

Theatre as Alter/“Native” in Derek Walcott

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Foreword

Accidental examiner of a PhD dissertation – this is how I saw myself when I first met Nirjhar Sarkar at North Bengal University where he was going to defend his thesis. So often this is how one comes to examine dissertations as the institutional head's random pen lights on a name in the panel of examiners. Nirjhar was the youngish, harried scholar, apparently charged with all the responsibilities of the day's rituals, hoping for an eventless defence, a seal of approval on his thesis and a relieved goodbye to the external examiner.

The subject of the dissertation itself intrigued me. Walcott was not an easy choice. How had he come to select him? Why had he selected the plays? How was he negotiating the theoretical minefield that he seemed to have taken on with author and genre? That the defense was successful, that he received his degree and went back to his life as an English teacher – this is the story of hundreds of PhD scholars in English departments across the country. But for Nirjhar, obviously, this was not the end. The choice of Walcott, his quiet passion for the area he had studied for several years, and a recognition of what it means to find a lifetime's work in one's author and context pushed him to do something that all Indian scholars of English perhaps dream of, but only a few successfully manage to do – transforming the dissertation into a book, for which there is now a publisher and a waiting readership.

This book develops around a number of key aspects of Walcott's work. Walcott's "mulatto aesthetics" is presented as a formidable challenge to colonial cultural discourses of Western origin and to an answering Afrocentric aesthetic which merely guarded borders and erased all local/native differences.

Walcott's position, that West Indian militancy lies in its art, is basic to this book's examination of the plays, as is the theatre's revision of identity, agency, and selfhood. For Nirjhar's work, Walcott is someone who represents the unrealized aspirations of postcolonial intellectuals – the urge to step out of the grip of revenge historiography and aesthetics, and to find in local cultures the sources of both theory and creative practice. But perhaps most importantly, Walcott's is that exemplary literary sensibility that translates local ethos so wonderfully into thematic and style. The determinedly Caribbean flavor of Walcott's work, its creolization of the theatre and the process of "de-Westernization" of Trinidadian drama are all displayed with care and attention by Nirjhar, as he builds on the emphasis of his title to show what an alter-'native' theatre can be.

The book brings to its readers one more example of literary work as cultural nationalism and is a valuable addition to scholarship on Walcott, and to theatre as a tool and site of resistance.

Prof. Nanadana Dutta
Guahati University

Acknowledgements

Ever since the submission of thesis in North Bengal University, I was encouraged to believe that it may be expanded to a full-length book. Words of appreciation from the senior scholars and academics and my unabated interest in Derek Walcott prodded me to undertake a more comprehensive revision of the dissertation in this monograph. At that stage, I was lucky enough to have the serious comments and observations of Prof. Nandana Dutta (of Guahati University), Prof. Ashis Sengupta and Prof. Ranjan Ghosh (at the University of North Bengal), Prof. Chidananda Bhattacharaya (of Rabindra Bharati University). Let me record my gratitude to noted Walcott scholars like Prof. John Thieme of East Anglia University and Paul Breslin for their mail response to my queries. My earlier research publication in the journals like *Anthurium- A Caribbean Studies Journal* and *Post-colonial Text- A Journal* provided the impetus for a further critical investigation into the individual plays. My students and young researchers at Raiganj University have always provided me with intellectual stimulus. Among them, a special thanks go to Mr. Subham Ganguly for all his technical assistance and Pankaj Kumar Das for active support during the preparation of my manuscript. My sincere thanks to the brilliant editorial team of the Vernon Press and anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

My daughter, Sanskriti, and wife, Debasri, have always been the biggest support of all academic ventures. It is their unconditional love and understanding that have mattered most in finishing my project.

