New Academia: An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory

(Online-ISSN 2347-2073) ***(U.G.C. Journal. No. 44829)*** **Vol. VII Issue III, July 2018**

Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain:* Negotiating the Heterogeneous Self

Tuhin Mukhopadhyay
M.Phil scholar ,
University of Calcutta, Kolkata
tuhinmukherjee0000@gmail.com

Abstract

Derek Walcott, a pivotal figure in World Literature, has certainly created a void in World Literature through his painful demise last year. His mixed cultural heritage of English, Dutch and African ancestry (both of the colonizers and of the colonized), accompanied by the complex colonial histories, creates identity complex. Unlike other postcolonial writers, Walcott has represented this psychic identity complex in almost all of his works. For him, 'Home' acquires a metaphorical as well as a metaphysical dimension, becoming an ideal space of stasis out of the constantly tormenting dynamism. In Dream on Monkey Mountain, Walcott journeys further and deeper into these spacio-temporal and psychic dimensions and back to the dark prehistoric place of man where "the voice must grovel in search of itself, until gesture and sound fuse and the blaze of their flesh astonishes them" (Walcott 5). The paper will, therefore, explore these complex interstices of psychic phenomena historicized on a spacio-cultural locale.

Keywords: Walcott, Identity complex, Dream on Monkey Mountain, Home

Derek Walcott, a pivotal figure in World Literature, has a unique kind of cultural experience. Although of African descent, he was born in 1930 in St Lucia of Caribbean Island and has worked both in US and in UK. His death on Mar.17, 2017 has certainly created a void in World Literature. Through his works, Walcott expresses the problematic nature of his Caribbean self and universalizes it. His family was of English, Dutch and African descent, and this hybrid nature of his familial inheritance, accompanied by the complex colonial histories, creates difficulties regarding his identity, which he reflects in almost all his poems and plays. Cultural contamination and miscegenation were inevitable for him, and his case differs from other typical postcolonial writers, who simply fought for their culture and

history, effaced by the colonizers, and thereby poses resistance in their works by reclaiming their own historicity and cultural identity. But, Walcott's fate was somewhat different, for he belonged to a mixed and hybrid cultural identity and historical representations- both of the colonizers and of the colonized. It is, therefore, difficult for him to choose one static position and pose resistance against the other. This complexity haunts Walcott throughout his life, and this is perhaps common to all the West Indian selves in the collective sense of the term because of a similar kind of situation. Walcott has represented this deep psychic identity complex in almost all of his works. For him and for the West Indians, 'Home' acquires a metaphorical as well as a metaphysical dimension, becoming an ideal space of stasis out of the constantly tormenting dynamism. West Indians are manipulated to enact various roles by other cultures forcing them to uncritically assume the roles prescribed for them, and thereby turning them into mimic men. The only relief lies in the escape from these hallucinations. 'Home' is constructed outside the cultural landscape of West Indies. For Walcott, 'home' involves the profound quest for the same, albeit in the very metaphorical sense of the word, in much the same way as with Soyinka's Professor in *The Road*. But, Walcott makes a journey even further and deeper into the spacio-temporal and psychic dimensions and back from man to the dark prehistoric place of man, where "the voice must grovel in search of itself, until gesture and sound fuse and the blaze of their flesh astonishes them" (Walcott 5). It is only through their return to the origin of language and being that the West Indians can realize their authentic self and retrieve a role plagued with a paradoxical joy and anguish. A proper reconciliation between the heterogeneous and conflicting aspects of the self, on the Caribbean landscape, will occur only when there will be a realization of the problems constantly reemerging to address those, who live in such a mixed milieu like West Indies. The West Indians may be standing on the ground of hiatus, but they can be released from this consolidated anxieties, only when they would find (as Walcott does through his plays) some socio-cultural, or artistic model, or archetypes, which would encompass the cultural paradoxes that plague and debilitate the individual and their social consciousness, and create a sense of alienation and homelessness.

Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* is an attempt to fuse those traditional and cultural conflicts, resulting in a sense of disorientation and homelessness. The traditions and the cultures of Europe and Africa have created a schizoid consciousness by enacting a psychic tug of war in the consciousness of the Caribbean people, which can be traced in Walcott's poem "A Far Cry from Africa," where the poetic persona says: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" (Walcott 17). Moreover, Walcott refers to this splintered status of West Indies, where the discontinuous lines of

culture clash and acquires a chiasmic dimension - become 'contaminated' in each other's term. In *What the Twilight,* Walcott says:

> Every state sees its image in these forms which have the mass appeal of sport, sensual and amateurish. Stamped on that image is the old colonial grimace of the laughing nigger, steelbandsman, carnival masker, calypsonian and limbo dancer . . . the folk arts have become the symbol of a carefree accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism, since the state is impatient with anything it cannot trade. (Walcott 7)

This dichotomy is the legacy and history of West Indies and her people, which is resulting in a dangerous illusion in the West Indian community and sensibility - that the 'home' lies somewhere else, perhaps in some distant ideal realm. But to evade this anxiety and the sense of dislocation, which emerging out of the fragmentary nature of the cultural landscape, the West Indians must not lose themselves in the illusion and fantasy of an ideal and utopic home, but rather they should embrace this fragmented and splintered stage, upon which a sense of home can be constructed in the schizoid consciousness of the West Indians. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain,* Makak, the central character, seeks to discover this link that binds the multiplicity residing in the psychic layers of Caribbean culture. The play itself, through the use of images and symbols, attempts a fusion of the heterogeneity, and an example can be drawn in reference to the stage-setting at the very beginning of the play: "A spotlight warms the disc of an African drum until it glows like the round moon above it. Below the moon is the stark silhouette of a volcanic mountain. Reversed, the moon becomes the sun" (Walcott 216). A stark contrast has been attempted by putting the spotlight on the firmly planted African drum vis-à-vis the celestial Moon, traditionally a feminine symbol, but here it is reversed and becomes the male-oriented Sun, in accordance with the tradition. The Moon or the Sun, in its connotative conversion, becomes the symbol of whiteness and Europe, against which the African symbol of drum is set. There is yet another symbol, and it is that of the mountain, as the pre-ejaculatory phallic symbol. The characters possess this spilt consciousness. The play begins with Tigre and Souris in one cell and Makak on the other, and they are arrested for 'mashing up' Alcindor Café and are presided over by corporal Lestrade, a mulatto, who, albeit a self-deluded representative of law and order, and bearing the 'white man's burden' to condemn the blacks as "animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers" whom he sees as dedicated to the task of "turning this place into a stinking zoo" (Walcott 216)), is also fragmented within, like that of Makak, who talks about his alienation, degradation and internalized racism in the following way: "Is thirty years now I have look in no mirror, Not a pool of cold water, when I must drink, I stir my hands first, to break up my image" (Walcott 226). Tigre and Souris also oscillate between their sympathy for Makak and their flattery towards Lestrade. Makak's response to Lestrade's formal queries reveals, by means of an

ironic implication, that he is a nameless figure, belonging to a tired race. In the above mentioned speech, Makak clearly indicates that he refuses to confront his own image, not only for his being a black, and thinking himself ugly, but also because of the very nature of his self, which is fragmented. But paradoxically enough, whereas he is true to himself by simultaneously embracing the very fragmented nature of his self, which is symbolized by the very breaking up of his image in the water, it is not the same as with the case of Lestrade, who makes a slaughter of language in his following speech: "I will spare you the sound of that voice, which have come from a cave of darkness, dripping with horror, these hands are hands of Esau, the fingers are like roots, the arteries as hard as twine, and the palms seamed with coal. But the animal, you observe, is tamed and obedient" (Walcott 222).

The play remains in profusion with rich imageries. In his dream, Makak evokes a mystical environ that gives birth to the spectral white woman in the mindscape of his consciousness. The white woman inevitably projects the image of Europe. Historically, Europe 'discovered' West Indies, but here inversely, the child gives birth to the mother. Here, Makak's speech, revealing his dream vision, is mentioned for the rich sources of imageries under scrutiny:

> As I brush through the branches, shaking the dew, / A man swimming through smoke, / And the bandage of smoke unpeeling my eyes, / As I reach to this spot, / I see the woman singing / And my feet grow roots. I could move no more. / A million silver needles prickle my blood / Like a rain of small fishes. / The snakes in my hair speak to one another / the smoke mouth open, and I behold this woman / The loveliest thing I see on this earth / Like the moon walking along her own road. (Walcott 227)

