

**READING CARIBBEAN WRITING: A  
CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH TO THE  
WORK OF EDWARD KAMAU  
BRATHWAITE, V.S. NAIPAUL, DEREK  
WALCOTT AND WILSON HARRIS**

**SIMON BEECROFT**

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
Department of English Literature  
The University of Sheffield  
October 2002



## Summary

This study is centrally concerned with the practice of reading Caribbean writing, and the representation of writers and readers, writing and reading in the work of four major Caribbean writers: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris. In it I seek to overcome some of the difficulties of reading culturally different books by offering a cross-cultural approach to selected literary texts. Since the emergence of an identifiable body of Anglophone Caribbean writing in the 1950's and 1960's, the literature of and about the Caribbean has largely been read in terms of a search for identity. I wish to argue that a key aspect of this search for identity is manifested in a thematic, formal and stylistic preoccupation with writing and reading that is evident in the literary works of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris. The work of Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin is central to my development of a cross-cultural approach to Caribbean writing. It is my intention to suggest that Bakhtin's work offers a valuable resource and response to the dilemma faced by the Western reader of Caribbean writing: a resource that not only provides a rich area of analysis in the field of cultural, linguistic and literary hybridisation, but that also implicitly offers a valuable theorisation of the practice of reading across cultures. The thesis comprises of six major chapters and a short conclusion. The opening chapter introduces issues relating to the reading of Caribbean writing, and establishes a theoretical connection between the work of Bakhtin and ideas central to Caribbean and postcolonial studies. Thereafter attention switches from Brathwaite to Naipaul, Walcott and Harris, to consider questions of language, authorship, history, reading and the tempero-spatial representation of the cross-cultural Caribbean.

## Acknowledgements

Despite the fact that individual research is by its very nature a largely solitary practice, there are nevertheless a number of people to whom I owe (in various measure) a clear debt of gratitude. I would principally like to thank Professor Neil Roberts for offering me the opportunity to begin this study and for acting as a patient and insightful supervisor throughout. I am also grateful to Julian Crockford, Martin Flanagan, David Shepherd, Sue Vice and Elsie Walker for their interest and advice, as well as other friends and colleagues in Sheffield and elsewhere who have offered words of kindness and encouragement at various points along the way. Special mention should go too to colleagues in the Graduate Research Office, and particularly Judith Watson, who have offered their support over the past months. I also want to thank Claire Ryan for believing that I would finish. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution and support of my parents, grandparents and other family members to whom I owe so much and from whom I continue to learn so much.

Contents	Page
<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	iv
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	vi
<b>Chapters</b>	
1. Reading Caribbean Writing	1
2. From Creolization to Calibanisation: Linguistic Performance in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's <i>The Arrivants</i> and <i>X/Self</i>	33
3. Finding a Centre: Questions of Authority and Authorship in V.S. Naipaul's <i>The Enigma of Arrival</i> and <i>A Way in the World</i>	73
4. 'A book left open by an absent master': Historical Emergence in Derek Walcott's <i>Another Life</i>	114
5. 'It was as if I was learning to read Homer when I was writing it': Aspects of Reading in Derek Walcott's <i>Omeros</i>	148
6. The Cross-cultural Imagination: The Chronotope of the Threshold in Wilson Harris' <i>The Guyana Quartet</i>	184
7. A Cross-cultural Approach to the Work of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris	216
<b>Select Bibliography</b>	223

## List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations will be used throughout this study when referring to key primary texts.

**A:** Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973)

**AaH:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', in *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), pp. 4-256

**AL:** Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, in *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), pp.141-294

**BSHR:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.10-59

**DN:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.259-422

**EA:** V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (London: Penguin, 1987)

**EaN:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.3-40

**FM:** Mikhail Bakhtin / Pavel Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978)

**FTC:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.84-258

**GQ:** Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985)

**MPL:** Valentin Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka & I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986)

**PDP:** Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

**RQNM:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from the *Novyi Mir* Editorial Staff', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.1-9

**O:** Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990)

**SG:** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp.60-102

**WW:** V.S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World* (London: Minerva, 1995)

**X/S:** Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces', in *X/Self* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.80-87

List of Illustrations	Page
1. Giorgio de Chirico, 'The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon' (1912) Reprinted in <i>De Chirico</i> , ed. by José María Faerna, trans. by Diane Cobos (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1995), p.14.	98
2. Winslow Homer, 'The Gulf Stream' (1899) Reprinted in <i>Winslow Homer</i> , John Wilmerding (London: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p.200.	158

# 1. Reading Caribbean Writing

## The Reader and Caribbean Writing

This study is centrally concerned with the practice of reading Caribbean writing, and the representation of writers and readers, writing and reading in the work of four major Caribbean writers: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris. However, the narrative of *Reading Caribbean Writing* will not begin in the Caribbean with a medley of Caribbean voices. Nor will it begin with the voice of the Western critic firmly situated in the Western academy. Rather, it will start with the opening of a series of questions by a female postcolonial critic, born in India and educated in both the East and West, who now finds herself in an authoritative position within the Western teaching machine. In a recent interview focused upon questions of multiculturalism Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak recounts an exchange between teacher and student that delicately reveals the paradoxes of speaking in the humanities at the present moment. Faced with the question of the authenticity of the critic, Spivak suggests that she is often puzzled by the apparent impotency of the young white male politically-correct undergraduate who says, 'I am only a bourgeois white male, I can't speak'<sup>1</sup>. For Spivak, this expression of the student's reading and speaking-position is inevitably debilitating, and it is easy to see why. Not only does the silence of the student lead nowhere. Without speaking, how can he offer an understanding and interpretation of colonial and postcolonial texts? But also, the student's identification of himself as 'a bourgeois white male' invokes a process by which he makes himself a universal representative by proxy of all bourgeois white males. This does not mean that in analysing novels, poetry and plays the student should aim to deny his identity. Or, even worse, that he should attempt to speak for someone else. Instead, Spivak advises that only through an awareness of cultural difference and a willingness to consistently subject his reading and speaking-position to self-critique will the student earn the right to speak and the right for his voice to be heard. Put in these terms, this hypothetical encounter between postcolonial teacher and Western student is instructive for a number of reasons. It

accepts the fact that different readers will inevitably produce different readings of literary texts. It recognises the critical distance that must often be crossed in the process of reading culturally different books. And, not least, it makes plain the need to always acknowledge and consistently question the position from which readings are made. This educational anecdote is therefore not simply hypothetical. It brings to mind some of the considerations each reader unconsciously makes in the process of speaking about their readings. It provides an apposite analogy of the theoretical and institutional issues surrounding my reading of Caribbean writing.

This foregrounding of a sense of self, of my status and identity as reader, is intended for at least two reasons. First, it emphasises the point that when reading (and writing about) Caribbean writing, I do so from a unique position. It is a matter of making this a (shifting) position of possibility and not vulnerability that is important. Secondly, it acts as a reminder of the possible difficulties non-Caribbean readers face when reading literary works of or about the Caribbean. Echoing the protestations of Spivak's student, it would be easy to say that this is a question of race, class or gender. However, it is surely also the case that each of these identifying categories speaks of a more general feeling of critical distance from the culturally-different text, that is connected to one's knowledge of the language, history and culture of the region as a whole and the islands as separate and interconnected entities, as well as one's social background. Reading Caribbean writing requires effort. But Caribbean writing is not particularly unique in this regard, and that is not to say that the gap between Western reader and Caribbean writer cannot be bridged. There are those who have called for a separate and independent criticism, exclusively produced by Caribbean critics for Caribbean readers. But such assertions are perhaps driven more by politics and polemics than anything else. In the late 1960's, for example, Edward Baugh pointed to the need for a specifically West Indian criticism in order to promote West Indian literature to an as yet reluctant local audience. This is important, he suggested, because 'West Indian literature is at present so directly and largely involved with particularly West Indian problems that it is unlikely that any outsider can discover better than we ourselves, the truths which discussion of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), p.60.

literature holds *for us*<sup>2</sup>. Jeannette B. Allis has more recently put forward the case for a regional criticism, and in so doing has followed Baugh by alluding to the limitations of readers and critics from outside the Caribbean:

Without attempting to exclude the valuable critical contributions of many individual critics outside the West Indies- for example, Hena Maes-Jelinek, Reinhard Sander, Robert Hamner, William Walsh- to West Indian literature, it can be seen ... that the non-regional critic is bounded by his own limitations. While the critic who recognises these limitations and works within them can produce meaningful assessments, only the regional critic can provide the vital cultural connection between a writer's works and his society.<sup>3</sup>

As a so-called 'non-regional critic' there are, of course, a number of objections that one might have to this statement. On the one hand, it proposes a critical practice that is both separatist and essentialist at the same time. On the other, Allis' conception of what might be termed 'committed criticism' rests upon a principle of indivisible correspondence between regional writer and regional critic that is unsustainable in a contemporary market of global production and reception. If nothing else, such assertions merely prove that the question of reading and readers has been central to the constitution of Caribbean literature since its inception.

That reading is such an important issue in Caribbean writing, an issue which necessarily reveals the vested interests of its writers and readers, is shown first in the difficulty of identifying and agreeing upon the moment when a clear body of writings emerged that could be properly called 'Caribbean'. Recognising the cultural impact of the 'boom' in Caribbean literary production in the second half of this century some set the date in the 1950's. Others suggest that such widespread recognition of a Caribbean literary canon was built upon the success of writers such as Claude McKay and C.L.R. James in the 1920's and 1930's. Others argue that the importance of literary periodicals in the first half of the Twentieth century must not be forgotten. Still more seek to trace the beginnings of a Caribbean writing to those literary outpourings produced in the period of slavery in the region. These shifting positions clearly reflect the urge to incrementally move the boundaries of the Caribbean canon, so that it becomes more inclusive and less exclusive. Each assertion suggests different criteria for the assessment of Caribbean writing. Should it include only those texts that promote Caribbean identities and values in the wider world? Should

---

<sup>2</sup> Edward Baugh, 'Towards a West Indian Criticism', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14 (1-2) (1968), 143.

it address only those texts whose narrative is based in the Caribbean and populated by Caribbean characters? Should it refer to only those texts that were written in the Caribbean? Should it refer to only those texts written by writers who were born in the Caribbean? Should it include work by black, white and creole writers who may or may not have vastly different creative agendas? Should it seek to take account of the Caribbean's colonial past? And, on what basis would this historical and literary recuperation take place? Such questions are not easily answered (and I will not attempt to answer them here). They do though reflect the central concerns of Caribbean critics in the contemporary period, and the most effective means of illustrating this is by assessing how scholarly readers have read Caribbean writing so far.

In contrast to the shifting recognition of Caribbean writing as a recognisable body of literary texts, it is generally acknowledged that a recognisable body of Anglophone Caribbean criticism only began in the late-1960's with the publication of *The Islands in Between* by London's Oxford University Press. Edited by Louis James (who had taken up a post at the University of Kent in the mid-1960's), the book offers a selection of essays on nine of the leading figures in the post-war renaissance in Caribbean writing. Each of the essays is authored by a critic with a close connection to the West Indies. The contributions themselves are headed by an extensive introduction. In this opening discussion, James provides a survey of some of the key issues within Caribbean writing, and structures his remarks around questions of history, language, tradition and the nascent shoots of an emergent literary culture in the genres of poetry and the novel. 'The West Indian writer's search for his own voice has been a peculiarly difficult one'<sup>4</sup> James asserts, in recognition of the significant cultural and economic influence that both England and the United States have had on the emergent Caribbean writer. But, if the Caribbean writer's voice is not easily found, for James it is nevertheless a search that ultimately produces positive effects:

Indeed, looking at West Indian literature as a whole, one realizes that much of its vitality does come from its refusal to retire from issues of the Caribbean situation, even if they may be examined from London or Accra, and even

---

<sup>3</sup> Jeanette B. Allis, 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28 (1-2) (1982), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Louis James, ed., *The Islands in Between* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.34.

though much exploration is the exploration of deprivation, for this itself is a way of discovering positive values. (James, *The Islands in Between*, p.35)

It is this kind of critical assessment, which considers the Caribbean literary text in the strict terms of the Caribbean writer's search for identity that has determined much of the reading of Caribbean writing in the intervening years.

*The Islands in Between* is something of a foundational text in Caribbean literary criticism. Yet, despite this James' collection is not without its problems, and a brief survey of a few contemporary reviews will show that these problems effectively circulate around the reading-positions adopted within the text. Edward Baugh's 1968 review, published in *Caribbean Quarterly*, is typical, and therefore provides an appropriate starting-point. Baugh acknowledges the success and importance of James' collection, and even describes it as 'another milestone in the development of [West Indian] literature' (Baugh, 'Towards a West Indian Criticism', 140). But at the same time he does not shy away from offering criticism of the collection and does not miss the opportunity to offer further suggestions for the formation of a 'West Indian criticism'. Sticking more closely to the collection itself, Edward Lucie-Smith also accepts the original intentions of *The Islands in Between*. He goes on to describe James' collection as a book that is 'partisan and often unfair, but never condescending'<sup>5</sup>. Whilst there is nothing essentially wrong with this, for Lucie-Smith it does raise serious questions about the treatment and selection of the writers concerned. In particular, he draws attention to the perception of Naipaul's apparent lack of commitment to the West Indian cause, and to the uncomfortable stance that the collection takes toward Brathwaite's poetry, that is steeped in its references to African culture. In turn, Brathwaite himself argues in 'Caribbean Critics' that the collection can be deemed a success if, and only if, 'the West Indian writers selected for examination in *The Islands in Between* might ... simply be seen as eight new talented "English" writers, not very well known to the English-reading public at large, and therefore deserving of special attention'<sup>6</sup>. In fact, unlike Lucie-Smith, Brathwaite's principal criticism of *The Islands in Between* is focused upon the Eurocentric bias of the collection, in terms of the selection of writers and the methodology adopted throughout. In contrast Brathwaite asks that:

---

<sup>5</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, 'West Indian Writing', *London Magazine*, 8 (4) (1968), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Critics', in *Roots* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de Las Americas, 1986), p.111.

the mind be left open for the discussion of the possibility that the Caribbean, in spite of the operation upon it of "The European system", in spite of-- indeed, *because of*-- "the peculiar circumstances" of its history, contains within itself a "culture" different from, though not exclusive of Europe. (Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Critics', p.114)

This request seeks to address what might be termed a general cultural flaw of *The Islands in Between*. It is an assessment that is shared by Kenneth Ramchand, who suggests in his review that in its concentration on content over form, and in its concentration on the post-1949 phase of Caribbean writing *The Islands in Between* offers nothing new for the interested reader. In his closing comments Ramchand's indictment of James' collection is damning to say the least:

It is a failure of the long diverse introduction that it is neither a scrupulous account of 'The Rise of...' nor a discriminating guide to 'What and Who are the most important in...' West Indian writing. As a consequence there is no rationale, except perhaps chronology, for the order in which the essays appear. At the end, in spite of [the] Introduction and Epilogue the essays are nothing more than a set of separate items found by chance between the same covers.<sup>7</sup>

If then *The Islands in Between* represents the beginning of Anglophone Caribbean criticism, it was clearly seen at the time (at least amongst West Indian commentators) as a fairly inauspicious opening. There are significant disagreements about how Caribbean writing ought to be read; and, such disagreements circulate around some of the following questions: How is the story of Caribbean writing best told? Who is most qualified to tell such a story? What are the issues involved in offering a reading of Caribbean writing and writers now (i.e. in the late 1960's)? And, who should the story of Caribbean writing be written for? Who are the readers of Caribbean writing? Who will read *The Islands in Between*?

If nothing else, it can certainly be said that Louis James's collection inaugurates a discussion of such questions. In fact, in a response to Kenneth Ramchand, James himself suggests that, for good or bad, this was the main purpose of the book<sup>8</sup>. However, as many critics observe, in his introduction James seems reluctant to engage with his material from a Caribbean perspective, perhaps because

---

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, 'In-Between', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), 127.

<sup>8</sup> In a brief letter James modestly notes that 'The anthology is a slim collection of essays tentatively offered well over two years ago, and put together much earlier than that, to get a debate on Caribbean writing going. Its success in doing so has come in part because it was timely and controversial enough to serve as a scratching post for other critics working out their ideas. That a revised edition could be better now is some tribute to its impact.'

Louis James, 'Reply to Dr Ramchand', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 10 (1970), iv.

he is a Western critic or because his collection is produced by a Western publisher and largely intended for a Western audience. In particular, he emphasises the influence of England and English language and culture in unequal proportion to the other possible contributors to a Caribbean literature (i.e. African, Indian, Asian etc.). In one sense, this inequality of attention may be an honest expression of the unequal influence of metropolitan values and institutions in the Caribbean during the colonial enterprise. But in a text such as this it seems curiously out of place. Alternatively, James' critical compromise might more productively be read as a reflection of the kind of difficulties Caribbean writers faced in the effort to get their work published and to find an audience. James himself notes that in the late 1960's there was a desperate lack of publishers and readers in the Caribbean, and it should be recognised that for a variety of reasons the position has not significantly changed in the intervening years<sup>9</sup>. Other critics have also acknowledged that in the immediate post-war period London paradoxically became the centre of Caribbean literary production. Therefore, in order for a Caribbean novelist to succeed in his profession he had to leave the Caribbean and journey to London where he would write his novel, where his novel would be published, and where his novel would be read by a largely white, middle class, educated audience. This obviously complicates any preconceived notions we might have had about a Caribbean reader or a Caribbean readership being exclusively or essentially black, Afro-Caribbean, or indeed exclusively from the Caribbean. In fact, it would be hard to determine what kind of reader Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott or Harris had in the 1950's and 1960's. Published in the same year as *The Islands in Between*, Mervyn Morris' article 'Some West Indian Problems of Audience' reveals that the relationship between the West Indian reader and West Indian writer is problematic to say the least. The most significant reasons for this, Morris suggests, are the small local readership, the poor economic opportunities for a writer as a result, and the limited cultural and critical appreciation of the writer in the West Indies. As a consequence, Morris is able to open his essay by stating that: 'One

---

<sup>9</sup> In a 1998 article promoting the release of a new Faber Caribbean series, Maya Jaggi reveals the economic problems of a Caribbean writer finding an audience based in the Caribbean. She writes: 'Given a dearth of local publishers, the islands' writers have always had to leave to be recognised. So there is excitement that a major British publisher (...) has launched this series "at home". While books usually reach this tiny and "marginal" market at prohibitive prices, Faber is selling the series here at half price, to remedy what its chairman Matthew Evans, told local journalists was "an absolutely ridiculous situation where Caribbean readers don't get to read their own writers"'.

of the curious facts about our literature is that it is almost entirely by absentee West Indians'<sup>10</sup>. Thus, it should be recognised that although both Brathwaite and Walcott lived and worked in the Caribbean until well into the 1970's and 1980's, the early works of all four of the writers in this study were published in the metropolitan centre. Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris were published and promoted in London and criticised and reviewed in London and in Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, St Lucia and Guyana. From the start of their writing careers their work has been directed towards both a Caribbean and non-Caribbean audience.

If James' *The Islands in Between* represents the first critical introduction to Caribbean literature it should by no means be seen as the last. Amongst others it has been followed by Kenneth Ramchand's *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (1976), Edward Baugh's *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (1978), and Bruce King's *West Indian Literature* (1979, second edition 1995). In each of these the question of the reader or critic's reading-formation remains an implicit concern. However, perhaps the most direct attention to the question of what a reader of Caribbean literature would look like is made in the recently published *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. In their introduction to an impressive anthology of creative and critical work from 1900 to the present, Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh principally seek to submit past and current readings of Caribbean writing to a re-evaluation. Central to this critical project is Donnell and Welsh's aim to challenge the stasis of what may be seen as a 'Caribbean canon'. This, they suggest, is 'dominated by a number of seminal works from the 1950's and 1960's, the period when Caribbean literature 'boomed' in the metropolitan motherland, London'<sup>11</sup>. Such a 'Caribbean canon' therefore includes the key early works of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris, as well as such figures as George Lamming

---

Jaggi, 'The Impure Norm', *The Guardian, Review*, 2 May 1998, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Mervyn Morris, 'Some West Indian Problems of Audience', *English*, 16 (94) (1967), 127.

See also Morris, 'Walcott and the Audience for Poetry', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.174-192.

It is interesting to note that two years prior to Morris' article, Margaret Blundell offers a similar assessment of the paradoxical nature of Caribbean literary production, that takes account of the view inside and outside the Caribbean. Her essay closes with the salutary question: 'Imagination, gifted writers, the lively and newly minted language are all here, but where is the West Indian patron who alone can be the real audience?'

Blundell, 'Caribbean Readers and Writers', *Bim*, 11 (43) (1966), 167.

<sup>11</sup> Alison Donnell & Sarah Lawson Welsh, *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.7.

and Samuel Selvon. The chief objection to this moment of canon-formation is that it has remained dominant within Caribbean literary studies ever since. And, that the introductory studies which first defined this canon (amongst which we should obviously include James' *The Islands in Between*) also defined the critical parameters of any reading of Caribbean writing to follow. Rather than initiating further debate, Donnell and Welsh suggest, such readings of Caribbean writing have proved 'positively damaging to both Caribbean texts and critical practices' (p.9). In contrast, they assert the need to consider literatures that will expand the accepted notions of the 'Caribbean canon' (i.e. literature before the 'boom', literature by women, literature by writers of East Indian origins, and literature of oral performance), and most interestingly, this leads them to sanction a decentred notion of reading according to which each reading position may not be equally authoritative but must be acknowledged as equally valid. Thus, in the opening pages of their *Reader* they are moved to declare:

We hope not only to construct a Reader in Caribbean literature but also a reader of Caribbean literature-- conceiving of the project as a joint production of text and living reader. The R/reader is multiple: just as the reader is always constructed by the overlapping functions of gender, class, education and cultural identity, so too the Reader resists any single intellectual perspective and aims to be open to a range of positions. The R/reader is a site of discensus and of process. (p.2)

There is a certain knowing playfulness in the dual construction of a *Caribbean Reader* and a Caribbean reader, which perhaps reflects an engagement with the postmodern as well as the post-colonial, and runs the risk of decontextualising Donnell and Welsh's Caribbean concerns. But, there is also much to admire in their recognition of 'the overlapping functions of gender, class, education and cultural identity', and their insistence that each reader adopts an active relation to the text during their open engagement with the *Reader*. The Caribbean reader they attempt to construct is a reader who is multiple, constantly mobile and able to accommodate shifting positions. He/she only ever engages in 'partial and provisional acts of meaning'. He/she is 'stable only for a moment within a matrix of mobile interconnections'. Offering their reader the opportunity to construct an identity in a productive dialogue with a variety of creative and critical texts, Donnell and Welsh's attempted theorisation of the Caribbean reader is a salient reminder of the continued importance of the question of reading and readers in Caribbean criticism. Almost

thirty years after James' introductory collection inaugurated critical discussion, 'readers' and 'writers', 'the written' and 'the read' remains central to any understanding of Caribbean writing.

The orthodox critical approach to Caribbean writing is to read the literature of the region in the simple terms of a search for identity. However, in this study I will argue that the major texts of the Caribbean literary canon are thematically, formally and stylistically preoccupied with the practices of reading and writing. Of course, these two readings of Caribbean writing are by no means mutually exclusive. The practices of reading and writing are both by their very nature practices of identification and representation. Nor is it exactly unusual that Caribbean writers should demonstrate an obsession with the representation of writers and readers, the written and the read in their work. Hailing from a region of islands that only recently achieved political independence from colonial rule, these writers- Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris- have participated in and been witness to a unique period of historical transformation. It is only natural that as Caribbean writers they should be concerned with how the Caribbean region is read by Caribbeans and non-Caribbeans alike. Equally, it is only right that they should reflect upon their role as 'Caribbean writers'. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, poet and historian, was born in Barbados in 1930. His first poem 'Shadow Suite' was published in the Caribbean journal *Bim* in 1950, and his most recent volume of innovative poetry *Dream Stories* was published in 1994. V.S. Naipaul, Nobel Prize winner in 2002, was born in 1932 in the village of Chaguanas in Trinidad. His career as a novelist and travel-writer has spanned the period from 1957 to the present day, during which time he has written a total of twenty-five works of fiction and non-fiction. His most recent publication, *Half a Life*, tells the story of a dislocated writer, born in the English colonies and educated in the metropolitan centre, who has struggled to find his place in the world. Derek Walcott, also a Nobel Prize winner, hails from the island of St. Lucia. Born in 1930, Walcott achieved his first self-funded publication, entitled *Twenty-Five Poems*, in 1948. Having produced thirteen volumes of poetry and written numerous plays since then his latest book, *Tiepolo's Hound*, was published in Britain in September 2000. Wilson Harris, the eldest of the four writers, was born in 1921 in New Amsterdam, Guyana, and has lived in England since 1958. He made contributions to the journal *Kyk-Over-Al* from 1945 onwards and published two volumes of poetry

entitled *Fetish* (1951) and *Eternity to Season* (1954) in the early 1950's. His first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, was published in 1960, since when he has completed a total of twenty-two novels up to and including *The Dark Jester*, which was published in 2001.

In this study, the reading of Caribbean writing and the writing of Caribbean reading will be first explored in an analysis of Brathwaite's poetry of linguistic performance in *The Arrivants* and *X/Self*. This will be followed by a discussion of Naipaul's barely fictional presentation of the life of the exiled writer in *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*. Naipaul's return to the question of Caribbean history in the latter of these texts will provide an intriguing contrast to Derek Walcott's re-reading of the historical and cultural legacies of colonialism in his two long poems *Another Life* and *Omeros*. The main part of the study will close by attending to Wilson Harris' concern with the time and space of the Caribbean landscape and the re-awakening of vision in the creative imagination. Throughout each discussion a reading of the work of the Russian literary theorist and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, will shadow and inform my reading of Caribbean writing. Born in Orel, south of Moscow in 1895 Bakhtin grew up in two cosmopolitan outposts of the Russian Empire (Vilnius and Odessa), before gaining a degree in Classics and Philology at the University of Petrograd in 1918. After graduation Bakhtin settled in Nevel, a small town in western Russia, but soon moved to Vitebsk where he remained for most of the 1920's. In 1929 however, Bakhtin was arrested as part of the Stalinist purges, and sentenced to spend six years internal exile in Kazakhstan. His sentence served, in 1936 Bakhtin took up a post at the Mordovia State Teachers College (later upgraded to a university) and moved to the town of Saransk. He largely remained in this region for the rest of his life, and died in 1975 at the age of seventy-nine. Living in obscurity for much of his life (for reasons of political expedience and probably personal inclination) Bakhtin was 're-discovered' in the 1950's by a group of Russian students, who encouraged him to publish, and in some cases re-work, his many earlier manuscripts. Virtually unknown in the West at the time of his death in 1975, Bakhtin's reputation in the fields of philosophy, linguistics, and literary and cultural criticism rests on the intellectual recuperation of a number of key essays and

monographs from a scattered archive of manuscripts<sup>12</sup>. In this study, I wish to argue that the work of Bakhtin, from his earlier more philosophical essays to his later fragments and notes, offers a way of thinking about the cross-cultural reading of Caribbean writing. Bakhtin suggests that the experience of reading relies unquestionably on the crossing of boundaries. But, at the same time and equally importantly, it relies upon the reader's grounding in his own experience, his awareness of the conditions under which reading takes place. The most persuasive marker of this can be found in a short essay that Bakhtin wrote on the state of literary scholarship in Russia in 1970. Bakhtin's 'Response to a Question from the *Novyi Mir* Editorial Staff' (originally given the more emphatic title: 'Use Opportunities More Boldly!'), written for a liberal Soviet journal, is important for at least two reasons. First, Bakhtin puts forward an impressive argument for the necessity of interdisciplinary study. He declares 'literary scholarship should establish closer links with the history of culture' (RQNM, p.2), and uses this declaration to expose the inadequacies of a scholarly practice directed towards greater and greater specialisation. Secondly, he proposes that the most productive understanding that one can gain of another culture or a culturally different text can only take place when one's outsideness is maintained in that moment of insidedness that is the reading experience:

---

<sup>12</sup> To date, the texts written by Bakhtin and available in English are: *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (published 1990, containing essays written 1919-1924), *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (published 1993, containing an essay probably written 1920-1924), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (published 1984, written 1963, a re-working of an earlier monograph written in 1929), *The Dialogic Imagination* (published 1981, containing four essays written in 1930's), *Rabelais and his World* (published 1968, written in 1930's and early 1940's), and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (published 1986, containing essays and notes written 1930's-1974). Bakhtin is also alleged to have authored or co-authored with friends of his intellectual circle a number of 'disputed texts' written in the 1920's Vitebsk period, these include: *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* (published 1987, written 1927), *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (published 1985, written 1928), and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (published 1973, written 1930).

Though much of this information may already be familiar, it nevertheless offers an important context for the following discussions. The question of Bakhtin's authorship of the 'disputed texts' is addressed at some point or another by most Bakhtinian critics, and discussed most fully in the following:

Katerina Clark & Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.147-170.

Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, eds. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp.31-49.

Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp.101-119.

I.R. Titunik, 'Bakhtin &/Or Volosinov &/Or Medvedev: Dialogue &/Or Doublethink?', in *Language and Literary Theory*, ed. by Benjamin A. Stolz, Titunik & Lobomir Dolozel (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1984), pp.535-564.

We raise new questions for a foreign culture [Bakhtin states], ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (...). Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched. (RQNM, p.7)

It is, thus, the prize of mutual enrichment that Bakhtin offers in this essay. Bakhtin's notion of cross-cultural reading results in neither essentialism nor total relativism. Instead, he suggests that in the cross-cultural reading experience the reader must acknowledge the integrity of the text, and seek to supplement this with a strategic acknowledgement of one's own reading-formation. This will reveal and activate new potentials in both foreign and native cultures the effects of which cannot be reduced to synthesis, merging or mixing.

To reiterate: this study is centrally concerned with the practice of reading Caribbean writing, and the representation of writers and readers, writing and reading in the work of four major Caribbean writers. It is also concerned with a notion of cross-cultural reading outlined in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Like the reading of Caribbean writing this necessarily informs, this approach offers original insight into an important and developing area of Bakhtin studies. On the topic of Bakhtin and the reader, David Shepherd notes, in an essay published in 1986, that 'there is no theory of reading or the reader to be plucked ready-formed from the diverse Bakhtinian legacy'<sup>13</sup>. Any survey of Bakhtin's work will conclusively confirm this. Although it is possible to find references to the reader or reading of some sort or another in almost all of his texts (disputed or otherwise), it is nevertheless the case that Bakhtin never addressed the question of reading in any sustained fashion. However, far from ending a dialogue before it had begun, Shepherd's statement can be seen as the opening engagement in an expanding field of enquiry. This is evident in at least two ways, both of which are suggested in Shepherd's signalling of his discursive intentions. These are first 'to pinpoint those aspects of Bakhtin's work which seem most relevant and useful to a reader-oriented project' and second, 'to place these aspects alongside and against some of the best known reader-oriented theories,

---

<sup>13</sup> David Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop & David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.91. See also Shepherd, 'The Authority of Meanings and the Meanings of Authority', *Poetics Today*, 7 (1) (1986), 129-145

illuminating their aporias and indicating possible new directions' (Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', p.92). Thus, whilst on the one hand he indicates the intersections of Bakhtin's work with that of Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Hans Robert Jauss, on the other, he offers speculative intimations of the limitations and possibilities of writing Bakhtin into 'a reader-oriented project'. Reading Bakhtin as a theorist of discourse (rather than reading or literature per se), Shepherd manages to find references to the reading experience in Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the Novel', 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences', and Pavel Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. And, acknowledging the difficulty of seeing what 'Bakhtin can do for a reader', Shepherd concludes with the suggestion that Bakhtin 'offers possibilities of working 'from the inside out'' (p.105) in the understanding of what goes on in the reading experience. That is to say, Bakhtin's blurring of the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside', 'text' and 'context', in the dialogic process of reading exposes the difficulties faced by the cross-cultural reader participating in an active, responsive, creative understanding of the culturally different text. For Shepherd, the exposure of these difficulties in turn reveals the 'conditions of possibility' of such cross-cultural readings.

Subsequent critical commentary on Bakhtin, readers and reading can be divided into two main categories. First, those that have sought to engage with the topic on a purely theoretical level. And second those that have approached the subject through the accompanying framework of close textual engagement. In the former, the work of Shepherd and Michael Bernard-Donals is especially useful<sup>14</sup>. An up to date survey of the on-line Bakhtin database might add to this perhaps a dozen articles written in English which in one form or another collectively seek to place Bakhtin alongside many of the usual suspects of reader-theory (e.g. Barthes, Fish, Iser, Booth, Jauss, de Man etc.)<sup>15</sup>. Meanwhile, in the latter category, Bakhtin's approach to

---

<sup>14</sup> Bernard-Donals reads ambivalence into Bakhtin, and suggests that Bakhtin's work is torn between the traditions of phenomenology and Marxism. He surveys the relationship between Bakhtin and theories of reception and hermeneutics, and concludes that any points of intersection reveal both the problems and possibilities within Bakhtin's work.

Bernard-Donals, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Between Phenomenology and Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.47-86.

<sup>15</sup> Celia Britton, 'The Dialogic Text and the Texte Pluriel', *Poetics: Occasional Papers* (Colchester, University of Essex Language Centre, 1974), pp.52-68.

Matthias Freise, 'After the Expulsion of the Author: Bakhtin as an Answer to Post-structuralism', in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. by Carol Adlam, Rachel Falconer, Vitalii Makhlin & Alastair Renfrew (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp.131-141.

reading has been set in a variety of literary contexts, which include Gothic fiction, Chinese literature, lyric poetry, 18th Century essays, and the 19th Century English novel<sup>16</sup>. As a topic which has noticeably increased in academic interest in the 1990's, perhaps the highest concentration of critics with a broadly shared ideological agenda can be said to come from the field of feminist criticism<sup>17</sup>. In general terms what is most attractive about Bakhtin's work for such critics is the possibility of finding within his theory of discourse an expression of a simultaneously hierarchical and yet multiplicitous notion of reading. This would enable a female perspective to sit alongside and counter a culturally dominant male perspective. The work of Lynne Pearce is particularly illuminating in this regard. In her 1995 essay, 'I: the Reader: Text, Context and the Balance of Power', Pearce provides 'an autobiographical account of [her] history as a 'gendered reader' and the sexual/textual politics involved in each of [her] many readerly incarnations or positionings'<sup>18</sup>. In her adoption of a self-reflexive mode of critique and her explicit use of the 'I' pronoun,

---

Hans Robert Jauss, 'The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding', in *The Identity of the Text*, ed. by Owen Miller & Mario J. Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp.146-174.

Stephen Souris, 'The Architectonics of Multivocality: A Bakhtinian/Iserian Analysis of Recent American Multiple Narrator Novels', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, 20-25 June 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated).

Ricardo Szmetan, 'Bakhtinian Interpellations in the Discourse of the Other: On Reader Response Criticism', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, 20-25 June 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)

<sup>16</sup> Siobhan Craig, 'Monstrous Dialogues: Erotic Discourse and the Dialogic Constitution of the Subject in *Frankenstein*', in *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, ed. by Karen Hohne & Helen Wussow (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1994), pp.83-96.

Lloyd Davis, 'Reading Irony: Dialogism in 'A Modest Proposal'', *AUMLA*, 77 (1992), 32-55.

Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

Shaun Kelley Jahshan, 'Reader-Oriented Polyphony? Zhang Zhupo's Commentary on the Jin Ping Mei', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 56 (1) (1995), 1-29.

Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, 'The Dialogic Search for Community in Charlotte Bronte's Novels', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 20 (3) (1990), 296-317.

Iris Zavala, 'The Manuscript and its Interpreters: Notes on the Omniscient Reader of the Poetics of the Lyric', in *Approaches to Discourse, Poetics and Psychiatry. Papers from the 1985 Utrecht Summer School of Critical Theory* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1987), pp.131-148.

<sup>17</sup> Kay Halasek, 'Feminism and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading in the Academy', in *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric and Writing*, ed. by Frank Farmer (New Jersey: Hermagoras Press, 1998), pp.51-62.

Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, 'Dialogically Feminized Reading: A Critique of Reader-Response Criticism', *Reader*, 22 (1989), 9-37.

<sup>18</sup> Lynne Pearce, 'I: the Reader: text, context and the balance of power', in *Feminist Subjects, Multi-Media and Cultural Methodologies*, ed. by Penny Florence & Dee Reynolds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.160.

See also Pearce's *Reading Dialogics* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), and *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Edward Arnold, 1997)

Pearce intends to make clear the apparent disjunction between her own reading practice as a woman and what she perceives to be the broader cultural processes of reading. What makes this account most interesting though, is the fact that she filters her individual history of reading through the prism of a shifting engagement with Mikhail Bakhtin. For example, reflecting upon her doctoral research on the poetry of John Clare at Birmingham University in the early 1980's, the moment of her introduction to Bakhtin, Pearce declares 'this was the period of both my greatest power and my greatest blindness' (Pearce, 'I: the Reader', p.162). Most simply, this is because in her enthusiasm to release 'all the hidden voices from John Clare's now manifestly polyphonic texts' Pearce evades the question of gender within a series of texts that for the most part assume a male reader. In contrast, in this essay, as a declaration of her present reader-position, Pearce proposes a vision of the author-text-reader relationship as a relationship of competition, reciprocation and negotiation. Arguing that the text incorporates 'a (mutable) hierarchy of reader-positionings', this nevertheless allows her to conclude that: 'Even as the text positions me, so may I (re)position my relationship to it' (p.169). In Bakhtinian terms, this effectively conveys a sense of reading as dialogic negotiation or struggle, and implies that in the formation of meanings there is always a balance to be struck between author, text and reader.

Translating Pearce's observations to the reading of Caribbean writing this obviously raises the question of how a Caribbean literary text might implicitly or explicitly seek to position me as a reader? And, how I might choose to accept or reject its codes of address, and (re)position my relationship to it? Such questions are central to this study, and directly speak towards the issues raised in the opening of this discussion. A series of possible answers will be provided in a practical way in the textual analyses to follow. In this study Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry of linguistic performance is read in terms of the performative aspects of Voloshinov and Bakhtin's notion of the verbal utterance. V.S. Naipaul's discourse on the writer is framed in the sense of a shifting engagement with authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. Derek Walcott's entry into the life of his island in *Another Life* is discussed in relation to the notion of historical becoming, whilst his reading of an epic precursor in *Omeros* is seen to exhibit the possibilities (and limitations) of a dialogic reading-practice. And, finally, Wilson Harris' complex narratives of

transformation are considered in terms of the chronotope of the threshold, which establishes a space within the texts where the fragments of various cultures can emerge to contribute to the formation of cultural identities.

### Mikhail Bakhtin and Postcolonial Hybridity

In their *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh's explicit aim is the 'joint production of text and living reader'. In the course of outlining the boundaries of this project, Donnell and Welsh not only demonstrate the centrality of the question of reading for contemporary Caribbean studies, but they also reveal the terms in which Caribbean writing as an object of study is currently considered. Addressing the various notions of a Caribbean literature, from its earliest forms to its latest incarnations, Donnell and Welsh declare:

In a plural culture there can be no single notion of 'Caribbeanness', rather there is a growing acceptance of a syncretic (centreless) model of cultural definition which is inclusive and accepts diversity and hybridity as the foundation for both Caribbean aesthetics and cultural identities. (p.6)

This reveals the extent to which the concept of hybridity has been appropriated within contemporary literary and cultural criticism as a way of reading Caribbean writing. It makes clear that all gestures toward the reading of Caribbean writing in essential or universal terms will be severely misplaced. Instead, any and every reader of Caribbean writing must take account of the 'diversity and hybridity' that defines the Caribbean as a region of independent and interrelated islands. The hybridity of the region and its literature is a visible product of the events of Caribbean history: a history which since the arrival of Christopher Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century has seen the virtual eradication of the native populations across the islands, and the voluntary and forced transplantation of millions of people from other parts of the world, most notably Europe, Africa, India and Asia. Therefore, although each writer in this study was born and raised in the Caribbean, each of them can also lay claim to either a legacy of intermixture or a history of ancestral dispossession. Both Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris have black and white parents or grandparents, whilst Edward Kamau Brathwaite and V.S. Naipaul can legitimately trace their familial roots to Africa and India respectively. In its simplest form, hybridity

recognises the Caribbean as the meeting place of old and new worlds, coloniser and colonised, and suggests that in the contact zone produced by the process of colonisation something new is necessarily produced. Such a notion of cultural contact (albeit in a variety of forms) inevitably finds its way into the Caribbean writing of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris too. Edward Kamau Brathwaite consistently suggests in his work that the Caribbean must be seen in terms of a model of 'creolisation', and it is only once this occurs that contemporary Caribbean society will move forward. His first trilogy, *The Arrivants*, ends with the possibility of the Caribbean people 'now waking / making // making / with their // rhythms some- / thing torn // and new' (A, pp.269-270). In his numerous works of fiction and non-fiction V.S. Naipaul is equally concerned with the possibility of creation in the face of the legacies of empire and colonialism. Initiating a reverse movement of cultural contact, in his 1987 novel *The Enigma of Arrival* Naipaul places the Caribbean writer in the heart of the English countryside. Here, he asks what the legacy of colonial hybridity really is, and considers how the postcolonial exile can forge a new identity in a new world. Echoing Naipaul's concerns, Derek Walcott's poetry also exists on the fault lines of hybridity. In an early poem he asks of his African and English ancestors: 'I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn divided to the vein?'<sup>19</sup>. In his 1970 essay, 'What the Twilight Says', Walcott offers a response to this question in his assertion that:

what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew, so that mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfathers' roots, both baptising this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian.<sup>20</sup>

As a declaration of hybrid identity and experience Walcott could not be more explicit. Most significantly, his statement also emphasises the degree to which the cultural contact of Old and New Worlds directly impinges on the language used within the Caribbean. In his two long poems, *Another Life* and *Omeros*, Walcott explores the desire for a language that can name the Caribbean and its people, and in the latter text he reveals the difficulty and necessity of reading the Caribbean in its

---

<sup>19</sup> Derek Walcott, 'A Far Cry From Africa', in *Collected Poems 1948-84* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), p.18.

<sup>20</sup> Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p.9.

own terms. In *Palace of the Peacock* Wilson Harris also confronts the question of Caribbean hybridity. Narrated by a split personality that incorporates both coloniser and colonised, the novel tells of the journey of a boat-crew made up of European, African, Asian and Amerindian members who go in search of a lost tribe of natives into the dark interior of the Guyanese heartland. As a template of Harris' creative vision *Palace of the Peacock* can be said to initiate an examination of what Harris has termed 'the cross-cultural imagination'<sup>21</sup>. But, before moving to consider each writer's works in detail, it is necessary to focus, for a moment, on the concept of hybridity.

For many readers the connection between the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Caribbean writing and the relation between Bakhtin and postcolonial theory will understandably seem, at first glance, quite obscure. As a philosopher, linguist and literary theorist Bakhtin never engaged directly with either colonial or postcolonial subjects. Yet, in the most recently published glossary of postcolonial critical terminology, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*, under the heading of 'hybridity' the authors nevertheless make the claim that Bakhtin provides 'the foundational use of the term'<sup>22</sup>. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin can therefore, in some sense, be said to provide a notional point of origin in the life of the concept of hybridity. Bakhtin's most detailed account of hybridity and the related process of hybridisation occurs in his seminal 1930's essay, 'Discourse in the Novel'. Written whilst he was in internal exile and working as a book-keeper on the newly collectivised farms of Kustanai in north-west Kazakhstan, 'Discourse in the Novel' initiates a radical and polemical approach to the history and language of the novel in Soviet scholarship. Written from the margins of the Soviet empire and in the same year as the Soviet Writer's Union proclaimed 'socialist realism' official literary doctrine, at the centre of the essay lies the notion of the hybrid: 'Every novel, taken as the totality of all the languages and consciousnesses of language embodied in it, is a *hybrid*.' (DN, p.366). Thus, in the context of analysing the various devices at the author's disposal for creating the image of a language in the novel, Bakhtin answers the question 'What is a hybridisation?' with the following response:

---

<sup>21</sup> This provides the title to Harris' 1983 study *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983).

<sup>22</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.118.

It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (DN, p.358).

One should note here the linguistic and novelistic context in which Bakhtin places his discussion of hybridisation. In thinking of the utterance as an arena of social encounter, Bakhtin captures a notion of the hybrid utterance as the conflictual meeting of two separate and socially differentiated accents, voices and interests. This is given added support by Bakhtin's earlier assertion that the hybrid utterance is an utterance which 'belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages", two semantic and axiological belief systems' (DN, p.304). I shall return later to Bakhtin's further elucidation of this. However, I wish to first consider where and how the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has been referenced in postcolonial studies. As the claim made regarding his significant contribution to current postcolonial critical terminology suggests, Bakhtin's concept of hybridity has made an interesting and eclectic journey into this expanding area of academic discourse.

A recent survey of the Bakhtin Centre on-line database shows that even now few Bakhtinian critics have felt inclined to focus their studies on the concept of hybridity in Bakhtin's work. At present there are only a handful of citations on 'hybridity' and 'hybridisation'<sup>23</sup>. In contrast, the large degree of implicit and explicit engagement with Bakhtin in postcolonial studies shows that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's claim is neither isolated nor unprecedented. In one of the most recently published selection of essays on hybridity (Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood's

---

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Arteaga, 'Beasts and Jagged Strokes of Color: The Poetics of Hybridisation on the US-Mexican Border', in *Bakhtin, Carnival and Other Subjects: Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference, University of Manchester, July 1991*, ed. by David Shepherd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp.277-294.

Ronald Blaber & Martin Gilman, *Roguary: The Picaresque Tradition in Australian, Canadian and Indian Fiction* (Springwood: Butterfly Books, 1990)

Rita de Grandis, 'Pursuing Hybridity: From the Linguistic to the Symbolic', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin, University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers*, ed. by Antony Wall (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)

Graham Pechey, 'Not the Novel: Bakhtin, Poetry, Truth, God', *Pretexts*, 4 (2) (1993), 63-86.

Mara Scanlon, 'By the People, For the People: Walcott's Epic and the Heteroglot Nation', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin, University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers*, ed. by Antony Wall (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)

*Debating Cultural Hybridity*), Bakhtin is assigned a crucial place in the debate in both the opening and closing chapters. In the former, Bakhtin's discussion of hybridisation provides the crucial grounding for the speculative discussion of 'what the contours of an emergent theory of hybridity that is postmodern, post-colonial and late-capitalist might be'<sup>24</sup>. In the latter, which attends to the task of 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', the author notes that Bakhtin's work 'constitutes a turning point in the debates on hybridity'<sup>25</sup>. Whilst this sense of 'a turning point' clearly problematises the attempt to locate Bakhtin at a notional point of origin (and it must be acknowledged that hybridity by its very nature confuses origins) it nevertheless suggests the significance of Bakhtinian hybridisation for contemporary postcolonial studies. Indeed, this is also suggested in the most recent full length account of hybridity in theory, culture and race, Robert Young's 1995 monograph, *Colonial Desire*. In the opening chapter of his illuminating study Young implies through the very structure of his discussion that Bakhtin holds a pivotal position between nineteenth century theories of sexual cross-fertilisation and racial intermixture and contemporary debates of cultural hybridity. Again this brings into doubt Bakhtin's role as a point of origin, but it still remains clear that Bakhtin plays a vital role in the story of *Colonial Desire*. On the one hand, Bakhtin provides the framework for the current academic interest in the concept of hybridity. On the other, Bakhtin's 'doubled form of hybridity', that is, a notion of hybridity which incorporates both conjunction and disjunction, offers a definition of the concept itself and a critique of its current uses. 'Hybrid is the nineteenth century's word. But it has become our own again' Young asserts<sup>26</sup>. But, in his identification of Bakhtin as the bridge between these two sentences, he implies that it is Bakhtinian hybridisation which can best illuminate the discursive tension created in that moment of contemporary enunciation.

If Bakhtin provides a notional point of origin for current discussions of postcolonial hybridity then it is the critic Homi Bhabha who arguably provides a notional destination in contemporary debates. 'What is theoretically innovative, and

---

<sup>24</sup> Pnina Werbner, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, ed. by Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, p.267.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.6.

politically crucial,' Bhabha states, 'is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences'<sup>27</sup>. This declaration is made in the opening paragraphs of Bhabha's introduction to his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture*. It can be read as a single sentence manifesto, a statement of intent, and it also offers a number of clues to the unravelling of his notion of hybridity. For, from this sentence alone, we can discover that Bhabha thinks of hybridity as: simultaneously theoretical and political; thought out and fought out in narratives of interaction and intersubjection; concentrated on moments or processes of disjunction between the pure and the impure, the original and the copy; and directed towards the exposure of 'the articulation of cultural differences'. For Bhabha, hybridity is a space of articulation in-between in which the authority of the culturally dominant sign is unsettled and exposed in a moment of enunciative repetition. In Bhabha's own words: 'This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p.4). This makes clear that the concept of hybridity is centred on questions of enunciation and representation in contemporary culture. Hybridity is both a condition of colonial subjection and a function or performance of (post-)colonial resistance. Of course, the nature of the subjection and resistance enacted and inscribed in the moment of enunciation is precisely the kind of question that also concerned Bakhtin as he wrote his essay on novelistic and discursive transmission from his position on the Soviet border.

With this in mind, the distance travelled between Bakhtin and Bhabha is perhaps most directly measured in those moments of theoretical expression in which the contemporary theorist looks back to the point of origin of their shared idea. Yet, close examination of *The Location of Culture* reveals that this retroactive journey is by no means easily traced. Nor does it follow the path most expected. Bhabha does reference Bakhtin in *The Location of Culture*, but not the Bakhtin of 'Discourse in the Novel'<sup>28</sup>. First, in 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'Introduction: Locations of Culture', *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, Monika Fludernik suggests that Bhabha 'makes little use of the Bakhtinian notion of *hybridization* since his concept of *hybridity* is already conceived as being internally dialectic and dynamized'.

modern nation' Bhabha alludes to Bakhtin's analysis of Goethe's *Italian Journey* that survives in a fragmentary late essay on the bildungsroman. Secondly, in 'The postcolonial and the postmodern: The question of agency' Bhabha seeks support for his conception of a contingent postcolonial agency from Bakhtin's attention to enunciation in 'The Problem of Speech Genres'. In both cases Bhabha adds qualifications to Bakhtin. In the former Bhabha questions Bakhtin's understanding of the time and space of the nation, whilst in the latter, he suggests that Bakhtin's sense of the enunciative moment as both a concrete and a generic utterance requires greater specification. It is notable too that in the latter instance Bhabha specifically admits to performing a 'catachrestic' reading of Bakhtin, that is 'reading between the lines, taking neither him at his word nor me fully at mine'<sup>29</sup>. This kind of reading suggests something of the disjunctive movement that occurs when ideas travel, a movement that is simultaneously within and beyond control. Thus, whilst in *The Location of Culture* Bhabha seeks to situate Bakhtin in a 'landscape of echoes and ambivalent boundaries, framed in passing' (p.189), in fact, such a reading of Bakhtin can be said to be as revealing of Bhabha and his critical context as it is of Bakhtin's analytical oeuvre. It is the active, performed enunciation of the contemporary critic which is arguably most important in such moments of discursive interaction.

If Bhabha fails to make a connection with Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Location of Culture*, he does go some way towards rectifying this apparent oversight in a more recent essay. In 'Culture's In-Between' Bhabha continues his project of (re-)locating culture by asking where an understanding of 'culture-as-difference' is most appropriately found in current academic thought. In contrast to a liberal reading of multiculturalism that desires an always equally respectful dialogic exchange between cultures across space and time, Bhabha reveals that his sympathies lie with a Bakhtinian hybrid 'which precisely undermines such claims to cultural totalisation'<sup>30</sup>. Such a revelation of theoretical alliance would be significant enough on its own, but in this instance Bhabha's engagement with Bakhtin goes even further. Immediately after providing an extended quotation from Bakhtin's 'Discourse in the

---

Fludernik, 'The Constitution of Hybridity: Postcolonial Interventions', in *Hybridity and Postcolonialism: Twentieth Century Indian Literature*, ed. by Monika Fludernik (Tubingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1998), p.22.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern' in *The Location of Culture*, p.189.