Introduction

This present monograph is intended to complement, develop and update the thesis I had submitted at The University of North Bengal in India towards the end of November 2016 on Derek Walcott's Plays. This academic focus reflects my growing critical interest in Derek Walcott, the playwright whose drive at initiation of the cross-cultural performance to the Caribbean stage has often been, sadly, lopsided. Robert Hamner, in a review essay (*Modern Drama* Vol. 39, No.1), mentions how Walcott himself lamented the meagre critical attention offered to his plays. Long way back in nineteen ninety-two, in an edited volume of essays, titled *Post-colonial English Drama Commonwealth Drama since 1960* Bruce King had noted that Derek Walcott's plays still have not had a book while his World-famous contemporaries like Wole Soyinka and Athol Fugard received full-length studies. However, King's own critical study —*Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama* has proved to be a work of painstaking scholarship and of singular importance in this direction. After King's pronouncement, only two monographs followed, entirely devoted to his plays—Julia. D. Davies's *Derek Walcott: Dramatist- creole Drama for creole acting-* (2008) and Dark Sinnwe's *Divided to the vein? Derek Walcott's drama and the formation of Cultural Identities* (2001). There is no gainsaying that the complex, diverse postcolonial theatre landscape has owed much to Walcott and his famous Trinidad Theatre Workshop- a highly productive association which spanned over three decades. An artist as astoundingly prolific as Walcott has always generated fresh interpretations and evaluations. This book seeks to explore how within the ambit of performance, the cultural entanglements and dialogues can be re-read in a more comprehensive and theoretically informed way.

Throughout his long and exceptionally prolific career of more than four decades, the poet-dramatist Derek Alton Walcott (1930-2017) has paid tribute to his beloved birthplace - the island of St. Lucia. It is his hallowed native land, his native community, displaced and dispossessed people in their peculiar cultural situation that have remained the nub of his creative enterprise. In fact, he has consecrated literary imagination to his island community-impoverished but culturally rich – a potpourri of race, language, religion and culture. This artistic debt is eloquently acknowledged in his Nobel acceptance speech, too (in 1992).¹ The cultural riches of the “unscripted” folk lives not

¹ “This is the benediction that is celebrated, a fresh language and a fresh people, and this is the frightening duty owed,” he said. And added in the name of the Caribbean people “I stand here in their name, if not their image.

only surrounded him but sustained dramas since his juvenile years. This cultural competence and authority, a form of Bordieuan *cultural capital*, is a counter to the inflow of global capital in the Caribbean archipelago. Though shackled with debt and heavily dependent upon tourism West Indies has continued to produce a plethora of artists, like musicians, poet, painters. At a very young age, the St. Lucian playwright Derek Walcott felt inspired to pursue “prodigious” creative ambitions; hailing from a colonial backwater, he had faced an acute dearth of resource for publication. In his essays and interviews, Walcott has left well-documented pictures of a struggle for literary productions in the small islands. His dedicated enterprise of staging a Caribbean theatre had to flourish against severe material constraints. Walcott knew well that theatre as a cultural product of historical, geopolitical and ideological conditions could map the Caribbean region notwithstanding the schism of language, religion and race. By exploring the inter-dependence of world, text and performance, the theatre could become “a crucial part of the entire process of decolonization and understanding of modernity” (Thiong’o XII).² Theatre, with a new “creole” architecture opened the way to interrogate the existing structures of power and knowledge.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries much of the native population in the Caribbean archipelago had shrunk due to slave labour and imported disease. With the virtual disappearance of the native population in all the islands of West Indies, the territories were gradually filled with the population of African descent and indentured, migratory Asian labours. The common experience of colonisation under the European powers like Spanish, British and French resulted in miscegenation or racial mix. These historical events resulted in “a body of literature exhibiting an extraordinarily robust and heterogeneous archive of discourse on involuntary displacement, courageous journeying, the pining for home and the ambivalence of return” (Bucknor and Donnell 245). The void created through ethnic cleansing or genocide and subsequent settlement of a huge diaspora population paved the way for heterogenous cultural formations, which I will call Alter/“Native”; it is the fulcrum of my main argument that weaves the five chapters, here. In the heterotopic space of theatre, the Caribbean alterity is not only fore-fronted, but theatre gestures towards becoming an alternative itself – a postcolonial leeway out of Manichean and polar politics. Walcott’s in-between racial and cultural location has shaped dialectical approach to culture—his deep involvement in myths, rituals, legends, popular performances of all diasporic communities