In this passage, there are imageries of stasis and dynamism, and internalized racism that reiterate the dualities, implicit in the backdrop of Caribbean experience. By referring to "my feet grow roots" and "I could move no more," Makak perhaps suggests rootedness in the positive sense of the term, but on the other hand, there are self-destructive images, such as, "a rain of small fishes" which evokes a sinister image of self-annihilation like that of the piranha fishes, and "The snakes in my hair speak to one another" evokes the figure of Medusa, the snake-haired Gorgon of Greek myth. The reference to the black man's hair unconsciously echoes the vary image that Makak tends to negate by stirring the water. Imagery, "Like the moon walking along her own road," is actually a static image assuming the illusion of dynamism and thereby creating the tension in them. Although an illusion signifying 'nothing', the nothingness is real in sense that it is Makak's obsession - the black man's obsession for whiteness and Europe. Ironically, Lestrade, Tigre and Souris also see this:

> CORPORAL LESTRADE: I can see nothing (To the judges)
> What do you see?

JUDGES: Nothing. Nothing. (Walcott 228)

Lestrade sums up Makak's vision in derogatory terms by calling it an insane one: "Is this rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad." There is an obvious sexual undertone in the statement. However, there is also a deeper psychological truth which involves the colonial experience and the suppression and transformation of African values, and this leads the colonize people to desire to usurp the colonizers' role. Therefore, they cherish an envious and lustful gaze towards them (Fanon 38). In scene 1, the action of the play shifts to the Monkey Mountain again, where Makak introduces the figure called Moustique, a figure representing practical realism and materialism. Moustique is a parasitic character, and indeed, his name suggests mosquito or flea. He is vital in every sense of the term, not merely for his existence in biological and ecological hierarchy, but also for the reason that his materialistic aspect offers balance to Makak's fantasy. But, his propensity towards extreme materialism is also dangerous. An example of this can be found in his response to Makak:

> Makak: I going mad, Moustique.
>
> Moustique: Going Mad? Go mad tomorrow, today is market day. We have three bags at three-and-six a bag, making ten shillings and sixpence for the week and you going mad? (Walcott 232)

In a way, Moustique can be assumed to be Makak's alter-ego, and Makak has a kind of compassion for him, which allows them to live together. This is clear from Moustique's statement: "you find me in the gutter, and you pick me up like a wet fly in the dust, and we establish in this charcoal business. You cut, burn and so on, and I sell, until we make enough to buy the donkey" (Walcott 233). Meanwhile, Makak recalls the vision of the white woman that he earlier told to Tigre and Souris, and also to Makak, and now there is an important addition to it, when he says: "She did know my name, my age, where I burn, and that it was charcoal I burn and selling for a living. She know how I live alone, with no wife and no friend . . ." (Walcott 235-36). The account of his very loneliness may confirm to certain extent the visionary quality of the white woman, and that she was a product of his psyche. The crucial thing is that Moustique regards this visionary white woman as a diabolic figure, although ironically he is himself the devil of excessive materialism. Another poignant irony found in Moustique's soliloquy is that: "The misery black people have to see in this life. . . . A man not only supposed to catch his arse in the daytime but he have to ride nightmares too" (Walcott 238). The rest of the scene and the play itself is a fighting for the soul of Makak, who is in the middle of the tug of war, and it is the battle between the materialistic devil Moustique, and the diabolic visionary white woman, both of whom in a way reside in Makak's psyche, irrespective of their physical representation. On one hand, she appeals to sensuality and tends to impose irrationality upon Makak, and on the other, Moustique forces a

practicality upon him, thereby tempts him into forming a relationship, either with the fantastic, or with the materialistic one, either of which attempts to possess his soul. A similarity can be drawn here with reference to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* where the Good Angel and the Evil Angel hanker after the soul of Faustus:

GOOD ANGEL: O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on thee . . .
EVIL ANGEL: Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all nature's treasure is contain'd. (Marlow 68-73)

The question that can be raised here is whether Makak would yield to one of them and be subjected, or would try to strike a balance or transcend them by maintaining his personal and psychic integrity.