Novel', Bhabha finally lays bare the apparent degree of distance between the (notional) origin and new location of the concept of hybridity:

Bakhtin emphasizes a space of enunciation where the negotiation of discursive doubleness *by which I do not mean duality or binarism* engenders a new speech act. In my own work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism and inequity. (Bhabha, 'Culture's In-Between', p.56)

Bhabha's discursive shift from 'Bakhtin' to 'my own work' places a significant value on the contribution of Bakhtin to postcolonial theory and, in his expression of subsequent development Bhabha encapsulates a clear expression of the distance travelled between the two. It is implied here that Bhabha initiates the re-location of Bakhtin within the cultural, colonial and postcolonial sphere. For Bhabha, Bakhtin provides an understanding of the dialogic social utterance which is always split within itself and in its relation to other utterances. For Bhabha, Bakhtin's hybrid utterance incorporates a notion of cultural difference and potential cultural resistance by opening up a space through which others may speak. It is the job of the postcolonial critic to uncover that partial moment in which the minority voice speaks up against its authoritative interlocutors.

Of course the terms in which this theoretical travel is couched also implicitly reveal the unsettling effects of discursive transfer and transformation. On the one hand, one might say that Bhabha appears to read the mid-period Bakhtin through the lens of Bakhtin's later essays. Yet, on the other hand, it is apparent that not only does Bhabha fail to mention Bakhtin's novelistic context in his narrative of theoretical transaction, but he also fails to maintain or assert the specifics of Bakhtin's conception of hybridity. This is most evident in Bhabha's direct quotation of Bakhtin which, using Bhabha's terms against him, turns out to be something '*almost the same, but not quite*' (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p.86). This can be shown by comparing a couple of key sentences. First, Bhabha's extract from 'Discourse in the Novel' begins with the elliptical quotation 'The ... hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented ...', which should in fact read '... the *novelistic* hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented'. And second, the expression 'It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these

---

<sup>30</sup> Bhabha, 'Culture's In-Between', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay

forms' is actually preceded in Bakhtin's essay by the phrase '*In an intentional novelistic hybrid, moreover, the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms- the markers of two languages and styles- as it is the collision...*' (my italics). In one sense, these minute but nonetheless significant textual excisions allow us to catch Bhabha at his own game: a game in which the authorising presence and the originary myth represented by Bakhtin are estranged and disturbed. Bhabha's partial engagement with Bakhtin allows him to open up a space of ambivalence and negotiation between the two at the same time as retaining the overall sense of Bakhtin's conception of hybrids and hybridisation. However, such textual excisions also inevitably direct us back towards Bakhtin's essay in order to explore this space of ambivalence.

As my objection to Bhabha's reading of Bakhtin in 'Culture's In-Between' implies, the distance between Bakhtin's hybridity and Bhabha's hybridity can be gauged by the loss of two key areas of Bakhtin's discussion of hybridity. First, it is clear that Bakhtin's analysis of hybridisation is conducted almost wholly within the novelistic context. This point is demonstrated nowhere better than in my first reference to Bakhtin's essay, in which, Bakhtin proclaims every novel to be a linguistic hybrid. Indeed, one might even say that as a literary genre the novel can be recognised and identified according to its incorporation of a wide variety of socially heteroglot languages, and the novelist's artistic organisation of these "languages" within the text. Secondly, having offered his definition of what hybridisation is, Bakhtin almost immediately makes a distinction between artistic, intentional hybridisation and unconscious, unintentional hybridisation. It is this split notion of hybridity which Robert Young refers to in *Colonial Desire*, and which Pnina Werbner introduces in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. According to this doubled form of hybridity, Bakhtin suggests that unintentional hybridisation occurs in the day-to-day social use of language when various "languages" meet and merge in the arena of a single utterance, whilst, in contrast, intentional hybridisation is hybridisation that serves a purpose, a hybridisation that possesses artistic direction. Therefore, whereas the former is written in terms of 'the opaque mixing of languages in living utterances that are spoken in a historically evolving language', the latter constitutes a battle fought out on the territory of the utterance, a collision of differing points of view on

the world, the construction of an utterance ‘fractured into two individualised language-intentions’ (DN, p.361). As Bakhtin’s analysis of double-accented, double-styled hybrid constructions in Dickens’ *Little Dorrit* reveals the intentional novelistic hybrid is always highly motivated and invariably used in order to expose the authoritative word of another. To offer a brief example, in the enthusiastic glorification of Mr Merdle in the sentence ‘O, what a wonderful man this Merdle, what a great man, what a master man how blessedly and enviably endowed- in one word what a rich man!’ Bakhtin argues that ‘The whole point here is to expose the real basis for such glorification’ (DN, p.304). There are thus two voices operating here in the same sentence, the voice of the author and that of an imagined chorus of Merdle’s admirers; which, in this instance, offer the reader differing interpretations of Merdle’s character. More importantly, from this it can be argued that apart from providing the outlines of a cultural dialectic of sameness and difference Bakhtin’s discussion of hybridisation in the novel also directs us to ask the questions: who stands to benefit from the performance of the hybrid utterance? And, who stands to benefit from the analysis and exposure of this performance?

In Bhabha’s defence it must be acknowledged that Bakhtin’s attention to the novel is by no means hermetically-sealed from the vicissitudes of culture and society. Indeed the exact opposite is true. The Bakhtinian novel lives and breathes in an environment of living language. Therefore, to appropriate Bakhtin’s novelistic study for the benefit of cultural or postcolonial analysis is, in many respects, an inevitable by-product of the concrete, social nature of his discourse. Equally, the deliberate exposure of the workings of authority in Bakhtin’s artistic, intentional hybrid does not seem too far from Bhabha’s attempt to ‘describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity’. Indeed, many of Bhabha’s most lucid enquiries into the performative moment of hybridity find their grounding in the apparent shift between conjunction and disjunction in the colonial text. Yet, it remains clear that even in Bhabha’s textual encounters there is a significant absence or erasure of the terms of Bakhtin’s mode of analysis. In ‘Signs taken for wonders’ for example, Bhabha focuses upon the historically, geographically and culturally specific enunciation of the English book ‘under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817’. The essay opens with a lengthy citation from *The Missionary Register* (published in London by the Church Missionary Society in 1818). The citation tells

of an encounter between Anund Messeh, one of the earliest Indian catechists, and a large group of Hindu converts who are reading the Bible, which has recently been translated into their native language. Inviting the group into conversation Messeh discovers that in their love for the Holy Book the Hindus have a zealous belief in Christian doctrine. However, in their responses to his questions the Hindus also implicitly challenge both the source of the truths that the Bible contains and the authority that it represents. 'How can it be the European book' the Hindus ask, 'when we believe that it is God's gift to us?'<sup>31</sup>. Meanwhile, to Messeh's suggestion that they must be baptised and take the sacrament, they declare: 'We are willing to be baptised, but we will never take the Sacrament. To all the other customs of Christians we are willing to conform, but not to the Sacrament, because the Europeans eat cow's flesh, and this will never do for us' (Bhabha, "Signs taken for wonders", p.104). This encounter therefore figures as a paradigmatic example of the ambivalent assertion of colonial authority. In 'Signs taken for wonders' it offers Bhabha the opportunity to reveal the intricate manifestations and implications of his concept of hybridity. 'The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference' Bhabha proclaims (p.107). Thus, he argues that the assertion of colonial authority relies upon a process of discrimination in which the presence of the colonial other, the hybrid, is both articulated and acknowledged. But in the course of this process of discrimination the presence of the colonial other must also and always be necessarily disavowed. This split process of recognition means that, according to Bhabha, in the moment of colonial enunciation the colonial power inevitably produces a hybrid utterance. It is this that offers the possibility of native resistance and, at a later stage, critical resistance. Hybridity is not a problem that can be simply resolved as an issue of multiculturalism or cultural relativism, Bhabha asserts; rather:

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority- its rules of recognition. (p.114)

This illustrates the degree to which Bhabha's notion of hybridity may be called upon as a strategy of colonial and post-colonial resistance. In Bhabha's terms, Anund Messeh's address 'assumes its authority', whilst the disjunctive address of the Hindu

---

<sup>31</sup> Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' in *The Location of Culture*, p103.

natives brings into question 'the English presence, revealing the hybridity of authority and inserting their insurgent interrogations in the interstices' (p.117). However, this understanding of hybridity as a problematic of colonial enunciation also demonstrates Bhabha's implicit debt to a Bakhtinian mode of analysis. This is revealed in Bhabha's suggestion that his 'reading of the hybridity of colonial authority' unsettles and exposes the unbounded, imperialist, non-dialogic, unitary demand 'at the centre of the originary myth of colonialist power' (p.115). Yet, whilst the assertion of the English book as the word of authority is revealed in the course of the essay as an ambivalent space of enunciation, and whilst the apparently authoritative account of Messah's meeting with the Hindus actually contains within it the dialogical encounter of 'two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages", two semantic and axiological belief systems' (DN, p.304), at no time does Bhabha ever explicitly refer to Bakhtin.

In simple terms this reflects the fact that Homi Bhabha is not a Bakhtinian critic but is perhaps most accurately described as a postcolonial theorist. As a practising academic in an increasingly globalised market Bhabha's intellectual frame of reference is not simply Bakhtinian. His essays also invest heavily in the lexicon of both psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, and frequently cite the authoritative voices of such figures as Derrida, Fanon, Said and Foucault. Nevertheless, Bhabha's apparent erasure of Bakhtinian hybridisation from *The Location of Culture* might draw one to question the validity and relevance of Bakhtin's contribution to postcolonial studies. In more than one respect this is not in doubt. The increasing engagement with Bakhtin's ideas by postcolonial critics supports this, and it is also possible, as Graham Pechey does, to demonstrate Bakhtin's historical and theoretical affinity with 'the postcolonial condition'. Beginning with biography Pechey points to the fact that Bakhtin both lived *in* an empire and *during* a time of imperial decline. He also suggests that Bakhtin's most profitable contributions to postcolonial studies may be found in the interrogation of meaning contained in his early and late texts, and in the notion of hybridisation from his mid-period, which, according to Pechey, offers a way of re-thinking the nature of postcoloniality<sup>32</sup>. Yet, in other ways Bakhtin

---

<sup>32</sup> Graham Pechey, 'Bakhtin and the Postcolonial Condition', in *Exploiting Bakhtin*, ed. by Alastair Renfrew (Strathclyde: Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Strathclyde, 1997), pp.29-37. Pechey defines the 'post-colonial' in Bakhtinian terms as 'any project of literature or language which takes its distance both from the metropolitan standard and from any nativist dogma of the purity of

still represents something of an anomaly within postcolonial studies. I have shown that whilst on the one hand Bakhtin's work may be a valuable resource for postcolonial practitioners interested in invoking the concept of hybridity, on the other hand, the incorporation of Bakhtin within a postcolonial enterprise is not without its problems. This is not simply a self-evident statement of the difficulties encountered, and often overlooked, during moments of critical appropriation and expropriation. It is also literally evident in the enthusiastic but fragmentary engagement with Bakhtin in postcolonial studies. The most obvious example of this is Homi Bhabha's brief reference to Bakhtin in *The Location of Culture*, though it can also be seen in Young's *Colonial Desire* and Werbner and Modood's *Debating Cultural Hybridity*. There appears to be an imbalance between this repeated surface engagement and the understanding of Bakhtin as the so-called founder of a key postcolonial concept. Drawing attention to Bhabha's short essay 'Culture's In-Between', and the possible relationship between Bakhtinian hybridisation and Bhabha's postcolonial hybridity, goes some way towards addressing this imbalance.

Similarly, the claim made by postcolonial critics that Bakhtin provides a point of origin for the concept of hybridity also raises questions regarding Bakhtin's entry into other discourses and disciplines. Certainly Bakhtin's theories can be more accommodating than most. With the exponential growth of Bakhtin studies over the past twenty years it seems there have been few disciplines that have not claimed Mikhail Mikhailovich as a founding father. However, such a practice of laying claims on Bakhtin's intellectual legacy has resulted in recent years in a new cautiousness on the part of Bakhtinian critics. In the 1980's Bakhtin studies was characterised by what one commentator has suggested was a desire for dialogism: 'When Bakhtin told us that those works we knew as "novels" were really dialogues in disguise,' Ken Hirschkop remarks, '...he provided not only analytical tools but cause for celebration'<sup>33</sup>. In contrast, the 1990's have been characterised by a clear attempt to limit the field of appropriate enquiry by shifting the terms of debate from the

---

vernacular, emphasising instead an ineluctable creolization which not only lies in the background of the standard itself (English being after all the most impure because historically the most pidginized of the Germanic languages), but also runs all the way from heard speech into the unheard depths of being and consciousness' (p.35).

See also Pechey, 'On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogisations, Decolonisations', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, pp.39-66.

<sup>33</sup> Ken Hirschkop, 'Is Dialogism for Real?', *Social Text*, 30 (1987), 102.

celebration of Bakhtin's 'applications' to the investigation of his 'sources'<sup>34</sup>. It is perhaps evident that post-colonial studies is now entering a similar period of self-reflexiveness, especially in its attention to the concept of hybridity. The publication of Young's *Colonial Desire* and Werbner and Modood's *Debating Cultural Hybridity* shows this to be the case, whilst the invocation of the name of Homi Bhabha in academic articles is increasingly accompanied by a pointed critique of his so-called celebration of hybridity. In her review of *The Location of Culture* Shaobo Xie acknowledges the radicalism of Bhabha's critical project (claiming that Bhabha 'will shock the reader into renewed knowledge of his or her own position in history and cultural discourse'), but also recognises Bhabha's overt textualism. This means that Bhabha brackets off the political history of colonialism in favour of a criticism that becomes apolitically immersed in discourse<sup>35</sup>. Likewise, both Robert Young and Monika Fludernik question the political relevance of Bhabha's model for postcolonialism. Reading ambivalence as the consistent theme of Bhabha's work, Young asks whether the position of ambivalence actually poses any threat to dominant power relations<sup>36</sup>. Fludernik argues that in its poststructural and postmodern turns Bhabha's critical project is in fact a conservative attempt to 'get the postcolonial condition accepted under the current rules of recognition' (Fludernik, 'The Constitution of Hybridity', p.50). This brief survey offers an indication that there are clear problems with Bhabha's universalising of postcolonial hybridity as the transcendental signifier of contemporary culture (it is notable that his collection of

---

<sup>34</sup> This was particularly noticeable at the Ninth International Bakhtin conference held in Berlin, 26-30 July 1999, at which a tension was revealed between the philosophical and philological investigations into Bakhtin's works and the social and literary readings influenced and informed by those same texts. It is also indicated in Carol Adlam's 1997 article on Russian and Western appropriations and expropriations of Bakhtin. Adlam notes that 'while the first two decades of Bakhtin's influence in the Western humanities were characterised by an enthusiasm for his appropriateness to various fields of thought, it is only now in the current period of exponential growth, that we can detect an increasing self-reflexivity in Bakhtin studies which indicates an increasing caution about the appropriateness of these same areas to Bakhtin's own thought'.

Adlam, 'In the Name of Bakhtin: Appropriation and Expropriation in Recent Russian and Western Bakhtin Studies', in *Exploiting Bakhtin*, p.76.

<sup>35</sup> Shaobo Xie, 'Writing on Boundaries: Homi Bhabha's Recent Essays', *ARIEL*, 27 (4) (1996), 165. This line of argument is also adopted in one of the earliest and most rigorous critiques of colonial discourse, Benita Parry's 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse'. Here Parry argues: 'The significant differences in the critical practices of Spivak and Bhabha are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis' Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1-2) (1987), 43.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.44.

essays is not entitled 'The Locations of Culture' but *The Location of Culture*). However, if Bhabha's analysis does rely too heavily on the apolitical notions of text, it would seem that this is precisely the point at which the work of Bakhtin can be most productive for postcolonial studies, providing as it does a clear connection between the textual and the social spheres of discourse.

A further consequence of this self-reflexive turn in postcolonial studies is the emergence of the question of reading in discussions of hybridity. Moving the postcolonial to the centre of the question of culture Bhabha's notion of hybridity blurs the boundaries between self and other or inside and outside, and asks the Western critic and reader to address their hybridity as well as the hybridity of the colonial or postcolonial text. 'The Western metropole, must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of post-war migrants and refugees,' Bhabha declares, 'as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national identity' (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p.6). Is, then, the concept of hybridity not simply a critical tool with which the Western academy may gain access to the Caribbean, Indian or Asian text? Is it also a term for the West's own reading of itself? Amit Chaudhuri certainly believes this to be the case in his recent essay on the 'Lure of the Hybrid'. Suggesting that in the 'national allegory' of the postcolonial Indian novel the West 'has found a trope for its own historical preoccupation at least as much as it has discovered in itself a genuine curiosity for, and engagement with, Indian history and writing,' Chaudhuri goes on to claim:

At this point in Western history, hybridity is morally preferable to the authentic quotation or discourse to "presence"; and postcolonial culture, in particular, the postcolonial novel, becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself.<sup>37</sup>

This implicates hybridity in a current practice of political correctness where the representation of minority discourses and positions is concerned. It suggests too why postcolonial novels have been so popular in recent years. And, most importantly, it provides an explanation and implicit critique of the West's investment in the concept of hybridity. If Chaudhuri's assertion is to be taken on board then, as well as reading hybridity into the postcolonial text the Western critic and reader must also confront the lure of the hybrid on a personal level. But if my reading of Caribbean

---

<sup>37</sup> Amit Chaudhuri, 'Lure of the Hybrid', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 September 1999, 6.

writing is also a reading of my own culture, in what terms should this practice of reading be understood? In Bhabha's invitation to adopt a position of hybridity in *The Location of Culture* there is very little more alluring than 'the possibility of a cultural hybridity without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'. But do I really want to accept this offer? And, what does such an offer promise? Does it appropriately answer the anxieties of the student who says 'I am only a bourgeois white male, I can't speak'? And, does it suggest an appropriate enunciative framework for the Western reader to productively and responsibly engage with the literature of the Caribbean? I suspect not. At least, not in Bhabha's terms. In the following chapters, it is my intention to suggest that Bakhtin's work offers a valuable resource and response to the dilemma faced by the Western student and reader of Caribbean writing: a resource that not only provides a rich area of analysis in the field of cultural, linguistic and literary hybridisation within the literary text itself, but that also implicitly posits a potentially fruitful theorisation of the practice of dialogic reading across cultures.

## 2. From Creolisation to Calibanisation: Linguistic Performance in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and *X/Self*

Arguably the best indication of the reception of Caribbean writing in the 1950's and 1960's is to be found in the reviews of Louis James' 1968 collection of essays, *The Islands in Between*. Edward Lucie-Smith's 'West Indian Writing', offers a good illustration of the general willingness to expose the perceived shortcomings of the volume, and shows too the equal desire amongst critics to provide a corrective to the always contentious question of the inclusion and exclusion of certain issues and writers. Lucie-Smith first concerns himself with the treatment of Caribbean novelists, who command the majority of attention in the book, and suggests that V.S. Naipaul is both 'the most successful and the least characteristic' of the writers discussed (Lucie-Smith, 'West Indian Writing', 96). Naipaul's apparent acceptance of a Western notion of history clearly contributed to his success in the West. But, as Lucie-Smith makes clear, this also 'leads us to the real heart of the debate about West Indian literature' (97), which is the question of the writer's commitment to the Caribbean. Does the writer contribute to the making of 'a West Indian literature'? Is the concept of 'West Indianness' central to their aesthetic? Or, is the fact of their 'West Indianness' merely an incidental appendage? In contrast to Naipaul, Lucie-Smith suggests, stand writers such as Orlando Patterson, who adopts a sociological approach to the novel, or Wilson Harris, who attempts to reveal the mythic qualities of Caribbean life. Both serve the cause of 'West Indianness' in their novels, and Harris in particular is described as 'the novelist whom West Indian intellectuals most admire' (98). In terms of demarcating boundaries between writers this sets up an apparently immovable distinction between Naipaul and Harris. The former is successful in the West but disliked in the Caribbean, the latter is less commercially successful but praised in the Caribbean by academic readers. The former rejects the very notion of being a Caribbean writer, the latter works to uncover in the present the hidden meanings and identities of the Caribbean and its people. This may be a deliberate over-simplification, yet in his attention to the treatment of Caribbean poets in *The Islands in Between*, Lucie-Smith also detects a similar schism between what might be termed a Western-orientated poet and a Caribbean-orientated poet. James'

collection suggests that by the late 1960's there were only two poets of any note writing within the Anglophone Caribbean. Moreover, Derek Walcott is the only poet felt worthy of an individual essay in the book. Like Naipaul, Walcott's early poetry is seen to reveal the influence of the major poetic voices of the Western literary tradition. Walcott is described by Lucie-Smith as 'an extraordinarily civilised and accomplished writer' (100), and this cultural civility not only suggests itself in Walcott's style and craft but also reflects a psycho-cultural paradox of mixture and division that is intimately felt by the poet. In contrast to Walcott's personal poetry, Brathwaite 'aims to explain West Indians to themselves' (ibid.). His poetry is described as 'coarse grained', and it is said to have 'thoroughly disconcerted English critics who were unaware of the West Indian context' (101). However, whilst Naipaul and Harris are only implicitly set against each other, the apparent divergence of Walcott and Brathwaite is significant enough for Lucie-Smith to even suggest that it is necessary to choose between the two. 'These two poets', he writes, 'are polar opposites. If you accept one, it becomes necessary to reject the other' (100). Choosing Brathwaite, at the close of his review Lucie-Smith declares: 'Of all the authors who are discussed or mentioned in *The Islands in Between*, Brathwaite is the one who most radically questions West Indian as well as English assumptions' (102).

Quite understandably, the idea that Brathwaite holds greater relevance for an emergent Caribbean literature than the Anglophone Caribbean's most celebrated poet inevitably invited a number of contemporary critical responses. In his review of Brathwaite's *Islands*, Gordon Rohlehr ends by addressing the clichés attached to the opposition of the two poets, and argues that 'Walcott and Brathwaite may be poles removed in the nature of their art, but they are complementary rather than opposed'<sup>1</sup>. Taking a similar line, Anne Walmsley suggests that despite the apparent disparity between Walcott and Brathwaite in *The Islands in Between*, the Caribbean actually 'has two kings'<sup>2</sup>. Again, Walcott and Brathwaite are to be seen as complementary poets. Responding to both Lucie-Smith and Rohlehr, Patricia Ismond provides the most detailed exploration of the opposition in her essay entitled 'Walcott versus Brathwaite'. Ismond considers Brathwaite as a public poet versus Walcott as a private poet, which, she argues, is another way of thinking about Brathwaite's

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Rohlehr, 'Islands: A Review', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16 (4) (1970), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Walmsley, 'Dimensions of Song: A Comment on the Poetry of Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite', *Bim*, 13 (51) (1970), 152.

opposition between the folk poet and the humanist poet<sup>3</sup>. Most simply, the former poet speaks towards society and joins himself in its fate, whilst the latter speaks away from society and withdraws into a world of private contemplation. At the essay's heart this opposition draws Ismond to ask:

How does Walcott's humanistic approach serve the West Indian dilemma as compared to Brathwaite's kind of protest? How do these peculiar positions reveal their respective types of involvement in the environment- [and] how do their visions of West Indian hope and renewal compare?<sup>4</sup>

Whilst one might think that the folk poet would achieve the most positive response to each of these questions, in fact it is Walcott, the humanist poet, who Ismond favours. Though there is a grudging admission from Ismond that both poets make a valuable contribution to Caribbean literature, she concludes that Walcott's personal quest is '*a most powerful gesture of assertion*' (Ismond, 'Walcott versus Brathwaite', p.235, Ismond's italics), whilst Brathwaite's direct protest fails to leave its reader with 'any positive attitude' (236). Finally, Lucie-Smith's declaration of the necessity of choice has been followed from a Black African perspective in an essay entitled: 'How far are Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite similar? Is it impossible for the Caribbean to choose between the two. If so which way should they choose and why?'. Here the author returns to the question of 'commitment' to the Caribbean, and again suggests suitable criteria for making a choice between the writers:

Firstly, who draws a more truthful picture of the social reality of the area; secondly, who knows the language of men in society (and therefore what kind of audience is anticipated); and thirdly, what kinds (sic) of vision of society emerges from each of these writers.<sup>5</sup>

The essay itself concentrates on the stance each writer adopts in relation to Africa, England and to language. For the author, Brathwaite's treatment of Africa 'seems to be more balanced' (Anon., 'How far...?', 97) than Walcott's; Walcott's attention to England reveals that he may even be 'Western in his thinking' (98); and Brathwaite's use of language is said to be less rigid than Walcott's. This means that following the example of Lucie-Smith, the author can also claim at the end of his/her essay: 'It is

---

<sup>3</sup> Brathwaite is said to have suggested this opposition at a series of seminars on West Indian poetry held in the Caribbean in the mid-1960's. I have not found a published exposition of these seminars, but Brathwaite's argument is nonetheless clearly suggested in his *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation-Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Ismond, 'Walcott versus Brathwaite', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), p.230.

therefore quite clear that the Caribbean needs Edward Brathwaite and has absolutely no place for Derek Walcott' (100). Even in the context of the early-1970's, in which expressions of Black Power and Rastafarianism were gaining increasing popularity in the Caribbean, this assertion is quite astonishing. Walcott remained in the Caribbean longer than most other writers of his generation, and despite its Western influences his poetry has always been centred on the privilege of naming Caribbean experience. It does though offer a clear insight into the perceived ideological position adopted by each writer, and the degree to which the supposed divergence of these positions can serve to entrench barriers between apparently separate and distinct reading communities. Patricia Ismond recognises this much in the opening of her essay. For it is here that she suggests that the opposition of Walcott and Brathwaite is not simply relevant within the context of the socio-political divisions operating within the Caribbean during the period of liberation. It is also crucial in delineating the relations between a writer and other writers, and between a writer and his readers<sup>6</sup>.

Lucie-Smith's closing assessment therefore acknowledges the clear difficulty that Louis James' *The Islands in Between* has with a writer such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Although Brathwaite's work does not receive individual attention in the book, his work is described by Lucie-Smith as 'a sore spot that Mr James's contributors cannot keep away from' (Lucie-Smith, 100). It is a difficulty that sets Brathwaite apart in both Caribbean and English literary criticism. Brathwaite challenges Caribbean readers to explore the complexities of Caribbean identity head on. His poetry is solely concerned with the roots and possibilities of an indigenous culture in the Caribbean, and he is particularly concerned to uncover the African contribution to Caribbean life. This is an aspect of the Caribbean experience that few Caribbean readers have been willing to open themselves up to<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Brathwaite

---

<sup>5</sup> Anon., 'How far are Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite similar? Is it impossible for the Caribbean to choose between the two. If so which way should they choose and why?', *Busara*, 6 (1) (1974), 90-91.

<sup>6</sup> Ismond notes that behind the opposition of Brathwaite and Walcott there is an issue to be faced: 'Either, on the one hand, there are deficiencies in the poets that makes this an authentic cleavage. Or, on the other hand, there are limitations in the attitudes of the audience that get in the way of a proper appreciation' (Ismond, 'Walcott versus Brathwaite', p.220).

<sup>7</sup> Commenting upon Brathwaite's *Masks*, Gordon Rohlehr states: 'The general reaction in the Caribbean is one of not really wanting to open themselves up to the African experience. The African experience has been censored out of us, and we have learned to censor ourselves. You say Africa, you say black, and the minute you say these words, there is a sense of why am I going on about this? Or, why am I preoccupied with the past? These notions immediately arise and you feel you shouldn't talk about it'.

challenges Western readers to enter an alien environment in the knowledge that for the most part the terrain (geographical, social, cultural, spiritual etc.) will be revealed in terms that are likely to exclude rather than include. As the difficulties faced by Caribbean readers show, this is not simply a question of race, class or gender. Rather, it is a question of critical distance that is perhaps more keenly felt the greater the degree of perceived cultural difference. Set in motion by the rhythms of African music and poetry and steeped in references to African religion and ritual, Brathwaite's poetry is likely to obstruct, rather than encourage dialogue across a cross-cultural divide. As a consequence, it is suggested in a 1994 volume of *World Literature Today* devoted to the Caribbean poet, that Brathwaite's entire career might be read as a trial of authenticity. Not least, this trial concerns the tension between Brathwaite's Caribbean concerns and the demands and expectations of a Western readership. Caribbean writers 'need to be able and willing to accept the Western reader as their interlocutor', Silvio Torres-Saillant asserts:

the writer comes from one world and the reader from another. The inside must speak to the outside, but the speaker must contrive a vocal texture that will not disturb the outsider's way of hearing. The insider must reveal a good deal of the mysterious interiority of the native cosmos for the outsider to feast upon, but the rendition must be codified in the system of signs that govern the interlocutor's view of the world<sup>8</sup>

This sense of two worlds meeting in the contemplation of the text places the Caribbean writer and the Western reader in a process of negotiation, in which the insider deliberately engages the outsider in the terms most familiar to the latter. It suggests that the Caribbean writer can only achieve success in the West by in some way suppressing his or her otherness. Conversely, the Western reader is most likely to enjoy and understand the stylistic and thematic texture of Caribbean writing if it has in some way already been translated. Following this logic one might therefore speculate that both Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul are masters of this strategy, whereas Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris are not. Walcott and Naipaul are celebrated in the West as the finest writers in the English language today (and for purposes of sales and marketing this epithet consistently adorns their book-covers), whereas both Brathwaite and Harris are increasingly seen as difficult writers to be noted for their experimentation and innovation. In fact, though one might argue that

---

Rohlehr, 'Rohlehr on Brathwaite', in *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, ed. by E.A. Markham (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1989), p.110.

in his novels Harris aims to renegotiate the terms of this textual encounter, Brathwaite appears to explicitly reject such a textual contract. This obviously presents obstacles for the Western reader to overcome in his understanding of Brathwaite's poetry, but it would be wrong to suggest that these are insurmountable barriers preventing access. In this chapter I will therefore address Brathwaite's cultural and historical otherness, and use this as a means to explore the foundations of a cross-cultural reading of Caribbean writing (how does Brathwaite's poetry address me as a Western reader? And, how might I choose to accept or reject its codes of address, and (re)position my relationship to it?). In particular, I will argue that Brathwaite's poetry thematically and formally depends upon a notion of linguistic performance. His concern for the Caribbean is centred on the acquisition of a language appropriate to the Caribbean experience and, as a consequence, he consistently adopts a performative relation to language in his poetry. It is this that lets the Western reader into Brathwaite's texts. It is the possibility of reading Brathwaite's poems as performed utterances that also makes Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to language crucial in this discussion.

Brathwaite's linguistic performance involves him in a writing strategy of 'replacing language' that is central to the understanding of colonial and postcolonial literatures. 'Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse', the editors of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* state, 'because the colonial process itself begins in language'<sup>9</sup>. The same authors note in their earlier study, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, that 'the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised place'<sup>10</sup>. The key strategies for doing this are the inter-related processes of abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation refers to the rejection of the language of the centre (i.e. London, England) as a normative concept, and therefore consciously disturbs the boundaries between so-called linguistic purity and impurity. Appropriation assumes that all language is more or less riddled with impurities, and therefore sanctions and describes the postcolonial writer's

---

<sup>8</sup> Silvio Torres-Saillant, 'The Trials of Authenticity of Kamau Brathwaite', *World Literature Today*, 68 (4) (1994), 698-699.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.283.

assimilation and adaptation of those aspects of the language and culture of the centre that are most useful for the formation of new identities in the formerly colonised place. In the postcolonial literary text this effects a 're-placing' of language in order to usurp socio-cultural power from the centre, and equally importantly to offer the possibility and conditions for an effective postcolonial voice to emerge. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin discover, one of the central paradoxes faced by the postcolonial writer is the 'problem inherent in using a language while trying to reject the particular way of structuring the world it seems to offer' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p.48). Of the writers in this study, it is Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris who are most troubled by their use of a language that both is and is not theirs. For Brathwaite, this dichotomous relation to language is central to his poetry. Brathwaite's poetry from *The Arrivants* (first published as a complete trilogy in 1973) to *X/Self* (published in 1987) consistently stages a linguistic performance that foregrounds the poet's troubled relationship to the English language. In the former, this linguistic performance most immediately arrests the Western reader in its use of rhythm, as the reader is transported from the cultural and spiritual landscape of the Black diaspora to the 'soundscape' and 'wordscape' of the poem<sup>11</sup>. Brathwaite's inventive use of African and Afro-American musical rhythms in *The Arrivants* provides a musical accompaniment to the poetry that helps to place the poems within a specific cultural context and emphasises the performative aspect of the trilogy. It also complies with Brathwaite's own notion of a 'jazz' aesthetic at work in Caribbean literature, which is most readily seen in his essay 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel'<sup>12</sup>. As the elements of this aesthetic suggest, this linguistic performance also takes the form of a deliberate play

---

<sup>10</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.38.

<sup>11</sup> This is suggested by Nathaniel Mackey in 'Wringing the Word', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1995), p.132.

<sup>12</sup> Here Brathwaite argues that there is a correspondence between jazz ('the emancipated Negro's music', 'the perfect expression for the rootless, cultureless, truly ex-patriate Negro', 'a music of protest, and a music of comfort and protection') and literary expression in the West Indian novel. In particular, Brathwaite offers an analysis of Roger Mais' *Brother Man*, first published in 1954, and suggests that jazz elements can be seen in the words used, the rhythm adopted, the allusion to folk forms, the improvisation and repetition upon a refrain and the variation in image and metaphor of the main theme. It is worth noting that as with Brathwaite's notion of 'nation-language', the jazz aesthetic depends upon an unconscious link with African and folk forms and the conscious promotion of 'an alternative to the English Romantic/Victorian cultural tradition which still operates among and on us' (pp.72-73). Brathwaite, 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel', in *Roots* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de Las Americas, 1986), pp.55-110.

with language. The Caribbean poet of *The Arrivants* is a 'word-breaker' and 'creator' (A, p.167), whose linguistic fragmentation and experimentation necessitates the reader to take a new look at the Caribbean region and its inhabitants. Central to the thematic drive of the trilogy is the need to abrogate and appropriate a language capable of properly naming Caribbean experience. The development of this proposition can be tracked through the poem through the performance of a variety of voices. Each represents a separate aspect of the Black diasporic experience, and each contributes to the eventual emergence of the poet's voice. Moreover, the many voices of *The Arrivants* do not simply interact with one another internally, that is within the confines of this particular text. They also participate in the performance of later utterances. In doing so they establish themselves as 'links in a continuous chain of speech performances' (MPL, p.72) in which Brathwaite continues to interrogate the nature and implications of language use for the Caribbean poet and his readers. Brathwaite's linguistic performance incorporates a movement from creolisation to calibanisation, in the sense that while his approach to language has always been informed by a cultural process of material, psychological and spiritual intermixture and change<sup>13</sup>, in his most recent work this has resulted in a more direct confrontation with the perceived signifiers of English cultural and linguistic dominance. Brathwaite's linguistic creolisation is now also a performance of linguistic calibanisation, in which the curse that linguistically binds Caliban to Prospero is evaded through the potential intervention of a previously submerged mother (Sycorax) and the re-emergence of a submerged language.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's linguistic performance can be read in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to language precisely because Bakhtin's understanding of language, discourse and the utterance is similarly based on a notion of linguistic performance. Simon Dentith makes this point when he notes that for Bakhtin and members of his intellectual circle (and by extension their readers), 'the key move is to take as your starting point language in use rather than language as a code or underlying system'<sup>14</sup>. This is suggested on a number of occasions in Bakhtin's monographs and essays, though for the purposes of illustration one might

---

<sup>13</sup> In *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), Brathwaite most succinctly defines creolisation as 'a cultural action- material, psychological and spiritual- based upon a stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and- as white/black culturally discrete groups- to each other' (p.296).

<sup>14</sup> Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.28.

most readily refer to the opening of the fifth chapter of Bakhtin's study on Dostoevsky and the opening of his 1934-35 essay, 'Discourse in the Novel'. In the former, Bakhtin states that the term 'discourse' signifies 'language in its concrete living totality' (PDP, p.181); whilst in the latter, he notes that 'verbal discourse is a social phenomenon- social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning' (DN, p.259). Consequently, whilst the linguistics of the early decades of the Twentieth century was dominated in Russia by the teachings of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, it is clear that Bakhtin and his ally and friend Valentin Voloshinov were both concerned to propose a sociological approach to language. There are four key texts in which Bakhtin and Voloshinov address the question of language. These are *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 'Discourse in the Novel' and 'The Problem of Speech Genres'. In each of these the author's first move is to offer a critique of the abstractions of traditional linguistics (see MPL, pp.45-98; PDP, pp.181-183; DN, pp.259-271 and SG, pp.67-68). Thus, whilst traditional linguistics studies language as a fixed system or a normative set of codes regulating the relationship between signifier and signified or the contract between ideal speaker and ideal listener, both Bakhtin and Voloshinov argue that the practice of studying language in isolation is essentially misconceived. For them, language is inherently social. It is both intrinsic and extrinsic to each individual consciousness, and as a result, it necessitates both speaker and listener to adopt an active relation to the utterance in the process of verbal interaction. In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin notes:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value-judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (DN, p.276)

This suggests that each word we speak is involved in a complex struggle of representation and self-assertion. Upon entering a world of already spoken words our own word must negotiate a series of 'complex interrelationships' with a number of different ideological positions ('value judgements and accents'). For Bakhtin, language is never unitary, nor is it neutral or impersonal: 'it is not, after all,' he exclaims, 'out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!' (DN, p.294). Rather,

where a speaker finds his words is 'in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions' (ibid.). Though he argues that the process of appropriating and assimilating other words is difficult precisely because languages are socially unequal, Bakhtin nevertheless implies that all discourse is subject to dialogic interaction and therefore all discourse is formed on a boundary between native and alien words. He proposes that our own word is likely to be influenced by the word of another to the extent that it may even have a concrete effect on our style and mode of expression. Our own word is therefore the complex product of an active relation between speaker and listener (or 'self' and 'other'), in which the word we speak is formed in response to another's past and present utterances and in anticipation of another's response in the future.

This dialogic concern for language is first made clear in Voloshinov's 1929 study, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Here Voloshinov argues that the alien word has been of crucial importance within linguistics and the philosophy of language, but again, notes that it has been thoroughly misconceived. Building upon the assumption that each individual utterance is constructed between two socially organised individuals, and that each word is orientated towards an addressee, he states:

In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other". I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (MPL, p.86)

This suggests that in the production of each word or utterance a dialogic process takes place that marks out verbal communication as a linguistic performance staged between word, speaker and listener. The speaker's enunciation of his utterance is necessarily determined by the socio-ideological purview of both speaker and listener, and by the extra-verbal context in which the utterance is performed. Equally, the speaker's word is said to possess an evaluative and intonational accent that reflects his or her ideological intentions. However, as Voloshinov suggests, the degree to which each of these determinants impacts on the style, tone and formation of the word is negotiated in the interaction between the speaker and a real or imagined

listener. Replace the term's 'word', 'speaker' and 'listener' here with those of 'text', 'author' and 'reader', and it is clear how significant this sociological conception of language is for literary analysis. Ann Shukman recognises this when she notes that Bakhtin and Voloshinov's approach to linguistic performance 'centres around the idea that verbal interaction- dialogue, understood in the widest sense- is the basic reality of language, and the utterance the basic unit for analysis'<sup>15</sup>. She concludes her review of Voloshinov's text with the suggestion that the 'understanding of every verbal act as an utterance opens the way to the notion of the work of literature as an utterance posited towards its assumed readership' (Shukman, 54-55). This confirms that Bakhtin and Voloshinov's sense of linguistic performance opens the way to a literary analysis that necessarily involves author, text and reader in a constant and conflictual negotiation that is centred upon the potency of language. And it is in this sense that the literary text may be seen as a performed utterance.

Published in 1973 Brathwaite's 'New World Trilogy' is still considered by many to be his most significant work. Comprising *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968) and *Islands* (1969), the poem as a whole is concerned with the fate of the Black Caribbean as the region enters an era of social, political and cultural independence. Described as 'a poem that every Caribbean writer will have to read and think about'<sup>16</sup>, *Rights of Passage* evokes the impression of a widespread cultural experience of rootlessness and dispossession as Caribbean man leaves the islands in search of life, love and labour. While the islands drift helplessly, fermenting mimicry and revolution in equal parts, the poet looks with anger and sorrow at the desolation of the New World. But at this stage he can do nothing. In *Masks* the homeless and historyless poet goes in search of spiritual roots, as he reverses the journey of the Middle Passage and returns to Africa. However, this is no simple romanticised vision of the ancestral past. Born in the New World, the poet recognises that he can never be wholly integrated into the African past. Instead, he surveys African language, history and religious ritual for points of connection, moments of ancestral survival and spiritual communion. The most powerful of these is the African talking drum ('Atumpan'), which sets a rhythm and refrain for the poet to follow. Back in the New World in *Islands* the poet again wanders the desolate terrain only to find a sterile land of materialist endeavour and secular destruction. He returns to the Caribbean

<sup>15</sup> Ann Shukman, 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language', *Language and Style*, 12 (1) (1979), 54.

<sup>16</sup> Louis James, 'Rights of Passage', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 13 (1) (1967), 41.

though, with a new sense of the sacred and the historical and religious continuities that may offer the possibility for salvation in the region. In *Islands*, more than *Rights of Passage* or *Masks*, the Caribbean poet works towards the possibility of a spiritual and linguistic reawakening, and the trilogy ends with ‘hearts / no longer bound // to black and bitter / ashes in the ground // now waking / making // making / with their // rhythms some- / thing torn // and new’ (A, pp.269-270). This closing phrase is perhaps Brathwaite’s most succinct expression of the positive effects of a process of linguistic creolisation within Caribbean society. In no small part this reflects the fact that Brathwaite’s New World trilogy was written at the same time as his doctoral study on creole society in Jamaica in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries. For a large part of his working life Brathwaite has been a historian by profession, though it seems safe to argue that his scholarly and creative careers are necessarily intertwined. In particular, Brathwaite argues in *The Development of Creole Society* that contemporary Caribbean society can only be properly understood within the framework of the acknowledged and illicit processes of acculturation and interculturalisation that were in operation during the colonial period. The effects of this intermixture can be recorded throughout all areas of social interaction. Most specifically though, in the context of linguistic performance this allows Brathwaite to claim that: ‘It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled’ (Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, p.237). Such a framework of imprisonment, use and misuse and rebellion clearly recognises the fact that during the period of slavery and the plantation system in the Caribbean, linguistic encounters between master and slave were far from benign affairs. However, while language may have been the means through which slaves were socialised and normalised into the structures of slave-society, it also provided the best means through which social, cultural and linguistic dominance could be challenged and brought into question. The linguistic encounter provides the opportunity for the slave to consciously position himself in relation to the words of an other (the master), and through his use and misuse of his master’s language to assimilate, appropriate and abrogate those words to his own intentions. Of course, just as Brathwaite calls for the acknowledgement of historical continuities between the colonial period and the present, so too it might be argued that the language of

contemporary post-independence Caribbean literature can be read as a creolised language that seeks to perform an act of linguistic rebellion.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's rebellion in *The Arrivants* thematically and formally depends upon a notion of linguistic performance, and it is in the poem's rhythms that this is most immediately evident. 'Rhythms are crucial to the poem,' Louis James writes in his review of *Rights of Passage*, 'that is why it must be read aloud, and why many European readers without ears tuned to Caribbean cadences are bound to find passages flat and crude' (James, 'Rights of Passage', 41). James is certainly correct in his opening statement, though his closing assessment is perhaps questionable. For, whilst the ears of a 'European reader' may not be finely tuned to a Caribbean wavelength, it would nevertheless be a resistant reader who does not recognise the thematic importance of the poem's rhythms from the outset. Brathwaite's trilogy opens with a poem, 'Prelude', in which the words themselves act as instruments of dislocation and detribalisation as the reader is thrust into an unnamed landscape on the verge of extinction. With monosyllabic doom the opening lines establish a sense of language being stretched to its naked simplicity as images of slavery are juxtaposed with a desperate plea for individual and communal salvation to be found in linguistic creativity:

Drum skin whip  
 lash, master sun's  
 cutting edge of  
 heat, taut  
 surfaces of things  
 I sing  
 I shout  
 I groan  
 I dream  
 about (A, p.4)

In his magisterial study of Brathwaite's *Arrivants*, entitled *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite*, Gordon Rohlehr describes this poem as 'a general introduction and overture to all three books'<sup>17</sup>. He notes too that that the drum is the major word, theme and symbol of the trilogy. The drum 'begins and ends each work, and is the Alpha and Omega of Brathwaite's new poetry. The drum is associated with a principle of rhythm, sound and music that simulates the tones of speech. The drum eventually becomes a symbol for both the

---

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Rohlehr, *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite* (Tunapuna, Trinidad: Gordon Rohlehr, 1981), p.23.

poet and his poetry' (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.64). In this opening stanza therefore, the beat of 'drum', 'skin' and 'whip' sets the rhythm for the rest of the poem, and within this rhythm the poet is able to sing, shout, groan and dream. Elsewhere, as Rohlehr and others indicate, the rhythm modulates to incorporate amongst others: African-American jazz and blues ('Folkways', 'The Journeys'), Jamaican reggae and ska ('Wings of a Dove') and Trinidadian calypso ('Calypso') in *Rights of Passage*; Akan drum rhythms ('Atumpan' and 'Tano') in *Masks*; and jazz ('Jah'), steel band ('Caliban'), Jamaican folksong ('Cane'), Negro spiritual ('The Stone Sermon') and Haitian drums ('Vèvè' and 'Jou'vert') in *Islands*. There are also poems in which the diction and rhythms of speech take control, most notably in 'Wings of a Dove', 'The Dust', 'Rites' and 'Cane', though these poems merely represent Brathwaite's more deliberate use of what he terms 'nation-language'<sup>18</sup>. And, so too there are poems that implicitly draw on the rhythms of other poems and novels. There is evidence of Brathwaite's debt to T.S. Eliot's Prufrock in 'Calypso' (in the lines 'O it was a wonderful time / an elegant benevolent redolent time- / and young Mrs. P.'s irrelevant crime / at four o'clock in the morning....'), whilst the central figure of 'Wings of a Dove' recalls the hero of Roger Mais' 1954 novel *Brother Man*. In their allusion to musical, verbal and literary contexts each of these rhythmic modulations demonstrates Brathwaite's rich use of a variety of sources to shape his poetic vision. Each also indicates the performative nature of *The Arrivants*. In one sense, this

---

<sup>18</sup> In his 1979 lecture, *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite argues that within the linguistic spectrum of the Anglophone Caribbean (which is broadly made up of English, creole English, nation-language and the disappearing fragments of Amerindian, Indian, Asian and African languages) nation-language is the language closest to the Caribbean experience. It is the language that Caribbean people actually speak. Moreover, it is characterised by a close proximity to the oral tradition, a close alliance to the African experience, a sense of communication with a communal native audience, and hence an agglomeration of meaning in a process of 'total expression' (pp.17-19). As a lived, dynamic and changing phenomenon nation-language challenges the institutionally imposed notion of Standard English. However, more than just a stratum of language, nation-language also challenges the dominant rhythm of English verbal expression: the pentameter. For Brathwaite, the pentameter 'carries with it a certain kind of experience' that does not correspond to the Caribbean. 'The hurricane does not roar in pentameters', Brathwaite comments, 'And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience?' (p.10). Questioning the logocentrism of the West, nation-language therefore effects and calls for a radical shift in the understanding of Caribbean language and life. It suggests continuities in the modern Caribbean with the submerged languages of slaves brought over in the Middle Passage, and it proposes that the language used in contemporary Caribbean literature is 'English in a new sense' (p.5). Elaine Savory notes that in *History of the Voice* Brathwaite essentially suggests that nation-language poems represent 'the rhythmic reflection of human response to African experience as transmuted into Caribbean life' (Savory, 'Returning to Sycorax/Prospero's Response: Kamau Brathwaite's Word Journey', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, p.214).

clearly involves an allusion to actual musical, verbal and literary performance<sup>19</sup>. However, it also involves a performed positioning of the poetic text both culturally and socio-historically. Explicating the nature of dialogic relations in verbal interaction, Voloshinov notes in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* that ‘Any utterance, no matter how weighty and complete in and of itself, is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication’ (MPL, p.95; Bakhtin’s italics). This means that each utterance is formed on the boundary between a ‘concrete verbal interaction’ (i.e. the poem’s orientation toward a particular internal or external addressee) and an ‘extraverbal situation’ (i.e. the poem’s allusion to a particular musical, oral or literary background, ostensibly shared between addresser and addressee). Therefore, just as each poem takes its literal meaning from the words on the page, so too those words refer to a social and historical reality outside the text that both places the textual utterance within a specific area of cultural discourse, and to a greater or lesser extent determines the style and rhythm of that utterance. For Brathwaite the rhythm of the poem as a performed utterance is crucial because it emphasises the orality of *The Arrivants* and, equally importantly, because it allows him to counterpose the Black Caribbean’s manifest sense of rootlessness in the modern world with a latent sense of the emergent possibilities for a new understanding of Caribbean life. Behind each of the rhythmic modulations of the poem is the image and beat of the drum. As an addition to Gordon Rohlehr’s analysis of the musical contexts of *The Arrivants* in *Pathfinder* it will therefore prove fruitful to track the repetition and development of the rhythm that opens the trilogy.

With the words ‘Drum skin whip’, ‘Prelude’ opens *The Arrivants* with a collection of hard sounds as the scorched landscape is revealed in a ‘wordscape’ in which the poet’s words are on the verge of drying up. It is only the rhythm of the drum and the rhythm of the work song that keeps the poet alive and gives his poem the momentum to go on. Consequently, the rhythm set by ‘Drum skin whip’ is echoed in the opening line of the second stanza by ‘Dust glass grit’. As the poem’s vision expands after the opening invocation of the poetic voice, the twisting internal rhyme of the following stanzas reflect the erosion of all matter to dust and the

---

<sup>19</sup> This point is perhaps more evident in the case of music and speech, but it is also notable that Brathwaite understands Eliot as a poet of the spoken word as much as the written word. In his 1984 lecture, *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite reveals that ‘what T.S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone’ (p.30). This is expounded upon in an accompanying note that also connects Eliot to a jazz aesthetic.

shifting of sand across the desert. '[A]cross the scorched / world water ceases', the poet writes, and again this finds its echo in the rotting 'carcasses' of the 'hot wheel'd caravan'. The sharpness of the glass and grit is illustrated in the use of assonance on 'c' and 'b' sounds to describe an environment where 'clay / cool coal clings / to glass, creates / clinks, silica glitters', whilst upon an isolated tree stump ravished by fire 'black / birds blink' (A, pp.4-5). Thus, in this opening poem the stark rhythm beaten out on the drum inaugurates a sense of sterility and dispossession, a vision of a world going to waste. Whilst the poet calls for his people to build new villages, to set down roots, the rhythm is as unforgiving as the natural elements, as swarms of flies suck the life-blood of whole populations and bodies rot away into dust. At the poem's heart there is a momentary shift in the rhythm as the poet calls for his people to look out across the dry riverbed:

But no  
rain comes  
while the flesh  
rots, while the flies  
swarm. But across the  
dried out gut of the river-  
bed, look!  
The trees are  
cool, there  
leaves are  
green, there  
burns the dream  
of a fountain,  
garden of odours,  
soft alleyways. (A, pp.6-7)

But this shift in rhythm, which is based around the repetition of 'are...there' and the rhyme of 'green' and 'dream', represents the vision of an impossible Eden. The desolate beat soon reasserts itself, and the poet's second call for new villages to be built is followed by the consumption of 'the dry leaves of the hot / house' by flames. 'Flames burn, scorch, crack', the poet laments, and the first 'Prelude' of Brathwaite's New World trilogy closes with the doom-laden line: 'Flame burns the village down' (A, pp.7-8). In this opening poem, then, which can be seen as an impressionistic rendition of the effects of geographical dispossession and migration, the hot dust and the engulfing flames have a destructive capacity. However, as Gordon Rohlehr notes 'by the end of *Rights of Passage*, both the fires of the past and those that are to come are accepted as symbolic *rites* of passage to be courageously encountered by all who

seek to create the new vision' (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.64). In its allusion to race, slavery, torture and trauma 'Prelude' does not seem to offer any indication of that 'new vision', but the rhythm of the poem will be encountered again.