² Ngugi wa Thiong’o has contributed a Foreword titled “Placing theatre at the center of postcolonial theory and modernist Discourse” in Awam Ampka’s critical study *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires*.

and his abiding fascination with Western classics and English language. As every performance emanates out of a particular cultural life and fosters a new cross-cultural theatrical reality, the 'everyday theatre' could prove to be an important marker of self-apprehension as well as the springboard of Walcott's creative writing. King observes: "Efforts to create a theatre about lives, written by local dramatists were and to an extent remain, international with producing classical and contemporary foreign plays" (3). In her brilliant study, *Theatre, Space and World Making*, Joanne Tompkins calls the space of theatre a space of alternate ordering because in such spaces the imaginative ordering resonates with the real. Also in Walcott's corpus, the imagined ordering of reality had a mooring on the socio-political context of his time. The singular events of post-independence days in the islands had deeply impacted Walcott's creative journey. His rich *oeuvre* of over 30 plays (with quite a few unpublished) and musicals testify to the stage product as a liberatory, vibrant cultural counter which can contest strident claims of nativist politics. His unfettered creative practice mounted challenge at the empty rhetoric of political nationalism. At its nascent stage, theatre could open up a terrain charged with creole energy and imbued with trans-continental influences: "From the *Ramayana* to Anabasis, from Guadeloupe to Trinidad, all that archaeology of fragment lying around, from the broken African kingdoms, from the crevasses of Canton, from Syria and Lebanon, vibrating under the earth but in our raucous, demotic streets" (Walcott, Nobel lecture transcript).³ The "demotic" lives of streets in his birth place, the daily, open-air performances and the rituals had inspired him; what he inherited from the Trinidadian cultural life were translated into signs of theatre. And within the ambit of performance, a complex interplay of several cultures managed to explore a "trans" zone. This imagined world of alternatives (in terms of narrative, architectural design of theatre and dramaturgy) has survived the "nightmares of History" and nurtured the "adamic" vision of green beginnings. And permanently altered the theatre landscape of the Caribbean.

Theatre at the Crossroads

In the early fifties when anti-colonial sentiment and vision of pan-Caribbean culture were widespread and prevalent, Walcott set out to espouse a radical and alternative representation in the forum of theatre. Seeking a voice for his people and geography of his place he attempted to establish a distinctly native literary tradition. This cultural and literary identity could be asserted in

³ In "The Antilles" (1992) - a transcript of his Nobel lecture repeatedly stresses that performance in the Caribbean emanates from transcontinental influence and transcends the specifics of language, race and history.

performance and rituals because theatre is empowered with strong transformative and emancipatory energy. As he was surrounded by “theatricalities of our lives”, his dramatist’s vision ignored all boundaries between society as the objective reality and theatre as a subjective, constructed, actional representation (mimesis). These two interrelated realms have always shared his stage representation. Walcott embarked upon producing plays at an important historical juncture—the end and withdrawal of colonial powers and the beginning of political independence in some of the West Indian islands. In the islands held still under the yoke of colonial rule, the burgeoning attention to theatre movements attested to the key role of theatre as powerful political engagement. Belonging to such an island, Walcott considered theatre to be the most appropriate medium for negotiating the politico- historical realities. From the beginning of his creative career, like Soyinka, Walcott was tirelessly involved in directing, teaching actors, scripting, conducting workshop and forming theatre groups. He worked towards creating a theatre company, often compared with Brecht’s theatre ensemble⁴ which became a travelling company in the islands and beyond. To realise his long-cherished goal, he had founded Trinidad Theatre Workshop (1959) - an expansion of Little Carib Dance Company. Despite paucity of all logistics and infrastructural set up, theatre proved to be an effort of immense faith, dedication and discipline. It rose to prominence with native and international productions. But when Walcott parted with the Company, it was exposed to vulnerable conditions. When the claim and promise of sovereignty joined hands with the rapid advance of modernity, in the eventful moment of transformation, theatre and performance had a very significant intervention to make. In dramaturgy, methods and perspective, it appeared to be a complete indigenous practice, a powerful cultural tool which can break down the tyrannical web of representations and mute “the noisy commands of colonial authority” (Bhabha 12).⁵ While finding a new form for the age, he felt that a style of performance had to be evolved that is global in its ambition and also critical of local political actions. A significant body of Walcott’s plays reflects the traumatic displacement of transatlantic slavery, the forced voyage of migrant Asian indentured labour and conquests of colonial powers and their settlement. And as a consequence, it proved instrumental in negotiating the complex, overlapping cultures and “intertwined histories” of his native land. The defining features of the region have been identified by Benitez Rojo

