

TWILIGHT METAPHORS IN DEREK WALCOTT'S EARLY POETRY

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METAPHORS OF TWILIGHT IN THE POETRY
OF DEREK WALCOTT 1948-1970

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the recurring metaphors of twilight in the early poetry of contemporary West Indian poet and playwright Derek Walcott (1930--). Walcott is an important poet with a significant body of work that needs consideration. This study approaches his achievement from literary criteria that can be applied to any major writer. The volumes of poetry discussed are In a Green Night (1962), The Castaway (1965), and The Gulf (1969).

After an initial introduction that surveys the critical reception so far accorded to Walcott, a short biography of the poet, and relevant background material in Caribbean history and culture, the poet's recurring metaphor of twilight is divided into four versions that reflect current West Indian experience. These are (1) twilight as the remains of the colonial past, (2) twilight as the incomplete gleamings of a self-governing future, (3) twilight as a static present of indecision, and (4) twilight as a directive towards humanism, which is Walcott's substitute for an unrevealed eternity. The metaphor is seen to modify and develop as the poet's vision develops from an initial pessimism to a stoical need to survive.

In each of these versions of the metaphor, Walcott manages to portray his society by treating personal pressures as representative of that society. The result is a formal yet impassioned oeuvre that transcends West Indian parochialism and speaks with authority about many of the twilight dilemmas faced by modern man himself.

RESUME

La présente étude fait l'analyse des métaphores périodiques de crépuscule dans la poésie primitive du poète et dramaturge contemporain antillais Derek Walcott (1930--). Walcott est un poète important dont une partie considérable de ses oeuvres mérite une critique sérieuse. Cette mémoire aborde ses réussites en y apportant les critères d'analyse littéraire qui servent en générale à l'étude des oeuvres de n'importe quel autre grand auteur. Les tomes qui y sont discutés sont In a Green Night (1962), The Castaway (1965), et The Gulf (1969).

Après l'introduction initiale qui donne un aperçu global de la réaction critique accordée jusqu'à date aux oeuvres de Walcott, une courte biographie du poète, et un arrière-plan essentiel de l'histoire et de la culture antillaise, la métaphore périodique du poète est divisée entre quatre versions, qui, dans leur ensemble, reflètent la trame antillaise actuelle. Ce sont (1) la crépuscule symbole des vestiges d'une passée coloniale, (2) la crépuscule symbole des lueurs inachevées d'un avenir autonome, (3) la crépuscule symbole d'un présent statique d'incertitude, et (4) la crépuscule symbole d'une directive vers l'humanisme, se qui est pour Walcott le succédané d'une éternité cachée. On voit la métaphore qui se modifie et se développe en fonction du développement de la vision du poète d'un pessimisme initial au besoin stoïque de la survivance.

En chaque version de la métaphore, Walcott réussit à évoquer sa société en traitant les pressions personnelles comme étant représentatives de la société dans son ensemble. Le résultant est une oeuvre à la fois formelle et passion-

RESUME (CONTINUE)

née qui dépasse le quotidien antillais pour parler
avec autorité sur les maintes dilemmes crépusculaires
qui font face à l'homme moderne.

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I wish to thank Professor Alan Heuser for his suggestions and patient supervision of this work. Also Alan Conter for helping me translate the abstract into French, Fred Anderson for use of his West Indian library, and the neighbours next door who never complained about late evening typing between the two Canadian twilights.

NOTE

In the body of the text I have included extracts from Walcott's poems. These are identified by abbreviations of the titles of Walcott's major volumes as follows:

[IGN] ----- In a Green Night (1962)

[SP] ----- Selected Poems (1964)

[TC] ----- The Castaway (1965)

[TG] ----- The Gulf (1970)

I use the American edition of The Gulf in all quotations and references.

[AL] ----- Another Life (1973)

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"isolation" n.:[Back formation from
isolated < Ital. isolato, pp. of
isolare to isolate < isola 'island' <
L insula island]

INTRODUCTION TO DEREK WALCOTT'S POETRY 1948-1970

1. The Critical Response

Derek Walcott is a West Indian poet and playwright with an international reputation among literary critics. He has produced six major books of poetry, two volumes of plays, and numerous chapbooks, essays, and articles since he first began publishing in the late 1940's*. In addition, he has been widely anthologized and awarded literary prizes in Great Britain and the United States as well as in his native Caribbean. Despite his achievements, Walcott has not yet received the critical attention he deserves. There have been no book-length studies of his work so far, and only one doctoral thesis^{1*} to counter the mass of ephemeral book reviews and critiques usually associated with new writers in developing countries. Although variously hailed as "the finest, the most complete, of the West Indian poets" and "one of the most incisive poets writing today"², Walcott is honoured in his own area of the world as often by default as not. This is because there are few good poets, let alone major poets, now writing in the Caribbean; this Third World situation, lack of recognized or real

*See BIBLIOGRAPHY at the end of this paper: (A) WORKS BY DEREK WALCOTT; (B) WORKS CITED in this paper; and (C) SUPPLEMENTARY WORKS WITH ANNOTATIONS. I have designated Walcott's major publications in (A) with an X.

*Notes are collected by chapter at the end of Chapter 6.

literary talent, has been a disadvantage to Walcott. He has had little literary competition from his countrymen, and has been forced to rely largely on his own sensibility for themes and techniques. This absence of a mature literary environment to sustain him has, to some extent, made Walcott a poet working in a void. His main poetic models have been British and American ones. The result is that his work has been both underestimated and overestimated, depending on the criteria used. In the Caribbean, Walcott is often adulated for the wrong reasons, and in England and America praised for correct, but only half-understood, accomplishments.

In the West Indies, an area brimming with social unrest, Walcott's poetry is sometimes held up as political ammunition to support current ideologies. This is to mistake the nature of his work, which is aesthetic rather than revolutionary. His verse is sometimes used as cultural justification that the West Indies does have at least one major poet. Both these representations have led to inflated claims being made for Walcott's stature in world literature. They have distracted attention from the need to assess the poet's work by ordinary and useful literary standards. Though sensitive Caribbean reviewers have written on Walcott,³ the real meaning of his work has tended to be obscured by partisan journalese

and blind adulation.⁴ Few West Indian critics actually "criticize" Walcott since he has assumed the stature of Caribbean poet laureate. Thus the universal nature of his verse has been neglected by Walcott's countrymen to some degree. But this may be explained by the possibility that many of his topics are still too close to home for objective analysis by West Indians.

Since 1962, the year of the publication of Walcott's first volume outside the Caribbean, British and American reviewers have been politely favourable. They mention his "echoes of Villon and Dante, Catullus, and the metaphysicals", his "pyrotechnic vocabulary", his "[rich and resourceful] verbal range", and his "sense of place, of racial tensions [and] an extraordinary objectivity in one so young".⁵ But because of lack of first-hand experience about West Indian and Third World cultures, and a tendency to mistake the nature of Walcott's relationship to the Western poetic tradition, English-speaking critics outside the Caribbean have only so far admired Walcott from a distance. Such prestigious poet-critics as William Jay Smith, James Dickey, and Robert Graves have reviewed Walcott's early volumes with faulty judgments ranging from the positive-but-noncommittal (Smith and Dickey) to the overly eulogistic (Graves).⁶

The only reviewer I have seen to do Walcott the service of a thorough and rational discussion has been

Robert Mazzocco.⁷ His review dates from 1964, but the points he raises still remain relevant to much of Walcott's current poetry. While admiring Walcott's virtues as his painter's eye for details, his poetic craftsmanship and musical texture, his high moral and imaginative responses to situations, Mazzocco is distinctive in trying to construe some of the limitations of the poetry:

Walcott lingers over his language like a lover; he employs orotund, mellifluously spunk lines. He is, as they say, "on the stage"... 8

He compares the poet to Hart Crane, one of Walcott's minor early influences, in their shared use of compressed language and ellipsis, and decides that "...Walcott comes to us as through a sieve, with a damp, muffled sonority". Also, Mazzocco finds Walcott's preoccupation with Self, his "lush melancholy that itches to be impressive", boring.⁹ Some of these reservations may be valid, of course, others not. The individual reader must decide on each point on his own, since Mazzocco's "charges" are against some of the very characteristics in Walcott's poetry that other critics extol. Despite its critical observations, the general tone of Mazzocco's article is favourable, and comes as a rare, serious evaluation of a poet who has been much ignored by our critics in proportion to his achievement.

It is perhaps too early to expect any full-length

study of a living writer like Walcott-- the poet is now only forty-eight (as of 1978), though he has been publishing for over thirty years-- but it is possible to recognize how his work is critically slighted in another way. As a difficult and ambitious poet, Walcott may be likened to such acknowledged but seldom-read masters as Milton and Ezra Pound. Both these poets in different stages of the history of their reputations were conceded "great poets", but were actually discussed and interpreted rather more rarely. This resembles the present reaction to Walcott's poetry. Over the past ten or fifteen years, Caribbean reviewers have tended to use Walcott for para-literary purposes, while British and American critics have recognized him dutifully (as we see above) but without much comment.

Despite these obstacles it has encountered, Walcott's collected poetry by any standards now forms an impressive body of work. It has managed to transcend the parochial themes hitherto found in West Indian verse, and can speak with urgency and power on a wide range of universal themes. The approach of this thesis will not be evaluative, but it will go on the assumption found by the few literary authorities who have studied Walcott with discernment: that Walcott is a special and major living English poet.

2. Walcott's Life and Work

Derek Alton Walcott was born in Castries, Saint Lucia, Windward Islands, on January 23, 1930.¹⁰ His father, Warwick Walcott, was a civil servant and draftsman whose father in turn was a white Englishman who emigrated to the West Indies from Warwickshire. Alix, Walcott's mother, was a schoolteacher at the Methodist Infant School in Saint Lucia. His father died when he was one year old, so Derek, his twin brother Roderick, and his older sister were raised by their mother. A precocious student, Derek earned scholarships to Saint Mary's College in Castries, and later to the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1953.¹¹ After graduation he returned to Saint Lucia where he founded "The Arts Guild of Saint Lucia" with his brother Roderick in an attempt to foster drama and creative writing on the island.¹² He served as assistant headmaster at Saint Mary's College, The Grenada Boys' Secondary School, and at Jamaica College during this time.

Walcott held a Rockefeller Fellowship from 1958-59 and studied drama in New York City under José Quintero and Stuart Vaughan. Since 1959 he has been the acting artistic director of The Trinidad Theatre Workshop and has directed a variety of international and Caribbean dramas, including his own plays. He has worked for The Trinidad Guardian and was poet-in-residence at Lake Forest College.

in Illinois in 1972. Married twice, first to Fay Moston, by whom he had two children, and, since 1962, to Margaret Ruth Maillard, the poet presently lives in Diego Martin, Trinidad.

His publishing career has been a long one for a writer still only middle-aged. When he was eighteen, his mother helped to finance the publication of his first chapbook, Twenty-five Poems. In 1950, the Bridgetown Barbados Advocate brought out his verse drama, Henri Chronicle, which was followed by another play, Harry Dernier, in 1951. In 1953 The City Printery in Kingston issued his Poems, and during the 1950's Walcott frequently published poems and short plays in West Indian newspapers and magazines. Ione: A Play with Music came out in 1957 from The Gleaner Company in Kingston, the same year the poet was commissioned to write an epic historical drama for the inauguration of the First Parliament of the West Indies. He completed this play, Drums and Colours, the next year and it was staged April 23, 1958 at "The Festival of the Arts" in Trinidad.¹³ The publication in 1962 of In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 first brought Walcott acclaim overseas: it won the Guinness Award for Poetry in England in that year. His Selected Poems came out in 1964, and The Castaway in 1965, with the further honour of the Heinemann Poetry Award in 1966. The Gulf came out in London in 1969, and in New York (in an expanded edition) in 1970, winning the Cholmondely Award. A

selection of four of Walcott's plays were collected by the author in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (1970). Walcott's plays have been produced in England, Canada, and the United States, as well as in the West Indies; Dream on Monkey Mountain won the Obie Award for "Best Foreign Play" produced Off-Broadway in the 1970-71 theatre season in New York. Another Life, a long autobiographical poem, was published in 1972. Sea Grapes, Walcott's most recent collection of verse, appeared in 1976, while The Joker of Seville and O Babylon!, two plays (1977), is his latest publication to date.

3. The Caribbean Landscape

The Caribbean background from which a poet like Derek Walcott springs must be understood since it is the psychological arena for his work. Perhaps this has been the problem with some of his overseas reviewers, a misunderstanding of the immense political and cultural burden that has been placed on the modern West Indian native by the accidents of history. Unlike the Negro in the United States, the non-European West Indian does not have a ready-made social group with which to identify. Because the island peoples have had such a long history of being the pawns of European colonial powers, each island often changing hands several times in a single

century,¹⁴ there is little racial homogeneity in the Caribbean. The Negro slaves that had been transported from West Africa since 1503 gradually intermingled and married with their English, French, and Spanish plantation owners. Today the West Indies is populated mostly by mulattos and blacks, as well as Europeans. East Indians and Orientals were also "imported" as plantation workers to parts of the Lesser Antilles and the South American mainland around the turn of this century. Varying racial gradations, dialects, and social customs have resulted from all of this, and many forms of patois exist from island to island, and sometimes even on the same island. This social pluralism has made any form of linguistic or artistic solidarity extremely difficult, unless it is restricted to small islands or even individual townships. Thus, post-colonial life in the West Indies has produced little political integration. The Caribbean archipelago has the disadvantage of a heritage that is too various in many observers' opinion. What Cyril Hamshire notes in his book The British in the Caribbean applies to the whole of the West Indies:

...small communities [were] settled on small islands by individual enterprise in days of slow communications. This fact has produced in each island an intense individuality, jealous of its neighbours, extremely sensitive about its independence, and hopelessly suspicious of any attempts to effect union in federation. 15

This characteristic "proud isolation", plus the economic

advantages of larger islands like Jamaica and Trinidad over the smaller islands regarding population and resources, were the main factors that dissolved the abortive First West Indian Federation around 1960. Because of the differences between island societies, the West Indies today is an amalgamation of heritages and peoples that is so far linked together only by geography. It is too miscellaneous an area of the world to compose a united political identity under a common destiny. Nor is today a peaceful period in the archipelago. Ideological protest, both marxist and humanitarian, runs through all sectors of West Indian society and continues to divide the Caribbean into political fragments.

