on language and the relationship between the self and the other. Their differences stem from Artaud's consideration of the plague as valuable in its condition as 'absolute' event: 'The plague is a superior disease because it is an absolute crisis after which there is nothing left except death or drastic purification.' (Artaud 2001: 22) Although its absolute character re-enacts, in theatre, the primal clash between destruction and birth – a recurrent theme in Harris's work – Artaud's clash is a medium towards a desired 'pure' state. His theatre of cruelty is based on a mistrust of the written word and a reliance instead on the visual, musical and vibratory elements of the performance, in an attempt to 'return' to an 'original purpose', to 'restore' theatre in its primal 'religious, metaphysical position', and to bring a reconciliation between theatre and the universe (Artaud 2001: 51). Artaud's proposition presents the idea of perfection as a return to some ideal pure origin that is harmonious and ordered. He condemns

the decadence and violence of Western society, and finds its cause in a chaotic disorder brought about by a separation from the natural and metaphysical interaction with the cosmos. This true original energy 'creates order and increases the value of life', and it is opposed to chaos, which causes 'famine, bloodshed, war and epidemics' (Artaud 2001: 60). For Artaud, the desired instability – brought about by the plague, and, ideally, by his Theatre of Cruelty – is not a re-enactment of the primal moment of creation, but a necessary stage in the West, a passage in order to return to a natural orderly state. For Harris, on the other hand, the underlying instability is a constant world of possibility for creation, a level of understanding that needs to be sought time and time again. The search for a natural stable order, which seems to be Artaud's goal, would constitute for Harris another fake mould for society. Moreover, Harris's views on language, including the written text, differ from Artaud, and his novels are proof that the same archetypal levels of communication can be reached through the written word as through the performance. Curiously enough, Artaud turns to colonialism and the conquest of Mexico as the first theatre of cruelty show. He opposes Western colonial 'monarchical chaos' to a natural order in the Aztec world, thus basing his theatre on a Manichean division of self and other that Harris undermines. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Artaud recognises the question of colonialism as the chore of violence and decadence within society. He proposes a staging of Montezuma's inner struggle in a hypothetical scene that brings Harrisian echoes:

We will show his inner struggle, and his symbolic discussion with  
visualised astronomical myths in a pictorial, objective manner.

Finally, aside from Montezuma, there are the masses, the different social strata; the masses rising up against fate represented by Montezuma (Artaud 2001: 86)

Artaud never staged *The Conquest of Mexico*, nor did he finish writing it, but he did give a reading of the intended scenario and sequence of acts for its performance, at a friend's house in 1934. Act one, *The Harbingers*, deals with a scene that prophesises the revolt. The description of the landscape is a scenery of intuition and premonition. On stage, Artaud wants 'shadows of wild horses passing in the air like distant meteors'. (Artaud 2001: 91) Montezuma and his priests appear with symbols of the firmament, and aside, a faint image of Cortez's caravels, with the Spanish conquistador and his men 'solid as rocks' (Artaud 2001: 92). The second act, *Confession*, describes the approaching army of Cortez as a silent motionless threat. The battle happens in the next act, *Convulsions*, but it happens within Montezuma's mind. Violence, blood and a magic evocation of the Gods are to be staged; Montezuma is to be seen as split in two; his costume will show 'manifold hands sticking out', and his body will show painted faces as a symbol of 'multiple meeting point of consciousness' (Artaud 2001: 92). The act closes with flying vessels full of riches on one side, and full of contraband weapons on the other, and with a mixture of terrible battle gestures: 'swirling gestures, horrible faces, glaring eyes, closed fists, plumes, armour, heads, bellies falling like hailstones pelting the earth with supernatural explosions.' (Artaud 2001: 93) The play finishes with the fourth act, *Abdication*, where Cortez and his men lose their assurance, and after references to treasures, the stage is occupied by a grotesque coupling of the Spaniard and the Indian woman. All the warriors then appear as Cortez, and the Indians massacre them, with the original Cortez day-dreaming in the midst of a gruesome fight, swaying to a music that directs the

movements of a statue on stage. The revolt continues and takes multiple forms, and eventually consumes itself. This, Artaud says, 'is the first indication of it being a love story.' (Artaud 2001: 93) The multiplicity of consciousness, the different levels of reality ('real' action and action in the mind), the references to the cosmos and the concentration on scenes that are exaggerated to act as symbols, all find parallels in Harris's work, not only in *Carnival*, but especially in The Dark Jester, where the conquest of Peru by Pizarro brings echoes of Cortez's episode. The importance and symbolism of Montezuma's costume is reflected in Atahualpa's garment, which appears and reappears throughout The Dark Jester. These garments represent an accumulation of consciousness, 'a layer above a layer descending into depths that needed to be created and re-created in their bearing on one another within a timeless domain'. (Harris 2001: 46) Indeed, literature for Harris should cause a certain distress, and even though Artaud remains within a static Manichean duality, he is re-enacting scenes in striking parallelism to Harris. The following excerpt from The Dark Jester bears a new meaning if put side by side with Artaud's unpublished – and unwritten – play:

A theatrical, fixed role, written for performance in uniform history, may edge into another life of art. It may outwit the writer – and the spectator in the writer – in terms that go beyond plain speech. It may reveal a descent into depths that bring a measure of subconscious distress (Harris 2001: 50)

Artaud's theatre is based on violence, bloodshed, a cruelty that has more of the Nietzschean will than with an evil, morally tinged emotion. Cruelty for Artaud is synonymous with a drastic decision that is taken to the extreme. His theatre, unlike that of Brecht, is supposed to transform through the senses, as opposed to the intellect. The dialectics of a naturalist psychological play lacks the necessary

physical level of upset for the audience, something that the Theatre of Cruelty, following the example of the plague, aims at. Thus, he rejects the exposition of metaphysical ideas directly on stage, but intends, instead, to use 'certain kinds of temptations, vacuums, around these ideas. Humour and its anarchy, poetry and its symbolism and imagery.' (Artaud 2001: 69) Although Artaud writes that his definition of cruelty is not sadistic or bloody, that it must be understood as a principle of life, 'in the Gnostic sense of a living vortex engulfing darkness' (Artaud 2001: 80), Artaud's concentration on the physicality of communication meant that his performances would be visually distressing, full of anguish, and that audiences should leave 'shaken and irritated by the inner dynamism of the show.' (Artaud 2001: 16). In his first published play, the Surrealist *Spurt of Blood* (1925), characters bite each other with blood spurting across the stage, and scorpions swarm in another character's vagina. In 1933, Artaud was to give a lecture at the Sorbonne, but instead he gave a performance of death by the plague, screaming and contorting his body in anguish, to the horror of the audience. The convoluted reality of his life finds truth in this Theatre of Cruelty. For Harris, on the other hand, violence is seen as a trap, as an unwanted consequence of a society's inability to accommodate change. Far from avoiding violence in his fiction, Harris, however, does not rely on it for enlightenment. In The Dark Jester, the narrator is able to recognise his murderous drive, his desire to kill Cortez, as a one-sided vision, a block function violence. The character's reflection upon his violent act frees violence from absoluteness. In this sense, both Artaud and Harris are engaging in an unconventional use of violence. Their goals, though, differ. While Artaud's violence expresses an inner unwanted chaos and attempts to shock

and disgust the audience, Harris treats violence as he does any other 'event'; he brings into play its malleability, its partiality, its hidden possibilities.

The relevance of Artaud in the context of a Harrisian reading of Walcott's plays is that, from the starting point of a common role granted to the arts as ritualistic and aimed at a society in turmoil, Artaud develops a theatrical, spatial language. The translation of common principles into an acting technique provides a useful backdrop in which to analyse Walcott's own theatre style for the Caribbean. Moreover, Walcott refers to Artaud to recreate his disgust at a sterile theatre (Part VI of 'What the Twilight Says'), and comments on the region's indifference to a Caribbean Artaud or Grotowski (Part V), in the context of a reflection on his own Theatre Workshop, suggesting a self-reference in the comparison. Part VI is introduced by a quotation from Artaud, and begins with the description of a disgusting feeling: 'I try to divert my attention from that mesmeric gritted oyster of sputum on the concrete floor'. (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 28) His repulsion extends then to the performance he is witnessing, which he identifies as the prostitution of culture, with no trace of a truthful re-enactment of ritual involved: 'The sour constipated earth is hard as cement'. (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 29) This theatre that is not art, that has sold its soul, presented in escatological terms, reaches its repugnant climax when, at the end of the performance, the national anthem is proudly sung. The constipated earth then lets its rotting entrails out: 'It smells as soon as it is aired. It sickens everything, as crude and as natural as that dusted globule of splayed spit that has become the itch of your whole body.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 30) The soul is gone 'with an odour of choking talc and perfume.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 30) One week before he died, Artaud wrote with disgust:

‘There are those who eat too much and others who, like me, can no longer eat without *spitting*.’ (Artaud 1971: 233) The problem in the Caribbean, for Walcott, was the emphasis on a pastoral vision, and the lack of a decadence that would invite experimental theatre. The avant-garde showed a general trend towards physicality, away from the restrictions of the realist theatre, and engaging in a more symbolic, poetic performance, with an interest in anthropology, tribalism, myths, and the Orient. Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, Brecht’s Epic Theatre, Beckett’s Theatre of the Absurd, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Peter Brook’s Holy Theatre, and Grotowski and Barba’s Poor Theatre are some of the trends that would stem from such revolution in the theatre. The means and ends differ, but all represent a break with the realism of the nineteenth century.

In the case of Artaud, his vision of a new theatre dates back to a performance of Balinese dance he attended in Paris in 1931, which included trance induction and a control of physicality to the point of not feeling pain. Artaud became fascinated with this type of performance because it offered a model of theatre where every single movement and gesture was necessary and meaningful, a model of a theatre that did not rely on words for its performance. Language comprises gestures, postures, certain phonetic modes, drum sounds, puppetry, cries, costumes; in sum, signs. This language appears to Artaud as a new compact form that communicates intuitively through the use of archetypes, and that is not transferable to words. The terms Artaud uses to describe this type of theatre are absolute, like the plague: it is a ‘faultless show’, the actors are ‘exact’, the technique is ‘tried and tested’, the signs are ‘effective’. (Artaud 2001: 37-38) There is no sterility, improvisation, or artificial spectacle in Balinese theatre, but a profound ‘Natural Philosophy’ (Artaud 2001: 42) that is ancient and

attuned with the mind; it is a ritualistic type of theatre, where the spectator watches a 'mental alchemy' transforming a state of mind into its natural gesture, as in a stage prior to language. Through the interposition of all these meaningful partialities, the theatre expresses outside the limits of the written word. The physical movements have, for Artaud, a 'musical quality', in the sense that the gestures, postures, and movements seem to spring from the laws of harmony. Every single element in the performance obeys a 'deliberate accuracy directing everything.' (Artaud 2001: 40) Even the role of the director or producer of the performance, which would seem to remain somewhat outside of the ritual, and thus artificial, is organically included in Balinese theatre. He is an 'organiser of magic', attuned with the gods, that hand this priest-like figure the materials to produce the ritualistic performance. These materials 'seem to stem from primal unions in Nature promoted by a double Spirit'. (Artaud 2001: 42) Artaud's description of the role of the artist in this ideal and perfect art form mirrors Harris's views on the artist, in that the writer works with something beyond his/her power, something numinous and divine that is also primal, archetypal, and sacred. The artist is in contact with the gods, as the Haitian Voodoo dancer, but remains also in a sort of unstable middle ground between consciousness and unconsciousness, like Ulysses escaping the sirens, tied to his ship. Balinese theatre provides for Artaud an ideal form that he describes as natural, primal, attuned with the gods as with the cosmos.

In essence, Artaud's views on theatre are based on the element of a physicality governed by archetypal transformations that re-enact the moment of genesis. In this way, Artaud discards the concept of nothingness that he identifies as the problem in the West. The parallel with Harris's goal of breaching nihilism



and rehearsing an infinite genesis of the imagination strengthens the links between these two artists. According to Artaud, the West has fallen into nothingness because of the false premise that human consciousness leaves the body when the body dies. Automatically, death as an absolute idea is linked to the physical part of the self, which is then rendered perishable, mortal, and prone to disappear. 'The human body', Artaud argues, 'only dies because we forgot to transform and change it.' (Artaud 1971: 216) In fact, the human body is immortal in a physical sense, because it transforms materially, anatomically. Artaud contrasts the present Western concept of the body as dirty and evil, as something that needs to be kept immaculate and unchanged, with a primal time when dealing with evil involved transforming the body. The evil was then 'transported,/physically and materially,/objectively and as if molecularly from one body to/another,/from a past and spent state of the body/to a strengthened and heightened state of the body.' (Artaud 1971: 217) Death as a state is something 'invented', it is a convention; only physical transformation exists, and nothing is permanent. Artaud calls for a revolution, but a true one that will bring a change to Western society. And change, for Artaud, can come in a sudden leap through physicality:

'And no political or moral revolution will be possible as long as  
man remains magnetically bound,

in his most elementary and most simple organic and nervous  
reactions,

by the sordid influence

of all the dubious circles of initiates,

who, ...

laugh at revolutions as well as wars,

certain that the anatomical order on which existence

as well as the duration of present-day society is based

could never change.

But in the human breath there are jumps and breaks of tone,  
and from one cry to another abrupt shifts  
things can suddenly be evoked through openings and impulses  
of the whole body and prop up or liquefy a limb like a tree one  
would shore up against the mountain of its forest.' (Artaud 1971:  
218)

Breathing to Artaud is what dreaming is to Wilson Harris. Accessing archetypes through the physical act of breathing has the same effect as dreaming in Harris, where dreaming acquires a certain meaning of entering a subconscious realm in tune with a collective archetypal level of signification. Artaud's techniques of breathing for actors could be regarded, in this sense, as an actuality, the physical correlative of Harrisian views, and thus pertinent as a transmutation of his ideas onto a physical plane, comparable to Walcott's theatrical experience. In this three-fold comparison, the form emerges as the guiding element; whether it is allegorical/mythical in Harris, physical in Artaud, or metrical in Walcott, the form is placed at the chore of art, as a metaphysical faith that overcomes nihilism.

Baring forms of their original meaning and boiling them down to archetypal primal signifiers works for Harris as for Artaud in order to communicate with the readership/audience at a deep level. In the case of Walcott, borrowing from other cultures at an early stage in his career constitutes a problem that has to do with artistic honesty. In this regard, he resembles Artaud, and shares his disgust for all forms of artificial theatre or simply 'bad art', which is, for Walcott, 'a reflection of social manners' (King 2000: 166), or, in Harrisian terms, a block function theatre. In order to avoid this static, block-theatre, every gesture and every movement need to be controlled and performed with an absolute discipline of acting technique. Although an absolute compact control of the

theatre may seem to stand in paradox with the idea of avoiding a static theatre performance, in Harris's idea of a desirable instability, the chaotic ground needs to be danced through within a certain pattern of dance, guided by a character, following initiation rites; i.e., attuned with a metaphysical ordering power that is located beyond the institutional mould of any given stable definition. The type of total control that Walcott strives for aims at providing this special pattern of instability. And anything other than this perfectly orchestrated form, which brings the theatre alive in the present and makes it effective, is a failure rejected in Artaudian terms: with utter disgust. If in Harris archetypal myths become the vessel in the voyage through instability as creative genesis, a parallel pattern in Oriental theatre offers Artaud and Walcott a performative technique to avoid a sterile and stagnant theatre.

Grotowski has summarised the intercultural dialogue between the Orient and the Occident. He considers the terms 'Orient' and 'Occident' as artificial constructs used as instruments to create a dialogue between cultures. Nothing that we take as absolute can be regarded as truthful or real. Considered in this light, the 'dance of doubt' that Walcott mentions in 'What the Twilight Says' as the frustrated attempt at creating a theatre becomes, paradoxically, a triumph in terms of truthfulness. Grotowski puts it simply:

If a phenomenon can be defined simply in terms of "it is that, and only that," that means it exists only in our heads. But if it has a real-life existence, we can never hope to define it completely. Its frontiers are always moving, while exceptions and analogies keep opening up. (Grotowski 233)

Artaud's theatre is a theatre of absolutes, of redemption or sheer hell. His Theatre of Cruelty is a concept rather than an actuality, because it could not be applied

without betrayal. The theoretical framework of his essays was always ahead of his productions, which never achieved the desired effect. Similarly, Walcott's frustration originates in his inability to make his own vision of theatre work in the Caribbean. The influence of the Orient, with its compact physicality, acted as a stimulating creative motivator in both writers. In Oriental theatre, Grotowski explains, there is always an underlying essential pattern directed by the energy flow in the body that pre-exists as the originator of any movement by the actor. These patterns consist of controlled bodily positions, so that movement *lives* between these shapes. Characters do not respond to the Western notion of individuality, but rather, they are types with a certain function. This element of the functional type is present in ritualistic theatre, such as the Yoruba, or in African and Haitian Voodoo rituals. In classical Oriental theatre, some characters may be represented by two actors, one doing the movements and the other one singing the text. The observing factor, where the actor is both acting the character and witnessing his own acting, is also an Oriental trait, which Brecht borrowed and developed into the V-effect (*Verfremdung* effect), the alienation effect, in order to achieve a distance from the actions on stage, and thus convey a critical standpoint for the audience. The function is somewhat different in Oriental theatre, where the act of witnessing the movements stresses the lack of subjectivity and the essential quality of the movement. Being aware of one's movement in Oriental theatre does not factor in the element of critical outlook but the component of concentration and awareness of the primal essential quality in the movement. Grotowski gives Brecht as an example of a positive intercultural exchange between the Orient and the West, in that it is not imitative, but rather, constructive and renewing. Trying to imitate a whole different cultural practice has resulted, Grotowski argues, in

mediocre failure based on a deep misunderstanding that often comes through direct translation. The concept of nothingness, of the empty space, is one of these misunderstood terms, and Grotowski offers a visual explanation that shows the fundamental difference between a Western perspective and an Oriental one: a line of ants that looks like a moving snake is for a Westerner, simply, a line of ants. For the Oriental, the empty space has an effect on the phenomenon, it affects the event and has an active role in creating what he sees as a moving snake. While the Westerner sees quanta, the Oriental sees a wave. Within the performance, the abrupt jumps from posture to posture in Oriental theatre rely on this perspective, whereas a Western acting technique requires a cause-effect continuum with no apparent empty spaces.

Walcott adopted several of the Oriental techniques for his theatre. As already explained, he borrowed the symbolism and simplicity of stage mainly from Japanese films that drew from their classical theatre, and he also experimented with the distancing alienation effect that Brecht adopted from Oriental theatre. In turn, Artaud offered a theory for a theatre where physicality was extremely controlled and directed, like the Oriental forms of theatre. There exists an underlying correlation between Walcott and Artaud that has to do with form, and that springs from both artists' aversion of the Western notion of nothingness, emptiness. Whether Artaud's aim at recreating a theatre equal to the Balinese is a flawed attempt similar to the avant-garde Manichean conception of tribalism as opposed to the West is not relevant in the present Harrisian reading of Walcott's theatrical production. What surfaces in this comparison is that Oriental theatre constituted for Artaud an answer to a growing nihilistic attitude in the West. Artaud's abhorrence of a sterile theatre responds to a rejection of

meaninglessness, which he expresses in his poem 'The Question Arises of ...' (Artaud 1971: 222-227), written in 1947 for a radio broadcast, and which Walcott recovers in its main metaphor, in Part VI of 'What the Twilight Says'. The 'crucial thing', Artaud says, is that there exists another order of the world after this one, but we don't know what it is. He jumps then from term to term in order to define this unknown entity: it is infinity, it is a word, it is consciousness, it is nothingness. Ultimately, 'nothingness' is a word we use to indicate what we don't know. He then abandons the logical definition, and attempts an emotional description of the unknown, in a similar turn to Walcott's words in 'Hic Jacet', where the poem states that he stayed 'for something rooted, unwritten / that gave us its benediction, / its particular pain' (Walcott 1992: 120): it is an emotional response to the unknown, which he recognises because he feels the pain. Artaud defines this unknown entity as a hunger for life, which is the 'space of possibility', a nothingness as possibility that is located inside the body, and which we feel although we can't define. It is when the body is pressured into an abolishment of this empty space of possibility that this nothingness asserts its existence through, in Artaud's bodily metaphor, a 'thundering manifestation' of 'explosive assurance':

and I farted  
irrationally  
excessively  
and in revolt  
at my suffocation (Artaud 1971: 227)

Artaud's statement of an unknown something beyond nothingness is his ultimate cry against nihilism. And it is this fundamental and metaphysical principle, conveyed with the metaphor of a strong, assertive discharge of the empty space

within the body, that Walcott recognises in Artaud and relates to the Caribbean: the community theatre singing the national anthem is like an irrepressible flatulence that 'smells as soon as it is aired.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 30) Walcott is also crying against a nihilistic concept of nothingness that fake imitations and tribalism do not overcome. The Harrisian eruption of violence in block function societies finds its correlative in Walcott's views on theatre through the Artaudian metaphor of his bodily excretion. Violence in Harris is the external sign that proves that the mould of an institution driven by rationalism alone suffocates its society. Where there is a prescriptive and complete definition of order without a recognition of an empty space of possibility, an explosion occurs like an affirmation of something that the same order negates.

The written text distances Walcott from Artaud. The strict theatrical technique stems for Walcott from a concise and thorough understanding of the psychology of the character, and the play as a whole. The Stanislavski method of the actor representing life truthfully on stage, and thus bringing the performance to a live reality appears in Walcott as a necessity that is based on an intellectual approach to the text. Understanding the meaning, a psychological insight into the play is secondary to the intuitive communication with the physical aspect in Artaud's theatre. Thus, he suggests that 'theatre today ought to return to the fundamental magic notion reintroduced by psychoanalysis, which consists in curing a patient by making him assume the external attitude of the desired condition.' (Artaud 2001: 60-61) Not only do the gesture and the form bear meaning, but they also bear the ability to affect the state of mind. The actor must therefore develop a physical technique consisting of breathing, or he/she may arrive at this level of physicality through his/her intuition, but a psychological or

intellectual apprenticeship is not essential. The idea of a theatre style independent of speech for its meaning, mainly relying on symbolic visual elements and on the communicative power of movement and gesture was useful for Walcott in this period of searching for a language that would be truly West Indian. Moreover, being a painter, the importance of the visual aspect is paramount, and he often began a play with sketches of what he wanted to depict on stage. However, as an artist formed in the possibilities of poetic form, and as a West Indian artist growing up and developing his own voice in a uniquely rich environment of dialect, imitation, language coexistence and creole, he retained the conviction that speech in theatre was as much a signifier, or more so than the rest of the elements. Thus, he regarded discipline in speech and articulation as important as fixing gestures, mastering dance, or controlling the movements in the actor. The physicality of the stage performance goes hand in hand with the deliverance of the speech found in the text. Understanding the plot, the characters' motives and conflicts, results in a truthfulness of acting that is expressed at all levels – physical and linguistic. Walcott's view, however, is not opposed to Artaud's, since he does not focus on an intellectual rendering of the message, as Brecht advocated, but on an emotional effect on the audience. Where he does require an intellectual involvement, however, is in the actor's engagement with the text. Going over the text with the theatre company before engaging in rehearsals becomes, in Walcott's case, a type of initiation ritual for the performance to come alive. Improvising lines was out of the question, and spontaneity would come out of a strict training of the voice, the body, and the lines of the text. As a playwright, Walcott was following the same poetic technique he used as a learning process: writing is a craft, and the poet needs to learn to use the instruments at hand. Each art has its



form, and theatre uses all art forms, so that all instruments need to be mastered and controlled before creativity can emerge. The process of learning to read, explained in the previous chapter as a necessary Harrisian initiation ritual for literature to have its desired effect, manifests itself in Walcott's theatre as a period of training and craftsmanship: his actors in the Trinidad Theatre Workshop trained for years before they put on a production. The frustrations that Walcott describes in his essay are related to an inability to create a theatre according to his rigorous expectations. Added to his own main artistic questions about the lack of history, the complexity of finding one's own voice in the English language and tradition from a foreign perspective, the impenetrability of the landscape, and the disturbing emotions regarding race, Walcott's theatre found other complications in the actors themselves: they were 'ashamed of their speech, they were moved only by the tragic-comic and farcical. ... They considered tragedy to be, like English, an attribute beyond them.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 17) The Theatre of the Absurd, rooted in Surrealism, could not be truthfully performed by the actors since this type of disfigurement was not something they could emotionally identify with.