⁴ In an exhaustive chapter titled “The Theatre of Our Lives’: founding an Epic Drama (208- 228)” Paula Burnett draws an analogy between Walcott’s Trinidad Theatre Workshop with Brecht’s theatre *ensemble*.

⁵ See, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817” *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1), 1985.

as: “its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity, its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism etc” (1). Without a single, homogeneous Caribbean identity and without a centre to what is called the “Caribbean”, the New theatre could map the region and ‘stage’ the essential plurality of West Indian experience.

Premier among the Anglophone playwrights, Derek Walcott did not have much of a theatrical legacy worth the name. In “Discovering Literature in Trinidad”, C.L.R. James comments that he did not “know much about West Indian Literature in the 1930s—there wasn’t much to know” (James 73). Though rich in cultural diversities, the Caribbean theatre had no well-developed tradition to rest upon. Notwithstanding this limitation, in the mid-30s, James’s own Haitian plays, no doubt, heralded a new era in producing Caribbean theatre. To him belongs the credit for recording and staging that “history from the below” in a passionate attempt to present the colonised as subjects of their own history. Walcott, also, had virtually no such tradition or model to resort to; beside dance, carnival, steelbands, there was hardly any mention of theatre. He lamented in his seminal essay “What The Twilight Says: An Overture”: that though theatre was ubiquitous in the Caribbean society, it was never “solemnised into cultural significance” (*Essays* 7). In his *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), George Lamming discusses the lack of a Caribbean audience and the sense of “inadequacy” and “irrelevance of function” consequently felt by many Caribbean writers in their own societies. But theatre activities also met with very frugal state support and lack of institutional validation in his time. Finding an acute dearth of interest in drama or rich theatrical experience in the archipelago, he had to forge his own way. Against the established practices, Walcott envisaged drama to be a powerful cultural force and an ideal national theatre to be a major cultural institution. Like his famous contemporary, Errol Hill, he stressed on post-colonial nation-building and its concomitant reflection in fashioning national theatre. Though West Indian fiction had ascended into prominence in the metropolitan literary circles, Walcott felt that the drama would not be lagging in finding a wider audience; as a truly egalitarian artistic form in the midst of the conditions of low literacy and poor educational opportunities, it will not fail to thrive. It was no wonder that local and particularistic drama entailed the audience at home as poetry did not. Staging and performing, like any other writing, claims the space for affirming selfhood beyond the rigid binary of “Self-Other”. As an enlightened response to oppression and oppositional politics, the drama could explore the interface and continuity between old antagonists and fix up the breach in history and culture. In the domain of performance, the natives could break away from the subjugation and interrogate the privilege of certain signifying systems. Walcott was convinced