Culture in the West Indies can be divided into two camps: high culture, as it were-- which centers in the universities and is largely European or American in origins; and folk culture-- the popular, often oral traditions which find such diverse expression as Carnival "band" competitions,¹⁶ Afro-presbyterian sects like Shango and Rastafarianism, and street music and legends. Both these "schools" have a common element, however: they are both products of largely imported traditions, producing a hybrid, second-hand culture that dissatisfies every West Indian artist and intellectual. Particularly in literature, the West Indian artist yearns for purely

indigenous themes to write about. In his article "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas", Wilson Harris cites V.S. Naipaul's acute interpretation of the situation:

A literature can only grow out of a strong framework of social conventions. And the only convention the West Indian knows is his involvement with the white world. This deprives his world of universal appeal. The situation is too special. The reader is excluded; he is invited to witness and not to participate. It is easier to enter any strong framework of social convention, however alien. 17

Despite the relatively large amount of writing finding publication in the Caribbean, only a handful of novelists of merit, and two important poets, Walcott and Edward Brathwaite,¹⁸ have emerged. But an indication of the profound effect these two poets (and especially Walcott) have had on the literary life of the West Indies is the fact that already in the 1970's younger poets are imitating them. This can only indicate that such a pessimistic assessment of the scene as Naipaul's is becoming obsolete, and that Caribbean poetry may be on the verge of radical new development.

4. Introductory Approaches

The suggestion for this thesis comes from a phrase in Walcott's essay "What the Twilight Said: An Overture":

The dusk was a raucous chaos of curses, gossip and laughter; everything performed in public, but the voice of the inner language was reflective and mannered, as far above its subjects as that sun which would never set until its twilight became a metaphor for the withdrawal of Empire and the beginning of our doubt. 19

Although in context Walcott is here discussing the formation of a Caribbean language for theatre, the comment can easily relate to all his poetry instead. Throughout his poetry from In a Green Night to The Gulf (and also in Another Life and Sea Grapes-- his last two verse collections which are beyond my scope here), "twilight" is used more or less consciously by Walcott as a symbol of modern Caribbean experience. The metaphor can be extended to a number of "figurative" interpretations beyond the "usual" meaning of the word. These include definitions such as "partial illumination", "an intermediate condition or period", "a condition before or after full development", "dim, obscure, shadowy", "of early times", and "pertaining to imperfect mental light" (O.E.D.). I will apply both the literal and some of the figurative meanings of the word to Walcott's view of his West Indian experience. The literal (and "usual") definition of twilight is, of course:

The light diffused by the reflection of the sun's rays from the atmosphere before sunrise, and after sunset; the period during which this prevails between daylight and darkness. (O.E.D.)

Part of my argument will be to illustrate how Walcott portrays in his poetry how aptly the number of different meanings for twilight applies to West Indian life, so this listing of definitions is not as gratuitous as it first appears.

It would be pedantic to try to compare all the different nuances of "twilight" to Walcott's use of the metaphor, so I will try to adopt a commonsense approach. Where the suggestion of twilight appears literally, I will discuss its meanings. Where the figurative meanings of the word appear, such as twilight produced by rain or an enclosed indoor room, for example, I will rely on personal judgment to see whether these instances should be included in my argument. Obviously, "light", "half-light", and "darkness" are such basic archetypal metaphors in poetry that any discussion of them can be drawn out to unnecessary lengths. By restricting "twilight" to mean a particular time of day I can avoid most of the difficulties of definition and, hopefully, explore the concrete senses of the symbol while disregarding some of the more abstruse meanings of the word.

I maintain that Walcott uses four different versions of the metaphor of twilight:

1. Twilight as Evening.
2. Twilight as Dawn.

3. Twilight as Indecision.

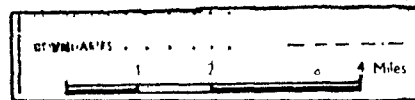
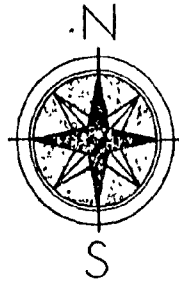
4. Twilight as Home.

These will each be discussed in separate chapters to follow.

Because of its erudition, complexity, and careful strategy, Walcott's poetry could certainly support many additional theses beyond the scope of this study. In many ways his work can be compared to the densely symbolic verse of Robert Lowell or the later Yeats. Walcott sees himself, among other things, as a spokesman for Caribbeans, and tries to deal with his whole culture from as many vantage points as he can. This variety in his work is why I am restricting this study to a single theme found throughout his first four books of poetry.* To try to include more of his work, or more aspects of the topic I am treating, would be impossible within the compass of these pages. This suggests how much more critical study Walcott's work could legitimately stand. Meanwhile I will not examine his plays or the poetry after 1970 except in the notes so as to deal comfortably with a fitting proportion of his work. Perhaps in the near future interpreters will recognize the vast amount of discussion that still has to be done on Walcott, discussion that has had to be left out of a study of this length.

*Actually, I am omitting Selected Poems, so my discussion will deal with the first three volumes. Selected Poems has only one poem, "Origins", which is not relevant to

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my discussion, that augments In a Green Night and The Castaway. Therefore, this thesis will treat only the latter two volumes and The Gulf in its scope.

II

TWILIGHT AS EVENING: THE AGE IN ASHES

Begin with twilight, when the glare
which held a cry of bugles lowered
the coconut lances of the inlet,
as a sun, tired of empire, declined.

--Another Life

In "What the Twilight Says", the introductory essay to his selected plays, Walcott expresses his sense of isolation in the West Indies:

[my upbringing] made me believe that twilight had set me apart, and naturally I arrived at the heresy that landscape and history had failed me. 1

When Walcott was growing up during the 1930's and 1940's on Saint Lucia, the English-speaking Caribbean was still under British dominion. The islands followed parliamentary procedures of government, schools and colleges were largely made up of European faculty members, and imported English institutions like cricket and Rhodes Scholarships were taken for granted by the British West Indian middle class. Most of the major islands in the Caribbean were at that time still members of the Commonwealth of Nations and, hence, still parts of its cultural dominion. But during the 1950's and 1960's, the decades that coincided with Walcott's maturation as an artist, local federation and

the gradual political independence from Britain of most of the West Indies changed existing views of the old order. After independence, most islanders in retrospect came to see British Rule as tyrannical, and, depending upon whether they profited or lost during the "days of Empire," viewed its passing with either nostalgia or relief.

Walcott, who was educated in British-run schools and whose ancestors were partly English (he himself is mulatto), belongs spiritually for the most part to the former group. He is fully aware of the social injustices that were inherent in Empire, but also feels adrift and disoriented in post-colonial times. For him the advantages of having secure ties with the established traditions of Europe out-weigh the dubious advantages of participating in the inter-mediate stages of post-colonial life. Walcott does not consider himself an "Afro-Saxon";² he never considered emigrating to England as several West-Indian writers of his generation did;³ he remains loyal to the political and cultural aspirations of the Caribbean. But after the withdrawal of British government and official society from the islands during the series of peaceful revolutions that gave Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad their independence in the early 1960's, the new-found autonomy of the islands seems little improvement spiritually for Walcott.⁴ An example of this can be provided by comparing Walcott's poems before and after 1960. They are themati-

cally similar; the political events of the time have influenced his real artistic concerns very little.⁵ For him, it is not a single political stroke that makes a nation, but a cumulative history of shared culture and experience. Contemporary life in the Caribbean is still undeveloped as it was in the days of colonialism and slavery. Whereas previously West Indians were slaves to an unjust regime, today (in Walcott's view) they are slaves to their own undisciplined desires.

We left
somewhere a life we never found,

customs and gods that are not born again,
some crib, some grill of light
clanged shut on us in bondage, and withheld

us from that world below us and beyond,
and in its swaddling cerements we're
still bound.

"Laventville" [TC, 35, 83-89]

Walcott's recurring metaphor for the predicament engendered by post-colonialism is dusk, the twilight of evening. This can be distinguished from his other versions of twilight symbolism in that it is "nostalgic" and harkens back with regret to the time of colonial "daylight". In "Veranda" [TC, 38-39], an elegy for both Walcott's grandfather and the entire old order, the metaphor is made explicit. At the opening of the poem, the poet imagines the ghosts of British colonists assembling at evening near the open porch of an old house:

Grey apparitions at veranda ends
like smoke, divisible, but one
your age in ashes, its coherence gone,

Planters whose tears were marketable gum,
 whose voices
scratch the twilight like dried fronds
edged with reflection

[TC, 38, 1-6]

The spectators are seen as "divisible, but one" by the poet, not only because that is an apt description of their filmy nature, but also because of their importance in history. They (presumably) had individual historical identities, and were distinctive path-finding adventurers who exerted their wills to colonize the early West Indies. But they are also seen as "one" because they shared the tradition of being "Englishmen", men with a clearly defined cultural identity and heritage. Walcott is aware that the colonial age was elitist and brutal; the ghosts he imagines are mostly fortune-hunters and opportunists:

Colonels, hard as the commonwealth's
 greenheart,
middlemen, usurers whose art
kept an empire in the red,

Upholders of Victoria's china seas
lapping embossed around a drinking mug,
bully-boy roarers of the Empire club

[TC, 38,7-12]

But he also recognizes that it was an age that insured social ties with a population united under a "common sun", be that the Commonwealth itself, the monarchy, or simply the privilege of belonging to a rooted

heritage. The implication that, during the "daylight" of Empire, West Indians had a chance to be "divisible, but one," free individuals operating within a brightly sponsored, clearly recognizable tradition, is compared to the present "evening" in the Caribbean. "Evening" is Walcott's vision of the fragmented, decaying state of post-colonial West Indian life. No visible history except imported history transpired to build a West Indian future during colonialism. The islands have always been separated from each other geographically by sea. It is a period right now of transition and doubt in which the immediate future seems dark and obscure. It is a time of light "reflected from clouds"--- imported ideas that are all second-hand---, shadows, and indecision. The citizen of such a milieu remains "divisible" in the sense of being "divided", apart, separated, but without the previous options bestowed on members of the Commonwealth. For Walcott, present-day society in the West Indies remains suspended between a living past and an unknown future. Thus, the metaphor becomes an expression of the West Indian's inability to find his identity divorced from European tradition.

"Veranda" moves on to explore this theme autobiographically. The poet suddenly recognizes his colonist-grandfather's ghost (his father's British father) among the apparitions in the crepuscular light. We know from

writings by Walcott elsewhere that his paternal grandfather died in a fire in the family home on Saint Lucia,⁶ and that his son Warwick (Derek's father) had his remains shipped to Warwickshire and buried in his native county.

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

And buried them himself on a strange coast.

[38,20-22]

The fire that destroyed the ordered life of the Walcott family becomes a micro-drama of the "fiery sunset" of Empire and the sudden social shock of independence for Caribbean inhabitants. Both are the death of a "father figure" and a forced propulsion into maturity.

Walcott then addresses his synecdochic grandfather with the question: "Sire,/ Why do I raise you up?"; that is, if the colonial era was so mercenary and unjust to non-European West Indians, why should that era be recalled in memory? Why not forget the cruelties of the past and look forward to the "dawn" of new Caribbean history? The poet supplies the answer in the next few lines:

Your house has voices, your burnt house,
shrills with unguessed, lovely inheritors,
your genealogical roof tree, fallen,
survives,
like seasoned timber through green, little
lives.

[39,25-28]

Despite the initial enthusiasm felt by West Indians over breaking ties with Britain, Walcott reminds himself and others that the "burnt house" of the Caribbean still remains haunted by British traditions. The structure of West Indian society, the "genealogical roof tree", is still a construct of British imperialism, and it is not a heritage that can be dismissed at a stroke.⁷ As Walcott says in an interview:

The West Indian has already had a European experience as a central thing. No one can afford to shut out something which is part of his organism, the culture within him. 8

"Veranda" ends on a muted note of hope. Walcott recognizes that he is "ripening towards the same twilight" as his grandfather, the twilight "...whose souls, // like pressured trees brought diamonds out of coals." [39, 31-32]. This suggests that the poet feels he is approaching some sort of creative "blaze of glory," whether personal or communal. While being also an obvious death reference, it can also be construed as a forecast for West Indian society. The "heat" and "pressure" of the Caribbean "twilight", the loneliness and isolation that Walcott and his grandfather share (it is suggested that his grandfather's death might have been suicidal), may yet produce "diamonds out of coals," fully developed social norms that invent their own standards. But despite the tentative allusion to this

coming renaissance, "Veranda" also concludes on a resigned note; the half-light of the present still allows no clear insights into the future. The poet forgives the spirits of the past who haunt him in the realization that they both share the impermanence of nature, "...the last inheritance / of earth, our shrine and pardoner" [39,39-40]. He despises the forefathers for their cruelties, but feels a melancholy sympathy with their isolation. In "What the Twilight Says" Walcott records how these ambiguous feelings go back to his youth:

At nineteen, an elate, exuberant poet
madly in love with English, but in the
dialect-drunk dusk of water-buckets and
fish-sellers, conscious of the naked,
voluble poverty around me, I felt a
fear of that darkness which had swallowed
up all fathers. 9

The unknown future, its inarticulateness, sometimes seems more frightening to the poet than the known tyrannies of the past regime of Empire.¹⁰

"The Banyan Tree, Old Year's Night" [IGN,71-72] is a poem from the same period that uses twilight as a metaphor for memory and historical decay. Walcott prefaces the poem with a significant quotation from Baudelaire's "Le Voyage":

Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté
des lampes!
Aux yeux de souvenir que le monde est
petit!

[Oh, how big the world is under lamplight!
And how small through the eyes of memory!]