The rhythmic structure and phrasing of 'Prelude' are repeated on two further occasions in *Rights of Passage*. It is also implicitly seen in the crucial opening poems of *Masks*, in which the poet returns to Africa to uncover his spiritual ancestry. In each repetition there are modifications that reflect shifts in intention, purpose and register, and in each the slowly emerging rhythm suggests lines of continuity might be drawn connecting the different parts of the Black diaspora. In the second 'Prelude' (A, pp.28-29), which is the lead poem of 'The Spades', Brathwaite relocates the original poem in the contemporary Caribbean and places it in the collective voice of the descendants of slaves. Temporally removed from the events of the slave period these children find their connection to the past is not enough to fall back on. Whilst on the one hand unlike their fathers and mothers they have 'no screams / no whip rope / lash', on the other, they have neither 'dreams' nor 'sweat- / ing free- / ness'. Here then, the rhythm of 'Drum skin whip' is replaced by the lines: 'Memories are smoke / lips we can't kiss / hands we can't hold / will never be / enough for us' (A, p.28). Yet, still it is an unforgiving rhythm. It now beats out the 'smash-and-grab' attitude of the young speaker who says, 'To hell / with Af- / rica / to hell / with Eu- / rope too, just call my blue / black bloody spade / a spade and kiss / my ass'. It is unlikely that this vituperative rejection of Europe and Africa represents the view of Brathwaite himself. However, echoing the natural desolation of the opening poem the rhythm here supports the expression of a contemporary spiritual desolation. The same rhythm is next seen in the final poem of *Rights of Passage*, 'Epilogue', in an almost word-for-word repetition of the opening two stanzas of the first 'Prelude'. Here however Brathwaite alters the direction of his opening verse, as the meaning of 'Epilogue' pivots on the line: 'but my people / know / that the hot / day will be over / soon...' (A, p.81). Hence, in contrast to the tone of waste and descent which opened the first volume of the trilogy, Brathwaite concludes *Rights of Passage* on a note of ascent: 'the flamboyant car- / cass that rots / in the road / in the gutter / will rise / rise / rise / in the butter- / flies of a new / and another / morning' (A, pp.81-82). Further evidence of this change of direction is shown in the formal shift to four-line stanzas mid-way through the poem in order to tell the story of 'old negro Noah' returning to the land of Africa after the Flood.

Brathwaite suggests that Noah's return 'to the firm / earth / his home' makes him a man again, and therefore his return to Africa effects a completion of his identity. The poem ends with the poet imploring Noah, the other characters of the trilogy, his readers and himself to open his Ark: 'shatter the door / and walk / in the morning / fully aware // of the future / to come' (A, p.85). This therefore anticipates the return to Africa that provides the main focus of *Masks*.

As the poet, like Noah, crosses a threshold that is both real and imagined, in the opening poem of *Masks* the principal litany of singing, shouting, groaning and dreaming finds its answer in 'this shout' and 'this song' (A, p.90). This 'Prelude' therefore represents the naming and awaking of Africa as the poet's shout and song can be seen to emerge out of the seven African kingdoms of Songhai, Mali, Chad, Ghana, Timbuctu, Volta and Benin. Here the rhythm established by 'Drum skin whip' is modified to offer a new ritual and ancestral decorum as the original line is stretched to become 'Out / of this / bright / sun, this / white plaque / of heaven, / this leaven- / ing heat / of the seven / kingdoms' (A, p.90). Whereas before the dry sun and white heat of the opening poem of the trilogy symbolised death and destruction, here the 'bright sun' and the 'leavening heat' of the 'white plaque of heaven' is a symbol of performance and creativity. The opening of *Masks* has been seen as the representation of a West African creation myth<sup>20</sup>. It is followed by an act of naming (notably in which the seven African kingdoms are not named in chronological order); a call to the drum of Africa ('Beat heaven, / of the drum, beat / the dark leaven / of the dungeon / ground where buds are wrapped / twist- / ed round dancing roots'); and an act of libation in which the poet offers a traditional prayer to Nana Firimpong, an ancestor, and Asase Yaa, the Earth Mother. The most significant part of the poet's request for a fruitful connection with his ancestral past is his invocation of the rhythm of the African drum, and this call is answered in the 'The Making of the Drum' and 'Atumpan'. The former provides a five-part rendition of the sources and characteristics of the talking drum: 'The Skin', 'The Barrel of the Drum', 'The Two Curved Sticks of the Drummer', 'Gourds and Rattles' and 'The Gong-Gong'. 'If the 'Prelude' was concerned with prayer as preparation for new creative endeavour', Gordon Rohlehr writes, "The Making of the Drum' is contemplation through

<sup>20</sup> Maureen Warner Lewis' essay 'Odomankoma Kyerema Se' (*Caribbean Quarterly*, 19 (2) (1973), 51-99) provides the most detailed exposition of the African contexts of *Masks*. Referred to by Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.117.

symbolic exploration of ritual, of the birth of art and its relationship to pain, sacrifice and death' (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.122). Consequently, we can see how in each section of the poem each part of the drum is intimately tied to the historical dispossession of the Black diaspora and, at the same time, the assembly of these parts asserts the opportunity to vocalise and overcome such dispossession. For example, the first section recounts the ritual killing of the goat for the skin of the drum. The goat's skin represents the skin of the poet's ancestors, the slaves of the Middle Passage. However, whilst both goat and slave-ancestor have been bound in rope, the goat is able to eat through his rope and also offer an image of freedom. As the goat's blood 'reaches // and spreads to devour us all' in the moment of sacrifice, the poet states: 'we have killed / you to make a thin / voice that will reach // further than hope / further than heaven' (A, p.94). This reflects the tentative steps to be taken at this stage in the trilogy to the assertion of an alternative Caribbean voice, which are here set alongside the massive implications of the vocalisation of the drum. It is important to note that although *Masks* concentrates on the poet's return to Africa, in 'The Making of the Drum' the poet does not forget where he has come from too. To this end, Maureen Warner Lewis points out that:

The fact that Brathwaite talks of a goat-skin drum and of the calabash tree indicates that he is referring here not to the making of an African drum, but a West Indian one. ... This is another example, then, of the poet's use of Akan ritual for his personal purposes' (quoted in Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.122).

Thus, 'The Making of the Drum' must be understood in the context of its place within a trilogy, and this will become particularly important as the poet returns in *Islands* to the Caribbean. 'The Making of the Drum' is immediately followed by 'Atumpan', which literally translates as 'talking drums', and it is here that Brathwaite's African/Caribbean drum first speaks directly to the reader. 'Atumpan' consists of a traditional African salutation that is written first in Akan and then partly translated into English (i.e. made to suit Brathwaite's 'personal purposes'). It also bears a direct relation to the opening poem of *Rights of Passage*. In response to the desolate drum that opens the trilogy 'Atumpan' suggests that the modern Caribbean can find a connection to its African roots through music, and most importantly through a music that provides access to African orality and traditional performance. Whilst the 'wordscape' of the first 'Prelude' is beaten out on a rhythm of doom, here the poet's reconstruction of the instrument of that rhythm finds its first positive results. This shows the complex thematic development of Brathwaite's rhythmic

linguistic performance in *The Arrivants*. What was first an instrument of migration and dispossession, gradually becomes through the trilogy an instrument of linguistic recovery and possession. Consequently, it is the drum constructed in the central volume of the trilogy that can be said to provide the rhythmic drive of *The Arrivants*. It can be heard in the opening lines of 'Prelude' and is explicitly referenced in the final lines of 'Jou'vert'.

If 'Atumpan' represents a high-point in the thematic understanding of the rhythms of *The Arrivants*, it can also be said to offer a clue to another aspect of Brathwaite's linguistic performance. Just as the drummer awakes from a sleep and addresses his drum in the lines 'we are addressing you / *ye re kyere wo* // we are addressing you / *ye re kyere wo* // listen / let us succeed // listen / may we succeed'; so too, the Caribbean poet can be said in these lines to implicitly address his own poetry and the linguistic craft at its heart. This moment of self-address is an integral part of the Akan ritual revealed in 'Atumpan'. It is also emblematic of the active relation to language that the poet more widely adopts throughout *The Arrivants*. This is most notably seen in the linguistic fragmentation and disruption that occurs across the trilogy and in the thematisation of the need for language that more exclusively takes place in *Islands*. It is also evident in the variety of voices that populate *The Arrivants*, which not only demonstrates the linguistic diversity of the Caribbean but also illustrates the fact that in a culture based upon oral traditions it is the voice which offers the surest connection with the past. It can be argued that in *The Arrivants* the poet finds his voice between and among the other voices of the poem. He discovers that each voice bears the scars of the past and each is constructed 'on this ground / on this broken ground' (A, p.266). Through the language obsession of the poet, *The Arrivants* therefore presents the dialogic emergence of a Caribbean voice that is both 'torn // and new'. 'All languages ... are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words' Bakhtin notes in 'Discourse in the Novel', and in the literary text, he continues: 'They may all be drawn in by the novelist for the orchestration of his themes and for the refracted (indirect) expression of his intentions and values' (DN, p.292). In this assertion Bakhtin reiterates the non-neutrality of the social and living word and suggests that within the confines of the novel all languages either implicitly or explicitly serve the intentions and values of the novelist. Though this may seem an obvious statement to make, for Bakhtin it nevertheless holds a series of important consequences. Building upon his argument

that language is essentially a borderline phenomenon (i.e. it belongs simultaneously to self and other), Bakhtin suggests that in the novel the novelist does not speak in language, but rather through language. The 'intentions and values' of the novelist emerge through his refraction of the various voices of the novel, voices which, for Bakhtin, are necessarily placed in the mouths of 'speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language' (DN, p.332). However, whilst this might suggest the importance of character in the novel, in fact Bakhtin proposes that 'Individual character and individual fates ... are in themselves of no concern for the novel' (DN, p.333). Rather than the events of the plot, the exploits of the hero or the 'image of man', Bakhtin argues, 'the central problem for a stylistics of the novel may be formulated as the problem of *artistically representing language, the problem of representing the image of a language*' (DN, p.336). This makes clear that Bakhtin's concern with discourse and language in the novel is not with language per se, indeed to talk of 'the language of the novel' is for Bakhtin a common critical misnomer. Instead, his interest is in "language" and "the image of a language"; that is, with the artistic representation of the languages of heteroglossia and the artistic orchestration or performance of their dialogic interaction. Of course, the primary means by which the novelist creates such 'images of languages' is through his adoption of a position of linguistic outsideness in relation to the ideological discourse of the speaking person in the novel, and through his use of such artistic devices as hybridisation, stylisation and parody. But, as Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson point out, 'Even when the novelist remains close to the empirical language [of the novel], his concern is not mere representation but a maximal use of "outsidedness"- the outsideness of other languages- to produce a dialogue' (Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, p.312). As a consequence, it might be suggested that Brathwaite's linguistic performance in *The Arrivants* not only expresses an evaluative judgement on the nature of language in the Caribbean, but also represents the artistic production of the 'image of a language'. That this is of no small significance in the understanding of the trilogy is evident in the way that the language of the text links both theme and form in a performed utterance that is addressed to both Caribbean and non-Caribbean readers alike.

'The image of ... a language in a novel', Bakhtin writes in 'Discourse in the Novel', 'is the image assumed by a set of social beliefs, the image of a social ideologue that has fused with its own discourse, with its own language. Therefore

[he continues] such an image is very far from being formalistic, and artistic play with such languages far from being formalistic play' (DN, p.357). Likewise, Brathwaite's artistic play with language in *The Arrivants* should not be seen as mere play for play's sake (though there is a good deal of humour in many of his puns). Instead, though Kenneth Ramchand notes that 'Just to look at the setting out of lines in a Brathwaite poem... is to become aware of a word-play determinedly insisting on its own kind of craftiness'<sup>21</sup>, Nathaniel Mackey indicates that this 'kind of craftiness' 'underscores the centrality of slavery, the plantation system and colonialism to the history and predicaments of the region' (Mackey, 'Wringing the Word', p. 134). Thus from the 'Prelude' onwards Brathwaite's disruption, fragmentation and reification of language have a clear social and historical significance. In *Pathfinder*, Gordon Rohlehr provides a detailed exposition of this linguistic play (especially in *Rights of Passage*) in terms of Brathwaite's 'jazz' aesthetic (structuring his analysis according to 'Allusion: Association', 'Repetition and Refrain', 'Improvisation', 'Dissonance and Discord', and 'Lyricism and Flatness'). Whilst this reading must be acknowledged for its productive insights, it is not necessary to subscribe completely to it in order to appreciate aspects of Brathwaite's stylistic technique. Reflecting a concern with the movements of men, in *Rights of Passage* words may be used as weapons of destruction and imprisonment, but for the Caribbean poet they more generally act as markers of deprivation, dispossession and migration. As has already been shown, in the second 'Prelude' of the trilogy the descendants of slaves angrily rail against their lack of opportunity in the post-independence Caribbean. In a spirit of 1970's Black assertiveness they reject the legacies of both Africa and Europe thus:

To hell  
 with Af-  
 rica  
 to hell  
 with Eu-  
 rope too,  
 just call my blue  
 black bloody spade  
 a spade and kiss  
 my ass. O-  
 kay? So  
 let's begin. (A, p.29)

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (Sunbury-on-Thames, Nelson Caribbean, 1976), p.130.

At first sight Brathwaite's fragmented presentation of the words on the page is quite deliberately disconcerting. However, a second look will reveal that in this instance the splitting of 'Africa into 'Af- / rica' and Europe into 'Eu- / rope' stylistically reproduces the speakers wish to split from the dominant influence of his divided ancestral heritage. It also reveals a double meaning to the key phrases of the utterance, as 'to hell with Europe too' can be read as 'to hell with you' and 'to hell with rope [i.e. slavery, bondage] too'. However, the consequences of this rejection of the past are also implicitly suggested, as the speaker identifies himself as 'blue', 'black', 'bloody' and a 'spade'. Each of these key words suggests subjugation rather than liberation. Therefore as a statement of independence this linguistic performance is perhaps more an act of vulgar posturing than a manifesto of intent. In the poems that follow, such as 'Folkways' and 'The Journeys' Brathwaite uses a similar technique as he follows the speaker of 'Prelude' and others like him to America and Europe. In the former the words are shaped to reproduce the frenetic pace of the railways transporting black workers across America ('So come / quick cattle / train, lick / the long / rails: choo- / choo chatanoo- / ga, pick / the long / trail to town', A, p.33), whilst in the latter Brathwaite counterpoints the restrained dignity of the Parisian with the jazz inflections of the 'black / hatted zoot- / suited' folk of Chicago (A, p.39). In each poem the tone and register of the language puts the word of the poem on display (see DN, p.321). It is either intended to enact in words the performance of a mechanical action (as in the first case), or it is intended to objectify the performed language of those who adopt linguistic masks as a result of their migrations (as in the second case).

The notion of the word on display is also central to the meaning of the second volume of the trilogy, *Masks*. In such poems as 'Atumpan', 'Adowa', 'Tano' and 'The Awakening' Akan ritual, prayer and dance provide the context of the poet's exploration of his African heritage. Here, the African word achieves a sacred quality, and it also assumes a ceremonial display. Lines such as '*Kon kon kon kon / kun kun kun kun*' (A, p.98) and '*dam / dam / damirifa / damirifa due / damirifa due / damirifa due / due / due / due*' (A, p.151) operate in the first instance purely as sound-words. They are intended to replicate the sound of the drum, and as a result they introduce a new language into the trilogy. Brathwaite's overt display of this linguistic difference (which is different in degree, but not in kind to linguistic display elsewhere) reifies and objectifies the sacred African word. It may even be suggested that the use of

such language foregrounds the poet's obvious desire for, yet uncomfortable accommodation of, an African mask. In fact, it is the question of the Caribbean poet's access to such African ritual and tradition that is most explicitly considered in the second volume of the trilogy. In 'Sunsum', which translates as 'spiritual blood', the poet goes in search of 'that black chord of birth' (A, p.148) that will confirm his connection to Africa. Here the 'black chord' represents both the umbilical cord connecting the poet to an imagined motherland, and the musical resonance at the heart of this connection. But, whilst the poet digs 'the dirt of the com- / pound where my mother // buried the thin breed- / ing worm that grew / from my heart // to her sorrow', he reveals that 'my spade's hope, / shattering stone, / receives dumbness back // for its echo' (A, pp.148-149). In its expression of 'dumbness' this seems to categorically deny the possibility of linguistic creativity in the Caribbean based upon continuity with the African past, and the poem ends with the assertion that three hundred years of historical amnesia 'have patiently ruined my art' (A, p.150). However, in the submerged language of the poem the poet's 'spade's hope' does receive its echo in the line: 'Beginnings end here / in this ghetto'. Thus whilst thematically 'Sunsum' asserts the poet's silence, formally it proposes the ruinous potential of the poet's voice. Moreover, in his return to 'the ghetto' it is clear that in the midst of his African journey the poet actually finds himself back in the Caribbean.

Linguistic play is at the heart of Brathwaite's endeavour in *Islands*, the final volume of the trilogy, and its performative quality is evident from the outset. The opening lines of 'Jah' join 'Nairobi's male elephants' in the blowing of horns by trumpeters in Havana and Harlem and the poet's own cracked blue notes in 'bridges of sound' (A, p.162) that connect Africa with the Caribbean and America in musical performance. 'Jah' is followed by 'Ananse', in which the trickster spider-hero of Caribbean folk tales 'sits with the dust' in the poet's house 'plotting a new fall from heaven' (A, p.166). Ananse is a folk symbol of linguistic cunning and creative linguistic performance, and his skills are evident in the 'silver skin / webs of sound' (A, p.165) he weaves into the fabric of the poem. A submerged rhythm of drum beats is established in the poem through the irregular repetition of key words (winking, thinking, thinking; green, green; stares, stares, stares; threading, threading; grinning, grinning and breathing, breathing). Ananse uses words for comedic effect (for example in the preference of 'stares' for 'stairs' in the line 'he stumps up the stares /

of our windows'), but the significance of his linguistic play does not go unnoticed too. In the closing lines of the poem the poet stands in awe as Ananse stares down from his webs, the 'black beating heart of him breathing / breathing / consuming our wood / and the words of our houses / black iron-eye'd eater, the many-eye'd maker, / creator, / dry stony world-maker, word-breaker, / creator...' (A, pp.166-167). Ananse therefore stands as a symbol of linguistic fragmentation and linguistic creation. The spirit of Ananse lives on in poems such as 'The Cracked Mother', 'Shepherd', 'Caliban', 'Negus' and 'Jou'vert'. In 'The Cracked Mother' a child's nursery rhyme provides the structure for the gradual acculturation of a Caribbean mother:

See?  
She saw

the sea  
come

up go down  
school children

summer-  
saulting in the park. (A, pp.180-181)

There is an obvious innocence to these lines, as the shifting rhyme conveys the image of children at play on a see-saw, which in turn symbolises the up and down fortunes of the children of the Caribbean. There is also a clear pun in the use of 'summer- / saulting' for somersaulting, which is intended to suggest the passing of time in the poem. According to Gordon Rohlehr these lines are also 'a parody of the way reading is taught in West Indian primary schools', as they recall the first sentence of J.O. Cutteridge's reading primer "I see a ship on the sea" (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.209). And, in Rohlehr's terms this inevitably suggests that 'the first lesson of encounter in Caribbean history has now become a fixed and recurring nightmare in the crazed mind of the mother' (ibid.). Here then linguistic play enacts a game in which the Caribbean mother must lose. The process of acculturation leads the mother to become alienated from her children, and this section of the poem closes with the question and answer: 'See? / I saw // my prayers / lost, // bread, float / on the dead water' (A, p.182). In 'Shepherd' and 'Caliban' Brathwaite's play with language is more firmly grounded in Caribbean religious ritual and musical performance, but again in each there is a movement up and down as affirmation is followed by negation or vice versa. 'Shepherd' opens with the lines 'Dumb / dumb / dumb' (A,

p.185) as the leader of the pocomania invites the drum to speak, and in the first half of the poem this is successful as the repeated refrain culminates in the suggestion that 'Slowly / slowly / slowly / the dumb speaks' (A, p.188). But in the second half this is followed by the assertion: 'But you do not understand' (A, p.189). In 'Caliban' the reverse process takes place. The poem opens with a list of statistics ('Ninety-five per cent of my people poor / ninety-five per cent of my people black / ninety-five per cent of my people dead', A, p.191), that is followed in the next two sections by a performance of carnival steel pan and limbo. The quick rhythm established by the short lines of the poem conveys the excitement of the carnival for Caliban, who sees the steel pan and limbo as a performative liberation from his daily life. Moreover, the descent of the middle section (seen in the repetition of 'down / down / down', A, pp.192-193), is countered by the ascent of the final section as Caliban is brought up from the ritual encounter with his slave history by the drum, gods and music 'praising', 'raising' and 'saving' him. This though is only a temporary liberation, and when the carnival ends Caliban will return to a world of constriction in which he must take 'hot / slow / step[s] // on the burning ground' (A, p.195). It is then in 'Negus' that language play in *Islands* is most explicitly connected to a call for linguistic and political rebellion. The first half of 'Negus' is dominated by the attempt to vocalise in a concrete way the true nature of the cultural and political settlement Black Caribbeans have accepted in the modern and contemporary era. In the opening stanzas of the poem, the poet angrily struggles to make himself heard:

It  
it  
it  
it is not

it  
it  
it  
it is not

it is not  
it is not  
it is not enough  
it is not enough to be free  
of the red white and blue  
of the drag, of the dragon

it is not  
it is not

it is not enough  
 it is not enough to be free  
 of the whips, principalities and powers  
 where is your kingdom of the Word? (A, p.222)

It is the stuttering quality of the poet's postcolonial speech that first arrests the reader in these lines. In the opening of 'Negus' the poet anatomises and objectifies language in the repetition of 'it', 'it is not', 'it is not enough' and 'it is not enough to be free'. Once again, the word is on display here, and it is revealed as a word that is broken, disrupted, fragmented, a word that is both 'torn // and new'. Bakhtin comments in 'Discourse in the Novel' that incorporated languages and genres of the novel may be 'treated completely as objects' and 'deprived of any authorial intentions- not as a word that has been spoken, but as a word to be displayed ' (DN, p.321). But, it can be argued that in *The Arrivants* such linguistic display does precisely serve authorial intentions, albeit in a refracted way. In his orchestration of an 'image of a language' in his 'New World' trilogy Brathwaite suggests that the masking and unmasking of language is central to the linguistic future of the Caribbean. Indeed Nathaniel Mackey argues that in his play with language in *Islands*, 'Brathwaite's work both announces the emergence of a new language and acknowledges the impediments to its emergence, going so far as to advance impediment as a constituent of the language's newness' (Mackey, 'Wringing the Word', p.134). This is clearly evident in 'Negus'.

It is also apparent that the linguistic impediment presented in the first half of the poem leads the poet to make a direct request for words in the second half of 'Negus'. 'I / must be given words to shape my name / to the syllables of trees' the poet demands, and thus proposes that freedom means nothing unless you have the means with which to appropriately express it. This first request therefore heralds a thematic concern with the acquisition of the raw material of language, the words themselves, so that the poet may properly accommodate himself within a Caribbean environment. Words are the stuff of the present, Brathwaite suggests, but they are also the foundation upon which a refashioned future will be built (see A, p.224). '[F]ill me with words / and I will blind your god' the poet declares in 'Negus' and this desire for words is seen also in 'Wake', 'Eating the Dead', 'Dawn' and 'Vèvè'. Like 'Negus', both 'Wake' and 'Eating the Dead' are based on the performance of a ritual in which, according to Rohlehr, 'the syncretic blend of African, Afro-Caribbean, and European cultures occurs' (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.257). Both are

highly formalised poems, and in both an affirmative move is made by the poet to possess language. In the first section of 'Wake', the poet asks a figure of his African ancestral past to 'mother me with words, / gems, spoken talismans of your broken tongue (A, p.210). Yet, as attention shifts in the second section of the poem, the plantation priest's empty command to 'Welcome the Word' is met by absence, disregard and material destruction in the contemporary Caribbean. In this context, the poet is likely to find it hard to possess a language that speaks to the diversity of the Caribbean, and this is acknowledged in 'Eating the Dead' as he reflects 'My tongue is heavy with new language / but I cannot give birth speech' (A, p.221). In 'Dawn' the acquisition of language is tied more closely to the natural and environmental experience of the poet. This is established both formally and thematically. The poem's first and last sections provide an affirmation of the awakening and sustaining power of the Caribbean sea and sun. In the former, the observational poet watches the activities of the beach folk in the early morning sun, whilst in the latter, he witnesses the brilliant sun entering the valley after a deluge of rain. The sea and the sun act as symbols of the poet's mother and father respectively, and the poem ends with the sun finally 'rising / rising // into the eyes of my father, / the fat valley loads of my mother / of water, lap- / ping, lapping my ankles, lap- // ping these shores with their silence' (A, p.238). Whilst this ending on a note of 'silence' might suggest the poet's inability to speak, in fact in this instance it prefigures the awakening of the poet to language. To this end, he notes that the absolution of water 'opens the eyes of my window // and I see you, my wound- / ed gift giver of sea / spoken syllables: words salt on your lips / on my lips...' (A, p.238). Thus, like Walcott in *Omeros*, Brathwaite recognises in 'Dawn' the undying influence of the Caribbean landscape on his 'wordscape'. In 'Vèvè' the poet's acquisition of language shifts back to the ceremonial, as the poet performs a vodoun rite of linguistic possession. As Brathwaite reveals in the glossary that accompanies the poems, vèvè are 'symbolic chalk (or flour) marks made on the ground by the priest at the start of a vodoun ceremony' (A, p.275), and this action takes place at the start of the second section:

So on this ground,  
write;  
within the sound  
of this white limestone vèvè,

talk  
of the empty roads,

vessels of your head,  
claypots, shards, ruins. (A, p.265)

In this invocation to 'write' and 'talk' Brathwaite anticipates a response from other Caribbean writers and, at the same time, acknowledges that the creolised language of Caribbean writing is made up of both African and European elements. In the moment of possession the 'graven Word' is 'carved from Oludumare / from Ogun of Alare, from Ogun of Onire / from Shango broom of thunder and Damballa Grand Chemin' (A, p.265), all African gods of creation and transformation. But, in the sketching of white marks on a broken black ground, the English language, albeit the English practised in the Caribbean, is accepted as the medium in which the gateway of linguistic possibility is opened. At the poem's close, with the personification of the Word and his movement among the people of the Caribbean, Brathwaite suggests that a language with a divided heritage that is also a language of possibility is now available for possession.

It is in the combination of the poem's rhythms with a language of disruption, fragmentation and rebellious ambition that Brathwaite creates and orchestrates an 'image of a language' in *The Arrivants*. However, as Bakhtin suggests in 'Discourse in the Novel', for such a "language" to hold sway within the novel each 'image of a language' must be backed by 'speaking persons'. '[T]he human being in the novel', Bakhtin notes, 'is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language' (DN, p.332). So too, in *The Arrivants* Brathwaite requires speaking persons to illuminate his linguistic performance. In the poem that follows 'Dawn', entitled 'Ancestors', the poet recollects in portraiture his grandfather and grandmother. Whilst his grandfather's assimilation to the English flag is shown in the ordered presentation of the events of his life and the effects of his death, of his grandmother the poet simply states 'All that I have of her is voices' (A, p.240). In this Brathwaite acknowledges the concrete connection that the voice provides to an ancestral past. For the poet the voice acts as a living memory of his grandmother's life. The voice is also a marker of identity and agency as the grandmother's voice comes alive in the final part of the poem in her song 'Sookey dead-o'. Numerous voices populate the other poems of the trilogy. In *Rights of Passage* there are the figures of Uncle Tom and his descendants, Brother Man the Rasta man and the folk of 'The Dust', as well as the more anonymous adoption of speech inflections in 'The

Journeys' and 'The Emigrants'. In *Masks*, El Hassan, an African chief and warrior speaks from the past of the tribal conflicts that necessitate movement, whilst on his own journey the poet adopts a series of masks or personae under the instruction of tribal priests. Finally, in *Islands* we find the tailor of 'Rites' confusing cricket and politics, Pearlie the farmer in 'Cane' struggling to survive and threatening action, the Jamaican revival preacher of 'The Stone Sermon' praising the Lord, as well as a variety of ancestors, fishermen, drunkards and dancers. Each of these voices contributes to the eventual emergence of the poet's voice, and each reiterates the performative quality of the trilogy.

The poem most admired for its representation of voices in *The Arrivants* is 'The Dust', which takes its place in the final section of *Rights of Passage*. In his 1967 review of the first volume of the trilogy Edward Baugh comments that in 'The Dust' 'the Bajan dialect at last finds its Muse... Brathwaite exploits the peculiar music of Bajan in such a way to achieve at one and the same time poetry and authentic speech'<sup>22</sup>. Likewise, in the same year Derek Walcott recognised that in 'The Dust' 'there is a stylistic achievement that one hopes will urge other or younger poets to study'<sup>23</sup>. More recently Velma Pollard has described the poem as 'a near perfect expression of the life, music and philosophy of the [folk]'<sup>24</sup>, whilst in the context of a jazz aesthetic Gordon Rohlehr reads it as 'Brathwaite's most elaborate composition for solo voices and chorus' (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.103). Written in the nation-language of Bajan vernacular, 'The Dust' recounts a conversation that takes place in the grocery shop of a small rural community between a handful of black Caribbean villagers. The poem begins as Pearlie enters 'de white people shop' and immediately offers a series of greetings: 'Evenin' Miss / Evvy, Miss / Maisie, Miss / Maud. Olive, // how you? How / you, Eveie chile? / You tek dat Miraculous Bush / fuh de trouble you tell me about?' (A, p.62). Hence, the opening lines establish an immediate sense of familiarity and formality amongst the speakers, which is further shown in their discussions of ailments, miracle cures and the difficulties faced in their hand-to-mouth struggle to survive a period of drought and 'pestilence'. This demonstrates the inherent orality of Brathwaite's poetry, and in particular his ability to make poetic language replicate speech. Brathwaite also shows how the

<sup>22</sup> Edward Baugh, 'Rights of Passage', *Bim*, 12 (45) (1967), 67.

<sup>23</sup> Derek Walcott, 'Tribal Flutes', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), p.44.

<sup>24</sup> Velma Pollard, 'The Dust' - A Tribute to the Folk', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 26 (1-2) (1980), 41.

conversation of such apparently simple people can shift between the everyday and the existential. This is most clearly seen in the story, recounted by Olive, which tells of the effects of a volcanic eruption on a neighbouring island. As Olive reflects: 'All uh know / is that one day suddenly so / this mountain leggo one *brugg-a-lung-go* // whole bloody back side / o' this hill like it blow / off like they blastin' stones / in the quarry' (A, p.66). Olive's phrase to describe the actual eruption- '*brugg-a-lung-go*'- reflects an attempt to capture the indescribable violence of the environmental experience. For her, there are no English words that could adequately describe the force of the blast. Instead, *brugg-a-lung-go* works purely in terms of sound-meaning, and suggests a moment of catastrophe when the world seems to experience a paradigmatic shift. As such, the eruption is followed by the total spread of volcanic dust across the island, as if 'God gone an' darken the day' (A, p.67). This leads Olive to be thankful for what little she has got and to be fearful of losing her precarious hold on existence. For, having realised she has her health, her children, her friends and her small portion of land, at the close of the poem Olive notes:

An' then suddenly so  
widdout rhyme  
widdout reason

you crops start to die  
you can't even see the sun in the sky;  
an' suddenly so, without rhyme,

without reason, all you hope gone  
ev'rything look like it comin' out wrong.  
Why is that? What it mean? (A, pp.68-69)

'The Dust' therefore represents the dialogic interaction of a series of voices around the theme of folk survival. Sharing a close conceptual horizon each voice sounds against the others, and each is contained in Olive's closing question. Olive's monologue may dominate the latter half of the poem, but her story is also known and shared (and could be told) by other members of the community. Stylistically representative of Bajan folk speech (as Baugh and Pollard recognise) 'The Dust' possesses an internal verbal consistency that makes it entirely suitable for dramatic performance. Considered also as a performed poetic utterance, according to Bakhtin's notion of linguistic performance, 'The Dust' also reveals itself as just one link in a chain of speech communication that stretches from *The Arrivants* to Brathwaite's 1987 volume entitled *X/Self*.

Within the framework of 'The Dust' Olive's closing question- 'Why is that? What it mean?'- acts as a discursive marker of a moment of crisis in which the material circumstances of the local rural community are dramatically and irreparably altered. For Olive and her interlocutors the eruption of the volcano and the arrival of the pestilence are events for which there is no rhyme or reason and no logical explanation. However, exactly thirty years later Olive's closing question reappears in the mouth of X/Self in the closing lines of 'X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces', one of the central poems in the final volume of Brathwaite's 'Ancestors' trilogy (which comprises *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem* and *X/Self*). What prompts this repetition of Olive's utterance? How, and in what way, are these poems in dialogue with each other? In his late essay, 'The Problem of Speech Genres' Bakhtin returns to the ground covered in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and 'Discourse in the Novel'. Thus, once again in response to the abstractions of traditional stylistics Bakhtin proposes that both speaker and listener actively participate in the understanding of performed utterances. In the moment of enunciation, Bakhtin suggests, the speaker orients his utterance toward the anticipated response of a real or imagined listener, precisely because 'the desire to make one's speech understood is only an abstract aspect of the speaker's concrete and total speech plan'. He continues:

Moreover, any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances- his own and others'- with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organised chain of other utterances. (SG, p.69)

This last sentence demonstrates the degree to which the understanding of Brathwaite's poetry as performed utterances inevitably leads beyond the putative confines of the individual text. Bakhtin conceives of the utterance here as an open linguistic unit formed on the boundary of system and performance, self and other, and past and present utterances. So important is this notion of the utterance in Bakhtin's 'speech genres' essay that it is repeated on at least three further occasions. First, Bakhtin counters the demarcation of the utterance according to 'a change of speaking subjects' with the assertion that: 'The work is a link in a chain of speech communion' (SG, p.76). Secondly, in the context of 'the relation of the utterance to

the *speaker himself* (...) and to the *other* participants in speech communication', he states: 'Any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion' (SG, p.84). And thirdly, in the orientation of the utterance toward an other, Bakhtin argues: 'an utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations' (SG, p.94). Each of these statements therefore suggests that not only do X/Self's questions- '*Why is dat? What it mean?*'- actively respond to Olive's questions in 'The Dust', but that both poems are connected in a complex chain of utterances and motifs.

Quite obviously, one such chain might concern the motif of dust in Brathwaite's poetry. In 'The Dust' the story of enveloping volcanic dust bears a direct relation to the drought that currently threatens the villagers who are present in the shop. It is in this respect an allegoric tale alluding to contemporary fears and anxieties. But this is not the only meaning of the dust available. In the opening poem of the trilogy, 'Prelude', Brathwaite presents a landscape in which entire populations are reduced to dust and then picked up by 'the hot / harmattan' (A, p.6). Here, he provides a submerged clue towards an alternative meaning of the dust. The harmattan is a dry trade-wind that carries large amounts of dust and blows from north-east or east in the Southern Sahara across the Atlantic Ocean. With its origins in Africa, Brathwaite sees this wind as an expression of the indelible link between Africa and the Caribbean, and another assertion of the presence of Africa in the life and language of the Caribbean. In a recent essay Brathwaite speaks of feeling the wind on his skin and lips, and argues that the dust carried by the wind has a specific connection to the time of slave rebellion:

We must become aware that an ancestor such as Africa can be intimately with us through the centuries, influencing the climate, creating a situation of clarity in December, January and February when slave rebellions become possible, because the time of the harmattan, the time when there is no rain, when your foot is not clogged by mud, when you can see your opponent clearly, this is the time when the slaves rebel.<sup>25</sup>

It may, then, be possible to read 'The Dust' in terms of an implicit linguistic rebellion, and this is perhaps most evident in the closing lines of the poem. As has

---

<sup>25</sup> Brathwaite, 'History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis & Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p.30.

been shown above, the poem ends with the lines: 'An' then suddenly so / widdout rhyme / widdout reason // you crops start to die / you can't even see the sun in the sky; / an' suddenly so, without rhyme, // without reason, all you hope gone / ev'rything look like it comin' out wrong'. Yet, whilst Olive says here that there is no rhyme or reason to volcanic eruption or pestilence, in fact she expresses this using two rhymed couplets (i.e. 'die' and 'sky', and 'gone' and 'wrong'). This suggests that as a representation of a native voice, Olive's language is already incipiently erring towards generation and creativity rather than destruction and unreason. Moreover, as part of a chain of poetic communication the motif of dust can be traced in a number of other poems in *The Arrivants*. In 'Mammon' the poet walks towards his father's home and remembers the three R's of his childhood education: 'Reading, a little Riting, / and some Rural lust: / the immemorial legacies of dust' (A, p.73). Here, then, the dust signifies the key areas of imprisonment and rebellion in the Caribbean- education, religion and sex. Next, in 'Prelude', the opening poem of *Masks*, the poet declares: 'I will hoe / I will work / the year has come round / again; / thirsty mouth of the dust / is ready for water / for seed' (A, pp.91-92). Thus, the dust reflects the linguistic drought of the Caribbean poet, and emphasises in this instance the restorative opportunity offered in the poet's return to Africa. Further references can be found in 'Timbuctu', 'Korabra', 'Sunsum' and 'Tano' in *Masks*; and 'Ananse', 'Rites', 'Cane' and 'Vèvè' in *Islands*. In the last of these Brathwaite explicitly supports his belief in the link between dust and slave rebellion, as the poet asserts: 'it is the bird that sings, / the green that wavers, wavers, wins / the slave rebellion of the rot / of dust // that matters' (A, p.264) This is, of course, followed by the possession of the Word in the final section of 'Vèvè', the expression of a Caribbean voice 'torn and new' in 'Jou'vert', and the submerged potential for linguistic rebellion also finds a response in 'X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces'. In support of this Bakhtin notes in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' that 'Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. [And] These mutual reflections determine their character' (SG, p.91). Indeed, Bakhtin goes on to comment at length on the varied forms that responsive reactions can take:

others' utterances can be introduced directly into the context of the utterance, or one may introduce only individual words or sentences, which then act as representatives of the whole utterance. Both whole utterances and individual words can retain their alien expression, but they can also be re-accentuated (...).

Others' utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. They can be referred to as though the interlocutor were already well aware of them; they can be silently presupposed; or one's responsive reaction to them can be reflected only in the expression of one's own speech- in the selection of language means and intonations that are determined not by the topic of one's own speech but by the others' utterances concerning the same topic. Here is an important and typical case: very frequently the expression of our utterance is determined not only- and sometimes not so much- by the referentially semantic content of this utterance, but also by others' utterances on the same topic to which we are responding or with which we are polemicizing. They also determine our emphasis on certain elements, repetition, our selection of harsher (or, conversely, milder) expressions, a contentious (or, conversely, conciliatory) tone, and so forth. (SG, pp.91-92)

In the dialogic relation between 'The Dust' and 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' it might then be suggested that the ending of the former is 'introduced directly into the context' of the latter, and that the words themselves 'act as representatives of the whole utterance' (that is, as links to Brathwaite's discourse on 'dust'). 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' response places these other utterances in a new literary context, and seeks to appropriate and assimilate those other meanings, intentions and values to a new artistically expressed point of view. Most specifically, 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' shifts the assertions of *The Arrivants* into the poetic context of a more overt and self-conscious concern with linguistic creativity and the material process of writing. In itself this suggests that the more direct linguistic rebellion of 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' arises out of the marriage of thematic content and poetic style. However, it could also be related to a more general shift in Brathwaite's style which itself reflects the recent emergence of an increasingly critically aware post-colonial literature. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that contemporary Caribbean literature is now into its second and third generation of writers, and therefore addressing a very different kind of (critical) readership than it was in the 1950's and 1960's.

Constructed in the form of a letter that X/Self addresses to his mother, the poem's main thematic and stylistic focus is once again the concrete acquisition of language. This is made clear in the opening lines of the poem as X/Self exclaims: 'Dear Mamma // i writin you dis letter/wha? / guess what! pun a computer o/kay?' (X/S, p.80). From this alone a number of significant implications can be drawn out. It is clear that Brathwaite uses certain conventions of letter-writing in order to start and structure his poem. Yet, X/Self's letter is not a letter in the traditional sense. It also incorporates a sense of direct and immediate response to an unheard and unwritten voice. The 'wha?' here is the first indication of this, and it is followed by a number

of other questions: 'say what? / get on wi de same ole // story?', 'since when i kin / type?', 'why i callin it x?' and so on. Collectively these suggest that the presence of X/Self's mother lies in the background of his utterance. It also indicates the extent to which Brathwaite's poem exists on the boundary between speech and writing, and therefore seeks to question the established hierarchy between the two. Brathwaite's language is a literary language but it also emphasises the sound of the voice, the oral and aural. X/Self's excitable 'guess what!' is one instance of this. The grammar and orthographic presentation of dialect or nation-language is another aspect, whilst the fragmented presentation of the words on the page also further demonstrates the basic orality of the poem. The back-slash before 'wha?' and 'kay?' in the opening lines adds a short but nonetheless decisive pause that in turn results in extra intonational stress being placed on the words following. X/Self's active relation to language takes account of his possession of a computer, and this new instrument of expression also determines the style of X/Self's utterance. The presentation of the language of the poem gives the impression that X/Self is acquiring and learning, using and misusing, a new language in the process of writing his letter. Most directly, he states at roughly the mid-point of the poem: 'is like what i tryin to sen/seh & / seh about muse/ // in computer & / learnin prospero language & / ting' (X/S, p.84). For X/Self the computer represents the (ambivalent) pinnacle of technological and historical achievement in the West, as he reflects: 'a doan know how pascal & co/ / balt & apple & cogito ergo sum / come to hinvent all these tings since // de rice & fall a de roman empire' (X/S, p.82). X/Self's possession of the computer signifies his investment in the history and language of the West. Yet, his use and misuse of it signals an appropriation of the communicative capabilities it represents for other purposes and alternative intentions. Thus, far from being imprisoned by the language and logic of the computer, X/Self concludes his letter with an indication of rebellion and liberation:

yet a sittin down here in front a dis stone  
face/eeee

lectrical mallet into me  
fist

chipp/in dis poem onta dis tablet  
chiss/ellin darkness writin in light

like i is a some/ is a some/ is a some

body/ a

x

pert or some

thing like moses or aaron or one a dem dyaaam isra  
lite (X/S, p.87)

Here, X/Self's language is shown to be both fragmentary and prophetic. The passage is characterised by a combination of vernacular orthography (i.e. dis, writin, dem dyaaam etc.) and linguistic x-plosion, according to which, words are stretched, broken and repeated. X/Self's writing on the computer screen is also figured in terms of the writing of Biblical laws on tablets of stone, therefore emphasising the depth of his rebellion. The shift from 'chiss/ellin darkness' to 'writin in light' also marks a shift in the very notion of the poet's identity as X/Self. The name or title of X/Self might signify a crossing-out of the Caribbean poet's identity, that is the figuring of the poet as an other/self, a non/self, a nobody. Yet, in this extract the poet is able to tentatively identify himself as a somebody, whilst at the same time retaining the inherent and elusive otherness symbolised by 'x' (i.e. an 'x / pert'). This probative assertion of identity is at first sight a source of anxiety for X/Self, as he asks his mother 'Why is / dat? // what it / mean?'; but, in their allusion to the prior linguistic performance of 'The Dust' these closing lines may also signify the rebellious intent of X/Self. In the language he adopts X/Self's performed utterance is certainly highly stylised and firmly located in an ultra-modern world of computer technology, but these closing lines also indicate that the purpose and meaning of what he is 'tryin to sen/seh & / seh about muse/ // in computer & / learnin prospero language & ting' shares vital points of connection with a folk language of the oral tradition in which the African presence in the Caribbean is intimately felt.

X/Self's appeal to his mother also establishes a connection between linguistic rebellion and the maternal. X/Self's mother acts as a submerged but nonetheless significant presence in the poem, and it is to her that the poem is principally addressed. Her importance can perhaps be explained by taking a more detailed look at the metaphorical structure of the poem. In particular, X/Self's dedication to 'learnin prospero language & ting' establishes a relationship between Brathwaite's poem and the colonial and cultural signifiers that have developed around William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Brathwaite suggests in the poem that the language of Western expansionist history, the language of the computer, the language of the

master, is represented by the figure of Prospero, the island overlord of Shakespeare's play. This fits with the reading of Shakespeare's play as an instrument and allegory of cultural imperialism that has dominated the play's reception and production in the latter half of the twentieth century. Such a reading, which was crucially influenced by Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (first published in English in 1956) figures Prospero as the colonial oppressor and Caliban as the colonial oppressed. To this end, summarising this view of Caliban, one source comments:

Like Caliban (so the argument goes), colonized peoples were disinherited, exploited and subjugated. Like him, they learned a conqueror's language and perhaps that conqueror's values. Like him, they endured enslavement and contempt by European usurpers and eventually rebelled. Like him they are torn between their indigenous culture and the culture superimposed on it by their conquerors.<sup>26</sup>

This kind of double-bind, which seems to forever tie the fate of Caliban to Prospero, is best exemplified in *The Tempest* in Act 1 Scene 2. When Prospero and Miranda first visit the monstrous devil of the island, Caliban rails against Prospero's gift of language thus: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!'<sup>27</sup>. More than anything else, this illustrates the extent to which the colonial metaphor of *The Tempest* centres upon questions of language. According to the Shakespearean text, Caliban (the slave) has been offered the gift of language by Prospero (the master). Yet, Prospero's gift primarily leads Caliban to 'curse' both his own fate and the power of his oppressor. It is this linguistic paradox which in the Caribbean context first informed George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*. Most specifically, Lamming acknowledges the cultural opposition of Caliban and Prospero in the identification of his subject as 'the migration of the West Indian writer, as colonial and exile, from his native kingdom, once inhabited by Caliban, to the tempestuous island of Prospero and his language'<sup>28</sup>. However, whilst Lamming suggests that language was Caliban's prison, it is possible to argue that Brathwaite offers an alternative reading that seeks to overcome Caliban's imprisonment in Prospero's language. In 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' this takes the form of what Brathwaite terms a

<sup>26</sup> Alden T. Vaughan & Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.145.

<sup>27</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Anne Righter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 1. 2, 363-365, p.77.

<sup>28</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p.13.

'calibanisation' of language. This reflects the close etymological proximity of Caliban and cannibal, and suggests how Brathwaite subjects words to a process of 'bends, breaks, deformation, reformation- othering'<sup>29</sup>. The term is first seen in the notes to Brathwaite's *Sun Poem*, in which Brathwaite explains that his use of 'cavicle' in 'Noom' (in the lines: 'there were tribes there of scarecrows / hunters of heads who ate human bones / crink skull and cavicle') is intended as 'A 'calibanism' for clavicle; the cave between neck and collarbone'<sup>30</sup>. This deliberate word-play, which speaks of disruption both inside and outside language, is most evident in 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' in such words as 'gun / power' instead of gun powder, 'slavely' for slavery, and in 'xerxes' for herpes. In the last instance the deliberate misuse of language foregrounds the otherness of the poets x-self and figures this x-ness as a skin disease. Available to multiple interpretations 'xerxes' also alludes to the celebrated King of Persia, who like X/Self, challenged the status quo of the Western world by staging an invasion of Greece in 4th and 5th century B.C.. X/Self also makes plain in the course of his performance that his calibanised/cannibalised language is 'not fe dem/ not fe dem / de way caliban // done // but fe we / fe a-we // for not one a we should responsible if prospero get curse / wid im own // curser' (X/S, pp.84-85). Hence, X/Self makes a direct response to Caliban's speech in *The Tempest*. However, in his distinction between 'dem' and 'we' Brathwaite implies that the difference between his Caliban and Shakespeare's Caliban is in the ideological direction each chooses. The latter too easily binds himself to a dominant other, whereas the former asks how language can be profitable for me, for us, 'fe a-we'. In terms of the poem itself this 'we' most obviously refers to X/Self (Caliban) and his mother (Sycorax). Thus, orientated towards X/Self's 'Dear mamma', 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' implies that the poet as Caribbean Caliban ought to turn his gaze from Prospero and look instead towards his submerged mother's world of words. In one sense this looks back to the volume that opens Brathwaite's 'Ancestors' trilogy, *Mother Poem*. However, Brathwaite also acknowledges the value of the maternal in the description that he offers of the style of his most recent poetry. He labels the poetic-performance of 'X/Self's Xth Letters...' and other poems like it, a 'post-modern Sycorax video-style'. Brathwaite therefore makes a clear association

<sup>29</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, 'Other: From Noun to Verb', *Representations*, 39 (1992), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Brathwaite, *Sun Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.100.

between a previously absent mother figure who is the bearer of a submerged language, and linguistic performance in contemporary Caribbean poetry.

Over thirty years after it was first made Edward Lucie-Smith's assertion that Brathwaite is the one Caribbean writer 'who most radically questions West Indian as well as English assumptions' continues to hold true. Brathwaite's notion of calibanisation bears a clear relation to the motif of linguistic creolisation that is at the centre of his poetry from *The Arrivants* onwards. Moreover, in its more explicit reference to the persistent cultural authority of Prospero in the Caribbean, calibanisation further addresses the close intimacy of language and power. Characterised by a performative play with the cultural properties of language, Stewart Brown argues that 'implicit in every act of Calibanization [is the recognition] that this is a power-game the poet is playing'<sup>31</sup>. That this also inevitably impacts on the reader's engagement with the text as a performed utterance is clearly seen in Brathwaite's insistence that X/Self's calibanised language belongs to 'dem' and not 'we'. This gesture of exclusivity seems to erect rather than dismantle further obstacles in the cross-cultural understanding of Brathwaite's poetry. Some of these obstacles are met in Bakhtin and Voloshinov's notion of linguistic performance as the foundation for an understanding of dialogic interrelations. Addressing the paradox of using a language that does not fully or adequately name Caribbean experience, Brathwaite's linguistic performance foregrounds his cultural and historical otherness. And, it is precisely in its masking and unmasking of language that this performed position of otherness allows the Western reader to engage with Brathwaite's poetry across a cross-cultural divide. Just as Bakhtin's sense of linguistic performance simultaneously enacts and investigates questions of representation, so too Brathwaite's calibanic play 'problematizes not only English but language in general' (Mackey, 'Wringing the Word', p.149). For Brathwaite the Caribbean writer's problematic relation to the English language leads to an appreciation of the submerged (African, oral, folk etc.) influences on linguistic performance in the Caribbean and a consideration of alternative possibilities for understanding the culture of the region. For V.S. Naipaul, as the following analysis will show, this leads to a performative assertion of the identity of the writer himself.