that it could offer fresh cultural ideas for literate and non-literate countrymen alike. By generating performance experience, theatre did not only bind them into an imaginary collective but constituted them “as a temporary community with a shared ideology and identity” (Gaskell 233). Whatever theatre was there in the islands under colonial rule, it had little vision and power to shape opinion or open up the scope for collective participation and representation. As a reflector of sociocultural reality, the institution of theatre could attract cultural cohesion entailing all ethnic diversities and class differences; by articulating various socio-political formations, it could aspire to transcend geopolitical boundaries. It is this re-imagining in the stagespace that could supplant the cohesion conceived by the political structures like fledging West Indian federation. In the post-independence days, Walcott knew that the play-world could actualize a sense of solidarity and community and act as a site of resistance to government policies. With this conviction to bring art to the community, Walcott organised the theatre group in the late 50s and early 60s - “theatre and performing arts”, as Bruce King notes, “were the cements needed to bring the various peoples and places of the region to a shared culture” (*Derek Walcott* 494). As an initiator of local drama and local production, Walcott had stated in explicit terms the unique responsibility of the playwright or theatre artist because his was the vocation to create “not merely a play, but a theatre, but its environment” (*Essays* 6). Walcott derived artistic inspiration from his father’s background in painting and his mother’s interest in Shakespeare. In the Catholic-dominated society, the twin Walcott brothers – both, aspiring playwrights– were banned by the Catholic Church, in 1958. The St. Lucian society in its parochial ways sought to limit the artist to race, ethnicity and social class. With the Methodist background of his family, Walcott did cultivate his anti-authoritarian stance and reposed faith upon poems and plays to generate a cultural consciousness which will break free from the clutches of the popular political, religious and cultural discourses of his time. Since the loci of the Caribbean cultures are numerous and widespread, there can be no single overarching cultural form. When the Caribbean colonies were on the brink of decolonisation, the cultural public spheres were found in need of mobilization to recover the indigenous voices. And theatre could integrate manifold cultural expressions popular in the Caribbean and, through this cross-pollination, become more egalitarian. Walcott knew well that new drama will entail local presence and community of actors, producer, designer and audience. And its audience will be a combination of the elite and the common mass. Walcott’s dramatic literature and practical theatre eased the clutches of Western otherization and local and nationalistic sentimentality with its radical overtones. This alter/“native” form has remarkably assimilated modernity to local and contemporary context, classical and creole acting to contravene neo-colonial modernism. The

present study affirms how this radically different, alternative ways of staging, in the face of oppositional choices, suggests a new ethics of hybrid and mulatto lives.

Identity formation and Theatre

“all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.”
(Said 1993: xxi)

“After the white man, the niggers did not want me
When the power swing to their sides
The first chained my hands, and apologize, ‘History’
The next said that I wasn’t black enough for their pride”

(*Collected Poems* 350)

Ever since the earliest moment of colonial venture in 1492, i.e., Columbus’s arrival in San Salvador and subsequent exploration of the lesser Antilles in 1493, the European contact with the original people had made it difficult to name the region; since then, the process of subject-formation began to move along self-other dynamic. The counter-image of Caribbean alterity was produced to maintain the civilizational superiority of the West. Following Middle Passage, slavery and indentureship, the colonial racism was reflected in the “black skin, white mask” dichotomy. The process of identity or subject formation was occluded by undifferentiated categorization, based upon sameness. By the eighteenth century, as the historian Kathleen Wilson argues, the Caribbeanness was associated with ineffable otherness. Both Naipaul and Froude voiced deeply pessimistic views about the region’s banality, non-achievement and its harsh legacy. The wealthy planters represented forms of vulgarity, backwardness and degeneracy that inverted the standards of English culture and civilization. Faced with such reductive, dismissive stereotypes and stringent cultural purism, Walcott’s plays exude fresh confidence to initiate a process “by which objectified others may be turned into the subjects of their history and experience” (Bhabha 178). All cultural boundary was rendered permeable by “Creole” theatre practices. As in a creole register, here, the colonizer and the colonized occupy several speaking positions while the cultural authority is denied to the both. In the site of drama conflicting legacies and cultures fused into a new eclectic mode and the notion of a homogeneous and unified imperial Britain is downplayed; it could, also, elide the divisions and tensions in a creole society. The future-oriented theatre sought to pay attention to the creolized New World, to cope with the place in its own cultural terms—mimicry, appropriation and

assimilation — a variety of ways which could produce an altered, fresh views. When Brathwaite called cultural artifact as “something torn and new” (*Arrivants* 269-270) could displace the old, parochial notions of identity and nationalism. It sought to repudiate the conviction of the British historian Froude about the failure of an imagined community in the West Indies as he was of the view that Africa and Asia will not mix.