The difficulty of articulating speech is another problem that his actors encountered. The solution, according to Walcott, was to take the mind and the body of the actor to a primal original state: 'we must begin again from the bush.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 25-26) Walcott, however, does not provide a theory of what this original state should be. Instead, he proposes an inward journey whose itinerary is unknown. Those Caribbean artists who start that journey with a clear view of their target point are fake and dishonest: 'On such journeys the mind will discover what it chooses, and what these writers seek, like

refugees raking debris, are heirlooms to dignify an old destitution.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 26) The journey towards a body in a state of original learning must not be understood as a boiling down to nothingness, but rather, as a search for the soul of a West Indian theatre. Throughout these years until 1970, Walcott experimented with techniques, trained his actors, took extreme measures and indulged in his own state of madness as a blind inward crusade in search of a basic truth. The tone of failure that emerges from his essay is also a confessional narrative of self-hate and acceptance, of recognition of corruption in himself. Part VIII delves into his own egotistical psyche as a playwright and director who then became a dictator in his own theatre company, as a personal parallel embodying the political development of Trinidad's Prime Minister at the time, Dr Eric Williams. The corruption of a 'revolt that settles for security' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 36), the paranoia of betrayal, and the transformation into a Christ-like figure with 'a readiness for suffering and betrayal' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 34) can be read in this section as a psychological explanation of Williams' corrupted politics. Walcott's years of apprenticeship developed in parallel to the beginning of a new era in the Caribbean which started with a true revolutionary vision, and reached in 1970 a climatic point of corruption and disappointment. Walcott's publication of his collected plays together with 'What the Twilight Says' that same year, on the other hand, shows the enormous value he places on this communal experience. The eruption of violence in society, as his own narrative of disappointment, are proof of an underlying meaningful essence. Walcott would continue his search for a Caribbean theatre, a search that would take him closer to his own primal essence as an artist.

## Part Two

### Chapter 3

#### The Folk Tale: *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*

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The use of folklore in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* responds to Walcott's desire to explore the oral and collective tradition as a source for Caribbean theatre. As Wilson-Tagoe has pointed out, "we are forced to listen to the familiar speech of the people as well as witness the enactment of life through the oral structures and forms that the people have created." (Wilson-Tagoe 1995: 35). Walcott creates a folk play that deals with colonialism and enslavement in terms that escape the Manichean opposition between good and evil. Through a configuration of characters that affect and complete each other, the play achieves a regenerative wholeness.

*Ti-Jean and His Brothers* has been read as a sophisticated fable that incorporates to the folk tale the metaphor of the resistance and liberation of the colonised from the coloniser. Eric Roach reviewed the play for the *Trinidad Guardian*, offering a generational reading of the three brothers in the play.

In a sense, the brothers are symbolistic (sic) of the movement of the generations through West Indian history.

Gros Jean, the huge peasant ... is one of the brawny post-slave generation who succumbs to everything that his 'iron arm' cannot master.

...

Mi-Jean is the self-taught moron, already infused with middle class snob values, proudly running off to be a lawyer or doctor in the wilderness beyond, ignorant of what is going on in his own backyard.

Ti-Jean, however, is of today's generation. (Roach 1970)

The element of resistance and the resort to wit have resulted in readings of Ti-Jean as a trickster figure, in the tradition of West Indian Anancy stories. For Ashaolu, Ti-Jean represents the rebellious impulse against enslavement, and compares his *vile* and *mischievous* behaviour to several cases he documents of slaves who poison their masters. (Ashaolu 120-121) Patrick Taylor elaborates on this reading of the character of Ti-Jean, and identifies in him 'Anancy's cunning and common sense.' (Taylor 216) Walcott's reworking of the Caribbean trickster merges Judeo-Christian and African tradition, to come up with a character whose interest is eminently communal, and who acts according to what is best for his society. However, as Taylor points out, he is not a romantic or ethical hero. 'No, he affirms life even as he acknowledges the reality of struggle and death.' (Taylor 216) Elizabeth Walcott has argued that Taylor's analysis of the trickster narrative is narrowed by a political imperative, thus reading any resistance as a sign of a trickster outline in the text, and understanding its unresolved character – the trickster can at once be the coloniser or the colonised, and he can either win or lose (Taylor 140) – as an adaptation within the status quo. In E. Walcott's reading of Taylor's analysis, '[t]he characters of the folktale come to terms with an oppressive condition not by transforming it but by functioning within it.' (E. Walcott 3) According to Taylor, the trickster's deceitful behaviour itself does not take the necessary step forward after rebellion, and the outcome always remains unstable. (Taylor 144, 150) E. Walcott's thesis points out, however, that Ti-Jean's

behaviour is never hidden, but rather, that he 'openly challenges the master.' (E. Walcott 3) Moreover, Ti-Jean distinguishes himself from Anancy in that he uses his talent to defend the community, and in that he does not derive great pleasure from his mischief. (E. Walcott 22) In brief, E. Walcott regards Ti-Jean as a folktale hero. Although she perceptively points out that Ti-Jean's rebellion takes place in the open and does not involve a hidden plot, the element of deceit is present at a dialectical level. Ti-Jean pretends to be drunk and to be the Devil's friend; ironically, he also deceives the workers by pretending to be the new foreman. Walcott's play, however, presents a version of Anancy that is full of compassion for his family, the animals of the forest, and the workers in the fields. The emotional element in the play is extended through the performance, as Wilson-Tagoe suggests. The narrative frame of the story-telling sets the tone as an 'incantation' to liberate the community from 'fears and anxieties.' (Wilson-Tagoe 1995: 30) Ti-Jean embarks on several 'emotional involvements' within his contest with the Devil. (Wilson-Tagoe 1995: 31) The play's emotional appeal is extended to the music, so that sadness, danger and joy are emphasized at various times during the play, and also to the cast, with Ti-Jean played by a child, thus providing a touch of innocence and frailty. Thus, the character of Ti-Jean cannot be contemplated in isolation as an individual hero; rather, the interactions between different characters combine to offer a narrative form that, as a whole, offers a particular re-enactment of resistance to colonialism.

In the opening lines of Walcott's *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, a chorus of forest creatures open the first act with a witty mixture of animal sounds and classical reference. Particularly the frog, who produces an educated sneeze that positions the play in a classical literary context that inaugurates the topic:

'Aeschylus me!' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 85) Not merely a reference to the first Greek tragic poet, this exclamation places Walcott's play in a very specific moment and work in ancient Greece. In Aristophanes's comedy *The Frogs*, a chorus of batrachians accompanies Dionysus in his journey to Hades in search of the acclaimed Euripides. The god of tragedy represents a decaying Athens in need of advice from the great poet. However, when he arrives in the underworld masqueraded as Heracles, embodiment of all virtues and ideal human being, Euripides and Aeschylus embark on a dialogic fight. The decisive question that Dionysus poses in order to decide which one will come back to Athens is how to save the city. In the end, it is Aeschylus that he chooses. Although the implications of the opening reference have been pointed out as an allegory of the artist<sup>8</sup>, the relevance this reference bears in the thematic sphere needs further consideration. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Frogs*, David Barret emphasizes the poet's compromise with a decaying society, while he explains how this level of social and moral involvement on the part of the artist was the norm at the time the comedy was produced. (Barret 149-153) The action takes place in Hades, where Dionysus, god of tragedy, takes on the role of judge, while the audience watches. There is a chorus that provides advice for the artist, Aeschylus, during his fight with Euripides. Dionysus has the last decisive word on this fight, and the power to bring Aeschylus back to life from Hades. The audience, as explained above, remains outside. In Walcott's play, the Devil appears as having the power to give or take life. In addition to this similarity with

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Ashaolu identifies the frog with Aeschylus, and by extension, with the actual artist himself, Derek Walcott. 'Walcott's invocation of Aeschylus' name, as put in the mouth of the Frog, is an implicit recognition of Aeschylus as the great and wise poet-playwright endowed with "maxims rare" and "noble thoughts" which a Narrator like the Frog needs as its muse and source of inspiration. And by invoking the name Aeschylus, the Frog has elevated itself from the low status of a mere folktale animal to that of an inspired poet-Narrator with a vision.' (Ashaolu 119)

Aristophanes's Dionysus, they both masquerade as older men: Heracles in *The Frogs*, and the old man in *Ti-Jean*. Both seem to occupy the same position in the play. However, the role of Ti-Jean considerably alters the scheme.

The character of Ti-Jean embodies that which is needed in a time of crisis, be it a crisis in society, in the family, or in both. He is conscious of the Devil's judgement, just as Aeschylus is of Dionysus'. Furthermore, the terms of life/death within which the judgement takes place are present in the two plays. The ending, however, provides the key differentiating aspects between Aeschylus and Ti-Jean. In the case of Aeschylus, there is no questioning of Dionysus' terms. Instead, the audience sees a complete acceptance of a fixed and uncorrupted set of principles with which to judge. In contrast, Ti-Jean is granted life through a rupture with the laws and principles set by the Devil. He takes matters into his own hands, and decides outside the boundaries of the Devil's prescription. This proves the only effective means to come back to life. The test set by the Devil is a middle ground between life and death, similar to Hades. However, while Aeschylus is an artist who fights with words, Ti-Jean is a young man with no occupation, whose virtues are to speak to the animals and to have a free mind. The crisis in Ti-Jean's society, that of colonialism and enslavement, requires something other than a dialectical fight. Walcott introduces the character of the man of words, the intellectual, as incapable of beating the Devil and winning the trial. Mi-Jean represents the stereotypical intellectual full of words but void of any practical sense. However, even though Ti-Jean is closer to a man of actions rather than to one of words, his character is more complex than a revolutionary figure. Gros-Jean, the oldest brother, and the first to die in the hands of the Devil, represents the man of strength and action. This strategy fails abruptly. In short, neither a man of words

nor a man of action are suitable as guides to the community, neither of them wins the trial. The main difference between Walcott's play and the classical comedy lies in the strategy chosen by the winner. While in *The Frogs* Aeschylus follows Dionysus' guidelines and principles, in *Ti-Jean* this strategy does not work, because the judge is not fair in any way. Ti-Jean looks for principles elsewhere, and it is mainly in his mother's words and in the forest creatures that he finds wisdom. Breaking down the hierarchy and questioning Western principles brings life to the community, to society. Instead of a man of words who writes what society needs, the hero is a man of action who guides and acts with the community. In this configuration of roles, the position formerly occupied by the intellectual becomes vacant, and Walcott's play provides a new figure to occupy that position: a new two-fold figure who is not merely an intellectual, neither a man of action. He is an artist in that he resorts to traditional myths and legends to relate to the community, and a guide in a political sense. The combination of characters in the different narrative frames bridges the gap between the world of myth and the social reality. In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Walcott presents a society in crisis, and offers a folk narrative that explains resistance in terms of community. The connection between the artist as creator and the community is at the core of Wilson Harris's understanding of the subjective imagination.

'One is deprived of community when one lives in a world that is wholly given, apparently wholly objective. (Harris 'A Talk on the Subjective Imagination' 61) One of the most precious traits of the true artist in Harrisian views of the world and of community is to be able to access and use his subjective imagination. When the artist thus becomes an imaginative, creative artist, he holds the key to a field of possibility. For Harris, the moment of creation seems to



acquire magical proportions, a regenerative power that brings about a sphere of new and unseen resources for community. When the artist's free subjective imagination embarks in the task of creation, the language he uses generates a narrative that alters our static notion of completeness and praise of unity. Imagining and creating combine and pinpoint hidden resources in the artist's society, in order to obliterate an illusion of finished cosmogony.

Because the artist's medium is the work of art, the latter needs to transfer the sphere of possibilities arising from the act of creation to the society. Full transfer of the resources available at hand from the memory of the past and from the reality itself is achieved by managing to transpose the power of creation to the work itself, so that the community will experience this regenerating creative moment. Rather than providing specific possibilities, a new closed and finished cosmogony, the artist should offer his own creative experience. The role of the artist, in a Harrisian sense, is thus explained:

he is the complex ghost of his own landscape of history or work. ... his poem or novel is subsistence of memory. In the final analysis the reality of his existence as agent or clown – as a unity of strange powers – turns upon faith, faith in the powers and resources of the human person at many levels of feeling, translation, and inquiry to invoke a 'presence' within an 'absence'. (Harris 'Interior of the Novel' 18)

The artist's dialogue with the past discovers new unnoticed areas of consciousness that remained, as it were, asleep. The act of representing and experiencing aspects of the past in an imaginative fashion bears an effect on the memory of those events. Reshaping and retelling the past facilitates a development of identity that results in a healthy community, a constantly evolving and regenerating

community driven by a creative force, not paralysed by a finished, inert cosmogony.

In order to avoid static notions of tradition, identity, and history, the artist must communicate a vision of reality deprived of 'an ideology of stasis.' (Harris 'Some Aspects of Myth and the Intuitive Imagination' 98) The artist's vision must move away from the categorisation as 'complete object', and open up instead 'a doorway into apparently eclipsed proportions one needs to unravel.' (Harris 'Reflection and Vision' 83) Thus, the point is stressed that *one*, meaning the potential reader, should undergo the same process of creation. In essence, the artist sketches new links with the past, and develops elements of the community's identity that would normally remain hidden in a world ruled by objectivity. The artist begins to move areas of society, resourceful capacities for creation and development that will enable the community to deal with traumatic experiences and regenerate their identity.

In Wilson Harris's essay 'The Writer and Society', three different myths are used to analyse the artist's position in relation to society. From his position, the writer searches for a redefined society, what he calls a 'species of fiction', which he uses as a synonym for community. Like an explorer, the writer must follow the signs to bring a new present and future to the community. Through imaginative and creative language, he enters a space where he comes into contact with a primary collective memory that will eventually take both him and the community to a shared vision. The figure of the artist performs a twofold role: on the one hand, he does not control the information he receives, and becomes a recipient, attuned with a universal unconscious resource. At the same time, he interprets and communicates this knowledge through his language, and in this

sense, he actively enrolls in the process of bridging the level he accesses, and the space he occupies in society. Thus, the writer is linked to the community in an unconscious space (collective unconscious), while he communicates and partakes of it through conscious verbal communication. This space the writer dwells in provides a realm of possibilities or visions of community. The visualisation is a new community that comes as an apparition, a species of fiction that exists beyond convention. The writer abides in a region where categories are blurred, opposite concepts overlap, and the illusion of self-sufficiency disappears, because the definition of oneness no longer applies. Simultaneity of opposites results in a space where paradoxes and impossibilities become viable. Ultimately, Harris describes the artist's function in society as a purveyor of a vision of reality, a visualisation of possibilities stemming from a collective wisdom that is transmitted through folklore and mythology.

In order to understand how the writer links this species of fiction to the reality of the community, Harris draws on three illuminating examples from the classics and from religious mythology: the spaces occupied by Tiresias, the vodun dancer, and Ulysses, develop and shape Harris's considerations on the role of the writer and his community. The writer reaches these positions through a fiction of reality, through an exploration and a search. Tiresias is the blind seer in Greek mythology. There are several versions about the origin of his powers, but the most accepted story is that, having come across two mating snakes in the path, he killed one of them, and turned into a woman. After several years, upon finding another pair of coupling snakes, again he killed one of them, and turned back into a man. Zeus and Hera were discussing whether it is the man or the woman who experiences more pleasure during intercourse, and they decided to ask the only

human who had knowledge of both views: Tiresias. His answer, that women receive more pleasure, pleased Zeus, but Hera was outraged, and blinded Tiresias. Zeus, however, bestowed the power of prophecy on him. Harris's choice of Tiresias responds not only to the prophetic element, but also to the fact that he embodies the very idea of blurred categorizations, he represents paradox, and challenges the concept of self-sufficiency and oneness. Tiresias represents ultimate freedom, all the possibilities in a spatial void; both male and female, he embodies like no one the realm of paradoxes, the lack of impossibilities or limits. The writer as Tiresias provides endless possibilities for the society. Bridging the exploration in a fiction of reality with the reality of the community itself becomes the next step for the writer.

In order to explain how the writer covers that distance, Harris draws on Haitian vodun. During the dancer's trance, his 'conventional memory' gives way to a 'deeper function of memory', (Harris 'The Writer and Society' 51) with the dance becoming an expression of two lives, the inner and the outer, overlapping. The revelation brought about by the dancer remains obscure to him: the dancer does not feel, he is fleshless, a mere catalyst for the new memory to manifest itself. The great difference between the dancer and the writer lies in the latter's use of language and imagination. While sharing the same space, he is not void of sensation: the act of choosing words relates to a state of consciousness that the vodun dancer has no access to. For the writer, the revelation happens in a state of semi-consciousness where he is able to direct the language for the purposes of communicating the possibilities beyond conventional tautology, in order to uncover the hidden variants available to society. Harris resorts then to another

myth, in order to explain how the artist manages to remain in such unstable ground.

First of all, Ulysses is bound to the mast at his own request by the members of the crew. The mast becomes an extension of his body and something at the same time to which he clings to preserve him in space like a tree in a storm for, in fact, he begins to shudder with all his strength he is so enthralled when the voices of the Sirens strike his ears. His struggle to fling all reason to the wind and return to Circe echoes a depth of relationship akin to life-in-death, death-in-life. For in the sense that the mast is an extension of his body (as well as something which embraces and holds him), so is the entire vessel an extension as well as a yoke in all its parts. (Harris 'The Writer and Society' 52-53)

Ulysses occupies a position that is both dead and alive, he is both human and a vessel, but a vessel that is driven by the rationality of the crew. On the one hand, he can hear the Sirens, he is in contact with the unconscious and gives up reason and control over his body. However, he can only maintain that ambiguous, unstable position because his crew are deaf to the Sirens, and because they are not deprived of reason to rule the vessel. Reason and society, embodied in the crew, are necessary for the hero to contact other levels of knowledge, which remain hidden from the rest. Harris describes the relationship between these two entities as a community where the relationships between members is explained dialectically and through myth, but it cannot be intellectualised. The combination of exercising a certain control while lacking will, plays a fundamental part in modern writing: 'The crucial problem for the modern poet, it seems to me, is to visualize a structure which is, at one and the same time, a structure of freedom and a structure of authority. Precisely what this means it is impossible to say in

purely intellectual terms.’ (Harris ‘The Place of the Poet in Modern Society’ 5)

The paradox of the individual having to both attach and separate himself from the community in order to access a knowledge that stems from that same community, the description of a state where the individual is both conscious and unconscious, keeping his will intact through language and communication (rationality), is best explained through a fiction of reality, dividing different states into a hearing Ulysses, a deaf crew, a vessel/body uniting both, and the Sirens whose song creates the schism of conscious/unconscious states in the vessel.

Aiming at the crew of the vessel, the Sirens sing a music that represents the chase of death. Through annihilation of reason and control over the body, be it each individual’s body or the vessel as body, the ‘muse of death’ (Harris ‘The Writer and Society’ 53) catches the crew. However, the configuration of the vessel in the myth alters the scheme of things. The crew is not drawn towards death, it escapes death. Harris points out that this is not a scene drawn by a romantic escape of doom. It is ‘a new form of ‘classical’ animation’ instead. And by this he means ‘that the role of the captain and the crew establishes itself as the relative ground of insulation from disaster which the drama of consciousness invokes.’ (Harris ‘The Writer and Society’ 53-54) The drama of consciousness is the tragedy of knowledge, the tragedy of death and Man’s consciousness of death as an individual. In the myth of Ulysses’ flight from Circe, the configuration of community and hero, together with the setting of the vessel, create a new order where disaster does not happen, while at the same time they are not escaping from it. The myth offers a middle space not deprived of knowledge and consciousness of death, and still driven by rationality and control over the body. The vessel becomes ‘the relative ground of insulation from disaster,’ the disaster of a

consciousness of death. In essence, this myth proves both live-giving and death-dealing. The architecture of air, water, the movement of the vessel, the immobility of the hero-captain, the deafness of the crew (ear of wood or stone), the knowledge brought about by the muse of death, this iconography brings, in the end, freedom. The flight from tyranny arrives when they reach this new equilibrium on unstable ground.

The comparison with Wilson Harris's conception of the figure of the artist reinforces the reading of Walcott's play *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* as a folktale whose effectiveness lies in its narrative structure taken as a whole. The myth of Tiresias works on different levels. Being a seer, he provides a vision of the future. Even though this might lead to an idea of predetermination and fixed future, his position is paradoxically open to all possibilities. The moment when the hero meets Tiresias becomes a timeless instant where the hero faces countless futures, myriad alternatives. Walcott's *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* provides an altered version of the position of Tiresias as described by Harris. To begin with, there is no one character in the play that comprises all of the characteristics present in the myth of Tiresias. Rather, several characters share the power and the knowledge of the blind seer of Greek mythology. The animals, for instance, provide relevant information. Like Tiresias, they give hints and warnings that prove essential and useful for the hero's enterprise. Together with the mother, the animals of the forest represent a nature that partakes of Tiresias' position. The knowledge of the devil exists in this nature, and it is through acceptance of good and evil as necessary in life (and death) that the animals can teach Ti-Jean and warn him. On several occasions, the firefly and the frog comment on their mutual enmity. Frogs eat fireflies, but it is not out of evil that they do. For the sake of story-telling, they

reach a covert agreement whereby the frog will not eat the firefly, and the firefly in turn will try not to get too close to the frog. In a sense, this mutually understood impasse sets the middle ground tone of the play, where spirits and humans interact, where the Devil challenges the living, and where the future of the protagonist and his community is at stake.

The mother appears as another Tiresias figure, with warnings and wisdom for her sons. She is also able to face the Bolom, the evil unborn spirit, and knows how useful the animals will turn out to be. When faced with the Bolom, she shows courage, and knows what to do: she offers the Bolom a home full of love, but the bolom is a product of evil, he cannot go back to life/love until the Devil himself is beaten. The symbolism of mother-fertility-nature-life-love conventionally opposes that of devil-sterility (because the bolom is an unborn child)-death. The dualism is blurred, however, because of what brings about this fight with the Devil. At the beginning of the play, the mother is praying to God, and it is right after she says: 'Wait, and God will send us something' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 92) that the Devil contacts them. While the perfect timing between the mother's words and the entrance of the Devil point to a narrative irony, an alternative reading of this coincidence shows that the borderline between God and the Devil actually allows for some communication and interplay to take place. The play happens in a middle ground sphere. The setting for the artist to perform his role is a space free from absolutes. The other Tiresias in the play is Ti-Jean himself. The protagonist is challenged through the same tasks as his brothers: working in the plantations, and other nonsensical jobs such as catching fireflies, or tying up a goat that inevitably escapes. Both Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean lose their temper and end up devoured by the Devil. However, Ti-Jean is the 'seer' in the story, and he



decides freely, considering possibilities other than those provided by the Devil himself. During the first task, he decides to castrate the Devil's goat, so that it will not escape again. The Devil is shocked, but the challenge continues. The second task, counting each leaf on the stalk in the cane-fields, seems a complete waste of time to Ti-Jean. Therefore, for a second time he sees beyond his duty, and tells the workers to burn all the fields, and he finally decides to set the Devil/planter's house on fire as well. The rest of the characters abide certain rules, they are unable to search beyond religious, intellectual, or hierarchical restrictions. But Ti-Jean's character occupies a position ruled by free will and imagination. His decisions, driven by a fundamental freedom of thought and action, change the course of the story, and finally beat the Devil. In the end, Ti-Jean is a Tiresias figure in the Harrisian sense, a seer that symbolises new and unexplored possibilities.

The second stage for the artist, according to Harris, is the position of the vodun dancer, which links the position of Tiresias – with all its possibilities – to the community. As explained above, the difference between the vodun dancer and the artist is their level of consciousness: the vodun dancer remains unconscious to his message, while the use of words on the part of the artist introduces a certain level of consciousness to the position he occupies. Vodun ceremonies are held for various purposes, but in all of them there are one or several dancers who are possessed by a spirit. Their will is then suppressed, and their bodies are commanded by the spirit instead. Their movements follow the spirit's favourite dance steps, they choose the spirit's choice of food and drink, and they deliver a message from the *loas* or gods. According to G. E. Simpson's account on vodun in Haiti, social rules and precepts are established through this rite. From his anthropological standpoint, Simpson enumerates the elements that are condemned

by the *loas* during the possession: murder, incest, theft, and disrespect for the elderly. (Simpson 252) *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* relates to the vodun cult of Haiti in many ways. Rhythm and dancing frame the play and insert it in a ritualistic form in order to access tradition through the myth of Ti-Jean. Within the tale itself, vodun plays an important part in shaping the theme of colonialism and enslavement. The Devil calls the three brothers by means of an unborn child: death calls the three young men, and gives them endless tasks that will keep them busy forever. In the vodun cult of Haiti, a person dead of an apparently unnatural death is given similar tasks to prevent them from being turned into zombies. Counting seed or threading a needle with a bent head are examples of this type of practice. In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, the Devil presents an identical attitude, with the purpose of keeping them enslaved. Paradoxically, in Haitian vodun this ritual is believed to prevent enslavement as zombies. Ti-Jean is, in essence, a human put under trial, with two given possibilities: death, or enslavement. Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean lose their temper and are devoured by the devil. Ti-Jean, however, manages to break the chain of events, deciphers the secret of finishing his tasks, and beats the master through the knowledge he receives from the animals of the forest. By outwitting the Devil, he communicates with the Devil, gains control over him, he frees the slaves/zombies, and restores the life of the unborn child.