---

<sup>31</sup> Stewart Brown, 'Sun Poem: The Rainbow Sign?', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, p.154.

### 3. Finding a Centre: Questions of Authority and Authorship in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*

In the opening sentence of his essay entitled 'Timehri', Edward Kamau Brathwaite claims: 'The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation has been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape; dissociation, in fact, of art from the act of living'<sup>1</sup>. Representing the view of the region 'accepted and articulated' by the 'intellectual elite' of the Caribbean in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Brathwaite's assertion provides the occasion for a part-autobiographical and part-cultural analysis of the difficulties and possibilities that Caribbean writers and artists of the period face in responding to such a deep-rooted sense of dispossession and dissociation. For Brathwaite the rootlessness of the Caribbean writer is the product of a long-standing process of cultural and linguistic creolisation, precipitated by the forces of empire and slavery and supported by the institutions of colonial endeavour. A history of hybridity and intermixture in the region has, Brathwaite argues, produced a fragmented culture and society. The problem that all Caribbean writers therefore encounter, 'is that having been born and educated within this fragmented culture, they start out in the world without a sense of "wholeness"... Disillusion with the fragmentation leads to a sense of rootlessness. The ideal does not and cannot correspond to perceived and inherited reality. The result: dissociation of the sensibility' (Brathwaite, 'Timehri', p.30). Read as a history of the Black Caribbean in the Emancipation period it seems clear that Brathwaite's *Arrivants* trilogy is written out of just this kind of cultural dislocation. Brathwaite's linguistic performance recognises and names the rootlessness of Caribbean life and imagination, and makes its claim to the Caribbean people on a broken ground of language, history and culture. Likewise, it is possible to suggest that V.S. Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction, from *The Mystic Masseur* to *Half a Life*, is also the product of a similar and equally fundamental 'sense of rootlessness'. Indeed, as Brathwaite himself notes in 'Timehri', in the period of massive post-war emigration from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Brathwaite, 'Timehri', in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. by Orde Coombs (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1974), p.29.

Caribbean this 'sense of rootlessness' was to be most sharply seen in *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul's early 1960's account of his travels in the Caribbean and South America. Having left Trinidad in 1950 in order to further his education and pursue his ambitions in England, Naipaul returned to the Caribbean ten years later with three books already to his name and a growing reputation (at least among Western readers) as a writer of some merit. Making a journey by boat to five separate societies, Naipaul arrives first on the island of his birth, and immediately confesses:

As soon as the *Francisco Bobadillo* had touched the quay, ship's side against rubber bumpers, I began to feel all my old fear of Trinidad. I did not want to stay. ...I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the endpaper of my Kennedy's *Revised Latin Primer* to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad.<sup>2</sup>

Illustrating the dissociation of the Caribbean writer's sensibility, as a moment of arrival this is by no means a moment to be savoured. It suggests that for Naipaul Trinidad induces fear, hysteria, panic and nightmare. His determination to leave at such a young age reveals the extent of his detachment from the island. To Naipaul, Trinidad seemed 'unimportant, uncreative, cynical ... a society which denied itself heroes ... a place where the stories were never stories of success but of failure' (Naipaul, *Middle Passage*, pp.43-44). Escape was the only option. But whilst in England he continues to suffer from nightmares of return, a fear of being 'back in tropical Trinidad', and when he returns to the island all his 'old fear' of Trinidad re-emerges, and his sense of unease is clearly evident.

Guided on his journey by Victorian travellers to the region, Naipaul takes the epigraph to *The Middle Passage* from a text written by the English historian and biographer James Anthony Froude. In *The English in the West Indies*, first published in 1887, Froude claims: 'There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own'. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul's belief in Froude's judgement leads him to reach similar conclusions in each of the societies that he explores. Naipaul rejects the very possibility of writing a history of the Caribbean islands, and instead accepts the view of the region as a rubbish-heap or dung-hill. He asks: 'How can the history of this West Indian futility be written?'. And answers: 'The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is

not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies' (p.29). Significant enough in itself, the sense of detachment that this statement suggests is most fully illustrated in Naipaul's account of his return to Trinidad. Here Naipaul reveals a sharp sense of historical, racial and cultural dislocation as he finds himself back on the island of his birth. In Naipaul's view Trinidad offers a society that prompts only 'the threat of failure' and 'the need to escape' (p.45). Trinidad is not considered (especially by Trinidadians) to have a history and purpose of its own: 'Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world' (p.45). Thus, for Naipaul, and others like him, Trinidadian history is seen as little but a minor footnote in the History of other nations; and the split-historical consciousness that this produces provides the basis for further divisions to be played out. Cut off from an indigenous or native history, Trinidadians are said, by Naipaul, to have a talent for little but intrigue and mimicry. The island itself is struggling towards a flawed modernity, happily selling itself to the neo-colonial dominance of modern America. Describing the Negro-Indian rivalry on the island, Naipaul writes: 'Like monkeys pleading for evolution, each claiming to be whiter than the other, Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged white audience to see how much they despise one another' (p.87); his phrasing demonstrating a bitterness and contempt for both groups, who share in a misguided quest for 'whiteness'. Yet despite this, Naipaul finds himself unable to offer any grounds for hope or cultural regeneration within the region. He has a personal dislike for Trinidadian steel band and calypso; and this is all the more significant precisely because, 'Naipaul's hatred of the steel band and all it indicates is no mere rejection of West Indian culture, but a rejection of the single common ground where Trinidadians of all races meet on a basis of equality'<sup>3</sup>. Like Froude, Naipaul can see no possibility for salvation or indigenous creation on the islands. Instead, he is irritated and annoyed. He is bitter and full of despair. It is an atmosphere that he cannot bear for long, and he soon senses he must move on.

---

<sup>2</sup> V.S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.43.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Rohlehr, 'The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V.S. Naipaul', in *The Islands in Between*, ed. by Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.121.

From the moment of Naipaul's arrival in Trinidad *The Middle Passage* offers one of the most visceral accounts of the dissociation and rootlessness of the Caribbean writer. Not surprisingly, the reaction it provoked amongst Caribbean readers at the time was one of both bitterness and disappointment. In his review of the book for *Caribbean Quarterly*, John Hearne describes *The Middle Passage* as 'a flawed, unattractive, often superficial book', the diagnosis of a society by 'a surgeon who has surrendered to despair'<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, in a short piece for the *Trinidad Guardian* Derek Walcott (at that time the region's most promising poet) bemoans the fact that 'possibly our best West Indian novelist, Mr V.S. Naipaul, has chosen to do our Grand Tour, Trinidad, Guiana, Martinique, Surinam, Jamaica, with his Victorian spectacles on'<sup>5</sup>. Other (Western) readers perhaps appear to have been more forgiving, and point out that in the midst of his despair Naipaul is equally critical of both Black and Indian attitudes, or suggest that as an exploration of self, *The Middle Passage* is 'brilliant in [its] evocation of place and quick with lucid, questing intelligence'<sup>6</sup>. In a recent essay, entitled 'V.S. Naipaul and the Post-colonial Order: Reading In a Free State', Dennis Walder adopts a more sanguine position, but remains particularly aware of the divisions that Naipaul's writing of *The Middle Passage* caused. Walder notes that whilst the publication of the book 'shocked and dismayed West Indians at home and abroad for its acid dismissal of Caribbean culture, history and society. ... Even more upsetting was the enthusiastic reception it received from English and American critics who praised its critical detachment and descriptive power'<sup>7</sup>. Arguing that 'our own responses will depend upon our contexts', Walder suggests that 'Naipaul's writings push us toward becoming *more* aware of our contexts; they push us sharply and disturbingly toward an acknowledgement of our position as readers caught up in one way or another, according to different orders of perception, by the networks of power in the postcolonial dispensation' (Walder, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order', p.84).

---

<sup>4</sup> John Hearne, 'The Middle Passage', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 8 (4) (1962), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Derek Walcott, 'History and Picong ... in *The Middle Passage*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.18.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Thorpe, *V.S. Naipaul* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1976), pp.20-21.

William Walsh, *V.S. Naipaul* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Walder, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Post-colonial Order: Reading In a Free State', in *Recasting the World: Writing After Colonialism*, ed. by Jonathan White (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p.82.

Naipaul's initial desire to leave Trinidad may be explained as a desire born out of material necessity: that is, the need to place himself as a writer at the centre of a literary market. But his wish to leave at the moment of his return to the island speaks of a troubling sense of dislocation. A writer of East Indian descent, born into a Black-dominated society, and educated into an English colonial tradition, Naipaul is inevitably subject to a complex process of identity-formation. As a Trinidadian, whose Indian grandparents were transported to the Caribbean as indentured labourers in the 1890's, he is cut off from an ancestral home in India. As an Indo-Caribbean, in a largely Black Caribbean colonial society, he is culturally and ideologically disconnected from the principal political and cultural movements within the region at this time (i.e. the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's). And, as a Caribbean, educated at Queens Royal College in Port of Spain and Oxford University in England, he is a willing but nevertheless uncomfortable exile in his adopted home of England. Bemoaning the fact that, even in the mid-to-late 1960's Caribbean writers in England were 'still rootless, still isolated, even if making a "name"', Brathwaite comments in 'Timehri': 'It seemed that flung out centrifugally to the perimeter of their possibilities, our boys were failing to find a centre' (Brathwaite, 'Timehri', p.36). For Brathwaite, this changed in 1966-67 with the visit of the black power leader Stokely Carmichael to London, and the formation that same year of the Caribbean Artists Movement. Brathwaite's 'beginning' began with his return to Africa and his immersion in the spiritual life of African people, as a result of which, he notes, 'I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland' (p.33). For Naipaul the process of finding a centre has taken rather longer. It has taken him to England, India, Africa, the Near East, South America and back on occasion after occasion to the Caribbean. He is, however, at home nowhere. His fiction and non-fiction may be read as a series of arrivals and departures. Of his twenty-five books a total of ten have a major preoccupation with the Caribbean, three recount his journeys in the Indian sub-continent, two are set in England, one in Africa, and a further nine share a variety of these and other locations. In each the motif of arrival and departure provides the frame for Naipaul's acute analysis of the post-colonial world, at the same time as a

---

The best discussion of (mostly West Indian) critical responses to Naipaul's work can be found in Dolly Zulakha Hassan's *V.S. Naipaul and the West Indies* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

structure in which Naipaul's own rootlessness represents the experience of a larger community of exiled individuals. Naipaul's cultural and historical dissociation from the Caribbean is seen in the ironic detachment of his early Trinidadian novels, in the exploration of a more universal dislocation and cultural disorder in the works of his mid-period, and in his re-examination of his own writing self in his most recent books. It is also immediately evident in the titles that Naipaul has given his books, which contain both a yearning for fixity and arrival (e.g. *A House for Mr Biswas*, *A Flag on the Island*, *Finding the Centre*, *The Enigma of Arrival*, *A Way in the World*), and an undying sense of statelessness and loss (e.g. *An Area of Darkness*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *In a Free State*). His concern throughout is with the question of how the experience of the rootless individual can be written.

In his most recent work Naipaul's textual travels have become intimately linked to his own journey, his own life and his own arrival as a writer. In *Finding the Centre*, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, Naipaul suggests that only in the process of constructing the narrative of his writing self can the writer come to a new understanding of his rootless existence. 'Half a writer's work,' Naipaul argues in 'Prologue to an Autobiography' (the first of the two narratives that make up *Finding the Centre*), 'is the discovery of his subject':

And a problem for me was that my life had been varied, full of upheaval and moves: from my grandmother's Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of village India; to Port of Spain, the Negro and G.I. life of its streets, the other, ordered life of my colonial English school, which was called Queen's Royal college; and then Oxford, London and the freelancers' room at the BBC. Trying to make a beginning as a writer, I didn't know where to focus.<sup>8</sup>

Recognising the importance of his past as a means of understanding his identity as a writer, Naipaul pays due regard here to the important Indian, Caribbean and English aspects of his background that have each contributed to his writing personality. He also acknowledges the difficulty of bringing these together in the early moments of his writing career. In his effort to find some kind of equilibrium between each of them as he enters maturity, Naipaul offers the (cross-cultural) reader an intriguing example of the complex cultural negotiations made and remade by one writer over the course of nearly fifty years of literary production. In response to this, the Indian critic Sara Suleri most pertinently asks of 'Naipaul's Arrival': 'what uneasy

commerce can be established between the post-colonial and the writer? Which imperial gestures must such a writer perform, before he can delineate the relation of his language to the canon of fiction written in English?'<sup>9</sup>. Appropriating the material reality of empire and trade to the sphere of literary discourse, Suleri asks her reader to consider what kind of negotiations the post-colonial writer (i.e. Naipaul) has made throughout his career in order to reconcile the notions of 'post-colonial' and 'writer'. What is the relation between the terms 'post-colonial' and 'writer'? How does a post-colonial writer's literary and linguistic inheritance affect his entry into the literary marketplace? 'Caught between the excessive novelty of post-colonial history and the excessive anachronism of the canon', Suleri argues:

Naipaul's language functions as a fascinating paradigm for one of the several difficulties at work in the definition of what is commonly called the colonial subject. Its temporal location is curiously threatening; its safety is aligned to the ritual of arrival; its fascination with disparate systems of classification obviates the necessity of facing the question of whether it is possible for a postcolonial writer to exist in the absence of the imperial theme. (Suleri, 'Naipaul's Arrival', 25)

Hinting at the urgent claim for authority that Naipaul's narratives seem to make, Suleri suggests that Naipaul's language exists uncertainly amidst questions of culture and canon, 'equally convinced of the limitations implicit in both modes' (ibid.). His language exposes the breach at the heart of 'the colonial subject', whilst in their repeated return to 'the ritual of arrival', his texts also explore the persistent need for the colonial subject to momentarily find a place of safety within the post-colonial world. Following this, Suleri intimates that the post-colonial writer's obsession 'with disparate systems of classification' perhaps deliberately delays the need for him to question his role within contemporary cultural debates. Yet, for Naipaul it is this very question that has been the major preoccupation in recent years. For Naipaul, the attempt to find an imaginative centre has led in his mature work to the performative assertion of the identity of the writer, and the possible reconciliation of his writing persona with his post-colonial Caribbean consciousness. Initiating this process, in 'Prologue to an Autobiography' Naipaul offers an autobiographical meditation on his origins as a writer, an account of his 'literary beginnings and the imaginative promptings of [his] many-sided background' (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*, p.9). *The*

---

<sup>8</sup> Naipaul, *Finding the Centre* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.26.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Suleri, 'Naipaul's Arrival', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2 (1) (1988), 25.

*Enigma of Arrival* continues the process with the barely fictional account of a middle-aged writer, living in voluntary exile in England, who is similarly engaged in a process of self-recovery; whilst *A Way in the World* sees the writer return to his native island of Trinidad, in order to reconcile himself to his Caribbean beginnings, and to explore the nature of his subsequent rootlessness. Each text provides a narrative centred upon the arrival of the writer, and each participates in the emergence of a new writer who has learnt from his past and been saved by his writing. Each text is then concerned with a crucial process of identity-formation, and it is the nature, implications and effects of this process that will provide the main focus of this chapter.

It is in 'Discourse in the Novel' that Bakhtin most explicitly lays the grounds for a discussion of the role of language in the formation of identity, and where he suggests that the novel as a genre may be the best form for revealing the intricacies of inner psychological development. For Bakhtin the word in verbal discourse is a two-sided act. It simultaneously belongs to the self and the other. This means that at the moment of enunciation each individual speaker is always necessarily involved in the process of appropriating and assimilating other words to their own individual consciousness, a process of answering others' words and authoring one's own words. The social world of verbal discourse is then, a multi-voiced and multi-langaged world, and in it (centripetal) forces of cultural and linguistic centralisation are constantly challenged and held in check by opposing (centrifugal) forces of difference and diversity. In the process of verbal interaction these linguistic tendencies inevitably enter into contact and conflict with one another; and, for Bakhtin, it is this type of linguistic performance that typifies the activity of the novel. In Bakhtin's terms, as Morson and Emerson observe, 'the novelistic self is constituted by and as language' (Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, p.218) , and it is for this reason that the process of answering and authoring is central to the process of development and becoming both in life and in novels<sup>10</sup>. 'The tendency to assimilate others' discourse takes on an even deeper and

---

<sup>10</sup> The idea of 'answering and authoring' is given a particular gloss by Michael Holquist, who notes that as a result of his 'translinguistic' project: 'Bakhtin, ...reminds us that literature is important not merely because it gives pleasure, or leads us to a kind of arcane knowledge we might otherwise lack. No, literature is important because it gives the most rigorous on-the-job training for a work we must all as men do, the work of answering and authoring the text of our social and physical universe'.

more basic significance in an individual's ideological becoming', Bakhtin notes, precisely because, 'Another's discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth- but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world; the very basis of our behaviour' (DN, p.342). In this sense, Bakhtin suggests, another's discourse acts both as authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse- and it is the relation between each kind of discourse that determines the development of one's inner consciousness, and the awakening of the self. In relation to the novelistic discourse of writers, Bakhtin submits that an understanding of the workings of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse would be potentially most productive with regard to questions of literary influence (DN, p.347), though it seems clear that such an understanding of the interaction of inner voices is also particularly relevant to the analysis of a writer's development. When a writer takes responsibility for his own discourse, the fractious divisions between previously authoritative and internally persuasive voices emerge within the literary text, and it is for this reason that it is possible to consider the arrival of the writer in Naipaul's recent work in terms of a textual struggle between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Not unexpectedly, authoritative discourse can be described as a discourse or a word which is wholly invested with authority (religious, political, moral etc.). In 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin states:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power that it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. ... Its language is a special (as it were, hieratic) language. (DN, p.342)

From this, it is clear that authoritative discourse is unconditional in its desires and effects. It commands a position of inalienable authority: 'we encounter it with its authority already fused to it'. It cannot be argued with. Rather, as an element of discursive transmission it can only be totally accepted or totally rejected. In formal terms, this means that within the context of the novel the authoritative word is clearly

separated from other discourses. It does not, as Bakhtin suggests, merge with other discourses. Instead, 'it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert' (DN, p.343).

In his most recent work, the identification and acknowledgement of authoritative discourse has had an important bearing on Naipaul's engagement with the subject of the post-colonial writer. In particular, in his 1987 novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*, the negotiation of previously authoritative and internally persuasive positions and beliefs is central to the process of identity-formation presented in the text. Naipaul's novel focuses on the relationship between landscape, literature and history, and their determinations on the writer and the writing process. Written retrospectively and divided into five sections, the narrative action takes place over the period of the writer's ten-year residence in a cottage in the village of Waldenshaw in Wiltshire, possibly between 1970 and 1980. The first section, 'Jack's Garden', presents an account that shadows the writer's presence at the cottage from the moment of his arrival to the point of his impending departure. 'The Journey', section two, turns the clock back from the writer's arrival at the cottage in 1970 to his departure from Trinidad in the 1950's. In Sections three and four, 'Ivy' And 'Rooks' the writer's attention is focused on the landlord and the Manor House to which his cottage is attached; whilst the final section, 'The Ceremony of Farewell', provides a reflection on the purpose and importance of the narrative as the writer returns to Trinidad, the island of his birth, for his sister's funeral. The novel closes with the writer finally able to start the process of writing. Yet, in the opening sentences the writer reveals that upon his arrival at the cottage he was simply unable to situate himself: 'For the first four days it rained. I could hardly see where I was. Then it stopped raining and beyond the lawn and outbuildings in front of my cottage I saw fields with stripped trees on the boundaries of each field...' (EA, p.11). It therefore opens with the writer in need of authoritative markers.

Over and above the characteristic English concern with the weather the opening sentences of the novel establish a direct relation between setting or landscape and self-constitution. The Wiltshire countryside and its representatives act as authoritative markers in the text, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the treatment of Jack and the landlord. In contrast to the writer's sense of feeling 'unanchored and strange', Jack, his neighbour, is 'considered to be part of the view', his life is seen as 'genuine, rooted, fitting: man fitting the landscape' (EA, p.19). In

this way, it becomes clear that, for the self-exiled writer, Jack's garden signifies the complete coming together of man and landscape. Echoing the location of the authoritative word in a distanced zone in the past, the writer admits: 'I saw him as a remnant of the past' (EA, p.19). In fact, it might even be suggested that in the first section of the novel the humanity or personality of Jack is effectively erased by the more compelling signification of his environment. To this effect, Jack's sickness is revealed in the recognition of the absence of a 'controlling hand' in the garden (EA, p.42), Jack's death is announced in the cessation of smoke signals emanating from the cottage of his chimney (EA, p.44), and the eradication of Jack's memory comes as his garden is 'concreted over, to create a forecourt' (EA, p.86). Just as Jack seems to be substituted by his garden, so too in the case of the landlord it can be argued that environment overtakes character in terms of importance for the writer. After his first glimpse of the mysterious figure at the centre of the decaying manor, the writer confesses that: 'more than ever for me the personality of the man continued to be expressed by his setting, by these beeches on the public road, by the permanently closed front gate of the manor and the overgrown garden at the back' (EA, p.172). In the context of an authoritative sense of 'Englishness' it is possible to comprehend what the figure of the landlord might represent to such a writer. Acknowledging that 'The estate had been enormous...It had been created in part by the wealth of empire' (EA, pp.52-53), for the post-colonial writer the landlord represents the metropolitan values of 19th century imperialism, privilege and authority, the anonymous institutional face of trade, expansion, and colonialism. It is a history and fantasy that has in fact drawn the writer to the cottage: 'This empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor' (EA, p.174). On the one hand, this suggests a certain historical intimacy between landlord and tenant that at the very least argues for the interconnection of both notional coloniser and notional colonised. Naipaul's novel may even be said to possess an allegorical dimension, primarily concerned with the decline of Empire and the renegotiation of the terms under which the contemporary world may be considered 'post-colonial'<sup>11</sup>. Yet, on the other hand, this point of connection is

---

<sup>11</sup> Bruce King makes particular reference to this aspect of the novel. King notes first that the landlord and his estate 'are associated with imperial England'. 'The landlord's sloth and preoccupation with his

almost immediately and quite deliberately undercut. During his stay at the cottage the writer only catches sight of the landlord on two very brief occasions. Moreover, the writer's comments make clear that there are concrete motives for the deliberate effacement of the landlord as man for 'the magic of the place' and 'the mystery of the manor and the grounds':

If I had seen my landlord, heard his voice, heard his conversation, seen his face and expression, been constrained to make conversation back, to be polite, the impression would have been ineffaceable. He would have been endowed with a 'character', with vanities, irritations, absurdities; and this would have led me to make judgements- the judgements that, undoing acceptance, can also undo a relationship. As it was, the personality of my landlord was expressed for me by the mystery of the manor and the grounds. (EA, p.175)

This shows that for the writer the landlord must only and exclusively figure as a sign of cultural authority. The writer has no wish to see or hear his landlord, as this would inevitably challenge his prejudices and preconceptions, and force him to make an evaluation of the landlord's 'character'. Instead the landlord's 'character' is contained by the estate, and the landlord himself is placed within a distanced zone of authoritative discourse marked by unconditional 'acceptance'.

The writer's wish to avoid his landlord might perhaps show the fragile nature of this 'acceptance'. However, it is also clear that the authority of the English setting is closely supported in the text by the authoritative markers of English Literature and Culture, and that this too has a determining effect on the formation of the writer's identity. At the beginning of the novel the first details of precise geographical location lead the writer to reach for and then push back a connection to the most authoritative of English writers: 'The river was called the Avon; not the one connected with Shakespeare' (EA, p.11). Although the connection here is undercut, this nevertheless shows that much of the fantasy of Englishness comes from the writer's investment in an authoritative notion of English literary and cultural identity, which was no doubt central to the colonial education of his youth. Hence, as he is seemingly thrust into a state of limbo in the opening of the novel ('I saw what I saw

---

past have led to decay, the loss of order in his estate and the emergence of a new people', whilst, 'Naipaul's presence on the estate and reconversion of a property into his own house reverses the imperial story of the indentured labourer on the Trinidadian sugar plantation' (King, *V.S. Naipaul*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p.145). He then goes on to suggest that the landlord and his estate are 'symbolic of English Literature'. 'It seems from the landlord and Alan,' King argues, 'that English literature has also decayed- ... - and the implications are that Naipaul is now, ironically, the heir of the imperial language and literature' (p.146).

very clearly. But I didn't know what I was looking at. I had nothing to fit it into') the writer reveals that Salisbury (the closest town to Waldenshaw) was in fact the first English town that he had known, 'the first I had been given some idea of, from the reproduction of the Constable painting of Salisbury Cathedral in my third-standard reader' (EA, p.12). This kind of cultural connection provides the only means for him to situate himself in his early days at the cottage, and thus illustrates the persistent and significant effect of colonial education upon the colonial subject, which can perhaps be understood as a 'domination by consent'. As the editors of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* note:

This domination by consent is achieved through what is taught to the colonised, how it is taught, and the subsequent emplacement of the educated subject as a part of the continuing imperial apparatus- a knowledge of English literature, for instance, was required for entry into the civil service and the legal professions. Education is then a conquest of another kind of territory- it is the foundation of colonialist power and consolidates this power through legal and administrative apparatuses. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, p.425)

The writer's colonial education provides knowledge of his new setting, but it is a knowledge of a certain kind- a knowledge that is supported by the educational tools of empire and, as a consequence, a knowledge that places the writer within a 'continuing imperial apparatus'. The idea of England which provides access to the meanings of the surrounding landscape also depends on an untouchable quality that is revealed in the following comments: 'So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of the stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy' (EA, p.22). The writer's language here is particularly revealing. For, echoing the earlier sentiment of 'magic' and 'mystery' placed around the landlord's estate, here the writer's knowledge of the English literary tradition sanctions entry to 'a special kind of past', a 'fantasy'. Both words or phrases possess connotations of the romance of English Literature, but more importantly they also suggest a sense of prior, distanced, acknowledged authority. The writer's appreciation of 'the history of language and writing' is not simply a formulaic history of words, novels and writers; rather, it is a history, a past, that has in a very real sense determined the path of his career. That is, a history and a past with 'authority already fused to it'. There is little

argument that the writer feels the effects of this fantasy, as he notes: 'It wasn't only that I was unformed at the age of eighteen or had no idea of what I was going to write about. It was that the idea given by my education- and by the more 'cultural', or the nicest, part of that education- was that the writer was a person possessed of sensibility; that the writer was someone who recorded or displayed an inward development' (EA, p.134).

This youthful conception of the writer's life is countered in the mature writer's reflection on his actual experiences, in which all notions of literary arrival, or entry into the literary canon, are always necessarily figured as too late. This is first and most effectively illustrated in the 'feeling of wrongness' the writer reveals at the moment he arrives in London in the 1950's, after the journey which he makes in order to become a writer. Whilst on the one hand, he feels 'like a man entering the world of a novel, a book; entering the real world'; at the same time, this feeling is contrasted with the realisation that 'I had come too late to find the England, the heart of empire, which (like a provincial from the far corner of empire) I had created in my fantasy' (EA, pp.119-120). In this respect the journey that the writer makes from Trinidad to London (via New York), presented in the second section of the novel, is crucial to the understanding of his emergence as a writer. It can clearly be read in the sense of a journey to the centre of authority, to a 'life at the centre of things' (EA, p.120). However, in the writer's mature reflection on this period of his life, it is also presented as the beginning of a process of questioning. On this journey, which leads to an apparently definitive moment of arrival, the writer's early fantasy of what it means to be a writer operating within an English language and tradition is both exposed for what it is, and brought into realigned focus. Two episodes in the novel can be cited in order to support this. The first, the visit to a bookshop in New York, presents an account of the writer's initiation into the commercial world of books, and reveals the strange twists and turns of logic that contribute to his vision of the writer. The episode is written as an experience of simultaneous negation and absolute confirmation, in which the journeying colonial student is enticed into buying a book that he knows he cannot read. This is because the experience of the bookshop and the subject of the book are essentially both unfamiliar and alienating. The shop contains few books that the young writer has heard of, and the book he eventually chooses, he says, 'was far from anything in my experience, and beyond my comprehension' (EA,

p.110). On the surface this might be seen to present a certain barrier or obstruction to the world contained within the book. Yet, he reveals that he was so consumed by the romanticism of Literature and the abstraction of his education, that this difficulty only added to the fantasy and authority he was making his way towards: 'the alienness of a book, though it might keep me from reading it (...), did not prevent me from admiring it. The very alienness, the inaccessibility, was like a promise of romance-- a reward, some way in the future, for making myself a writer' (EA, p.110). Thus, in this instance the fantasy of becoming a writer does not even depend upon putting books to the use they were intended for. In fact the opposite is true, books are principally objects of affection or admiration, signs of success, a mark of the writer's existence. The book is accepted as a sign of complete authority.

This paradoxical understanding of the value of writers and writing seems to be further supported by the account of the young writer's attempt to write a short-story whilst on the ship from New York to London. Entitled 'Gala Night', the story is intended to retell the events of the last full day on the ship that ends with a dinner-dance that takes place in tourist class in the evening. To an eighteen-year-old with dreams of becoming a writer the story 'was knowing and illusioned' (EA, p.113), and he explains elsewhere: 'It was wise; it suggested experience and the traveller. 'Gala Night'- it might have been written by a man who had seen many gala nights. Knowing what it was doing, knowing the value of names, it played easily with great names' (EA, p.112). This obviously fits with an account of the writer as a man possessed of sensibility engaged on a kind of epic personal adventure, with a desire to take his place amongst a pantheon of Great Writers and reveal how much he knows about the world. However, in the retrospective presentation of this piece of writing it becomes apparent that there is much that is excluded from the early writer's vision precisely because of the fracturing and prohibitive effects of dominant literary models. To this end, the mature writer comments:

Because of my ideas about the writer, I took everything I saw for granted. I thought I knew it all already, like a bright student. I thought that as a writer I had only to find out what I had read about and already knew. And very soon-after 'Gala Night' and all my many writings about the Hardings and Angela- I had nothing to record and had to stop. (EA, p.134)

This reveals the debilitating influence of unconditionally accepted authoritative discourse. Bakhtin remarks in 'Discourse in the Novel' that, within the artistic

context, the authoritative word enters the novel as an 'alien body ...- it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life, and the context around it dies, words dry up' (DN, p.344). So too, at a key moment in his writing career words quite literally dry up for the writer precisely because his conception of writing leaves him with 'nothing to record'. He has to stop. However, because in *The Enigma of Arrival* 'there is some kind of exchange always' (EA, p.83), much can be read into the overcoming of this period of creative sterility.

Bakhtin notes in 'Discourse in the Novel' that in contrast to the closed-off, inert, monologic authoritative word, the internally persuasive word is 'half-ours and half-someone else's' (DN, p.345). The internally persuasive word therefore most directly relates to acts and moments of appropriation and assimilation when it is possible to make the word of another one's own. The transition from Bakhtin's explication of authoritative discourse to that of internally persuasive discourse is best seen in the following passage:

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us. (DN, p.345)

Here Bakhtin suggests that internally persuasive discourse instigates a process of ideological awakening that leads to an awareness of cultural and literary difference, and an appreciation of the persistent and necessary influence of the other. Bakhtin makes clear that the possibilities opened up by internally persuasive discourse accrue as a result of the fact that unlike authoritative discourse it is not isolated, static or finite. Instead, it is full of potential, a word formed in a zone of contemporaneity, directed towards the future and therefore 'able to reveal ever new *ways to mean*' (DN, p.346). At the point at which the gap between man and writer is revealed in Naipaul's text then, the appreciation of a discourse that is internally persuasive (and not merely authoritative) becomes integral to the arrival of the writer. Here the mature writer first explains: 'In what I wrote I was recording my ignorance and

innocence, my deprivations (...) and frustration', and then recognises that: 'though travelling to write, concentrating on my experience, eager for experience, I was shutting myself off from it, editing it out of my memory' (EA, p.112, and p.115). It is in this sense that 'Gala Night' does not and ultimately cannot contain the truth of what really happened on the ship- characters must speak as if in films, the writer must keep his distance from his subjects, and most importantly, the question of race must be evaded, along with anything else that might lead to 'disturbance', 'vulnerability', and 'separation'. Hence, reflecting upon the eighteen-year-old who stepped off the ship to arrive in England as a 'writer', the new writer of *The Enigma of Arrival* suggests:

To be that kind of writer (as I interpreted it) I had to be false; I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be. Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself much damage. (EA, p.134)

Finally, in this passage the writer identifies the conscious cultural negotiations that have influenced and determined the nature of his writing. The words that stand out here are 'false', 'pretend', 'concealing' and 'damage'. They collectively suggest the harmful lies that the young writer sought to construct in order to play the part of the metropolitan writer. The desire to become a metropolitan 'kind of writer' represents a desire to assume an apparently dominant form of cultural and literary authority. However, the inherent dangers in doing this are also clear. The mask hides the writer's background. It conceals the writer's 'I'. In particular, it evades the question of race. It disguises the fact that the writer of 'Gala Night' is from the Caribbean, and that this Caribbean writer also has a Hindu-Indian ancestry. In this sense, it is possible to see how the total acceptance of a historically-conditioned and institutionally-enforced idea of English literary and cultural authority can lead to a creative sterility for the Caribbean writer. Closed-off from all other forms of discourse, authoritative discourse, in strict terms, cannot be creative. Hence, this may be one reason why it took the writer six years to get out of writing derivative 'Gala Nights'. However, in contrast to its theme of literary imitation and mimicry, the writing of this episode in the novel can be seen as a prime example of the process of experimentation and discrimination crucial to the ideological awakening of the writer's consciousness. For, in the process of narration the writer subjects the story of 'Gala Night', and the experience it simultaneously refers to and evades, to close

scrutiny from all possible angles. Alongside an intimation of the story of 'Gala Night' the writer places: a sense of what his younger self actually experienced but which was repressed from the story, a description of how characters and their speech were formed, and a suggestion of how he would now figure the journey differently. Such examples of creative excision are explained in terms of a fear of the assertion of racial identity at the time of writing 'Gala Night', as he notes: 'It was too frightening to accept the other thing, to face the other thing; it was to be diminished as man and writer' (EA, p.117). However, such 'racial diminution' ultimately leads to a gap between man and writer, and it is in this sense that the mature writer's identification of his 'colonial-Hindu self' serves to mark the point at which this gap can begin to be bridged within the text. It also signals the moment at which *The Enigma of Arrival* becomes a narrative in which the writer begins to negotiate his own rootlessness, and finally faces his own otherness.

The question of how the writer 'delineates the relation of his language to the canon of fiction written in English', and how he reconciles the fantasy of the English writer with the reality of his colonial background is most immediately answered in the text itself. In a phrase that perhaps underplays the importance of the event, the writer states that after five years of struggling to find a voice, struggling with 'material': 'I wrote very simply and fast of the simplest things in my memory' (EA, p.135). This refers to the writing of his first book (*Miguel Street*), and the imaginative return he begins to make to the island of his youth in this and other books. Moving between the poles of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, writing becomes a process of salvation and restoration and an integral part of the writer's survival<sup>12</sup>. Illustrating this, at the central point of the novel the writer confesses, 'With me, everything started from writing. Writing had brought me to England, had sent me away from England; had given me a vision of romance; had nearly broken me with disappointment. Now it was writing, the book, that gave savour, possibility, to each day, and took me on night after night' (EA, p.154). Suggesting how he is made and remade with the writing of each book, the writer indicates here how his struggle with other authoritative and internally persuasive

---

<sup>12</sup> It should perhaps be made clear that the two types of discourse that Bakhtin describes in 'Discourse in the Novel' do not simply lead from one to the other in terms of a linear progression. Instead they are best thought of as concurrent forces in constant interaction throughout one's life. Bakhtin sets up what may seem like a binary opposition merely to emphasise the limits of these two tendencies.

discourses is essentially a struggle with himself, and thus how it is central to his process of self-creation. Addressing the rootlessness of the post-colonial writer, *The Enigma of Arrival* presents a post-colonial consciousness awakening to independent ideological life in a world of alien discourses, and suggests that in the face of the legacies of empire and colonialism all identities and truths are at least half fictions. In the course of the novel, this leads the writer to conclude that there is no essential and universal connection between landscape, literature and history. Rather, each one in turn is subject to the shifting modes and practices of ideological and cultural construction. Neither Jack nor the landlord is exclusively or unproblematically presented as representative of an authoritative discourse of Empire or England. Both are also signs of an England on its last legs, when the fantasy of Empire is on the edge of extinction. For example, whilst the writer is told that 'The estate had been enormous ... It had been created in part by the wealth of empire', this assessment is followed by his own assertion that 'then bit by bit it had been alienated' (EA, pp.52-53)<sup>13</sup>. Likewise, whilst *The Enigma of Arrival* might be seen to be 'saturated in the English literary tradition', it is also clearly 'hesitant as to whether it altogether belongs', precisely because (as Helen Hayward notes) 'its allusions work so hard to place it in relation to this tradition'<sup>14</sup>. In purely stylistic terms, the adoption of a retrospective mode of narration throughout the novel means that although the writer is subject to the authoritative signification around him, at the same time, at the moment of writing, such things are consistently worked over and subject to experimentation and discrimination. In fact, the structure of the novel shows this to be the case as, in one sense, it can arguably be read as the telling and retelling of the same narrative in five separate but interconnecting sections. The shift of focus from Jack to the writer to the landlord and to the writer's sister, emphasises the fact that *The Enigma of Arrival* is as much a novel about textuality as it is exclusively about ideas of Englishness or the post-colonial subject. Both fictional autobiography and

---

<sup>13</sup> Reading *The Enigma of Arrival* as an examination of the West Indian's relation to the idea of England, Helen Tiffin suggests that Naipaul's novel 'involves the 'othering' of England'. She describes *The Enigma of Arrival* as 'a text whose performative function is the unmasking of the literary and cultural authority represented by England to the end of reconciliation with the self; an essay written in resistance to a colonial interpellation destructive of the person-as-writer since at the outset it created a deeply rooted division between the two'.

Tiffin, 'Rites of Resistance: Counter-Discourse and West Indian Biography', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1) (1989), 38.

autobiographical fiction<sup>14</sup>, the 'novel' conceals the truths of the writer's life within the saving lies of fiction, until it finally becomes impossible to separate one from the other. Described on its cover as 'A Novel', *The Enigma of Arrival* only ambiguously fulfils this description, and is perhaps more accurately described as part-novel, part-autobiography, part-essay and part-cultural history. Such generic ambiguity naturally reflects Naipaul's apparent dissatisfaction with the novel as a form (he has not written what one would term a conventional novel since the late 1970's). Whilst, more specifically, it indicates that, 'Naipaul's most significant work has little to do with definitive statements about post-colonial history, and more with a perception of the writer's guilty involvement in the construction of his own plots' (Suleri, 'Naipaul's Arrival', 26). In the novel itself this sense of guilt is reflected in the writer's final acceptance, towards the end of 'Rooks', that: 'Land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories' (EA, p.301). In a sense this is evident from the outset. Yet, the motivation behind its assertion, a sense of grief caused by the final recognition of a decaying landscape, suggests that this is clearly a statement of some importance. More than anything else, it hints at the writer's uneasy acceptance of his infiltration into the Wiltshire landscape, and the difficulty he has in acknowledging the effects of his presence in the valley. As a moment of arrival this is clearly another uncomfortable moment of self-discovery. The writer's sense of guilt at his part in the changing life of the valley reflects his recognition of the constructions at the heart of a previously sacred world. His acknowledgement that he too is implicated in the process suggests that his performed persona is also partly constructed, and that his arrival is also partly staged.

Clearly, the status of the writer is fundamental to the meaning of *The Enigma of Arrival*. It has though also provided one of the main concerns in many of Naipaul's

---

<sup>14</sup> Helen Hayward, 'Tradition, Innovation, and the Representation of England in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 32 (2) (1997), 63.

<sup>15</sup> Mark McWatt explores this cross-generic tendency in recent Caribbean writing in his essay, 'The West Indian Writer and Self: Recent 'Fictional Autobiography' by Naipaul and Harris', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1) (1989), 16-27.

Likewise, Judy Rao addresses the question of Naipaul's apparent dissatisfaction with the form of the novel in her essay, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Self-destructive Novel', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (2) (1989), 53-66.

essays and in his most important earlier works<sup>16</sup>. The list of aspiring writers in Naipaul's fiction is a long one, and includes such key figures as Ganesh Ramsumair in *The Mystic Masseur*, Mohun Biswas in *A House for Mr Biswas*, Ralph Singh in *The Mimic Men* and Jimmy Ahmed in *Guerillas*, as well as others such as Man-Man and B. Wordsworth in *Miguel Street* and Mr Blackwhite in *A Flag on the Island*. Naipaul's writers share an obsession with the idea of authorship and a belief in the authoritative signification of the book and the word. Each comes to writing with a desire for enunciation, fulfilment, and self-definition. For each, writing offers an escape from the insularity of the colonial society to an imagined world of fantasy and romance, an assertion of individual freedom. Yet, as Patrick Parrinder notes, for Naipaul's writers the meaning of such freedom is 'always problematic, since literacy comes to them not as a natural inheritance, but as an aspect of the 'synthetic' cultures of the post-imperialist world'<sup>17</sup>. Ganesh Ramsumair, for example, is the owner of some fifteen hundred books, who one day makes a vow to write whilst in a printing shop in San Fernando, Trinidad. And write he does. First producing *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*, Ganesh goes on to write such devotional works as *The Road to Happiness*, *Re-Incarnation*, *The Soul As I See It*, *The Necessity for Faith*, *What God Told Me* and *Profitable Evacuation*. He also produces an island handbook for American soldiers stationed on Trinidad during the war, *The Guide to Trinidad*, and an autobiography, 'variously described as a spiritual thriller and a metaphysical whodunnit'<sup>18</sup>, entitled *The Years of Guilt*. Yet, as Ganesh gradually moves from pundit to politician the urge to write recedes, and four months after publishing his autobiography he voluntarily suppresses it, and then decides to dissolve his own publishing company. He comes to see his career as a mystic as an embarrassment, and the writing of his autobiography as a mistake. Abandoning writing altogether, at the close of the novel Ganesh remakes himself as G. Ramsay Muir M.B.E., a cold-hearted colonial statesman. He thus establishes a clear distance from his earlier incarnation as a pundit and writer, and effectively separates himself from his earlier spiritual and confessional writings.

---

<sup>16</sup> A selection of Naipaul's essays, written between 1958 and 1967, can be found in Robert Hamner's *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul* (London: Heinemann, 1979). Of particular note are 'London', 'The Little More', 'Jasmine', 'Images', and 'The Writer'.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Parrinder, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Uses of Literacy', *Critical Quarterly*, 21 (2) (1979), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1964), p.14.

For Mohun Biswas, meanwhile, the desire to write is intimately connected to his search for a place in the world, which is symbolised in Naipaul's most celebrated novel in the central character's quest for a house of his own. Mr Biswas' greatest fear is 'to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated'<sup>19</sup>, and his story records in part the role that writing, language and signs play in his quest for accommodation. Born into a world of signs that negate his presence, Mr Biswas' very identity is bound up with language and the written word. His first real job is as a sign writer (he has a particular affinity for lettering), and it is this which rather haphazardly leads him first to the orthodox-Hindu Tulsi household, and then later to the *Trinidad Sentinel* and a job as a journalist. He is also an avid reader and an aspiring creative writer. However, unlike his son Anand, he is unable to connect the fantasy world of English Literature to his life in Trinidad. His attempt to write a short-story entitled 'Escape' ends with him either abandoning the story after the first sentence ('At the age of thirty-three, when he was already the father of four children....'), or writing the same story over and over again. 'None of these stories was finished, and their theme was always the same,' the narrator of *A House for Mr Biswas* comments, 'The hero, trapped into a marriage, burdened with a family, his youth gone, meets a young girl. She is slim, almost thin, and dressed in white. She is fresh, tender, unknissed; and she is unable to bear children. Beyond the meeting the stories never went' (Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp.344-345). Such a sense of entrapment and desire for escape suggests much about Mr Biswas' social and cultural condition. The fact that he is unable to finish the story indicates too that his quest is likely to end with absence and lack, a desire unfulfilled, rather than conclusive signs of presence or success. This is shown in the novel as Mr Biswas is forced to move from house to house until he finally ends up at Sikkim Street, in the suburbs of Port of Spain, at the close of the novel. But even this house falls far short of Biswas' ideal, and its deficiencies act as a constant reminder of the many compromises he has had to make in order to claim his own portion of the world.

Like Mr Biswas, Ralph Singh is also engaged in a quest for identity and so too is his quest centred upon the activity of writing. Singh is an exiled colonial politician ensconced in an unglamorous English hotel, attempting to make sense of himself and the events of his past by slowly ordering his life into a narrative

---

<sup>19</sup> Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.14.

structure. A casualty of Caribbean politics, Singh comes to writing in the hope of recording the restlessness of the region. But acknowledging that he too is a victim of such restlessness, his story becomes more personal and his writing turns into an attempt to rediscover the untold truth of his existence. Through the course of the novel writing provides order and routine for Singh. He builds around himself a complexly constructed, multi-layered narrative, and this even enables him to conclude on the final page of the book that 'writing, for all its initial distortion, clarifies and even becomes a process of life'<sup>20</sup>. Yet, there is also the suggestion throughout that Singh's turn to writing actually represents an evasion of life. He withdraws from engagement in the political future of his island, and instead adopts the role of a classically educated, Anglicised solitary writer. From this position of safety he forges a new identity for himself. However, his professed faith in the transcendent, redemptive quality of writing is implicitly and consistently subverted by his own contradictory discourse, and it is this that inevitably leads the reader to question both the status of the writer and the authority of his writings.

In *Guerrillas* it is Jimmy Ahmed, the leader of a Black-power commune called Thrushcross Grange, who makes the most compelling claim for the authority of authorship<sup>21</sup>. For Jimmy, words are a powerful vision of reality and writing- whether it is a revolutionary manifesto or a romantic novel- is an assertion of his apparent authority over others. Living on the boundary between order and disorder, he writes, we are told, 'out of disturbance, out of wonder at himself, out of some sudden clear vision of an aspect of his past, or out of panic' (Naipaul, *Guerrillas*, p.38). He therefore looks to words for deliverance and confirmation of his self. But, his belief in the power of his words has fatal consequences too. Amidst the heightened racial tension on the island the gap between fantasy and reality becomes blurred and

---

<sup>20</sup> Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.251.

<sup>21</sup> The name of Jimmy's commune, Thrushcross Grange, is of course an allusion to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. In *Guerrillas* the intertextual connection is made on the first pages, as Jane and Roche approach the commune, as follows:

'Thrushcross,' Jane said.

'T'rush-cross. That's how you pronounce it. It's from *Wur-thering Heights*. Like "furthering".'

'I thought it sounded very English.'

'I don't think it means anything. I don't think Jimmy sees himself as Heathcliff or anything like that. He took a writing course, and it was one of the books he had to read. I think he just likes the name.' (Naipaul, *Guerrillas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.10).

For a detailed analysis of the literary allusion in Naipaul's *Guerrillas*, see Bruce King, *V.S. Naipaul*, pp.111-115, and Neil ten Kortenaar, 'Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V.S. Naipaul and *Guerrillas*', *Contemporary Literature*, 31 (3) (1991), 330-331.

Jimmy's rejection of Marjorie in the final pages of his romantic novel both sanctions and foretells his later murder of Jane. The apocalypse that Jimmy brings down on those closest to him does not lead to his salvation. Rather, he finds himself as rootless at the end of the novel as he was at the beginning. Like Ganesh Ramsumair, Mohun Biswas and Ralph Singh before him, Jimmy Ahmed demonstrates the difficulty that Naipaul's writers face in making their arrival in the world.

In *The Enigma of Arrival* just as the novel at its beginning and at its close foretells the remaking of the world (the former is written in the terms of a pseudo-biblical act of creation, and in the latter Naipaul asserts: 'our sacred world had vanished. Every generation now was to take us further away from those sanctities. But we remade the world for ourselves; every generation does that', EA, p.318), so too, it is clear that in many ways the novel also enacts the remaking of the writer. That the two projects are necessarily combined is suggested by the statement that: 'Ever since I had begun to identify my subjects I had hoped to arrive, in a book, at a synthesis of the worlds and cultures that had made me' (EA, p.144). Here the writer reveals his desire for reconciliation and arrival within the text, at the same time as implicitly disclosing the synthetic, fabricated, self-constructed nature of his own writing identity. The most crucial cultural negotiations within *The Enigma of Arrival* centre upon the emergence of a writer situated somewhere between author, narrator and character. In fact, it is this which leads John Thieme to carefully describe Naipaul's novel as, 'a personal meditation by a Trinidadian writer, whose origins replicate Naipaul's, who has written a series of books which (although never named) exactly match Naipaul's own and who, since around 1970, has, like Naipaul, been living on Salisbury Plain, the area which provides the novel with its main setting'<sup>22</sup>. As Thieme suggests, although Naipaul's name is never actually mentioned in the narrative, the reader is encouraged to make an implicit connection between Naipaul and the writer because of their shared biographies and bibliographies. *The Enigma of*

---

<sup>22</sup> John Thieme, 'Thinly-veiled Autobiography', *Third World Quarterly*, 9 (4) (1987), 1376.

The use of autobiography in Naipaul's work is clearly a theme that has occupied many of his critics, and as such, individual discussions of this would be too numerous to mention just in passing. The most recent full-length study of this aspect of Naipaul's work is Judith Levy's *V.S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995). Working within a Lacanian framework of textual analysis, Levy argues the following- that 'a fundamental impetus of Naipaul's writing is to create a self, which, in textual terms is to write autobiography', that 'the writing of autobiography is for Naipaul conditional on the acquisition of a myth of origin', and

*Arrival* delves deep into the writer's supposed literary past and contains barely hidden references to a number of Naipaul's previous texts. Indeed, the writer even finds himself in Wiltshire due to the commercial failure of his history of Trinidad (Naipaul's *The Loss of El Dorado*). When he arrives at the cottage he is in the midst of writing 'a book about fear' (EA, p.93) that is for the most part set in Africa (*In a Free State*). But he is struggling. The first story that comes to him after his arrival at the cottage seems to be something different, 'a free ride of the imagination' (EA, p.92), that is inspired by an early painting by the Surrealist artist Giorgio de Chirico, entitled 'The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon' (see Illustration 1). Unlike the writer's book, this new story is to be set in classical times. It will present the tale of a man who arrives at a port, enters the life of the city, finds himself after some time lost and bereft of purpose, wishes to escape, but is finally unable to do so having already 'lived out his life' (EA, p.92). Yet this story never gets written. Or, if it does, it is seen only in fragments in the final narrative of *The Enigma of Arrival* (EA, pp.156-157). Instead, the narrative structure of mysterious arrival, momentary crisis and ambivalent ending finds its way into the writer's other texts and offers the writer a narrative framework in which to view his own life-journey. This is first made clear at the beginning of 'The Journey', the second section of the novel, when the writer confesses, 'it did not occur to me that the story of 'The Enigma of Arrival'-- a sunlit sea journey ending in a dangerous classical city-- which had come to me as a kind of release from the creative rigours and the darkness of my own African story, it did not occur to me that that Mediterranean story was really no more than a version of the story I was already writing' (EA, p.93), whilst at the close of this section, he repeats: 'It did not occur to me that the story that had come to me as a pleasant fantasy had already occurred, and was an aspect of my own' (EA, p.157).

---

that 'this condition is thwarted by a split that constitutes his cultural dislocation' (xi). For, Levy this results in the production of 'deflected autobiographies' (ibid.).