Walcott's selection of this quotation reveals how little he feels the past can affect the present: in the twilight, circle of lamplight, the dangers and fears of the real world, the world of the present, are seen as far greater than the effects of history distorted through the filter of memory. In "The Banyan Tree, Old World's Night" this position is explained. The poet is standing at nightfall in a town park meditating on a banyan tree. The occasion is the end of the year, and there is a dry fountain nearby. The banyan is a tropical tree with a thick, convoluted trunk and a complicated system of roots and branches. It thus becomes a symbol in the poem (as it stands in the twilight) of the meaningless tangle of West Indian history:

Soaring from littered roots, blackened
 with rain,
With inaccessible arms the banyan tree
Heaves in the year's last drizzle to
 explain
What age could not, responsibility.

[ICN, 71, 13-16]

The mood is elegiac; the year, as well as the day, are at an end, and the message conveyed by the poet's contemplation of the battered tree is one of endurance. History may be a fatalistic chaos, a bundle of twisted origins, but the response to the situation the poet learns is one of existential perseverance. Like the

meaning of the couplet from Baudelaire, Walcott comes to see at the end of the poem that to live in the present is perhaps the greatest challenge, to live without history's luxuries or illusions and achieve a calm detachment like the banyan

[which] still remains, its sources
Blank as the rain on the deserted mind,
Dumb as the ancient Indian tree that forces
Its grieving arms to keep the homeless wind.

[72,41-44]

Evening appears consistently as a representation of current Caribbean history in Walcott's early poetry.¹¹ As a metaphor, its emphasis shifts from poem to poem, as is natural in a poet as perceptive as Walcott, but the central conceit of a world that may be dying remains constant. The idea for Walcott's image undoubtedly comes from the anonymous famous phrase "The sun never sets on the British Empire".¹² The irony of this slogan, especially after the disintegration of the Commonwealth, is implicit in Walcott's revision of the metaphor. As a West Indian, as far as he is concerned, the sun has set irrevocably on the Empire. However, the British influence on the colonies has been so deep and pervasive that the agonizing "after-glow" that is the present in the Caribbean shows all signs of being long and unresolved. For the West Indies particularly of the "released" colonies of the old Commonwealth, the current

era of struggling psychological independence is a difficult one, as Walcott suggests. Although political autonomy has already been achieved by most of the major Caribbean islands, this is only a basis for the truer freedom of self-realization discovered by shared symbols and identifiable characteristics in a common culture. In this respect, the West Indies (according to Walcott) still operate under the "reflected light" of an England that has gone by. As he says in a later poem, Another Life, this reflected glow is one of the characteristics of provincialism:

But we were orphans of the nineteenth
century,
sedulous to the morals of a style,
we lived by another light,
Victoria's orphans, bats in the banyan
boughs.

[AL, 77, ii, 1-4]

The islands for Walcott are still temperamentally provinces of Europe, and especially England, despite recent cultural advancements. But since culture for the artist is the most valid society, there has to be a form of cultural sovereignty arising that will signal the dawn of a new age. But until this happens, Walcott's twilight is applicable for the historical ruins that he sees as comprising his society today.

III

TWILIGHT AS DAWN: TO FIND THE TRUE SELF

At the end of the small hours: life
flat on its face, miscarried dreams and
nowhere to put them, the river of life
listless in its hopeless bed, not rising
or falling, unsure of its flow, lamen-
tably empty, the heavy impartial shadow
of boredom creeping over the equality
of all things, the air stagnant, unbroken
by the brightness of a single bird.

Aimé Césaire
Return to My Native Land

In "What the Twilight Says" Walcott uses twilight-as-dusk as his central image for Caribbean decay. In that essay he restricts his usage of twilight to its "evening" version to represent aspects of his society that include the decline of civilized ideals brought about by the withdrawal of Empire, the historical void produced by the experiences of slavery and colonialism, and a general nostalgia for a happier past that (perhaps) never existed in the West Indies. In "What the Twilight Says" and in many of his early poems, Walcott employs this metaphor to evoke the moribund characteristics he sees in the post-colonial West Indies.

However, in many of his other poems, the symbol is altered slightly to represent the incomplete "dawn" in West Indian culture. Besides dusk, twilight can also mean "the half-light of morning":

the light diffused by the reflection of
the sun's rays from the atmosphere before
sunrise and after sunset. [my italics]

O.E.D.

If political independence meant the "sunset" of the European order in the West Indies in the early 1960's, it also inferred the "dawn" of a Caribbean cultural identity. It is this use of twilight as unfulfilment that also appears in Walcott's poetry. For the poet, this "dawn" is abortive rather than triumphant: it is not yet the full light of day, but rather "the small hours" of the morning as in Césaire's famous poem Return to my Native Land.¹ West Indian culture cannot yet be said to have flowered. It is still considered a Third World area of the globe, and the aspirations of its people remain largely unrealized. Walcott writes about the Caribbean hunger for indigenous heroes in another context:

Provincialism loves the pseudo-epic,
...these heroes have been given a stature
disproportionate to their cramped lives

[AL, 41, 1-3]

The heroes of West Indian novels, legends, and politics are really just average men who share the victimization of their compatriots. It is the society's need to find justification for its chaos that allows it to raise these "everymen" into artificially heroic situations. Caribbean culture is still in its infancy, says Walcott, despite exaggerated claims to the contrary made by politicians and tourist bureaus. Independence solved many problems

but Walcott feels few cultural manifestations have resulted. Indeed, for Walcott, politics has little to do with the privacy of the artist's task or with the long communal process he believes will develop a "national identity". As he says in an interview with Dennis Scott:

Walcott: ...it really sounds very affected but I think the bulk of West Indian poetry that we have is very, very bad. Don't you think so? I mean it's pretty poor!

.....
 Walcott: Well I believe the West Indian poet has never approached the language as a construction problem, as a structure---... [West Indian poets] depended a lot it seems to me on the 'Landscape' or 'Pain'... 2

In quotations like this Walcott places the responsibility for art on the shoulders of the artist and not the State. As he says in "What the Twilight Says": "The future of West Indian militancy lies in art",³ and it is to this belief that Walcott has committed his life. He feels that the morning of Caribbean identity will be determined primarily by the way its artists view their society. He sees present life in the West Indies as static and incomplete without this. It is still post-colonial and not yet self-realized, despite stirrings by its artists to accelerate this struggle towards its goal.

Walcott's image for this state of affairs is the twilight of dawn.⁴ In "The Almond Trees", this pre-dawn is explicitly identified with the social situation:

Indians, are impotent except to view passively the tourists who yearly desecrate the peace of their "sacred grove". As survivors, inheritors of the "Middle Passage", the ancient shipping route for slaves across the Atlantic, the bright sunlight of the tourists' day is meaningless to them, since the "night" of slavery is still a part of their lives.⁶ In "The Almond Trees" the traditional images of dawn and morning are used ironically. There is no rebirth or consummation in the poem. Although the "sunlight" of the foreign sunbathers may be real and revitalizing to the sunbathers themselves, it is utterly divorced from the shade and "twilight" beneath the almond trees. West Indians have no "sun" (Walcott seems to be saying) and can only witness the healing rays of "suns" that belong to imported elites. Like the almond trees, victimized and battered by brutal historical "elements", they can only vicariously witness other destinies while remaining in a gnarled, inert half-light of their own.

The fatalism we find in "The Almond Trees" results from Walcott's sense of the impotence West Indian man experiences in struggling to realize himself. Some recent reformers in the West Indies have posited a "Return to Africa" movement to emphasize the West Indian's cultural ties to Africa and counteract the cultural domination of the Caribbean by Europe and America.⁷ Walcott has no

faith in this venture. He writes in "What the Twilight Says":

What to do then? Where to turn? How to be true? If one went in search of the African experience, carrying the luggage of a few phrases and a crude map, where would it end? We had no language for the bush and there was a conflicting grammar in the pace of our movement. 8

For Walcott, European experience, no matter how exterior, has played too great a part in formulating West Indian consciousness to be discarded in favour of an obscure historical connection to Stone Age Africa. Painful as it might be, the Caribbean must build its future on its British and European roots rather than on a seductive but alien return to a primitive African utopia.

In "Bronze", Walcott stresses the irreversibility of history. While studying a primitive bronze mask made by the original aborigines of the Caribbean, he ponders its face:

By tears unrunnelled, guiltless of
surprise,
Bathes in dawn's wind, the wild night
hair blown back

[IGN, 78, 4-5]

Gradually the mask becomes in the poet's mind a symbol of primordial innocence that "bathes in dawn's wind", at once enigmatic and serene. But after he recalls how the Amerindians were wiped out by the European discoverers, he realizes that primitive society is a false "dawn":

affect what Walcott feels is the inner man. In saying this, he agrees with V.S. Naipaul, who has also pointed out some of the negative effects of political freedom in the Caribbean. Gordon Kohlehr reviews Naipaul's position in an article about Walcott:

Naipaul regarded [present West Indian] society as worse than in the Crown Colony period, where "there was an element of aspiration." In the post-Independence period "most people don't have any manners." "I feel that the manners of the proletariat have infiltrated the values of the rest of the society." 9

Part of the West Indian cultural dilemma for Walcott is stagnation, the type of stagnation that results from being geographically close to the U.S.A. and the overwhelming nature of mainland American culture. Since U.S. culture and identity are so strongly formulated and so heavily publicized to the rest of the world, it becomes especially difficult for nearby smaller nations like the Caribbean states to create an authentic self-image. They are intimidated by the size and depth of America. Thus, it becomes easier to assume American standards in art, music, fashion, and literature than to develop them on one's own. In many West Indians' eyes, their society is thus denied a chance to unlock itself from the "twilight" it presently suffers between the night of "Empire" and full cultural autonomy. A stasis results that is all the more troubling for the West Indian artist because it is not completely "dark" as

was the entrapment in the days of slavery and colonialism. Independence has teased without fulfilling. The transition period of the present is almost more frustrating to him than the indignities of the past, precisely because it forbids the West Indian even the opportunity of a completely tragic situation.

In "Cold Spring Harbour", Walcott analyzes his own personal share in West Indian displacement. This time the scene is not the Caribbean, however, but the United States. Once again, the time is dawn. It is a snowy morning in the town of the title on Long Island Sound.¹⁰

From father-stuffed bolsters of cloud
falling on casual linen
the small shrieks soundlessly float.
The woods are lint-wreathed. Dawn
crackles like foil to the rake
of a field mouse nibbling, nibbling
its icing.

[TG, 98, 1-7]

The time of year is either Christmas morning or near Christmas morning, and the peaceful fall of snow on the trees at first seems idyllic, reminiscent of a Robert Frost poem or a Currier & Ives lithograph. However, Walcott realizes all too well that he is not at home. It is not only physically a white world around him, but also a white-man's world, which is blank to a Caribbean visitor without equal historical and social roots.

...The world is wrapped
 in cotton and you would tread wool
 if you opened, quietly, whitely,
 this door, like an old Christmas card
 turned by a child's dark hand, did
 he know it was dark then,
 the magical brittle branches, the white
 house
 collared in fur, the white world of
 men,
 its bleeding gules and its berry drops.

[TG, 98, 7-15]

The daybreak scene before the poet is gentle and inviting, but in reality turns out to be cruel and "dark" at its core, holding no room for the outsider. The branches he sees are "magical" only in his imagination. The "white house" (probably a pun on the U.S. presidential residence) is "collared in fur": that is, allowed the luxury of expensive ermine only by virtue of a tradition of murdering animals and exploiting labourers. The pure, white world Walcott witnesses is actually a facade for "bleeding gules", which in traditional heraldry is ermine dyed red, the blood of a victim. The scene to Walcott suggests that the luxuries of the elite are always paid for by the blood of the masses.

Walcott's verse here is oblique in its statement, as in most of his poems, rather than vehemently spelt out, but he is still accusing the part of the American tradition that endorsed slavery and later culturally swamped the West Indies. His expression of the situation

matches its complexities. The dawn light in "Cold Spring Harbour" is once again somebody else's dawn and not Walcott's, however. At the end of the poem, the poet realizes his alienation from the place. He yearns for a chance to recapture the innocence of childhood and Christmas morning, but he realizes it is impossible. Hope of someday belonging to such a world is as forbidden to him as the Christian rebirth the time of year celebrates. His prayers can only rise to the ears of "some white-haired old God who'd forgotten/ or no longer trusted his miracles"[98,21-22]. Alone, away from his family and friends in the West Indies, Walcott sees himself as the only "black" object in a landscape of vapid "whiteness". Even God is a Caucasian to him in America. All this whiteness to Walcott is false and the dawn unreal, in the face of private suffering and dislocation. Even this realization does not allow him to escape the colour of his skin or the place of his birth. They are part of an indelible "twilight" he cannot shed that singles him out as an alien wherever he goes. Not only is he uprooted when at home in his native land, but also in such a "liberal" foreign land as the United States. The particular life-in-death he inhabits cannot be disowned by leaving the West Indies. In "Cold Spring Harbour" he discovers another dawn he cannot share, being locked in the eso-

teric predicament of being West Indian.

The metaphor of morning twilight is a symbol of waiting, inchoateness, and dissatisfaction. For Walcott, the Caribbean still has far to go before it achieves the balanced and harmonious ideals of a "New Aegean" archipelago that mirrors the ancient Hellenic culture Walcott admires. As an educated man, a society in the West Indies similar to that of Ancient Greece or Rome should be the total aspiration of his people. Unfortunately, his goal is not shared by many of his kinsmen, most of whom place political and material objectives ahead of the moral and intellectual ones that since classical times have been considered desirable by Western thinkers. In his role of the artist in the West Indies, Walcott shares in this way the frustrations of the universal artist's search for the perfect society.

In "Allegre", Walcott records one reservation he has about modelling Caribbean life on classical blueprints. He admires and loves ancient Roman and Greek culture, but feels that for a real West Indian renaissance to occur, it cannot be imported from far away or long ago. The poem uses dawn half-light to express the unborn nature of his society, and alludes to the problems of self-dependence. "Allegre" starts by describing a tranquil Caribbean pastoral scene:

spreads of the West Indies as a tropical paradise. This may be true on postcards, but for the denizens social wholeness is not realized by the simple fact of living in a clement climate. Walcott ends "Allegre":

Yet to find the true self is still
arduous,
And for us, especially, the elation can be
useless and empty
As this pale, blue ewer of the sky,
Loveliest in drought.