For Walcott theatre was a syncretic alternative to cultural monolith and creative counter to all the painful experiences of colonialism. As an opaque medium, his creole theatre could absorb all components without relinquishing one's own dimension. Without limiting to “hybrid” practice in sheer neglect of material realities it could pay adequate attention to economic, political and social inequities.⁶ It may be read as “the sign of the productive emergence of new cultural forms which have derived from apparently mutual “borrowings”, exchanges and intersections across ethnic boundaries” (Brah and Coombes 9). It serves as a conduit between the “local” and the “global” bringing together disparate themes ranging from imperialism to subject formation. This process also facilitated new narratives of becoming and emancipation which will be the focus of my discussion in the opening chapter. The totalizing narrative had long colonized modes of thinking and production of knowledge. The events in local world threw into disarray the grand narrative of Western modernity and critique trenchantly the encroachment of global capital in the poverty-ridden islands. The theatrical misrepresentation had prodded the disfigurement and dehumanization of the “native”. At the observance of the centenary year of the British rule, two of L.O. Inniss's works, *Carmelitta*, *the Belle of San Jose* and *The Violet of Icos* extolled the British rule and completely denied the presence of the Africans, the group that constituted almost eighty percent of the population. Many other plays were informed with discourses of “othering”, as Gay in *Polly* perpetuated imperialist and mercantilist dependencies upon the construction of the very identities so dispossessed by the Power. Another remarkably successful play *The West Indian of Cumberland* staged the glorification of the English identity and romanticization of the Caribbean life. In the eighteenth century, local military groups and travelling companies from England and America visited the Caribbean islands, regularly. There is no denying that since the nineteenth century and well into the early decades of the twentieth century, Caribbean theatre remained merely a reflection of English and European, British, and occasionally French and American play houses. And these performances were

⁶ In her study *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, Shalini Puri argues that “hybrid” is a misleading category and refuses to see it as a panacea to the exclusionary notion of cultural purity.

mostly attended by the upper-class society, like the planters, merchants, military and naval officers, govt. officials and civic leaders. Some performance activities like song, dance and masquerade though, were conducted by the migrant indentured labourers and free workers. Walcott's new theatre refused to adhere to any of these models and moved towards making theatre truly demotic and egalitarian— a point where high and low culture converge and where theatre ceases to be a ghettoized cultural experience. As a syncretic model with alternative theatrical idioms, it could play out “the masses of Caribbean peoples traditionally misrepresented in master script but to the very mechanisms that continue to erase and denigrate, enslave and encrypt” (Canefield 297). Laurence Breiner has noted that like Brathwaite, Walcott never ceased to ask how the West Indians could divest themselves of the attributed identity of being Africans, Asians and Europeans and pursue their fate as West Indians only. Hence, building a self- image was a serious imperative for all West Indian artists. It was drama, in particular, which could effectively contravene the Western imagining and unmoor itself from Eurocentric anchorage.⁷ As the Caribbean world was not merely an outpost of empire the artists were bent on transforming it into a self-invented world. The non- European performances by the slaves and indentured workers sought to retain the tradition of the distant homeland. But as practitioners, Walcott and Hill were forging more community-based theatre — theatre “as means to raise the social, political and aesthetic consciousness of the people through what has been called the theatre of collective creation” (Banham et al. 142). Rather than linear history, their imaginative narration could fill the void and deepen the awareness and significance of the Caribbean world. The spirit and sensibility of the age could best be reflected in new theatre rather than in political discourse or rhetoric of propaganda. And the aesthetic consciousness could best be generated by community-based theatre.