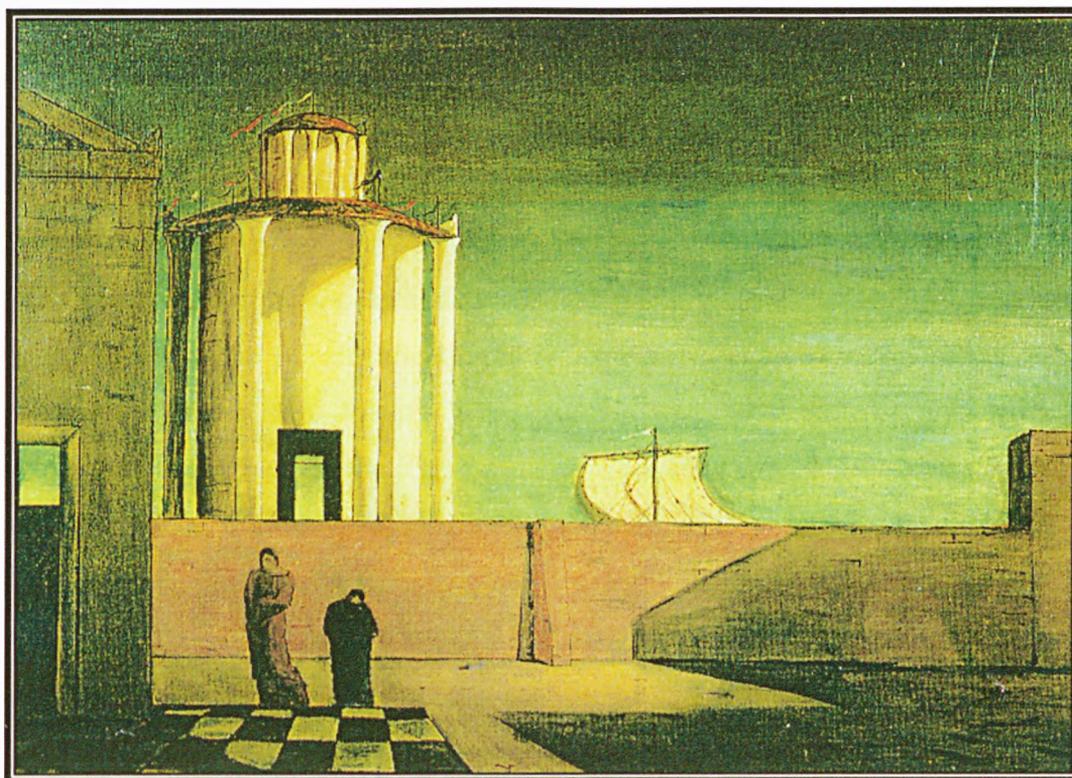


Illustration 1: Giorgio de Chirico, 'The Enigma of Arrival and the Afternoon'

This apparent correspondence between the life of the writer and the texts he produces perhaps suggests that in *The Enigma of Arrival* the writer has indeed arrived at a 'synthesis of the worlds and cultures that had made [him]'. In fact, the writer even concludes *The Enigma of Arrival* with a summation of its purpose and importance, which provides an indication of what he has come to learn in the process of writing the text:

The story had become more personal: my journey, the writer's journey, the writer defined by his writing discoveries, his ways of seeing, rather than by his personal adventures, writer and man separating at the beginning of the journey and coming together in a second life just before the end. (EA, p.309)

This might be seen as the final coda of the writer's arrival. However, the degree to which this is achieved by the close of the book might be questioned. Despite his protestations to the contrary, it can be argued that the writer's use of personal pronouns here gives him away. The story may be 'more personal' and it may follow

an arc of separation and reconciliation, but there does seem to be a distinction between 'my journey' and 'the writer's journey' or 'my journey' and 'his ways of seeing'. In the shift between first and third person perspectives a gap opens up, which allows the writer to incorporate within himself both the omniscience of an author (nominally recognised as V.S. Naipaul) and the (relatively) more limited perspective of a narrator or character operating within the bounds of the fictional world. Whilst on the one hand, this suggests the potency of the writer's position; on the other, it also reveals the writer's self-conscious construction of his own creative persona. Such overdone and over-determined self-fashioning leads Peter Hughes to suggest that the high degree of self-reflection in Naipaul's text actually serves to subvert its primary referentiality<sup>23</sup>. Hence, what reads like and aims for the truth of autobiography, by bearing the marks of its own construction, actually reveals its very constructedness. Certainly, Naipaul's foregrounding of the writer is intended to get at the truths behind the writing process, and the negotiations made in order to reconcile writing and the writer's post-colonial life. Yet it is equally clear that in the process of doing this the figure of the writer comes to stand for something more.

As the newly constituted writer attempts to fill in the gaps of previous utterances and reflect upon the meanings attached to past texts and contexts, the wish to complete the puzzle of arrival in the narrative is most evident in 'The Journey'. Here, the mature writer looks back to the journey that he made to England, the supposed centre of institutional and cultural authority, in the early 1950's. It is at this point that questions of truth and falsity get to the heart of the constitution of the writer, and it is here too that the writer most directly attempts any form of self-definition ('To be that kind of writer (as I interpreted it) I had to be false; I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be. Concealing this colonial-Hindu self below the writing personality, I did both my material and myself much damage'). For a split-second the writer reveals a background that cannot fail to infiltrate his creative project. After this, the writer arguably acts as a mediating symbol for a whole series of textual, contextual, intertextual and extratextual negotiations. For, as well as acting as a possible disguise, protection or cover for the author, the writer also signifies the ambiguous uncertainty of absolutely truthful representation. To this end, in his review of

---

<sup>23</sup> Peter Hughes, 'Tropics of Candor: V.S. Naipaul', *Contemporary Literature*, 38 (1) (1997), 211.

Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination*, entitled 'The Authoritative Lie', Hayden White reveals the degree to which Bakhtin's sense of language is inevitably involved in questions of truth and lies. White notes:

When it comes to the representation of reality in language, it is never, Bakhtin suggests, a matter of being absolutely truthful. The *formal* coherency that language imposes on the clutter of life is *always* illusory. And this is because, as he puts it, "truth does not seek words; she is afraid to entangle herself in the word, to soil herself in verbal pathos." The *schematic* coherency that discourse imposes on life is even more illusory, especially insofar as it tends toward monological authoritativeness, advances claims to being the one proper or adequate way of speaking the truth, and pretends to know what "the truth" consists of; this is worse than an illusion- it is a lie.<sup>24</sup>

Applied to Naipaul's 1987 novel, one might be inclined to ask first whether Naipaul's sense of himself as 'the writer' represents a textual strategy of formal and schematic coherency, an attempt to locate a position of 'absolute truth'? Or, alternatively whether his explicit foregrounding of this self-fashioned persona works according to a performed disclosure of the illusory basis of such definitive positions? One could clearly argue for both propositions. This does not mean that the writer contained in *The Enigma of Arrival* is a liar and therefore not to be trusted. Within the confines of a structured narrative there will inevitably be some form of formal and schematic coherency. Rather, it suggests that in the masking and unmasking of the writer's language, the writer's arrival, in whatever terms this may be couched, will always inevitably be an uncertain and ambiguous one. Indeed, Naipaul's construction of the writer in *The Enigma of Arrival* might even suggest the degree to which all dialogue (including supposed absolute or monologic language and discourse) has conditions attached to it. Properly understood, as Bakhtin suggests, dialogue is rarely staged as a benign or equal encounter. It is more appropriately considered a drama in which structures of power, dominance and influence constantly operate between our own need to author our selves and the resistance of others to succumb to a process of assimilation or reaccentuation. Amongst other things, this makes the question of authorship (and readership) central to a Bakhtinian interpretation of literary discourse. It also highlights the degree to which the language of the literary text, in Bakhtin's terms, both enacts a conflictual struggle for

---

<sup>24</sup> Hayden White, 'The Authoritative Lie', *Partisan Review*, 50 (2) (1982), 309.

representation and investigates the limitations of representation in relation to real and novelistic selves.

Naturally, the question of what position the over-determined, self-fashioned writer takes in this textual struggle seems particularly pertinent. The writer holds a unique position in *The Enigma of Arrival* as he is both born out of and in some sense regulates the terms under which textual exchanges take place. Is he to be considered a character within the novel, on the same textual plane as Jack or the landlord? Or, does he retain the authority of an omniscient narrator akin to the author of an autobiography? Certainly a strong case can be made for the latter. In *The Enigma of Arrival* the existence and survival of the writer stands for everything. For example, whilst the writer retains the first and last word of the text, it is clear that few other characters are able to speak with success, if at all. In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin typically conceives of individual characters or speaking persons as purveyors of ideologically exposed discourse- characters are the novelistic embodiment of a represented image of a language, and the various interactions between these 'languages' produces what Bakhtin calls 'character zones'. Such 'character zones', he states, are formed 'from the fragments of character speech, from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's word, from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators' (DN, p.316). This means that, according to Bakhtin, the novel provides an enunciating space in which the voices and discourses of characters meet and (unconsciously) influence one another, and even encroach upon the voice of the author-narrator. It therefore suggests that within the confines of the fictional world characters will inevitably have a wider sphere of influence than their allotted dialogue suggests. However, whether this takes place or can be identified in Naipaul's text is questionable, precisely because the novel seems to be wholly directed toward the establishment of the writer's voice. It would be hard to establish any clear sense of Jack, Pitton or Bray's voice, or to distinguish each individual's voice from the role they play within the conceptual framework of landscape, literature and history. Trapped in his decaying Manor house the landlord can only

---

White's discussion of Bakhtin's approach to language contains an inserted quotation from Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination*. The source for this is to be found in 'Discourse in the Novel' (p.309), in which Bakhtin makes reference to the Rabelaisian 'philosophy of the word'.

speaking through intermediaries such as the Phillipses, whilst Jack's boomed greetings make no real sense and come 'over less as defined words than as a deliberate making of noise in the silence' (EA, p.31). Perhaps the only exception to this might be Pitton's use of the word 'refuge' (instead of 'refuse') that denotes both an area to dump gardening rubbish and an area of protection and cultivation. Yet, the fact that the writer also hears the word from Bray, Mr Phillips' father and a mouse-catcher, in some way wrests the word away from Pitton, and the writer even discovers that to use 'refuge' for 'refuse' was 'more or less common usage in the valley' (EA, pp.182-183).

This kind of communicative failure suggests that, at least in one sense, *The Enigma of Arrival* is a rather character-less novel. Characters do not exist as individual speaking subjects, but only through and for the writer<sup>25</sup>. Likewise, it is clear that the writer stands apart from the two other writers present in the novel: the landlord, and Allan. Both are failed writers whose failure sets the writer's ability to remake himself in relief, and both are potential others whose fate the writer has managed to evade. In the course of the novel, the landlord sends the writer two samples of his work- poems about Krishna and Shiva, and a short-story in verse set in Africa- and each is described as 'something from the days of imperial glory' (EA, p.192), evidence that the landlord 'had early arrived at his idea of who he was, his worth and his sensibility; and he had stalled there' (EA, p.254). Allan, meanwhile, lives the life of a writer but cannot reconcile himself to the process of writing itself. He fails to produce a book throughout his life ('No novel or autobiographical novel... no critical study of contemporary literature... no Isherwood-like book about postwar

---

<sup>25</sup> It is noticeable that we learn almost nothing of the writer's immediate family during his time at the cottage, and receive no indication that Naipaul is married and shares his cottage with his wife.

This certainly jars with two of Naipaul's more famous readers.

In 'The Garden Path: V.S. Naipaul', Derek Walcott confesses that 'mischievous uncertainty' begins to irritate him as he reads Naipaul's novel, 'because of the suppression of those things that advance fiction: whether the narrator lived in total solitude in the Wiltshire countryside, and, if the narrator did, whether he avoided, for the sake of art, the temporary solaces of sex or marriage, whether he cooked for himself'. For Walcott, 'Naipaul's book sours, because the narrator is not interested in love'. Walcott, 'The Garden Path: V.S. Naipaul', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p.123.

Likewise, Salman Rushdie describes *The Enigma of Arrival* as lifeless, bloodless and loveless. 'A life without love, or one in which love has been buried so deep that it can't come out, is very much what this book is about' Rushdie notes. Yet, for him, it is this that makes Naipaul's novel 'so very, very sad'.

Rushdie, 'V.S. Naipaul', in *The Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), p.151.

Germany', EA, p.259), and eventually commits suicide as he enters middle age. His death is a signal of the writer's life gone wrong, a reflection of the unbearable expectations surrounding the image of the writer. It shows too how the post-colonial writer's survival places him in direct opposition to the metaphoric framework of the novel. At the opening of the final section of the novel the writer comes to recognise, 'Death was the motif, it had perhaps been the motif all along' (EA, p.309), and this is confirmed in the writer's recurring dreams of death, the series of deaths that occur throughout the book (Jack dies, Jack's father-in-law dies, Brenda a neighbour is murdered by her husband, Alan commits suicide, Mr Phillips, another neighbour, collapses and dies before an ambulance can arrive, the landlord is dying, the writer's sister dies and he even leaves his cottage under the shadow of serious illness<sup>26</sup>), and the symbolic meanings attached to both 'Ivy' and 'Rooks'(according to folk-lore, the former acts as an evil omen because it kills that which it embraces, whilst the latter foretells death in the family, especially that of the master). But whilst others pass away it is the writer who survives, and it is his 'new awareness of death' (EA, p.309) that actually allows him to write *The Enigma of Arrival*. Thus, set apart both formally and thematically, the writer implicitly assumes a certain authority within the text. This reflects the fact that the arrival of the writer is central to the meaning of the novel. Yet, it is also the case that the terms in which he makes his arrival actually serve to question and negate such assertions of authority. In respect of their shared biographies and bibliographies the writer may claim a certain proximity to the author of the text, but within the text itself the writer is seen neither exclusively as an author, a narrator or a character.

Perhaps a more pertinent response to the questions surrounding the identity of the writer can be found then in one of Bakhtin's earlier essays, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. Written in the post-revolutionary period of 1919-1924, when Bakhtin lived in the towns of Nevel and Vitebsk, 'Author and Hero' illustrates Bakhtin's understanding of classical and contemporary European philosophy, at the same time as it introduces his developing interest in prosaic (i.e. everyday) and literary paradigms. In the essay itself, Bakhtin focuses on the aesthetic relationship between I (author) and an other (hero), and is therefore centrally concerned with

---

<sup>26</sup> The book, written between 1984 and 1986, also brackets the death of Naipaul's brother, Shiva, in 1985.

questions of aesthetic identity and identity-formation. He suggests that contrary to those who seek biographical explanations to the motivations behind characters and events within literary texts, both author and hero belong to different planes of existence, and must reside in separate spheres of understanding. Author and hero share an *aesthetic* relation, and it is the job of the author, as a 'uniquely active form-giving energy' (AH, p. 8), to consummate the hero as a determinate whole. In order to do this the author 'must become another in relation to himself, must look at himself through the eyes of another' (AH, p.15), whilst, at the same time, occupying 'an intently maintained position *outside* the hero with respect to every constituent feature of the hero' (AH, p.14). Assuming that he upholds this position of outsidedness, Bakhtin suggests, the author is then able to bestow life upon the hero as a gift and to orient the hero within a world that is both bounded and consummated. And when this kind of direct relationship between author and hero is established and maintained, the notion of character adopts a particular gloss:

*Character* is the name we give to that form of the author-hero interrelationship which actualizes the task of producing the *whole* of a hero as a determinate personality, where, moreover, this task constitutes the fundamental task: the hero is given us, from the very outset, as a determinate whole, and the author's self activity proceeds, from the very outset, along the essential boundaries of the hero. Everything is perceived here as a constituent in the characterization of the hero, i.e., fulfils a characterological function; everything reduces to and serves the answer to the question: *who* is he? (AH, p.174)

Here 'character' is the name given to a task, it is the name given to the activity of consummating the hero, and 'producing the whole of the hero as a determinate personality'. This would suggest that in the formation of character, both author and hero hold clearly demarcated positions (the author is active, the hero is passive). But again the degree to which this direct relationship is accomplished in *The Enigma of Arrival* is far from clear. In its struggle with previously authoritative and internally persuasive positions and beliefs the novel does work towards answering the question '*who* is he?'. However, it is somewhat less certain whether the writer who emerges from that process of discrimination is to be seen as a character, a narrator, or an author. The boundary between each is blurred in the text, and it is this that makes the identity and status of the writer central to the meaning of Naipaul's 'novel'.

Exploring this potential confusion, in 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin highlights three typical cases when the author fails to establish a position outside the hero, each

of which most frequently occurs 'when the hero coincides in life with the author, i.e., when he is essentially autobiographical' (AH, p.15). First, 'the hero takes possession of the author'. Second, 'the author takes possession of the hero'. And third, 'the hero himself is his own author' (AH, pp.17-21). In the first case, the lack of distinction between author (Naipaul) and hero (the writer) results in a situation in which the hero's cognitive-ethical position is the most potent and authoritative determinant upon the author's own position in the world. Of course, the author must be able to at least partially consummate the hero, in order to bring him into being. Yet, as the hero takes him over the author is unable to fully separate himself from the hero, and he finds himself unable to establish a stable position outside the hero<sup>27</sup>. According to the second proposition, Bakhtin notes that the author's relationship to the hero 'becomes, in part, the hero's own relationship to himself' (AH, p.20). This means that in the context of *The Enigma of Arrival* it could be said that Naipaul's relationship to the writer becomes, in part, the writer's own relationship to himself. The author's possession of the hero can develop in one of two directions. When the hero is not autobiographical, the author is able to consummate the hero. But when the hero is autobiographical, as in Naipaul's 'novel', then the hero is not capable of being consummated: 'he experiences consummated wholeness as a limitation of himself and opposes to it an inexpressible inner mystery of some kind' (ibid.). From this, it might be possible to suggest that the performative identity of the writer suggests a fundamental resistance to 'consummated wholeness' in *The Enigma of Arrival*, whilst the sense that the writer's arrival will always be too late provides the outlines of the enigmatic, inner mystery at the centre of the text. In Bakhtin's terms, this offers the writer an 'inner loophole' through which he can consistently question and negate his own consummation, and in this regard Bakhtin notes: 'A hero of this kind is, for the author, infinite, i.e., he is reborn again and again, requiring ever again new forms of consummation which he himself then destroys through his own self-consciousness' (AH, pp.20-21). Finally, in the third case, when 'the hero himself is his own author', it is possible to see the writer within Naipaul's text playing the role of the author, as he looks back over his writing career and 'interprets his own life

---

<sup>27</sup> This kind of confusion is supported by a reference to Naipaul's identification of himself as 'the writer' in a recent interview. Jason Cowley notes 'Naipaul often refers to himself as the "writer", as if he were discussing someone outside the room; or in an imperious third person' ('The Long Road to Happiness', *The Times*, 11 May 1998, 17).

aesthetically' (AH, p.21). The writer might be said to establish clear boundaries between his mature self, the writer writing *The Enigma of Arrival*, and a younger self who acts as his potential other: he descends into this other, but also maintains a distance from him. Yet, this process of self-consummation is inevitably complicated by the existence of the real author outside, above or alongside the text. Excluded from the process of aesthetic creation, the author is unable to provide a consummating background for the hero, and the hero's self-assertion emerges more as an artistic performance than an effective act of identity-formation. This indicates the extent to which the writer figures in the text as a performative icon who enacts a symbolic process of self-construction, whilst it is also clear that the insistent assertion of this performative identity serves to intentionally question the apparent authority of the writer's position.

All three propositions are potentially evident in Naipaul's text, and each in turn highlights the considerable effects of the writer's struggle for self-consummation within the text. The confusion surrounding the aesthetic relationship between author and hero in *The Enigma of Arrival* places the question of authorship at the centre of Naipaul's mature work. Unable to fully consummate himself, the writer is also unable to make his arrival without first accepting the contingency of his position in the world, and then reconciling himself to the shifting constructions that lie behind previously held authoritative and internally persuasive beliefs. In one sense, this sets a limitation on the writer's arrival, as he is made conscious of the obsolescence of his own discourse even as he asserts the potency of his own position. Yet, this also provides an opportunity for the writer to make and remake himself and a chance for him to place the rootlessness of his experience at the centre of this narrative recuperation. This suggests that there may be a particular and interesting connection between Bakhtin's theory of (failed) authorship, as it is presented in 'Author and Hero', and the formation of the post-colonial writer, as it is revealed in *The Enigma of Arrival* in particular and Caribbean writing in general. Of course Bakhtin's discussion provides an approach to all forms of autobiographical narrative as well as all kinds of acts of authorship. But, in his consideration of three typical cases of author-hero confusion Bakhtin offers the opportunity to consider questions of identity-formation addressed in those literary texts that centre on the writer's struggle for identity amidst the shifting contexts of the contemporary post-colonial world

when the authoring of self is so obviously problematic. Certainly, the question of Caribbean identity and authorial identity has proved a persistent concern for Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris in their many and varied literary works. In *The Enigma of the Arrival* the blurring of the boundary between author and hero reflects the difficulty Naipaul has in asserting the truths of his identity, which in turn hints at the enduring sense of rootlessness he feels as a 'post-colonial' from the Caribbean. In this sense, the arrival of 'the writer' signifies a moment of self-assertion and emergence, a synthesis of worlds and cultures. But it is also a moment tempered by the writer's recognition of his part in the constructions of his environment, and thus a recognition of his part in the constructions of his past and present identity. At the close of 'The Ceremony of Farewell', the final section of the novel, the writer comes to realise that the sacred world that he had accepted in the past, which preserved the sanctity of Trinidad, England, India and the fantasy of the writer, can no longer be said to exist. The world that he had imaginatively possessed, which had given him a particular sense of himself, has now vanished, and in its place is a world created and recreated with each new generation. Finding his place in this world of mixture and impurity, the post-colonial writer is able to achieve a 'new wonder about men' (EA, p.318). And, as he begins 'to write very fast about Jack and his garden', he is also able to set about the task of answering and authoring his sense of self.

In *The Enigma of Arrival* the writer's arrival is predominantly staged in the novel in terms of his claim to an English inheritance, and in relation to his position within an English cultural and literary tradition<sup>28</sup>. His life in the heart of the English countryside places him at the centre of an idea of England that can be found in many of the most canonical of English literary texts. But he also first arrives in Wiltshire as a result of the failure of one of his books (*The Loss of El Dorado*), 'an historical book about the region where [he] had been born' (EA, p.94), that had consumed him for almost two years and then finally broken his spirit. From the seclusion of his Wiltshire cottage the post-colonial writer is gradually able to find a new way of looking at this disappointment, as bit-by-bit he is also able to reach a new

---

<sup>28</sup> In his 1993 study of Naipaul's work, Bruce King notes that *The Enigma of Arrival* 'is not really a story of acculturation or assimilation; rather it implies that Naipaul and other former colonials are now part of, and inheritors of, the English literary tradition. It continues a history that started with the English conquest of India. It is a daring claim.' (*V.S. Naipaul*, p.148).

understanding about his place in the world. His return to Trinidad at the end of the novel allows him to test this new understanding in an environment that he senses he is both part and not part of. In his next 'novel', entitled *A Way in the World* (first published in 1994), Naipaul's focus shifts back to the Caribbean to continue this process of identity-formation and to explore the nature of the post-colonial writer's Caribbean inheritance. Principally concerned with questions of home and homelessness, *A Way in the World* presents 'A Sequence' of nine interrelated stories in which Naipaul's native island of Trinidad provides the link between the various lives recorded. In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul had revealed a clear sense of alienation from the Caribbean and asked in despair how 'the history of this West Indian futility [could] be written?'. Responding to this, and to the perceived failure of *The Loss of El Dorado*, in *A Way in the World* Naipaul presents a fragmented yet intricately connected history of the Caribbean, as the narrative shifts between various times and places in order to answer a sense of historical void. Frequently foregrounding the process of the text's own creation, Naipaul also suggests that the performative assertion of the writer's identity provides the best means for the rootless post-colonial writer to reconcile himself to a Caribbean that does not have a simple or singular History and that does not offer a simple or singular cultural inheritance.

In the opening story, '*Prelude: An Inheritance*', the writer makes his return to Trinidad, and hints at his confused sense of Caribbean identity, as he notes that after just six years absence from the island, 'everything was strange and not strange ... Six years before I had known the jingles the Rediffusion sets played; but these jingles were all new to me and were like somebody else's folksong' (WW, p.1). Stuck between knowing and not-knowing the intimacies of his home the writer describes himself as 'more of a looker, half a tourist' (ibid.), and it is this sense of in-betweenness that allows him to 'play with impressions' of the island and its people, as the reality of the Caribbean shifts with each visit that he makes to the region. Certainly, it is with the curiosity of a traveller that he comes across the story of Leonard Side, a Muslim Indo-Caribbean, who spends his days working at Parry's funeral parlour and his evenings demonstrating cake decorating at the local Women's Auxiliary Association. Side's story is told to the writer by a local school-teacher, who had attempted on a number of occasions to get Side to judge a local flower arranging competition. It is therefore a second-hand story, which the writer passes on as a

testimony of the life of a contemporary Caribbean. The teacher's account primarily reveals her distaste for Side's 'idea of beauty', which allows Side to comfortably combine the various aspects of a variety of cultures (Muslim, Christian, Indian, English and Caribbean) without recognising the incongruity of this or acknowledging the contradictions that this may cause. 'That idea of beauty- mixing roses and flowers and nice things to eat with the idea of making the dead human body beautiful too- was contrary to my own idea', the school teacher comments. And soon after, she adds: 'He frightened me because I felt his feeling for beauty was like an illness; as though some unfamiliar, deforming virus had passed through his simple mother to him and was even then- he was in his mid-thirties- something neither of them had begun to understand' (WW, pp.7-8). Horrified by this mixture of cultures, traditions and religions, the school-teacher cannot accept Side's easy accommodation of his hybrid cultural identity. For the writer though, it offers an insight into Leonard Side's sense of cultural inheritance, and even exposes (if it does not explain) his sense of self. Addressing the reader directly, the writer declares that, 'With learning now I can tell you more or less how we all came to be where we were' (WW, p.8). For example, he can tell us that 'the name Side might have been a version of Sayed' (ibid.). But he knows too that his learning- his knowledge of Indian genealogy or Trinidadian place-names- can only take him so far. This means that, much as he might wish otherwise, the writer is able to offer only 'fragments' of Side's inheritance. Side's 'idea of beauty' might be traced back to ambiguously-gendered ancestors from Lucknow in India, but this would only be 'a fragment of the truth' (WW, p.9). Thus, whilst the writer asserts, 'we go back all of us to the very beginning; in our blood and brain we carry the memories of thousands of beings'; at the same time, he also suggests that this node of connection can only ever be partly comprehended, as he notes in conclusion, 'We cannot understand all the traits we have inherited. Sometimes we can be strangers to ourselves' (ibid.). Finding absence and otherness at the centre of self, the writer thus appropriates the story of Leonard Side in order to trace the complex cultural inheritance of the post-colonial Caribbean subject. As an emblem of contemporary Caribbean hybridity Side also illustrates some of the difficulties the post-colonial writer will face in addressing his own relation to the Caribbean.

Ending on a note of fragmentation, 'Prelude: An Inheritance' provides the key to the main concerns of the remaining stories, which centre on questions of cultural inheritance, (mistaken) perception, self-deception and (textual) construction. It is an important first step in Naipaul's historical recuperation of the Caribbean that is followed in the dislocated narrative sequence of *A Way in the World* by 'History: A Smell of Fish Glue', an autobiographical account of the writer's life just prior to his departure for England in the 1950's, and 'New Clothes: An Unwritten Story', a fictional reconstruction of a trip made by the writer in the early 1960's into the heart of the Guyanese interior. 'Passenger: A Figure from the Thirties' considers the legacy of witness made by European travellers to the island; 'On the Run' concentrates on the life of the Trinidadian writer and political activist, Lebrun; while 'A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tobacco, a Tortoise: An Unwritten Story' provides a dramatic account of Sir Walter Raleigh's final expedition to Trinidad in search of the mythical gold of El Dorado. 'A New Man' records the results of the writer's conversation with Manuel Sorzano on a flight to Venezuela in the 1970's; 'In the Gulf of Desolation: An Unwritten Story' moves back in time to consider the life and legacy of Francisco Miranda; whilst in the final story, 'Home Again', the writer meets Blair, a Trinidadian working as a political adviser in Africa, whom he had first known when he worked in the government offices back in Trinidad. The sequence closes with the brutal murder of Blair and the return of his body to Trinidad, and in this Naipaul offers an internal circularity that supports a sense of continuity without convergence in this (re)writing of Caribbean history. The ending of the novel also emphasises the circularity of human lives that all end in a return to a place of origin, however tenuous that sense of 'home' might be.

As elsewhere, Naipaul's interest in how the history of the Caribbean is written makes the position of the post-colonial writer central to the understanding of the text. The writer who arrives in Trinidad in 'Prelude: An Inheritance' is virtually synonymous with the figure who gradually emerges in *The Enigma of Arrival*, and once again it is the survival of the writer that is notable at key moments in the text. Blair's death at the close of the novel echoes that of the writer's sister in *The Enigma of Arrival*, and similarly it is writing and the writing life that proves the source of the writer's salvation in *A Way in the World*. 'Only Naipaul as narrator survives,' notes Fawzia Mustafa, 'thus reiterating one of the earliest obsessions of his writing life: the

escape, release, that writing has granted him'<sup>29</sup>. Projecting a self-conscious persona, it is the contingency of his writing that allows the post-colonial writer to negotiate his relation to the Caribbean. Over half of the stories begin with a reflection on the status of their own writing, and three even bear the title of 'An Unwritten Story', drawing the reader's attention to a history that has not yet been written, as well as pointing to the problematic status of the words that appear on the page. Blending imagination and fact, fiction and history, the post-colonial writer draws attention to his own subjectivity in order to emphasise the subjective nature of all texts, and thus to confirm that all he can offer here are fragments of a plural culture. At the beginning of 'New Clothes: *An Unwritten Story*', for example, the writer offers an account of 'an idea that has stayed', and describes how 'A story shaped in my mind, over some years. But it never clothed itself in detail, in the 'business' necessary to a narrative' (WW, pp.43-45). 'My idea remained an idea', he notes, 'and (partly working it out for the first time) I write it down here' (ibid.). Commenting upon this, Paula Burnett argues that the foregrounding of the persona of the writer indicates 'the subjectivity of perception and the instability of narration, both of which make retrieval of any kind of past reality difficult and flawed'<sup>30</sup>. Thus, whilst *A Way in the World* 'refers repeatedly like a conventional history to surviving documents', Burnett suggests that, 'Naipaul instructs us that they bear witness less to facts than to subjectivities' (Burnett, "'Where else to row but backward?'" , 15). In terms of the representation of 'the writer', this is no less true of Naipaul himself than it is of Foster Morris, Lebrun, Raleigh or Miranda. This shows too that the problem of the text is a problem with 'text' itself: the need for narrative as a means of establishing identity, and the instability and vulnerability of narrative as a means of establishing unconditional authority.

*A Way in the World* is both a writing of Caribbean history from the rootless post-colonial perspective, and a rewriting of texts and contexts, both real and imagined. In the course of the narrative Naipaul returns to ground covered in earlier works, and most specifically to episodes already presented in *The Middle Passage*, *Finding the Centre* and *The Loss of El Dorado*. The 'fictional' story presented in

---

<sup>29</sup> Fawzia Mustafa, *V.S. Naipaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.212.

<sup>30</sup> Paula Burnett, "'Where else to row but backward?'" Addressing Caribbean Futures Through Re-Visions of the Past', *ARIEL*, 30 (1) (1999), 15.

'New Clothes' is based closely on a journey Naipaul made into the Guyanese jungle, which is recorded in *The Middle Passage* (pp.153-178); the account of the writer's visit to French-speaking West Africa in 'On the Run' is a version of 'The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro' in *Finding the Centre* (pp.73-160); whilst the stories concerned with Raleigh and Miranda are reworkings of evidence provided in Naipaul's most directly historical study, *The Loss of El Dorado*. This approach reflects the revisionary perspective of the mature writer, whilst, as Ian Hamilton notes, 'The resurrection of old drafts can perhaps be seen as an aspect of the book's overall preoccupation with forgotten tales, with tales that have been wrongly told, that have to be revised'<sup>31</sup>. Above all, this narrative repetition suggests that the text as a whole may be located within a 'frame of probability', in which alternatives, pluralities and contradictions are built into the disjunctive structure of the book. For Fawzia Mustafa this 'frame of probability' characterises all the stories of the book, 'reiterating once again Naipaul's fascination with what he feels he, Naipaul, could have been against what he feels he is' (Mustafa, *V.S. Naipaul*, p.218). 'In the light of Naipaul's latest conclusion', Mustafa comments, 'it is probable that he has now embarked on an extensive program of rewriting, for the more he writes, it seems, the more there is for him to return to' (ibid.). This may be true, but it is the impact that this 'program of rewriting' has had upon the notions of authorship, identity and cultural inheritance in Naipaul's most recent work that is surely most significant. Arriving at a constructed sense of self, Naipaul, as a post-colonial writer, has been able to approach anew the often conflicting and contradictory sources of a sense of rootlessness and alienation that has contributed to the style, content, tone and nature of his work over the years. Arguing that the history of the Caribbean has been consistently subject to the vagaries of prejudice, privilege and propaganda, in *A Way in the World* the post-colonial writer opens history up to the perspective of the other, with the intention of showing how all histories are partial and how all cultures are finally mixed and therefore cross-cultural. For Naipaul, it is through the process of writing and rewriting that the post-colonial writer is able to do this, and it is through the process of writing and rewriting that he is able to make a cautionary gesture of reconciliation with the Caribbean. In 'Home Again', at the end of the sequence, it is the writer's first piece of writing, 'an article about a black beauty competition' (WW, p.363), that

---

<sup>31</sup> Ian Hamilton, 'Gambling Against History', *Sunday Telegraph* 8 May 1994.

brings the post-colonial writer and Blair, a representative of the Black Caribbean and a proponent of Black-African politics, momentarily closer. Whilst in 'A Parcel of Papers, A Roll of Tobacco, A Tortoise: *An Unwritten Story*', Don José, an Amerindian captured and offered to Raleigh in the strange clothes of a Spanish nobleman, and kept as a man-servant until the aged explorer's death in the Tower of London in 1619, returns to the Caribbean to tell his side of a story that, according to Naipaul, 'catches part of the New World at that moment between the unseeing brutality of the discovery and conquest and the later brutality of colonization'<sup>32</sup>. Like Naipaul, Don José has undergone his own cultural odyssey. Finally returning to the place of his birth, he is asked by the Spanish historian recording his testimony what he has learnt from this experience. At the close of the story, Don José replies: 'I've thought alot about that. And I think, father, that the difference between us, who are Indians, or half Indians, and people like the Spaniards and the English and the Dutch and the French, people who know how to go where they are going, I think that for them the world is a safer place' (WW, p.205).

---

<sup>32</sup> Naipaul, *The Loss of El Dorado* (London: Readers Union, Andre Deutsch, 1970), p.88.

#### 4. 'A book left open by an absent master': Historical Emergence in Derek Walcott's *Another Life*

The revisionist aesthetic evident in Naipaul's recent novels shows that questions of authorship are inevitably connected to questions of narrative authority and historical legitimacy in recent Caribbean writing, and also that notions of ideological becoming are intimately related to those of historical becoming in the work of the region's writers. In *Finding the Centre*, his most directly autobiographical piece of writing, Naipaul outlines the contradictory sense of history that he grew up with in Trinidad in the 1930's and 1940's. On the one hand there was a history with dates, a history that belonged to others and elsewhere, 'ancient Rome; ... nineteenth century England; the nationalist movement in India' (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*, p.115). On the other hand, there was a local history that 'was not interesting', that 'offered little', and that 'had no dates' (Naipaul, *Finding the Centre*, p.51). This apparent schism, this sense of rootlessness and historylessness associated with life in the Caribbean, caused Naipaul to leave Trinidad at the age of eighteen, and to look elsewhere (England, India etc.) for safe historical ground. His most brutal assessment of the sense of historical absence in the Caribbean occurs in *The Middle Passage*, in which he writes: 'The history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies' (Naipaul, *The Middle Passage*, p.29). In one sense, Naipaul's judgement reflects his investment in a version of history associated with a specifically English colonial impulse, represented in *The Middle Passage* by James Anthony Froude. However, the effect of this clear cultural acquiescence has been to overshadow and inform the reception of Naipaul's subsequent texts, and more specifically to centre Naipaul's work on the ways in which colonial and post-colonial histories are both written and read. Both *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World* take their cue from Naipaul's historical obsession in *The Middle Passage* and *The Loss of El Dorado*, and in both we find Naipaul seeking salvation in the constructed persona of the post-colonial writer, in order to apprehend in maturity a sense of cultural inheritance that suggests at least a

partial shift from his earlier position. For Naipaul, the burden of historylessness, felt and shared by many others of his generation, led initially to bitterness and despair, then departure, then a restless, permanent exile. For others, such as Derek Walcott, the apparent absence of history has offered both a challenge to be met and an opportunity for creativity in the Caribbean.

The contrasting approach taken by Walcott to the perceived historical vacuum in the Caribbean can be most directly seen in a series of implicit responses made to Naipaul in the late-1960's and early-1970's when the subject of history was also very much on Walcott's mind. Whilst Naipaul asserts in 1962 that 'History was built around achievement and creation, and nothing was created in the West Indies', Walcott claims in 'What the Twilight Says', an essay written in 1970, that 'If there was nothing, there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began' (Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p4). Identifying Naipaul's position in *The Middle Passage* as one of 'chronic dispiritedness' (Walcott, 'History and Picong', p.18), Walcott sees the expression of 'nothing' as the opportunity for a beginning not the occasion for an ending. Indeed, in 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', written in 1974, he also notes, 'Nothing will always be created in the West Indies, for quite a long time, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before'<sup>1</sup>. Turning Naipaul's negative into a positive, Walcott argues in this essay that far from being simply a form of mimicry or imitation Caribbean carnival, for example, is also a form of energy, imagination and invention. Whereas Naipaul sees carnival as the bastard product of a society selling itself to a colonial and neo-colonial influence, Walcott suggests that what is best and most distinctive about carnival is that 'on one stage, at any moment, the simultaneity of historical legends, epochs, characters, without historical sequence or propriety is accepted as a concept' (Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', p.55). For Walcott, such an instance of mixture and simultaneity is creative in itself, facilitating a perpetual interaction of histories and cultures. Thus, whilst Naipaul denied any attachment to the West Indies in the late-1960's<sup>2</sup>, Walcott describes himself in 'What the Twilight

---

<sup>1</sup> Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.54.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview conducted in 1968 Naipaul somewhat provocatively rejects any idea of him being West Indian or a West Indian writer. 'I don't know what the word means' he says, 'I have nothing in common with the people from Jamaica ... Or the other islands for that matter. I don't understand them. As a writer I have to make a living and I certainly don't think I can make a living by being regional.'

Says: An Overture' as 'this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian' (Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p.9), accepting both the African and European legacies that are part of his ancestry and indicating too his determination not to let Africanness or Europeanness obscure his commitment to Caribbeanness.

In 'The Muse of History', also written in 1974 and first published in the same volume as Brathwaite's 'Timehri', Walcott takes up Naipaul's concern for the way history is written in the Caribbean and most directly addresses the concept of history and its impact upon the New World writer. Most importantly, Walcott draws a distinction between those writers who submit themselves to the iron-rule of linear history and those who seek to read presence and possibility into a history of absence and futility. He suggests that in the Caribbean, 'servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters'<sup>3</sup>. Indicating that both positions ultimately lead nowhere Walcott contrasts the desire for a literature of revenge or remorse with that of a writer willing to accept and assimilate the various characteristics of every ancestor that has played a part in the formation of his or her cultural identity. For Walcott, such writers 'have gone past the confrontation of history, that Medusa of the New World', and instead, he suggests:

These writers reject the idea of history as time for its original concept as myth, the partial recall of the race. For them history is fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory. Their philosophy, based on a contempt for historic time, is revolutionary, for what they repeat to the New World is its simultaneity with the Old. Their vision of man is elemental, a being inhabited by presences, not a creature chained to his past. (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.37)

It is in these terms that Walcott attempts to extricate himself from the burden of historylessness extant within the Caribbean and evident within the work of certain Caribbean writers of the time. In Walcott's essay, history as a narrative discourse becomes open to challenge and interpretation, as an emphasis upon 'simultaneity' between past, present and future persistently exposes the New World to the forgotten lessons of a mythic past whose fragments are shared by both worlds. The point of

---

Ewart Rouse, 'Naipaul: An Interview with Ewart Rouse', in *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Feroza Jussawalla (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Walcott, 'The Muse of History', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, p.37.

connection may be literary, as Walcott confirms toward the end of 'The Muse of History', when he notes:

There is a memory of imagination in literature which has nothing to do with actual experience, which is, in fact, another life, and that experience of the imagination will continue to make actual the quest of a medieval knight or the bulk of a white whale, because of the power of a shared imagination. (p.62)

Yet, more broadly, Walcott suggests that the history of the Caribbean does not simply reside in an unerring acceptance of motive and causation associated with the historical reality of colonialism. But rather it can most powerfully be found in the shared memories of island communities and in the elemental experience of man. In one sense, history has no relevance for Walcott, as he notes, 'The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force' (p.37). Yet, at the same time the idea of history as myth, in which myth is understood as a shared cultural imagination, represents an important starting-point for Walcott during this period of his career. Not least because in this period Walcott's critical discussions begin to converge with his creative intentions in the writing of *Another Life*, his book-length poem which was first published in 1973.

The clearest aspect of this convergence is evident from the way in which Walcott continues to respond in *Another Life* to the pervading sense of negation and nothingness in the Caribbean, represented by Naipaul's *The Middle Passage*. One of the first instances of this occurs in the final chapter of Book One where, in a moment of epiphany, the poet falls to his knees and weeps 'for nothing and for everything / ... for the earth of the hill under [his] knees, / for the grass, the pebbles...' and so on (AL, p.185). Framed in quasi-religious terms, this passage describes the moment of the poet's conversion to a life of art. It also indicates a desire to shift a negative (nothing) perception of the island's history to a positive (everything) sense of acceptance and opportunity, as he seeks to find and fulfil his vocation by naming the island. At the close of the poem the poet finds himself in meditative mood again. Here he contemplates the absence of history in the Caribbean from the vantage-point of Rampanalgas, a remote fishing village on the north-east coast of Trinidad. Watching his children play with conch-shells 'in the brown creek that is Rampanalgas River', the poet observes that, 'that child who puts the shell's howl to his ear, / hears nothing, hears everything / that the historian cannot hear' (AL, p.285).

Addressing those historians who chase after facts and 'gild cruelty' the poet hopes 'they will absolve us, perhaps, if we begin again, / from what we have always known, nothing' (AL, p.286). And later, he admits, 'I wanted to grow white-haired / as the wave, with a wrinkled // brown rock's face, salted, / seamed, an old poet, / facing the wind // and nothing, which is, / the loud world in his mind' (AL, p.290). As in Walcott's essays of the early-1970's then, the idea of nothing has a significant part to play in the meaning of *Another Life*. On one level it operates as a performative that signifies the polemic position adopted by the poet to a linear sense of historical determination in the poem. On another level, it also signals a starting-point: the cultural base from which Walcott must proceed in his writing of Caribbean history as myth. John Figueroa certainly supports this assertion when he notes that in *Another Life* 'nothing is no longer only the experience of the negative, the depriving, the bitter', rather, 'It is at the very least, the emptying that is the necessary condition of creativity, of the fresh start'<sup>4</sup>; whilst, Edward Baugh more specifically remarks in his monograph on Walcott's poem that, 'Rampanalgas is the nothing which is everything, the nothing out of which something can be made'<sup>5</sup>. What Baugh means by this is that, within the world of the poem, Rampanalgas acts as both a reference point for the so-called absence of history, and an opportunity for a new historical beginning, precisely because of the blank canvas it offers. For Baugh, the former is shown in the opening description of the Rampanalgas landscape, which allows for neither history nor meaning ('Miasma, acedia, the enervations of damp... ', AL, p.283); whilst the latter is intimated in Walcott's celebration of the 'holiness' of Rampanalgas and its inhabitants, who have both survived centuries of physical destruction ('holy is Rampanalgas and its high-circling hawks, / holy are the rusted, tortured, rust-caked, blind almond trees, / your great-grandfather's, and your father's torturing limbs', AL, p.289). With this final gesture of praise, Baugh suggests, Walcott offers a record of presence and endurance in *Another Life* which, occurring as it does at the climax of the poem, iterates and affirms the potential for cultural and historical renewal where others have seen only 'nothing'.

---

<sup>4</sup> Figueroa, 'Some Subtleties of the Isle: A Commentary on Certain Aspects of Derek Walcott's Sonnet Sequence *Tales of the Islands*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.151.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision: Another Life* (London: Longman, 1978), pp.72-73.

Described by Walcott as 'a biography of ... a West Indian intelligence'<sup>6</sup>, *Another Life* is a poem of the Caribbean mind, another account of the emergence of the Caribbean artist, that is both personal and political, individual and communal, and fundamentally autobiographical and historical. Written as Walcott approached the age of forty, the poem looks back to the 'other life' of the poet's youth, and presents an account of love, tragedy, celebration and death against the backdrop of his entry into the world of poetry (he had previously thought of becoming an artist) and his impending departure from his native island of St Lucia. Perhaps best seen as an ensemble piece, in *Another Life* Walcott pays homage to three key figures in his early life- Harry Simmons, a mentor and art tutor; Dunstan St Omer, a friend and fellow artist (known in the poem as Gregorias), and Andreuille Alcée, his first love (often referred to as Anna). Divided into four parts (mostly covering the period 1947-50, but also moving up to the present, i.e. 1973), the poem consists of four books and a total of twenty-three chapters, in which Walcott employs a variety of poetic registers and styles in order to present a complex, imaginative whole. In Book One, 'The Divided Child', the poem opens with the young Walcott surveying the view across the Castries harbour during a day spent painting. Thereafter the vision expands across the 'sociological contours' of the island (AL, p.148), taking in home and village, business and religion, before closing with Walcott's acceptance of his vocation and inheritance. Following this, Book Two, 'Homage to Gregorias', tells of how, along with his friend Gregorias, Walcott immersed himself in his art. This in turn occasions a consideration of the methods and role of the New World artist seeking to intervene in the writing of the life and history of the Caribbean. The second book closes with the outbreak of a fire throughout Castries, and against the backdrop of this event, Book Three, 'A Simple Flame', concentrates almost exclusively on the young poet's love affair with Anna, who is also an emblem of his love for his island. Towards the end of the book the poet's departure from the island is fast approaching, and with it too come feelings of betrayal. However, as the poet leaves the island 'A Simple Flame' closes with a simple but compelling evocation of the names of 'Harry, Dunstan, Andreuille' (AL, p.257), providing a reminder of the debt the poet owes to each. In the final book, 'The Estranging Sea', the mature poet

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), p.23.

returns to consider the role of art and the artist in the Caribbean, in the face of the sudden death of his mentor Harry Simmons. Most significantly, this leads him to reflect once more upon the 'muse of history', and it is here that he makes clear his desire to challenge the dominant recorded history of the islands, that has created a literature of remorse and revenge. His belief in the possibility for historical recuperation in the Caribbean, through the artistic contribution of the region's painters and writers, is reflected in the dedication to Dunstan St Omer in the final lines of the poem, 'Gregorias, listen, lit, / we were the light of the world!' (AL, p.294).

The closing lines of *Another Life* provide a testament to the enduring influence of Harry Simmons, as well as a tribute to the inspiring presence of Walcott's childhood friend Gregorias. The poem is however primarily a narrative of emergence and becoming, in which Walcott's apprenticeship as a painter and a poet is intimately connected to an important process of identity formation, which in turn is connected to the awakening of a distinctly Caribbean historical sensibility. Like Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Brathwaite's *Arrivants* trilogy, this allows us to read Walcott's *Another Life* as another example of ideological becoming in which the arrival of the Caribbean writer provides one of the major themes of the work. *Another Life* begins with the poet sketching the outlines of the surrounding landscape from the verandah of St Mary's College in St Lucia, 'where the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master / in the middle of another life' (AL, p.145)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in the opening stanzas we see him making an initial claim on the Caribbean landscape in the process of realising his art. Looking out across the harbour, over the 'the British fort / above the promontory', 'the gables of the St.Antoine Hotel', 'the flag / at Government House' and 'the last shacks of the Morne', the aspirant painter stands 'mesmerized like fire without wind', waiting silently 'for the verification of detail' that will complete his impression of the Caribbean (AL, pp.145-146). Identifying himself as 'a prodigy of the wrong age and colour' (AL, p.145), he hints at the gap between his experience of the Caribbean and the impression of the Caribbean that has thus far been recorded, and thereby establishes a close relation

---

<sup>7</sup> Though not referred to in the poem, the exact details of the poet's location are suggested in a short prose piece written by Walcott, entitled 'Leaving School'. Walcott, 'Leaving School', *London Magazine*, 5 (6) (1965), 4.

between art and politics in the writing of the poem. Surveying 'a landscape locked in amber', burnt with the colour of sunset, he also provides an intimation of one of the central paradoxes of the poem, as his desire to seal and preserve the view contrasts with a desire to heighten and transform the region through his art, and thus both represents and re-enacts the conflict between history and art in Walcott's remembrance of things past<sup>8</sup>. Providing a good indication of the way in which history as a concept impacts upon an individual's vision of reality, this suggests, as Nana Wilson-Tagoë argues, that there is a clear relationship between Walcott's 'developing concept of history and the direction of his poetic style' (Wilson-Tagoë, 'History and Style in *Another Life*', p.51). In addition to this, it is my contention that Walcott's developing concepts of history and style coalesce in a narrative of individual and cultural emergence in *Another Life*, and that the opening sequence also introduces the theme of historical becoming into the poem. The 'book left open by an absent master' is not only a reference to an artist's manual or collection of prints that a master might leave open for his pupil, but it also suggests an opening onto history from which the poet can begin again and start anew, in order to work towards a notion of Caribbean history based upon the idea of history as myth and a vision of man as elemental. Writing and rewriting the history of the region as he follows the relentless, unforgiving rhythm of the sea, the poet is given the opportunity to name his island by an absent master, who offers an alternative vision of the island and introduces him to the worlds of art and literature and the attendant paradoxes of each<sup>9</sup>. The word 'begin' occurs three times in the first two stanzas, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Exploring the relationship between Walcott's sense of history and his poetic style, Nana Wilson-Tagoë notes: 'As a recapitulation of Walcott's memories of his past: his past of home, landscape and personal experience, *Another Life* exemplifies the contradictions and paradoxes of Walcott's personal development as artist and man. ... In his modes of representing this past Walcott re-enacts the seemingly conflicting pulls of history and art: the historical need on one hand, to record and transfix experience and the creative poetic urge on the other, to illuminate and extend what is real. In their complementary relationships these two modes reflect the inter-relationships between Walcott's historical vision and his conception both of the imagination and the poetic style.'

Wilson-Tagoë, 'History and Style in *Another Life*', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed., Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Seren books, 1991), p.52.

Likewise, Edward Baugh explains the significance of 'amber' in the opening stanzas by suggesting that 'when Walcott speaks of the 'landscape locked in amber' ... he is not just using a correct image to convey the colour of sunset. He is also thinking of the amber glaze which was perfected by the Old Masters- a film of transparent resin applied to a painting and having the effect not only of 'sealing' or preserving the painting, but also of heightening, 'transfiguring' the colours' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.20).