[59,27-30]

There is still the importance of men to fill this bucolic paradise, and it is with man that the problem lies. In the early dawn of "identity", Walcott (as spokesman for his society) realizes it is a cultural pitfall to be taken in by the jargon of the tourist trade about the West Indies. To see the Caribbean as solely a geographical Elysian Fields is as naive as the innocence of the original Adam and Eve of Biblical myth. This is why the scene in "Allegre" is frozen and painted like a picture. It is a dawn still infused with "the warm blue shadows of the range" of night, a dawn that seems unable to mature into full morning.

Reality, the need "to find the true self", will soon press in on experience and puncture the daydream. Besides simple aesthetics there is also responsibility, says Walcott, drawing a parallel to the youthful nature of Caribbean culture. Because of this, the "elation" he feels viewing the scene becomes "useless and empty"

since not based on any social significance. It is unjustifiable innocence, in a sense, representing only the appearance of "true light" and of insight into the self. It may seem to be part of a scene from some Golden Age, but that to Walcott can only be a notion produced by the absorbed European standards of classical beauty and society. Meanwhile, the poet still waits for a true morning with a trepidation mixed with hope. When the real West Indian "millenium" appears, Walcott suggests, it will be self-created and not have to rely on antique stereotypes for its "daylight."

IV

TWILIGHT AS INDECISION: QUARRELS WITH THE SELF

All [Caribbean] betrayals are quarrels with the self, their pardonable desertions the inevitable problem of all island artists: the choice of home or exile, self-realization or spiritual betrayal of one's country. Travelling widens the breach. Choice grows more melodramatic with every twilight.

"What the Twilight Says"

This extract, one of Walcott's concluding remarks in "What the Twilight Says", describes some of the psychic problems faced by the Caribbean inhabitant, and especially the Caribbean artist. Walcott refers to several problems each West Indian must resolve early in his career. First, he must decide ultimately whether to remain where he was born or emigrate to the "mainland", that is, perhaps, a metropolitan centre like New York or London. Whether he stays or not, he must then decide whether to uphold his island customs or adopt American or British styles of self-expression. Because livelihood is difficult in all areas in the islands, and it is a relatively easy step to emigrate elsewhere, this becomes a very real struggle for the West Indian. Perhaps no other area of the world offers so little advantages to the patriot. Before he does anything else, the West Indian must choose his home, whether or not his allegiance to Caribbean society is strong enough to warrant his

remaining. For the Caribbean artist, especially, this unavoidable choice will determine his entire artistic destiny. Walcott himself decided at least a decade ago to remain and live in the West Indies, but he still recognizes the "pardonability" of a desertion of the homeland for greener pastures. He is aware that West Indian society is still in an embryonic state, and that it may not be personally worthwhile for many talented individuals to bother seeing it through to its maturity.

Caribbean society, as we've said, is a farrago of customs and heritages. Its inhabitant thus finds himself constantly torn between conflicting loyalties, including the basic loyalty of remaining in one's homeland. Almost by definition, to be West Indian means to be displaced and divided by global currents. Walcott's biography is a concentrated version of many of these indecisions, and he often makes use of autobiographical material to speak for his fellow West Indians.

He was born of mixed ancestry on Saint Lucia, an island whose people are primarily Negro. His parents and his upbringing were middle-class, in contrast to the poorer majority around him who shared few of his comparative advantages. He was well-educated as well as a scholarship student on an island that has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the West Indies.¹ Finally, he was the product of an English family of Methodist persuasion amid a population that was almost exclusively

Roman Catholic speaking a French patois. From the beginning, Walcott was personally involved in many aspects of the cultural "schizophrenia" of the West Indies. He was born a minority citizen (in several senses) in a minority society. Crises of choice were forced on him by his circumstances, and these choices have remained with him as themes throughout his artistic life.

In the following sub-headings I have selected two major dilemmas in Walcott's poetry that he expresses by using the twilight metaphor.² Each is an inner problem for him, "a quarrel with himself", but both reflect important West Indian problems of consciousness. Like most of his thinking countrymen, in each dilemma Walcott wrestles with a choice he has to make, sometimes resolving the problem, more often remaining unable to find a solution.

1. The Religious Dilemma

In "Crusoe's Island", Walcott treats the theme of the inadequacy of the old faiths for the New World. The setting is Sunday morning. Standing on a slope overlooking the sea and rooftops of Scarborough, the capital of Tobago, the poet ponders the relevance of Old World beliefs in such chaotic tropics that would be more appropriately pagan.

Below, the simple plaid
Of Scarborough is spread

To a blue, perfect sky;
Our dome of hedonist philosophy.
Bethel and Canaan's heart
Open to hymn and psalm.
I labour at my art.
My father, God, is dead.

[TC, 54, 12-19]

Walcott gradually identifies himself in the poem with a "castaway" like Robinson Crusoe. He sees himself as a figure arbitrarily shipwrecked in the West Indies, cut off from real civilization and cultural companionship. He is the educated man in the wilderness, "The second Adam since the fall"[55,73]:

Craftsman and castaway
All heaven in his head,
He watched his shadow pray
Not for God's love but human
love instead.

[55, 78-81]

He accepts that the traditional rules no longer apply on his virgin "island", and that as an artist he faces the awesome responsibility of "naming things anew", of recreating a human language and order to arrange the blankness of the tropical sea and sky around him. Like Crusoe in his small domain, he has reluctantly inherited the duties of God.

Walcott's metaphysical sense of isolation is almost exactly comparable to the physical isolation expressed by Defoe's castaway in the original novel:

I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I had nothing to do with,

no expectation from, and, indeed no desires about. In a word, I had nothing indeed to do with it, nor was ever like to have; so I thought it looked as we may perhaps look upon it hereafter, viz., as a place I had lived in but was come out of it; and well might I say, as Father Abraham to Dives, 'Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed'. 3

By using Robinson Crusoe as a symbol for West Indian alienation, Walcott discovers a resonant and accurate metaphor for that experience.⁴ The world Crusoe yearns for is, of course, Europe. For Walcott, the "world" he seeks is the civilized, devout society of the past that Europe stands for and which has not imported itself well to the Caribbean. In "Crusoe's Island", Walcott despairs of ever returning to that kind of symmetrical universe.

O love, we die alone!
I am borne by the bell
Backward to boyhood...

To those whom a cruel
Just God could gather
To His blue breast, His beard
A folding cloud,
As He gathered my father.
Irresolute and proud,
I can never go back.

[TC, 56, 72-74, 77-83]

Meditating on his personal as well as cultural forefathers, the poet laments the fact that he doesn't know whether to surrender to his need for belief or pattern his life on the grim self-dependence of the typical existential hero. He finds himself divided on the horns

of a dilemma involving comforting illusions and unbearable realities, and neither course seems reassuring.

Up to this point in "Crusoe's Island", the "lighting" for the poem has been harsh tropical sunlight, representing the scorching, focussed revelations the poet is confronting. In the third section of the poem, the daylight of soul-searching disintegrates into evening. Walcott confesses to a failed vision. He admits that art is ultimately only a poor mirror of reality. It can only be a substitute for a true faith in life. He, as Crusoe-the creator, can never hope to console men the way traditional religion has been able to do.

Art is profane and pagan.

The most it has revealed
Is what a crippled Vulcan
Beat on Achilles' shield.

[TC, 57, 94-97]

Then, while it is still daylight, Walcott watches a group of simple black girls walking to church dressed in their Sunday best. Though they are described as "Friday's progeny", the offspring of Crusoe's black servant, they still have a dignity and an "air of glory" about them, despite what the poet would call their misguided faith, because in a sense he realizes that their faith is not actually that misguided. Walcott watches, realizing that he has nothing to offer the innocent young girls in place of their innocence.

At dusk when they return
 For vespers, every dress
 Touched by the sun's will burn
 A seraph's; an angel's,
 And nothing I can learn
 From art and loneliness .
 Can bless them as the bell's
 Transfiguring tongue can bless.

[57,111-118]

The poem ends with evening because the problem the poet is considering has no answer. Despite everything, the young girls are seen as transfigured by the dying light, while it is the poet-searcher who is damned to the outer darknesses of agnosticism.

The twilight with which "Crusoe's Island" closes is suspended animation, the twilight of indecision. Whereas during the daylight of the poem, the poet angrily faced the prospect that "[his] father, God, [was] dead", his indignation and pride eventually decline into exhaustion. Again he must compromise. He resigns himself to the fact that he alone as individual artist cannot solve the spiritual lives of those around him. The coming night of the future, and perhaps of death, are actually less dismaying for the peasant girls he watches than for himself. In this sense they are better off. The blazing noonday self-vindications he presents at the beginning of the poem become useful only to his own artistic egotism. What characterizes the dilemma, he concludes, is that his poetic deceptions are just as real as the young girls'

religious "deceptions". The twilight that eventually descends on all of them is the crippling, current Zeitgeist. Between the past glory of the age of belief and the obscure dawn of a possible return to faith and order, Walcott concludes in "Crusoe's Island" that art is no more an accurate depiction of spiritual truth than traditional orthodoxy. In his final vision in the poem, he sees both as fallible. He suggests that doubt is not a particularly West Indian problem, though it may be compounded in the West Indies. The dilemma all men face is too complex to decipher by any "program", whether artistic or religious, and the shadow-world of twilight and doubt must be endured.

In "Crusoe's Island" the metaphor of twilight is actual, a time of day. In another poem on a religious theme, "The Wedding of an Actress", the twilight is used figuratively. This time, instead of the dimness of a real evening, the atmosphere of the poem is the "half-light" of the interior of a church, though the metaphor is similarly employed.

Entering from the glare
Of the mid-morning traffic, we assume
Our lily-bordered pew; our eyes
Gradually grow familiar with the gloom.

[TC, 30, 1-4]

The visitors' eyes grow accustomed to the gloom in a symbolic sense: it is the same shadowy doubt that ends "Crusoe's Island". They are used to it.

I press my forehead hard on the scarred
pews,

Wrestle with prayer and fail.
 It is no use.
 In any church my brain is a charred vault
 Where demons roost,
 A blackened, shifting dust.

[TC, 30, 16-21]

Because of the suffering and injustices the poet has experienced, he feels he cannot accept a faith in the equity of the universe, and is doomed to carry the darkness of doubt with him even into the sacred places of others. The dimness of the church interior represents decay and superstition for him, not otherworldliness. But as in the earlier poem, his mood is still ambivalent. The "hedonistic", pagan sunlight of the outside is no more an answer to his quandary than the half-light of "the Lord's house". Since he is unable to pray with any conviction, the poet feels that the church's darkness mirrors his own state of mind. Sunlight would be inappropriate. His despair is real, but it is the despair of the frustrated believer, not the convinced heretic, and this intensifies his sense of lostness. If the persona in the poem truly believed in "darkness", we suspect he would probably be outside in the "pagan sunlight" seizing the day and making the most of his brief hours, so to speak. Instead, he still retains his guilt. His conscience forces him to struggle with his soul in the twilight shadows of his pew between life and death. His struggle

is between an affirmation of life-as-it-is ("sunlight") and a need to perceive cosmic justice in a universe of death ("shadow"). Both desires oppose each other, and the poet's spiritual agony is increased by the fact that he is equally balanced mentally between the two poles. It is the very intermediate nature of his twilight between faith and doomed acceptance that causes his turmoil.

The occasion for "The Wedding of an Actress" is the marriage of a female theatrical colleague of Walcott's. But at what is normally a joyous occasion and the traditional happy ending of comedies, the poet finds tragedy: he has a vision of the bride as "white Ophelia on the black flood", a pale trousseau surrounded by death. The wedding ceremony becomes another play, both for the participants and for the audience; when it is over, the congregation will return to the profane and meaningless activities of their everyday lives outside the church-theatre.

We too are actors, who behold
This ceremony; we hold
Our breath, defying dissolution,
Faith, we are told, like art,
Feeds on illusion.

[TC, 31, 32-36]

In the poem's last stanza, Walcott continues to witness the ceremony through the eyes of the outsider: "Through the illusion of another life,/ I can observe this custom like a ghost"[31, 37-38]. But this time he recognizes that it is also his own spiritual pride that prevents

him from relating to the liturgy of the wedding. As in "Crusoe's Island", he sees it as his own mind that partly isolates him, and not any particular monopoly on truth he might possess as an artist:

Faith is as virginal as every bride,
Custom the church from which I am divorced.
Because of pride, because of grievous pride.

[31,46-48]

His echoing of the mea culpa, mea maxima culpa from the Roman Mass suggests that he recognizes his suffering to be as much his fault as a product of the indifference of the universe.⁵

The ending of "The Wedding of an Actress" reveals that Walcott accepts the relativity of truth. The faiths of the bride and the congregation may be vulnerable, but so is his own tortured "freethinking" as narrator. Thus, Walcott's metaphysical dilemma is not resolved at the conclusion of the poem. His deep hunger for a faith is not enough to justify one. Neither is his profound sense of mutability and death. The poet's desperation is caused by the symbolic twilight he inhabits: in a limbo where "nothing is real", neither sun nor shadow, he has no available absolute upon which to construct an ethic of conduct. If his self-esteem were less, he admits, he might be able to join one of the spiritual parties he watches so distantly. As it is, he remains tormented by his sunset world. His one comfort is that

that world is completely outside his power to improve, so he can to some extent justifiably submit to his own impotence.