According to Harris, the process of possession undergone by the vodun dancer places him in contact with a primal memory, or rather, replaces a universal unconscious memory where there was an individual one. 'All conventional memory is erased and yet in this trance of overlapping spheres of reflection a primordial or deeper function of memory begins to exercise itself within the

bloodstream of space.’ (Harris ‘The Writer and Society’ 51) In this sense, the artist occupies a space where he comes into contact with a higher level of wisdom that is expressed through tradition. The definition and role of tradition is a very specific one in Wilson Harris’s work. Tradition is a mutation capacity, a non-static immaterial entity that springs from a history of conquest and exploitation. Hena Maes-Jelinek identifies Harris’s endeavour to explain ‘what is nameless’ (Maes-Jelinek ‘Introduction’ 2) as the main difficulty in dealing with his essays. Often Harris develops aspects of tradition as opposed to an absolute conception of the term, since he deals with a tradition that is continuously in the making: its heterogeneity and resourcefulness emerges from a connection with the past that ‘asks impertinent questions of the past.’ (Harris ‘A Talk on the Subjective Imagination’ 63) Harris’s tradition shows a powerful interactivity that facilitates a shift away from immobility and static notions that paralyse societies. The vodun dancer represents, within a real space, the ability to speak and question the past, to alter and continue the remaking of tradition. Thanks to this conception of tradition, suffocating situations that might seem at first sight unbreakable – like the choice between doing work for the Devil and being devoured by him – start to change. Thus, Ti-Jean is attuned with the constant openness of possibilities (in the Tiresias fashion), and he is able to move around that sphere to fight the Devil, as a vodun dancer.

This capacity for mutation is best explained in the literary character of the trickster figure. Taylor considers Ti-Jean as a trickster figure through his witty and cunning behaviour. However, he also analyses the ambiguity of the trickster narrative as a sign that the trickster remains confined within the colonial social configuration. Nevertheless, taking Harris into consideration, the trickster’s

ambiguity becomes the symbol of a lack of a complete wholeness. In its malleability, the trickster comes to represent the principle of possibility outside static notions within society. Ti-Jean is put on trial, supposedly, by the Devil. However, we have seen that categories are blurred in this play: the Devil appears when God is summoned, evil and good are indistinguishable in nature, and Ti-Jean accepts his mother's death as part of life. In Paul Radin's study of the trickster figure in American Indian mythology, Karl Kerényi writes in his introduction:

The Book of Job, generated by an archaic civilization, a society no longer primitive, symbolizes the converse of the primitive notion of the trickster and represents, also, the origin of our own conceptions of good and evil. (Kerényi xi)

In Kerényi's reading of Job's story, the element that distances it from the trickster figure is the stability it seeks to maintain: absolute good fights against absolute evil, Job learns that he must not question God. Instead, humble acceptance of Man's ignorance is the answer to the choice. The rigidity of the status quo is thus kept unchanged. The trickster figure, however, bears a creative element beyond the choices given. The cosmology offered by the trickster mutates, transforms in a cycle akin to nature, and represents not the origin of good and evil, but the origin of life as movement, the blurring of categories. In Harrisian terminology, the notions of self-sufficiency and oneness disappear. Both Harris and Kerényi refer to a society driven by such a cosmology as devoid of extremist groups, of imbalance in the name of pure conceptions of good and evil.

The Greek mythical character Arachne shares the trickster's creative capacity. Arachne challenged the goddess Athena in a weaving contest, which she won. In anger, Athena touched Arachne's forehead and made her feel the guilt of

her sinful pride. In the end, after Arachne's suicide, Athena feels pity for her, and brings her back to life in the form of a spider. This tale bears similarities with Job's story in that both Arachne and Job question a divine entity; they disobey and alter the prescribed order of things. In both stories, the ending is parallel: first they are punished, and then they receive the sympathy and pity of the divine entity. The trickster figure, on the contrary, does not follow the same ending, because the story is not trying to maintain the status quo.

Ti-Jean's triumph is relative, and the ambiguity of Ti-Jean as Anancy/trickster figure, through his connection with vodun, acquires a new dimension. Patrick Taylor analyses the role of Haitian vodun in the Haitian revolution. Taylor distinguishes two stages on the political role of vodun in Haiti: vodun as rebellion, and, after the Haitian revolution, the use of vodun as an instrument of control of the masses by an oppressive government. Vodun rituals constitute a narrative structure that gives a certain coherency to the experiences lived by the community. (Taylor 100) Colonial oppression is symbolised through the legend of Trou Forbam, 'the fearsome plantation on which zombies work as slaves for their sorcerer-masters.' (Taylor 101) In Walcott's *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, the tasks set by the Devil are enslaving chores that never end, and the plantation where Ti-Jean finds the workers symbolises the fate that the community faces. Taylor analyses the elements of resistance provided by the vodun narrative structure, and focuses on the crossroad deities, especially Legba and the Gede family. Legba is an intermediary between the human and the divine, and its Haitian version has no trace of his original trickster quality, which has been transferred to the Gede. The power to preserve life or to kill is assigned to Baron Samedi, from the Gede family, who are tricksters. Legba and Gede meet at

the crossroads, 'the point of intersection between the visible and the invisible, the living and the ancestors, the devotees and the loa.' (Taylor 106) Taylor explains that Legba lost some of his powers to the Gede because the Gede operated at night, thus avoiding prohibitions and remaining hidden. Through the experience of colonialism, Legba becomes aware of death, and 'is reborn in the Gede as the struggle for survival and life.' (Taylor 107) Gede is now the Lord of Resurrection. Taylor describes the Gede as a trickster group free of social restrictions. It is this moral ambiguity that later results in a reversal of roles, when the same vodun narrative structure operates for the benefit of the new oppressing governments.

Although Taylor's reading of Walcott's plays draws links with this mythical narrative, these links are limited to the analysis of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. It seems to me that *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* presents a symbolic and narrative parallelism that ultimately links the play with the Haitian revolution, a topic present in Walcott since he began to write. The middle ground setting, outside of society and of linear time, provides a magical space where the social crisis will be dealt with. There is the presence of salutation rituals, as well as the use of the legend of the zombies enslaved in the master's plantation. Taylor explains that the cross is the symbol of the crossroad loas. Ti-Jean's encounter with the Devil takes place with the backdrop of his brothers' crosses throughout the fight. Finally, the element of resurrection appears in the figure of the Bolom, who is granted life in the end.

The rituals of going forth, saluting the animals, and then going back again to salute the dead, before he moves forward again to find the Devil, are parallel to the rituals of salutation for the houngan or vodun priest. At the beginning of almost all ceremonies, the houngan's assistant (the *la-place*), symbolising the loa

of the temple or *hounfor*, arrives with a sword, followed by two members of society, representing the community with flags. They perform a number of salutations, until finally they greet the houngan. The houngan receives them holding his sacred rattle or *asson*, and then a specific ritual starts, which Ti-Jean echoes in his ritualistic initiation before meeting the Devil. Maya Deren explains this ritual as a fake battle between the *la-place* and the houngan:

While they do not make actual contact, the sword causes the *asson* to retreat, and then is suddenly pressed into retreat itself. Back and forth they go, the sword threatening and shaking and the *asson* rattling and ringing. There is no question but that it is a competition, re-enacted, to be sure, between the power of the *loa* and the *société*, together, against that of the houngan. (Deren 177)

The outcome of this battle is a mutual demonstration of respect, so even though the houngan rules over the *loa* and the community during the vodun ceremony, he is also responsible for them. Ti-Jean performs these rituals of respect in Walcott's play, and only then is it possible for him to go forth and meet the Devil's challenge. The houngan is not an absolute monarch, while, paradoxically, the responsibility falls entirely on him. Although in practice he shares the dictator's unrestricted power, he is also a democratic figure elected by the community, and driven by a powerful set of principles. These principles require that he offer gifts and rituals to the gods, but also that he serve the community in various ways. The houngan needs to be able to help his people in very practical matters; he is a healer and an adviser, a mediator between the community's interests and external institutions. His position demands of him that he be sensitive, with an instinctive intelligence, but at the same time he needs to be able to give advice about everyday matters. In his connection to the divine sphere, the houngan is equally

double-natured. Alternately he rules over, and serves the loas. While during the ceremonies the houngan mediates between the community and the gods so that they bring their help, he also needs to be extremely careful about the decoration of the altar and the offerings to the loas, because his skill as server to the loas is of enormous importance if the houngan wants to receive their help, and thus be respected among his people. In a similar way, Ti-Jean performs the ritualistic acts of saluting the animals and then the dead, as a manifestation of his respect, in order to receive their much needed help.

The story of Ti-Jean comes from a festival ritual played in St Lucia at Christmas. A man dressed as the Devil parades down the street, together with a group of devils, scaring people and defying and challenging everyone. At every crossroad, the Devil performs a life-giving ritual of resurrection.

Papa Diable (The Devil), with a following of Ti Diables (little devils), is challenged to a duel by the Acrobat who is knocked down by the Devil. However, with the help of two friends, or so, the Acrobat, sword in hand, revives and attacks Papa Diable ... This time, the Acrobat emerges as the winner. Then he performs an acrobatic dance of victory. (Ashaolu 122)

Ashaolu explains this ritual as a Christian festival symbolising the death and resurrection of Christ. The Devil in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, however, does not appear as completely evil, and he is not destroyed, but temporarily beaten. Taylor describes the evil component within the narrative structure of Hatian vodun as an unavoidable integral part of life, and it is through laughter and humour that the awareness of death is dealt with within this narrative. (Taylor 122) In Walcott's play, the Devil appears at first as a frightening figure, but soon the humorous tone cools down his menace. Although he does devour the first two brothers, the three



encounters with the devil are full of puns and jokes, stage pantomime humour, and they are charged with an important emotional energy relating to family, friendship, and compassion. The Devil is humanised, not beaten, and his ambiguity escapes the Manichean duality of good versus evil. *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* resorts not only to a folk tale, but to an Afro-Caribbean narrative structure (as represented by a collectively-driven Anancy, or a vodun ritual of resurrection). Thus, Walcott is weaving a subtle narrative of symbolic and linguistic creolisation that brings together different cultures and figures to understand the past through a mythical form. Ti-Jean works not as hero or trickster figure, but as a folktale, in the sense that it is, like Taylor's explanation of Haitian vodun, a narrative structure that accommodates evil and the lived experience.

Wilson Harris includes in the development of the position of the artist a third metaphor that accounts for the duality of a conscious/unconscious state on the part of the artist. Walcott's *Ti-Jean* reflects this last reference, that of Ulysses in his escape from Circe. The episode of the flight from the Sirens, where Ulysses is tied to the vessel and loses all rationality while his crew keep the vessel safe, is introduced by Harris as the perfect description of an unstable position between consciousness and the unconscious. The artist must hear the Sirens and be in contact with the divine, but he must also keep a link with the reality of his community. This ambiguous situation is an unstable state of mind that has been termed 'imperfect rationality' in psychological studies, (Elster 36) meaning that the rationality is achieved through indirect means. The result of not giving in to the Sirens is not merely an escape from them, but rather, an opportunity to access a certain level of knowledge, while maintaining a control through reliance on a

community.<sup>9</sup> Harris focuses on the importance of the Sirens' message, and its role in uncovering hidden truths that spring from a 'divine' sphere, an unconscious sphere.

Harris believes in the collective unconscious as a repository of myths which can nourish the conscious imagination and create illuminating perceptions of landscape and history. (Wilson-Tagoe 1998: 114)

Within the stages followed by the artist, the myth of Ulysses accounts for his position as walking on unstable ground in the communication process. Through this configuration, the artist and the community receive their reward as a new perception and experience of the past. That is the importance of overcoming the Sirens' music, the "drama of consciousness". Bringing about the knowledge hidden in the collective unconscious requires a flexible figure that can move between the conscious and unconscious realms. This figure's robes fit Walcott's Ti-Jean in his encounter with the Devil throughout the third scene. Right before he leaves his home, his mother describes him as 'A stalk, bending in wind / With no will of its own.' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 132) Like Ulysses, the power of his mind appears threatened, subject to stronger forces. Ti-Jean's reply acknowledges his weakness, but wisely contextualises this drawback, arguing that while others might seem more capable, stronger and determined, they are actually at the same level, because nobody controls his own life or death. Thus, the third scene presents Ti-Jean as a weak character, but one that is aware of his own weakness. Like Ulysses, he is aware of the dangers and accepts them. In contrast to his two elder brothers, Ti-Jean's humbleness and common sense prevent him

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<sup>9</sup> This structure is very similar to the experience of possession through trance as described in chapter 1.

from showing the sinful pride and arrogance that end up destroying his two brothers. This main divergence from their former behaviour allows Ti-Jean to take advantage of the advice his mother gives him before leaving: 'Instinct be your shield, / It is wiser than reason. (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 133-134) These words, said by one of the characters that take up the role of Tiresias, teach Ti-Jean to listen to the unconscious. Ultimately, Ti-Jean fulfils the role that Harris ascribes to Ulysses. Divine knowledge, the voice of the collective unconscious, brought to the surface through instinct rather than reason, acquires a value that Ti-Jean trusts in order to take the risk posed by the Devil.

The structure of the vessel in Ulysses' myth, as Harris explains, facilitates his contact with the unconscious while not being driven by it. In the case of Ti-Jean, this balance is achieved through different means. Several ritualistic events precede his encounter with the Devil. His conversation with the creatures of the forest acts as a way of being in harmony with nature, something both Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean had failed at in their journey through the forest. The tone of Ti-Jean's exchanges with the animals is one where praise dominates over mock and arrogance. The repetition of his admiration for the beauty and value of these creatures brings balance and opens up the stream of advice from these animals that constitute a second Tiresias in the play. Immediately after this conversation is concluded, Ti-Jean shows his determination to meet the Devil, but finds the tombs of his brothers. Here, the second ritualistic act of weeping for the dead takes place. Harmony with nature is followed by peace with the dead, and it is only after these that he can go on towards his battle. The animals, like the deaf crew of the vessel, advice him not to look at the tombs. The muse of death, consciousness of death, is ignored by the animals, but Ti-Jean gains consciousness and keeps on. In refusing

to remain ignorant, he places the narrative again in the tradition of the trickster as opposed to Kerényi's explanation of the Book of Job. Ti-Jean's instinctive drive encourages him to move on, impatient to meet the Devil. His 'oracle,' in the shape of the animals, balances out this instinct, and brings the rational element that is constituted by the crew in Ulysses' vessel. Even though the dead brothers might seem to play a rather passive role, links between them and the animals suggest that their part is activated after death through the animals. After Ti-Jean's double ritual of being at peace with the animals and with the dead, the frog addresses him as 'brother', offering to help whenever Ti-Jean calls them. When the Devil first outwits the young man, he asks for help, calling his brothers, and going back to the crosses. Immediately afterwards, the bird comes to help him unmask the Devil. In essence, nature shares with the dead a realm that Ti-Jean needs to access in order to deal with evil.

Once the Devil's true appearance is revealed, with the protagonist having full access to this other level of knowledge, Ti-Jean needs to retreat to the previous state where masks allow him to interact with the Devil. Being able to move from a rational, conscious state, to another where he is in contact with the dead, the animals and the Devil's true face, this episode presents Ti-Jean as a Ulysses figure, swaying between the conscious and the unconscious. However, the intensity of each realm proves too strong to maintain, and thus Ti-Jean asks the devil to wear his mask again, because 'this is like looking / At the blinding gaze of God.' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 145) During their fight, Ti-Jean rebels and moves outside the Devil's domain, thinking freely and acting according to his own will. This possibility exists for Ti-Jean because he has been able to access and face the true appearance of the Devil. Little by little, the game of

masking and unmasking develops into a reversal of the original situation: after a couple of pages, the Devil needs a mask to cover not just his true evil nature, but also the fact that he is being defeated by Ti-Jean. After the young man castrates the goat, the Devil appropriates Ti-Jean's brothers' 'smile' that conceals his impatience and growing anger: 'Angry? I'm not angry. I'm not vexed at all. / You see? Look! I'm smiling.' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 146-147) At this stage, Ti-Jean has managed to stay inside his own domain, and move the Devil to the position that he would have found himself into, had he not been flexible enough to maintain an equilibrium between the conscious and the unconscious, the dead and the living. The danger of his position lies in its very flexibility. On the one hand it empowers Ti-Jean against the Devil; on the other, it prevents him from standing on stable ground. Soon the Devil recovers his vigour and authority, and tries the young man a second time with another menial task. The Sirens strike Ulysses' vessel again with their fatal music. But this time, Ti-Jean knows how to fight back and not lose his temper: he has found a balance on his flexibility, and again steps outside the boundaries set by the devil. With the aid of the workers, he destroys the very foundations of the Devil's power, and burns down his plantations. Ti-Jean has finally found the Devil's Achilles' heel: 'The one way to annoy you is rank disobedience.' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 153) The Devil is resourceful though, and tries to find Ti-Jean's vice. Once more, the young man is way ahead of him. First he deceives the Devil by pretending to be drunk and off-guard. Second, he shows the Devil his burning house. At this point, the Devil, weakened by drink and by being outwitted before, reveals his anger, and technically loses the fight. The devils and the Bolom recognise Ti-Jean as the winner, and ask their master to be fair. However, the Devil shows no desire to

play fair, and decides to eat Ti-Jean anyway. The mother, the Bolom, and Ti-Jean himself beg for justice, and insist that the Devil keeps his promise. In the end, he accepts, but not without a final blow; his last trial on Ti-Jean. He will fulfil his promise and restore the Bolom's life, if Ti-Jean can accept his mother's death. For this test, Ti-Jean needs the guidance of the animals again, who, as the Devil says, 'have no evil in them.' (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* 150) At this moment, when the vessel starts drifting towards destruction, the crew, in the shape of the animals, guide Ti-Jean to redirect the development of events once more towards balance. Ti-Jean must not get vexed, he must beat the Devil once more and accept death as the animals do, without anger, frustration, or evil. Nature teaches Ti-Jean how to accept this:

Sing, Ti-Jean, sing!  
Show him you could win!  
Show him what a man is!  
Sing Ti-Jean ... Listen,  
All around you, nature  
Still singing. The frog's  
Croak doesn't stop for the dead;  
The cricket is still merry,  
The bird still plays its flute,  
Every dawn, little Ti-Jean ... (Walcott *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*  
162)

The position of the artist, according to Harris, can only be explained through a mythical configuration or structure, as that of Ulysses and the crew in the vessel. In his introduction to Glissant's Caribbean Discourse, Michael Dash recovers Harris's analysis of Ulysses and his crew, and relates it to Glissant's concept of immobility that the written text requires. 'Glissant sees the crew or community as

deaf but following an involuntary movement. The creative imagination, chained to the same vessel or island, is the lone, immobile figure, voluntarily bound to the ship's mast, and sensing through it the shudder of the vessel and the energy of the crew.' (Dash xxviii) In the case of the Ulysses/crew image as presented in relation to Glissant, the immobile figure seems to be directing the vessel, with the crew experiencing the uncontrollable movement. The role of the immobile Ulysses is to restrain the excessive physical movement caused by a long repression of one's identity by colonialism. The Caribbean's tremendous physical energy, as expressed through Carnival, for example, requires from the artist an immobility in order to transfer orality to a text, and thus manifest 'secret accumulated hurts.' (Glissant 4) Ulysses and the crew occupy different mythical spaces: through his hearing of the Sirens, Ulysses enters a realm that his crew – his community – ignores. Similarly, Ti-Jean enters an area within the myth that is beyond the reach of other characters in the play; neither the mother nor the animals or the workers have access to that space. Ti-Jean's brothers enter the space of challenge, and die. Like the crew, the animals go with Ti-Jean and guide him, but remain within a safe distance from the Devil, and advise Ti-Jean *not to look* at his brothers' tombs. There is, therefore, a certain magical quality to this space, which bears similarities with Haitian vodun, through the ritual of going back and forth, entering this magical space that is both dangerous and empowering. It seems, therefore, that the artist occupies a position that raises his status over the rest of the people. As a total guide, he has access to information no one else can understand. Walcott was criticised as a director for his dictatorial manner, and the 1970 production happened in the middle of a schism in the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, for this reason among others. In addition to this, Walcott wrote about West Indian

physicality in terms that proved controversial: 'Our sin in West Indian art is the sin of exuberance, of self-indulgence'. (Walcott 'Meanings' 47) Olaniyan criticises what he reads as Walcott's attempt to domesticate this excess:

If carnival is to be used at all, the strong folk content would have to be tamed, by Japanese and English, specifically Elizabethan, traditions. ... These are good grounds for being suspicious of Walcott's history as myth and its vaunted openness. In fact, his kind of reading of carnival could not but sound elitist and Eurocentric to its committed defenders. (Olaniyan 103)

Reading Walcott's considerations in the light of Harris's description of myth as applied to Glissant by Michael Dash, however, his point about providing a formal shape for a seemingly excessive physicality can be understood as a declaration of his personal quest, as a writer, for a pattern to give some direction to what he considers as an overwhelming energy in carnival. (Walcott 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' 55) Transferring folk festivals into the artistic realm requires a form that is not prescribed by the artist from above – or from England – but rather, a form that springs from the very rituals that are being discussed: 'But those who see only disorder, futility, and chaos must look for the patterns which they produce'. (Walcott 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' 55) For his own theatre, Walcott found that the strict physicality of Japanese theatrical forms were useful in the Caribbean context.<sup>10</sup>

Carnival was regarded as a model for a Caribbean theatre. Its history of resistance to prohibitions, and the combination of characters, steelband, music forms, masking and parading made of Carnival one of the strongest ritualistic festivals to draw from. The theories as to how this would have to be done differed

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2.



between those who considered the festival itself as what Caribbean theatre should aim at, and those who, like Walcott, considered that folklore had to be adapted, through literary form, in order to become artistic theatre on the stage. According to King, Walcott's theory was that art begins in folklore, but that for the playwright to be a serious artist, he needed to study art, and he would need to become, somehow, a ruler over his company, demanding absolute obedience from its members. (King 1995: 49) Walcott's focus on form and on the sacredness of art meant that every other consideration had to be subjected to art. 'Walcott openly said he believed theatre was an undemocratic dictatorship in which the talented ruled and others followed.' (King 1995: 128) Just as Ti-Jean in the play has access to a sphere that the rest do not enter – or are not ready or skilful enough to deal with – the artist has 'talent', a special gateway into art. Even though the terms Walcott used were probably not intended as conciliatory, his attitude springs from an infinite respect and care for folk forms, and it is with talent and hard work that the artist must approach these. Walcott does not reject folklore, but the superficiality and inauthenticity of certain folkloric expressions. As in Dash's reading of Glissant, the artist needs to guide a community that exerts a tremendous power brought about by a history of repression of that energy. Through Harris's interpretation of the myth of Ulysses, Walcott's 'absolutism' becomes, rather, a guidance within a new architecture of the world, one that is unstable and uncertain. This new architecture, as we have seen, draws links between the artist and Tiresias, the vodun dancer and Ulysses, and through the fable of Ti-Jean, with ambiguous narratives that remain open to new possibilities, like that of Anancy the trickster spider, and that of Haitian vodun; and finally, through the latter, with the Haitian revolution, historical and mythical symbol of

the resistance and defeat of colonialism and enslavement. However, the artist as guide is not an isolated figure: Ti-Jean does not function alone. Like the vodun houngan, he also serves the community; like Ulysses, he needs his crew in order to move forward. Walcott as artist draws not only from folk festivals, and the art of story-telling, but he is also guided by language form, the dialect speech of the community. It is within this linguistic space that the artist creates the new architecture of the world that escapes the traditional Western tragic ending of fate – as represented in the deaths of the two elder brothers – and inaugurates a new era where the trapping mould of Manichean opposites disappears.