<sup>9</sup> It is clear from the evidence of the opening section of Chapter 1 that Simmons principally offered Walcott instruction and guidance about sketching, drawing and painting. The first section closes with

this emphasis upon beginnings connects artistic potential with historical potential, as the opening of the poem presents a moment of creation and possibility from which the rest of the poem must follow. Certainly, this sense of possibility is supported by Walcott's argument in 'The Muse of History', in which he speaks of 'the possibility of man and language waking to wonder' in the Caribbean (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.53), in as much as the poem portrays the figure of a Caribbean man gradually able to erase the past from his memory and emerge into a world of Caribbean presence with a sense of elation. However, it is also this sense of creation and possibility that makes Bakhtin's understanding of the concept of history, and in particular his developing notion of historical becoming, central to the present discussion of Caribbean writing and writers. Therefore, building upon the preceding accounts of linguistic performance and authorial arrival, in this chapter I will briefly outline the historical dimensions of Bakhtin's dialogic notion of language, before concentrating in detail on the process of cultural awakening evident in Walcott's *Another Life*.

The importance of history in Bakhtin's work is shown on at least one level by Michael Holquist's assertion that 'as a "method", [dialogism] is perhaps best grasped as a historical poetics'<sup>10</sup>. In his illuminating monograph Holquist uses this statement as the basis for a discussion of the chronotope as a marker of time-space relations. The notion of a 'historical poetics' is though pertinent to Bakhtin's thought in general, and in particular it serves as a useful description of Bakhtinian linguistics, which fundamentally offers a historically-conditioned appreciation of social

---

the master amending his pupil's work. However, in section two of Chapter 1 a reference is also made to the Jamaican poet George Campbell, who was associated with Jamaica's first entirely literary periodical, *Focus* (which was first published in 1943), and who introduced into Anglophone Caribbean poetry a genuine sense of protest and social consciousness. 'At his best [Campbell] demonstrates that poetry can be fully political without any aesthetic sacrifice,' Laurence Breiner comments, 'and that demonstration has proved crucial to nourishing the growth of West Indian poetry'.

Breiner, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.66.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.108.

To his credit, Holquist acknowledges that the phrase 'historical poetics' comes from Bakhtin himself, and specifically notes that Bakhtin's chronotope essay has as its subtitle, 'Notes Toward a Historical Poetics'. He does not however point out that the same phrase also occurs in at least three other texts written by Bakhtin and members of his circle. In *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* Bakhtin and Medvedev speak of 'the necessity for a historical poetics to be the intermediate link between theoretical sociological poetics and literary history' (FM, p.30). In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin observes that a proper examination of 'the process of artistic preparation for the polyphonic novel is the task of an historical poetics' (PDP, p.36). And, in *Rabelais and his World* Bakhtin notes that 'Our work has basically a historic and literary character, though it is more or less closely linked

discourse as it occurs both inside and outside the literary text. Most simply, Bakhtin's approach to language seeks to establish the concrete historical basis of verbal interaction, whilst also maintaining that such socially-orientated interaction brings about the shifts in socio-linguistic conventions, styles and norms that are essential to a language's evolution. His concerns therefore include both ideas of stasis and fixity (i.e. historical concreteness) as well as ideas of change and production (i.e. historical becoming). In 'Discourse in the Novel', for example, Bakhtin notes that 'at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot [i.e. socially-stratified, connected to a set of concrete interests and contexts] from top to bottom', whilst also observing that 'These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages"' (DN, p.291). Bakhtin's emphasis upon the intercontextual relations between utterances and "languages" reveals a break from the interpretation of language as a closed system, and instead suggests a vision of language as an open conglomeration of conflicting accents and beliefs. Arguing that 'language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and another' (DN, p.293), Bakhtin points to the dialogic nature of all social communication, and asserts the importance of relations between one's own word and the word of another. Equally, he implies that immanent within language are forms of shared possibility and mutual potential, which may be realised in the crossing of voices and discourses that is central to the process of individual ideological becoming. Bakhtin's approach to language thus offers a notion of history in which the concept of history does not represent an amalgam of dates or a fixed system of thought. Rather, it suggests a history that is firmly attached to a specific temporal and spatial moment and a history that is open, unfinalisable and always in production: a history of multiple potentials.

Such a notion of history is perhaps most clearly seen in Bakhtin and Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and in Bakhtin's 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism'. In *The Formal Method* Bakhtin and Medvedev problematise the Formalist distinction between the inside and outside of a literary text, and instead suggest that meaning and history are formed out of the interrelations between the two. In 'The *Bildungsroman* and its

Significance in the History of Realism' Bakhtin approaches the question of history via the theme of 'the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel' (BSHR, p.19, Bakhtin's italics). In the essay itself Bakhtin offers a brief historical typology of the novel and a discussion of time and space in Goethe's works, organised according to the criteria of 'the assimilation of real historical time [in the novel] and the assimilation of historical man that takes place in that time' (ibid.). Dividing the history of the genre into novels without emergence (such as the travel novel, the novel of ordeal and the biographical novel) and novels of emergence (including cyclical-idyllic novels, classical novels of education, biographical and autobiographical novels, didactic-pedagogical novels and novels of historical emergence), Bakhtin claims that real historical time is best assimilated in those novels that show man in a real process of development, and suggests that it is only in novels of historical emergence that 'man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence' (BSHR, p.23). According to Bakhtin, this is because, in contrast to other instances of the genre, it is only in such novels that the actions of concretely-located characters can have a real impact on the world created, and that changes to this world can contribute to the emergence of a new man. This suggests that there is an irreducible link between individual and historical becoming in such novels, at the same time as characters remain free from the traps of dominant historical and social forces and retain both the potential for creative action and the freedom to effect social change. As Morson and Emerson note, for Bakhtin '*the process of becoming*' involves at least three elements- namely, the genuine growth of the individual, the genuine growth of history and the recognition that 'individual and historical becoming- are neither versions of each other nor wholly independent' (Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, p.405). In this chapter I wish to suggest that this offers a notion of history as open, unfinalisable and always in production, and that it is in just these terms that Walcott's *Another Life* might most profitably be read.

Bakhtin notes in his bildungsroman essay that 'problems of reality and man's potential, problems of freedom and necessity, and the problem of creative initiative rise to their full height' (BSHR, p.24) in novels of historical emergence. In doing so

he reflects upon the importance of history as a narrative discourse crucial for apprehending reality and recognises its significance as a framework vital for constructing one's own world. The impact of this on post-colonial writers and writing is also affirmed in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, where the editors observe that:

The significance of history for post-colonial discourse lies in the modern origins of historical study itself, and the circumstances by which 'History' took upon itself the mantle of a discipline. For the emergence of history in European thought is coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism, which in its radical othering and violent annexation of the non-European world, found in history a prominent, if not *the* prominent, instrument for the control of subject peoples. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, p.355)

Responding to what he terms 'the muse of history', in *Another Life* Walcott addresses the debilitating nature of this sort of dominant notion of 'History', and instead suggests the need for a new historical perspective in the Caribbean. In Walcott's poem questions of 'potential', 'freedom' and 'creative initiative' are central to the main narrative of historical emergence, and it is through the individual emergence of the Caribbean artist and poet that this process of becoming is principally revealed. It is in this sense that the poem begins in autobiography. *Another Life* emerges out of a short memoir ('Leaving School'), which contains in embryo many of the themes and incidents that are presented in the poem<sup>11</sup>. The narrative is tied to the occurrence of actual events in Walcott's life on St Lucia- the fire at Castries, the day-to-day business of painting with Simmons and St Omer, the pursuit of Andreuille Alcée. Mention of these things helps to ground Walcott's text in a definite temporal and spatial locale, as well as they invest the narrative with the authority of personal testimony. But, as it develops, the narrative of the autobiographical self is devolved to incorporate and include other fully and partly developed consciousnesses- such as Simmons, St Omer and Alcée, and the mythical townsfolk presented in Chapter 3- as well as other moments and motifs- such as an

---

<sup>11</sup> 'Leaving School' opens with Walcott 'stood on the long wooden verandah of St Mary's College, [from where he] could see clear across the charred pasture of Castries to the Vigie promontory' (Walcott, 'Leaving School', 4). Thereafter he refers to the fire at Castries, the influence of Harry Simmons, the legacy of his father, Dunstan St. Omer's departure and return, his love for Anna, his sense of division and his departure from the island.

Edward Baugh comments that 'The commissioned act of setting down his memories of this special period released in Walcott a flood of recollection ... It also gave him the idea of disburdening himself of those memories by writing a full-scale autobiography, the story of his St Lucian life. In April 1965 he began to write what was to be the first version of *Another Life*. By early November he had filled a quarto-size exercise book of 76 pages in closely written longhand and had started on a second such book' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.4).

act of native resistance presented in Chapter 11, or the memory of slaves lost in the crossing of the Middle Passage alluded to in Chapter 22<sup>12</sup>. This works to externalise the individual identity of the poet, and gives his narrative a sociological dimension, which in turn suggests that the emergence of the poet is 'inseparably linked' to the emergence of the island as a society of potential and possibility. Walcott's reflections on his apprenticeship as a painter and his emergence as a poet, and the effect this has upon his developing language and style, will provide two of the key elements of the following discussion. It is however first necessary to establish the historical divisions evident within his book-length poem.

In the penultimate chapter of *Another Life*, which was published separately in *The New Yorker* (28 October 1972) as 'The Muse of History at Rampanalga', Walcott makes clear his distinction between a notion of history as time and history understood as myth. The chapter opens with a description of a lifeless decaying landscape that yields nothing from 'bland water to bland sky' (AL, p.283), which may, in one sense, reflect the poet's despair at the death of his mentor, Harry Simmons. Whether this is the case or not, the setting is more significantly used to expose the affectations of those that perpetuate and serve 'the muse of history' in their glorification of dates, facts and calculations. Describing the historian as a 'water rat', a 'Mediterranean accountant', a 'Chinese grocer', the poet suggests that what each produces is a history that is little more than a list or inventory composed of 'so many lbs. of cod, / so many bales of biscuits, / on spiked shop paper, / the mummified odour of onions, / spikenard, and old Pharaohs peeling like onionskin / to the archeologist's finger' (AL, pp.283-284). The reference to the Pharaohs indicates the historian's misguided emphasis upon a lifeless past waiting to be discovered, in contrast to a living past waiting to be created. As Walcott suggests, this leads to the sanctification of history for its own sake, and this is further supported by the historian's romanticisation of murder and cruelty (AL, pp.286), or the writing of history out of shame or revenge which is also based on a litany of dates (AL, p.287). The latter of these emphasises the continuing authority of historical time and is shown in the poem by the reference to particular historical moments, such as '1857 Lucknow and Cawnpore' and '1834 slavery abolished', which though central to a

---

<sup>12</sup> This is suggested by Sarah Phillips Casteel in her recent essay, 'Autobiography as Rewriting: Derek

process of cultural and political emancipation are still regurgitated 'in the masochistic veneration of / chains, and the broken rum jugs of cutthroats' (ibid.). 'Sick of [the] black angst' that produces this slavish adherence to dates, the poet pleads for this kind of history to be categorically avoided. Instead, in the remainder of Chapter 22 he chooses to celebrate the holiness of the life of Rampanalgas, and praise the endurance and survival of its inhabitants.

Walcott's dismissal of a history 'machined through fact, / for the poet's cheap alcohol' (ibid.) is explicitly and successfully made in Chapter 22. However, earlier in the poem Walcott also reveals that it was just this kind of recorded history that he grew up with and was educated in as a child. In Chapter 11 of the poem Walcott suggests the nature of his own historical division and the historical divisions of others, as he presents two different notions of history- one the history of war and empire, the other the lost history of a band of native Caribs. He describes first how he was captivated by a tapestry celebrating British victory at Waterloo and captured by the tales of glory contained in Williamson's *History of the British Empire*, which was part of the island scholarship exam (AL, pp.210-211). Acknowledging the influence of his English history master, he fondly recalls the 'Hymns of battles not our own' and 'those dates we piped of redoubt and repulse' (AL, p.212). The product of white and black ancestry, he even imagines himself on the British side, as 'behind the chevroned jalousies / I butchered fellaheen, thuggees, Mamelukes, wogs' (AL, p.211), his language imitating racist descriptions of a colonial other. Perhaps this implicates the young Walcott in the faded glory and stained heroism of a rotten and decaying empire. However, highlighting the gap between the boy remembered and the man remembering, the mature poet also suggests that such fantasies of chivalry and militarism were just 'The fiction / of rusted soldiers fallen on a schoolboy's page' (AL, p.212). In contrast to this kind of dominant colonial history, in the second half of Chapter 11 Walcott places an example of local heroism and historical survival based around an act of native resistance. The event itself concerns a tragic confrontation between French troops and a band of approximately eight hundred Caribs on the island of Grenada in the mid-Seventeenth century. The French first arrived on Grenada in 1650 to a hospitable reception from the Carib chief. However,

within a year relations between the colonisers and the colonised had cooled as the French sought to take control of the island. The Caribs began a campaign of resistance. But after their first major attack on the French fort in 1652 had failed, they were relentlessly pursued until, encircled by colonial militia, they leapt to their deaths off a cliff now known as Le Morne des Sauteurs (or Leaper's Hill)<sup>13</sup>. Consciously sealing the fate of a race, the Caribs leap off the cliff might be seen by some as an act of loss and defeat, the end of a native presence on the island. However, it is also more importantly an act of defiance and victory, in that the Caribs surrendered themselves to their gods and were thus saved from being killed at the hands of the French. Illustrative of a lost history, their leap into *Another Life* is significant precisely because it heralds the moment when history is re-opened and the events of the forgotten past are shown to have a continuing and creative effect on the process of Caribbean historical recuperation. As the poet's memories of imperial history fade the poem's style suddenly shifts from long stanzas of free verse to a short quatrain- 'The leaping Caribs whiten, / in one flash, the instant / the race leapt at Sauteurs, / a cataract! One scream of bounding lace' (AL, p.213)- in order to heighten the sense of contrast between the two notions of history. Moreover, from the moment of the Carib's introduction various interconnecting images and motifs extend throughout the text, around which radiate the outposts of Walcott's poem.

In the two stanzas immediately following, the poet works his way inside events normally outside history and makes the past present by working towards a sense of history rooted in elation. In the first stanza the poet reveals how he is involved in a process of re-animation, bringing the Caribs back to life, even as he suggests that he is returning them to the soil they should never have left. 'I have wept less for them dead than I did / when they leapt from my thumbs into birth', he observes, 'than my /

---

<sup>13</sup> 'About 300 Caribs were pursued by the French to a Carbet [i.e. village] at the top of a mountain and about 80 of them were killed. The remainder rushed down the hillsides at dazzling speed, like stones dropping from a 1,000 foot cliff; those able to reach canoes and even logs, escaped to the Cabsterre of the island. A band of about 40 pressed further north until they reached the northernmost point of the island, but realising the hopelessness of their situation, with the French soldiers then close at hand, the impossibility of escape, covering their eyes with their hands they plunged into the sea to meet what to them was a glorious end, compared to a base and shameful death at the hands of the Frenchman. The French pursuit of the Carib lasted several days, beginning in St George's (Basseterre) and ending at Le Morne des Sauteurs or Leaper's Hill, the name subsequently given to the spot from which the Caribs plunged.'

George Brizan, *Grenada: Island of Conflict, From Amerindians to People's Revolution 1498-1979* (London: Zed books, 1984), p.18.

heels which have never hurt horses that now pound them / back into what they should never have sprung from, / staying un-named and un-praised where I found them-- / in the god-breeding, god-devouring earth!' (AL, p.213). Such concerns reflect the problems inherent in sanctifying the events of a past historical moment, making the Caribs into 'gods'. However, the elemental presence of history soon takes hold, as the poet finds himself running alongside the Caribs to the edge of their abyss in the second of the two stanzas. This narrative transition is indicated by the shifts in subject-position between each of the stanzas, as the first-person singular opening of 'I am' in the first becomes a collective plural 'We are' in the second. The frenetic and chaotic feelings of the chase are conveyed by the long sentence with few grammatical interruptions, so that it 'runs' with the Caribs ('We are ground as the hooves of their horses open the wound / of the widening cliffs and the horns of green branches come... ', AL, pp.213); while Edward Baugh notes too that 'this is the only passage in the poem which uses traditional or "true" epic style', in which:

The long anapaestic and irregularly alliterative lines, the long, breath stopping periods, characterised by run-on lines, often with the metrical foot itself being carried over from one line to the next, combine to evoke all the terror, speed and urgency of the running and the leap, as well as the exhilarating sense of being transfigured by the action. (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, pp.45-46)

Deliberately heightening the impact of the passage, the first sentence closes with the emphatic naming of 'Sauteurs' (the word 'Sauteurs' is placed after a comma, at the beginning of a line, and is followed by an exclamation mark). Thereafter the poet truly becomes one with 'the thousand / running towards the exclamation of their single name', as the stanza continues and closes with the following lines:

Their leap into the light? I am no more  
 than that lithe dreaming runner beside me, my son, the roar  
 of his heart, and their hearts, I am one with this engine  
 which is greater than victory, and their pride  
 with its bounty of pardon, I am one  
 with the thousand runners who will break on loud sand  
 at Thermopylae, one wave that now cresting must bear  
 down the torch of this race, I am all, I am one  
 who feels, as he falls with the thousand now his tendons harden  
 and the wind god, Houroucan, combing his hair .... (AL, p.214)

The poet's assertion that 'I am no more' in the first line indicates his internal awakening into the historical moment. His repetition of 'I am one', 'I am one', 'I am all, I am one' at the beginning of each clause emphasises his sense of affinity with the

Caribs and their collective historical legacy. For the poet, the Caribs represent more than mere victory. They also symbolise 'the torch of [a] race' whose light still shines in the contemporary Caribbean. The epic stature of the Caribs' leap is shown by the reference made to Thermopylae, another celebrated example of heroic resistance. As Baugh points out, this perhaps suggests certain ironies about Walcott's alternative to those tales of heroism found in the annals of Western history<sup>14</sup>. However, the allusion to both Western and Central American influences (i.e. Thermopylae and Houroucan) also provides evidence of Walcott's conscious assimilation of various and often conflicting ancestries in his creation of a new and contemporary Caribbean history.

Ending with the Caribs' 'leap into the light', this section of *Another Life* inaugurates a sense of history that embraces life in death, the refusal to submit to defeat. It also provides a record of events constructed from within the historical moment and yet situated outside the dominant disciplinary vision of history. 'Walcott is saying that the West Indian must have the courage to leap outside history, rather than be enslaved or intimidated by it' - Robert Elliot Fox is right to conclude<sup>15</sup>. But it is Walcott's deliberately tangential relation to history that is surely most interesting here. Blurring the distinction between inside and outside Walcott first presents the Carib's jump off the cliff as historical event, and then balances this with his subsequent leap into the present action of their flight. This allows him to adopt a position outside as the narrator of historical events, and inside the events of narration, which necessarily brings into question the static nature of the idea of history as time. It also establishes an understanding of history as open and unfinalisable, and it is this that is integral to the process of historical becoming in *Another Life*. In *The Formal Method* Bakhtin and Medvedev offer a detailed critique of Russian Formalism in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, and propose a move towards a 'sociological poetics' that seeks to claim a middle-ground between Formalism and Marxism in the

---

<sup>14</sup> Reflecting upon this irony, Baugh notes that 'while, on the one hand, the story of Sauteurs is being presented as an alternative to stories of European heroism, it ultimately is shown to have full significance in its parallel with such stories, in being part of a wider human view in which each story has its equal and rightful place' (Baugh *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.46).

The lines and parallels Walcott draws between the Caribbean and the West are also central in his later book-length poem, *Omeros*, in which the figure of Homer provides the main point of connection. This is the subject of my next chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Elliot Fox, 'Derek Walcott: History as Dis-ease', *Callaloo*, 9 (2) (1986), 334.

understanding of the literary text<sup>16</sup>. For Bakhtin and Medvedev the basic Formalist ideas of this period- such as their notion of poetic language, and their concepts of material and device- are characterised by a severing of the work of art from anything and everything external to the text. The Formalists regarded such a process of subtraction as the best and only way to isolate and study the form of the work of art in and of itself. However, such a closed system of literary interpretation prevents any consideration of the connections between the intratextual and the extratextual, which is central to Bakhtin and Medvedev's 'sociological poetics'. It also suggests a particularly mechanical notion of literary evolution and history, whereby historical change is necessarily driven by the replacement of devices from generation to generation, and no account is taken of formal shifts on either a large or small scale. According to Bakhtin and Medvedev, 'The Formalist theory of literary evolution lacks the essential aspect of history: the category of historical time' (FM, p.170). In response, they argue for a notion of history that exists within 'a complex system of interconnections and mutual influences, [according to which] ... Each element of the system is defined within several unique but interrelated unities' (FM, p.27). In this way, the study of the effect of form in the work of art would proceed from the unity of the text itself, to the unity of literature, to the unity of ideological life and to the unity of the socio-economic development and in all directions in between. Likewise, (literary) history would proceed from an appreciation of the interdependent and mutually determining relationship between the inside and outside of the literary text, thus offering a more open understanding of historical change and possibility.

---

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the usual sources (i.e. Clark & Holquist *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Morson & Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*), the following offer a valuable introduction to the issues surrounding Bakhtin's engagement with Russian Formalism:

Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 1979), pp.75-82.

Michael Bernard-Donals, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Between Phenomenology and Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.1-17.

Ken Hirschkop, 'M.M. Bakhtin / P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 6 (1986), 145-146.

Michael Holquist, 'Bakhtin and the Formalists: History as Dialogue', in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson & Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Centre for International and Area Studies, 1985), pp.82-95.

Graham Pechey, 'Bakhtin, Marxism and Post-Structuralism', in *The Politics of Theory, Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature 1982*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen & Diana Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), pp.234-247.

I.R. Titunik, 'The Formal Method and the Sociological Method (M.M. Baxtin, P.N. Medvedev, V.N. Volosinov) in Russian Theory and the Study of Literature', in *MPL*, pp.175-200.

One of Bakhtin and Medvedev's main concerns in *The Formal Method* is to find a theoretical path between an understanding of history or the literary text that exclusively concentrates upon the intrinsic (i.e. Russian Formalism) and one which only focuses on the extrinsic (i.e. Marxism). This leads them to argue that, 'every literary phenomenon, like every other ideological phenomenon, is simultaneously determined from without (extrinsically) and from within (intrinsically)' (FM, p.29). The irreducible relationship between the inside and outside of a literary text is characterised in *The Formal Method* as 'a simple dialectic' (ibid.), in which 'what occurs ... is not the substitution of one type of significance for another, but the superimposition of one significance on another' (FM, p.154)<sup>17</sup>. The impact this has upon Bakhtin's dialogic approach to language and history is evident in his subsequent works, just as it is recognised by David Carroll who notes that:

a critical, dialogic approach to form and history would have as its goal neither the return to history as the ground of all grounds nor the return to any formal or textual system as the context of history. It would not be oriented towards saving history or "saving the text" from alien, intruding languages and strategies, but rather towards saving each from itself, from succumbing to the metanarratological, metahistorical ends each has so often been made to serve.<sup>18</sup>

What this means for Walcott's poem, and specifically the symbolic example of *Sauteurs*, is that the crossing of the boundary separating those inside and outside the historical record gestures toward a notion of history that does not serve any dominant or all-encompassing cultural or political ends. Walcott's blurring of this distinction complicates the fixed notion of history as time, and introduces difference into the writing of history. The naming of *Sauteurs* suggests a vision of history in which the traditionally absent are made habitually present, as a forgotten race is brought to life again. The past is made present by making the historical event part of a shared imagination, and because this is written from within the historical moment whilst at the same time retaining a sense of contemporary existence, this becomes the source of potential and possibility that is recognised elsewhere in the text.

---

<sup>17</sup> Although there seems to be a close relationship between dialectics and dialogics, Bakhtin is harshly critical of the former in his later notes, where he writes: 'Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness- and that's how you get dialectics.'

Bakhtin, 'From Notes Made in 1970-71', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, p.147.

<sup>18</sup> David Carroll, 'The Alterity of Discourse: Form, History and the Question of the Political in M.M. Bakhtin', *Diacritics*, 13 (2) (1983), 83.

One of the ways in which the events at Sauteurs inaugurate a sense of history as open, unfinalisable and always in production is in the reverberating effects they have on other aspects of the narrative. The impact of the Sauteurs episode on the rest of the poem is perhaps most clearly seen at the climax of the poem, when the poet asks: 'what else is there / but books, books and the sea, / verandahs and pages of the sea, / to write of the wind and the memory of wind-whipped hair / in the sun, the colour of fire?' (AL, p.289). Placed in the context of the poet's reflections on 'The Muse of History at Rampanalgas', these wave-like lines recall the opening phrases of *Another Life*, where 'the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master / in the middle of another life' (AL, p.145). They therefore connect the process of writing to the process of historical becoming. Equally, they refer back to the Caribs' 'leap into the light', especially 'the wind-god, Horoucan, combing his hair...', and suggest the need to establish lines of relation between the various historical movements of the text. The closing allusion to 'the memory of wind-whipped hair' provides an illustration of the importance of Sauteurs in the text, and suggests too that in Walcott's attention to the writing of Caribbean history the past continues to be present as well as it continues to be creative. The notion of a 'creative past' is most specifically introduced by Bakhtin in 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism', where he explores its outlines in relation to Goethe's sense of time and space. Highlighting Goethe's ability to see and read time, Bakhtin notes that in order for the past to be necessary and creative, 'It must have its *effect* in the present', and that 'Such a creatively effective past, determining the present, produces in conjunction with the present a particular direction for the future' (BSHR, p.34). This leads to what he terms 'a *fullness of time*' (ibid.), which is achieved, according to Bakhtin, when there is a clear line of historical development between past, present and future. In this way, the reference to the events at Sauteurs in the penultimate chapter of *Another Life* might be read as an example of the forgotten past converging with the present in order to suggest a particular direction for the future in the Caribbean.

The notion of history as shared imagination represented by Sauteurs provides a foundation for the kind of history Walcott wishes to create throughout *Another Life*. As images and motifs occur and recur throughout the poem, the full significance of the poet's declarations 'I am one', 'I am one', 'I am all, I am one' only gradually

begin to come clear. As the poet returns to St. Lucia in the final book of the poem, 'One life, one marriage later' (AL, p.271), he discovers a new strength and humility in his friend Gregorias, who has 'entered life':

They shine, they shine,  
 such men. After the vision  
 of their own self-exhaustion bores them,  
 till, slowly unsurprised at their own greatness,  
 needing neither martyrdom nor magnificence,  
 "I see, I see," is what Gregorias cried,  
 living within that moment where he died. (AL, p.272-273)

Celebrating Gregorias' return, the tenor of this passage points to the sense of life-in-death ('living within that moment where he died') most obviously associated with Sauteurs. The repetition of 'They shine, they shine' and 'I see, I see', mirrors the style of the earlier piece and suggests too the idea of illumination that is central to the Caribs' 'leap into the light', which is itself described as a 'flash' and a 'cataract'. Another line of relation is later traced to the poet himself, who reiterates his personal investment in the history created at Sauteurs and suggests the importance of this as a turning point in the process of his historical becoming:

when I leapt from that shelf  
 of rock, an abounding bolt of lace,  
 I leapt for the pride of that race  
 at Sauteurs! An urge more than mine,  
 so, see them as heroes or as the Gadarene swine,  
 let it be written, I shared, I shared,  
 I was struck like rock, and I opened  
 to His gift! (AL, pp.281-282)

Again using similar phrasing to that which occurs in Chapter 11, here the remembrance of Sauteurs is seen as a moment of divine light, a Biblical awakening, that leads to an opening of consciousness, an opening to the gift of an absent presence. Preceded by an assertion of the authenticating property of writing, the repetition of 'I shared, I shared' reiterates the power of the shared imagination in Walcott's narrative of historical emergence. Part of a process of reconciliation, this passage sees the poet making peace with his past, and is particularly inspired by the memories of Anna and Harry. The legacy of the Caribs is also seen in them too. Anna is associated throughout the poem with 'A Simple Flame', and therefore extends the imagery of illumination; while Harry's suicide, like the Caribs 'leap into the light', is as much an act of rebellion as it is an admission of defeat. The death of Simmons

provides the major focus of the closing book of *Another Life*. Yet, though the act itself is the source of immense grief, the poet's sense of utter despair is balanced by a sense of Simmons' living spirit. News of his death is followed by a portrait of him alive ('Brown, balding, with a lacertilian / jut to his underlip, / with spectacles thick as a glass paperweight/ and squat, blunt fingers,...' AL, p.276), and this in turn is followed by an expression of his continuing presence:

I see him bent under the weight of the morning,  
 against its shafts,  
 devout, angelical,  
 the easel rifling his shoulder,  
 the master of Gregorias and myself,  
 I see him standing over the bleached roofs  
 of the salt-streaked villages,  
 each steeple pricked  
 by its own wooden star. (AL, p.280)

It is noticeable in this that Simmons provides a sense of endurance, a will to go on with his art in spite of 'the weight of the morning', that can be traced back to Sauteurs. It is also important that this memory of Simmons is of him as an artist of the people, painting the village life of the island, as it is the task of naming the island in paint and in print that is Simmons' greatest gift to his pupils.

The task of naming the landscape and life of the Caribbean is one of the main preoccupations of Walcott's poetry from *Twenty-Five Poems* in 1948 to *Tiepolo's Hound* in 2000. In *Another Life* it is an integral part of the poet's artistic development and is therefore also central to the process of historical becoming within the text. In his bildungsroman essay, Bakhtin notes that the hero within a novel of historical emergence stands 'on the border between two epochs, at the transition point from one to another' (BSHR, p.23). 'This transition is accomplished in him and through him', he reflects (ibid.). So too, it might be suggested that in *Another Life* the transition from one epoch to another takes place 'in and through' the figure of Walcott as painter and poet. This process of transformation not only has a determining effect on the language and style of the poem as a whole, but also begins with the more local task of naming the environment and claiming the island. The opening chapter provides a portrait of the young artist at work in the Castries harbour, sketching the outlines of his vision, and this is followed in the remaining chapters of Book 1 by an ever-expanding survey of the island. In Book 2, 'Homage to Gregorias', the focus turns to the practical possibilities of making a new art. The epigraph to the book is

taken from Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* (first published in English in 1956), a novel that like *Another Life* also seeks to provide a mythical response to the historical reality of conquest and colonisation. Providing an image of a handful of artists 'growing gaunt and pale in their unlighted studios' the epigraph ends with the assertion that the most important task for the New World artist is 'Adam's task of giving things their names' (AL, p.189). This phrase, which also appears in the final lines of the poem, provides an important coda to Walcott's *Another Life* precisely because an Adamic approach to art and life of necessity requires a new sense of individual historical being and a new approach to the concept of history. Describing this Adamic vision, in 'The Muse of History' Walcott argues that a belief in a second Adam requires 'the re-creation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals' (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.40)<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, in *Another Life* Walcott reveals how, under the guidance of Simmons, both he and Gregorias dedicated themselves to fulfilling this task through their art.

The delineation of their efforts not only places a new world of native flora and fauna at the centre of Caribbean art, but also impacts upon Walcott's emergence as a Caribbean poet. Their shared vision is most clearly introduced in Chapter 8, as the mature poet remembers the joint declaration they made:

that we would never leave the island  
until we had put down, in paint, in words,  
as psalmists learn the network of a hand,  
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,  
every neglected, self-pitying inlet  
muttering in brackish dialect ... (AL, p.194).

Laurence Liederman sees this enunciation as 'a ritual first step in the process of recovering the lost history of the native peoples, and forging a poetic craft informed by history and the vitality of its correlative myths'<sup>20</sup>. It is followed in the poem by

---

<sup>19</sup> The phrase 'a second Adam' suggests that Walcott's sense of the Adamic is more attuned to new beginnings than first beginnings. In 'The Muse of History', he goes on to comment that, 'The great poetry of the New World does not pretend to such innocence, its vision is not naïve. Rather, like its fruits, its savour is a mixture of the acid and the sweet, the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience' (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', pp.40-41).

In 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin also questions the reality of somehow getting back to a wholly innocent Adamic world, when he notes that 'Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish [the] dialogic inter-orientation that occurs in the object. Concrete historical human discourse does not have this privilege: it can deviate from such inter-orientation only on a conditional basis and only to a certain degree' (DN, p.279).

<sup>20</sup> Laurence Liederman, 'New Poetry: The Muse of History', *The Yale Review*, 63 (1) (1973), 115.

the naming of the bois-canot, a tree, which is in the process of being uprooted by an axe<sup>21</sup>. Recognising that 'no one had yet written of this landscape / that it was possible', Walcott makes his description of the bois-canot a description of a Caribbean historical void. Thus, the broken roots of the tree reflect the broken history of a Caribbean, in which 'like bastard children, hiding in their names, // whole generations died, unchristened, / growths hidden in green darkness, forests / of history thickening with amnesia' (AL, p.195). This clearly shows how namelessness is intimately connected to historylessness in the Caribbean setting, and this is reflected in the erasure of African and Arawak 'hieroglyphs and signs' and the mixture of their 'symbols' with lichen that is referred to in subsequent stanzas (AL, p.196). The closing lines of Chapter 8 offer a picture of the archipelago in which tribal division is 'nearly' overcome, an environment in which men like trees 'nearly' find their proper sounds (ibid.). Symbolising the ubiquitous struggle for identity across the region, this presents the Caribbean as both a ground of frustration and failure and a ground of potential and possibility. Building upon this, Walcott and Gregorias' art is intended to name and christen the region and its people and in so doing connect their complex lives and histories together. Placing the figure of the Caribbean artist in the position of the first man, the island pioneer, the namer, this illuminates the sense of an Adamic vision Walcott wrote of elsewhere during this period. It is also an extension of an earlier fascination with the myth of Robinson Crusoe, particularly evident in poems such as 'The Castaway', 'Crusoe's Journal', and 'Crusoe's Island', first published in *The Castaway* in 1965, the year Walcott began work on *Another Life*. The connection between Crusoe and the Caribbean artist is addressed in a paper entitled 'The Figure of Crusoe', in which Walcott argues that the image 'of a lonely man on a beach who has heaped a pile of dead bush, twigs, etc., to make a bonfire' is resonant of the Caribbean poet, who is able to discover himself again and again out of the daily contemplation and creation of his island<sup>22</sup>. Interestingly, he notes too that what feeds the bonfire is 'that rich irony of

---

<sup>21</sup> The name 'bois-canot' derives from the French language ('bois' meaning 'wood', and 'canot' meaning 'boat') and is a legacy of St Lucia's earlier colonisation by the French. Therefore, even here the history of colonialism infiltrates Walcott's language.

<sup>22</sup> Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.34.

It is worth noting that Walcott's figure of Crusoe is a Crusoe of a particular kind: 'My Crusoe, then, is Adam, Christopher Columbus, God, a missionary, a beachcomber, and his interpreter, Daniel Defoe. He is Adam because he is the first inhabitant of a second paradise. He is Columbus because he has

our history' (Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe', p.40), suggesting that, in his innocence and isolation, the Caribbean poet is somewhat paradoxically privileged to be the first to name a tree or a town as he works himself out of a history of namelessness.

The identification of the task of 'giving things their names' in Chapter 8 of *Another Life* is followed in Chapter 9 by a consideration of the artist at work. It is here that Walcott most explicitly pays homage to the other life of painting he actively pursued during his youth, and as a consequence it is here that the complexities of his creative identity are most clearly revealed. In the first section Walcott provides a detailed impression of the act of painting; in the second he reflects upon his failure to capture his vision; and in the third he alludes to some of the influences that have determined his artistic direction. The imagery associated with painters and painting is important throughout the poem (and it is at least in this respect that *Another Life* bears a vital relation to Walcott's later volumes, *Midsummer* and *Tiepolo's Hound*<sup>23</sup>). It is worth noting that in the opening chapter of the poem Walcott makes direct reference to Meindert Hobbema and Sir Thomas Lawrence, whilst in Chapter 9 he explicitly alludes to Fra Fillippo Lippi, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Albrecht Dürer, Peter de Wint, Paul Sandby, John Sell Cotman, François Boucher, Jean Honoré Fragonard, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, Giotto di Bondone and the early Renaissance artist, Masaccio. Such abundant allusion to other painters and paintings acts as a celebration of the period of Walcott's apprenticeship as a painter and traces an important connection to an absent (i.e. Western) artistic tradition. It also impacts upon the meaning of the poem, because, as Edward Baugh succinctly argues, 'painting is not only a subject of the poem, but ... an important aspect of its style and texture'<sup>24</sup>. Baugh supports this with the suggestion that 'Every view [in *Another Life*]

---

discovered this new world, by accident, by fatality. He is God because he teaches himself to control his creation, he rules the world he has made, and also, because he is to Friday, a white concept of Godhead. He is a missionary because he instructs Friday in the uses of religion; he has a passion for conversion. He is a beachcomber because I have imagined him as one of those figures of adolescent literature, ... and finally, he is also Daniel Defoe, because the journal of Crusoe, which is Defoe's journal, is written in prose, not in poetry, and our literature, the pioneers of our public literature have expressed themselves in prose in this new world.' (pp.35-36)

<sup>23</sup> *Midsummer* represents a moment of stasis, in which the contemplative act of painting provides the basis for a close scrutiny of the Caribbean poet and his place in the world.

*Tiepolo's Hound* tells the story of the impressionist painter Camille Pissaro, a white Jew born in St Thomas, who like Walcott left the Caribbean to pursue his art in the West. The hardback version of the book includes prints of Walcott's own paintings.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Baugh, 'Painters and Painting in *Another Life*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.239.

is composed and coloured and framed as for a painting' (Baugh, 'Painters and Painting in *Another Life*, p.240), and notes too the special significance that Renaissance painters (such as Lippi, Dürer, Giotto and Masaccio) have within the poem. Providing the first instance of the painter in action, the poet's opening vision of the island is described as 'a cinquecento fragment in gilt frame' (AL, p.146, i.e. a Renaissance-style painting). Likewise, at the moment of his dedication to art in Chapter 7 he alludes to two of the notional fathers of the High Renaissance, Michelangelo and Raphael (AL, p.186). 'In the Renaissance [Walcott] found a supreme example of a great age defined by its art, so to speak, the idea that it is the art that brings the age to the fullest self awareness, that "signs" the epoch', Baugh writes (Baugh, 'Painters and Painting in *Another Life*, p.240), and it is precisely in this sense that the narrative of artistic renaissance, which is also a narrative of individual and communal becoming, is presented and framed in *Another Life*.

In the opening section of Chapter 9 Van Gogh and Gauguin provide the predominant points of reference. In effect, Van Gogh and Gauguin function here as models for Walcott and Gregorias. Elsewhere the pair are also linked to Harry Simmons as pioneers and practitioners of a shared artistic vision as well as victims of a shared fate (AL, p.261-262). As Clara Rosa de Lima observes, Van Gogh offers the lesson of an 'absolute commitment to art and the obsessional ... pursuit of that commitment'<sup>25</sup>. It is therefore through his example that the poet comes to examine himself as a painter and to analyse what he perceives to be his artistic failings. On the one hand, he is troubled by the failure of all art, by the inability of art to do anything more than momentarily arrest and frame the real. On the other hand, he is perplexed by the disparity between his finished paintings and the artistic ideals and inclinations that he hoped to capture in them. 'Where did I fail?', he asks (AL, p.200), and in response he posits a division that suggests one of the main reasons why Walcott emerged as a poet and not a painter:

I could draw,  
I was disciplined, humble, I rendered  
the visible world that I saw  
exactly, yet it hindered me, for  
in every surface I sought  
the paradoxical flash of an instant

---

<sup>25</sup> Clara Rosa de Lima, 'Walcott, Painting and the Shadow of Van Gogh', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, p.175.

in which every facet was caught  
 in a crystal of ambiguities,  
 I hoped that both disciplines might  
 by painful accretion cohere  
 and finally ignite,  
 but I lived in a different gift,  
 its element metaphor (AL, p.200-201)

Caught between the felt need for exactness and the natural desire for ambiguity Walcott chooses the latter, when he notes that his 'gift' lies in metaphor. 'It is not ... that Walcott cannot succeed as a painter', Pamela Mordecai reflects, 'It is rather that paint and the exigencies of interpreting reality in that medium cannot express the range and complexity of the insight of his heightened imagination, nor construe it to his satisfaction'<sup>26</sup>. In fact, the phrasing of this section of the poem catches the essence of the poet's conflict between paint and the word. In the first half of the sentence, which deals with the poet's impression of the visible world, each word is precise in its place and cut off from other words and worlds with grammatical exactness. Then suddenly, in 'the paradoxical flash of an instant', the word takes over and the lines run on into each other, hinting at the associative mode of metaphor according to which a resemblance is implied between one thing and another.

The poet's preference for ambiguity, for openness and unfinalisability, naturally influences his language and style. However, in its implicit echo of the introduction of the Sauteurs episode ('the paradoxical flash of an instant' brings to mind that 'one flash, the instant / the race leapt at Sauteurs') it also impacts upon the concept of history that gradually emerges through the poem. Addressing the relationship between the developing concepts of history and style in *Another Life*, Nana Wilson-Tagoe argues that, 'The pull between representing reality as it is and recreating it in other reflections is also the pull between arresting the moment, the particular time, and seeing the moment represented in all time' (Wilson-Tagoe, 'History and Style in *Another Life*, p.60). She thus suggests that the division between exactness and ambiguity underpins a more far-reaching conflict between the need to record (i.e. history) and the urge to heighten and illuminate (i.e. art), out of which a sense of history's simultaneity emerges. Similarly, Pamela Mordecai notes that the poet's central expression of his desire for ambiguity:

---

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Mordecai, 'A Crystal of Ambiguities: Metaphors for Creativity and the Art of Writing in Derek Walcott's *Another Life*', *World Literature Written in English*, 27 (1) (1987), 100.

suggests a preoccupation on Walcott's part with perceiving all that there is in everything; or to tie down the lines more rigorously, with perceiving all aspects of everything within the thing at that point in time, or every possible aspect of the thing itself at that moment in time, or that especial moment when the truth of poetry, of art, which explains the subtle interfaces of all things, becomes available through the particular thing. (Mordecai, 'A Crystal of Ambiguities', 104)

This exposition suggests the kind of effect Walcott seeks in paint but finds in language, which is evident in *Another Life* in the constant reverberation of images across the poem and in the deliberately ambivalent language the poet uses to describe his own creativity. It indicates Walcott's apparent preoccupation with a notion of history in which the effect of a historical moment (such as Sauteurs) resonates beyond its temporal particularity to potentially incorporate 'all that there is in everything' or 'all aspects of everything within the thing at that point in time' or 'every possible aspect of the thing itself at that moment in time'. Filtered through the organising vision of the poet, this sense of openness also suggests the kind of historical perspective in which the determinants of historical concreteness and historical becoming continually reverberate to create a history that is open, unfinalisable and always in production. Blurring the boundary between the concrete and the potential, Walcott thus introduces into the text a new temporality based on the proximity between past, present and future and presents a new image of Caribbean man in the process of becoming.

The mature poet's recognition in Chapter 9 of *Another Life* that he 'lived in a different gift, / its element metaphor' marks this section of the poem as an important moment in the main narrative of historical emergence. Exploring the differences between himself and Gregorias, Walcott offers a number of clues to his developing notion of language and style. Following the intimation of the division between 'exactness' and 'ambiguity' in his work, the poet claims that 'while Gregorias would draw / with the linear elation of an eel / one muscle in one thought, / my hand was crabbed by that style, / this epoch, that school / or the next' (AL, p.201). Extending this image of the Caribbean artist further, he reveals that 'often my hand betrayed / creeping across the white sand, /... its circuitous instinct / to fasten on what it seized', and a few lines later also states that Gregorias denounced him for 'this sidewise crawling, this classic / condition of servitude' (ibid.). Acknowledging a debt to other painters and paintings that is demonstrated throughout the poem, at first

glance the image of the poet's 'crabbed' hand suggests a sense of constriction, diminution and slavish imitation, which is further supported by the description of his style as a 'classic / condition of servitude'. It perhaps suggests that Walcott's painting during this period was largely derivative and, by extension, implies that Walcott's language in his early poetry was also under the influence of other 'styles', 'epochs' and 'schools' with which he had forged an imagined connection<sup>27</sup>. However, in addition to this, it can also be suggested that the poet's 'circuitous instinct' and 'sidewise crawling' offers an implicit notion of linguistic creativity and cultural potential, which is supported (according to Walcott) by the experience of master and slave in the arena of the colonial encounter. Addressing the question of colonial interaction in 'The Muse of History', Walcott echoes the stance taken by Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* and argues that the slave's adaptation of their master's religion and language marks the beginning of creative effort in the Caribbean (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.48). The assertion of the poet's 'circuitous instinct' is then, an expression of Walcott's 'leaning towards obliquity, towards finding out directions by indirections' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.41), and also an expression of his identification with those who survived slavery through cultural creativity. The conscious assimilation of various cultural traditions and artefacts within the poem parallels the slave's instinctive creolisation of cultures, whilst the intimation of the poet's 'sidewise crawling' suggests both a humility towards absent masters and a trickery and ingenuity in relation to those masters. Likewise, 'this classic / condition of servitude' is classic because slavery is a thing of the past, and also because the appropriation and abrogation of other languages and cultures has 'class', in the sense that it is a potentially successful strategy of cultural emancipation and survival.

In 'The Muse of History', Walcott notes that 'In tribal, elemental poetry, the epic experience of the race is compressed in metaphor' (Walcott, 'The Muse of

---

<sup>27</sup> This aspect of Walcott's poetry is most fully explored by Stewart Brown, in 'The Apprentice: 25 Poems, Epitaph for the Young, Poems and In a Green Night', in which he argues that most of the poems in Walcott's early period 'are blatantly 'in the style of' various masters' (amongst which he includes, T.S. Eliot, Baudelaire, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, W.H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and Andrew Marvell). Brown argues that in such poems Walcott adopts 'the technique of the apprentice' as an 'enabling mask which sanctioned the inevitable derivativeness of [his] poetry but at the same time furthered [his] career as a poet.' Stewart Brown, 'The Apprentice: 25 Poems, Epitaph for the Young, Poems and In a Green Night', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, pp.15-16.

History', p.47), and suggests that this kind of poetry is best seen in the contemporary period in a 'classic style' that is born out of a 'filial impulse', which recognises that 'maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor' (ibid., pp.36-38). In *Another Life* this process of mature assimilation underpins the main narrative of emergence and becoming, and is especially seen in the poet's engagement with the Western traditions of painting and literature that illustrate his investiture into the world of art. 'I had entered the house of literature as a houseboy, / filched as the slum child stole, / as the young slave appropriated / those heirlooms temptingly left / with the Victorian homilies of *Noli tangere*' (AL, p.219), the poet reflects, directly associating cultural appropriation during the slave period with his own inheritance of an English literary tradition<sup>28</sup>. Evidence of the way in which Walcott's reading is adapted to his Caribbean setting is provided in Chapter 3, which begins with a child reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* and Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes*, and is followed by the poet's imaginative re-creation of local characters in an alphabetacised mythology of Caribbean heroes (AL, pp.158-164). More generally, a number of critics have pointed to the way in which *Another Life* adapts structures, themes and motifs from a variety of literary texts, such as Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and, most recently, Dante's *Vita Nuova*<sup>29</sup>. In the latter instance, for example, it is clear that both Walcott and Dante's poems share key concerns, amongst which might be included: the discussion of questions surrounding the relationship between art and life, the revision and incorporation of previously written poems, the sanctification of the work as a book of memory governed by the power of imagination, the account of the poet's conversion to poetry, and the deification of the poet's first love. Dante's wish 'to write of

---

<sup>28</sup> Given that one of the writers from whom the young Walcott 'filched' was T.S. Eliot (see especially Walcott's 'Epitaph for the Young'), the phrasing of this passage may provide an ironic reference to Eliot's assertion that 'immature poets imitate, mature poets steal'.

Eliot, 'Phillip Massinger', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p.206.

See also Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Selected Essays*, pp.13-22.

<sup>29</sup> M. Travis Lane, 'A Different Growth of a Poet's Mind: Derek Walcott's *Another Life*', *Ariel*, 9 (4) (1978), 65-78.

Edward Baugh, 'The Poem as Autobiographical Novel: Derek Walcott's *Another Life* in Relation to Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Joyce's *Portrait*', in *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. by C.D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi: Sterling, 1978), pp.226-235.

Maria Christina Fumagalli, *L'Alto Volo and the Return of the Real: The Poetical Journey of Dante, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott* (University of Sheffield, PhD. thesis, 1997).

[Beatrice] that which has never been written of any other woman'<sup>30</sup>, therefore illuminates Walcott's presentation of Anna, just as it also informs the declaration of artistic intent the poet makes in Chapter 8 of the poem. The young poet's love for Anna is most fully explored in Book 3, 'A Simple Flame', which is framed at its opening by the fire at Castries and, at its close, by the poet's departure from the island. In between the poem becomes 'a radiantly sustained love poem' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.51), in which Walcott offers two contrasting versions of Anna, one highly metaphorical the other defiantly elemental.

Anna's entry into the poem in Book 3 is made by metaphorical association, when her 'golden body' is likened to 'a lamp blown out / that holds, just blown, the image of the flame' (AL, p.228). This identifies her as one of the figures behind the title 'A Simple Flame', which in turn connects her to the fire itself, as well as the Caribs' 'leap into the light' and the poet's opening impression of the amber-coloured island. Though gesturing toward a vision of simplicity it is therefore also a deliberately idealised image. It is followed by the memory of a lovers' meeting in a 'magical lagoon', in which the tension between Walcott's wish to 'present reality as it is', and his desire to 'recreate it in other reflections' is seen in the tension between images of motion and stasis implicit within the language of the verse. With Anna slowly approaching, the pace of the narrative momentarily slows, with the lines: 'Reader, // imagine the boat stayed, / the harbour stayed, the oar's / uplifted wand, // hold the light's changes to / a single light, repeat / the voyage, delay the arrival' (AL, p.229). Caught within short three- and four-line stanzas, the lyrical nature of this passage demonstrates a conscious elevation of emotion, a deliberate transformation of the historical moment into art, which is supported by the call for the reader to move to another imaginative realm. There is a sense here that time has stopped for the pair, but at the same time this momentary hiatus is kept in abeyance by an internal insistence on movement. The sense of arrested motion suggested in the words 'stayed', 'stayed', 'hold' and 'delay' is set against a wish to keep moving contained in the expression, 'repeat / the voyage, delay the arrival'. In Chapter 15 the same tension is considered twenty years after the lovers have parted. 'It is twenty years since', the poet reflects, and still 'your gaze haunts innumerable photographs // now

---

<sup>30</sup> Mark Musa, *Dante's Vita Nuova: A Translation and an Essay* (Bloomington: Indiana University

clear, now indistinct, / all that pursuing generality' (AL, p.237). Remembering Anna as 'another country', he sees her as a martyred heroine plucked from the Russian novels he has read, declaring 'You are all Annas, enduring all goodbyes, / within the cynical station of your body, / Christie, Karenina, big-boned and passive ...my Akhmatova!' (AL, pp.238-239). Perhaps aware that this betrays the reality of her character, in the final section of Chapter 15 Walcott lets Anna respond in her own voice to this reading of her:

I am simple,  
I was simpler then.  
It was simplicity  
which seemed so sensual.

...

It was your selflessness  
which loved me as the world,  
I was a child, as much  
as you, but you brought the tears

of too many contradictions,  
I became a metaphor, but  
believe me I was unsubtle as salt. (AL, pp.242-243)

Asserting her elemental 'simplicity', she appears to forgive the poet for making her into a metaphor, whilst also suggesting that his misrepresentation of her was an act of love. Establishing a clear distinction between her own mode of expression and the poet's increasing complexity, her repetition of 'simple' words is supported by what Baugh sees as a 'somewhat childlike syntax' in which 'the verse takes on a limpid, translucent quality which captures the luminous innocence of a young girl's love' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, pp.54-55). Answering Anna, however, the mature poet re-affirms his need for metaphor, his desire to see her reflection in other moments and things, when he notes that 'a man lives half of life, / the second half is memory' (AL, p.243), making an implicit connection between memory and imagination.