Scene 2 would be the perfect space for studying Makak's character vis-à-vis Lestrade, who symbolizes yet another aspect of Makak's consciousness, and whose recollections begin to merge and complement that of Makak. Lestrade shows how easily he succumbs to European temptations, and consequently eclipses a portion of his psychic or cultural make-up. His concept of the self and home completely resides in the total and static mimicking of the European concepts and idiosyncrasies, and simultaneously in the denial of the black aspect of his mulatto legacy. Although suit him literally, with the borrowed robes of wig and gown, he tells Souris and Tigre: "This is our reward, we have borne the high torch of justice through darkness to illuminate with vision the mind of primeval peoples, of back-biting tribes. We who have borne with us the texts of the law, the Mosaic tablets, the splendour of marble in moonlight, the affidavit and the water toilet . . ." (Walcott 256). This is nothing, but an Orientalist view of the West, to stereotype the East as the place of darkness, uncivilization and barbarity, and by default, it is, therefore, the duty and the burden of the West to civilize the East and bring enlightenment and illumination to it. This stereotypical concept can be found in many literary as well as historical and cultural representations of the white men, and one suitable example, that can be posited here, is that of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* in which the colonizer sees himself as the bearer of torch of civilization and salvation to the 'darkness' of Africa. But when a man of color or a colonized man utters the same words, it becomes a case of the internalization of the Western values and a wearing of a Western glass to see the world, and judge everything by saturating it through Western value system, and alongside cherishing hatred towards its own culture. However, Moustique, symbolizing Western materialism, exposes through his self-deception the official nakedness and the lie, inherent in the superlative construction of the whiteness and the language (English) of predominance, which is spoken with the "usual voice of small time authority" (Walcott 267). Thereby, he creates perforations in the complacent and inflated fabric of

European value system. Lestrade reveals his fear behind the façade of Moustique's overconfidence and power, but when Moustique, afraid of the spider, drops the bowl, he raises the question, "A spider? A man who will bring you deliverance is afraid of a spider?" (Walcott 268). Nonetheless, Basil ultimately unveils Moustique's deception to the people as well as his self-deception by saying that his "tongue [is] on fire, but the eyes are dead" (Walcott 269), and in anger, Moustique cannot help make the confession: "All that I have is this, black faces, white masks!" In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon elaborates upon these dilemmas of the colored people, and the disturbing qualities of their Black Skin and White Mask, which emerge out of the destructive Lacanian gaze, and wonderfully responds with an agonizing performance of the self-image:

> I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of the colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema . . . I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects . . . I took myself far off from my presence . . . What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (Fanon xxv).

However, as Moustique's deception to his own people finds revelation, the incensed crowd beats him to death, and this symbolically signifies how dangerous and self-destructive could be this deception, or rather the self-deception, which is emerging out of this obsession for the whiteness. When Moustique was dying amidst the spoils of his deceit, Makak enters, and the last remark that Moustique makes is fascinating enough and is a matter of concern: "I take what you had, I take the dream you have and I come and try to sell it. I try to fool them, and they fall on me with sticks, everything, and they kill me" (Walcott 273). At the literal level, 'They' refers to the community of the black people to which Moustique also belonged, but at the symbolic one, 'they' refers to the self-destructive nature of the white obsession, which Moustique tried to sell to his people, and the consequence is obvious. The characters, such as, Lestrade, Moustique and Makak, cannot be studied in isolation, because they complement to each other and represent the different facets of Makak's consciousness. Moustique's final condition portends the future perils of Makak and Lestrade, and it is through Mostique's confession that Makak is able to confront the materialist aspect of his self. Mostique's final advice reverberates with the prophesying ring "Go back, go back to Monkey Mountain. Go back," which is simultaneously suggesting the horrible otherwise that may occur, if the advice remains unheeded. Initially, Makak did not give heed to such advice, but when he looked into the dead man's eyes, he saw there a vision that "darkens his [own] vision," and he "lets out a terrible cry of emptiness" (Walcott 274). This situation can obviously be compared with the last moment of Kurtz, who cried out "horror horror" (Conrad