Yet, there is one aspect in the play that seems to make Ti-Jean position himself as somehow superior to his community. When he addresses the workers, Ti-Jean tells them that he is the new foreman. The figure of Ti-Jean as foreman is controversial. For practical reasons, he takes on the persona of the foreman, who is the planter's right-hand employee. Awareness on the part of the workers is not relevant in order to achieve liberation. There is grounds to find in this behaviour a foreshadowing of figures like the Duvaliers, tyrants over their communities; figures whose egotistical madness Walcott writes about in 'What the Twilight Says' – referring in part to himself, and, I have earlier suggested, to Trinidad's first Prime Minister, Dr Eric Williams – and which he develops further in his play *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* springs from the indigenous people, it is based on highly specific socio-historical coordinates, and it is defined as much by the text as by the rehearsal, the process of developing a physical acting technique, and the resulting performance. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* was written throughout a whole decade, before it took its final form in 1967, for its performance at the first Caribana Festival, in Toronto. For years, Walcott rehearsed bits and wrote the parts with specific actors in mind, (King 1995: 82) in the same way as the character 'types' that appear in the play were modelled on real people in St Lucia. Makak was a man who 'got drunk every weekend, and would be put in jail after hitting people and breaking up bars. His employer would then bail him out.' (King 2000: 241) Walcott's writing of the play becomes a filtering process with real people and St Lucian society in mind, and the actor's physical appearance and performative abilities, including voice and diction, as the original source for the resulting form. The extent to which his company had become a form in itself was obvious when Walcott explained in a letter that the play was a total, indigenous theatre to be performed by his company, and that the complexity and specificity of the Caribbean should not be culturally transferred in the United States as a black-protest text. (King 1995: 136-7) The performance, the delivery of the text, the dances, songs, movement and speech are as much a part of the play as the text itself. The very physicality of the actors is an agent in creating the play. This vigorous and incontestable connection between the playwright, the actors and the

play parallels Harris's Ulysses/crew configuration in a real-life situation. Tied to the performance space, the playwright pulls in one direction, while the actors redirect the movement through their own energy and effort. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* appears, then, as a living text, a living performance that is geographically and socially defined in a way that suggests a ritualistic character: the play works within a very specific social and cultural context. It will become something else if played by different people. The process of rehearsal, the development of speech and movement by the actors become initiation rituals that enable them to achieve the level of performative control that Walcott's West Indian theatre aimed at. '[T]he bongo or wake dance, the donkey dance, the Baptist and revivalist, Shango rites and African dances' had been filtered and disciplined into a rigidity that followed the precepts of the strict Japanese Kabuki.' (King 1995: 136)

In 'What the Twilight Says', Walcott refers to this process as an imaginative and bodily journey towards an original instinctive state where movements need to be learned again: 'we must begin again from the bush.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 26) The actor's journey involves a linguistic and physical reduction that is explained in terms of memory loss. Walcott's efforts at absolute control of the performance, based on theatrical influences ranging from the Kabuki to the idea of a director's theatre (such as Brecht's or Artaud's), appear to mix at this stage with his own unresolved dualism between ancestries.

I was taught to trim my tongue as a particular tool which could as easily have been ordered from England as an awl or a chisel, and that eloquence which I required of its actors was against the grain of their raw and innocent feeling. This kind of aggression increased

an egotism which can pass for genius. I was thus proclaimed a prodigy because I insisted on a formality which had nothing to do with their lives. It made me believe that twilight had set me apart and naturally I arrived at the heresy that landscape and history had failed me. (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 32)

Walcott then adopts the persona of the martyr, whose self-sacrifice springs from narcissism and results in an anger that calls for revenge. The process of reducing the movements and speech markers off the actors' bodies and voices responds on the one hand to a search for a West Indian essence directed by form; in practice, on the other hand, it becomes an extension of the trimming of his tongue: a self-inflicted wound caused by an identity crisis. Walcott would dwell in this 'ecstasy of nervous exhaustion' and anger, as an antidote to drowsiness, and carrying his company through this period of darkness, he recreated this violent anger on stage: 'plays with the purgation of revenge.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 36)

Identity confusion, bodily reduction, disappearance and anger constitute the themes of the poems analysed earlier as depicting Walcott's concerns at the time.<sup>11</sup> 'Hic Jacet' presents a confused and ambiguous poetic persona that undergoes an Eliotian death by drowning before becoming elemental man, the commoner. The erasure of history caused by colonialism is the focus of 'A Change of Skin', where hatred adopts the shape of a purifying burning flame which, however, does not yet reveal the poet's new reflection. Nature's unrestricted destructive power appears in 'Air' as both an impassive demolition of the poet's known world, and a liberating erasure of the colonial definition of the poet's identity. Finally, 'Negatives' directly addresses the problem of political corruption of blacks blinded by the colonial racial precepts. As a unifying trait,

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2.

the poetic persona in all of these poems appears as an impotent observer, a passive sufferer or watcher of the erasure of identity. As Ismond argues, this is a period of 'abandoning dead metaphors' through 'a complex, arduous, exploratory process, fraught with an inevitable burden of pain and possibility, as well as residual ambivalence.' (Ismond 2001: 57) In the poems, Walcott resorts to possibility within the landscape. In 'Guyana', the poet floats down the waterfalls like a flower, rather than drowning, (Ismond 2001: 95) in a Harrisian escape from nihilism and utter destruction. Finding an alternative to an identity crisis that mirrors the region's own shifting patterns of self-definition within the theatre proves more complicated, as Walcott's egotistical and dictatorial manner are caused by resentment and anger. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* provides a channel, a creative catalyst for Walcott's poetic concerns at the time. The journey to an essential state, the sinking to the bottom of the sea, is realised through the dream, and the performance's communal character, the inter-dependent configuration of text-actor-rehearsal-playwright bring the drowning afloat again, like the weightless flower, in a resurrection that inaugurates a new beginning for man. In the Prologue, when asked for his name, Makak answers: 'I forget'. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 219) The play will become a nightmarish journey in search of his forgotten identity.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* has been analysed as an exorcism, a healing experience that liberates the society from the trap of a Manichean racial dualism that prevents freedom of the individual. Olaniyan focuses on the interplay between body and discourse, and the performative, linguistic, and thematic tensions within the play. While he recognises Walcott's effort as an effective rendering of a mythic-historical account on to the stage, he nonetheless criticises

the sophistication of the language as a drawback, arguing that a fair amount of the public would not fully understand the meanings contained in the play. (Olaniyan 170) This lack of understanding seems to extend to several critics, who find the play's ending a defeat, the violence and beheading of the white apparition an apology of revolutionary violence, or even the play itself as having nothing to do with politics. According to Willis, the dream is simply a parenthesis between being a charcoal burner, and being a charcoal burner. Makak remembers his name, and goes back to the same life as before, embodying 'a dream of freedom that must be maintained in the colonized world.' The 'glorifying and idealizing' of Africa 'displays the power of the theatre in everyday life.' For this critic, Makak's hallucination is an 'awakening', an 'illusion to discover his essential self.' (Willis 154) The fact that Makak's liberation comes through the beheading of that very hallucination is completely overlooked in Willis's reading, and the mistake of equating the dream with Makak's identity misses the exorcising character of the play. One Lacanian reading of Walcott reveals the play's commentary about identity formation as being constituted in the interactions between characters. The play, rich in role switching, gives ample examples of the different stages to form a social and personal identity in the Caribbean. Hogan explains that the first stage of 'Mimeticism' is characterised by a desire to be white, a schizophrenic condition resulting in racial despair (Makak identifies himself as ugly because he is not white), or in 'mimetic collaborationism' (Lestrade, the mulatto, considers himself whiter than the rest). The second stage, 'Reactionary Nativism', is developed either romantically by Makak, or through greed and opportunism, by Moustique. The last stage, 'Post-colonization Identity' is realised at the individual level by Lestrade, and at the communal level by Makak in his ritual of violence. Hogan

confesses that he is 'uncomfortable with this ending' (Hogan 116), and that he is not the only one. Suggesting that Walcott agrees with what he considers to be Fanon's defence of violence as illuminating, he concludes that "Fanon seems to be just wrong here", and explains that violence only results in more violent leaders rising to power, that it perpetuates itself, and that '[m]oreover, it will tend to operate through and thus support the sort of stratified thinking, and thus identity, promulgated by colonial racism.' (Hogan 116) Paradoxically, Hogan's explanations follow Fanon's own thesis, which is a psychiatrist's analysis of the colonial and postcolonial mind, rather than an invitation to violent action: the coloniser's violence causes an endemic violence in the colonial society, which continues into the postcolonial state. The passages Hogan quotes from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* are part of the first chapter 'Concerning Violence', where Fanon explains the mechanisms through which decolonisation takes place. Hogan refers to the following passage: 'At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force.' (Fanon 94) Hogan discards the opening phrase 'At the level of the individuals', changing the tone of the sentence from expository to sentential. Earlier in the same chapter, Fanon explains that the process of changing a society around is so vast, that the native 'is ready for violence at all times.' (Fanon 37) He then explains this violence through a description of the colonial world where the agents of government relate to the citizen by force, creating a dualism where the native's position is inevitably that of confronting the colonial violence. Further on, Fanon explains this as a Manichean world: 'The natives' challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a treatise of the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute.' (Fanon 41) Within the chapter concerning violence, Fanon refers to



rituals of possession as an existing cultural pattern that liberates the dream of violence that springs from the colonial experience:

the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away. The circle of the dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits. ... Symbolical killings, fantastic rides, imaginary mass murders – all must be brought out. The evil humors are undimmed, and flow away with a din as of molten lava. (Fanon 57)

As a parallel to Walcott's play, this passage fits Makak's dream much better than the phrase that Hogan decontextualises. Like these rituals, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* does not advance a judgement over violence. The play acknowledges the forces and psychological mechanisms of decolonisation, and translates them into the specific case of the Caribbean.

Considering the relevance and influence of Fanon's work in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Innes's suggestion that there is no political dimension to this play is a striking statement; or, as Hogan would put it, Innes 'seems to be just wrong here.' Innes reaches this conclusion by arguing that 'Walcott has said so little ... about the aims of his drama, or its interpretation, that it counts as an intentional denial of external commentary. This implies a rejection of any direct political dimension for a play such as *Dream on Monkey Mountain*'. (Innes 79) Paradoxically, Innes then extends on Walcott's opinions about revolutionary art, Marxism, Africanism, and the way in which the play deals with the binary coloniser/colonised, the black bourgeoisie, the trickster as fighting oppression, and the links between this play and Genet's *The Blacks*, Beckett, Yeats, Césaire's negritude, all of which are political issues. Innes seems to read Walcott's criticism of certain political trends as a rejection of politics altogether, in favour of art as

the only possible militancy. Although it is true that Walcott presents his play from the very beginning as a contradictory and derivative dream of the writer, it was published alongside 'What the Twilight Says', from which Innes extracts his argument for Walcott's opposition between politics and art: 'The future of West Indian militancy lies in art.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 18) Again, a phrase out of context misleads the critical reading of the play. Walcott's essay deals with his theatrical experience in the political context of decolonisation, and art becomes the radical, revolutionary change that the region needs. The word 'militancy' is political, the social change is political, and the plays deal with these processes through an art that aims at being truly revolutionary. Walcott's criticism of politics, his views on the different decolonisation processes, his awareness that intellectual debate often goes on without the participation of the people, all of these are political concerns. Innes concludes by analysing the socio-political impact of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in the context of the Black Power Revolution in Trinidad. (Innes 83-4)

Critics dealing with *Dream on Monkey Mountain* emphasise the cultural richness of a play that combines cultural elements from a great variety of sources. Breiner mentions the reference to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Biblical elements in the structure of descent from the mountain, the Saturday delirium and the Sunday ascent as the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, Tigre and Souris as the good and bad thieves crucified with Jesus, and the use of masks and role-play as a Carnival trait from West Indian folklore. Thieme points to the relevance of the formal elements, the music, the dances, and 'an impromptu dance performance which includes the singing of a bongo.' (Thieme 223) Wilson-Tagoe refers to this rich performance, and then concentrates on the interpretation of Makak as a lone

visionary whose dream is a metaphorical cathartic liberation of the 'alienated and schizophrenic psyche that brings on Makak's hallucination'. (Wilson-Tagoe 1998: 176) Similarly, Ismond defines Makak as an alienated figure representing the 'poet-hermit' (Ismond 2001: 51)

Thieme contrasts *Dream on Monkey Mountain* to a much earlier play, *Henri Christophe* (1950). He argues that Christophe's tragedy extends to the formal aspect of Walcott's play, in that the form of the play fails to step outside the Manichean binary. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, however, does not belong to the 'apprenticeship' period, and it successfully develops a form that moves across different heritages: 'the play itself employs a theatrical mode which, while drawing on a diverse and polyphonic range of intertexts, is rooted in folk forms and thus transcends both European and African atavism.' (Thieme 228) Regarding the violence in the trial scene, Thieme's interpretation provides an illuminating reading of a controversial episode that has been read as a justification of revenge. In Thieme's view, the trial scene is a comic climatic moment of apotheosis, 'a riot of parody and pantomime.' (Thieme 224) The use of random African elements emphasises the exaggerated tone of a scene that is aimed at farcical ridicule rather than solemn justice and retribution.

Seriousness arrives with the beheading of the white apparition, which Makak wants to perform alone. Stepping out of the theatrical scene, he creates an aura of ceremonial sacredness which, together with the denouement, brings an ambiguous ending to the play. Wilson-Tagoe pinpoints the problem of Makak's return to 'a society that remains basically unchanged.' (Wilson-Tagoe 1998: 177) She rejects a reading of the ending as suggesting that a return to Africa can only be realised through hallucination and romanticism, given Walcott's formal

engagement in revealing the continuities between Africa and the Caribbean. The mythic atmosphere of Makak's awakening, she explains, points towards a metaphorical beginning of a Caribbean community. But Wilson-Tagoe hints that the relevance of the mythic conception of history is not fully answered in the play. Thieme interprets Makak's beheading of the white apparition as an exorcism that positions Makak outside the opposing duality Europe-Africa. The ending, for Thieme as for Wilson-Tagoe, presents a paradox. The reference to the Middle Passage cannot be read as a return to Africa, as the play clearly rejects this solution, and Thieme finds the answer in the fact that the dream seems Lestrade's as much as Makak's, thus rendering the individual exorcism collective. The mythical dream represents a communal coming to terms with hybrid origins. Wilson-Tagoe sees the play's purgation as individual, and considers the collectivity of the performance as a big 'mass' that may or may not bring liberation. (Wilson-Tagoe 1995: 33) Still, the problem of Makak's return to an unchanged society remains unsolved.

The influence of Fanon in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is made explicit by Walcott himself, through the use of quotations and references to his work. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has summarised what he calls 'critical Fanonism.' According to Gates, Said's use of Fanon as a global theorist inaugurated a fertile critical debate about the tension between the global and the specific, the gap between the discursive/theoretical and the actual reality, and the problems that arise from 'applying' in other cases what Fanon considered context-specific works. Bhabha's Lacanian reading of Fanon brings to the surface the 'colonial ambivalence' of the decolonization process. In turn, Jan Mohamed objects to Bhabha's discursive empowerment of the colonised as agent within the colonial context, as it ignores

Fanon's description of the Manichean relation between the coloniser and the colonised. According to Benita Parry, Jan Mohamed reads Fanon's work as a reaching point, and not as a transitory stage of liberation, while she agrees with Mohamed that both Bhabha and Spivak deal exclusively at the discursive level. Parry's contribution to the debate brings forth an overlooked aspect of Fanon's works: the need for a new configuration of identity outside the dominant structures of representation. Parry proposes a Fanonian critical mode that 'rejects totalizing abstracts of power as falsifying situations of domination and subordination'. (Gates 464) However, Gates explains that the Fanon that has been recovered for global colonial discourse theory is a different figure from the Fanon according to the society he wrote about. Tunisian novelist and philosopher Albert Memmi falls back on Fanon's own life to emphasise his distance from the Algerian culture; even his work as a psychiatrist in Algeria and Tunisia had to be conducted with the help of a translator. Memmi criticises Fanon for being haunted by his own racial issues, expecting that after the liberation process, a completely new man will emerge. Finally, Neil Lazarus recovers the racial and revolutionary element in Fanon, explaining his current relevance in a world still driven by the same old imperial order. It is this Fanon that Taylor analyses in connection to Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. In particular, Taylor is interested in the way in which Walcott employs the myths of vodun mythology, the trickster tale, and negritude as narrative structures that Fanon explained in the context of decolonisation and the struggle for national liberation through their symbolic structure. Taylor makes a distinction between the mythical structures within the drama of colonialism, and their transformation into narratives that inaugurate cultures of liberation. This transformation occurs through a historical awareness,

'the revolutionary consciousness of colonial and neo-colonial socio-political systems'. (Taylor 185) This implicit filtering of religious mythology and ritual, and of folkloric narratives into a different kind of template echoes Walcott's vindication for the need to filter raw folkloric forms into an art form. Thus, Haitian vodun mythology can appear as a narrative structure that restores social structures under colonialism, and afterwards, 'in the revolutionary moment', as a narrative that conveys the imperative of freedom. Folklore does not have in itself a specific political correlative, nor does race. Taylor explains that, according to Fanon, '[t]o talk about black culture is to reduce to an abstract idea the specific cultural expressions that developed in response to unique conditions.' (Taylor 162) This is evident in Walcott's endeavour to represent racial concerns within the specific context of the Caribbean, and it extends to his philosophy of theatre and his reluctance to perform his play with a foreign cast that would alter the meaning. The 'unique conditions' of his actors' apprenticeship, rehearsals and speech were intrinsic to the meaning of the play, intrinsic to his idea of the play as West Indian. The play's exorcism is of the colonial world definition in terms of race.

Taylor analyses Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* through the playwright's use of Haitian vodun mythology to create a narrative of liberation. The central ritual of resurrection, and Makak's judgement and condemnation of the white race relate the play to the figure of Baron Samedi, in an attempt to give mythic form to Makak's incoherence. (Taylor 214) Taylor explains the myth of Baron Samedi, who belongs to the Gede loa, tricksters within Haitian vodun mythology, as an ambiguous principle which accounts for the shift from vodun employed during the Haitian revolution as an instrument of resistance and struggle, to vodun adopted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a tool of

political control by oppressive leaders. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott shows this ironic shift in political stances through the ambiguity principle of Baron Samedi, the crossroads loa. After emancipation, the first stage is a sublimation of the colonial culture. Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe tried to suppress vodun. In a reversal of patterns, the subsequent leaders adopt vodun mythology as a means to impose a new oppressive order. Taylor analyses this cultural pattern as a narrative structure, and as such he finds it shows parallels with Walcott's play. When a revolutionary Makak kills Lestrade, the agent of colonialism, the latter resurrects first as a coloniser on an expedition to 'hunt natives,' but then, through the intervention of Baron Samedi, as the revolutionary figure that crowns Makak as king and directs the trial scene of violence. Taylor finds further links with Haitian vodun mythology in the puppet-like character of Makak at several points during the play, explaining that Makak 'has become a zombie under the control of a sorcerer, Corporal Lestrade, and his divine master, Baron Samedi.' (Taylor 214) Taylor explains that Walcott's play becomes a narrative of liberation for the Caribbean through Makak's use of Baron Samedi's power over life and death. Walcott transforms 'the Afro-Haitian Baron Samedi into a new creative symbol'. (Taylor 214) The beheading of the white apparition represents Makak's 'leap to a liberating consciousness.' (Taylor 204) According to Taylor, the change that occurs in the play is Makak's return to society with a new self-awareness. (Taylor 205) Taylor reads Moustique as a demonic trickster in that he exploits his own people, but also, as the character who unveils the truths of the society. Finally, Taylor closes the analysis of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* with a definition of Makak that echoes Walcott's denouement as a commoner in

‘Hic Jacet’: ‘Makak is the Caribbean peasant or working-class person who has completed the liberating journey of self-recovery.’ (Taylor 223)

Although Taylor’s conclusion of self-awareness and a return to reality with a new consciousness of self-identity explains the play’s ending and solves the problem of the unchanged society, Taylor’s analysis is limited to one reading. The text arrives at the category of narrative of liberation, a liberation which Haitian vodun mythology does not entail by itself. The ambiguous principle embodied in the figure of Baron Samedi, the principle that shifts and causes change, is, in the play, controlled by Makak, who transforms Baron Samedi’s shifting power into the power of liberation within the Caribbean context. Several problems arise from Taylor’s reading. His analysis depends on the one character that was included in the play after it was written, in order to give Albert Laveau ‘something to do’. (King 1995: 83) King explains that the part of Basil existed before, but was given further relevance to give Laveau a part to play. (King 1995: 172) However, Walcott himself backs up the interpretation of Baron Samedi in the play as a central figure that acquires an unexpected importance in terms of interpretation and meaning:

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 Le Veau ... We were going on tour, but there was no part in it for him. So I worked in the figure from the center 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’s one of the beautiful accidents that can happen when you have a good company. (Walcott ‘Meanings’ 47)



Taylor's analysis, fully backed up by Walcott's words, rightly places Baron Samedi at the core of his interpretation. In spite of the fact that Taylor brings our attention to a figure that has been somewhat overlooked in the criticism of the play, his reading restricts the relevance of other characters in the play, especially Moustique, who is as complex a figure as Baron Samedi, and who is treated in Taylor's interpretation as a lesser trickster that is beaten by the greater trickster from Haitian vodun mythology. Moreover, although Taylor rightly points out that the open-ended conclusion to the story should be interpreted as a new beginning, the relevance of language in the play is not analysed as a defining factor. Through the theme of language, the issue of history necessarily follows. The writing of history, the retelling of events, the interplay of the characters' speeches all point to a radical questioning of the concept of history, which Taylor does not mention. Reading Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in terms of a leap into 'history' at a time when Walcott was redefining and delineating his relationship to this term ignores the extent to which this debate shapes his ideas on art and theatre at the time. The relevance of arriving at a self-awareness based on the reality of the Caribbean, however, is an important aspect which is emphasised in an illuminating way throughout Taylor's analysis.

Wilson-Tagoe relates the 'green beginning' to the landscape as origin of the community, and to the process of purgation through the amnesic journey of the actors, as described by Walcott in 'What the Twilight Says.' Walcott propounds a return to a beginning from the bush as a solution to his actors' difficulty in performing absurdist drama, despair, surrealism and the 'catamite dances of death.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 24-25) While rehearsing Jean Genet's *The Blacks*, for example, the actors 'resist the emphatic gaiety of that

dance at the edge of the abyss', (Walcott 'What the Twilighth Says' 24) which constitutes a form of imitation, and not an instinctive physical expression. The play is transformed by the humanist performance of its actors, and it '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, but simply that their minds refuse to be disfigured.' (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 25) Walcott despairs at this theatre which he reads then as a form of avoiding the truth about themselves, and yearns for an instinctive, original performing style from the actors, which requires their starting afresh through amnesia and the destruction of all that is known. Earlier in the sixties, Walcott writes about the problem of surrealism in the Caribbean in different terms. Surrealism is possible in French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese, but not in English – 'Neruda, Lorca, and Cesaire, are to a fair degree, untranslatable [into English].' (Walcott 'Necessity of Negritude' 22) In contrast to Walcott's 1970 call for a return to an original instinctive stage of pre-history, a stage of rediscovery and naming, an Adamic stage, in 1964, he explains the reason why Negritude, through Surrealism, stems from the French Caribbean:

The mnemonic use of words, of naming things and blessing them by naming, is something which has gone out of English, since it is possible that the more complicated in syntax a language becomes the more its original impulses, worship and communication weaken. (Walcott 'Necessity of Negritude' 22)

Leaving aside the questionable comment about English syntax, this statement contradicts his later enterprise of naming the Caribbean, of an Adamic rediscovery of the region. The tribal memories are dead for 'us', meaning the Anglophone Caribbean, and Walcott seems to suggest that, while Negritude is a logical step for

Césaire in the French Caribbean, it does not account for Trinidadian identity, which is plural and mixed. The French Caribbean has to deal with assimilation, while Walcott considers the British as non-interfering. Obviously enough – in hindsight – the Negritude movement as pertaining universally to the black race did have an enormous impact in Trinidad, leading to the Black Power Revolution in 1970. What Walcott's words do show is that his creative struggle was with language. Later, in another essay contemporary with 'What the Twilight Says', after the experience of writing and performing *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, his commentary about the play focuses mainly on the non-linguistic. The bongo dance is explained as an example of the disciplined body movement that he was after, following Japanese precision in art. The figure of the charcoal burner, similar to the Japanese woodcutter (Walcott 'Meanings' 48), constituted in the Caribbean 'the most isolated, most reduced, race-containing symbol.' (Walcott 'Meanings' 48) Walcott talks about visual imagery, actors' movements, and style in terms of one very specific step within the bongo dance. The isolation of detail and the description of the style generated avoid the language issue completely. In fact, Walcott states that his first idea was to 'reduce the play to an inarticulateness of language.' (Walcott 'Meanings' 48) *Dream on Monkey Mountain* would have to be performed through incomprehensible sounds and 'grunts,' the words reduced to 'primal sounds.' However, in writing, 'another more literary tradition took over.' (Walcott 'Meanings' 48) Walcott presents the language aspect as springing from the English tradition. The West Indian style is a 'combination of classic discipline inherited through the language, with a strength of physical expression that comes from the folk music.' (Walcott 'Meanings' 50) The problems with language described in 'What the Twilight Says' are here swiftly

solved by relating the linguistic level to England, and the presence of the West Indian factor is defined in terms of physicality, warrior-like dances, instinctive movement, and folk music. It would seem that the optimistic exaltation of 'Meanings' was re-written the morning after, into the frustrating pessimism present in 'What the Twilight Says.' Both essays are testimony of an unstable period of inner struggle and apprenticeship. Walcott's pessimistic tone, which appears as well in the poem 'Guyana,' is overcome by 'the elation and faith of a fresh order of intelligence [that] win through in the end.' The coexistence of pessimism and an enthusiastic faith are an expression of 'Walcott's identification of his own inner process, as poet in quest of Imagination, with that of the country, which also signals the effort to integrate the poetic self into its living community'. (Ismond 2001: 101)

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* was finally written not in grunts, but rather, in garrulous speeches and dialogue. The use of English in a play that is a comment on the duality between Eurocentrism and Africanism bears a heavy risk, given the automatic implications of choosing the colonial language. In Makak's stepping out of the racial Manichean duality, the play is rehearsing another liberation: that of language itself. The issue of language, a major concern of Walcott's at the time, and one that presented problems for him as a poet and playwright, for his actors, and for his critics, is unravelled in all its intricacies throughout the play. This does not mean that the meaning of Walcott's play rests on its language alone, with the performance forms as colourful accompaniment, but rather, it points to the element that remains problematic within Walcott's company at the time. The theatrical style in terms of movement, dance, bodily expression and control, and musical quality are elements that he can already count on. It is the language that

needs further consideration. Having been criticised from the beginning for his incomprehensible high-brow language, and firmly believing that a truly West Indian poetry and theatre should stem from the rhythms and forms present in folklore, Walcott is engaged throughout these years in a struggle with his own language. After the 1960 production of *Drums and Colours*, Noel Vaz suggested that Walcott 'should not begin by writing a literary play and fitting dances and music to it. He should start with some ideas for scenes, set, and a brief scenario and add lines as the artists develop the materials in workshop.' (King 2000: 167) *Dream on Monkey Mountain* started from a real character that provided the idea, Walcott worked from drawings of the characters and the stage towards the making of his plays, and the play was rehearsed and written throughout the sixties, with the unifying central figure of Baron Samedi acquiring its full import, as explained above, by accident. Vaz's suggestions influenced Walcott, who let the forms and rhythms guide him, and the language follow.