2. The Racial Dilemma

As a mulatto in the West Indies, Walcott has both advantages and disadvantages going for him in attempting to be a spokesman for all West Indians. By being racially related to both blacks and whites, he can offer an objective representation of both cultures. However, by being a type of half-breed, a complete part of neither group, he becomes in many ways alienated from both groups. In trying to transcend artistic provincialism, Walcott would like to be able to express the ideals of all Caribbean peoples, regardless of race. But this sometimes presents contradictions. What Victor Questel says about Walcott as a dramatist also applies to Walcott as a poet:

His language estranges him from the people, his role as self-sacrificing instructor demands distance, and yet he envies the poor "their theatre"; the result is constant contradiction in his work when he refers to the people. There is his desire to enter the life of the poor without living it, and there is his feeling of guilt, envy, and contempt for the people. 6

This is a fair argument, and one that Walcott is aware of. By having linguistic and cultural allegiances to Britain foreordained by his upbringing and education,

Walcott is handicapped when he attempts to speak for the West Indian everyman. Because he is neither poor nor black, but still wishing to articulate the pain of those who are, he has to experience their lives vicariously. And, conversely, he cannot write from the "innocent", unpersecuted viewpoint of the Caucasian West Indian, since his experience belies this innocence. The colour of Walcott's skin becomes for him a sort of emblem of twilight, the isolation of being "the man in between." In many of his poems it also serves as a theme for his rage and guilt.

A sense of angry self-mockery appears in at least two of his poems that do not exclusively concern race, but in both of which race plays a major part. The first poem, "Goats and Monkeys", is ostensibly about lust, but more importantly concerns inter-racial relationships. The poem is about the incompatibility yet fatal attraction between the black and white races. The title refers to two breeds of animals that symbolize lechery in Renaissance typology. The characters in the poem are Othello and Desdemona (cf. Othello IV,i,256 for the title quotation).

Bent to her lips
he is Africa, a vast, sidling shadow
that halves your world with doubt.
'Put out the light', and God's light
is put out.

[TC,27,5-8]

Retaining the violent "black-white" puns and symbols of Act V, Scene ii of Shakespeare's Othello, when the

Moore contemplates smothering Desdemona, Walcott revises them to refer to both the confrontation of the black and white races in Caribbean history, and to the Negro male's reputation for sexual potency. The goats and monkeys of the title refer to this so-called primitive vitality of the black man.

The poem depicts a static moment: Othello's indecision whether to kill or forgive Desdemona for her alleged infidelities. But the relationship of the "shadow" man and the "light" woman, despite its turmoil, is a complementary one:

Virgin and ape, maid and malevolent Moor,
Their immoral coupling still halves
our world.
He is your sacrificial beast, bellowing,
goaded,
a black bull snarled in ribbons of its
blood.

[27, 21-24]

The black and white worlds need each other, Walcott says, even if it be the relationship of exploiter and victim.⁷

But like the West Indian who cannot hope for an authentic "tragic joy", the pseudo-Othello in the poem hesitates too long in his choice and becomes a self-parody. He spoils his initial heroic *grandeur* by a Prufrockian vacillation.

A bestial, comic agony. We harden with mockery at this blackamoor who turns his back on her, who kills what, like the clear moon, cannot abhor her element, night; his grief

farcically knitted in a handkerchief

[TC, 28, 10-45]

The character who began as a "vast, sidling shadow", a threatening mysterious presence of Negro pride, has degenerated into a buffoon in blackface. This portrayal may refer to a feeling of perverse envy on Walcott's part for the "luxury" of the original African's anguish, and anguish and tragedy he feels he, as a mulatto and West Indian, cannot participate in. It is also an allegory for Caribbean experience. Unlike the Jew or the South African black (to name two persecuted groups in the modern world), the West Indian, whether black, white, or mulatto, no longer has fully tragic grievances. The ages of slavery and of Empire are over. What is left is a sterile wasteland of unformulated desires without the consequent power to realize these desires. The Othello-figure in "Goats and Monkeys" represents the West Indian who burns to "murder" his white betrayer, but realizes that this would only doom him since he is culturally dependent on that betrayer. He is tempted to regress to the primal fury of the black people, but finds he cannot: he is too in love with the white world, too civilized to rediscover that type of wild abandonment in the self. The rumour of the brutally potent black man is a myth. In "Goats and Monkeys" he is seen as even less potent than the white man, since his primitive, chaotic urges incapacitate

him from operating normally in the stricter discipline of the white world. Once again, the narrator (both Walcott-as-individual and Walcott-as-Caribbean) finds himself caught between two undesirable choices in an enervating "twilight": whether he opts for the purity of the "daylit", white world or the vitality of the black "night", he will lose something of his nature. By being trapped between both parts of his identity, he loses his entire identity.⁸

"Blues" is a later poem (from The Gulf) that specifically deals with the poet's mixed heritage. While "Goats and Monkeys" uses "black" and "white" emblems, only stating at the end of the poem how these apparent polarities are related, in "Blues" the question of physically belonging to a specific ethnic group is the poem's motivating theme. The scene is Greenwich Village in New York City, and the time of day is again (significantly) evening.

Those five or six guys
hunched on the stoop
that oven-hot summer night
whistled me over. Nice
and friendly. So, I stop.
MacDougal or Christopher
Street in chains of light.

[TG, 67, 1-7]

Told with the spare irony of a traditional blues number, the poem is a simple anecdote with a complex undercurrent. The narrator, who describes himself as "...[not] too

far from / home, but not too bright / for a nigger, and not too dark"[67,9-11], innocently goes over to the "young guys." By being "not too bright... and not too dark", the narrator is punning on his light negroid features as well as his "stupidity." As might be expected in New York City, the young men beat him up:

I'm coming on too strong? You figure right! They beat this yellow nigger black and blue.

[67,15-17]

During the assault, the narrator does not retaliate.

I hung my olive-green, just bought sports coat on a fire plug... I did nothing. They fought each other, really.

[67,20-23]

At the end of the poem he gets away from his assailants, reminding himself with bitter sarcasm that it may not be the youths' fault: "It's nothing really. / They don't get enough love"[68,35-36]. After considering a moment, he finally assesses the encounter by expressing a sardonic despair at human nature:

Still, it taught me something about love. If it's so tough, forget it.

[68,40-42]

The poem implies that the reason Walcott gets mugged is because he is a mulatto, a "yellow nigger", an oddity and hence a target in New York. It also suggests that the narrator's assailants are probably blacks and/or

Puerto Ricans, both relatively "pure" ethnic groups compared to him: "...Life / gives them a few kicks, / that's all. The spades, the spicks"[67,24-26]. What causes the assault, then, is his West Indian "mongrelness", the inheritance of being who he is, and not any earned characteristic. As in the poem "Cold Spring Harbour" (discussed in Chapter II), Walcott cannot discard either his heritage or his skin, even in an ethnic "melting pot" like the United States. If he belonged to one of the extremes of racial lightness or darkness, he might have some identity, no matter how persecuted. In the symbolic twilight of Greenwich Village in "Blues", which is the twilight of his identity, as well as his own "yellow skin" and "yellow" fear, he is doubly lost. Instead of either fighting or taking flight, he allows himself to be battered. The passivity is no longer the tormented indecision of an Othello or Robinson Crusoe; it is the self-imposed failure to make a meaningful decision that characterizes the West Indian temperament for Walcott, and this leads to his victimization. The vacillation in "Blues" has shifted from the uncertainty of "Goats and Monkeys" to real and painful impotence, while still retaining the ludicrousness of the "blackamoor Othello", and his inability to direct his own fate. There is no tragedy in "Blues" and even less comedy: the humiliation is finally recognized as neither purgative

nor even meaningful. By being racially and culturally both black and white (and, in a mental sense, allied to every West Indian), Walcott learns reluctantly to accept that he can never be either totally, and must endure his twilight until the possibility of a new form of dignity arrives.

In portraying the Caribbean consciousness in his art as irresolutely caught between religious, racial, and other polarities, Walcott cannot escape expressing personal dilemmas.³ Like most artists, he uses his private life and artistically transforms its stresses into the universal stresses of the people around him. For example, being torn between hedonistic abandon and Christian guilt in poems like "Crusoe's Island" and "The Wedding of an Actress", he can take use of unusual circumstances by selecting details that reflect every West Indian's need for original myths and ideals. Just as Walcott yearns for a spontaneous but truthful system of beliefs to accurately reflect the complexities of his world, so does he feel that his Caribbean countrymen (and, at another level, all twentieth century men who are also spiritually bankrupt) need new faiths to sustain them. At this level in his work, the displaced West Indian becomes a symbol similar to The Wandering Jew

as a representation of modern man.

The racial metaphor Walcott frequently uses in his work is that of the "half-breed." This can be a mental state, like the fluctuations of the Othello figure in "Goats and Monkeys", or it can be a physical state like the "yellow nigger" in "Blues." Either way, Walcott identifies such an isolated half-state as isolated by its very proximity to "normal" racial extremes, and not by being truly foreign and new, and hence unthreatening. He almost seems to be saying that the fate of the "mutant" (as he is ethnically, and West Indians are psychically) is worse than that of the "newly-discovered" species in the eyes of the world. And he discovers that this situation cannot be discarded merely by leaving the West Indies. It is an interior problem rather than a problem of geographical locale, and it must be solved by inner struggle between the conflicting parts of the fractured self.

Both Walcott's religious and racial problems are seen to be intricately related to horizons beyond the West Indies. They are no longer intramural or provincial problems. The "twilight" produced by the inadequacies of European religion and politics in the Caribbean has to be solved by cooperation with the outside world. Both sides must forgive past affronts suffered at the hands of the other. This is why Walcott finally

abandons the metaphor of Crusoe and his island, a metaphor he used frequently in his poetry up to and including The Castaway. An island can be a self-contained paradise, as Robinson Crusoe first believed his to be, but it can quickly turn into a jail that separates the islander from the mainland of human society. In his poems on religious and racial themes, Walcott never resorts to advocating violence or revenge for injustices inflicted on Caribbeans. He recognizes that compassion may ultimately be the only answer for the twilight West Indian "slave", since power is beyond his reach. In his vision of the shadowy half-world of current Caribbean society, Walcott seems to be approaching the conclusion that forgiveness may perhaps be the only way the West Indian can discover dignity and reach his full human potential.

V

TWILIGHT AS HOME: THE RING OF LIGHT

...at once it struck me what quality
went to form a Man of Achievement in
literature and which Shakespeare
possessed so enormously--- I mean
Negative Capability that is when man
is capable of being in uncertainties,
Mysteries, doubts, without any irrita-
ble reaching after fact and reason---
 ...

John Keats
 Letter to George and Thos.
 Keats, December 22, 1817

Time tells me what I am. I change and am the same.
I empty myself of my life and my life remains.

Mark Strand
 "The Remains"

Connected as he is as artist to the developing nature of the Caribbean world, Walcott finds in the end that he must resolve the problem of West Indian twilight. Particularly in his volume The Gulf, we find that he discovers that he can no longer simply keep describing the West Indian dilemma of being "in a green night", a tropical void, as a member of "Friday's children" marooned on their island-outpost in the twentieth century. By the end of the 1960's, such observations were clichés in West Indian literature. Everyone was becoming tired of the insight. Even the

younger poets and novelists by that time, Walcott has noted, were becoming too reliant on "pain" and "the landscape" as easy themes to start their careers with.¹ He himself chooses in The Gulf not to abandon the subjects of West Indian history and identity, but to try to move beyond them to a personal reconciliation of his relationship to them. Naturally, not all the poems in that volume are about this search for peace; some are as troubled and pessimistic as any in his earlier books. But there are enough poems in The Gulf standing as legitimate attempts to discover a world-view that is not just an artistic description of chaos, that the volume can be called a philosophical advance over its predecessors.

By the time of the poems in The Gulf, Walcott has in many ways reached a thematic impasse. The life-in-death state of post-colonial life in the Caribbean that he sees his countrymen inhabiting is no longer the new and vital insight it was in the early 1960's. Most intelligent Caribbeans were aware of it, and trying to transcend the definitions it imposed on them.² Walcott, meanwhile, as we have seen, renounced militarism and social upheaval as means towards the West Indian cultural "morning", and sought to invoke change by artistic methods. His poetry in many ways becomes more and more personal during this time, espousing the

merits of family and friends and concentrating on the beauties of the "particular" rather than on artificial globalism ready-made for poetry lovers. The theme of twilight survives in the work, of course, but instead of remaining ominous, becomes a metaphor for humanism. As Walcott gradually comes to accept the limitations imposed on man by an unknown universe, he begins to recognize the value of specific details, relationships, and place-names. Instead of also trying to reach a world literary audience through the use of topical subjects, he surrenders to the shrunken world surrounding him and concentrates on writing about the minutiae of his everyday life. Thus, he abandons even the "particularity" of West Indian subject matters for the more private universe of his own intimate circle of friends. He now chooses to write poems that are personal without being especially hermetic. By doing this, he not only writes in a manner truer to his own concerns, but also follows the artistic precept "the more individual, the more universal." He knows, like Yeats did, that he cannot wait for his island society to reach its cultural maturity to appreciate him. Instead, he must recreate an imaginative world of his own before he dies as a monument to his society that is temporarily unsupported by that society.

There are suggestions in some of Walcott's poems

before The Gulf that he is thematically considering the path of a sort of domestic poet.³ "Lampfall" (from The Castaway) is his clearest expression of his meditations on this possibility during this period. Surrounded by passionate poems like "Goats and Monkeys", "The Prince", and "Codicil", "Lampfall" is an oasis of acceptance amid the angry, dissatisfied poems of The Castaway. It begins with a description of Walcott and his family on the beach at evening:

Closest at lampfall
Like children, like the moth-flame metaphor,
The Coleman's humming jet at the sea's edge
A tuning fork for our own still family choir
Like Joseph Wright of Derby's astrological
lecture
Casts rings of benediction round the aged.

[TC.58.1-6]

The group are brought "closest together at lampfall", the time of the lighting of lamps in the actual Caribbean twilight, out of the primordial fear of the unknown symbolized by darkness. The scene has timeless human significance for Walcott: the people involved are reduced to the level of children huddling together at night in a ring of light. But they are also compared to the group of adults alluded to in lines 5-6 featured in Joseph Wright of Derby's famous eighteenth century painting "The Orrery."⁴ The poem thus opens with one of the simplest but most universal emblems of the human condition. The campfire light is human companionship, and the surrounding darkness is the meta-

physical unknown.

