

Split Caribbean Self in Walcott's Poems

Abstract

Derek Walcott, a Caribbean poet the recipient of Nobel Prize for literature in 1992. He is acknowledged for his literary works picturing island life in the post colonial era. He reached this apex of literary achievement by transmitting the Caribbean culture with strength, sensitivity and ingenuity. His works centred on amalgamation of racial and social diverse cultures which yielded the unique Caribbean culture. He worked from the point of view of the islander who appreciated the culture of an enslaving colonial force. Walcott found that the postcolonial culture generated new identity which is self divided in itself.

Keywords: Post colonialism, Split personality, Caribbean, Decolonization, Unhomeliness, Identity Crisis.

Introduction

Sir Derek Walcott was a Saint Lucian poet, and playwright. The most prominent work he wrote was the Homeric Epic poem, *Omeros*. As far as his family background is concerned, his ancestors belong to English, Dutch and African descent. The complex colonial history of England is explored in his poetry. He wrote, "forty years gone in my island childhood, I felt that the gift of poetry had made me one of the chosen that experience was kindling to the fire of the muse." It can be called that his poetry is an amalgam of everyone's experiences. "It is also an amalgam of peoples- Africans, Indians, English, Dutch, French- A unique environment that develops its own unique culture and identity."

Aim of the Study

In my paper I am to collect the poetry of Derek Walcott and analyze these poetry make deeper understanding of the impact of post-colonization on the colonized minds.

My work will explore the following issues:

1. How does Walcott deal with the African and European traditions in his works?
2. How do the post colonial and racial divisions constitute the crux of Caribbean identity? How are they reflected in his poems?

Review of Literature

This paper shows how postcolonialism affected the native identity. The Caribbean Island had been always in domination of one or other. Derek Walcott is the native of Caribbean Island. When one talks about decolonization, there is no place left for carry caribbeans to go in order to assert their identity. Walcott living in colonized world developed an attachment with English language, therefore he used English to express himself and he did not consider it as an instrument of oppression by colonizers. He used English to express his hybrid identity This research paper tries to figure out split Carribbean self in his poetry.

Research Method

My research method will consist of collecting, interpreting and analyzing the poetry of Derek Walcott trough the application of psychology and philosophy.

I have chosen this methodology to investigate the post colonial experience, probing and revealing its discontents, ambivalences, struggles for power and dignity as well as its various points of disconnections and tensions in the local and global contexts.

Post Colonial aspects - Hybrid Identity in the poetry of Derek Walcott Postcolonial aspects is one of the key features of Derek Walcott's poetry. A commentator said about his artistic imagination that it is in response to "Complexity of his own situation". His friend and fellow poet James Dickey described with a remarkable litany: "Here he is a 20th Century man living in the West Indies and in Boston, poised between a lapsed colonial culture the industrial north between Africa and the west, between slavery and intellectualism, between the native Caribbean tongue and the English learned from books, between the black and white of his own body, between the sound of the home ocean and lure of European



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culture."These relationships have remained a major subject of his works. For Walcott, the Caribbean writer deals with two traditions namely the African and European traditions.

"I am a kind of split writer. I have one tradition inside going on in one way and another going on the other way. The mimetic, the narrative and dance element are strong on one side and the literary, the classical is strong on the other."

Walcott points out how a Caribbean thinks of himself. He is splitted in his own personality. The colonization has too much deeper effect that colonized caribbeans cannot even escape of it in the post colonial era. In his best known work **A Far Cry from Africa** he grapples with the issues of conflicting loyalties and asks

I am also poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule,
how choose
Between this Africa and English tongue I Love?
Betray them both or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live?

Walcott's poems stemmed out of the consciousness that he had received from the intermixing of the cultures in the Island. A sort of multiculturalism can be seen in the terms of interracialism, multiethnicity representing different class, gender and sexuality. The Caribbean culture is the heterogeneous mixture of different cultures existing there because of colonized sections.

For Walcott "the process of poetry is one of excavation and of self- discovery."

The central character of the poem *The Schooner Flight Shabine*, beautifully and powerfully expresses the implications of intricacy of his racial and colonial background for nation building:

I'm just a nigger who love the see

I had a sound colonial education

I have Dutch, Nigger and English in me

And either I am nobody or I'm nation.

He amalgamates material from different culture: West Indian, African and European. "Derek Walcott's extraordinary idiom is born in meeting between European virtuosity and the sensuality of the Caribbean Adam," Espmark says.

He has oft-quoted Jean Paul Sartre's crucial text in postcolonial studies *The Wretched of Earth* where Sartre stresses the duality of the colonial world between the white colonizer and black colonized: "They must have both. Two words that makes to bewitching ; they dance all night and at dawn, they crowd into the churches to hear mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing."

The Caribbean post colonialism treats the Caribbean as both an instance and an interrogation of

post colonialism. Its central project is to consider the range of ways in which different discourses of cultural hybridity have functioned as strategies for constructing, deconstructing and reconfiguring national imaginaries. Walcott criticizes and scrutinizes the colonial relationship. In this way his post colonial writing overlaps with what Ngugi calls the period of decolonization.

And then there was no more

Empire all of a sudden.

Its victories were air, its

Dominions dirt:

Burma, Canada, Egypt,

Africa, India, The Sudan.