Setting these conflicting perceptions of Anna against each other, at the close of Book 3 Walcott attempts to honour her for what she is, by placing her alongside Harry Simmons and Dunstan St. Omer, who each assemble at the airport to bid

farewell to the poet as he leaves the island. In a simple evocation of their names- 'Harry, Dunstan, Andreuille'- Walcott reflects his wish to get beyond metaphor, to reach an elemental mode that will simply record his debt to 'three lives' and 'three loves' (AL, p.257). But, even at this moment of communion there is paradox as he also notes, 'not one is real, they cannot live or die / they both exist, they never have existed' (ibid.). At the close of *Another Life* this gesture is repeated in Walcott's remembrance of the artistic vision shared with St Omer, in the concluding exclamation of 'Gregorias, Apilo!' (AL, p.294). The first name the classical name given to St Omer by the poet, the second a nickname that St Omer has apparently had since childhood. As Baugh suggests, both represent 'a real and an ideal St Omer' (Baugh, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision*, p.78), a vision of St Omer as an artist and a man of the people. Between the two the man himself uncertainly emerges. In the act of naming St Omer twice Walcott ends the poem with an arresting moment of simplicity that is also a moment of potential and possibility. In this way, the process of historical becoming continues beyond the confines of the text, and is continued in Walcott's subsequent volumes. In *Sea Grapes* (1976) and *The Star Apple Kingdom* (1979) Walcott again struggles with the multiple divisions and tensions caused by a history of dispossession and forgetting. In *The Fortunate Traveller* (1982) and *The Arkansas Testament* (1988) he moves back and forth between Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean (the volumes are divided between 'North', 'South' and 'North', and 'Here' and 'Elsewhere'), an exile exposing the complexities of his mixed racial heritage. *Midsummer* (1984) which appeared in between these two volumes represents a moment of stasis, a chance for reflection, a chance to come to terms with both language and history. In *Omeros* (1990) Walcott returns to his native island of St Lucia and presents a narrative in honour of his people, in which history merges with epic and then fades to reveal 'a patient, hybrid organism' growing in the Caribbean (O, p.297). The continuation of this process of historical becoming in Walcott's poetry illustrates that Walcott is often his own most important subject<sup>31</sup>. It also underlines the fact that the extended focus on his sense of identity and craft is

---

<sup>31</sup> Edward Baugh observes that 'Walcott's binding theme is Walcott, the pursuit and delineation of a fictive character based on an actual person named Derek Walcott. The self-portrait emerges as an interplay between the man's recognition of weaknesses and deficiencies in himself and a definition of ideal strengths, values and virtues, by which he seeks to determine himself.' Baugh, 'Ripening with Walcott', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.278.

more often than not tied to his developing sense of history in the Caribbean. Walcott's wish to see 'Harry, Dunstan, [and] Andreuille' as they simply are is a reflection of his earlier longing in 'Islands', 'to write / Verse as crisp as sand, clear as sunlight, / Cold as the curled wave, ordinary / as a tumbler of island water'<sup>32</sup>; and in 'Nearing Forty' to discover 'the style past metaphor / that finds its parallel however wretched / in simple shining lines'<sup>33</sup>. It also foreshadows the desire to 'enter that light beyond metaphor' (O, p.271), which sits at the centre of the poet's reading of Helen in *Omeros*, and reflects too on Walcott's reading of Homer, which will provide the main focus of the following chapter.

---

<sup>32</sup> Walcott, 'Islands', in *Collected Poems 1948-84*, p.52.

<sup>33</sup> Walcott, 'Nearing Forty', in *Collected Poems 1948-84*, p.136.

## 5. 'It was as if I was learning to read Homer when I was writing it': Aspects of Reading in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

Since its publication in 1990 criticism of Derek Walcott's book-length poem, *Omeros*, has almost exclusively concentrated on the presence of Homer in the text. John Figueroa's essay in *The Art of Derek Walcott* offers one of the earliest responses to the poem to appear in print. Interestingly, Figueroa devotes at least half of his essay to the metaphorical aspect of Walcott's poem, and also suggests that a crucial part of *Omeros*' metaphorical intent is contained in the metaphor of Homer as bardic poet, blind seer and founder of an epic tradition. Acknowledging an apparent surface connection between Walcott's poem and the motifs, structures and characters of the Homeric classics, Figueroa's first instinct is to establish a point of difference between the two by stating that the poem 'is in no way written, as it were, over the template of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*'<sup>1</sup>. He goes on to suggest that 'the point of the use of Homer lies elsewhere' (Figueroa, '*Omeros*', p.203), hinting at the role that Homer comes to play in Walcott's poem as a wanderer and beggar poet, and pointing to the purpose that Homer serves as a focus of enquiry into the nature of foreign influence in the assimilative culture of the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, Figueroa's immediate sense of the complexities informing the relationship between Walcott and Homer has been echoed in other critical responses. Mary Lefkowitz points to the protean figure of Homer, 'rather than the heroes of his poems', as the focus of Walcott's attention<sup>2</sup>. Rei Terada centres her more extensive analysis on the very question of Homeric analogy, exploring questions of likeness, disfigurement, genealogy and originality in the poem<sup>3</sup>. Gert Lernout agrees that 'Walcott's most important structuring device, without which there would probably be no *Omeros*, is the intertextual reference to Homer'<sup>4</sup>. Robert Hamner makes a similar point in *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros*, the most detailed study of the poem to date. Hamner begins his 1997 monograph by claiming that, 'Nobel Prize winning poet Derek Walcott was

<sup>1</sup> John Figueroa, '*Omeros*', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, p.198.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Lefkowitz, 'Bringing Him Back Alive', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.400.

<sup>3</sup> Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), pp.183-212.

fully conscious of the classical influences that nurtured his epic poem *Omeros* in 1990'<sup>5</sup>. His opening sentence therefore offers an intimation of the connection between Walcott and Homer on the grounds of shared epic conventions and norms, a subject which provides one of the main strands of Hamner's analysis. However, this is soon followed by a qualifying statement, in which Hamner notes, 'Despite the obviously conventional epic paraphernalia, the poem is based on Walcott's creolized version of a wanderer called Homer (for whom *Omeros* is named) rather than a sanctified literary progenitor' (Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, p.1), highlighting the part of Homer's legacy that Walcott is apparently most interested in (i.e. the version of Homer as a wanderer), and alluding to Walcott's appropriation of Homer within a specifically Caribbean aesthetic.

Part fact, fiction and metafiction, Walcott's poem pivots on a formal and thematic comparison between the modern Caribbean and the ancient Aegean, which is reflected in his assimilation of the Homeric classics and his engagement with the figure of Homer. Walcott's relationship to Homer will also provide the main focus of this chapter. However it is my intention to partially shift the direction of preceding critical approaches by suggesting that Walcott's writing of the metaphor of Homer can also be understood as an extended inquiry into the practice of reading. In addition, I will argue that the parameters of this act of reading (and misreading) are illuminated by Bakhtin's notions of active understanding and creative understanding. The formal, structural and cultural connections made between Walcott's Caribbean poem and those attributed to the ancient Greek poet, provides an effective illustration of Walcott as both a contemporary Caribbean writer and a contemporary Caribbean reader. In fact, it is Walcott himself who most directly supports this. In an interview carried out at the time of the book's publication Walcott stated: 'The happiness I feel about this book is that I didn't force classical reverberations or stretch to make associations with the classics. It is a book for people, not a conundrum for scholars. It was as if I was learning to read Homer when I was writing it'<sup>6</sup>. This can be seen as a warning or plea on the writer's part, an attempt to undermine the intentions of academics eager to solve the obscure classical conundrums of the poem. The first

---

<sup>4</sup> Gert Lernout, 'Derek Walcott's *Omeros*: The Isle is Full of Voices', *Kunapipi*, 14 (2) (1992), 95.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), p.1.

<sup>6</sup> D. J. R. Bruckner, 'A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, p.399.

sentence offers a sense of a natural relation to the classics and seeks to deny or subvert an apparently overburdened association between the contemporary Caribbean and the ancient Aegean. In the second sentence, Walcott identifies and acknowledges one kind of audience (i.e. 'the people'), and rejects the intellectualising efforts of another (i.e. literary scholars). In the third, he connects reading to writing and suggests that the activity of writing *Omeros* has taught him, a Caribbean poet, how to read Homer, an archetypal Western poet, without the constrictions of authoritative 'reverberations' and 'associations'. There is perhaps something a little too insistent about Walcott's rejection of epic parallels in this enunciation. Granted that most critics would agree that Walcott's poem is indeed full of 'classical reverberations', in my opinion, it is the final sentence which is most revealing. This is because Walcott's reference to his reading of Homer suggests that inscribed within *Omeros* is not only an exploration of the process of cultural assimilation, but also an indication of the nature and effects of cross-cultural reading. This is made particularly clear in the poet's introduction to the figure of Omeros which occurs in the early chapters of the poem and in the reading of the central female character, Helen, that forms one of the key concerns of the text.

Predominantly set in a fishing village called Gros Îlet on the island of St Lucia, *Omeros* tells the story of a handful of real and fictional characters, whose interlocking lives are united in their search for a sense of rootedness and home. Achilles, Hector, Helen, Philoctete, Ma Kilman, Seven Seas and the poet are all native to the island, whilst Major Dennis Plunkett and his wife Maud arrived from England after the second World War. Divided into seven books and sixty-four chapters of three sections each, the poem opens with Philoctete entertaining tourists on the beach, as he explains how fishermen make canoes from cedar trees and reveals a sore on his leg made by a rusted anchor. Thereafter, we learn of Achilles's quarrel with Hector over Helen, whose beauty encapsulates the beauty of the island, Major Plunkett's interest in empire, and the reason behind old blind Seven Seas' name. The poet also enters the narrative. He is shown the marble bust of Omeros in a studio attic in America. On his return to the island of his birth he meets the ghost of his dead father, who instructs him of his duty to honour the people of the island. Book Two begins with Plunkett embroiled in historical research centred on the 'Battle of the Saints', which took place on 12 April 1782 and effectively ended the French threat to

British possessions in the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the attention of the villagers is focused on the local elections fought between the Marxists and Capitalists and a third party, The United Force. Helen moves in with Hector, and Achille suffers the pain of loneliness also felt by Philoctete, whose rotting leg-sore isolates him from society. In the mid-section of the poem a series of real and imagined odysseys take place. In Book Three, Achille makes an imaginative return to Africa to meet his ancestors and discover who he is and where he came from. In Book Four, the recently divorced poet explores the tragic history of the Indian tribes of Mid-West America, and focuses on the story of Catherine Weldon, who sympathises with the Indians plight and is exiled from her race for this. In Book Five, he crosses the meridian of the globe and ventures through the imperial centres of Lisbon and London, where he meets Omeros dressed 'in a bargeman's black greatcoat, clutching in one scrofulous // claw his brown paper manuscript' (O, p.193). In Book Six he returns to St Lucia. Hector dies in a car-crash. Philoctete's leg wound is cured by Ma Kilman, with a root brought over from Africa by a sea-swift. Maud Plunkett also dies. At her funeral the poet stands side-by-side with the characters he has created in his fiction. Meeting Plunkett in a bank a day later, the poet's thoughts turn toward Helen, who they have both tried to imaginatively possess. In the final book, the poet is led round the island by Seven Seas / Omeros, and forced to question and evaluate his relation to the island, its people and his craft. Unhappy with the increasing dominance of tourism, which leads to the simplification of the islands, Achille and Philoctete sail south down the coastline in the hope of finding another more peaceful home. Major Plunkett is slowly coming to terms with the loss of his wife. Helen is pregnant, although she does not know who the father is. The poem ends with Achille returning from a fishing trip. As he leaves the beach 'the sea [is] still going on' (O, p.325).

Walcott's statement- 'It was as if I was learning to read Homer when I was writing it'- posits the connection between himself and Homer as a productive and dynamic relation, that (at least for Walcott) reveals new aspects in his understanding of the classics. It is therefore a reading in which creative and critical boundaries are crossed and through which knowledge of both past and present cultures is extended. It is also a reading that partakes of 'the ceaselessly shifting power relations between words, their sensitivity to each other, and the relativising force of their historically

motivated clashes and temporary resolutions'<sup>7</sup>. In short, a reading that may be framed in the terms offered by Mikhail Bakhtin's key concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism. As the preceding definition suggests, dialogism is a concept that points to the primacy of language. It posits interactive social communication as the operative force which connects, transforms, shapes and makes claims on our ideological being. Bakhtin puts forward a notion of social discourse as an unending and unfinalising process of tension-filled interaction during which the variegated and stratified languages of heteroglossia, the languages of daily social life, the languages of the moment, are produced in the constant clash of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Language is shown to be consistently subject to contest and conflict between one's own words and the words of past, present and future others. This demonstrates the applicability of Bakhtin's approach to the language and literature of the Caribbean, in which the meanings forged between the Caribbean present and both dominant and submerged others is central. After colonialism, the Caribbean has been left with a variety of imperial languages such as English, French, Dutch and Spanish, the remnants of ancestral languages such as Amerindian, and a number of languages imported during slavery such as African, Chinese and Indian (in all their various forms), that have each been variously mixed with local creoles, patois and dialects across the islands. In the Anglophone Caribbean, according to the linguist Peter Roberts, this has produced 'a high degree of linguistic variation within a broadly specifiable linguistic spectrum'<sup>8</sup>. In relation to Walcott's writing, such linguistic variation and intermixture supports a mode of analysis in which the various interanimating voices and discourses of Walcott's text might be identified according to their different socially-stratified markers and according to how such voices and discourses interact with each other. This kind of approach has already been made by Stephen Breslow in 'Trinidadian Heteroglossia: A Bakhtinian View of Derek Walcott's Play *A Branch of the Blue Nile*', and more recently, by Mara Scanlon in 'In the Mouths of the Tribe: *Omeros* and the Heteroglossic Nation'. In the former, Breslow understands heteroglossia as the interanimation of languages and the

---

<sup>7</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Roberts, *West Indians and their Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.6.

Illustrating this sense of 'variation within a broadly specifiable linguistic spectrum', Roberts suggests that West Indian English can be cautiously divided into the following types: Foreign English, Radio and Television English, Erudite English, Colloquial English, Creole English, Rasta English and Profane English (pp.17-84).

corresponding objectification of axiologically accented world-views. He suggests that such objective linguistic intermixture is most evident in Walcott's use of a variety of different languages (African, patois, French, English and classical Latin), and in the parodic relation that *A Branch of the Blue Nile* adopts toward Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*<sup>9</sup>. In the latter, Scanlon describes *Omeros* as 'Walcott's heteroglossic and polyglossic epic', and suggests that the poem 'represents language not as a finalized monologic, singular phenomenon, but rather as an animate exchange or struggle between varied, oppositional languages'<sup>10</sup>.

Scanlon's intention is to read *Omeros* as the epic of a culturally diverse heteroglossic St Lucian nation<sup>11</sup>, and in doing so to challenge Bakhtin's understanding of the epic as a limited and antiquated genre. For Bakhtin, the epic is characterised by three constitutive features- 'a national epic past [that] serves as the subject for the epic', a 'national tradition [that] serves as the source for the epic', and 'an absolute epic distance [that] separates the epic world from contemporary reality' (EaN, p.13). In 'Epic and Novel' he claims that 'the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted', whereas epic is described as 'a genre that has not only long since completed its development, but one that is already antiquated' (EaN, p.3). Similarly, in 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin argues that it is the novelist who 'welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his own work', whilst 'The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance', (DN, pp.296-298). At first glance, such opposing statements point to the important distinction Bakhtin seemingly makes between the novel and all other genres. Detailed most fully in 'Discourse in the Novel' (pp. 275-300), at its most basic Bakhtin's polemic distinction between poetry and the novel is an example

---

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Breslow, 'Trinidadian Heteroglossia: A Bakhtinian View of Walcott's Play *A Branch of the Blue Nile*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp.388-393.

<sup>10</sup> Mara Scanlon, 'In the Mouths of the Tribe: *Omeros* and the Heteroglossic Nation', in *Bakhtin and the Nation*, ed. by San Diego Bakhtin Circle [Barry A. Brown, Christopher Conway, Rhett Gambol, Susan Kalter, Laura E. Ruberto, Tomás F. Taraborrelli, Donald Wesling] (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2000), pp.105-106.

<sup>11</sup> Other critics have also seen Walcott's writing of the poem as a nation building exercise.

Sidney Burris argues that in *Omeros* Walcott 'attempts to provide for his Caribbean homeland the definitive strengths and comforts of a national narrative'.

Burris, 'An Empire of Poetry', *Southern Review*, 27 (3) (1991), 559).

Sarah Phillips Casteel notes that 'Walcott's artistic struggle to give voice to his nation goes hand in hand with his autobiographical Homeric quest for a sense of rootedness'.

Casteel, 'Autobiography as Rewriting: Derek Walcott's *Another Life* and *Omeros*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 34 (2) (1999), 24.

of his more wide-ranging separation of monologism and dialogism<sup>12</sup>. Scanlon's issue with Bakhtin is that this theoretical opposition does not hold up, especially in a modern world of increasing global interaction, diversity and change in which genres necessarily adapt themselves to the needs of the day. In his essays Bakhtin appears to categorically deny the possibility of finding heteroglossia within the epic, and instead conceives of it as a temporally fixed genre essentially written in a unitary language. However, this jars with Walcott's poem which, according to Scanlon, 'shatters the monologic authoritative voice of the traditional epic bard and replaces it with multiple discourses' (Scanlon, 'In the Mouths of the Tribe', p.106). More fundamentally, Bakhtin's strict generic distinction is also brought into question by his simultaneous suggestion that heteroglossia and dialogism are in fact defining qualities of all language. Languages are never unitary, Bakhtin asserts in 'Discourse in the Novel', rather, 'the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a "unitary language", operate in the midst of heteroglossia,' and as a consequence, 'At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (...), but also- and for us this is the essential point- into languages that are socio-ideological' (DN, pp.271-272). In this sense, monologism can be seen as not the opposite of dialogism, but a part of it (or more precisely a misrecognition of it). The confusion arises because, particularly in the essays written in the 1930's, Bakhtin seems to move between definitions of dialogic interanimation that are broadly linguistic and those that are more specifically novelistic (see Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, p.5). For Scanlon, such theoretical confusion offers the opportunity to re-think the parameters of the epic as a genre, and

---

<sup>12</sup> Although it might be suggested that Bakhtin is let down here by a binarism of which he is generally so critical, it must also be acknowledged that in making this distinction Bakhtin is most interested in separating two opposing ideologies rather than specific novels or poems per se.

It can also be shown that Bakhtin's position was not always so hard line. One of the most cited texts in 'Discourse in the Novel' is Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, whilst in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin analyses one of Pushkin's lyrics along the embryonic lines of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. by Vadim Liapunov & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp.65-75).

In his illuminating essay 'Dialogism and Poetry', David Richter suggests that 'at both the beginning and end of his working life Bakhtin seems to have taken a somewhat different approach to poetry' (Richter, 'Dialogism and Poetry', *Studies in Literary Imagination*, 23 (1) (1990), p.11).

Other useful discussions of Bakhtin's novel-poetry distinction include:

David Lodge, 'After Bakhtin', in *After Bakhtin, Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.87-99.

David Morris, 'Burns and Heteroglossia', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 28 (1) (1987), 3-25.

Carol McGuirk, 'Burns, Bakhtin, and the Opposition of Poetic and Novelistic Discourse: A Response to David Morris', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 32 (1) (1991), 58-72.

in particular the chance to expose the flaws in Bakhtin's fixed understanding of the epic. Her emphasis upon the 'intense clash of languages which distinguishes the condition of heteroglossia' (p.106) offers an indication of the various ideological positions available to different characters within Walcott's *Omeros*, and thus challenges the cultural unity of the traditional epic poem.

'Of the myriad discourses included in *Omeros*,' Scanlon asserts, 'the ones most frequently noted are the French and English Creoles which challenge Standard English as the only authoritative mode for the English epic' (p.107). Illustrating this, after the poet's introduction to a marble bust of Omeros in Chapter II of the poem, attention cuts to 'the prose / of abrupt fishermen cursing over canoes' (O, p.15) in Chapter III and an argument taking place between Achille and Hector over an old bailing tin that is really a fight over Helen:

*"Touchez-i, encore: N'ai fendre choux-ous-ou, salope!"*

"Touch it again, and I'll split your arse, you bitch!"

*"Moi j'a dire- 'ous pas prêter un rien. 'Ous ni shallope,*

*'ous ni seine, 'ous croire 'ous ni choeur campêche?"*

"I told you, borrow nothing of mine. You have a canoe, and a net. Who you think you are? Logwood Heart?"

*"'Ous croire 'ous c'est roi Gros Îlet? Voleur bomme!"*

"You think you're king of Gros Îlet, you tin stealer?"

Then in English: "I go show you who is king! Come!" (O, pp.15-16)

For most of this extract Hector is shouting at Achille. Presented first in French creole Hector's accusations of theft are also repeated in English creole. This suggests that he has accommodated and assimilated the linguistic legacy of French and British rule, and also reflects the ease with which he is able to switch between the two linguistic modes. The suggestion is that both speech acts exist within his ideological purview. The last line sees Achille respond 'in English'. But his 'English' is also a creole-inflected mode of language, as "I am going to show you who is king!" becomes "I go show you who is king!". In the final section of Chapter III Ma Kilman and Philoctete also display the same linguistic ability as they discuss Philoctete's wound:

*"Mais qui ça qui rivait- 'ous, Philoctete?"*

*"Moin blessé."*

But what is wrong wif you, Philoctete?"

"I am blest

wif this wound, Ma Kilman, *qui pas ka guérir pièce.*

Which will never heal.” (O, pp.18-19)

Here, Ma Kilman and Philoctete’s language shifts between French creole, English creole, demotic English and Standard English often within the same utterance, and suggests the multiplicity of linguistic perspectives available to them as Caribbean speakers. Philoctete’s last phrase- ‘Which will never heal’- is in Standard English, but he has shown that he can make equal use of French creole as well as other languages across the linguistic spectrum. His (mis-)translation of ‘blessé’ as ‘blest’ shows the process of linguistic creolisation in action, and this is also seen in Achille’s naming of his canoe ‘*In God we Troust*’ (O, p.8) and in the character of ‘Statics’ who is named for ‘the short-circuit prose / of his electrical syntax in which he mixed / Yankee and patois’ (O, pp.104-112). The challenge this linguistic creolisation sets for the authoritative Standard English mode of the national epic is perhaps most clearly seen when Achille receives words of advice from God, who speaks to him in English creole: ““Look, I giving you permission / to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot, / the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion. // And thou shalt have no God should in case you forgot / my commandments”” (O, p.134). With this Walcott suggests that even the most authoritative of speakers speaks in a mixed idiom of creole and standard inflections. The religious command of ‘thou shalt have no God’ is played off against the demotic tone of ‘should in case you forgot’, and brings the word of God onto the same discursive plane as a simple Caribbean fisherman such as Achille. As Scanlon makes clear, this does not mean that Standard English is not used effectively in Walcott’s poem. In particular, she points to the fact that ‘the narrative voice of the poem ... often uses Standard English’ (Scanlon, ‘In the Mouths of the Tribe’, pp.111-112), and perhaps more interestingly focuses upon a short passage of dramatic dialogue in Chapter XXV when Achille and Afolabe discuss the process of amnesia that has lead Achille to forget the meaning of his name (O, pp.136-139). Instead, Walcott’s equal mobilisation of both creole and standard forms democratises the epic and indicates the potential of heteroglossia as ‘an emancipating formal strategy’ (Scanlon, ‘In the Mouths of the Tribe’, p.113). It also shows Walcott’s loyalty to the complexity of the Caribbean, and brings to mind the description of him as ‘the mulatto of style’ offered in his essay ‘What the Twilight Says’. Identifying himself as a ‘traitor’ and an ‘assimilator’ Walcott urges his fellow Caribbeans to accept their hybridity (Walcott, ‘What the Twilight Says’, p.9). In *Omeros* the linguistic diversity and multiplicity of

his characters demonstrates that hybridity, precisely because each of the languages of the text is seen through the eyes of an other language. In Bakhtinian terms, Walcott's poem may be seen as '*an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving out of a living image of another language' (DN, p.361).

Each of the languages and discourses in *Omeros* also represents a particular intention and ideological position. In 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin notes that what allows us to juxtapose each of the "languages" of heteroglossia against each other is the fact that, 'all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meaning and values' (DN, pp.291-292). What this means, according to Morson and Emerson, is that 'Each language reflects in its particular unsystematic clustering and clumping the contingent historical and social forces that have made it' (Morson and Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, p.141). In this respect, the choice of dialect and language in the poem is inevitably important. This is because, like the social language of daily life, the literary language of *Omeros* is also saturated with the ideological intentions of previous uses and users, and everywhere imbricated with the asymmetries of power and privilege. This is shown most clearly when questions of race and class enter into the text. At the mid-point of Book Four, for example, the poet visits a museum in his adopted home of Boston. Catching sight of Winslow Homer's 'The Gulf Stream'<sup>13</sup> he makes a connection between the reality of his own life and the life depicted in the painting, and exclaims 'Achille! My main man, my nigger!' (O, p.183), an expression which suggests a sense of natural affiliation. The painting shows a black man on board a small broken sailboat at the mercy of the elements. Sharks circle his craft, a hurricane can be seen in the distance, and on the horizon a ship passes by, yet despite this the sailor displays a sense of majesty and resolution with his head turned toward Africa and 'fixed in the tribal dream' (O, p.184).

---

<sup>13</sup> Walcott's reference to Winslow Homer clearly provides another Homeric association in the poem. In addition to the correspondence of names linking American painter to Greek poet, it is also worth

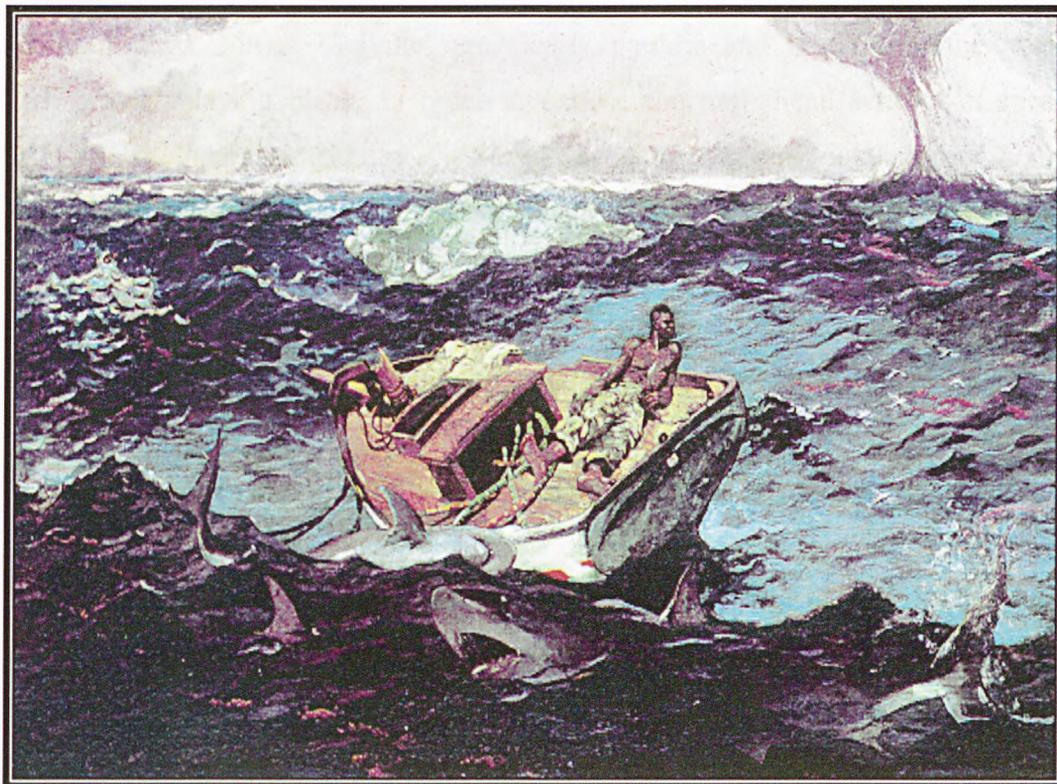


Illustration 2: Winslow Homer, 'The Gulf Stream'

The black sailor looks firmly away from both danger and saviour, and his apparent rejection of a 'redemptive white sail' turns the poet's thoughts to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*:

Heah's Cap'n Melville on de whiteness ob de whale-  
 "Having for the imperial colour the same imperial hue ...

*giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe."*  
 Lawd, Lawd, Massa Melville, what could a nigger do  
 but go down dem steps in de dusk you done describe? (O, p.184)

Walcott's deliberate stylisation of the voice of a black slave is principally intended to mock Melville, and in particular highlight the flaws in his metaphorical mapping of the battle between the white whale and Captain Ahab onto that between the 'white man' and the 'dusky tribe'. In order to achieve this Walcott accentuates the racial inflections of a black voice, which is also partly his own voice, as there are no

---

noting that Winslow Homer was born in Boston, which is where Walcott has partly lived for much of last two decades.

distinguishing discursive markers separating the two. The language here is as much on display as it is in Brathwaite's *Arrivants*, where words are also often 'treated completely as objects' (DN, p.321). The phrases 'on de whiteness ob de whale' and 'Lawd, Lawd, Massa Melville' are clearly parodic and imply that the poet is deliberately playing black, in order to expose the prejudicial writing of race in Melville's Nineteenth century classic. The poet's mockery is therefore double-voiced. But, when he leaves the museum there seems to be no getting away from the racial and cultural dominance of Melville's book. He is unable to get a taxi because 'cabs, like the fall, were a matter of colour' (O, p.184). Likewise, as he steps out of the shadows into the glow of a streetlight a woman gives him a look 'straight out of Melville's book' (O, p.185). The woman's 'alarmed pale look' soon reverts to a 'consoling smile, like a shark's' (O, p.185), and reaffirms his sense of isolation. Despite the venting of his anger, then, he discovers that the language of Melville's book will continue to fix interpretations of him and others like him.

If in America the poet is made aware of the assumptions that contribute to the divisive identification of racial others, back in St Lucia he is reminded of the class divisions that endure beneath the surface of post-colonial Caribbean society. In Chapter LIV of *Omeros* the poet meets Plunkett in a bank the day after Maud Plunkett's funeral. As the pair pass each other in the queue an assumed hierarchy of relations asserts itself in their exchange of words:

"Our wanderer's home, is he?"

I said: "For a while, sir,"  
too crisply, mentally snapping to attention,  
thumbs along trousers' seam, picking up his accent

from a khaki order.

"Been travellin' a bit what?"  
I forgot the melody of my own accent,  
but I knew I'd caught him, and he knew he'd been caught,

caught out in the class-war. It stirred my contempt.  
He knew the "what?" was a farce, I knew it was not  
officer-quality, a strutting R.S.M.,

Regimental Sarn't Major Plunkett, Retired. (O, p.269)

The conversation between the two speakers opens with an informal question from Plunkett. It suggests a certain intimacy and also refers to the theme of odyssey that runs throughout the poem. The poet is cast here in the role of Odysseus, the

wanderer. The poet's response- "For a while, sir"- reveals his enduring respect for Plunkett, who used to train him in the local cadet force. His acceptance of Plunkett's social position is revealed in his accompanying actions- 'too crisply, mentally snapping to attention, / thumbs along trousers' seam'. His reaction displays a willingness to assume a role set out for him in the colonial period. This is answered in Plunkett's mimicry of colonial speech- 'Been travellin' a bit, what?'- which exposes a similar desire to use language as a means of perpetuating an outmoded hierarchy of relations. In one sense, Plunkett's phrase reveals the close relationship between language and authority. However, as the poet himself points out, Plunkett's colonial affectation assumes an authority that is itself based upon stylisation and appropriation (i.e. how an upper class, regimented colonial ought to speak). Both the poet and Plunkett are aware of this. The irony is that Plunkett is no more colonial gentry than the poet is native. Both share a deep tenderness for the island, and it is arguably this love of the island that joins each to the other in their wish to invest Helen with a meaning beyond the simple expression of her beauty.

Elements of stylisation are particularly productive in highlighting the underlying intentions and values attached to language use in Walcott's poem. The conflicting languages and discourses contained within *Omeros* help to reveal some of the key issues surrounding Walcott's writing of a national epic in a post-colonial context. In addition, Bakhtin's sense of the social stratification of languages and the dialogic interactions between those various languages also gestures toward a notion of reading in which both text and reader are seen to work together in the generation of context-specific meaning. Bakhtin most clearly alludes to this when he comments in 'Discourse in the Novel' upon the internal dialogism of the word. In contrast to those linguists who see dialogue 'merely as a compositional form in the structuring of speech', Bakhtin argues that the word itself is structured dialogically and that it is precisely this aspect of internal dialogism 'that has such enormous power to shape style' (DN, p.279). For Bakhtin, the word is 'born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it' and also 'directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates' (DN, p.280). He thus suggests that rather than merely participating in an external dialogue, every word is dialogised from within, and it is this quality of immanent outsideness that provides the outlines of the active relationship that develops between author, text and reader in the act of reading. Words form themselves in response to other words that have been already

spoken, and in anticipation of other words that may be spoken. As a consequence, words bear the memory of their pasts just as they also contain the potential for their future expression and reaccentuation. Complementing his distinction between a meaning that is abstractly produced and a meaning that is actively produced out of the interaction between one's own word and the word of another (i.e. between what might be termed 'abstract linguistics' and 'sociological stylistics'), Bakhtin establishes a further distinction between two kinds of understanding: passive understanding and active understanding. Not surprisingly, the former is described as 'an understanding of an utterance's *neutral signification*...an understanding [that] never goes beyond the boundaries of the word's context and in no way enriches the word' (DN, p.281), which perhaps suggests a notion of reading as duplication. Set against this, the latter emerges as an understanding 'that discourse senses as resistance or support' (ibid.), an understanding that 'assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement' (DN, p.282). The notion of active understanding therefore emphasises the importance of the listener as an other consciousness, and suggests that in the process of verbal interaction the speaker consciously forms his utterance within the alien conceptual horizon of the listener in the interests of mutual enrichment:

Thus, an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex inter-relationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social "languages" come to interact with one another. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background. (DN, p.282)

Replace the terms 'speaker', 'word' and 'listener' here with 'author', 'text' and 'reader' and it is clear how important this conception of dialogic interaction may be for comprehending the act of reading in general, and the act of assimilation in

particular. In this instance, reading becomes a conflictual negotiation in which author, text and reader actively shape the meaning of the text in the process of their interactions. It is perhaps difficult to conceive how Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* might be orientated to the vision and perspective of a contemporary Caribbean poet. Yet, it is nonetheless clear that Bakhtin offers a necessarily open understanding of the literary text here, that in its orientation toward an other is able to incorporate both an awareness of past textual utterances and an anticipation of future textual utterances, just as it is also able to accommodate a variety of socially stratified languages and orchestrate the interactions between those various languages. As David Shepherd observes, 'the intratextual gives way to the intertextual' in Bakhtin's account of the novel and dialogism, and therefore the act of reading necessarily leads beyond the confines of an encounter between the individual text and the individual reader in Bakhtin's intimation of the author-text-reader relationship (Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', p.94)<sup>14</sup>. At the close of 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin argues that 'The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of social and ideological re-accentuation' (DN, p.421). In this he suggests that the Homeric classics contain in embryo the potential for their future transformation, as in each age the images of the original poem continue to grow and develop<sup>15</sup>. Of course, that is not to say that all possible future meanings of a text are present from the moment of its inception or that a text merely possesses an ever-changing situational meaning,

---

<sup>14</sup>The concept of 'intertextuality' brings to mind the work of Julia Kristeva, who provided one of the earliest commentaries on Bakhtin's thought in the West in her reading of *Rabelais and his World* in the mid-1960's. In 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', which was first written in 1967, Kristeva argues that 'Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary studies does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the 'literary word' as an intersection of textual *surfaces* rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier context'. (Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon Roudiez (Blackwell, 1981), pp.64-65)

What is most noticeable in this is Kristeva's emphasis upon the 'textuality' of Bakhtin's ideas. This perhaps reflects her wish to co-opt Bakhtin into literary theoretical debates extant within the West at that time, such as structuralism. However, Karine Zbinden has recently questioned the importance of text in Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin. Zbinden notes that Kristeva opened the way for the projection of discourse onto a purely linguistic level in contemporary theoretical debates, and argues that by replacing intersubjectivity with intertextuality Kristeva essentially 'misses the social dimension of Bakhtin's theory of discourse, its heteroglossic relief'.

Zbinden, 'Traducing Bakhtin and Missing Heteroglossia', *Dialogism*, 2 (1999), 49-51.

<sup>15</sup> One need only consult George Steiner's *Homer in English* (London: Penguin, 1996), to see this process of Homeric reaccentuation unfold. In his introduction to the assorted Homeric translations and adaptations from Chaucer in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century to William Logan in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Steiner notes that '*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*... are the texts most frequently translated into English', and that through Homer 'we can follow the development of the [English] language' (pp.xv-xxi).

'but rather that a text continues to bear the marks of its past historical engagements which, as well as being open to recontextualisation must also place some limit on the nature and degree of that recontextualisation' (Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', p.98). Bakhtin's awareness of the inequalities inherent in social heteroglossia suggests that it would be naïve to think that in the process of active understanding all readings will carry equal weight. At certain times and in certain places, some positions will inevitably be more authoritative than others will. But that does not mean that other readings are not equally valid, and that the reader's awareness of the conditions of possibility that underpin his reading cannot lead to a more thorough understanding of the relations between discourse and power that influence and inform the act of reading itself.

In Bakhtin's terms the act of reading simultaneously becomes an act of authoring or, perhaps more precisely co-authoring, a process of co-dependence or mutual participation; and it is in these terms that one may approach Walcott's relation to Homer in *Omeros*. In one sense, *Omeros* could be read as a quite specific formal and thematic stylisation of the Homeric classics, according to which Walcott 'freely incorporates material from alien languages into contemporary topics, joins the stylised world with the world of contemporary consciousness, projects the stylized language into new scenarios, [and tests] it in situations that would have been impossible for it on its own' (DN, p.363). But more than this, Walcott's interaction with Homer in *Omeros* represents an act of 'creative understanding', and his active response speaks of a deliberate engagement with a foreign culture in order to better understand his own culture and the nature of its cultural associations. Walcott's textual interrogation of the Homeric metaphor constitutes an enquiry into the nature of cross-cultural contact (where 'cross-cultural' refers to the crossing of a cultural, historical, geographical etc. divide). This is first indicated when the poet is introduced to a marble bust of the Greek poet in the early chapters of the poem. *Omeros* opens with St. Lucian fishermen chopping down trees to make canoes. As the sun rises on the village of Gros Îlet Seven Seas awakes and moves to his kitchen to make his morning coffee. Then at the mid-point of the second chapter, with Seven Seas 'sat as still as marble' (O, p.12), the poet interrupts the narrative to offer an epic invocation to his Greek muse: 'O open this day with the conch's moan, Omeros, / as you did in my boyhood, when I was a noun / gently exhaled from the palate of the

sunrise' (O, p.12). This temporary pause in the text allows the poet to turn 'the harbour's pages back' (O, p.13). In the next section of the poem he returns to the moment when he first heard the name of Omeros in a studio attic somewhere in North America. Told the Greek version of Homer's name the poet dismantles it, and in doing so reclaims Homer as a figure redolent of the Caribbean:

"O-meros," she laughed. "That's what we call him in Greek,"  
stroking the small bust with its boxer's broken nose,  
and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek

of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows' noise.  
I said: "Homer and Virg are New England farmers,  
and the winged horse guards their gas-station, you're right."

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as  
cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light  
in the studio attic. I said, "Omeros",

and *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was  
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,  
*os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.  
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes  
that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed.

The name stayed in my mouth. (O, p.14)

In his analysis of Walcott's poem, Gert Lernout considers this passage an appropriate example of Walcott's technical mastery in *Omeros*, focusing in particular on the terza rima structure and the rich use of rhyme and alliteration (Lernout, 'The Isle is Full of Voices', pp.91-92). I would, of course, support this. This passage is, however, equally revealing of Walcott's position as a reader and, the degree to which his reading of Homer gradually emerges in the course of his writing. The name Omeros becomes intimately connected to the landscape of the Caribbean islands and the inescapable influence of the sea. On the one hand the poet is all too aware of the absurd appropriations of Greek culture in the contemporary American landscape, such that ancient poets are now New England farmers and the winged-horse Pegasus provides a symbol for oil, industry and global commerce. Yet, on the other hand, he is able to adapt the name of Omeros to the environmental fabric of the Caribbean. With the closing line of the third stanza emphasising the Caribbean poet's declaration of the name 'Omeros', the relationship between Walcott and Homer is

indicated in the following two stanzas. Here, the name 'Omeros' is broken down into its constituent syllabic parts, and each part is analogically connected to Caribbean land, Caribbean ancestry, Caribbean sounds and the unforgiving, propulsive rhythm of the Caribbean Sea. Such widening of vision is forcefully put forward as the end-rhyme of each line is echoed and reinforced by the next (i.e. 'Omeros', 'mer was', 'patois', 'crashes', 'shore', 'washes'). This implies that although *Omeros* may possess certain epic conventions and characteristics- the narrative begins in medias res, the poet makes an invocation to his muse, the story contains battles and a visit to the underworld<sup>16</sup>- Walcott ultimately responds to Homer / Omeros on the basis of a shared experience of island sea-culture.

Walcott has made the point in a number of interviews that he reads Homer not as an epic poet, but as a poet of the seas. For example, on one occasion he reflects: "I do not think of it as an epic ... Certainly not in the sense of epic design. Where are the battles? There are a few, I suppose. But 'epic' makes people think of great wars and warriors. That isn't the Homer I was thinking of; I was thinking of Homer the poet of seven seas' (Bruckner, 'A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man', p.396). Thus, when the poet first hears the name of Omeros his thoughts immediately turn to Seven Seas. At the start of the last book of the poem, the figures of Seven Seas and Omeros seem to shift from one to the other as the poet's muse emerges from the Caribbean Sea. With the enunciation of the name of "Omeros" the poet sees 'the marble head [rise], / fringed with its surf curls and beard, the hollow shoulders // of a man waist-high in water with an old leather / goatskin or a plastic bag' (O, p.280). Then, as the weather darkens, he sees 'Seven Seas stood // in the white foam manacled his heels' (ibid.). The two keep changing shapes until they are indistinguishable. Omeros emerges at this moment in order to guide the poet round his native island and excise the wounds of his people's history. It is during this tour, in which the poet sees 'the light of St. Lucia at last through her own eyes' (O, p.282), that the most direct reference to the poet's reading of Homer is made. Told by Omeros (or Seven Seas) that "'a drifter / is the hero of my book'", the poet replies, "'I never read it / ... Not all the way through'" (O, p.283). His partial reading suggests something of the distance between the modern and ancient worlds of the two poets. The poet confesses that he has not read *The Odyssey* 'all the way through'

---

<sup>16</sup> Robert Hamner, *Derek Walcott* (New York: Twayne, 1993), pp.142-144.

because the gods seem to hold little relevance today<sup>17</sup>. However, instructed to 'read the rest', he responds by quietly revealing the nature of his connection to Homer:

I muttered, "I have always heard  
your voice in that sea, master, it was the same song  
of the desert shaman, and when I was a boy

your name was as wide as a bay, as I walked along  
the curled brow of the surf; the word 'Homer' meant joy,  
joy in battle, in work, in death, then the numbered peace

of the surf's benedictions, it rose in the cedars,  
in the *lauriers-cannelles*, pages of rustling trees.  
Master, I was the freshest of all your readers." (O, p.283)

Here too, the sea is the dominant motif governing the Caribbean poet's access to Homer. The freshness of the poet's reading of Homer is the freshness of the cumulative rhythm of waves breaking on sand 'in battle, in work, in death', that is then followed by the momentary calm of 'the numbered peace / of the surf's benedictions'. Such wave-like rhythm is a fundamental aspect of the poem's style, which combines the long hexameter line of the Homeric classics with Dantean terza rima, according to which the first and third lines of each section rhyme, and the second line of that section rhymes with the first and third lines of the next section (i.e. aba, bcb, cdc etc.). This is shown in this passage in the rhyme of 'peace' with 'trees', and 'cedars' with 'readers'. Thus, when the poet asserts 'Master, I was the freshest of all your readers' he is establishing a connection on the basis of a shared island culture and also making the point that his understanding of Homer is inevitably informed by his own identity as a contemporary Caribbean reader. His emphasis upon 'freshness' evokes a sense of newness and active understanding. The splitting of Omeros into O-mer-os demonstrates that Walcott's Omeros is both similar to and different from his Greek counterpart. When the poet notes that 'The name stayed in my mouth', he does not principally mean that it left a bad taste. This is one possible response that a Caribbean poet, without Walcott's equal appreciation

---

<sup>17</sup> In 1992 Walcott wrote a stage version of Homer's *Odyssey* that was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon (Walcott, *The Odyssey* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993).

Robert Hamner comments that, 'Whatever parts of the *Odyssey* [Walcott] may not have read at the time he wrote *Omeros*, he must have remedied that omission before writing this play; his narrative line derives from many of Homer's characters and episodes' (Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, p.29). Hamner makes the same point in his earlier and more extensive review of Walcott's play, entitled '*The Odyssey*: Derek Walcott's Dramatization of Homer's *Odyssey*', *Ariel*, 24 (4) (1993), 101-108.

of his European, African and Caribbean heritage, might make of Homer. Instead it suggests that the poet's encounter with the Greek poet's marble bust will act as the main focus of the poem. Walcott approaches the legacy of Homer from a position that reflects his existence as a Caribbean writer. It is precisely this that makes the metaphor of Homer so central to the meaning of the poem; and, it is also this that in one sense turns the poem into an exploration into the practice of reading.

Literary, historical and cultural parallels between the contemporary Caribbean and the ancient Aegean are established in Walcott's poem and then more often than not qualified and undercut. In terms of shared plot episodes, the most immediate correspondence of concern would appear to be the quarrels that take place between Achille and Hector over Helen, and the odysseys that both Achille and the poet make in Books Three, Four and Five of *Omeros*. Again though, Walcott's appropriation of the classical example is neither direct nor simple. In *The Iliad* Achilles and Hector are sworn enemies and the bravest and best fighters of the Greek and Trojan armies. Walcott's more domestic quarrel is influenced by this stand-off. But, it also incorporates the quarrel between Paris and Menelaus over the theft of Helen, which is the real cause of the Trojan War, as well as an early fight between Achilles and Agamemnon over the prize of Briseis. Similarly, Achille's imaginative journey to Africa echoes Odysseus' long journey home in *The Odyssey*. But, in *Omeros* it is the son who goes home to the father, and not the father who returns to his wife and son. Whilst on their journeys both Achille and the poet discover that 'by definition one cannot encompass one's own origin' (Terada, *Derek Walcott: American Mimicry*, p.26), and recognise the importance of distinguishing between the Old World and the New World. Hence, Achille's return to the village of his forefathers highlights points of similarity and the unenviable distance that persists between life in the contemporary Caribbean and in ancestral Africa. The poet, meanwhile, ranges over the imperial bastions of Lisbon and London only to discover 'under everything an underlying grime' (O, p.195) and 'my disembodied trunk split // along the same line of reflection that halved Achille' (O, p.207). Walcott's St. Lucian characters are called Achille, Helen, Hector, Philoctete, Ma Kilman and Seven Seas. Therefore, by name alone a direct link is forged between a handful of the key characters in both contemporary and classical texts. However, in making this connection Walcott is not only suggesting that the ordinary people of the Caribbean possess qualities of heroism, but also highlighting the legacy of a practice started in

the period of plantation and slavery of giving slaves names from the classics. That this has been consistently and effectively erased from the memory of the inhabitants of the contemporary Caribbean is illustrated during Achille's dream-odyssey in the third book of the poem. Asked by his father, Afolabe, 'What does the name [Achille] mean?', Achille admits: 'I do not know what the name means. It means something, / maybe. What's the difference? in the world I come from / we accept the sounds we were given. Men, trees, water' (O, pp.137-138). In fact, as the text indicates, difference is everything- especially where names and nouns are concerned. Seven Seas shifts into the shape of Omeros, but that is not why he has that name. Instead, he is christened 'from a cod-liver-oil label / with its wriggling swordfish' (O, p.18). Like Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*, Maud Plunkett weaves a tapestry in *Omeros*, but this does not become a symbol of her loyalty to her husband. Rather, as Plunkett observes, it acts as her shroud (O, p.89). Hector vies with Achille for Helen's love, but he is not killed by Achille's hand. Instead, forsaking the life of the sea he dies in a car-crash as his island transport, named the Comet, plays out its arc. Ma Kilman, the proprietor of the No-Pain cafe, adopts the role of Machaon as healer of Philoctetes. Yet, her Caribbean character is suggested in the villagers's belief in her 'as a *gardeuse*, sybil, obeah-woman' (O, p.58), each description reflecting an aspect of her mixed origins. Ma Kilman is also introduced in Walcott's earlier poem 'Sainte Lucie', another poetic dedication to his native island. Divided into five interrelated sections 'Sainte Lucie' contains at its centre a '*St. Lucian conte, or narrative Creole song, heard on the back of an open truck travelling to Vieuxfort, some years ago*' (Walcott's italics) that begins: 'Ma Kilman, Bon Dieu kai punir 'ous / Pour qui raison parcequ 'ous entrer trop religion. / Ou, l'autre coté, Bon Dieu kai benir 'ous, / Bon Dieu kai benir 'ous parcequi 'ous faire charité l'argent'<sup>18</sup>.

Walcott's writing of the figure of Philoctete further reveals the complexities of his appropriation of Homeric characters. The figure of Philoctetes is mentioned only briefly in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In *The Iliad*'s 'Catalogue of the Ships' we learn that as the Greek troops are assembling 'Philoctetes was lying in agony of pain on an island, in sacred Lemnos, where the sons of the Achaians had

---

<sup>18</sup> Walcott, 'Sainte Lucie', in *Collected Poems 1948-84*, p.314. This is translated in section four of the poem as 'Ma Kilman, God will punish you, / for the reason that you've got too much religion. / On the other hand, God will bless you, / God will bless you because of your charity' (p.317)

left him suffering from the vile wound of the vicious water-snake bite'<sup>19</sup>. However, in an interview conducted at the time of *Omeros*' publication, Walcott suggests that, 'where this poem started was the figure of Philoctetes, the man with the wound, alone on the beach' (Bruckner, 'A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man', p.397). This reference to 'the man with the wound, alone on the beach' echoes Walcott's earlier inscription of the figure of Crusoe as 'that of a lonely man on a beach who has heaped a pile of dead bush, twigs, etc., to make a bonfire' (Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe', p.34). His insistence upon the importance of Philoctetes also suggests that one of the other influences on his poem is Sophocles' play *Philoctetes*, which concentrates on Odysseus and Neoptolemos' efforts to persuade the abandoned and embittered Philoctetes to leave Lemnos and return to the battle at Troy. The story goes that, despite his earlier exclusion from his comrades, 'the gods would not allow Troy to be captured [by the Greeks], except by means of Philoctetes and his unerring bow and arrows'<sup>20</sup>. Philoctete's wound is therefore effectively an affliction shared by all Greeks and the healing of his wound precipitates the fall of Troy and the end of the Trojan campaign. Walcott's poem begins with the revelation of Philoctete's wound as he shows a group of tourists 'a scar made by a rusted anchor, / rolling one trouser-leg up with the rising moan // of a conch' (O, p.4). 'He does not explain its cure' to the tourists- "It have some things ... worth more than a dollar", he quips (ibid.). But later in Ma Kilman's rumshop the poet reveals that, 'He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure? / That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's // but that of his race' (O, p.19). This suggests that Philoctete's wound is a symbol of all Caribbean wounds, and specifically those caused by the practice of slavery. His affliction echoes throughout *Omeros* and his cure precipitates the process of healing that takes place in the final stages of the poem.