This "situation" is both the physical incident and the symbolic subject for "Lampfall." Although Walcott identified with the people within the lit, human circle in the first six lines, he also goes on in the poem to explain his affinities as poet and "creator" with the sea and the night beyond the lamplight:

I never tire of ocean's quarrelling,
Its silence, its raw voice,
Nor of these half-lit windy leaves, gesti-
culating higher
'Rejoice, rejoice...'

[TC, 58, 7-10]

As an artist, he cannot be content with the known properties of existence as represented by the campfire. The seductions of the night, the unspoken and the unseen, compel him to search beyond the parameters of human relationships, and it is this emotion that prepares us for the shift described in the next stanza in the poem:

But there's an old fish, a monster
Of primal fiction that drives barrelling
Undersea, too old to make a splash,
To which I'm hooked!
Through daydream, through nightmare trolling
Me so deep that no lights flash
There but plankton's drifting, phos-
phorescent stars.

[58, 11-17]

Here, in accord with the usual divided self Walcott expresses in his poems, he suddenly sees himself beyond the circle of humanity, attached like a deep-sea fisherman to some gigantic submarine creature dragging him

The sea-rock like a loom
 Shuttling its white wool, sheer Penelope!
 The coals lit, the sky glows, an oven.
 Heart into heart carefully laid
 Like bread.
 This is the fire that draws us by our dread
 Of loss, the furnace door of heaven.

[59,25-32]

Remembering the day and his family's outing on the beach, Walcott briefly shifts his metaphor of the circle of humanity to change it into "the shores of human knowledge", so to speak. These boundaries, in turn, are compared to the Odyssey story: as artist and adventurer, Odysseus-Walcott is out on the sea searching for his spiritual home; in contrast, Penelope (Walcott's wife, perhaps, or all his friends and family collectively) awaits his return, contented to be "at home" in the physical, domestic world. As the sun goes down, and the lamp's light contrasts with the oven of the tropical sunset, the two opposite natures of Odysseus and Penelope are re-united in a common "dread" of twilight. Metaphorically, Walcott is saying here that even the archetypal artist, for all his hunger for the unfamiliar, must maintain ties of compassion with other men who exist in the routine world. Death and the "outside world" are common experiences to both the wanderer and his wife: "At night we have heard / The forest, an ocean of leaves, drowning her children" [59,34-35]. But as long as there is human love, there is still belonging: "Still, we belong here. There's Venus,

We are not yet lost" [59,36].

"Lampfall" ends with a relatively peaceful coda:

Like you, I preferred
The firefly's starlike little
Lamp, mining, a question,
To the highway's brightly multiplying beetles.

[59,37-40]

Like contented people such as "Penelope" and his family and friends, Walcott decides that the humble life of the everyman "firefly" has its own struggles, rewards, and "questions to mine". In a modern world that is shattered and fragmented into small colonies, this may be the only sane way to live in the existential unknown. "The highway's brightly multiplying beetles", the fast pace and uprootedness of the public life, are not for him. To speak accurately for the people, Walcott suggests at the end of "Lampfall" that he must first speak honestly about himself.

With the publication of The Gulf in 1969, Walcott returns with growing emphasis to this theme of the importance of human relationships. Indecisions still occur in his mind--- whether to forsake society to become the isolated poet-prophet meditating on society from afar--- but this possibility is gradually discarded as escapist. In these poems, Walcott decides to steer a moderate course between the extremes of an ivory tower and a life of public platitudes, and the manner in which he prepares to achieve this by sharing in print private emotions that

others can relate to.

"Star" is a short poem that reveals the same calmer, resigned side of Walcott that we have seen in "Lampfall":

If, in the light of things, you fade
real, yet wanly withdrawn
to our determined and appropriate
distance, like the moon left on
all night among the leaves, may
you invisibly delight this house

[TG, 97, 1-6]

The levels of meaning here are complex and puns are used, but the poem is, at every level, a hymn to life as it is. If, in the daylit material world, Walcott prays, the star of beauty and love is disfigured, the poet calls on the star (a symbolic projection of himself) to influence his life. The house mentioned in line six is not only his mind, but presumably also the real house in which he lives with his family; he is hoping amidst the twilight of dawn for a small light of ideals (like the firefly and the gaslight in "Lampfall") to remain on for him throughout the darkness, so he and his beloveds will be kept safe and sane within its glow. The poem is also a quiet invocation to the powers that be for the power to accept life as a castaway within the gulf, to resign the gap between his own desires and their fulfilment. Beauty and love, Walcott suggests, need no exterior reasons for being and can be established within by anyone.

O star, doubly compassionate, who came
 too soon for twilight, too late
 for dawn, may your pale flame
 direct the worst in us
 through chaos
 with the passion of
 plain day.

[TG,97,7-13]

In these lines, Walcott expresses gratitude for the star's timely arrival in twilight, and hopes that it will remain with him through the turbulence of the future to inspire him with a proper sense of reality. In this way, "Star" is both a spiritual and an existential poem. Without closing any doors on possibilities ahead, the poem is able to call equally upon both abstract entities (like beauty, love, and the imagination) and concrete ones (sexual love as represented by Venus, the "day star", acceptance of chaos, and survival). "Star" is a surrender to the human and West Indian twilight. What M. Travis Lane says about Walcott's outlook at this stage in his poetic career relates in many ways to "Star":

...chaos is human in Walcott's poetry, 1
 and, if only on the logical ground that
 man can only perceive nature through his
 own humanity, Walcott's nature is suffused
 with humane memories, humane suggestions,
 humane symbols--- and is chaos only when
 we feel it ~~be~~ so. 5

Walcott expresses a new faith in mankind in the poem, an emotion that has been only slowly forming in his earlier work. The tumult that is implicit in much of life here becomes a function of restless human desires. By re-

signing oneself to existence as it is and finding beauty in the actual, Walcott stresses in "Star" that it is possible to find a certain amount of rootedness within uncertainties.

"Homecoming: Anse La Raye" is another poem in The Gulf that combines metaphors from Homer (as in "Lampfall") and an attempt by Walcott to interpret his own origins. Anse La Raye is a quarter in western Saint Lucia, Walcott's home island, and the event described in the poem is Walcott's return to his native island after an absence. He begins the poem by announcing that for the "Afro-Greeks" (line 2) who are West Indians "...there are no rites / for those who have returned" [TG, 84, 5-6]; wanderers like himself who happen to travel overseas like the heroes in The Iliad to "defend their country's reputation", get no reception or recognition when they come back from the Big World. For Walcott the islands are intellectually impoverished as well as economically poor. He returns to his homeland an established literary figure who has defended the "Helen" of beauty in his work, but nobody recognizes him. The hot tropical landscape oppresses him, and the only people who take notice of him are some urchins playing on a beach.

...sugar-headed children race
 pelting up from the shallows
 because your clothes,
 your posture

seem like a tourist's.
They swarm like flies
round your heart's sore.

[TG,84,19-25]

This reception Walcott receives gains impact by its similarity to Odysseus' return to Ithaca after Troy, when none of the adventurer's former acquaintances recognize him except the swineherds. Walcott seems to be saying here that it is impossible to return to an earlier environment that one has outgrown and still be appreciated.

But a change of heart occurs in stanza three.

Suffer them to come,
entering your needle's eye,
knowing whether they live or die,
what others make of life will pass them by,
like that far silvery freighter
threading the horizon like a toy

[84-85,26-31]

The allusions to Christ's words about the innocence of children (Suffer them to come) and the superfluosity of wealth as a prerequisite to enter the kingdom of heaven (entering your needle's eye) are significant. The children Walcott sees should be suffered, he realizes, since they are the "enlisted", poor individuals without a future that the rest of the world bypasses like an ocean freighter.⁶ For those left stranded and impotent, those without any particular hopes or ambitions, Walcott feels genuine sympathy since he often shared (and shares) the same sense of vacuum as poet:

for once, like them

you wanted no career
but this sheer light, this clear
infinite, boring, paradisaal sea,
but hoped it would mean something to
 declare
today, I am your poet, yours,
all this you knew,
but never guessed you'd come
to know there are homecomings without
 home.

[TG.85.32-40]

On the personal level, this simply means that Walcott is disappointed that the ignorant, common people of his island don't appreciate his poetry. But in another sense, it is a justification for returning to Saint Lucia. The island is still really part of his heritage; he cannot forsake his roots to become a famous, international poet at the expense of denying his associations with his past. He would not be able to, at any event, since a poet can only write about native passions. Walcott is too West Indian in his temperament to survive elsewhere. His phrase, "homecomings without home", thus, voices his acceptance of the situation. Saint Lucia cannot stop being his "ring of light", the centre of his forming psychic associations, even if it lies within the gulf of displacement and twilight. Although he comes back "without home" to a society that his education and experience exile him from, it is still a "homecoming" because all his education and travel paradoxically cannot alter his early upbringing. "Homecoming: Anse La Raye" shows Walcott's intimate connections with the unthinking

poor of his island, and expresses their shared problems. The poet realizes in the poem, with a kind of tired consolation, that his literary task can only take on relevance to the outside world when the society he represents comes into its own "morning". Because this present period of waiting is not something he can alter, he finds redemption in resigning himself to his "island of light" while waiting.

"Hic Jacet", the last poem in The Gulf, can be said to summarize Walcott's position on nationalism. It also acts as a definite stance on the problem of "Caribbean twilight" that opposes many opinions held by Walcott's intellectual fellows in the West Indies. While many West Indian thinkers formerly felt obligations to oppose the harmful "brain drain" of talented people away from the islands, there simply wasn't enough justification to support their position. Opportunities for artists and thinkers just didn't exist in the Caribbean; the majority of the people were uneducated (and still are), either by choice or inability; and the government sponsorship of intellectual projects was grossly inadequate. Thus, the "patriots" often contradicted their earlier views by being forced to emigrate to better cultural horizons. Walcott's "Hic Jacet" becomes, in such a context, one of the first real defenses of "staying home" for the West Indian that is supported by hard,

personal experience. In addition, it explains why Walcott remained to wait the twilight out, and attempts a definition of home, a home within the "gulf" and the chaos of evil. It expresses what M. Travis Lane calls "the right subject" for Walcott:

...though home contains pain and loss
and isolation--- it is, Walcott avers,
the right place, the right subject---
the true self. 7

The title of "Hic Jacet" shows that the poem is meant to be an epitaph. So we know that its feelings are definite ones that Walcott finally considers worthy to speak for him for the rest of his life. In "Hic Jacet" Walcott finally takes a stand and finds a motto for his life.

They'll keep on asking, why did you remain?
Not for the applauding rain
of hoarse and hungry thousands at whose
center
the politician opens like a poisonous
flower,
not for the homecoming lecturer
gripping his lectern like a witness,
ready to explain
the root's fixation with the earth,
nor for that new race of dung beetles, frock-
coated, iridescent
crawling over the people.

[TG, 110, 1-9]

The poet states unequivocally here that he never abandoned his people, but not because they were all worthy. Walcott exposes with angry indignation the corruption and petty pretensions of many island societies (as he

has done elsewhere in prose⁸). The politically-minded are seen as mindless creatures who follow dangerous individuals as leaders, politicians, "poisonous flowers" out for their own advantage. The intellectual ("the homecoming lecturer") who returns from abroad to speak about staying-in-one-place is a blatant hypocrite to the poet. And "that new race of dung beetles" is obviously Walcott's designation for the fundamentalist West Indian clergies who hold (for the poet) such archaic possession over the common people. All these members of Caribbean society are exploitative and ignorant, but that does not negate Walcott's authentic concern for the majority of people in his homeland. "Before the people became popular / he loved them all"[110, 10-11]. Before it became trendy to be ostentatiously socially-minded, he says, he was quietly working on behalf of the people through his art.

Instead of on behalf of the "exploiters" who exist in the fabric of West Indian society, Walcott says he remained for another reason,

...for something rooted, unwritten
that gave us its benediction,
its particular pain.

[TG, 110, 14-16]

Besides staying true to the basic humanist position of caring more about people than about abstractions,

Walcott here expresses a trust in the future of the West Indies, a totally unfashionable belief in something

that may move its clouds from that mountain,
that is packing its bags on that fiction
of our greatness, which, like the home-
coming rain,
veers to a newer sea.

[TG, 110, 17-20]

He states that he was "Convinced of the power of provincialism"[27], that the particularness and strangeness of the West Indian experience would potentially grow into something realized and coherent. This is why he never emigrated to America or "wrote poems on the Thames / [shivering] through cities furred and cracked with ice"[24-25].

"Hic Jacet" becomes in this way an affirmation of West Indian life despite its nebulous and unformed character. Walcott knows all the pain and isolation of post-colonialism, but chooses to move forward. In an essay roughly contemporaneous with this poem, he defends the mixed up, plural nature of the Caribbean in a similar way as in "Hic Jacet":

Yet I feel absolutely no shame in
having endured the colonial experience.
There was no obvious humiliation in
it. In fact, I think that many of what
are sneered at as colonial values are
part of the West Indian psyche, a
fusion of formalism with exuberance,
a delight on both the precision and
the power of language. 9

The West Indian has no need to feel responsible for his history of exploitation, even though features of it still persist and are self-induced. That simple people should be manipulated by cunning opportunists (even by their own peers, as stanza one suggests in the poem) is nothing new; but to defend the simple life despite such disadvantages is what Walcott does originally in the poem. Like Whitman in Leaves of Grass, Walcott embraces the common people and finds an eternal quality about them that survives all facile political vices and changes. His conviction in home, compassion, and endurance triumph at the end of the poem:

I sought more power than you, more
fame than yours,
I was more hermetic, I knew the
commonweal,
I pretended subtly to lose myself in
crowds
knowing my passage would alter their
reflection,
I was the muscle shouldering the
grass
through ordinary earth,
commoner than water I sank to lose
my name,
this was my second birth.

[TG, 111, 33-40]

By refusing to become seduced by the false sirens of transient West Indian events, Walcott discovers through his poetry characteristics that are universal in the ordinary, unknown people on the "commonweal" he writes about. His vision becomes deeper by being

closer to the real roots and concerns of common people. Against the intensities of his own consciousness and the inherited results of his quarrelling ancestors, this amounts to being an apologia for being who he is.