Coming from St Lucia, Walcott found that Trinidad offered a plurality and a mixture free of the polarities between British English and French creole of his own island. But the polarity between standard English and creole divided those who rejected standard English as expressing British culture and identity, and those, who, like Walcott, believed that, as their language, English had to be used for the purpose of expressing their identity. In order to truthfully employ African mythologies and languages, one would need to travel back in time, in the linear, historical sense of time. In a similar way, one cannot express his identity in grunts, and, for Walcott, it is necessary to accept one's language as a valid tool of self-expression. Far from understanding his language as a strict standard English to be achieved – a mimicry of the original – Walcott engaged in his apprenticeship

years in an exploration of English as the language of his expression of West Indian cultural identity. For Walcott, English is not a sanctified holy ideal, but, like any other language, a medium of openness and possibility. In response to Naipaul's coinage of West Indians as 'Mimic Men', Walcott offers an analysis of the concept of mimicry. 'When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes.' (Walcott 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' 53) The absurdity of constraining a language to a mimicry of the 'original' is unveiled in this effective and witty passage:

there is no scientific distinction possible between the last ape and the first man, there is no memory or history of the moment when man stopped imitating the ape, his ancestor, and became human. Therefore, everything is mere repetition. Did the first ape look at his reflection in the mirror of a pond in astonishment or in terror? Could it, or he, identify its or himself, and what name was given to that image? And was it at that moment of the self-naming grunt, a grunt delivered either in terror or in amusement, that the ape became a man? And was that the beginning of the human ego and our history? (Walcott 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?' 53-54)

I quote this passage in full because it works as a prelude to the treatment of language in the play. The connection between the names of the characters and several animals (Makak, monkey, Moustique, mosquito, Tigre, tiger, Souris, mouse), or the absence of an animal reference (Lestrade, who insults them by calling them by their animal name), brings forth the relation animal-man, and raises the question of the humanity of these characters. When Makak remembers his name in the end, he is born – or reborn – as human. The rich interplay of speech types in the play aims at unveiling a one-sided interpretation of language.

Caliban uses Prospero's language to curse the latter. Walcott uses the language of the coloniser to explore his inner divisions, and the risk he takes pays off in the play's linguistic exorcism, that closes Walcott's highly unstable period from his beginning in St Lucia, until 1970 and 'What the Twilight Says.'

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* is presented as a physical poem, and a contradictory dream. Walcott's dream-play exists, he explains, 'as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of its writer.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 208) Part One opens with the main characters in the prison, and moves on to Makak's confessional testimony of his dream. Part Two opens again in the jail, where dream and reality overlap, until the final awakening to a new day. There are two segments to the dream: one is Makak's account, an oral relation of his dream up to the present moment in jail; the second part of the dream begins in the prison, and this time it is not a retelling, but an action dream. Similarly, there are two awakenings to the dream(s): Scene One in Part Two brings us back to the reality in the jail; apparently, the characters are back in the present. However, his first awakening turns out to be the beginning of a nightmarish vision of revolution and violence, where the characters outside the 'first dream' are suddenly engaged as well. In the final scene, Makak wakes up a second and last time into a reality that only exists in the Prologue and the Epilogue. The structural pattern of this complicated dream-play activates Harris's concept of infinite rehearsal understood as a principle of constant and timeless possibility.

As explained in 'Fossil and Psyche,' the manifold fossil of psyche refers to a capacity within the unconscious to uncover a hybrid and heterogeneous 'moment' of genesis that exists as an ever-present parallel alternative. In the play,

Makak first wakes up to a fake reality, a reality of block function polarities. This reality exists as a parallel to a possibility beyond the dream, in the second awakening. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* rehearses a double genesis into an *inferno*, and later into a new *paradiso*. Makak becomes, in this sense, Walcott's Second Adam, as he experiences twice his own genesis or awakening. If in Harris's case the character of young Masters embodies a human living fossil that experiences simultaneously all myths of origin<sup>12</sup>, in Walcott's play, various narratives of genesis coexist that account for Makak's origin, and for his forgotten identity. Makak's origin encompasses all possible discourses.

Representing the language of Roman Law and of England, Corporal Lestrade's rational and 'scientific' speech defines Makak as an ape capable only of obeying orders. Lestrade's is the colonial version of genesis:

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 backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 216-217)

Lestrade also represents the written word. In his mission to bring charges to the prisoner, he sets the questions that will define Makak on paper. In contrast, Makak's account is an oral performance that needs to be acted out, and that moves outside imprisonment in a literal sense – Makak's cage is lifted when he begins his oral narration – and in a linguistic sense, as it cannot be contained within Lestrade's institutional questionnaire that defines identity in colonial terms.

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 1.



Makak's speech, however, is under trial. His identity is being recorded to determine his guilt or innocence, and the Prologue opens up the play as a pantomime trial, where Lestrade's law speech is an incomprehensible gibberish of standard English full of technical jargon and little meaning, while the prisoners, excited at the prospect of a spectacle, play the jurors. Makak's language is described as 'a foul, incomprehensible manner.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 224) The caricaturesque litigation sets the humorous tone of ridicule and mockery. Makak's poetic speech, while liberating him from the cage, is delivered alongside the constant mocking gestures of the other characters on stage. As an alternative dream-like myth of genesis, Makak's speech refers to his life in the mountain, away from society in order to hide his ugliness. 'On resurrection morning,' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 226) he has a dream that takes him, through nature, back into a pre-historic beginning: 'the cigale sawing, / Sawing, sawing wood before the woodcutter.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 227) In his dream, Makak hears a woman singing, and immediately he grows roots. When he hears her voice, Makak changes from 'a wild beast,' to a human being: 'I feel my spine straighten.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 229) Lestrade's remark that 'is this rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 228) interrupts Makak's speech as an ironic and unconscious self-description: Lestrade is the character who embodies the desire to become the closest possible figure to the white colonial in appearance as well as in speech. This first monologue by Makak presents the white apparition as stemming from Africa, in an obscure description that could be understood as a reference to the vodun figure of Erzulie: 'Lady in heaven, is your old black warrior, / The king of Ashanti, Dahomey, Guinea'

(Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 229), and which turns into an ambiguous symbol of Africa and Europe alike. The reference to the straightened spine that humanises Makak, is identical to the origin of humans as explained in Lestrade's genesis speech, a hint that Makak's hallucination follows the same linear view of history as progress and evolution. In spite of his temporary liberation from his cage, Makak's vision is a dream-trap that he will wake up from to find himself in prison once again.

Makak's dream-speech appears twice in the play; first under trial, and then, already within the dream, in a different context, with Moustique as friendly listener. Moustique is younger than Makak, and he is the practical character who feels hungry, needs money, worries about Makak, and brings him out of jail in the end. Taylor sees this character as playing a malevolent, almost evil role in that he deceives the people for money. Taylor rightly points out that, in his unwilling uncovering of his identity, Moustique acts as a messenger of truth, but he must be killed by the people for the sake of narrative justice in the play. However, in a play where most characters willingly or unwillingly deceive either with their language, with role switching, or playing along with the dream story for selfish purposes, the role of uncovering the truth is equally shared by characters. Tigre plays along Makak's dream for money purposes, and then unveils his truth in the forest, thus bringing Makak back to reality. Lestrade exploits and controls the people from his position of power, to then become a convert of Makak's nightmarish dream. Even the people in the market, in a sense, take part in deceit by retelling stories in a mythical mode, adding details and consciously exaggerating Makak's deeds. In fact, one of the women in the market takes the same position as Moustique, when her husband remarks that one of his uncles was

also a healer. Her answer follows the same money-driven thought pattern: 'If you did have an uncle so, you think is basket I would be selling?' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 259) Rather than an ill-disposed, treacherous figure, it seems to me that Moustique bears strong links with the common people – he is poor, hungry, practical, witty, but also weak, and mistaken at times – and, as a Harrisian reading of the play will show, he is also the figure that represents the constant underlying capacity for regeneration within the black function racial polarities of Walcott's dream-play.

Moustique appears in the first scene as Makak's friend who walks up to the mountain to bring him down to the market with him. But Makak is sad, he thinks he's going mad, and Moustique, worried and distressed, checks that he doesn't have a temperature, prepares a hot coffee for him, and refuses to go to the market alone. Instead, he patiently sets to restore Makak so that they can go together. This is a scene of friendship and tenderness, and it is Moustique who gives a second account of genesis, the genesis of their friendship, which becomes a eulogy of Makak, as well as Moustique's own genesis, which turns out to be, in fact, a resurrection:

I remember how you find me. ... Drunk. Soaking drunk ...  
Sleeping anywhere, and one morning when you come to market,  
you find me in the gutter, and you pick me up like a wet fly in the  
dust, and we establish this charcoal business. ... Yes. You was the  
only one to make me believe a breakfoot nigger could go  
somewhere in this life. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 233-  
234)

The image of Moustique as a 'wet fly in the dust', a less graceful phoenix that emerges from the ashes, is the image of a second birth. Makak helped him then,

and gave him direction, but he has forgotten his deed. In telling his story, Moustique is also reminding Makak of his own identity. If previously Makak had described himself in the dream as feeling like God, Moustique's account offers a portrayal of him as a life-giving force, a character who set Moustique right, who made Moustique a human again. As a Prospero-Ariel structure, Makak liberates Moustique and gives him a new life. Unlike Prospero, however, Makak does not establish then a vertical hierarchy where Ariel is enslaved under his rule in order to pay for his favour. Rather, Makak establishes a horizontal friendly and professional bond that is symbolised by Berthilia, the donkey they managed to buy for their business. In brief, Makak has in Moustique the same effect as the white apparition has in him: he causes his spine to straighten, he restores his human quality. However, unlike the white apparition, this story is no mirage. Although apparently this scene takes place within the telling of Makak's dream, Berthilia, the donkey that symbolises the true story of regnesis, the real example of Makak's and Moustique's humanity, appears in the Epilogue, outside the boundaries of the dream, when Moustique arrives to take Makak out of prison. As the character who embodies Makak's humanity and regenerative power, Moustique becomes the underlying realm of possibility that runs throughout the fake alternatives played out throughout the dream. His sacrifice by the people and his death sentence cannot bring the demise of a character who appears, from the start, as a resurrected figure. In his appropriation of Baron Samedi's robes in the second scene of Part One, he is deceiving the people, but he is also playing out the ambiguous Haitian vodun trickster, the principle of social change. In his triumphant return at the end of the play, Moustique typifies Makak's human

factor, which he deemed lost, but which resurrects and breaches the mould of dream, to bring Makak out of prison.

The realm of possibility for a human identity, however, remains hidden behind a dream of dialectic as well as mythical blur. Language and its creative power are at the heart of a play that dissects speeches, words and interactions in such detail that a new dimension of speech emerges. If in the Harrisian Carnival logic the repetition and rehearsal of scenes brings to the surface a deeper dimension of experience on the part of the characters, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*'s rehearsal of speeches and language results in a discovery of English as free from its block function character as the colonial language. The first speech to be rehearsed is Makak's dream monologue.

Makak repeats his dream speech to Moustique. The same words that Makak utters in jail become a different speech in the context of a friendship free of threat. On both occasions the other characters render Makak's speech ridiculous and funny, through their contrasting rational and mocking reaction to the apparition. However, in prison, Makak's speech counteracts the colonial speech of law and judgement, thus becoming a revolutionary discourse that lifts the prison cage and liberates Makak during his account. Moustique, on the other hand, offers no menace, and while he does make fun of Makak at times, he is more worried and saddened than amused by Makak's distress. In reaction to the dream, Moustique first tries to explain that it is nothing more than a bad dream, but when Makak insists, he loses his patience and tries to bring Makak down to what he sees as the fact that he is 'black, ugly, poor, so you worse than nothing.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 237) Although these words follow Lestrade's colonial definition of Makak, they take the latter's dream seriously,

sensing the danger of not realising what Moustique considers to be their actual identity. Moustique reacts impatiently, but the audience knows from before that he respects, admires, and is grateful towards Makak. Unlike Lestrade, Moustique tells Makak: 'You like me. ... together both of us is minus one.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 237) Their interaction as equals is emphasised by Moustique's actions of taking care of the domestic and practical sphere: he makes the coffee, he puts out the fire, tidies the place, and even complains in a demeanour that matches the women's reactions to men in the market: 'The misery black people have to see in this life. ... Him and his damned fits.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 238) The familiarity and closeness of their interaction is further extended when Moustique, after his impatient fit, turns to humour and decides to play along with the story. He won't tell Makak that he is wrong, but instead, he will subvert the sacredness of the apparition by dealing with it in humorous puns and jokes. Once Moustique decides to play along, they become the quixotic pair:

MAKAK

Saddle my horse!

MOUSTIQUE

Eh?

MAKAK

Saddle my horse, if you love me, Moustique, and cut a sharp bamboo for me, and put me on that horse, for Makak will ride to the edge of the world, Makak will walk like he used to in Africa, when his name was lion!

MOUSTIQUE

Saddle your horse? Berthilia the jackass? When you will put sense in that crack coal-pot you call your head? ... Saddle your horse? I could put this beat-up tin pot on your head, cut a bamboo for a spear and put you on that half-starve jackass you call a horse and

send you out for the whole world to laugh. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 240-241)

As a Sancho-like figure, Moustique describes Makak as Don Quixote, with a tin hat and a spear, but the reference to a beat-up tin and a bamboo spear suggests a carnival gear put to the wrong use, misplaced and turned into a circus-like spectacle for the world to laugh. This scene sets the pattern for language deceit within the play: a donkey becomes a horse, a tin becomes a hat, Makak becomes a lion king, in a dialectic game where all parts play a role. When Moustique laughs at Makak's idea of going to Africa – 'Oh-o! Africa? Why you didn't tell me? We walking?' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 241) – Makak, blind in his belief, insults him by calling him an insect, and throws him to the floor. He is playing the lion, but when Moustique cries, Makak feels compassion, and asks him to go and fight with him, reminding him that he once helped Moustique. If before Makak exercised a horizontal hierarchy unlike that of Prospero-Ariel, now he follows Prospero's power resource over Ariel, asking for loyalty in return for the past. Of his own accord, Moustique decides to play along, and calls him 'master,' while remaining sceptical and never losing touch with reality. Language, therefore, appears in the first scene as an unreliable volatile entity that can have real consequences. Agreement on the terms of discursive exchange is a necessary premise to move on. Although Moustique does not believe in Makak's dream, he willingly accepts his role and participates in a reality that exists only through their verbal agreement.

The structural pattern of language deceit through mutual agreement appears again in the next scene, the scene of resurrection. In this scene, Moustique's link with the people is reinforced. When he arrives, the people are

praying around a dying man. Moustique stands with them, and combines Catholic prayer with his own personal message hidden between the lines. The peasant understands the code, and a conversation develops in which Moustique is told that the man has been bitten by a snake, and that they need coal to make him sweat. Setting up this secret dialogue, Moustique proves a versatile speaker, capable of playing along with Makak's story, while also finding his way among the people. Through his linguistic power, he creates the figure of Makak as healer. When the man shows no sign of recovery, Moustique accuses the prayers of not having enough faith; and after the man is finally healed, Moustique takes over, jumps on top of a box, and declares that Makak is God's messenger, and that the people should 'further the cause, ... God's work must be done, and like Saint Peter self, Moustique, that's me, is Secretary-Treasurer.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 251) This is the beginning of Moustique as a greedy deceiving figure, that Taylor sees as malicious. However, language has no power unless an agreement is established between the parts. The people decide to believe Moustique's story about Makak, Makak plays his part with a speech of resurrection through language – 'I see you all as trees, ... like trees without names, ... let my tongue catch fire' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 248) – and the story becomes, by mutual cooperation, a miracle of resurrection. Afterwards, when they are alone, Makak finds out that Moustique considers the 'miracle' a coincidence. The description of the scene, however, changes into Moustique's own 'dream' of monetary gain: '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.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 253) Although Makak believes it is his own healing power that has resurrected the



man, he agrees to charge people after Moustique argues that he is hungry, tired of being poor, and that, rather than a white woman, the moon to him looks like an empty plate licked clean by a hungry dog. The dialectic fraud combines intentional deceit, wilful acceptance, playing along, and practical concessions. Language, therefore, arises as a rehearsal of positions, where betrayal materialises as a result of several counteracting wills.

The market scene opens with what has become a mythic account of the figure of Makak. The memory of one event is transformed, through exaggeration and collective oral retelling, into a fictional account. The corporal's version, a rational and common-sensical view, appears side by side with the people's view, rendering his speech just another retelling, actually part of the making of the myth of Makak. The language of the law in the market scene is just another convention, as the Corporal himself illustrates:

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. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 260-261)

The retelling process extends to the performative, with the staging of Makak's ritual of resurrection by the market people. In the middle of this doubling of the

original event, Moustique arrives as a fake Makak, delivering a grandiose speech of healing and revolutionary frenzy. His audience, a committed group of followers, echo his words in an imitation pattern that recalls Makak's puppet-like obedience to the Corporal in the Prologue. Moustique's speech as Makak is a Manichean division directed by a linear conception of history as progress: 'Makak shall not pass this road again.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 267) Moustique's words introduce the vocabulary of revolution: he talks about the 'enemies of Africa,' 'lightning handwriting,' 'the sword of sunlight,' and the moon as 'shield.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 265) Ironically, the Corporal's retelling of Makak's myth foreshadows the advent of revolution. Once the people believe in what he considers an 'illiterate lunatic', 'is then blood start to bleed and stone start to fly.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 261) As a sign that revolution is about to break out, the conventions of the colonial order, by which Corporal Lestrade decides that a melon is a pawpaw, no longer hold:

CORPORAL

That's a nice set of cages you have there

VENDOR

Is a basket, Corporal. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 262)

Moustique is responsible for creating the myth of Makak, for developing a language around it, for bringing hope and a revolutionary vision to the people in the market. However, the key aspect that differentiates Moustique from Makak, and which makes of him a fake healer, is faith. Unlike Makak, he does not believe in this vision. Paradoxically, however, he transmits through language a message that activates the revolutionary potential in Makak's dream. In turn, through their religious faith, the people create a real space for what is originally Moustique's money-driven hocus-pocus. The dream as revolution becomes a reality, and

Moustique is killed when he is unmasked by Basil, the character that represents Baron Samedi and who has sent several warnings to Moustique throughout Part One. Basil refers to the lack of faith: 'The tongue is on fire, but the eyes are dead. ... What comes from that mouth is vapour, steam, promises without meaning.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 268-269) At this point, Moustique breaches the mould of linguistic fraud, and challenges the people with the truth:

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"? ... 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. Moustique then! Moustique! (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 270-271)

Moustique's honest speech to the people re-establishes him as the character who is not blinded by the mask. He is the character who knows who Makak is, as their friendship reveals the latter's humanity. Now he unveils the people's wilful blindness, but the seed of revolution has been activated by the end of Part One. Language's creative force is emphasized when a fake and meaningless discourse proves to have a veritable effect in reality. Moustique's true speech does not convince anybody in the market, and, blinded by the mythical story of Makak, they beat Moustique to death. The dangers of employing a particular discourse for the wrong reasons points towards a sacredness in Walcott's conception of language. However, Moustique's irresponsible use of a revolutionary language is not an outsider's desecration of the people's cultural elements. Rather, his

language combines truth and invention: Makak's dream provides the inspiration, and he elaborates on the myth, with the aid of the people.

The last dialogue takes place between a dying Moustique, and a sorrowful Makak who appears as absolutely unaware of Moustique's basic human needs. Makak can dream, but Moustique – like the people – feels the urgent need for food and money. The scene closes with Makak looking into Moustique's dead eyes for inspiration, and a terrible sight of pain, violence, and revenge darkens his vision. As the third debate between Makak and Moustique, this brief dialogue is an important reminder that Makak's dream is detached not only from reality, but from the urgent needs of the people. Together these two characters created the myth, and decided to charge money; somewhere along the line Makak – representing faith – got lost, and Moustique continued alone. The end of this dream is a death that foreshadows the violent revolution, but it is also the death of a character who symbolises the underlying parallel possibility of an alternative reality. After all, he is the one who knows the truth about Makak's identity, about Makak's true power of resurrection, and it was Makak himself who created the figure of Moustique as a 'follower,' which then the latter spread out to the people. With Moustique's death, the second part of the dream grows into a one-sided delirium of revenge and violence. While the first dream (Part One) includes several 'revisionings' of the events in the shape of Moustique and Makak's debates and decision-making pauses, Part Two offers a chain of events characterised by a unidirectional vision of progress, with no space left for looking back, no time to stop and rethink the next step, no possibility other than a blind movement forward.

Makak wakes up in prison. Having finished the account of his dream, the setting returns to the present of the Prologue; apparently, the characters are back in reality. In fact, at the end of Part Two, after the beheading of the white woman, Makak wakes up a second time, rendering this section yet another dream-like experience. However, both Makak and the audience go through Part Two as a reality outside the narrative of Makak's dream, which is completed in Part One. The relevance of Walcott's technique to engage the audience in such a way lies in the fact that he is extrapolating the game of deceit-belief, dream-reality to the audience watching the play. The familiar humour and the emotional element introduced by Makak's friendship with Moustique develop in the public an empathy that follows into the second part. Thus, the fast action and revengeful violence present in this section have a stronger effect in the audience. In this way, Walcott is rehearsing a linguistic and performative ritual that stands free from fake possessions or artificial imitations of ritualistic practices. Makak's final liberation similarly spreads beyond the stage, carrying the audience out of the nightmarish vision of Part Two.