Leaving behind derivative and bland imitativensess of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, West Indian literature was entering a new epoch towards the establishment of a literary canon; it was facilitated by the institutions like the University of West Indies, the Caribbean voice of BBC, magazines like *Bim* and the Caribbean Artists' Movement. Beside the leading role of *The Beacon*, quite a few little magazines and literary journals fostered the new writings and exerted the influence beyond the collapse of the Federation. The Rockefeller Foundation played a key part in starting modern West Indian theatre in the 50s and 60s and made supportive contribution to theatre groups of adequate

⁷ In an interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott said, “to me there are always images of erasure in the Caribbean – in the surf which continually wipes the sand clean...” (*Critical Perspective* 74).

promise. His early verse plays like *The Wine of the Country*, *Henri Cristophe* opened at the Dramatic Theatre of the University College of the West Indies where the University Players put up spirited performance. Under the aegis of the Little Theatre in Kingston, the Jamaican school of Drama was established in 1969, a permanent home for the school that was erected in 1976. This is the only theatre school in the English-speaking Caribbean which brought together theatre practitioners from all over the region. With all these institutional and organizational supports the West Indian literature claimed an independent space for itself and as a cultural agency it moved outside the homeland. In the 1950s, the novels of Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul, had brought to the notice of metropolitan readers the range, depth of creative imagination of the diasporic West-Indian artists. Kenneth Ramchand has singled out that West Indian literature is one among the three cultural institutions which have kept alive the inchoate idea of the federation. The political federation and the emerging nationhood of various islands were closely tied to the growth of independent literary writings and many such intellectual enterprises. The literary establishment set off a flurry of anthologies as "Federation meant a way out of the parochialism of the individual islands, meant larger audiences, and better communication among writers" (Breiner 95). Walcott belonged to a generation stirred by West-Indian nationalism, with federation struggling to take shape and the Empire on its last leg. Inspired by the provincial aesthetic-cultural, his mission was to fashion theatre as a home-grown cultural product, appealing to an indigenous as well as to the non-indigenous audience of the metropolis. It was an era of literary writings which combined anti-colonial perspective with new values and beliefs. Notwithstanding all the local differences, a vision of unified Caribbean was taking shape to subsume all experiences, local differences and contraries. The practice of indigenous theatre could promulgate cultural resistance to the Euro-American cultural homogenization and "imperial humanitarianism" which justified the expansion of European power. When poetry and novel were striding ahead, drama too did not lag far behind in asserting Caribbean identities.

Fanon was deeply sceptic of belief in "authentic" cultures and identity which in a very simplified way, impedes the growth of international consciousness in a writer. As a corrective to the "purist", oppositional aesthetics, Walcott had espoused "mulatto aesthetics" because it eschews "the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge" (*Essays* 39). By brushing off the poetics of anger, revenge and recrimination or remorse, Walcott sought to reassemble the legacies of all his ancestors. Unburdened by any cultural baggage, most of his plays form an intricate web of cross-cultural and trans-historical influences. Like Achebe and Brathwaite, the sound colonial education and intimacy with classics in school years moulded Walcott's plays of his juvenile, apprentice period. Despite avid consumption of the canonical works, they wrote back to the

strategic ideological control of the “centre”. By fashioning new creolised plays, Walcott could assimilate all cultural values and belief patterns and eliminate negative patterns of race-based politics. He himself was a progeny of mixed-race and his mixed ancestry provided the impulse for mulatto aesthetic; its ceaseless cross-cultural dialogue could redefine the native Caribbean form. The ideological programmes of Black Power, Negritude Movements tended to efface the plurality of colonial cultures and the racial diversity of the colonized. They championed homogeneous, all-embracing black culture grounded upon the awareness of specific national communities. Walcott knew that no single aesthetic agenda could evince the multiplex reality of the Caribbean. As a postcolonial hybrid Walcott knew “a myth of shared origins is neither a talisman which can suspend political antagonism nor a duty invoked to cement a pastoral view of black life that can answer the multiple pathologies of contemporary racism” (Gilroy 99). He sought to extend the Caribbean frontier beyond geography into culture and reorient the promises of cultural nationalism.