"Hic Jacet", unlike "Lampfall" or "Star" or "Homecoming: Anse La Raye", does not explicitly refer to West Indian experience by using a twilight metaphor. But the situation expressed by Walcott's earlier uses of the metaphor is the same: the exploitation and impotence, the waiting, the agnosticism. In "Hic Jacet" Walcott finally takes an intellectual (and ultimately existential) stand and defends it; this contradicts the "in-between" nature of twilight as a poetic symbol, so he abandons it. There is an increased suggestion of an imminent full "dawn" in this poem, where uncertainty is replaced by a calmer expectation. Walcott at last decides that his ring of intellectual light will be the average, human life he lives in the islands. This life is one of acceptance, where love is a kind of "lamplight" in the night, and where future reunions are not impossible. What Walcott learns by the end of "Hic Jacet" is the lesson of all his earlier violent meditations: a greater faith in human relationships. What Gordon Rohlehr says in an essay on Caribbean culture, referring to Aimé

Césaire's decision to return to the West Indies from France in the 1930's, applies to Walcott's similar decision to stay home almost forty years later:

...this self-acceptance is the important thing. It is what Césaire's return really meant, a terrible affirmation in the face of an almost total despair, which, however, is how Kierkegaard would have defined real faith. 10

By accepting twilight in this and other poems in The Gulf, Walcott also finally accepts the human condition. By refusing to abandon his small circle of familiar light in the West Indies, he solves the problems of self by selflessness and humanity.

VI

CONCLUSION

VLADIMIR.-- Alors on y va?

ESTRAGON.-- Allons-y.

Ils ne bougent pas.

Samuel Beckett

En Attendant Godot

Modern West Indian experience is characterized by cultural pluralism and the burden of a chaotic history: these are important preoccupations in Derek Walcott's poetry between 1948 and 1970. Taking the cue from the Celtic Twilight of Yeats, another provincial poet on an island, Walcott treats the "birth labour" of Caribbean identity in his work by expressing these tensions through the metaphor of intermediate twilight. This becomes a metaphor for unfulfilment, one that is usefully wide-ranging in verbalizing several related dilemmas that Walcott recognizes in the world and in himself. These include the half-way state of the "island" between water and mainland, between freedom and system, and between spirit and matter. Like Yeats's twilight, Walcott's vision of Caribbean decay is political and cultural as well as literary: West Indians, like the Irish before them, are undergoing struggles to overcome governmental interference and cultural domination from the "mainland".

Also, both societies share an unexpected nostalgia for a tyrannical past, while yearning for the original artistic renaissance they see about to appear in their society.

The private aspects of Walcott's twilight metaphor should not be subordinated to the social ones. As in T.S. Eliot's poetry, so in Walcott's the isolation of society turns out to be always a projection of the poet's own interior isolation. The twilight metaphor has personal associations for Walcott, based on his mulatto, "in-between" racial colour and his metaphysical uncertainty, that lend it an intensity born of real experience that another poet's use of the same imagery would lack. In poems like "Veranda", "Crusoe's Island", and "Homecoming: Anse La Raye" the metaphor's social and personal associations become indistinguishable. The poet assimilates the turbulence of the world around him and filters it through his creative machinery to merge subject and object. This is why in many of Walcott's poems it is hard to determine if it is Walcott-the-man speaking or an assumed persona. Such ambiguities can be said themselves to be literary manifestations of Walcott's vision of twilight where realities are dim and illusory and where light and dark intermingle.

The twilight in the poetry is actually a pro-

jection of the poet's state of mind. It cannot be called an obsessive image exactly in the poetry simply because it does not predominate in the work. I have obviously selected my material in dealing with this topic. Some of Walcott's finest poetry has nothing to do with the experience of twilight at all and has had to be overlooked. He has a large number, perhaps a majority, of poems that treat unrelated themes altogether. However, the isolation that twilight represents is certainly Walcott's major theme in all his work.

I have considered this metaphor in four different versions. The first version deals with the feelings of regret over the passing of "Empire" and all the civic, social, and religious coherence that accompanied Empire's structures. But since political independence improved the West Indies very little spiritually (according to Walcott), these feelings of regret are really the more universal features of loss experienced by modern man. The sun has set, something is over, and the last after-rays of the sun even prevent the subsequent chance of total darkness. These are the basic components of Walcott's metaphor that are variously used politically, spiritually, and personally, or all three at the same time, as in "The Banyan Tree, Old Year's Night."

The second version of twilight Walcott uses presents thwarted expectations. Topically, this is the cultural

autonomy that West Indians await but, again, this is only an "objective correlative" for the poet's internal situation. In poems like "Cold Spring Harbour", Walcott (or the West Indian) is portrayed as trapped by his inheritance and unable to share in the benefits of foreign "dawns". He is doomed to "setting his own house in order" before he can participate in the rest of the world, and this singular position becomes degrading. He feels that the restrictions placed on him by twilight, his lack of identity or horizons, reduce him at times to the level of a creature without a soul, an ape or a ghost, but always something sub-human. Hence, there is not even tragedy, since tragedy implies "a fall from a high place": the speaker in Walcott's poetry is too subordinate and unformulated to warrant even this dignity.

A third version of twilight in Walcott's poetry incorporates the above two, but outside the temporal sphere. Instead of regretting a past glory or anxiously awaiting a future golden age, the persona is trapped in the eternal present of indecision. In matters of race and religion, especially, he finds himself torn between antinomies. He may follow either the European Christian tradition or the "pagan" hedonism of his African forefathers. Torn, he may

try to relate to mainland life, either American or African, because of his racial ties to aspects of these societies. But in both cases, he still does not fit in. Racially, for example, the term "West Indian" is meaningless, unless it means hybrid. These indecisions between the "sun" (the "Son", Christ, or the white-man's lifestyle) and "night" (black magic, or primitive vitality) are reflected in Walcott's poetry by an elaborate and shifting "light and dark" imagery expressing the static, crepuscular nature of West Indian life. In some poems, such as "Goats and Monkeys" and "Blues", the mood of the metaphor verges on the comic, the indecision is that of a blundering buffoon. But overall, the fatalistic theme implied by twilight is serious: if not exactly "tragic", at least, for Walcott, as tragic as a Caribbean situation allows.

Finally, in trying to unify his perceptions into a positive aspect, Walcott adapts his metaphor of twilight to express both a fourth aspect of Caribbean experience and the broader pattern of twentieth century Zeitgeist. Here doubt, waiting, and twilight become normal features of la condition humaine and challenge men to invent their own spiritual answers. The beacons of love and brotherhood remain within the darkness for Walcott and provide the inspiration

for the self-dependence he sees as necessary to face the future. This amounts to a simultaneous acceptance of both Caribbean provincialism and his own sense of exile as emblems of a wider reality. Without forgetting the past, Walcott shows by this affirmation that he holds no grudges against the outside world that exiled him.

If we place Walcott's twilight poems in chronological order, we see what appears to be a thematic progression. The twilight poems of doubt and indecision are most extreme in In a Green Night and The Castaway (with the possible exception of "Lampfall", as we have seen). By the time of The Gulf, however, Walcott's poetic vision changes and, perhaps, matures. He accepts the darkness in the belief that the paradox might, after all, be the answer, and this becomes his substitute for eternity. The last poem in The Gulf, "Hic Jacet", casts off the twilight metaphor where it could very easily have been applied. This is because Walcott recognizes redemptive features in his life that he did not notice before--- the timeless values of compassion and humanity. These ultimately can defuse the spell of twilight because, once discovered, for Walcott, they have the capacity to illuminate everything.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

¹ Umberto Bonsignori, Derek Walcott: Contemporary West Indian Poet and Playwright, doctoral thesis (Los Angeles: The University of California at Los Angeles, 1972).

The title of this dissertation is misleading since it does not discuss Walcott's poetry, and only summarizes the playwright's dramatic accomplishments by using biographical material and synopses of the plays.

² Respectively:

William Walsh, Commonwealth Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 65.

Edward Hirsch, "Sea Grapes" (A Review), The New York Times Book Review (October 31, 1976), p. 38.

³ Cf. Gordon Rohlehr, "The Creative Writer and West Indian Society", Tapia (vol. 3, no. 35, September 1, 1974), pp. 4-5 and 7.

Also: Lloyd King, "Derek Walcott: The Literary Humanist in the Caribbean", Caribbean Quarterly (vol. 16, no. 4, December, 1970), pp. 36-42.

⁴ Cf. Rohlehr's statement in his "Derek Walcott's The Gulf and Other Poems", The Black I (vol. 1, no. 1, March, 1972), p. 68:

It has recently been argued by Lynne Griffith in an article on Walcott in Art and Man that there is little use for introspection or pessimism in the West Indies, because "The West Indies have newly found their national identities" and "are a people whose attention is focussed outside themselves and toward the future."

⁵ Respectively:

A quote from a review in The Listener on the sleeve of In a Green Night, Walcott's first volume published in England (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).

A quote from a review in The Sunday Times on the sleeve of The Castaway, Walcott's third volume (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965).

NOTES: INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

Anon., "Moral Landscapes", The Times Literary Supplement (December 25, 1969), p. 1467. This is a review of the British edition of The Gulf and three other poetry volumes.

William Jay Smith, "Some New Poetry: From Last August to This", Harper's (vol. 229, no. 1371, August 1964), p. 103. Smith reviews Walcott's Selected Poems along with with other new volumes here.

⁶ Respectively:

Smith, "Some New Poetry", pp. 99-103.

James Dickey, "Review", The New York Times Book Review (September 13, 1964), p. 44. This review covers Selected Poems with three other volumes.

A quote from a review by Graves which is included on the sleeve of Selected Poems (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964).

I have not been able to locate Graves' review or the reviews of In a Green Night and The Castaway in The Listener and The Sunday Times. Graves' comments may have been in personal correspondence and were used by the publishers to promote the book, which is a common practice with younger writers. The other two reviews may have been part of a group review.

⁷ Robert Mazzocco, "Three Poets", The New York Review of Books (vol. III, no. 10, December 31, 1964), pp. 18-19. This article reviews Selected Poems.

⁸ Mazzocco, p. 18.

⁹ Mazzocco, p. 18.

¹⁰ All the following information, except where noted, can be found in:

Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair, eds, The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry (New York: Norton, 1973), entry essay on Walcott, pp. 1244-51.

Derek Walcott entry essay, W.L.G. James, Contemporary Poets of the English Language, general editor Rosalie Murphy (London: St. James Press, 1970), pp. 1130-33.

Derek Walcott, Another Life (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972).

Walcott, "Leaving School", London Magazine (vol. 5, no. 6, September, 1965), pp. 4-14.

Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou (no. 2, 1970), pp. 45-51.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

¹¹ Saint Mary's College is a medium-sized college run by the Irish Brothers of the Presentation, a Roman Catholic order that has been on Saint Lucia since the nineteenth century. Cf. Walcott's "Leaving School".

The University of the West Indies has several campuses in the Caribbean, the major ones in Kingston and Mona, Jamaica, and one in Trinidad.

¹²

Cf. Walcott's "Meanings" and "Leaving School". The "Arts Guild" seems to have folded when Derek and Roderick moved to Trinidad in the early 1960's.

Cf. also Another Life, section one, "The Divided Child", pp. 3-45.

¹³ Bonsignori, p. 92.

¹⁴ Cf. Eric Williams, The Negro in the Caribbean (New York: Haskell House, 1942, repr. 1971), p. 13:

All the European wars between 1660 and 1815 were fought for possession of the valuable Caribbean islands and for the privilege of supplying the "tons" of labour needed for the sugar plantations. Between 1760 and 1813 Saint Lucia changed hands seven times.

¹⁵ Cyril Hamshere, The British in the Caribbean (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 92.

¹⁶ Cf. Bonsignori, pp. 110-117.

Bands of masqueraders have grown in size from thirty to forty individuals to from four hundred to twelve hundred men and women in the present day. Occasionally a single band includes three thousand or more individuals. (p. 115).

A "band" is a group of masqueraders at the yearly Lenten Carnivals held in the West Indies. They group together, often dressing up under a single theme or style, and compete for prizes at the Lenten parades.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION (CONT'D)

¹⁷ Wilson Harris, "History, Fable, and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas", Caribbean Quarterly (vol. 16, no. 2, June 1970), p. 30.

¹⁸ With the completion of his poetry trilogy The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy in 1973, Edward Braithwaite was recognized as a major poet and spokesman for West Indian experience. His poetry recounts the history of the colonization of the Caribbean to the present, using African expressions, myths, and a colloquial, jazz vocabulary. In this way, he tries to raise the racial consciousness of Caribbean blacks regarding their Old World heritage.

Though technically highly sophisticated, Braithwaite's verse sharply contrasts with Walcott's, which is more classical and European in its inspiration.

¹⁹ Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture", the introductory essay included in Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970), p. 4.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

¹ Derek Walcott, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970), p. 32.

² Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," p. 9.

³ V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, and Edward Lucie-Smith are three important writers from the West Indies who emigrated permanently to England, contributing to the "brain drain" existing in the West Indies.

⁴ David Caute, Fanon (London: Fontana, 1970); p. 56. The author summarizes the independence movements in the major Antilles and shows how these influenced the Martiniquean revolutionary intellectual, Franz Fanon.

⁵ The poems in In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 (1962) all predate 1960. However, they are thematically very similar in their topics of isolation, "unborn-ness", and racial identity as the poems in The Castaway (1965) and Selected Poems (1964):

⁶ Cf. Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," pp. 9-10. Also Walcott's essay "Leaving School," The London Magazine, September 1965, vol. 5, no. 6, p. 10. Also Walcott, Another Life (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973), see the first section "The Divided Child" about Walcott's family, pp. 3-45.

⁷ The root word in "veranda" is derived from the Latin word vara, "forked pole," or "roof tree," and is etymologically related to words like "various" and "variety". Walcott seems to be here suggesting the veranda as a symbol of the mixed Caribbean heritage.

⁸ Umberto Bonsignori, Derek Walcott: Contemporary West Indian Poet and Playwright, doctoral thesis (Los Angeles: U.C.L.A., 1972), p. 234.