The Caribbean aesthetics and literature: A post colonial study

Bill Ashcroft in his work *The Empire* writes back inverts the concept of universalism or Eurocentrism. This can be seen in Walcott's work when he asserts his identity as

I have Dutch, Nigger, English in me

And either I'm nobody or I'm nation

It also shows the quest for identity. Playing on Walcott's famous line about being divided in *A Far cry* from Africa and possibly answering Brathwaite's agonized question *Where then is the nigger's home* ? Nicholas writes

To tell you de truth

I don't know really where I belong

Yes, Divided to be ocean

The loss of his country land is also one of the themes of his poetry. To employ post colonial terminology, the feelings of the poet can also be referred to Unhomeliness used by Bhabha

"To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home even in yourself: Your identity crisis has made you psychological refugee"

Edward Said's Orientalism refers to the style of thinking, a form of representation that creates opinions, images of the non-European culture in racialized way so that the east was always contrasted negatively with Europe and it justifies the colonial presence in East. Walcott represented the tension between what is real and what is depicted in occidental literature. This representation has been inverted in Walcott's poetry, North and South which is the part of The fortunate traveler. It describe the tension between two poles. Mapping reveals the tension between the representations and represented.

The genesis of Caribbean aesthetics and literary outpouring can be seen as a desire to decolonize and indigenize and to claim a voice for a history, geography and a people which had been dominated by British. The Caribbean aesthetics can be properly assessed with the help of emergence of post colonial identities in present day.

For the white man, the native is always negative, primitive other: the very opposite of what he and his culture stand for. Fanon develops a psychoanalytic theory of colonialism when he suggests that European self develops in its relation and encounter with other. This relationship is always in contrast. Post colonial perspective is the method of interpreting, reading and critiquing the cultural

practices of colonialism, where it proposes that the exercise of colonial powers is also the exercise of racially determined power of representation.

Themes of Walcott's poetry

Omeros is one of the most important poem written by Walcott. Omeros had the colonial history of Saint Lucia. Saint Lucia is called as 'Helen of Westindies' because English and French both wanted to have control over it and therefore the history of Saint Lucia illustrated that it was colonized by some or the other. The culture was influenced by the other exploitative cultures which tried to prove their superiority over them. The colonial dominion had been there for a long time that it had assimilated and acculturated the native culture. When a Caribbean wanted to look for his own native original culture, it would not be possible to search it. Other influential cultures had their deep effect that there is no demarcation left between what they had and what they took from others.

Derek Walcott celebrated the concept of multiculturalism. He did not have any opposition regarding English language. He thought of English as his own because he could feel comfortable in expressing himself through this language. Walcott did not criticize English as an instrument of expanding colonial culture but he felt that English had intimacy with himself and he profoundly used it in his works. English, for Walcott as a means of expression solely. It does not have any political implications. When he talked of decolonization he used English language, but this usage did not imply that he had the effect of colonial cultures in spite of he thought that he used English as an instrument to decolonize themselves in post colonial era

The plot plot of Tiepolo's Hound can be analysed symbolically there are two images. one is of white hounds and other is of black mongrel. The White Hounds tried to pursue the black mongrel showed how white colonisers tried to dominate the black culture to acquire the position of Supremacy over latter.

Explicit Resistance, Subversion, Dissent in Walcott's Poetry

Derek Walcott's post colonial aspects are not present in his poem only but also the title informs about the post colonial perspective. On going through his titles it can easily be understood. He has titled his poem as "Conqueror", "To a Painter in England", "Ruin of a great house", "Tales of the island."

Conqueror means a person who conquers place or people. This poem talks about the settlers who take control over Saint Lucian. To A Painter in England is another poem of Walcott in which it is shown how colonizers use their policy for their benefits claiming that it is meant for colonized ones only. Ruin of a Great house, ruins are the remains of a building or place after being decayed, collapsed or disintegrated. Ruins must have been sometime a great house as the title suggests but the colonizers turned it into complete waste by imposing their ideology. Tales of island recorded the apex of literary achievement by transmitting the Caribbean literature with strength, beauty and sensitivity.

Dual inheritance in language of Walcott's

The intermixing of different cultures like African, American and European descent which came to be understood as creolization.

Walcott talked of of resistance against colonial culture but he favoured the use of English. He did not feel that English belonged to the English. He inherited English from his culture though his native culture is not English but the use of English is quite common and therefore he had a comfortable space in using English for his poetry.

I who am poisoned with the blood of
both

Where Shall I turn, divided in the
vein?

...How choose

Between this Africa and English
Tongue I love?

Betray them both or give back what
they give?

It is itself a paradox in itself that Walcott uses English against English culture. Asserting intermixing of strangeness and familiarity in his work, he talked of post colonial identity. The topics are quite familiar because they dealt with the problems of Caribbean but it is at the same time strange also because Walcott had used English language which is again the symbolic of English culture.

Walcott did not see English as a language but he saw that it could be the means to show his artistry. While opposing against English culture and asserting his own identity it is dilemma for Walcott whether to use English in his works or not. He favoured English when he was talking against English culture. Doing this, he claimed that he found English as only language not as the instrument of English culture. He was very much used to English that he could not dissociate himself from English culture. He did not see that English usage is also one of the factors to promote English culture. He dissociated English language from English culture.

One's post colonial response to this dilemma is to abandon English and revert to as nation language, a strategy that the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiongo's famously urged for Decolonizing the mind. But 'The English is nobody's special property', asserts Walcott.

Conclusion

Caribbean's poetry is not only the ultimate effect of history but also culture who were in domination there once. While Walcott's creative aspirations and strategies played important role in shaping the character of poetry produced in the continent, the dominant shaping influence had been the characters of colonial heritage and the post colonial culture in country. Caribbean poetry celebrated the colonial culture. It did not take into account that dominant culture engulfed the native culture. Instead it found that when a culture interacted with other there were some or other changes which ultimately produce the multicultural context. Culture could not be homogenous. It had always been the heterogeneous mixture of practices, thinking, customs, ideas etc. The liberal multiculturalism had the ability to transform and this transformation could

be the result of inter racism, multiethnicity, representing class, gender and sexuality. Edward Said celebrated the culture as unmonolithic, heterogeneous and diverse.

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