Described as the leading light of Caribbean theatre, Walcott knew that the creole aesthetics would reinvent the New World. Such aesthetic evinces appropriation of all possible sources and influences and shrug off all the illusions of the Old World. A new insight could be added to non-colonial and non-white cultural sources and it looked set to part with the practice of high literary idolatry. In his much-cited essay “The Muse of History”, he has paid homage to the poles of his ancestry- black and white – both of which had their best offerings and gifts to cultivate for the young artist “like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice ...” (*Essays* 64). His postcolonial theatre negotiates between the ancient tradition of drama and its immediate political objective which evolved into a “new model” (Burnett 211). Such theatre was intended to be a local praxis to emerge from the interface of cultures and assert the origin of theatre as multiple and non-singular. At a time of intense cultural flux and repositioning, it could explore the legacy of colonial histories and postcolonial subjectivities. It set out to respond to the challenges attending to the cultural imaginary of distinct national agendas and characters. Particularly in the seventies, in the heydays of Afrocentric demagoguery, Walcott’s polyphonic theatre took up a new dimension, seeking an elimination of the discrete identity categories which were promulgated in adversarial discourses. In his numerous articles and interviews, he had vented his deep annoyance with art committed to the causes of chauvinism and narrow nationalism. He dismissed the nativist railing against Western worldviews as a reductive formulation. In a total dismissal of Revenge aesthetics, the proposed alternatives of theatre brought to the fore the jarring juxtaposition of multiple cultural heritage- “creole- continuum” and European classics, informal

language, street *patois* and sublime poetry and diction of Elizabethan verse. It was committed to

“forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things... (*Essays* 15)

Such language, Walcott was convinced, will be most enabling for creating an oral culture of chants, jokes, folk songs, and fables. To the region's emerging cultural habits, this theatre offered a new artistic experience as it reconciled all disparate heritages. For scant experience of serious theatre and relatively small size of educated theatre-goers, the Walcott brothers- Derek and Rodney were spurred to make forays into local theatre without the blemish of provinciality. Together they had established the St. Lucian Arts Guild, performing both the local and canonical plays. In a way, they responded to Shaw's famous instruction to reclaim a space for the home-grown theatre and get rid of the habit of mimicking Western styles of performance. Because the touring troops were disconnected from the place of its origin and its local moorings. In these years, the protest plays of Amiri Baraka stirred a new fervour in America about black consciousness and claimed an elimination of white supremacy. But Walcott was strongly sceptic of the politics of hatred, bitterness, rage and fuming protest and no wonder that his new theatre carefully evaded straightforward political affiliation. For him, resistance of performance and (re) action of speech, acts and gestures could generate a new consciousness beyond victim-victimizer duality. Art serving only radical, militant agenda, for Walcott, is bound to be ethnocentric and non-egalitarian. As he famously proclaimed, “the future of west Indian militancy lies in its art” (*Essays* 16). Therefore, his creole theatre mounted a strong challenge to absolute valorization of the black and absolute denigration of the white. Walcott's immediate predecessors like C.L.R James and Marcus Garvey initiated local dramas which would vent the spirit of anti-colonial movement. His dramatic narratives were couched in highly symbolic language and its rich verbal and visual qualities were particularly appealing to the native folks. The local drama groups and entertainers sought to exhibit more folk entertainment and deployed dialects in a far more dignified way. The focus on indigenous culture brought to the fore native comedians, notably Ernest Cupidon of Jamaica and Sam Chase of Guyana, both of whom wrote and performed comic sketches before admiring popular audiences. In the Hispanic Caribbean, too the 50s was the decade of the flowering of drama and greater visibility of local aesthetic and artistic parameters.

In its formative days, Western-styled education had enriched the theatrical form and content of the Caribbean plays. And the African plays enlivened the stage with sophisticated use of music, mime, masquerade. Before Walcott, Louis

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