Bonsignori conducted a series of personal interviews with Walcott as field research that forms the nucleus of his dissertation.

NOTES: CHAPTER 11 (CONTINUED)

⁹Walcott, "What the Twilight Says", p. 11.

¹⁰Cf. Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," pp. 19-20:

The West Indian mind is historically
hung-over, exhausted, prefers to take
its revenge in nostalgia, to narrow its
eyelids in a schizophrenic daydream of
an Eden that existed before its exile.

¹¹Cf. poems like "In a Green Night," "Ruins of a
Great House," and "Two Poems on the Passing of an
Empire."

"Ruins of a Great House" is prefixed by an instructive
quotation from Sir Thomas Browne's Urne Burial:

...though our longest sun sets at right
declensions and makes but winter arches,
it cannot be long before we lie down
in darkness, and have our light in ashes...

-¹²Cf. The MacMillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and
Famous Phrases, edited by Burton Stephenson (New York:
MacMillan, 1948), pp. 2180-81.

This entry mentions that the phrase has been ascribed
(in varying forms) by Alexander the Great, Philip of
Spain, and members of the British Commonwealth, inclu-
ding John Smith, Thackeray, and Thomas Hughes.

The earliest English variation, according to this
volume is from John Wilson, Noctes Ambrosianae, no. 42,
April 1829:

His Majesty's dominions, on which the
sun never sets.

NOTES: CHAPTER III

¹ Aimé Césaire, Return to my Native Land, tr. John Berger and Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 41.

This is a translation of Césaire's A la Retour du Pays Natal, a long surrealistic poem that celebrates the author's return to his native Martinique after an extended sojourn in France. It was originally printed in a magazine in 1939, and has since become a classic of French literature and the Negro Freedom Movement, both for its impassioned beauty and its message.

Walcott's poem "Pays Natal" in In a Green Night alludes to its title.

² Walcott, "Walcott on Walcott", interview by Dennis Scott, The Caribbean Quarterly (vol. 14, nos. 1-2, March-June 1968), pp. 80-81.

³ Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," p. 18.

⁴ When Walcott use the metaphor of morning twilight, it is mostly a cultural symbol, since it is a mature culture and identity that West Indians still seek after political independence. Walcott uses evening twilight primarily in a political sense, in contrast.

⁵ The same situation appears in Walcott's play The Sea at Dauphin, which opens with two grizzled old fishermen, Afa and Gacia, waiting for sunrise on a deserted beach.

⁶ Cf. Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro: the History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969 (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970).

Also, V.S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962).

⁷ The Marcus Garvey Movement in the 1920's was the original political inspiration for this ideal in the Caribbean. It has been taken up by contemporary writers like Edward Braithwaite and by Black American thinkers like Malcolm X and Leroy Jones who see this as a viable alternative for North American blacks.

NOTES: CHAPTER III (CONTINUED)

⁸ Walcott, "What the Twilight Says," p. 37.

⁹ Gordon Kohlehr, "The Creative Writer in West Indian Society", Tapia (August 18, 1974), p. 5.

¹⁰ Cold Spring Harbour is on the north shore of West Long Island Sound and forms the Southeast arm of Oyster Bay. It was a whaling port in the nineteenth century (a fact that would add to Walcott's own feelings of historical vacuum; being from the West Indies) and has a marine biology station. It seems pertinent that, given Walcott's racial preoccupations, a large university department of genetics is situated at Cold Spring Harbour.

¹¹ In these lines, I interpret "fruits of intelligence and "flowers of identity" to be rather negative in connotation. Without temples (or beliefs) intelligence is sterile to Walcott. Similarly, the flowers of identity in his society are without roots, that is, ungrounded and temporary. Thus, they are worthless.

NOTES: CHAPTER IV

¹ Eric Williams, The Negro in the Caribbean (New York: Haskell House, 1942, repr. 1971), p. 71.

² I use the word "dilemma" advisedly, meaning "an argument forcing [the] opponent to choose one of two alternatives, both unfavourable to him" (O.E.D.).

Walcott constantly ponders dilemmas of race, culture, and religion that eventually appear to have no answer. In these matters his state of mind can be expressed by the popular phrase "caught between the devil and the deep blue sea."

³ Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner, edited by J. Donald Crowley (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 128.

⁴ Poems like "The Castaway", "Crusoe's Journal", "Prelude", and "Origins" from the first three volumes all use the marooned mariner motif as a West Indian emblem. By the time of The Gulf, however, Walcott abandons the symbol.

⁵ The mea culpa is from the Confiteor of the Roman Catholic Mass in which the congregation confess their sins. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa translates "through my fault, through my most grievous fault."

⁶ Victor Questel, "The Horns of Derek's Dilemma", Tapia (Sunday, March 25, 1973), p. 4.

⁷ "Goats and Monkeys" may, of course, also be a domestic poem and refer to marital difficulties between Walcott and his wife. This adds further implications to the poem's meaning, without being necessary to its interpretation here. The poem can stand alone without involving hermetic motivations the poet might have undergone during its creation.

⁸ Cf. G.K. Hunter, Othello and Colour Prejudice, Annual Shakespeare lecture of the British Academy, 1975 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 151:

NOTES: CHAPTER IV (CONTINUED)

Othello may be the 'devil' in appearance, but it is the 'fair' Iago who gives birth to the dark realities of sin and death in the play.

In "Goats and Monkeys" Walcott intentionally remains ambiguous about true guilt, and whether it should be assigned to the "white" or "black" worlds, since both appear to be what they are not.

⁹ It should be remembered that Walcott never portrays the Caribbean "indecision" as either frivolity or utter passivity. To him, the West Indian is divided between legitimate poles of experience in his search for identity. The African experience is as valid as the commercial North American one, for instance, for the West Indian to adopt and refine into his future. However, neither is first-hand and satisfactory. But Walcott feels there is a Caribbean destiny, though something in Caribbean temperament seems to shy from this responsibility. The myth of the "lazy Negro" may hold a grain of truth for him in the West Indies. Thus Walcott feels that a true inspiration might spur West Indians into determining their future "dawn". But he also realizes that that "dawn" must be at first composed of other cultures. This causes the present suspension in decision-making and the current "twilight".

NOTES: CHAPTER V

¹ Cf. Walcott, "Walcott on Walcott", an interview with Dennis Scott, The Caribbean Quarterly (vol. 14, nos. 1-2, March-June, 1968), p. 81ff.

① ² Walcott, "Walcott on Walcott", p. 80.

³ This possibility is explored in poems like "Islands", "A Lesson for this Sunday", and "Orient and Immortal Wheat" in In a Green Night, and in "Nights in the Gardens of Port of Spain", and "Veranda" in The Castaway.

By "domestic poet" I mean one who uses familiar environments like the family, the home, and friends as themes, and derives significance from them apart from the transient public world.

⁴ "The Orrery" (1766) is in the Derby Museum and Art Gallery in England. The painting shows a group of scientists and two children gathered around a lighted model of the solar system (an orrery) in a dark room. The orange light from the contraption glows on their faces in a lit circle similar to the technique in many of Rembrandt's works. As a painter himself, Walcott certainly has a close familiarity with this and other works of the period.

⁵ M. Travis Lane, "At Home in Homelessness: The Poetry of Derek Walcott", The Dalhousie Review (vol. 53, no. 2, Summer 1973), p. 335.

⁶ Cf. the image of the ocean liner out at sea as a figure for the outside world in other poems by Walcott such as "Prelude" [IGN] and "Ebb" [TG].

⁷ M. Travis Lane, p. 336.

⁸ Cf. Walcott's essay "What the Twilight Says" and Umberto Bonsignori's interviews with Walcott in his doctoral thesis on Walcott (UCLA, 1972), p. 168 ff.

⁹ Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou (no. 2, 1970), p. 50.

NOTES: CHAPTER V (CONTINUED)

¹⁰ Gordon Rohlehr, "Afterthoughts", Tapia (no. 23, Sunday, December 26, 1971), p. 13.

DEREK WALCOTT: A CHRONOLOGY

year	life	poems: volumes	plays: volumes	articles
1930	born, Castries			
1931	Warwick Walcott dies			
1944	first poem published in <u>The Voice of St. Lucia</u>			
1948	The Great Fire of Castries	<u>Twenty-five Poems</u> (1948)		
	DW attended St. Mary's College 1945-1949	"A City's Death by Fire" [IGN] probably dates from this time. <u>Twenty-five Poems</u> (second ed. 1949) <u>Epitaph for the Young</u> (1949)	<u>Henri Christophe</u> opened in St. Lucia (1949)	
1950	DW attended the Univ. of Jamaica	poems influenced by Dylan Thomas	<u>Harry Dernier</u> (1951) <u>Henri Christophe</u> produced in London (1952)	
1953	DW graduates from the U. of J. (ca. 1953)	<u>Poems</u> (1953)		

DEREK WALCOTT: A CHRONOLOGY (CONTINUED)

year	life	poems: volumes	plays: volumes	articles
ca.1953	founded Arts Guild of St. Lucia married Fay Moston taught at St. Mary's College, the Grenada Boys' Secondary School, and the U. of J.		<u>The Sea at Dauphin</u> (produced 1954) <u>Ione</u> (?) <u>Wine of the Country</u> (?) <u>Ti-Jean</u> (1957)	
1957	Went to New York and Stratford, Ontario to see Tyrone Guthrie Commissioned to write <u>Drums and Colours</u>	"Greenwich Village, Winter" "Bleeker Street, Summer" "A Letter from Brooklyn" "A Statue Overlooking Central Park"	<u>Drums and Colours</u> (produced 1958)	
1958-9	Rockefeller Fellow- ship to study drama in NYC founded "The Trini- dad Theatre Work- shop" (1959)	"A Map of the Antilles" (1959?)	<u>Jourmand</u> (draft: 1959)	
1962	married Margaret Ruth Maillard (1962) Guinness Award (1962)	<u>In a Green Night</u> (1962) "Origins" (1962?)		

DEREK WALCOTT: A CHRONOLOGY (CONTINUED)

year	life	poems: volumes	plays: volumes	articles
1965	feature editor for <u>The Trinidad Guardian</u>	<u>The Crusoe Poems</u> <u>Selected Poems</u> (1964) <u>The Castaway</u> (1965)	<u>Malcauchon</u> (1966) <u>Dream on Monkey Mountain</u> (produced in Toronto in 1967: early version)	"Leaving School" (1965) <u>London Mag.</u>
1970	Heinemann Award (1966) Travelled to England, New England, Texas, and South America	<u>The Gulf</u> (1969) <u>Sections of Another</u> <u>Life</u> (April 1965- April 1972)	<u>Dream on Monkey</u> <u>Mountain and Other</u> <u>Plays</u> (1970) <u>DMM</u> produced in NYC in 1971: wins Obie as Best-Foreign Play Off-Broadway	"Walcott on Walcott" (1968) <u>C.Q.</u> "Meanings" (1970) <u>Savacou</u> "What the Twilight Says" (1970)
1976	Taught at Lake Forest College in Illinois (1972)	<u>Another Life</u> (1972)	<u>In a Fine Castle</u> (produced in L.A. 1972)	articles and reviews in <u>Tapia</u> and other W.I. magazines
1977	visited England(?) visited USA: California, New England and NY	<u>Sea Grapes</u> (1976)	<u>The Joker of Seville</u> and <u>O Babylon!</u> (1977)	

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_____ (x) Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970.

_____ Drums and Colours. An Epic Drama Commissioned for the Opening of the First Federal Parliament of the West Indies, April 23, 1958. Caribbean Quarterly, Special Issue, vol. 7, nos. 1-2, March-June, 1961.

_____ (*)Epitaph for the Young: A Poem in XII Cantos. Barbados: Advocate Company, 1949.

_____ (x)The Gulf. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.

_____ (x)The Gulf. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970. [The American edition which I have used that includes revised selections from The Castaway.]

_____ (*)Harry Dernier: A Play for Radio Production. Bridgetown, Barbados: Advocate Company, 1950.

_____ (*)Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes. Kingston, Jamaica, Extramural Department, University College of the West Indies, mimeo, Caribbean Plays [n.d.].

- _____. (*) In a Fine Castle. [Extracts of this play are reproduced in Bonsignori, pp. 173-226, as per Walcott's fourth draft of the play. A try-out of the play was produced in Trinidad in 1970, and it was reviewed by Syl Lowhar in Tapia, August 29, 1971. It was also produced, in a condensed form, by the Centre Theatre Group in Los Angeles at the Mark Taper Forum on May 3, 1972, directed by Edward Parone. As far as I can ascertain, the play has not yet been publicly printed.]
- _____. Ione: A Play with Music. Kingston, Jamaica: The Gleaner Company, 1957.
- _____. (x) In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960. London: Jonathan Cape, 1962.
- _____. (x) The Joker of Seville and O Babylon!. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977.
- _____. (*) Jourmand, or a Comedy Till the Last Minute. [An unpublished play mentioned in Bonsignori, pp. 129-130, and written ca. 1958-59 in New York.]
- _____. "Leaving Home---VIII." The London Magazine. Vol. 5, no. 6, September 1965, pp. 4-14.
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- _____. The Sea at Dauphin. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Caribbean Play no. 23, the Extra-Mural Department, the University of the West Indies, 1966 [This play is also included in Dream on Monkey Mountain.]

- _____. (x) Sea Grapes. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976.
- _____. (x) Selected Poems. London: Jonathan Cape, 1964. [Contains selected poems from In a Green Night and poems later published in The Castaway, as well as the poem "Origins".]
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- _____. (*) Twenty-five Poems. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Guardian Commercial Printery, 1948.
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- _____. (*) Wine of the Country. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies [n.d.].

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C) SUPPLEMENTARY WORKS WITH ANNOTATIONS

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The former volume is a classic of Third World histo-
rical research. William's style at times is sardonic
about injustices perpetrated on blacks during colo-
nialism, but this gives his work its bite. His
histories are the best and the most perceptive yet
done on patterns in West Indian history. The latter
volume is a little too specialized except for true
specialists.]