178), and the only difference that lies in this case is that in Conrad, only Kurtz himself could see the 'horror' of his unconscious, whereas in the play under discussion, it is not only the Kurtzian Moustique, who could see the 'horror,' but also though him, Makak is also able to see this. Makak's cry was therefore from the very depth of his unconscious. Through Moustique, who embodies the extreme materialistic aspect of his consciousness, Makak could see the terrible existential void, a horrible dark nothingness. Lestrade, Moustique and the visionary white woman - all represent different facets of Makak's consciousness, which are intersecting with each other - with the only difference that the former ones are to some extent grounded in reality, but the latter is wholly a psychic phenomenon. Lestrade, as mentioned earlier, represents a severe obsession for whiteness. Tigre sums up Lestrade's character in the following manner: "Corporal Lestrade, the straddler, neither one thing nor the next, neither milk nor coal, neither day nor night, neither lion nor monkey, but a mulatto, a foot-licking servant of marble law" (Walcott 283). Earlier, he never realized that by dehumanizing the 'other,' he actually degraded his own self, and concomitantly he has to carry the burden of his conscience. This is true for any oppressor as well as any oppressive race. Later, confronted by the figure of death, he makes confession of his burden of conscience and fragmented consciousness: "I jeered thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in the heart of the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain I kiss your foot, O Monkey Mountain. . . . Was that my voice? My voice. O God, I have become what I mocked. I always was. I always was (Walcott 299-300). This vision of the white woman, which is literally suggesting an ideal vision of the West, also leads to an obsession for the nostalgic African heritage, when appropriated. But, as the play progresses, Makak realizes that any one of these obsessions will not create a sense of the self, or wholeness, particularly for the Caribbean subject, but on the contrary will inevitably result in the denial of the self by giving birth to a cultural and psychological emptiness, rather than the integration, or the fulfillment of the self. For the Caribbean subject, there should be an amalgamation of the black and white, spiritual and material, African and Europe in their consciousness, rather than a hostile relation between them. Hence, in the second part of *Dream on Monkey Mountain,* Walcott has introduced the quotation from Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth:* "Two worlds; that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn they crown into the churches to hear mass; each day the split widens . . ." (Walcott 277).

At last, Makak is disillusioned and moves away from his static concept of home by realizing the dangerous consequence of it and by bringing out a wonderful cosmic imagery, in which everything lives in a harmonious whole, and one leads to the other: "I wanted to leave this world. But if the moon is earth's friend, eh, Tigre, how can we leave the earth? And the earth self? Look down and there is nothing at our feet. We are wrapped in black air, we

are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind" (Walcott 304). When Makak kills the White woman in a ritualistic seclusion, he kills not only the authoritarian white aspect of his consciousness (which had already died with the death of Moustique, the extreme mercantile mentality), but also the static romanticized vision of his ancestral past, which had arisen itself out of Makak's obsession with the Whiteness. By now, the West Indian subject has learned to repudiate any one of the neatly categorized and tempting models of home by knowing completely well that choosing one over the other would inevitably result in self-abuse, self-denial and moreover self-annihilation. All of these contrasting and varied fragments must be patiently collected and gathered in a harmony, and even if contested, they must be done within the constriction of the heterogeneous domain, and no single fragment should be allowed to have power over the other. Otherwise, it will create the terrible darkness and the horror of nothingness. The Muse residing at the top of the Monkey Mountain also warmly invites the participation of all the aspects of the Caribbean self, and the song that Makak and Moustique sing ("I going home") after having confessed their obsessions within the dreams goads them towards the home, the real home, as the dreams fade. West Indies is place vibrant with the heterogeneity - both of cultural and psychological – and it is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-racial milieu. The real home, therefore, lies not in evading this multiplicity, but in confronting it. Therefore, the excellence of this play and of the playwright lies in his understanding of these cultural as well as psychic variables, and the West Indian consciousness, notwithstanding its fragmentariness and its nature of living on the splintered stage, bears its potency of transcendence from the anxiety of its tortured existence. It would be pertinent, indeed, to conclude this essay with Walcott's 'confession' in his 1970 essay "Meanings," in which he explains his ambition as a West Indian dramatist, as it had evolved up to *Dream on Monkey Mountain:* "I am a kind of split writer. I have one tradition inside me going on one way, and another tradition going on another. The mimetic, the narrative and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* I tried to fuse them . . ." (qtd. in Baugh 60)

Works Cited:

Baugh, Edward. *Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature.* Cambridge UP, 2006.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales.* Oxford UP, 2002.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Trans. Charles Lam Markmann.

Grove Press, 1967.

---. 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth.* Trans. Constance Farrington. Grove Weidenfeld, 1963.

Marlowe, Christopher. *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*. Ed. John D. Jump. Routledge, 1965.

Walcott, Derek. *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.

---. "What the Twilight Says: An Overture." *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.

---. "In a Green Night." *Collected Poems 1948-1984.* Faber and Faber, 1992.