The multiple and varying speech and interaction patterns at work in Part One operate again in this parallel section under the new revolutionary context. Corporal Lestrade exerts his racist colonial power in jail, showing a strong rejection to Tigre's suggestion that he too is partly black. The imminent revolution is hinted at when Souris insistently complains that he is hungry, and it subsequently takes shape through Tigre's plot: 'We must help the old bitch escape, track him to Monkey Mountain, then put him out of his misery. Eat your food when it come, but dream about money, Souris.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 281-282) As a prisoner with no other resource, Tigre uses language for

his purpose. After encouraging Makak to tell them about Africa, he then explains to him how he must first kill Corporal Lestrade and help them out of prison. From that point onwards, Makak is again a puppet, as in the Prologue, while the revolutionary Tigre uses the same deceitful tool previously employed by Moustique and the Corporal: his speech. In this case, his words are geared towards inducing a trance-like state in Makak, who is again carried away by the dream, and ends up killing Corporal Lestrade. In a conscious attempt to stimulate Makak's feelings of revenge, Tigre delivers a monologue directed at Makak which includes certain almost magical words – the moon, the lion, the jaws – that activate Makak's dream:

You know why you must kill him? Because she tell you to, old man, remember, in the dream? Lion, she call you. And lion don't stop to think. The jaw of the lion, that is the opening and closing of the book of judgement. When the moon in quarter, you know what Africans say ...

That the jaw of the sun, that is the lion, has eaten the moon. The moon, that is nothing, but ... a skull ... a bone ...

How else can you prove your name is lion, unless you do one bloody, golden, dazzling thing, eh? (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 283)

When Makak takes the knife awaiting Corporal Lestrade, Tigre continues his mesmerizing discourse, carefully making sure Makak hears the key words – bright blood, forest, hunted, thunder, lion, moon, forest fire, blood – which he echoes after the murder: 'Blood! Blood! Blood! Lion ... Lion ... I am ... a lion.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 285) The violence is directed towards the ambiguous figure who is not definable in this Manichean world order of black and white. Lestrade is 'neither one thing nor the next, neither milk, coal, neither day nor

night, neither lion nor monkey, but a mulatto, a foot-licking servant of marble law' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 283) After they drink his blood and escape, Corporal Lestrade closes the scene by being 'reborn' as a fully-fledged colonial hunter of natives.

The scene of the forest hunt and the trial sum up a bloody revolution where Makak begins as warrior summoning his soldiers to battle, Souris eventually buys into Makak's appealing language, Lestrade converts into the revolution as a mad blood-thirsty force, and Baron Samedi kills Tigre, the only character who, like Moustique, remains aware of the deceit. The language of revolution is unleashed to its full extent, with fireflies becoming shining helmets, the bamboo as spears, and the forest as Makak's war regiment. The blind quality of Makak's revolution surfaces in a speech of brief phrases, repetition of bare words, a speech without subtleties: 'I want to tell them [his soldiers] this. That now is the time, the time of war. War. Fire, fire and destruction. ... Fire, death. ... Fire. The sky is on fire. Makak will destroy.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 295) Makak has discovered that his power is in his mind, and in a quixotic frenzy, he creates, by naming them, a whole regiment of soldiers; more importantly, he creates, by a nostalgic wordy description, the Africa of his mind: '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.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 291) In the midst of this collective dream of war driven by a nostalgic narrative of the past, Tigre tries to prevent the inevitable by uncovering the truth. When Souris is carried away by Makak's hypnotic words, Tigre erupts: 'I'm a criminal with a gun, in the heart of the forest under Monkey

Mountain. And I want his money.’ (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 303)

Tigre’s honesty wakes up Makak, who then realises that his fantasy is but another dream, understands his error, and recuperates his vision that now shows him the coming morning. In an attempt to put things right, he tries to teach compassion, makes an attempt to placate the others’ rage with his tears, but the Corporal has already had his own vision, and the dream is already out of Makak’s hands – or tongue. Baron Samedi’s killing of Tigre symbolises the irreversibility of the revolution. The exchange between Makak and Tigre, a debate in the same conciliatory tone of Makak and Moustique’s interactions in Part One, is abolished by Lestrade and by Baron Samedi. There are to be no ambiguities in the revolution: ‘Onward, onward. Progress. Press on. ... No. We cannot go back. History is in motion. The law is in motion. Forward, forward. ... I have the black man work to do ... I don’t know where we are going. But forward, progress!’ (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 306-307)

The trial scene shows the same alluring excitement for the performative character of the judgement that appears in the Prologue, when the thieves encourage Corporal Lestrade to wear the wig and gown for Makak’s hearing. Although the scene reverses the race element, it still follows the same pattern as the colonial order, in the same way as one single speech can work in different contexts. In a repetition of the market exchange between Corporal Lestrade and the market vendors – where the conventions of colonial order are set – Makak says ‘I am only a shadow’, to which the Corporal answers ‘Shh. Quiet, my prince.’ (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 311) The structure of misnaming fruits in Part One is here reduplicated in human terms; being aware of the truth, Makak acknowledges himself as shadow, but the revolution requires a royal



nomenclature, which is imposed over the reality. Basil delivers the speech of condemnation, with a list of names whose crime is to be white. Although it is Makak who condemns them, his actions in this scene are reduced to gestures, as a puppet following the speech of the 'tribes.' The people judged are already dead, it is their language that is being condemned and killed. Similarly, Moustique is already dead, but he reappears to be condemned and killed again. Even in this brief appearance, Moustique uncovers Makak's truth: 'That is not your voice, you are more of an ape now, a puppet.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 315) In the condemnation of the apparition, Makak obeys the wishes of the tribes and the Corporal, but he wants to kill the apparition alone. The pantomime nature of the trial scene, pointed out by Thieme, turns solemn in a beheading with no anger: he wants to understand why he is killing her, who she is, why she appeared to him. Lestrade answers: 'She is the white light that paralysed your mind, that led you into this confusion.' (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 319) In saying this, Lestrade is adding himself to the list of characters in the play whose role it is at several points to uncover the truth behind the various visions. The sharing of responsibility in creating and disentangling the changing dreams and visions in the play suggests that the real protagonist is language, and its creative power. The play between reality and dream, between a relatively 'innocent' invention of stories in the first part, and the real consequences and dangers of engaging in this linguistic fantasy in the second part, is brought together by the figure of Baron Samedi, a mythical figure with a real counterpart, who appears in Part One as an observer and a warning figure, but then turns into an active element that acquires full power over life and death in the second part. Language and faith act as

catalysts for this change in Baron Samedi's role. It is when language begins to create belief among the characters that he gains momentum.

The Epilogue brings Makak and the audience back to reality, with an unclear feeling about the revolutionary section. It is when Moustique appears again that Makak realises it has all been a dream. It is morning, and Makak's awakening symbolises his second genesis, a genesis into the real vision, the new paradise, where Makak remembers his name, asserts his innocence, and adds that he cannot sleep, meaning that he is now aware of his own identity, that he is not a blind puppet anymore. He is the Second Adam, the resurrected Adam, which, in a way, closes the first scene of resurrection, where the man to be healed had been bitten by a snake, in a reference to a paradise lost through sin. Makak is the resurrected man, and Moustique – symbolising himself the resurrection of the phoenix – arrives as evidence that their friendship speech is their truthful genesis account.

Makak's last speech mirrors his words when he kills the white apparition. When he is about to behead the woman, he remembers a day when he was born, and he felt 'like a dead tree.' Looking to his future, he saw his death, disappearing afterwards under the earth, and he felt lonely 'as if I was happy once, and strong, but could not remember where'. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 318) Makak's last speech, which closes the play, recovers his strength; where he was a tree that could not grow roots, he finds the ground:

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." ...

now this old hermit is going back home, back to the beginning, to the green beginning of this world. Come, Moustique, we going home. (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 326)

The loneliness he felt, which resulted in the confusing apparition, is replaced by Makak's realisation that he will live in the minds of his people when he dies, and also by the fact that he is not going home alone; Moustique is coming with him. Makak's metaphor of himself as a dead tree, and his final image as a grounded body bears great resemblance with two passages that Walcott quotes in 'The Muse of History.' Published in 1974, but written and delivered as a talk in 1971 (right after the publication of 'What the Twilight Says'), this essay articulates in prose Walcott's complex puzzle of race, history, amnesia, language, society, and revolution. In part V, he quotes from Denis Williams' *Other Leopards* and from Ted Hughes 'Wodwo,' two extracts that share 'the drilling, mining, molelike or mole-cricketlike burrowing into the origins of life'. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 61) The physical journey to a pre-Adamic state of being is, for Walcott, a universal trait of the modern artist:

what is there is the displaced, searching psyche of modern man, the reversion of twentieth-century man, whether in Africa or in Yorkshire, to his pre-Adamic, to pre-history, and this shared contagion of madness exists universally in contemporary poetry. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 61)

Described as a search for the meaning of humanity, this journey through nature emerges in a slow naming process, moving from a cycle of purgatory destruction, to a new beginning. In the New World, this truly revolutionary transmutation appears in 'writers with an optimistic or visionary force', which 'exists wholly in Wilson Harris.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 61) Makak's metamorphosis into

a live tree reflects the poet's transformation of the language of tradition into a live, optimistic force that roots the artist to humanity, and to his society. Makak's true name, Felix, which means 'happy,' symbolises the artist's triumph over a nihilistic cynicism defined by Walcott as the metropolitan defensive attitude, originated by 'an attempt to enter the sense of history which is within every Englishman and European, but which he himself has never felt towards Africa or Asia.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 58) The urban pretence of revolution is the superficial evidence of a rootlessness that overlooks the peasant and follows a linear vision of history. The true revolution, Walcott says, 'is here. It was always here. ... The peasant cannot spare himself these city changes. He is the true African who does not need to proclaim it.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 57)

Part II of the essay deals with the New World's Adamic man, with a cyclic non-linear vision of history where '[f]act evaporates into myth'. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 38) The revolutionary character of this fluctuating circular perception of history lies in its 'perennial freedom,' or, in Harrisian terms, the infinite genesis of the imagination. The character remains a nomad: 'the wanderer, the man who moves through the ruins of great civilizations with all his worldly goods by caravan or pack mule, the poet carrying entire cultures in his head.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 38) As a symbol of the poet, Makak carries all civilizations in his mind, and his emergence in the final scene to a new green beginning is the poet's discovery of his own voice, rooted, therefore alive. Makak's identity as optimistic, as Felix, is hinted at from the very beginning of the play, when he smiles assertively and answers that he is a Catholic – the only trait of his identity that he is certain about. Walcott sees the phenomenon of religious assimilation not as defeat, but as a liberation: 'What seemed to be

surrender was redemption. What seemed the loss of tradition was its renewal. What seemed the death of faith was its rebirth.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 43) Thus, conversion into Christianity becomes a choice of a spiritual battleground in which to fight:

What was captured from the captor was his God, for the subject African had come to the New World in an elemental intimacy with nature, with a profounder terror of blasphemy than the exhausted, hypocritical Christian. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 46-47)

The key liberating element is faith; a faith that is expressed through Makak's smiling assertion of his religion as the character's freedom from a cynical nihilism. And a true religious belief, as opposed to the hypocritical colonial Christian, entails a true faith in words. The literature of the New World does not imitate, it makes happen, it re-creates, it engenders. Walcott makes it clear that he is not aligning himself with the myth of the noble savage. This Second Adam is not innocent or naive. Rather, his words have the bitter taste of experience, while his perennial freedom, carried on through faith across the amnesic sea, keeps alive the elemental awe of a language that is truly alive. This new beginning embittered by experience yields history understood as progress, and renders the idea of time absurd. This is not, however, an existentialist stance. Existentialism stems from a nostalgia for innocence; it 'is simply the myth of the noble savage gone baroque.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 41) The pivotal factor that makes freedom a possibility for the enslaved is faith. The true constant revolution lies dormant until it is activated by belief, which entails a willing agreement to convert. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the characters engage in several willing agreements through language, and the element of faith is the crucial factor that washes Makak 'from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. ... Let me be swallowed up in mist again,

and let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up ... and say, "Makak lives there ... in the dream of his people." (Walcott *Dream on Monkey Mountain* 326) The last speech emerges thus not as a defeated reference to the Middle Passage, but as a metaphorical image of faith as a tree that re-grows its roots after the Middle Passage, a figure of rebirth and cyclic movement which is, at the same time, a prophetic promise of ensuing reappearance, of unfinished genesis.

Derek Walcott delivered what was later published as 'The Muse of History' at an international conference in Columbia University. There, Walcott witnessed how a radical 'went up to the conference table and explosively ranted that Borges was reactionary, dead, useless, wrote fantasies while Latin America and the Third World were suffering. ... Walcott claimed that ... [h]is rage paid respect to Borges and Borges understood the futility, a futility which neither ... could do anything about.' (King 2000: 270-271) In his comment about the Borges episode, Walcott projects his own struggle with the paradox of the artist as drawing his inspiration, his art, and his form from the people, while remaining, at the same time, distant and unengaged. In such aggressive criticism directed at Borges, Walcott probably sees reproduced in 1971 the type of criticism that he himself senses at the time. Drama remains Walcott's contact arena, his communication line with the people. As in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, communication requires agreement and concessions, and it is through language that the insuperable gap begins to ease off. The problem remains with language:

the West Indian poet is faced with a language which he hears but cannot write ... because the closer he brings hand and word to the precise inflections of the inner language and to the subtlest

accuracies of his ear, the more chaotic his symbols will appear on the page. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 49)

In the theatre, language is shared, it reverts the process of oral-written to oral again, and words are filtered through the bodies of the actors on stage. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott rehearses his position as artist in relation to society through an exercise of linguistic stretching and exploration. The theoretical premises of the play, developed into prose in 'The Muse of History,' prove well-grounded. In practice, 'What the Twilight Says' offers a verdict of doubt, which he identifies as the inevitable shared sense of futility by the radical addressing Borges in anger. While Ti-Jean enters the magical space that brings freedom on his own, *Dream on Monkey Mountain* presents a character who engages with society through a language heavily charged with the weight of the past. However, in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott appears to be engaging in a dialogue more with his critics than with the people. As he explains in the closing lines of 'The Muse of History': 'Fisherman and peasant know who they are and what they are and where they are, and when we show them our wounded sensibilities we are, most of us, displaying self-inflicted wounds.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 63)

## Chapter 5

### Ritual and the Caribbean Crusoe: *Pantomime*

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*Pantomime* is written with the format of the theatre within the theatre, which acts in this case as the transformation of a theatre as show for tourists to a rehearsal that works as a social ritual in order to adjust to the changes that take place after independence, and to adapt to a new communal order. By means of this ritual of passage, violence is exorcised, while the role of the artist is polished and modified to cleanse the tensions within the communication process between the artist and the society. Having dealt with the language issue in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott now writes with safer strokes, and a conceptual maturity that facilitates the full exploration of the process of decolonisation, completes the ritual of initiation, and puts forth the terms of a new freedom of dialogue that unblocks the true movement of society through a vital art form.

After an enthusiastic avant-garde period, Walcott's plays become more naturalistic in form, his characters more realistic. 'What the Twilight Says' and 'The Muse of History' provide the clues for this turning point. Described as 'penitential cults,' the avant-garde theatres do not challenge the pillars of the society they spring from, but rather, they play a cleansing role: '[they] are not threats to civilization but acts of absolution' in a century of wars, genocide, and concentration camps. (Walcott 'What the Twilight Says' 6) The power and decadence of colonial Europe that gives sense to experimental theatre does not



speak to the Caribbean at the time. *In a Fine Castle*, *The Charlatan*, and *Franklin* are plays that Walcott begins writing before 1970, but that acquire a renewed relevance after the Black Power revolution. While before 1970 the main characters in the plays are black, culminating in Makak as the representative of the black race in the Caribbean, now the protagonists are white, and the thematic concern turns to the role and position of whites and descendants of whites in the Caribbean.

The lack of financial resources has been pointed out as one of the reasons why Walcott turns after 1970 to a more naturalistic style. The influence of American and European trends which were moving away from an experimentalism that had settled as part of the establishment could also be a decisive factor. On the one hand, Walcott is interested in the musical genre as a distinctly American – non-European – genre that could be moulded to incorporate the types of dances, movements and acting style of the West Indies. On the other hand, the tendency towards a naturalistic style in the tradition of Chekhov is an important influence on Walcott. The similarities that Walcott finds between Chekhov's plays and the Caribbean are in terms of tone and depiction of characters. Within a mood of farcical comedy, 'Chekhov's characters have rural agricultural beginnings, neglect their homeland and mimic the sophistication and manners of Paris.' (King 1995: 232) In this, Walcott observes a parallelism with the governors in the Caribbean, who practice what he considers a micro-nationalist tyrannical mismanagement of the land. Indeed, advocating the West Indian Federation, Walcott sees the islands in the Caribbean as sharing a landscape, a history, and a sensibility. Racial and cultural differences within the region are a sign of a genuinely multicultural society, a positive source of

creativity. Walcott considers politicians narrow-minded and lacking in a unifying vision to help ease tense social and racial divisions. 'The Muse of History' shows Walcott taking his position as an artist within the American continent as a whole, separate from Europe not only geographically, but morally, artistically, and humanely. The poets of the New World have an Adamic vision of man, a perception of man as free from history, a mythical understanding of the world, devoid of existentialist fatalism. Many writers in the Caribbean, however, mirror the European despondency and hopelessness: 'to most writers of the archipelago who contemplate only the shipwreck, the New World offers not elation but cynicism, a despair at the vices of the Old which they feel must be repeated.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 42) The fresh start of the Caribbean, represented by Makak's awakening to a green beginning, encompasses Walcott's affirmation of a broad philosophical premise that runs through his plays as an underlying optimistic beat. 'The Muse of History' articulates Walcott's triumphant break with a nostalgic yearning for despair, and an engagement with a Caribbean that frees itself not only from Britain, but from the weight of its past history. Whether his subsequent plays show an influence from Europe or from America, the position Walcott has found for himself as artist within the Caribbean and globally is a space of certainty and of freedom.

Before fully turning towards more naturalistic plays, Walcott engaged in the production of *The Joker of Seville*. Commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, this musical retells the story of Don Juan within the form of a total theatre, with music, dance, stick-fighting, audience participation, and a reading of Don Juan as a West Indian figure whose defiance uncovers the authorities' hypocrisy. *The Joker of Seville* became a huge success, toured around the

Caribbean, manifesting Walcott's triumph in creating an acting style and a dramatic genre that includes all performance and artistic modes, a highly elaborate and symbolic text, and an immediacy and freshness that invites the audience's participation. The musical was never performed in the Royal Shakespeare Company; it was too West Indian for a British audience. Walcott was interested in musicals because they experiment with dance, music, folk-traditions, and a more active interaction between stage and audience. He also wanted to revise previous plays, and create a permanent repertoire and a steady sponsorship. These were years of touring, of new actors who did not have the experience of the slow training process of earlier years, and Walcott's directing style was based on detailed instructions rather than the previous shared work of developing the character through a slow training process.

Walcott's Trinidadian period shows a close analysis of the act of performance, the theatre within the theatre, but it is also a period of self-reflection and coming to terms with the past experience of building a company. After his stormy resignation in 1976, Walcott steps outside of the chaotic urgencies of his theatre, and begins to produce plays that deal not only with the problems of the West Indian society, but also with the tensions and confrontations that he had gone through in his experience as theatre director in the Caribbean. If before Walcott had written 'What the Twilight Says' to be published alongside his St Lucian plays as an account of the effort and value of their theatrical training process and creative achievements, his plays now similarly engage in the experiences of acting, performing, and being an artist in the Caribbean. While the political commentary is more direct, and the plots and characters less symbolic perhaps than in previous years, the new mature phase in Derek Walcott's

theatrical production offers a multiplicity of other readings ranging from the meaning of independence, to the analysis of his own blind directorial manner. The distinctive aspect of his theatre production after the period around 1970 is summed up in the figure of the New Adam.

Walcott's New Adam embodies a true elemental freedom, as a result of man's liberation from history as truth. Following T.S. Eliot, Walcott proposes that true culture, one that is alive to its people, cannot survive without faith, without belief. In this context, under the appearance of a seemingly passive acceptance of events, the slave's true battle is being fought at the level of the spiritual. The victory of the New World, therefore, is found in the triumphant survival of the tribal faith throughout enslavement. Walcott's New Adam does not represent an innocent pre-existence of Man. Instead, an experienced Adam personifies the New World's regensis; he is the symbol of survival, of renewed and knowledgeable faith. In the light of Wilson Harris's concept of time as infinite genesis, this New Adam exists as a constant source of possibility for Man, and not as a symbol of a lost irretrievable innocence. The endless perennial freedom of Walcott's New Adam extends to language:

In tribal, elemental poetry, the epic experience of the race is compressed in metaphor. In an oral tradition, the mode is simple, the response open-ended, so that each new poet can add his lines to the form, a process very much like weaving or the dance, based on the concept that the history of the tribe is endless. There is no dying fall, no egotistical signature of effect; in short, no pathos. The blues is not pathos, not the individual voice, it is a tribal mode, and each new oral poet can contribute his couplet, and this is based on the concept that the tribe, inured to despair, will also survive: there is no beginning but no end. ... No history, but flux, and the only sustenance, myth. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 47-48)

The Caribbean creative force consists in the merging of traditions, and *The Joker of Seville* is a loud example of what Walcott has in mind. A Spanish classic, re-written in English verse, incorporating stick-fighting, limbo dance, slave ships, Robber speech, calypsonians, strong women characters, the Catholic Church, and bacchanal. 'When Walcott inserts Trinidad dialect into a play thundering with English couplet precision the effect is shaking. ... our artists, who are but voices of the spirit of our people, are singing about freedom like never before.' (Raoul Pantin's review of *The Joker of Seville*, quoted in King 1995: 226) As the essence of West Indian creativity, the mixing of traditions works as a cross-cultural form of expression that offers a picture of the people's culture as ongoing and alive.

Walcott's essential literary optimism runs through his theatrical production at the time. From the early years in St Lucia and Jamaica, through his experiences in New York and Trinidad, he had finally managed to articulate and stage a set of plays that deal with the folk-traditions, language, decolonization, and now directly with immediate political matters. However, the racial tensions and differing literary views remained a problematic issue in spite of his enthusiasm. Thus, 'The Muse of History' strongly criticises the writers who produce a literature of remorse, or those he calls 'ancestral writers', whose poetry is driven by a certain political agenda, as uprooted as the metropolitan cynicism of the exiled writer, but unlike the latter, fake and empty of real faith. The aggressive tone of Walcott's criticism results in harsh and sometimes unfair readings of his plays. According to Trinidadian critic Gordon Rohlehr, Walcott's artistic attitude towards the oral tradition is one of confrontation and opposition, until 'the irresistible force of the oral paradigm ... is made to justify itself.' (Rohlehr 31) Rohlehr refers to the aggressive tone of 'What the Twilight Says' and 'The Muse of History' to

conclude that Walcott's abusive language stems from an attempt to 'close off the West Indian sensibility from its own indigenous oral tradition,' (Rohlehr 38), and from his 'inner reluctance to yield to the pressure of the voice' and his 'fear of experimentation in regions uncharted and unsanctified.' (Rohlehr 39) Far from suppressing the oral tradition, Walcott's essays celebrate its survival:

The epic concept was compressed in the folk lyric, the mass longing in chanter and chorus, couplet and refrain. The revivalist poems drew their strength from the self-hypnotic nature of their responses, interminable in monody as the tribal hope. ... But this monody is not only resigned but martial. ... The epic poem is not a literary project. It is already written; it was written in the mouths of the tribe, a tribe which had courageously yielded its history. (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 45)

Walcott's strong rejection turns towards revivalists of Africa whose inward journey is planned ahead, its arrival point defined beforehand, as he states in 'What the Twilight Says.' These writers' search for the epic in the Caribbean starts off from the same perspective of history as truth, celebrating the traces from the past 'as if the ovens of Auschwitz and Hiroshima were the temples of the race.' (Walcott 'The Muse of History' 44) Although Walcott's language bears an abrasive tone that often turns abusive, Rohlehr's reading overlooks the fact that Walcott's artistic position is that of the commoner, the Caribbean man unapologetic and free. His theatre stems from folk and classical traditions alike, his plays engage in the process of decolonization and finding a West Indian identity, and Walcott gears his remorseless attitude as much towards himself as towards others. 'What the Twilight Says' bears a confessional tone, while 'The Muse of History' shows an artistic maturity made possible through Walcott's unrelenting honesty, and not through what is sometimes read as a choice of

European over African traditions. This inaccurate criticism of Walcott's literary production fails to step outside the Manichean opposition of Prospero-Caliban, Crusoe-Friday that Walcott's plays challenge. However, there is an obvious and forceful belligerence in his essays as in his plays, as well as a stubborn political incorrectness based on a solid belief in the poet's responsibility towards artistic honesty.

Although Walcott moves to the United States after resigning from the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, his plays remain West Indian. *Remembrance*, commissioned by the Courtyard Players, deals with the pre-independence generation of teachers in the Caribbean. The limitations of cast and budget combine with Walcott's move towards a more naturalistic, simplistic theatrical style, and a more introspective treatment of the characters. Walcott wrote *Pantomime* in Tobago, when a British hotel owner asked him to write a play to entertain the guests. With a cast of just two actors, and very basic props, Walcott creates a play that integrates the racial tensions of the past and the present, the artistic disagreements and conflicts that Walcott had gone through, the process of creation, the quarrel between discipline and improvisation, the topic of West Indian independence, the difficulties of decolonising the mind, the Caribbean economic dependency on tourism, the break with the classical tradition, the search for a truly cross-cultural Caribbean identity, and finally, Walcott's artistic self-definition.

*Pantomime* presents a reversal of the Robinson Crusoe myth. Harry Trewe wants to put on a pantomime of Robinson Crusoe, with his employee Jackson Phillip as Friday. When the idea of changing roles arises, the underlying tension between the two characters is unleashed, until its resolution through confrontation

of their conflicts. Taylor describes Jackson as the ultimate trickster figure, who, moving on from a narrative of resistance, enters the sphere of the liberation narrative. Jackson, Taylor argues, has already undergone Makak's exorcism of the mind. Moreover, Jackson represents liberation as an ongoing process, and not just as a final arrival point. Taylor bases his reading of Jackson as a trickster on the fact that 'he resists with impunity.' (Taylor 219) He disturbs Harry, changes the rules of acting, subverts the language and kills the parrot without punishment. According to Taylor, Jackson's character develops the figure of the trickster into a politically conscious individual whose goal includes an achievement of mutual respect.

Jackson does exhibit a self-assurance and certainty that demands a level of acknowledgement and respect that perhaps Harry is not able to endorse. However, the basis of his self-assertion and confidence lies in the fact that the tricks are not intended to take him to a different position, closer to a desired result by outwitting Harry. They are intended as a form of meaningful communication. Jackson's behaviour is a willing exchange of messages, at times overtly conveyed, other times in an ironical tone; but even in the latter case, the interaction takes place under both characters' understanding of what is being said. Where sarcasm does not reach the other, the interaction turns serious and direct. In addition to this, Walcott's Harry is not an outsider, but part of the Caribbean, for the simple reason that he has landed there. Walcott's choice of a British white man instead of a white descendant does not respond to an attempt to present a colonial against a colonised. Whereas Makak's character symbolises the black race in the Caribbean, characters now are fully-fledged individuals. The stereotype of white British as colonial appears at the discursive level, but the complexity of the



character places him outside the limitations of a character type. If Jackson uses pretence and tricks at times, Harry employs the same techniques. Finally, Taylor's analysis seems to suggest that while Harry's character develops throughout the play, Jackson begins and ends with the same degree of self-knowledge. To a certain extent, reading Harry as a colonial and Jackson as a liberated and assured trickster remains within a Manichean understanding of West Indian identity, and overlooks Jackson's own evolution. It is in the interaction of both characters, and not in how well Jackson performs in the face of a colonial mindset where the value and importance of this play lies. As Wilson-Tagoe points out, 'it is only when the actors relate to each other as humans that they achieve an understanding beyond the defined roles of master and servant'. (Wilson-Tagoe 1995: 33) The play's achievement and that of its characters lies in their successful development of a means of communicating with each other outside of a historically-bound template.

Derek Walcott's choice of the pantomime for his play points towards a revision of the 1781 Sheridan pantomime *Robinson Crusoe*, the first time Defoe's story was staged in a theatre. It is also the first pantomime to be produced in America, in 1786. Part One of Sheridan's pantomime presents an accurate retelling of Crusoe's narrative, a realistic and detailed scene-by-scene adaptation of the novel. On the other hand, Part Two presents a fantasy that follows Friday-turned-Harlequin throughout a series of chaotic comic episodes involving magic, fantasy, disguise, transformation, a chase, an *auto de f * by the Inquisition, and a final transformation into a garden. The eighteenth-century pantomime offers a clear-cut division between the realistic, rational Crusoe plot, and the anarchical and mischievous comedy of the Friday-Harlequin episodes.

Walcott's pantomime brings these two forces together in a pantomime whose humour carries a serious and threatening feeling. Comedy and laughter appear not only as a way of releasing some of the tension kept all through the play, but also, as Fiet explains, because the heavily charged scenes reflect the real social conditions of the audience watching a seemingly light genre. (Fiet 89) The language plays between seriousness and a seemingly joking tone, between enmity and mutual understanding. Likewise, the play's unstable character is emphasised by the 1980 production by Corsbie, who incorporated the cliff as an important element within the stage. The unremitting presence of a deadly risk contrasts with the light-heartedness of a comic genre like the pantomime. Wilson Harris's principle of instability as a desirable environment where change becomes viable permeates through Walcott's play. Nevertheless, Harris clarifies that for this instability to trigger creativity, a ritualistic pattern must govern it, in the form of initiation rites that will render the malleability safe, expectable, and controllable. Like the vodun dancer, or like the Ulysses/crew configuration, art in the form of theatre acts in this case as the secure context in which the tensions and conflicts are rehearsed and resolved. If in Harris's novel *Carnival* scenes were repeated and rehearsed, Walcott's *Pantomime* provides a double rehearsal. First, it rehearses a classic text through its original staging introducing an element of confrontation and focusing on the interaction of two opposing modes, yet still within a frame of theatre as spectacle for tourists. Second, it rehearses the very process through which Walcott had undergone his own ritual of self-search: the theatre within the theatre alters the centrality of the plot story towards a more analytical understanding of the role of the artist and the role of the play within its society, turning the play into a staged ritual of renewal. At the core of *Pantomime*, the

interaction between cultures represents the collision of worlds that Harris describes in *Carnival*. Harris chooses a marketplace setting for its lack of rules, its inherent social freedom. In *Pantomime*, improvisation plays the part of a free setting.

Starting from an idea, the play has not been written yet. Although based on the story of Robinson Crusoe, the actors have no script, bringing to the stage a space of possibility, spontaneity and impulse. The storyline provides the partial measure and control that results in a Harrisian balanced flexibility. The setting, a holiday resort in Tobago owned by a British ex-pantomime actor, is closed for repairs, as a metaphor of a society that needs some adjustment. The carpenter, who is supposed to be there to do the repairs, never arrives, and Jackson takes on the job. Two actors stuck in a situation of paralysis with a carpenter who never arrives and references to the tourists who they are waiting for shows reminiscences of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. However, Jackson knows what to do, and more importantly, he does it. Along with Jackson's practical achievements, the play also moves on through their interaction towards a better mutual understanding, and a liberated form of communication. In the fable *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* the main character of Ti-Jean fights the devil alone. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* shows Makak engaging with his society, his humanity defined in this dream-play in terms of his friendly interaction with Moustique. Now in *Pantomime*, Walcott's analysis changes from the individual psychology, to the practical interaction of two fully-fledged individuals. Their past life-stories appear, their future prospects are slowly delineated, and it is the moment of interaction, or rather collision, that is under analysis.

For several pages, they are not seen on stage together. Harry is rehearsing a scene as a lonely Crusoe, while Jackson's appearance re-defines Harry as the hotel owner. Their physical distance on stage continues into the play through a dialectic that avoids closeness. Walcott's *Pantomime* opens with Harry, then Harry exits, and Jackson appears, then Jackson leaves and Harry re-enters the stage. The two characters are defined in terms of their master-servant relationship, and time itself in the play is rendered through this master and servant association: Jackson is wearing a waiter's jacket, and he brings breakfast for Harry, whom he addresses as Mr. Trewe. Their first greeting, a tense exchange of how they are doing respectively, is answered using the weather forecast as a metaphor for their emotions. Jackson is 'fair to fine, with seas moderate', Harry is 'Overcast with sunny periods'. (Walcott *Pantomime* 95) The quintessential British small talk works in this scene to express how far away from each other these two characters are. Jackson and Harry start out separately on stage, their relationship defined in terms of the Manichean duality of master and servant, and their talk renders their connection even more tense, distant and unengaged. They are, however, alone together in this hotel, and communication becomes inevitable. The tension in their interaction is based on this need to share a space, but moreover, the uptight and suspicious tone of their conversations surfaces due to the fact that there is no other character to divert the focus of the play. Together, Harry and Jackson carry all the weight of the tension: they build it, and they also have to relieve it. They carry all the information about themselves, and about each other, and they have to work together to move on. The relevance of this close-up play is that there is no subtlety, no escape from each other. The idea of the island as an isolated individual transforms into a depiction of the island as a setting for interaction,

communication, merging. The archipelago woven together by the Caribbean sea bears a meaning of mixture, encounter, and contact that points towards a new creative spring already inaugurated in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* with Makak and Moustique's friendship as genesis. Walcott's Robinson Crusoe story, however, is far from an easy straightforward exchange. Using a close-up of two characters that start off far away from each other and who are in a sense obliged to work with one another, *Pantomime* provides the type of social tension that a West Indian audience would understand. Following the two characters in the play throughout their uncomfortable and sometimes violent interaction towards a better understanding of each other eases the social distances that exist in the reality of the Caribbean, and which Walcott is concerned about.

*Pantomime* is divided into two acts. Act One begins with Harry and Jackson as two almost opposing characters with communication difficulties. The first act develops into a rehearsal of Harry's attempts to get his idea through to Jackson, to convince him to improvise the play with him. The second act opens with Jackson trying to convince Harry, who has decided to give up the project, to continue with the play. Through a slow and difficult game of willing and unwilling communication, the walls that separate them begin to fall, and a true honest communication becomes viable at the end. Both characters move from their original standpoint, and both move on together in the end. The underlying hostility and permanent risk overcome through their interaction points towards a liberation that faces the challenges of social cohesion and healthy intercommunication. Like Harris's architectural reference, where buildings take in the shaking of the earthquake, Walcott's play takes place within an emotional and

social 'earthquake,' where the two characters move from their positions and alter their standpoints to accommodate each other and their new situation.

The social tremors that Harry and Jackson need to modulate and balance, however, involve deep-seated assumptions that they might not even be aware of at the beginning. This is most obviously the case with Harry, whose past of human rights struggle and freedom fighting has not erased certain subconscious colonial precepts that remain hidden beneath the surface of what could be termed a block-function freedom-fighting persona. As Harris explains throughout *Carnival*, fake rituals of fertility may hide an underlying sterility. Like in the discourse of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, apparently liberating words might lead into another fake path. Harry does not define himself as the white British colonial, but his discomfort at playing Friday and going too far into the reversal of roles reveals a longstanding ingrained sense of self as separate from the other. Similarly, and although his self-knowledge proves more thorough from the start, it takes the whole of the first act to get Jackson to step outside the safe professional relationship of boss-employee/master-servant where he feels at ease. Moving outside those boundaries requires a willingness to interact that Jackson is not prepared to grant at the beginning. The solidity of their respective outlooks melts away through an uneasy and laborious adjustment process that opens up a new social horizon in the Caribbean.

The first scenes clearly show the characters' distance and enmity. Harry's suggestion to put on a Robinson Crusoe pantomime for tourists is received by Jackson from the very beginning with a solid negative answer. In a first attempt to change Jackson's mind, Harry resorts to tragedy, in a theatrical drama where he pretends he will jump off the cliff. Harry's exaggerated recourse neither convinces

nor amuses Jackson, who prefers to leave than to waste his time and energy on something that obviously irritates him. Just before Jackson leaves, Harry comes back, saying that committing suicide would be 'too exasperating'. (Walcott *Pantomime* 97) In fact, the drama of suicide itself is exasperating in this scene, and Harry's comment is more a bait for further conversation rather than a statement in itself. The reason he gives is that a suicide attempt in the Third World would be unsuccessful because the pencil to write a suicide note would break and the blades are of such poor quality that one would not be able to cut one's own wrists. The practicality of the situation alters the nihilistic affirmation that suicide symbolises. The joke seems quite forced, as Harry is not seen at this stage as belonging in the Caribbean. Jackson's answer, 'We trying we best, sir, since all you gone', (Walcott *Pantomime* 97) emphasises their difference, and modifies Harry's joke into a complaint. Moreover, it brings their hostility to the forefront, as his comment implies that he would be willing to make an effort to help Harry commit suicide. However, Jackson's definition of Harry as an outsider does not silence the latter, who defines himself as a minority, but still part of the Caribbean. Immediately, Jackson rules out Harry's argumentation by pointing to the fact that he is the minority in power, and he then goes back to his position as waiter/servant, undermining Harry's attempt at drawing closer: 'So, now the fun and dance done, sir, breakfast now?' (Walcott *Pantomime* 97) Jackson's contextualising of their tensions as having been addressed within the frame of 'fun and dance' renders their conversation a menial chat of no consequence. Going back to their roles in reality is a way of moving back to not addressing the issues between them. The pattern of moving closer and further away, of making some advancement and then retreating back to a safe position resembles Ti-Jean's

strategy of going back and forth in a game of masking and unmasking the devil and himself for the purpose of dealing with something – in that case the devil – which is too difficult to behold. Similarly in this case, the tension between them increases to a point where one of the characters – in this first act Jackson – retreats to the safe position. Harry, however, is not the devil, and if one of them loses their temper, they will not be devoured as in the case of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. The explosion of anger is part of the journey towards an understanding of each other. In the first act, however, the game of moving closer and stepping back continues.

In spite of restoring his position as an unengaged waiter with a purely professional relationship with Harry, Jackson is ready to contribute to the business with his own common sense. He finds it more urgent to improve the basic facilities than to waste time and money on entertainment. Again, he is defined not only in terms of physical practicality, but also as a character who knows what actions need to be taken. While Harry daydreams about Robinson Crusoe, Jackson brings him to the reality that '[the tourists] ain't shipwrecked, they pay in advance for their vacation.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 98) Jackson is the Caribbean man with a realistic understanding of their economic dependency on tourism, as well as the character who fulfils the role of getting things done. Harry is depicted as a dramatic wreck who has little business sense, and whose idea of Robinson Crusoe is that of a tragic lonely figure. Jackson's involvement in bringing Harry down to reality serves both the purpose of disengaging himself from the pantomime, as well as of making some movement forward in the business. His impatience clashes with Harry's nostalgia, and the conversation moves on to the issue of the parrot. The parrot, who incessantly mispronounces and calls Jackson 'Heinegger,'



too much like 'hi, nigger,' becomes a symbol of a colonial mindset that has not disappeared yet in the island.

Harry's repetition of the parrot's words, together with his defence of the bird, brings him closer to the position of the parrot towards Jackson. Harry's explanation that the parrot is a creole parrot and that its mispronunciation is unintended opens one of the serious exchanges between Harry and Jackson about colonialism. Jackson explains that the parrot is prejudiced in the same way as a child is made to be prejudiced: by education. 'That parrot survive from a pre-colonial epoch, Mr Trewe, and if it want to last in Trinidad and Tobago, then it go have to adjust.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 100) Jackson seems to be talking more about Harry himself than about the parrot, with the anecdote of the bird becoming a catalyst for Jackson to address Harry's patronising attitude towards him, a remnant, as with the parrot, of an earlier epoch. Harry has told Jackson that he will 'bring it all [the pantomime] down to your level,' to which Jackson answers: 'I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 98-99)

The parrot as symbol of Harry's own prejudice will be sacrificed later, in an act of exorcism that will bring the two characters even closer together. Throughout the first act, however, Harry remains oblivious to his own bias, and in order to prove that he is far from the colonial mindset, he proposes that they reverse the roles in the pantomime. Again, Jackson can see beyond Harry's good intentions, and shows his total scepticism before resorting yet again to his professional role, as a way of distancing himself:

#### JACKSON

You mean you prepared to walk round naked as your mother make you, in your jockstrap, playing a white cannibal in front of your

own people? You're a real actor! And you got balls, excuse me, Mr Trewe, to even consider doing a thing like that! Good. Joke finish. Breakfast now, eh? (Walcott *Pantomime* 101)

Jackson is trying to make Harry face the implications of what he has just suggested directly, and to avoid any fantasy or Romantic idea about it. The conversation having gone too far, Jackson leaves and comes back a little later, to find Harry rehearsing both Robinson Crusoe and Friday, without his trousers on. The next conversation, where the issue of manners and wearing trousers develops, becomes Jackson's struggle to maintain their distance through their fixed professional roles. Outside of their roles as boss and waiter, their prejudices give way to a tension that is too intense to keep the conversation going. If Harry does not wear his trousers, these safe roles are undermined, thus bringing them closer together. At Harry's insistence, Jackson's anger explodes, he shouts at Harry, who finally puts on his trousers. Once again, by means of a conversation about a small detail, they are dealing with the causes of the tension that exists between them. If the parrot episode brings in the question of the psychological remnants of the colonial order after the demise of colonialism, the scene dealing with Harry's trousers serves the purpose of testing how close they can get before the tension reaches a climax.

Both characters in *Pantomime* start from positions far away from each other, and their uneasy interaction takes them to their limits and beyond. Far from retreating to a safer position where the conversation can become calm again, Harry insists and tries to convince him about his idea. Jackson gets serious, tries to explain without irony or sarcasm his reasons for disagreeing with Harry, and he even threatens him with physical violence. Although Jackson's threat is very real,

Harry's boredom is such that he prefers to continue rather than get back to their professional relationship. Thus, after telling his own male-fight anecdote, he tries to counteract Jackson's resolve to remain distant by using direct and non-subliminal language: 'I'd say, Jackson, that we've come closer to a mutual respect, and that things need not get that hostile.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 107) At this point, Jackson is running out of resources: he has asked politely to get back to work, he has threatened to resign, he has shouted at Harry, he has used violent threats, but Harry's almost childlike determination manages to resist Jackson's continual opposition. Taken to the edge, Jackson's last resort disarms Harry: he will only stay if it is an order, thus obliging Harry to play the master role in full. Irritated, Harry loses his temper, adopts the role and gives the order. Jackson accepts and sits down with Harry. Making Harry give an order is Jackson's triumph to set the conversation on his own terms. Harry has lost his temper and has to occupy the position that Jackson puts him in. Once Harry is irritated, Jackson is ready to make concessions. The parallel with *Ti-Jean's* fable, where the failure to beat the devil comes with losing one's temper shows a continuation between Walcott's early plays and his naturalistic period. The difference is a question of scope. In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, the character's exploding anger marked his end. On the other hand, *Pantomime* shows characters who do not disappear after an outburst of anger. The exploration of the effects of society's raging fury in *Dream on Monkey Mountain* provides a psychological examination of the social and historical elements at stake in the process of decolonisation. The focus in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, however, is an introspective analysis of language, self-discovery, and renewal. *Pantomime* deals with the aftermath of decolonisation, with the problems of sharing a space and creating a society within

a multicultural and economically dependent context. Thus, instead of disappearing, the characters remain on stage, their conflict still present after the irrepressible wrath surfaces. Within the fable, the meaning is symbolic. Within the dream-play, the analysis is psychological. Now, within Walcott's pantomime, the conflict is stretched, its scope extends to the rehearsal of possibilities that will have to accommodate anger, opposition, irritability and the complexity of cross-cultural communication, in order to avoid a cul-de-sac.

After Jackson succeeds in setting his own terms for their interplay, he is ready to make concessions, and, above all, to listen to Harry's idea. Although Jackson's demand to be given an order might be read as a statement of servanthood, within their tense conflict it becomes a triumph over Harry, a sign that he decides how and in which context they will interact. Significantly, this triumph involves Harry's impatient explosion of anger. Once they start discussing the show, Jackson is in control of the situation, whereas Harry feels uncomfortable, he is overtly politically correct, and tries not to offend Jackson, who ignores Harry's patronising slips. The fact that Harry feels uneasy about giving an order while Jackson gains control of the situation points to the fact that, for the latter, serving or being served is simply not an issue. In fact, right after sitting down at Harry's command Jackson feels free to ask for a cigarette and light from Harry, without any discomfort. On the other hand, Harry's uneasiness proves that giving an order opens a whole dimension of class and racial markers that he has internalised and repressed, but which are switched on by his order, and which trigger a series of automatic mechanisms of political correctness: 'We could work up a good satire, you know, on the master-servant – no offense (sic) – relationship.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 109) They continue the conversation, and

again, Harry appears worried that Jackson might be offended by having to wear the hat, to which Jackson replies ‘It ain’t bothering me. When you going make your point?’ (Walcott *Pantomime* 110) Jackson’s triumph, therefore, lies in bringing to the surface – and to their interaction – Harry’s underlying colonial assumptions.

Harry’s proposal seems unrealistic to Jackson, who expresses it without any worries about offence or political correctness: ‘I think is shit.’ (Walcott *Pantomime* 111) Jackson begins to improvise, and enters a trance-like state, where the pantomime transforms into a rather serious commentary about how the colonial order remains active as a shadow after colonialism disappears. When Harry suggests that he improvise, Jackson is hooked and convinced thereon. Engaging in a pantomime where there is no pre-planned programme mirrors the creation of a West Indian nationhood after independence, where different groups share in the building of a society as they go along, without a clear pre-determined vision of their goal. Jackson starts right away by giving orders, he invents a language and acts out his new role as master in an exact reversal of roles, thus following the coloniser’s ways. The episode develops in a language that neither Harry nor the audience understand. Here Walcott is addressing his own concern about using African languages, and making the theatre understood to the artist’s audience. Harry makes a comment about an invisible cameraman and the subtitles that will have to be introduced for the pantomime. The stage directions throughout this scene give the English translation of this new terminology. In this way, the actor playing Jackson will pronounce the words knowing exactly what they mean, so that he will act in the same way each time. This means that the acting is entirely Walcott’s responsibility. Gesturing is detailed in this section without

linguistic meaning, and communication takes place through pointing to the things the words refer to, but also through an understanding of the act of naming. The first interaction between the coloniser and the colonised within their pantomime, therefore, happens through gesturing, with no linguistic communication. The effect of this episode in the play is that English appears outside the colonial interaction. Any language could be used, even a fake one. Harry challenges him to remember all the terms Jackson has invented, and shows him that this new language does not exist for them, and will not work. At that point, Jackson has to concede that Harry is right, accepts English as his language, but far from losing his enthusiasm, he engages in the creation of an improvised calypso.

Harry and Jackson start an argument about how to act out the boat, a sea bird, and Crusoe's shipwreck. This scene rehearses in a tone of mockery the period of disagreements about how to develop and create a nation after independence. Jackson plays Crusoe rowing alone on a boat, while Harry acts out the sea bird. Both characters interrupt each other's acting, criticising their gestures and rejecting each other's ideas. The scene shows a quarrel where agreement becomes impossible, mainly because Harry decides to stop, as he does not feel comfortable in his new role as sea bird: 'Er, Jackson. This is too humiliating. Now, let's just forget it and please don't continue, or you're fired.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 123) Although it was Harry's proposal to invert their roles and follow Jackson's instructions, this scene becomes too much for him, and he retreats to his role as master/boss, where he feels safe and dignified. If their disagreement symbolises the various opposing views after independence, Harry's move comes to represent the continuation of a colonial order where the master-servant relationship is reproduced and any social change aborted by the privileged classes.

Harry's threat to fire Jackson mirrors Jackson's previous demand to be given an order, setting the context for their interaction. This time, however, Harry's attempt to bring back their master-servant relationship does not work, because their improvised pantomime has already started.

Improvisation, representing a new independence free of colonial instructions, alters the scheme of their interaction, and challenges a character like Harry, who faces his own prejudices even within a light-hearted pantomime. As a point of no return, this scene turns the play towards a new unknown direction. Jackson objects to stepping back to their normal everyday interaction, which is exactly his reaction throughout the first act until Harry convinces him to participate in the pantomime. The fact that they will improvise and that the play is not predetermined convinces Jackson, so that Harry's present restriction and back-stepping do not make sense. The clue lies in Harry's lack of awareness of the implications of his suggestion. The conversation turns serious, and Jackson's enlightened words identify the problem underlying their paralysis: 'This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 125) This scene closes the first act with a level of tension equal to that of the start, with an offended Jackson, and an apologetic, patronising Harry. However, their improvisation has opened up a path that extends beyond the limits of the pantomime into their real-life situation, rendering the technique of the theatre within the theatre a commentary about the role of the theatre within its society. In the same way as Jackson and Harry deal with their conflicts and tensions through the enactment of the Crusoe pantomime, their realisations bring a certain level of enlightenment on the part of the audience. The missing tourist audience within the reality of the play is replaced by the real audience of Walcott's play, who witness

the rehearsal, rather than the finished version, since it is within the rehearsal that the conflicts are dealt with.

At the beginning of the second act, Harry is alone on stage. Apparently, their previous distance has been re-established, but soon Jackson's presence is felt through a hammering noise that disturbs Harry's reading. This hammering noise represents in the first place Jackson's statement of identity: his presence cannot be ignored. Secondly, it inaugurates an element of violence and a real imminent physical threat that symbolises the repressed tension between the characters, and that foreshadows the violence within the act. Jackson accompanies his hammering with the singing of the *Crusoe calypso*, which points to the fact that, once started, the revolution will not stop. However, this is not a blind revolution driven by a linear vision of history, as that which appears in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. This time, Jackson is an individual whose understanding of the mechanisms of colonialism incorporates the element of a time-perspective. Moreover, he is a calypsonian 'who is untouchable as a figure, who contains the history of the race, who is its vessel.' (Walcott quoted in Burnett 2000: 116) What appears in the second act as the same unbridgeable distance between both characters hides the possibility of meaningful interaction through the unavoidable sharing of space. In addition, Harry's retreat to a safe master position at the end of Act One soon proves impossible to maintain. The movement towards a mutual understanding is now inevitable, although the process they undergo in the second act involves bringing the violent tension to the surface.

Early in Act Two, Harry and Jackson start a dialogue to discuss their respective stances. Harry explains that he wanted to set up a pantomime due to his extreme boredom: 'I daresay the terror of emptiness made me want to act.'



(Walcott *Pantomime* 135), and admits openly that he wouldn't have imagined that he could be prejudiced: 'I mean, I'd hate to believe that under everything else I was also prejudiced, as well. I wouldn't have any right here, right?' (Walcott *Pantomime* 136) Jackson, on the other hand, identifies Harry's problem as loneliness, and offers to help. Jackson's words contain both criticism and tenderness, still charged with a tension and a certain distance that keeps him somewhat uninvolved, but ready to take a step that he is not really obliged to take:

JACKSON

... So you lonely, but I could make you forget all o' that. I could make H. Trewe, Esquire, a brand-new man. You come like a challenge.

HARRY

Think I keep to myself too much?

JACKSON

If! You would get your hair cut by phone. You drive so careful you make your car nervous. If you was in charge of the British Empire, you wouldn'ta lose it, you'da misplace it.

HARRY

I see, Jackson.

JACKSON

But all that could change if you do what I tell you.

HARRY

I don't want a new life, thanks.

JACKSON

Same life. Different man. But that stiff upper lip goin' have to quiver a little. (Walcott *Pantomime* 137)

Realising that Harry needs to move on from his isolation, Jackson offers to help on the condition that they reach a true equality and a respect for each other. Jackson unveils the reality that their everyday interaction is a pose, a pantomime

where they smile and talk to each other, but where an urge for violent confrontation lies dormant. Jackson's words enable an honest exchange where their tension finds expression within a safe impasse. Harry mentions Jackson's 'vindictive hammering' and the fact that Jackson mispronounces words on purpose: 'It's a smile in front and a dagger behind your back, right? ... I'm aware, chum. I'm aware.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 139-140) What this conversation unveils, and exorcises, is a form of communication where an agreement is constantly being set to accept a certain amount of hypocrisy. Jackson's smile is fake, but so is Harry's. The hammering is vindictive, but there would be no reference to it unless within this specific context of honest communicative impasse. This and other short conversations where Jackson and Harry use a direct language and leave sarcasm aside resemble Makak and Moustique's debates on the best way to move on in their journey. In this case, their interaction has the effect of bringing them together again, in a second serious attempt to organise the Crusoe pantomime. The purpose of the pantomime has been slightly altered on this second occasion. What starts in the first act as Crusoe's pantomime for the entertainment of tourists becomes in the second act a ritual for Harry and Jackson as representatives of society.

The ritualistic character of *Pantomime* is activated when both characters agree to engage together in the creation of the pantomime a second time. The repetition of Crusoe's story brings to the surface unconscious colonial assumptions that need to be dealt with. By getting involved in the rehearsal of this pantomime, both characters have broken their everyday implicit agreement to interact with a smile – their own usual pantomime – ignoring the tension and violence that remains unexpressed and invisible but certainly real. The pantomime

inside the play affects the characters' everyday interaction in the same way as a ritual activates certain underlying assumptions that need to be addressed within a society. Consequently, once these subconscious elements have been brought to the surface, the characters must go through the ritual in order to return safely, and changed, into a healthy social environment. Harry's decision to stop the pantomime, therefore, brings the pantomime as entertainment to an end, and it interrupts the pantomime's ritualistic function merely temporarily. From this turning point onwards, the violence is exorcised, the past is dealt with, and the figure of Crusoe is modified to adapt to Trinidad, with the killing of the parrot as the necessary sacrifice within the ritual.

However, the ritual does not follow a well-established set of practices. Indeed, the idea is to improvise. Harry and Jackson have no predetermined plan to deal with the combination of their extremely different views. Harry's vision of Robinson Crusoe is tragic and Romantic, with the character reciting poems about his ill fate. Jackson's idea, on the other hand, is that, after being shipwrecked, Crusoe will kill a goat, construct a hut, and use the goat's skin to make clothes for himself. The difference between their respective views lies in the fact that, according to Jackson, Crusoe has not lost his faith, whereas for Harry, the castaway is a figure who has lost all hope. In this episode, Walcott is bringing together the existentialist European tradition and the metaphysical optimism of survival that combine in him as poet, playwright, but essentially, in himself as a West Indian.

Harry and Jackson begin their ritualistic Crusoe pantomime by reading out from the script. Jackson reads, and Harry corrects him, with a perfectionist attitude that resembles Walcott's own as playwright: 'if you're going to do

professional theatre, Jackson, don't take this personally, more discipline is required.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 144) However, when Jackson gives his opinion, their distance reappears and their tension becomes obvious once again, with Jackson's acting described as creole, and with Harry behaving in a dictatorial manner. The pause between this build-up of tension and the exorcism scene is an interlude where Jackson goes to the toilet. Their discussion about the duration of this specific ritual turns into an exchange of sarcasm and racial prejudices, with a reference to the separate toilets for the boss and the servants which in practice reproduces the racist law of separate toilets for whites and blacks. Finally, this short break turns into an analysis of the complexity of altering a whole society after years of forced submission. Once again, it is Jackson who identifies the meaning under the surface of an apparently trivial yet tense conversation:

JACKSON

... You mustn't rush things, people have to slide into independence. They give these islands independence so fast that people still ain't recover from the shock, so they pissing and wiping their hands indiscriminately. You don't want that to happen in this guest house, Mr. Harry. Let me take my little five minutes, as usual, and if you have to go, you go to your place, and I'll go to mine, and let's keep things that way until I can feel I can use your towels without a profound sense of gratitude, and you could, if you wanted, a little later maybe, walk round the guest house in the dark, put your foot in the squelch of those who missed the pit by the outhouse, that charming old-fashioned outhouse so many tourists take Polaroids of, without feeling degraded, and we can then respect each other as artists. So, I appreciate the offer, but I'll be back in five. Kindly excuse me. (Walcott *Pantomime* 152)

As the tension and the sarcasm grow, the threat of violence anticipated by Jackson's hammering becomes more and more obvious. While Jackson talks from the toilet, Harry rehearses a pantomime of becoming a savage Crusoe. Half-naked, his hair dripping water that he has poured over his head, he grabs the ice pick and drives it hard into the table. Meanwhile, and off-stage, Jackson has killed the parrot, which he brings and throws at Harry's feet. The parrot, that symbolises the remnants of the colonial order after independence, dies and becomes the sacrifice that is needed within their ritual. Although in actual fact it is Jackson who performs the ritual, Harry mirrors Jackson's actions in a doubling of the parrot's sacrifice. This coincidence between action and mime shows both characters attuned and engaged in the same ritual stages. In addition, the killing of the parrot serves the purpose of being a catalyst for their tension to become real violence and physical threat. Harry explodes, while Jackson takes the role of accompanying Harry through a scene that becomes the exorcism of his own past.

In a trance-like state, Harry directs his violence towards his wife, who abandoned him and accidentally killed their son. Jackson impersonates Harry's wife by holding a picture of her. The seriousness of the scene is broken by Jackson's humorous depiction of Harry's wife running away from the ice pick, and repeating Harry's scene of suicide threat. At the last moment, when Jackson as Ellen threatens with jumping off the cliff, Harry utters the words that liberate him from his past: '*Ellen! Stop! I forgive you*' (Walcott *Pantomime* 164) Jackson then brings him back to reality, and urges him to move on as a new Crusoe: 'Crusoe must get up, he must make himself get up. He have to face a next day again.' (Walcott *Pantomime* 164)

After this scene of violence exorcised, Harry is able to cry and let go of his past. More importantly, he is aware of the change he has undergone.

An angel passes through a house and leaves no imprint of his shadow on its wall. A man's life slowly changes and he does not understand the change. Things like this have happened before, and they can happen again. You understand, Jackson? (Walcott *Pantomime* 169)

Jackson's answer, that Harry is making 'a mole hill out of a mountain', (Walcott *Pantomime* 170) points to a reading of the play as a metaphor of a greater conflict and exorcism. Within the theatrical frame, the story of Harry and Jackson acts as a ritualistic rehearsal and depiction of the process of decolonisation, identity formation, and multicultural interaction in the Caribbean. As a double of reality, the theatre becomes a ritual where society comes to terms with a new context and a new environment. Jackson's phrase, a reversal of the usual idiom, appears as a witty epigram that works as the play's epilogue.

Harry's development as a character who ends up liberating the ghosts of his past contrasts with Jackson's character, whose process of change is more subtle. Jackson is the calypsonian, witty and knowledgeable of the history of his and Harry's countries. He has a profound understanding of the mechanisms of colonialism and decolonisation. Besides, being a calypsonian, he is articulate and masters the language in a way that overpowers Harry. The ritual enables him to break out of a certain type of fake interaction that he and Harry have pantomimed for long. His unwillingness to open up to Harry at the beginning slowly gives way to an active offer to help. Jackson's contribution to the pantomime is clearly to set it within his own terms, so that the pantomime becomes more a ritual to heal their interaction, rather than a tourist attraction. However, in the same way as Harry

retreats when he feels uncomfortable, Jackson's suspicious attitude towards Harry makes him step back on several occasions. It is as much through Harry's honesty as through Jackson's understanding that both characters are able to come together.

The process of learning to understand and respect each other proves very complex. It is necessary to face the issues that separate them, in order to get to the chore of their conflict. As the play shows, this process is not linear, but a series of failed attempts, infinite rehearsals, where the characters must be capable of moving closer after having distanced themselves from each other. At the end of the play, the conflicts are not totally solved. Indeed, this is a continuous process, which will be repeated in the future, as Harry suggests when he acknowledges his own inner change. In spite of the open-ended character of the play, Jackson's last words show a certain achievement, a symbolic step towards a better interaction between them. Earlier, in his sarcastic analysis of post-independence social behaviour, he pinpoints a problem that exists between them: 'let's keep things that way until I can feel I can use your towels without a profound sense of gratitude'. (Walcott *Pantomime* 152) This sentence, which settles the toilet episode with Jackson using the servant's room, gives a clue about Jackson's last words in the play. After they laugh and cry together, Jackson closes the play: 'Starting from Friday, Robinson, we could talk 'bout a raise?' (Walcott *Pantomime* 170) If before Jackson remains within a sarcastic defensive attitude, now their interaction is free enough for him to ask for a raise. Finally, Jackson changes in another way. He decides that he will resign, and that his true identity is to be a calypsonian. In conclusion, apart from benefiting from a better interaction with Harry, Jackson undergoes a self-realisation that runs parallel to Harry's own.

The use of the figure of Robinson Crusoe to focus on the conflicts that arise from social interaction is rather striking, if one considers Walcott's description of Crusoe as the isolated and lonely hermit castaway on an island. In 1965, Walcott explains his understanding of Crusoe as a literary figure who reconciles the poet with his society. His Crusoe is shaped after the image of a hermit burning anything around him in order to make a bonfire: 'I am trying to make a heretical reconciliation between the outer world, and the world of the hermit, between, if you wish, the poet and the objects surrounding him that are called society.' (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 35) For Walcott, the figure of Crusoe is a myth that adapts, changes shape, and he is Adam, the first man who controls and rules the world. Moreover, Crusoe is Adam in the sense that he names the world around him. In this respect, Walcott adopts the figure of Crusoe as the position of all poets and prose writers of the West Indies, because all of them are 'namers.' Walcott's pre-1970 Crusoe is not the colonial symbol of masculine technological rationality coming from the West, but an individual alone, under pressure, who survives. This hermit-like Crusoe, bored and dehumanised by his own isolation, becomes a writer, and remains sane through his journal accounts. Crusoe becomes the master when Friday appears. 'It is only when Friday arrives that Crusoe again withdraws into himself ... and becomes by necessity, a master.' (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 38) What Friday provides in this early depiction of Crusoe as a mythological figure, is a social context, where, transformed into master, Crusoe restores all the social and cultural patterns of his past. At that stage, Walcott concludes that the poet's will turns an apparently empty past into a 'fertile desert'. (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 40) However,



this early essay already points towards the development of later key ideas that shape and inform the more recent Crusoe myth that appears in *Pantomime*.

First, Crusoe as a mythological figure is malleable and, although he might appear as an existentialist, 'he changes shape'. (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 37) This careful distancing from existentialism, together with the portrayal of Crusoe as a survivor develops later on into the concept of the second Adam, which Walcott hints at in this essay when he says that Crusoe is Adam, 'the first inhabitant of a second paradise.' (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 35) Secondly, the figure of Crusoe for Walcott is not a Crusoe for tourists:

The commercial Crusoe gives his name to our brochures and hotels. He has become the property of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist board, and although it is the same symbol that I use, you must allow me to make him various, contradictory and ... changeable. (Walcott 'The Figure of Crusoe' 35)

It seems to me that this quotation gives an excellent idea about Walcott's later play on the same mythological figure of Robinson Crusoe. Harry and Jackson are both part of that creative force that Crusoe represents for Walcott, with their contradictions, conflicts, and changes. A pantomime that starts with tourism and a commercial Crusoe in mind triggers a ritualistic journey of interaction between seemingly opposing natures, to unveil the pantomime of everyday reality that exists between the two characters. The key difference in *Pantomime*'s Crusoe, however, is that the parts are not strict and unchangeable. Harry is Crusoe, but Jackson is Crusoe as well. Although it is true that Harry is generally read as the Crusoe figure in this play, it is important to realise that when Jackson appears, apparently as a Friday figure, the result is not that Harry transforms into the master automatically, or 'by necessity,' as Walcott explains in this pre-1970

essay. On the contrary, Jackson's appearance, and their unavoidable interaction, transforms the play into a true communication line between the poet and his society. Walcott's development of the Crusoe figure into a varied, manifold myth of interaction and malleability mirrors Harris's concept of the manifold fossil of psyche, where creation, and genesis start from a collision of worlds, from a duality, and not from a pure single origin. Through a complicated and difficult interaction, the characters, and then the audience with the poet, enter a new social dimension that renders their own prejudices malleable, and unblocks the mould of suspicious distance.

Reading Derek Walcott's plays through a Harrisian prism highlights the coincidence of ideas and parameters of both writers, and it shows the profound changes that Walcott undergoes in his long journey that descends into the depths of his innermost contradictions and resurfaces into a new freedom where his artistic expression manages to incorporate the paradoxes of life. The concepts of *Unfinished Genesis* and *Infinite Rehearsal*, solidly grounded in a malleable understanding of time and space, emphasise some of Walcott's essential concepts, which delineate the artist's self-definition and his view of the Caribbean. In 'Guyana', the poet witnesses the Guyanese surveyor's interior journey through the rainforest and back. Such immeasurable task appears to the poet almost impossible to undertake; while his poetic vision travels ahead and identifies the need to embark on a similar inward quest, his impatience boils into frustration, annoyance and desperation. However, Walcott continues with his relentless effort throughout his early career, driven as much by a stubborn honesty as by a constant faith in art as synonym of survival and of life itself. His refusal to give up brings him safely to another shore, where language is liberated, and the artist finds freedom to sing his own music.

Walcott's music, understood as the voice behind his plays, is a chord that faces conflict, engages in the troubles of his society which he embodies; a chord that vibrates in harmony with Harris's music of the living landscapes. The principle of instability, that calls for a malleability in form and in art, enables Walcott to write his own inward journal within the context of an utmost artistic honesty. Furthermore, Walcott manages to delineate the foundations of his artistic

voice through his theatrical experience which sways between the written and the spoken, the tragic and the joking, the nostalgic and the impatient.

The analysis of the plays shows that, as early as *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Walcott challenges the dualism of good versus evil within the context of a folktale legend. Ti-Jean triumphs in finding the human element in the Devil, through a profound understanding of the meaning of community. The trickster figure as a paradigm of adaptability and survival symbolises the regeneration of the community after enslavement and colonialism, while the folktale legend is used as a background template that incorporates the communal experience to restore a balanced human quality by means of the oral tradition. *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* deals with the tension arising from confrontation – in this case with the Devil – in a way that Walcott extends into his other plays: the movement forwards and backwards between Ti-Jean and the Devil appears in this play as a necessary strategy of survival, and of revolution. The rehearsal of positions to and fro is transferred to language in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, where the power of discourse is based on the interaction between several counteracting wills, on the readiness to believe, and on the establishment of semantic agreements.

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* presents the pattern of moving closer and further away in endless repetition as a revelation of deceit behind certain discourses, but it also brings forth an interaction paradigm of friendship and understanding that becomes the genesis, or resurrection, of Man. The tree that grows roots a second time represents the survival and resurgence of the Caribbean as human, after the process of dehumanisation and zombification. The liberation of language and discourse, as well as the portrayal of a mythical resurrection in the friendship between Makak and Moustique, and the liberation of the former

from prison, work as an original starting point for Walcott as artist, which brings echoes of the Harrisian concept of the manifold fossil of psyche. Genesis as interaction, or a new concept of genesis as resurrection based on friendship and self-knowledge are at the core of Walcott's dream-play.

Finally, *Pantomime* offers a close-up of the conflict between two characters who personify the nostalgic tendency of tragedy and nihilism, and the willingness and impatience to move on that is based on hopeful faith. The repetition of the to and fro paradigm is taken to its limit and beyond, in a mature play that copes with the growing tension and explosions that arise from the conflicting interaction between these two opposing forces. The result is not a final unity, but a medium of communication and debate: the setting of social rituals that enable the characters to adapt, incorporate and resolve their past, their present and their future together. In essence, Walcott's play manages to establish a number of initiation rituals, a cultural adaptation between seemingly opposing natures, that guarantees a freedom of communication and the unblocking of a tense social paralysis.

The confessional tone that predominates in Walcott's essays 'What the Twilight Says' and 'The Muse of History' adopts in his plays the form of self-definition and commentary on the role of the artist, and his position in relation to society. Harris defines the role of the artist as responsible for creating a picture of society that is free but that at the same time exerts some form of authority or control.<sup>13</sup> This idea is represented in the mythical configuration of Ulysses/crew. With Harris's paradoxical idea of freedom and control as a premise, Walcott sets to explore the ground under his feet, as does the surveyor in the poem 'Guyana',

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 2.

not letting the immeasurability of the rainforest intimidate him on his task. In the case of Walcott, his role as artist of the theatre incorporates his society into his creations in a physical way. As a playwright and director, Walcott's inner journey is shaped by his experiences with the actors, the audiences, the critics, and the practicalities that determine, to a certain extent, the outcome of the plays. In a painful and conflicting growing process, the artist sets the battling ground, exorcises the language, and resurrects into a second Adam, a new malleable Crusoe figure who accommodates the tremors of a complex period in the Caribbean. The tension and conflicts experienced throughout his theatrical endeavour in the Caribbean are but the poet's own infinite rehearsal of the pattern of moving backwards and forwards between differing wills. Thus, after his resignation and move to the US, Walcott's play *Pantomime* shows the artist's exploration of their tensions in a play where distance disappears, and the close-up is total. Stepping out of the immediate practical matters allows him to rehearse an extreme approach within a safe ritualistic frame.

The duality of the infinite exploration ahead, and the impatience of the artist that begins is resolved through a swaying movement that begins in dialect, a tidal wave that makes its own music:

There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary, and the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery. Tonally the individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance of an imperial concept of language ... Poetry is an island that breaks away from the main.

...

the noun, the "Antilles" ripples like brightening water, and the sounds of leaves, palm fronds, and birds are the sounds of fresh dialect, the native tongue. The personal vocabulary, the individual

melody whose metre is one's biography, joins in that sound, with any luck, and the body moves like a walking, a waking island.  
(Walcott 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory' 70, 79)

As surfaces in Walcott's plays, the key to breach nihilism lies in the faith in language, that turns into a creative force, and constitutes the secret of survival and regeneration: faith restores community. Similarly, the artist's colossal undertaking requires a direction and a patience in the face of a seemingly immeasurable vacuum. Restoring the humanity of his characters, and the authority of his speech, Walcott draws an artistic mythical configuration that works as an antidote to nihilistic sarcasm.

The difficulty of visualising a map of Caribbean identity during the period immediately following independence surfaces in Walcott's early desperation caused by an impatient urgency, while later on, it is by pausing to reflect that a play like *Pantomime* takes shape. As early as his poem 'Guyana,' Walcott is already writing about the final tone of actions like the straightening of a bed-sheet by lovers who have never lain together. Walcott's early desperation and frustration bears a tone of doomed sentence. In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, characters who lose their temper find their tragic end, and disappear. However, in *Pantomime*, angry explosions give way to new attempts to come closer, and later, to an exorcism of personal and social conflicts. Walcott's theatrical experience and his firm belief in the vital relevance of art grow into a mature understanding of his position as an artist, and, after growing roots as Adam resurrected, Walcott avoids the paralysis of existentialist fatalism.

Recently, Walcott's Caribbean phase has been analysed in a book by Patricia Ismond, who focuses on his poetry, and emphasises the revolutionary

aspect of his apprenticeship years. Dealing with the period between 1948 and 1979, Ismond shows Walcott's process of dealing with the lack of history side by side with a lack of metaphors, and explains the poet's search for new metaphors as the poet's expression of his inward journey. Walcott's early poetry has received further attention in the form of a new edition of 'Epitaph for the Young: A Poem in Twelve Cantos' (1949),<sup>14</sup> and his plays have been published in a new series by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. In addition to this, the bi-centennial of Haiti's declaration of Independence in 2004 was marked in Trinidad by a conference where scenes from Walcott's play *The Haitian Earth* were performed. The renewed scholarly interest in Fanon's texts points towards a scholarly scene that returns to a period that could be described as a space of possibility: going back to the years immediately before independence and analysing the development of decolonisation. A revision of Walcott's plays in this context shows the gap between the early years of impatience and optimistic excitement, his early frustration, and his subsequent maturing process in theatrical form and content.

Much needs to be written still about Walcott's theatrical production. The wide range of genres and productions, the taped performances, his sketches of characters, scenes, and stages, together with posters, leaflets and photographic material constitute an enormous archive that is still being sorted by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. His early journalism is currently being edited by Gordon Collier, together with a selection of transcriptions from the BBC's 'Caribbean Voices.' All of these will provide new insights into an area of Walcott's artistic production that is often overlooked. A Spanish translation of Walcott's *The Odyssey. A Staged Version* was performed this year (2005) at the Mérida Classic

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<sup>14</sup> Published in the Special Issue of *Agenda* (Fumagalli 2002-2003)



Theatre Festival in Spain, while *Pantomime* has been republished in the Routledge anthology of postcolonial plays. When I visited Walcott early in 2003, he was working on his unpublished musical *Steel*, and rehearsing the scenes from *The Haitian Earth* for the Trinidad conference.

Walcott the playwright wrote his plays with the idea of creating a repertoire. His plays were written in the span of several years, but they continue to speak about the Caribbean today. Like Harris, Walcott believes in rehearsal and repetition, in art as a social ritualistic practice in order to overcome the paralysis of cynicism. Asked if there is ‘a kind of Naiupaulian truth of something hopeless and unfinished about the region’, (Dabydeen 39) Walcott’s answer sums up his theatrical stance:

Either you’re patriotic or you’re cynical and I think that’s the answer. I don’t think that’s a Caribbean answer – I think that the Caribbean temperament is one of comedy or tragedy. Not complete tragedy nor complete comedy. ... There is a comedy underneath the tragedy – it is not just laughing at error, but I think there is a temperament in the Caribbean that keeps it fertile, contradictory but rich. (Walcott in Dabydeen 39)

Walcott’s plays provide an answer to the nihilistic cynicism of today, the idea that given enough time, joy inevitably grows into cynicism. The inaugural faith and enthusiasm of Walcott’s early years transforms into a fertile maturity of cross-cultural flexibility.

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