Commenting upon the historical divisions evident within *Omeros*, Paula Burnett claims that Walcott's subject 'is the way history has wounded a people, but as well as giving expression to the horrors of the past and their legacy to the present, he also suggests an answer, a cure to the wound'<sup>21</sup>. Following Burnett, I wish to suggest that contained in Walcott's poem are a series of textual wounds that almost

<sup>19</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Martin Hammond (London: Penguin, 1987), p.36.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth McLeish, 'Introduction', in Sophocles, *Electra, Antigone, Philoctetes*, ed. by Kenneth McLeish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.107.

without exception link all the major characters to Philoctete. And that set against this accumulative agony Walcott includes a writing cure, in which the very act of writing provides the motive force behind the process of healing in the poem. For example, when Helen leaves him for Hector, Achille faces a crisis of faith and believes 'he smelt as badly as Philoctete / from the rotting loneliness that drew every glance / away from him, as stale as a drying fishnet' (O, p.116). Similarly, after the failure of his marriage the poet is excised from society until 'like wounded Philoctetes' he grows tired of his isolation (O, p.171). Philoctete's belief that his wound has at least in part been caused by the legacy of slavery also provides the focus for an expanding chain of signification. When he returns to Africa, Achille witnesses his ancestral village being raided by slave-traders. From a distance he counts 'the chain of men / linked by their wrists with vines; [and] watche[s] until / the line was a line of ants' (O, p.145). The metaphorical reduction of Achille's ancestors to 'a line of ants' perhaps suggests the apparent inconsequentiality of the African slave in the history of colonial domination. However, the same chain is seen again and again in *Omeros* until it leads Ma Kilman to the root that will heal Philoctete's wound. Addressing his place within privileged Boston society, the poet reflects that he 'saw what Achille / had seen and heard: the mental eyes joining their hands / to wrists adept with an oar or a "special skill"' (O, p.210). Likewise, commenting upon the destruction of the native American tribes of the Dakotas, Catherine Weldon sees 'a chain of men linked / by wrists', and like Achille watches 'until // they were a line of red ants' (O, p.215). When Walcott meets the ghost of his dead father, his father reminds him of 'the unending / line crossing like ants' of women carrying coal onto liners (O, p.74). He instructs his son that his work must seek to honour these women and 'give those feet a voice' (O, pp.74-76). Finally, when Ma Kilman goes in search of the root brought from Africa by a sea-swift, she staggers back 'from the line of ants at her feet ... signalling a language she could not recognize' (O, p.238).

As Philoctete is prepared for his bathing in the brew of the ancestral root, the poet reveals 'There was no difference / between me and Philoctete' (O, p.245). With his cure, a process of healing is begun in the poem, 'the proof of a self-healing island / whose every cove was a wound' (O, p.249). This is perhaps most clearly seen as the poet is led round the island by Seven Seas / *Omeros* in Book Seven, and in the

---

<sup>21</sup> Paula Burnett, '*Omeros*', *Wasafiri*, 14 (1991), 32.

questioning of his and Plunkett's earlier readings of Helen. However, it is also the case that the notion of a writing cure is implicit at the moment of the poet's introduction to the marble bust of the Greek poet in the second chapter of the poem. This is because the Caribbean poet's assimilation of Omeros to a specifically Caribbean aesthetic also provides the occasion for writing. At the mid-point of this crucial section of the poem, the poet submits himself to the process of memory and states: 'I write, it returns' (O, p.14). In simple terms, Walcott means that the act of writing enables him to remember the events of his first introduction to the name of Omeros. The memory of that day returns to the forefront of his mind: what was said, what happened and so on. But, this phrase also implies that in the very act of writing such events are able to be re-turned too. Thus, the enunciation of the name of 'Omeros' becomes intricately associated, through the extension of metaphor and imagery, to a number of the key concerns of the poem. This is first demonstrated in the way that the movements of the poet's female acquaintance are written in terms of the fresh, rhythmic movements of the Caribbean sea ('I saw how the surf printed its lace in patterns / on the shore of her neck, then the lowering shallows / of silk swirled at her ankles, like surf without noise', O, pp.14-15). Next the poet is led to speculate upon how the decorative presence of ancient Greece in contemporary America might be interpreted by Omeros. Suggesting a conflict between inner and outer appearance (the marble bust's broken nose turns away, whilst his 'rustling silk agrees'), the poet asks Omeros to 'read between the lines' and recognise the narrative of slavery hidden beneath the ornamental effects of an ancient past. Imaginatively transported to the white-hot deck of a slave-ship, Omeros is asked to look 'to the shadows in its hold', to breath in 'the stench from manacled ankles' and to feel 'the coffled feet / scraping like leaves' (O, p.15). As the poet's attention shifts back to the girl, the name of Omeros is once again invoked. On this occasion though, it is not heard in the classical mode of 'kings floundering in lances of rain'; but rather for the more domestic 'prose / of abrupt fishermen cursing over canoes' (ibid.). This returns the poet to the central Caribbean setting of the poem. The phrase 'I write, it returns' can therefore be read as a signal of the encircling vision of the Caribbean poet. As the primal moment in the metaphoric framing of the poem, the naming of Omeros establishes the key importance of the narratives of lost-love and unacknowledged history that are present throughout. Similarly, the re-turning of the experience by the

poet at the moment of writing suggests that the poem contains a (writing) cure for the series of wounds that are stitched into the fabric of the text.

The phrase 'I write, it returns' establishes the importance of writing in the poem. It also places the poet on the same discursive plane as Achille, Hector, Helen and others. One of the main narrative strands of the poem is the personal story of the poet, suffering from the scars of a lost love, whose biography echoes that of Walcott. Although he is the writer of the text, within the world of the poem the poet does not assert his authority over his characters. Instead, in the course of the narrative he comes into contact with the characters he has created. He receives words of advice from some, and allows others to assert their independence. For example, in Chapter LIII the poet attends Maud Plunkett's funeral. He stands among the wooden pews of the chapel with Achille, Helen and Philoctete. His curious position at the funeral of one of his characters is shown by his remark, 'I was both there and not there. I was attending / the funeral of a character I'd created; / the fiction of her life needed a good ending // as much as mine' (O, p.266). The poet's ambivalence as both a represented and representing consciousness is a subject for concern in itself. His emotional recovery and the completion of his text are both intimately tied to the fictional lives of others. For the poet the two most influential figures in the poem are the ghost of his father, Warwick Walcott, and Omeros, another literary father. Both provide prescriptive reasons for the writing of *Omeros*. As the poet and his father look out over the harbour of Gros Îlet in Book One, Warwick Walcott advises: 'Measure the days you have left. Do just that labour / which marries your heart to your right hand: simplify / your life to one emblem, a sail leaving a harbour // and a sail coming in' (O, p.72). Connecting feeling to writing, this acts as a musical refrain through the text. It suggests that for the poet and his Caribbean characters there will always be a journey out and a return or homecoming. It implies that there will always be the disappointment of exile, but this will be followed by hope and healing. In the last book of the poem, Omeros echoes this sentiment when he reveals, 'the right journey / is motionless; as the sea moves round an island // that appears to be moving, love moves round the heart- / with encircling salt, and the slowly travelling hand / knows it returns to the port from which it must start' (O, p.291). The idea of a writing cure therefore begins with the poet's engagement with Omeros and widens to envelop a sense of both individual and island consciousness. The poet's self-

conscious assertion of his own identity and his engagement with other characters also offers the possibility of reading Walcott's poem according to Bakhtin's notion of polyphony. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin argues that '*A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels*' (PDP, p.6).

This is because, as he explains:

What unfolds in [Dostoevsky's] works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather *a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event. Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*. (PDP, p.6-7)

In the polyphonic text the author ceases to assume a dominant position over and above the characters he has created. The polyphonic world is not 'a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness'. Rather, it is a world in which several conflicting consciousnesses 'combine but are not merged in the unity of the event'. The polyphonic author engages with his characters as equals and, once they are brought into being, allows them to speak for themselves. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this in *Omeros* is when Helen momentarily emerges out of the poet's shadow to assert her independence in Chapter VI of the poem. Here, the poet sits on a hotel terrace watching the games taking place on the beach below. Then Helen enters his vision, and the narrative perspective slowly switches from the free indirect speech of the poet to the direct speech of Helen:

She was gossiping with two women  
about finding work as a waitress, but both said

the tables was full. What the white manager mean  
to say was she was too rude, 'cause she dint take no shit  
from white people and some of them tourist- the men

only out to touch local girls; every minute-  
was brushing their hand from her backside so one day  
she get fed up with all their nastiness so she tell

the cashier that wasn't part of her fucking pay,  
take off her costume, and walk straight out the hotel  
naked as God make me, when I pass by the pool,

people nearly drown, not naked completely, I  
still had panty and bra, a man shout out, "Beautiful!"

More!” So I show him my ass. People nearly die. (O, pp.33-34)

The shift in narratorial perspective is shown here in the movement from third person to first person narration. When allowed to speak for herself Helen reveals herself as a colourful, perhaps even confrontational, sexualised individual, fully aware of the demands made on her and her body. Her actions suggest the struggle she has to survive her exploitation, and her emergence acts as a confirmation of the vitality of her being, an expression of her independent consciousness.

Echoing the fight to possess Helen of Troy in Homer's *Iliad*, one of the key narrative strands of Walcott's poem is contained in the attempt to possess Helen. 'If Walcott risks thematic diffusion by scattering the narrative perspective, sharing the protagonist's role among a succession of voices and expanding the geographical and chronological boundaries to include distant continents and ancient Greece,' Robert Hamner reflects, 'the cohesive centre of *Omeros* remains [the] figure of Helen' (Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*, p.45). Like her classical namesake, Walcott's Helen is an object of affection and desire. Indeed, she is effectively introduced as a character in the opening book of the poem through the claims made on her by the principal male characters of the poem. Achille and Hector fight a duel over an old rusted bailing tin that is really 'over a shadow, and its name was Helen' (O, p.17). The poet, who catches sight of Helen from a hotel terrace, feels 'like standing in homage to a beauty // that left, like a ship, widening eyes in its wake' (O, pp.23-24). And Major Plunkett admits that he too feels 'a duty // towards her hopelessness, something to redress / (he punned relentlessly) that desolate beauty / like her islands' (O, pp.29-30). Each of these expressions of male desire mark the beginning of reifying textual readings of Helen. The quarrel between Achille and Hector on the beach of Gros Îlet represents a battle for Helen as a sexual object and partner, and throughout the poem Helen moves back and forth between her two lovers. Their symbolic enactment of the duel fought between Achilles and Hector in front of the gates of Troy at the end of *The Iliad* once again urges the reader of Walcott's poem to cross an Homeric parallel. But, as Rei Terada suggests, 'Helen is ... someone whom others ... strive intensely to read' (Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry*, p.191), and it is therefore the respective positions taken by the poet and Plunkett that are more interesting. This is because although they also desire Helen they essentially fight for her imaginatively and intellectually. The poet substitutes Helen for the myth of Helen of Troy. Hence, when he first sees Helen he makes a

direct allusion to the phrase most often attached to Homer's Helen. 'The face that launched a thousand ships' becomes in the Caribbean setting 'a beauty // that left, like a ship, widening eyes in its wake'. When he next sees Helen on the beach she is walking towards the smoke of a beach fire singing The Beatles' 'Yesterday' as a young Indian boy hurtles towards her on a horse. As 'the stallion's sound scalded her scalp with memory' the figure of Helen all but disappears in the smoke as the poet leaps to make connections with the events of the Trojan war: 'A battle broke / out. Lances of sunlight hurled themselves into sand, / the horse hardened to wood, Troy burned, and a soundless // wrestling of smoke-plumed warriors was spun / from the blowing veils, while she dangled her sandals / and passed through that door of black smoke into the sun.' (O, p.35). This is followed by the poet's own appropriation of Helen's 'Yesterday', as he seeks to surmount the temporal distance between the Caribbean and Aegean settings. This is most evident in the repetition of the refrain of 'Yesterday': 'yesterday these shallows were the Scamander ... yesterday, the black fleet / anchored there in the swift's road ... yesterday the sightless holes of a driftwood log' and so on (ibid.). Major Plunkett is also moved by 'that housemaid swinging a plastic sandal / by the noon sea, in a dress she had to steal', and he too sees the Homeric association in Helen's name that 'rose like smoke from a siege' (O, p.31). Discovering that the island was once named 'Helen', Plunkett falls prey to an 'historic hallucination' which leads him to conclude: 'Helen needed a history, / that was the pity that Plunkett felt towards her. / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war' (O, p.30). Inspired into action by Helen's theft of a yellow dress owned by his wife, which 'had an empire's tag on it' (O, p.64), Plunkett immerses himself in historical research surrounding the battle for the island. In the course of his research he finds and loses an ancestor, and thus pays his debt to Helen and the island. Such reverberations and associations determine the poet's and Plunkett's reading of Helen for much of the poem. Indeed, as examples of possible readers of *Omeros* they demonstrate that the allure of Homeric parallels is powerful.

It is possible to view the poet and Major Plunkett's reading of Helen as an extended textual illustration of passive understanding or a one-sided, monologic reading. In Bakhtin's terms both the poet and Plunkett might be said to accept the authoritative lessons of literature, myth and history. They each attempt to build around such closed vision a metaphorical structure that obscures the Caribbean identity of Walcott's Helen. 'Insofar as the speaker operates with such a passive

understanding,' Bakhtin reflects in 'Discourse in the Novel', 'nothing new can be introduced into his discourse; there can be no new aspects in his discourse relating to concrete objects and emotional expressions' (DN, p.281). The brief outline provided of the poet and Plunkett's individual reading formations suggests that this holds true. In both cases, Helen becomes an idea, an objectified character, onto whom they, as readers, project an overwhelming surplus of metaphorical vision. This is shown to particular effect in Plunkett's reading of historical superstition as 'Homeric repetition' and 'coincidence' (O, p.96). Disavowing the 'factual fiction / of textbooks, pamphlets, brochures' produced 'dryly with pen and compass', Plunkett asserts that 'If [Helen] / hid in their net of myths, knotted entanglements // of figures and dates, she was not a fantasy / but a webbed connection' (O, p.95). Thus, whilst the poet recognises that there may be no difference between him and Philoctete, there is also little to tell between him and Plunkett: 'like enemy ships of the line, / we crossed on a parallel' (O, p.270). This leads the poet to conclude in the mid-section of Chapter LIV:

My inspiration was impulse, but the Major's zeal

to make her the pride of the Battle of the Saints,  
her yellow dress on its flagship, was an ideal  
no different from mine. Plunkett, in his innocence,

had tried to change History to a metaphor  
in the name of a housemaid; I, in self-defence,  
altered her opposite. Yet it was all for her. (O, p.270)

Such a blinkered reading leads to a finalising vision of Helen that can lead both poet and Plunkett nowhere. However, the recognition of this impasse signals a new wish to unhinge the rigid structure of Homeric metaphor surrounding Helen, and therefore participates in the process of healing contained in the poem. In his recently published 'Reflections on *Omeros*' Walcott somewhat insistently suggests that this shift in direction provides the key to understanding *Omeros*:

If you look (if you take the trouble to look) at *Omeros*, you will see that the last third of it is a total refutation of the efforts made by two characters. First, there is the effort by the historian, Plunkett, to make a woman he has fallen in love with grander and nobler... The second effort is made by the writer, or narrator (presumably me, if you like), who composes a long poem in which he compares this island woman to Helen of Troy. The answer to both the historian

and the poet / narrator- the answer in terms of history, the answer in terms of literature- is that the woman doesn't need it.<sup>22</sup>

What Walcott terms 'a total refutation' here reflects his desire to question the strategies of reading and understanding undertaken so far in the text. Such a shift is clearly evident in the final lines of the second section of Chapter LIV. Reflecting back on his and Plunkett's first vision of Helen, as a Caribbean woman walking along the beaches of the Caribbean sea, the poet is drawn to ask: 'There, in her head of ebony, / there was no real need for the historian's / remorse, nor for literature's. Why not see Helen // as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow, / swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone, / as fresh as the sea wind? Why make the smoke a door? (O, p.271).

The apparent dissolution of Helen's Homeric shadow leads to a renegotiation of the poet's and Plunkett's reading positions in *Omeros*. Whilst Plunkett forgets 'the war's // history that had cost him a son and a wife' he is able to think of Helen as 'not a cause or a cloud, only a name / for a local wonder' (O, p.309). The poet, too, comes to accept a more understated vision of Helen's beauty. Thus, although he still suggests that 'Sometimes the gods will hallow // all of a race's beauty in a single face' (O, p.318), his desire to supplant the implicit association of Trojan and Caribbean Helens is demonstrated when he sees her dressed in national costume working as a waitress in a local bar. Considering the possibility of a series of different interpretations of Helen, the poet states: 'you might recall that battle / for which they named an island or the heaving wreck / of the *Ville de Paris* in her foam-filled bodice, // or just think, "What a fine local woman!"' (O, p.322). From this it might therefore be suggested that the apparent shift in reader positions in *Omeros* inscribes the text with the possibility of a dialogic reading practice, an enriching act of reading that is more in tune with Bakhtin's notions of active understanding and creative understanding. Both the poet and Major Plunkett become aware of the self motivations that informed their one-sided understanding of Helen. In each of their final readings of her it is clear that they specifically seek to place Helen within a Caribbean locale. However, I say 'possibility' here because it can be argued that there is a lack of conviction to the poet's intra-textual dismantling of the Homeric metaphor. At the poem's close there are still intimations of Homeric and historical coincidence in the poet's reading of Helen. Equally, if the question 'why make the

---

<sup>22</sup> Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (2) (1997), 232-233

smoke a door?' signals the moment when the Homeric parallel is most forcefully questioned and the possibility of a dialogic reading is most potently put forward, then it is also evident that this seems to stall at the moment of enunciation. The question 'why make the smoke a door?' is followed by three further questions devoted to the subject of Homeric analogy, but each one merely serves to suggest that the pressure of Homeric parallels remains strong. The poet asks:

When would the sails drop

from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War  
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?  
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse

shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,  
the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros";  
when would I enter that light beyond metaphor? (O, p.271)

As each question increases in rhetorical fervour the reader of *Omeros* is compelled to respond: 'never'. Indeed, this is implicitly acknowledged in the poet's pragmatic response, 'But it was mine to make what I wanted of it, or / what I thought was wanted' (O, p.272). Thus, at the moment in which the question of the Caribbean poet's relation to Homer ought to be categorically closed, it appears to be left open.

The poet's declaration of metaphorical possession provides an indication of Walcott's reading of Homer during the writing of *Omeros*. The phrase 'it was mine to make what I wanted of it' is a clear statement of the poet's personal and political response to the legacy of Homer. It is also an assertion of the Caribbean poet's Caribbean reading of the ancient Greek founder of Western Literature, and to this end John Figueroa suggests that, 'It is the "making of something" out of it that matters' (Figueroa, 'Omeros', p.206). Interestingly, Walcott makes a similar point in his Nobel lecture, entitled 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory'. Describing the various cultures of the Caribbean (European, African, Asian, Indian and American) as the shattered fragments of a broken vase, he declares that Caribbean art must be seen as the product of an act of restoration or recovery in which the object newly made has a power and meaning that was unrecognised in the original:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain

than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.<sup>23</sup>

For Walcott, poetry is the 'making'- or more precisely the 'remaking'- of the 'fragmented memory', and it is through the poet's act of 'excavation' and 'self-discovery' that the common culture of the Caribbean survives and is continually renewed (Walcott, 'The Antilles', pp.69-70). 'Prelude', one of Walcott's earliest poems, sees the young poet surveying his island, setting his view against an other (Western) vision, and shows the poet caught between location and vocation, unable to tell the story of his life until he has learnt 'to suffer / In accurate iambs'<sup>24</sup>. In *Another Life* Walcott finally tells that story and crucially connects the artistic awakening of the poet to a notion of presence and possibility, based upon the idea of history as myth. *Another Life* ends on a note of celebration, paying tribute to the memory of friends and the dreams and convictions they have shared. In contrast, *Omeros* opens with the revelation of an odorous wound, which is symbolic of a shared suffering and loss. The poem relies upon the construction of an overarching classical metaphor and the subsequent (partial) dismantling of that metaphor, as the wounds that are shared across the text are (at least partly) cured. This process of healing begins with the bathing of Philoctete in the brew of an ancestral root, and turns again on the poet's reading and misreading of Helen, the central female character and symbol of the poet's native island. *Omeros* closes with Helen at work at the Halcyon and Achille at work on the beach, each quietly asserting dominion over their own lives.

As a statement of Walcott's artistic concerns 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory' is an important document, which has been expertly discussed by Gordon Collier in an essay published in *Kunapipi* in 1993<sup>25</sup>. Written in the period immediately following the publication of *Omeros*, Walcott returns to the question of the reading and misreading of the Caribbean, and makes a plea that the islands be allowed to reveal their own complex truths. The lecture opens with Walcott's recollection of a trip, made with friends from America, to the village of Felicity in Trinidad, where the local East Indian population is making preparations for the

<sup>23</sup> Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, p.69.

<sup>24</sup> Walcott, 'Prelude', in *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, p.3.

performance of the Hindu epic, *The Ramayana*. Felicity is the name for luck or happiness, though Walcott first provides hints of its role in the business of empire, situated as it is on the edge of a sugar growing area and home to the sons and daughters, grandsons and grand-daughters of indentured labourers brought over from India. Part-insider and part-outsider, Walcott (who now lives half the year in St Lucia and half the year in America) acts as interpreter for his friends, but admits that he knows little about the meanings behind the annual Hindu ritual taking place in the village. Drummers are preparing their instruments, costumed actors (presumed to be princes and gods) are gathering in a field, whilst at the edge of the field the fragmented body parts of a Hindu god are being carefully assembled, to make an effigy that will later be burnt. Gently intimating the gap between African and Asian constituencies on the island, Walcott (who lived in Trinidad from 1959-1976, when he was founder and director of the Trinidad Theatre Company) reveals that 'he had no idea what the epic story was, who its hero was, what enemies he fought' (p.66). He also notices the irony of this, having just completed a stage version of *The Odyssey* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, 'presuming that the audience knew the trials of Odysseus, hero of another Asia Minor epic' (ibid.). Although partly mocking the assumptions that he made when writing his play for the English stage this reference to *The Odyssey* is not purely incidental, as the epic parallel provides a framework for Walcott to place the performance of *The Ramayana*. Falling back upon his role as writer, Walcott confesses to having tried to read the scene as a piece of theatre, to having seen the actors as amateurs assuming roles in the same way that 'method' actors might construct the tics and intricacies of a character. 'Out of the writer's habit', he reveals, '[I] searched for some sense of elegy, of loss, even of degenerative mimicry in the happy faces of the boy-warriors or the heraldic profiles of the village princes' (p.67). His use of the terms 'elegy', 'loss' and 'mimicry' here alluding to the idea of the Caribbean as an empty, inferior, imitative region; a view typically associated with Froude and Naipaul, but by no means typical of Walcott. His wish to see the marks of absence and loss in the performance may suggest an unconscious affiliation with Naipaul, or recall the cynicism of the well-travelled writer inured to such acts of local celebration. But it is more likely that this admission serves a strategic purpose, providing the opportunity for Walcott to

---

<sup>25</sup> Gordon Collier, 'Multicultural Self-Definition and Textual Strategy in the Poetic Speech of Derek Walcott: The Nobel Prize Speech', *Kunapipi*, 15 (2) (1993), 86-103.

contrast two different ways of reading the Caribbean, each determined by two different or contrasting views of Caribbean history. Just as in *Omeros* the first reading of Helen is eventually (partially) corrected, here too Walcott soon realises that his first response was more than slightly wrong:

I misread the event through a visual echo of History- the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples and trumpeting elephants- when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation; delight in the boys' screams, in the sweet-stalls, in more and more costumed actors appearing: a delight of conviction, not loss. (ibid.)

Walcott's recognition of such 'elation', 'delight' and 'conviction' is an acknowledgement of the villagers' continued belief in an ancient ritual that, though clearly adapted to the Caribbean setting, still plays an important part in the formation of a collective identity. For the inhabitants of Felicity, this aspect of their Hindu culture was not lost on the journey their ancestors made from India to the Caribbean, but it remains and survives even now in Trinidad, albeit in fragments of its original form. This leads Walcott to describe the performance in linguistic terms, as 'a dialect, a branch of its original language, an abridgement of it, but not a distortion or even a reduction of its epic scale' (p.68). In addition, he connects the ritual actions of the boy-warriors to the homecoming of a flock of birds to the Caroni swamp, suggesting both the naturalness of their performance as well as asserting their rightful place in the environmental fabric of the island.

Walcott's impression of the events taking place at Felicity moves from a vision of absence and loss to a 'celebration of real presence' and 'the perpetuation of joy' (pp.68-69). His identification of 'elation' amongst the East Indians of Felicity constitutes a key moment in his Nobel lecture. It also implies a return to the ground covered in earlier essays, notably his sense of the New World writer's elemental vision of man. In 'The Muse of History' Walcott describes the New World writer's Adamic vision as 'an elation which sees everything as renewed' (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.38). He speaks of the privilege of naming the New World as 'an elation common to all of [our great poets], whether they are aligned by heritage to Crusoe and Prospero or to Friday and Caliban' (p.40). And later, exploring the example offered by the Francophone poets St.-John Perse and Aimé Césaire, he comments that 'what astonishes us in both poets is their elation, their staggering elation in possibility' (p.53). For Walcott, Perse and Césaire provide access to a vision of Caribbean man's emergence, an expression of cultural awakening

instructive for him during the writing of *Another Life*. He suggests that the importance of both poets has been largely misconceived or misread across the islands of the Caribbean by minor poets eager for revolution, 'who assume a grandeur without a language to create it' (ibid.). Arguing that 'The revolution is here. It was always here' (p.57), Walcott returns at the end of his essay to consider the question of the Caribbean writer's exile from history. Examining three different positions present in the literature of the period, he offers an implicit critique of Naipaul and Brathwaite, and in passing suggests a correspondence between his own work and that of Wilson Harris. The first response is that of 'the colonial in exile' (p.59), who in aligning himself with the vision of the West, must inevitably see the Caribbean as a place of loss. It is not hard to see this as a reflection upon V.S. Naipaul. The second response is that of the writer who 'longs for the ancestral dignity of the wander-warrior', and puts his faith in a return to an idealised past in Africa (ibid.). Gordon Rohlehr suggests that this is a veiled attack on Edward Kamau Brathwaite (Rohlehr, *Pathfinder*, p.110-114). And, the third response comes from those who search for what Walcott terms the 'the primal imagination'; that is, those who look to connect with a primordial, elemental world and seek to uncover within that world, 'the roots of contemporary man' (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.59). Walcott sees this mode of enquiry in Dennis Williams, Ted Hughes and Samuel Beckett, in whose work language deliberately disturbs and disrupts the reader in the anguished search for something beyond the surface of contemporary existence. He also suggests that this is evident in the work of Wilson Harris, who he describes as a writer 'with an optimistic or visionary force', a writer whose work is characterised by 'the same slow naming' of the world (p.61). Unfortunately Walcott does not expand on this impression with reference to any of Harris' fiction or poetry. This may in fact be the only direct reference he makes to Harris in any of his essays. However, even in this brief remark Walcott establishes a connection with Harris in terms of a move beyond History as a linear record of success and failure, to a sense of living continuity with the past, a sense of simultaneity between Old and New Worlds.

In both his essays and his poetry Derek Walcott repeatedly suggests that it is only once he releases himself from nostalgia or absolves himself from despair, that the New World writer will be able to free his imagination from the heavy burdens of the past. His approach is built upon the tension aroused between cultures and traditions of which he is himself a product and the felt need to achieve, as Fred

D'Aguiar puts it, a sense of 'reconciliation and synthesis in his art'<sup>26</sup>. Echoing D'Aguiar, Michael Gilkes argues that Walcott represents 'that aspect of West Indian writing which involves the acceptance of 'mongrelism' as a means towards a deliberately catalytical art, an art which facing both ways, can make creative sense of both worlds of Caribbean and European sensibility'<sup>27</sup>. This points to the ambivalence and division at the heart of Walcott's poetry, and suggests that for Walcott the very act of writing, the act of making art, is fundamental to the process of cultural restoration in the Caribbean. In Walcott's work the problem of racial and cultural division is not simply a symptom of a fractured identity, it is also the beginning of creativity in the Caribbean. For Wilson Harris too, such division marks not the end but the beginning of the creative encounter, and the start of an important and necessary process of cross-cultural renewal.

---

<sup>26</sup> Fred D'Aguiar, 'Ambiguity without a Crisis? Twin Traditions, the Individual and Community in Derek Walcott's Essays', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, p.157.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (Trinidad and Jamaica: Longman Caribbean, 1975), p.xxxvi.

## 6. The Cross-cultural Imagination: The Chronotope of the Threshold in Wilson Harris' *Guyana Quartet*

Just as Walcott's essay 'The Muse of History' implies that Walcott and Harris are each concerned with the discovery of the 'primal imagination', so too Michael Gilkes' monograph *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* suggests that both writers share key interests which effectively circulate around the notion of the cross-cultural. Gilkes' study is notable for its deliberate discussion of Harris within a Caribbean context, and for its exploration of the crisis of identity at the heart of Harris' fiction. Arguing that writers such as Edgar Mittelholzer and V.S. Naipaul represent one line of a nascent Caribbean literary tradition, which sees racial and cultural mixture as weakness and impediment, Gilkes suggests that another line emerges in the work of Walcott and Harris, who both accept mixture as the basis of future growth (p.xxv-xxvi). In Walcott and Harris the contradictions and divisions within contemporary Caribbean society are felt within themselves and across their work, and are necessarily met by acts of imagination and creativity. Both are engaged in a process of cultural restoration, which begins with an act of self-healing and expands to encompass the wider Caribbean as well as other cultures and peoples across the world. Many of Walcott's best known poems, including *Another Life* and *Omeros*, emerge from a clear sense of the poet's own inner cultural division and go on to present a plea for rebirth and renewal. Similarly, all of Harris' novels bear the marks of his mixed ancestral heritage and argue for the recovery and recuperation of a hidden or forgotten past as the basis for establishing a cross-cultural future<sup>1</sup>. Often described as strange and difficult, Harris' novels are perhaps best seen as complex narratives of social and psychological crisis, in which the possibility for radical change is born in those moments of tension when opposing visions of reality conflict and interact with each other<sup>2</sup>. For Harris, this provides the opportunity to

---

<sup>1</sup> Gilkes argues that the 'main theme of Harris' work' is the striving for 'a new state of consciousness, a new and original growth in sensibility produced, as it were, by a genuine cross-fertilization of cultures and races' (*Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p.xxxvi).

<sup>2</sup> The publisher's blurb attached to the first edition of *Palace of the Peacock* describes the novel as 'A strange and difficult ... but rewarding book' (this is cited in an anonymous review that appears in *Bim*, 9 (33) (1961), 76). The question of the apparent difficulty of Harris' writing, and the impact this has had upon his audience, has been discussed by a variety of readers and critics during the forty years that his work has been published. Commenting upon Harris' early poetry, Edward Brathwaite

question the fixed notion of an inherited colonial reality, to dismantle the rule of absolute thought that governs the colonial consciousness, and to return to the past to recover a more creative understanding of the way cultures inevitably and positively interact. In novel after novel Harris maps out an almost identical imaginative terrain, which suggests that each novel he has written is part of an ongoing process of cross-cultural engagement<sup>3</sup>. His work begins and ends in Guyana, his native land and the setting for many of his most important novels. His reclamation of Guyana as a space of possibility and potential is most readily seen in his first four novels, collectively known as *The Guyana Quartet* (published in one volume in 1985), comprising *Palace of the Peacock* (first published in 1960), *The Far Journey of Oudin* (1961), *The Whole Armour* (1962) and *The Secret Ladder* (1963).

Arguably presenting the blue-print for all of Harris' subsequent novels, *Palace of the Peacock* is a Caribbean quest novel, which centres around the relation between Donne, a colonial landlord, and a dreaming 'I', his Other<sup>4</sup>. Set in the dense forest and

---

identifies the key difficulty of Harris' work as that of 'the scale and uniqueness of its point of view, the strangeness of its discoveries on the very fringes of experience' (Brathwaite, 'The Controversial Tree of Time', *Bim* 8 (30) (1960), 107). Offering judgement on Harris' first four novels, John Hearne notes that 'Harris is not an easy writer', as images, metaphors and events within the novels 'at first seem examples only of a wilful and unrelated vividness' (Hearne, 'The Fugitive in the Forest: Four Novels by Wilson Harris', in *The Islands in Between*, pp.145-146). Both Brathwaite and Hearne's essays consider Harris' early work, and thus give an indication of an immediate response to Harris' writing. Their thoughts have been echoed in more recent essays that also point to the strangeness of Harris' complex fiction and prose writings. In an essay published in the mid-1980's, Gregory Shaw reveals that Harris' 'readers still approach his work with a measure of awe and trepidation, conscious that the conventional signposts of literary interpretation are quite inadequate as a means of guiding one through the complexities of his prose' (Shaw, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', *New Left Review*, 153 (1985), 121). In 'Reading Wilson Harris', published in 1991, Mark Williams and Allan Riach go so far as to suggest that Harris requires an academic audience, 'if the full force and radicalness of his work is to be appreciated' (Williams & Riach, 'Reading Wilson Harris', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1991), p.51). In 2000, the Caribbean-born writer Caryl Phillips describes Harris as 'The Guyana enigma', suggesting on the one hand that Harris' fiction contains a conundrum the source and answer to which lies in an imaginative obsession with Guyana, and on the other, implicitly proposing that Harris has received a somewhat puzzling and paradoxical reception to his work (Phillips, 'The Guyana enigma', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 November 1999, 26).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Shaw notes that Harris' novel's 'tend to be serial and repetitive, in the sense of returning to the same themes, images and characters'. '[I]t is crucial to note that the cycles of Harris's novels are progressive or incremental', Shaw suggests, '...In dialectical terms each succeeding stage may be said to cancel the relations of its predecessors, but it also preserves them and raises them to a higher level' (Shaw, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', 122). This view is certainly supported by two key phrases associated with Harris' later fiction and criticism; namely, 'the infinite rehearsal' (the title of a novel published in 1987) and 'the unfinished genesis of the imagination' (the title of an essay written in 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Gilkes describes *Palace of the Peacock* as 'the overarching vision which informs Harris' fiction' (*Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, p.43). Others have also identified it as the progenitor and foundation of Harris' creative vision. In a preface attached to an early edition of the novel, Kenneth Ramchand is said to have written that '*Palace of the Peacock* contains all Harris' basic themes, and anticipates his later designs' (cited in Desmond Hamlet, 'Renewal in a Far More Resonant Key:

jungle landscape of Guyana, Harris' first published novel is a recasting of the myth of creation, a reworking of the first innocent voyage of the colonial conquerors into the Guyanese hinterland, and a journey into the interior of psyche. The novel opens with a series of half-waking dreams, which are triggered by a primal dream in which a horseman (Donne) is shot and killed by a mysterious figure (presumed to be Mariella, Donne's Amerindian mistress). At the entry to the world of the text this blurs the boundary between dream and reality, and infuses the concrete events of the narrative with the associative language of symbol and myth<sup>5</sup>. Donne requires labour to work on his land, and assembles a boat-crew to take him to an inland station where an Amerindian tribe is said to live. They arrive at the mission-station but discover it has been deserted save for an old woman, whom they capture. The crew agrees to continue their journey up river in search of the lost folk. Over the next seven days they face a series of trials and suffer a series of losses, until on the sixth day Donne is left alone to confront the blindness of his past and the inner contradictions of his world. The climax of the sixth day heralds Donne's return to 'the compassion of the nameless unflinching folk' (GQ, p.110). On the seventh day the I-narrator joins the crew in the Palace of the Peacock, an El Doradone idyll, in a symbolic moment of cross-cultural community. *Palace of the Peacock* ends with the consumption of hierarchical bias and with intimations of hope for the future of the Guyanese nation. In *The Far Journey of Oudin*, *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder* Harris adopts a similar structure, and in each novel offers the possibility of a shift in the fabric of the Caribbean consciousness only after the fixed certainties of the colonial

---

Reflections on the Mad Sin-Eating Relics of Fire in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 84). In *The Islands In Between* John Hearne notes too that the 'first book in the quartet seems to state most of the themes which are later developed in the others' (Hearne, 'The Fugitive in the Forest', p.148).

<sup>5</sup> The opening paragraphs of the *Quartet* reveal the foundational importance of dreams in Harris' fiction, and the role that the symbolic plays in his texts. The formation of a dream-work relies upon the intricate association of a series of symbols, images and metaphors. The dream-work also represents an alternate inner reality, which captures in fragments that which is most feared or desired by the dreamer. The dream-work thus provides Harris with an appropriate means to capture the fragmentary nature of Caribbean society and identity, whilst also unleashing powerful inner forces of imagination and creativity within the regenerative text. The use of symbolism in Harris' writing is explored in the following:

W.J. Howard, 'Wilson Harris' *Guiana Quartet*: From Personal Myth to National Identity', *ARIEL*, 1 (1970), 46-60.

Jeffrey Robinson, 'The White Goddess and *Palace of the Peacock*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 2 (2) (1988), 15-22.

John Fletcher, "'The Intimacy of a Horror": The Tradition of Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Commonwealth Literature in the Modern World*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Brussels: Didier, 1975), pp.43-50.

consciousness have been eroded and exposed. The drama of *The Far Journey of Oudin* centres on a family of East Indian plantation owners in the east-coast region of Guyana, and focuses upon their conflict with a rival named Ram. The mysterious figure of Oudin arrives at the plantation (possibly sent by Ram). His coming poses a threat to the status quo and precipitates the slow destruction of the family, as one-by-one three brothers die in strange circumstances after the death of their father. Ram's intention is to gain land, but also to make Beti, a young member of the household, his wife. However, before Ram can do this Oudin abducts Beti and the pair journey into the savannah where they live together until Oudin's death some years later. When Oudin dies Beti recognises that his contract with Ram is finally broken. Beti is also pregnant with Oudin's baby, and it is her unborn child who holds the key to a different, more positive future.

If in *The Far Journey of Oudin* it is Oudin who acts as a catalyst to events, in *The Whole Armour*, the third novel of the *Quartet*, it is Cristo who offers the main impetus. Accused of a murder he did not commit, Cristo is on the run and put in the care of Abram by Magda, his mother. Abram soon dies after Cristo's arrival. Taking advantage of the situation Magda urges Cristo to put on Abram's clothes, in order to fake his own death; and then holds a wake for her son in the hope of ending the local police's on-going search for him. Not wishing to be discovered, Cristo dons the pelt of a tiger to disguise himself as he moves around the region. He is eventually reunited with Sharon, his first love, and in their time together Sharon becomes pregnant. Aware of this, Cristo decides to give himself up, in the hope that a process of rebuilding can finally begin with the birth of the next generation. One year later he is to be executed, accepting the sins of the local community as the moment of his death approaches. *The Whole Armour* is set at the mouth of the Pomeroon River, on a fragile strip of land where the rainforest meets the sea. In *The Secret Ladder* the action takes place further inland along the Canje River and, like *Palace of the Peacock*, follows a seven-day structure moving from the exposure of surface illusion and appearance to a moment of climax and change. The narrative of *The Secret Ladder* concerns the conflict between a land-surveying crew collecting data for the building of a government dam and a native tribe, whose land will be lost should the dam go ahead. Fenwick, the skipper of the crew, clashes with Poseidon, the oldest inhabitant of the Canje. But he also comes to realise that his own fate and the fates of those around him are all intimately connected to that of Poseidon, who is the last

surviving remnant of an ancient past. Poseidon's followers stir up trouble for Fenwick and make a series of attacks on the gauges used to measure the river. When Poseidon is accidentally killed his followers threaten revenge, but at the last moment this is averted, and the followers take flight. The future of the nation is encapsulated in the union of Bryant and Catalena Perez- one a descendant of African slaves, the other an abused and subjugated woman of Portuguese extraction- which symbolises the joining together of the two sides of a colonial divide. *The Secret Ladder* ends with the dawning of the seventh day, as Fenwick awakes from a dream that has taught him: 'In our end ... our end ... our end is our beginning ... beginning ... beginning' (GQ, p.464)<sup>6</sup>. This implicit narrative circularity provides the link that connects the four movements of the *Quartet* together as a single body of work. In keeping with Walcott's reference to Harris in 'The Muse of History', it also underlines Harris' sense of the need to return to the past to uncover the origins of contemporary man, as the best way of establishing a productive relation to history in the Caribbean.

Harris' notion of the cross-cultural emerges out of the environment established in his fiction from *Palace of the Peacock* onwards, which is itself a reflection of his own identity as an exiled Guyanese of mixed parentage<sup>7</sup>. In this chapter I intend to examine Harris' *Guyana Quartet* in the context of Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope. I principally wish to suggest that Harris' early fiction may best be read in terms of the chronotope of the threshold, and that such threshold narratives work in order to expose the presence of the other at the heart of Caribbean cultural identities. Defined as 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (FTC, p.84), the notion of

---

<sup>6</sup> This assertion of cyclical temporality is borrowed from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and is most likely taken from the final section of 'Little Gidding', in which Eliot writes:

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.

Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p.221.

The last book of *The Secret Ladder* also bears an epigraph from Eliot's 'Little Gidding' ( see GQ, p.445). This illustrates Harris' debt to an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Modernist aesthetic that sought to question the fabric of the contemporary moment through experiments in language, form and style, at the same time as establishing links with an unconscious, mythic past through a combination of imagery and symbolism.

<sup>7</sup> Harris can lay claim to English, Hindu-Indian, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous Amerindian ancestry. In 'The Guyana enigma' Caryl Phillips makes the point that 'the cross-cultural content of Harris' work has been informed by his understanding of himself and his relationship to the land of his birth, Guyana' (26).

the chronotope is perhaps best seen as a name for the way in which a writer organises the actions and events of his narrative, the way in which a writer makes and remakes his world. The concept of the chronotope provides a valuable adjunct to Bakhtin's theory of social discourse, and is integral to his writing of an 'historical poetics'<sup>8</sup>. He introduces the concept in 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', which was largely written in the period 1937-38, with a conclusion added in 1973. In the opening paragraphs of the essay Bakhtin makes the point that the way time and space are constructed in the novel is of generic significance for the novel as a whole, and establishes the importance of the concept for our understanding of the image of man. Thereafter he turns his attention to the various major chronotopes of the European novel moving from the Greek Romance of antiquity (the chronotope of 'the adventure novel of ordeals', FTC, p.82), to the works of Apulieus and Petronius (the chronotope of 'the adventure novel of everyday life', FTC, p.111), ancient biography and autobiography (the chronotope of 'an individual who passes through the course of a whole life', FTC, p.130), the Chivalric Romance (the chronotope of 'a miraculous world in adventure time', FTC, p.154), and the Renaissance novels of François Rabelais (which, according to Bakhtin, display 'the completely unrestricted, universal chronotope of human life', FTC, p.242). In his concluding remarks Bakhtin addresses the question of the significance of the chronotope, and suggests that the concept provides a motif for discussing the essential building-blocks of literary narrative. He argues that the constructions of time and space inevitably inform the language we use as well as our understanding of our selves and our relationship with the world around us. Almost any word, action, event or locale will have its own chronotope. Equally, 'each chronotope can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes' (FTC, p.252); whilst the relations between chronotopes are dialogical in nature.

The main body of Bakhtin's chronotope essay provides a literary-historical analysis of certain generic plot-generating motifs fundamental to the development of the European novel. In the course of this analysis Bakhtin establishes a link between the presentation of time-space relations in the literary text and the prevailing world-

---

<sup>8</sup> In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson suggest that 'the discourse and chronotope theories of the novel are two aspects of the same theory. The form-shaping ideology of the novel includes both a view of languages of heteroglossia and a way of understanding time and space' (p.372). In *Dialogism*, Holquist confirms the connection between the chronotope and Bakhtin's 'historical poetics' (pp.107-148)

view of the time. Commenting upon the late-Medieval vision of Dante, for example, Bakhtin argues that the central structural tensions of *The Divine Comedy* are indicative of the work's chronotopic location, situated as it is on the boundary between the Medieval and Renaissance worlds. 'What is remarkable in these works', Bakhtin notes, 'is the fact that- ...- there lies at their heart an acute feeling for the epoch's contradictions, long overripe; this is, in essence, a feeling for the end of an epoch' (FTC, p.156). In Bakhtin's opinion *The Divine Comedy* is built upon a tension between an other-worldly, vertical axis and a concrete historical, horizontal axis. In contrast, he sees a return to a unified and material whole in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which is displayed in 'the extraordinary *spatial and temporal expanses* that leap at us from the pages of Rabelais' novel' (FTC, p.167). The shift from the Medieval to the Renaissance world-view necessitated a shift in the temporal and spatial understanding of the world, and therefore required a new chronotope. The impact of this new way of seeing the world is hinted at in Bakhtin's observation that:

a restoration of the spatial and temporal material wholeness of the world ... paved the way for the novel's appropriation of that world, a world in which simultaneously America was being discovered, a sea route to India was being opened up, [and] new fields in mathematics and science were being established. (FTC, p.166)

On one level, this establishes a nexus between developments in the novel and developments in man's knowledge and understanding of himself and his place in the world, reflected in the geographic and scientific discoveries mentioned. On another level, it also suggests the importance of seeing Bakhtin's concept both on the small scale as a way of understanding individual literary texts and on the large scale as an indicator of its times. As Michael Holquist puts it, the chronotope 'must be treated bi-focally ... invoking it in any particular case, one must be careful to discriminate between its use as a lens for close up work and its ability to serve as an optic for seeing at a distance' (Holquist, *Dialogism*, p.113). In connection to Harris' fiction this underlines the importance of identifying the major chronotopes of *The Guyana Quartet*, such as the chronotope of the threshold; whilst at the same time placing Harris' work within the wider contexts of the key literary and historical concerns of the period. Written in the late-1950's and early-1960's the four novels of *The Guyana Quartet* were written at the heart of a post-war 'boom' in Anglophone Caribbean literary production, and published just before Guyana achieved political independence on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1966. Recognising the significance of the latter, Robert

Carr reads the sequence as ‘an opus of Guyanese territorialisation’, and notes too that the final part (i.e. *The Secret Ladder*) ‘closes on the eve of Guyana’s independence and Co-operative Socialism’<sup>9</sup>. This suggests that like Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, Harris’ trilogy was also written on the boundary between two worlds; that is to say, it emerges at the moment when the Caribbean is beginning to move from a colonial to a post-colonial framework. It therefore places Harris’ text firmly within the complex socio-political context of the period, and suggests too an analogy between formal and thematic freedom and the desire for greater personal and political independence for the peoples of Guyana.

In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe the concept of place in post-colonial societies as ‘a complex interaction of language, history and environment... characterised firstly by a sense of displacement ... and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place’ (p.391). In *The Guyana Quartet* Harris records this split sense of displacement and investment, and replaces all absolute claims to ownership of the land with a notion of living interaction between man and landscape. Before he took up writing for a career, Harris worked as a land-surveyor for the Guyanese government in the 1940’s and early 1950’s, and made a number of expeditions into the interior of the country<sup>10</sup>. In his novels this expeditionary impulse reveals an inherent uncertainty

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert Carr, ‘The New Man in the Jungle: Chaos, Community and the Margins of the Nation State’, *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 136. Carr’s politicised reading of *The Guyana Quartet*, and *The Secret Ladder* in particular, establishes a number of interesting aspects of the text as an exercise in nation-building, not the least of which is his emphasis upon the importance of the jungle metaphor. Carr notes that ‘Harris’ *Guyana Quartet* seeks to decipher the history of social relations, of national and nationalist identities, of labor relations, and the constitution of men and national administration from the locus of the micrological spheres of the jungle zone into which the universe has collapsed’ (134). He reads the metaphor of the jungle as ‘that which has always been unyielding to the interests of the colonial state and which the new nation must confront’ (144). His identification of the territorial aspect of Harris’ novels therefore highlights Harris’ complex sense of place, and points to the felt need to establish and maintain an active relationship to the land of his birth.

<sup>10</sup> Harris has commented in a number of interviews and essays upon the significance of this period of work for his writing career. In interview with Michel Fabre, Harris suggests that *Palace of the Peacock* ‘comes out of my first major confrontation with, and immersion in, the heartland of Guyana’ (Fabre, ‘Wilson Harris’, *Kunapipi*, 2 (1) (1980), 100). In his own ‘Adversarial Contexts and Creativity’, Harris begins:

I was profoundly affected as a young man by the primeval rainforest and the savannahs of British Guyana in South America.

I travelled as land surveyor on the coastlands and into the interior for many years and became immersed in the fabric of the place, the waterfalls, the calm but treacherous intervals that lie between the rapids.

The rainforest makes both a subtle and deep impact on one’s consciousness and on dimensions that lie beneath consciousness.

Harris, ‘Adversarial Contexts and Creativity’, *New Left Review*, 154 (1985), 124.

and ambivalence beneath fixed impressions of the land, and an increasing rejection of both temporal and spatial restrictions on the understanding of man's relationship to his surrounding environment. In his essay Bakhtin proposes that 'a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope' (FTC, p.243). In Harris' *Guyana Quartet* the key chronotopic considerations centre on the writing of Guyana as an active, living, symbolic space; a vast, mythic region that provides access to the ancestral history of the nation. Space predominates over time in each novel: 'One of [Harris'] fictions most striking attributes is that it takes place in dislodged space. It is concerned with the recovery of dimensionalities that our received ideas, our conventional reckonings, flatten out or conventionalize', Andrew Bundy remarks by way of introduction in a recent selection of Harris' essays and ideas<sup>11</sup>. Elsewhere, Gareth Griffiths argues that, 'For Harris space 'annihilates' time as it establishes itself as the primary category, the 'womb' of space from which and to which temporal structures and constructions arise and return'<sup>12</sup>, whilst John Hearne comments that the importance of space in *The Guyana Quartet* shows that for Harris '[the] sacramental union of man and landscape remains the lost, or never established factor in our lives' (Hearne, 'The Fugitive in the Forest', p.160).

One of the key themes of *The Guyana Quartet* is the question of each individual's claim on the land. At the start of *Palace of the Peacock* Donne states 'I'm the last landlord ... Every boundary line is a myth. No man's land, understand?', and later adds, 'Rule the land.... while you still have a ghost of a chance. And you rule the world' (GQ, pp.22-23). Such statements mark Donne out as the colonising presence in the novel, a position shared to a greater or lesser extent with Ram and Mohammed in *The Far Journey of Oudin* and Fenwick in *The Secret Ladder*. Each of them is (at least initially) representative of a fixed or singular mode of thought, predominantly characterised by a cruel and harsh materialism. Donne is an archetypal colonial landlord; Ram and Mohammed are both preoccupied by the power of contractual obligation; whilst Fenwick is an ambassador for the modern

---

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Bundy, 'Introduction', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. by Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999), p.13.

<sup>12</sup> Gareth Griffiths, 'Postcolonial Space and Time: Wilson Harris and Caribbean Criticism', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, p.67.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin note too that 'In Harris's formulation, hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite, the 'composite'. It replaces a temporal lineality with a spatial plurality' (pp.35-36).

nation state and its industrial and technological complex. Donne's search for labour is really only a search for land. However, as he moves deeper into the jungle interior his claim to complete possession almost inevitably comes to seem less and less certain. In fact Cameron tells Donne that the mission folk 'is the only people who got the real devil of a title to this land' (GQ, p.41). Similarly, towards the end of *The Secret Ladder* Fenwick himself comes to realise that 'what was at stake [in his battle with Poseidon] was not the inevitable ruin of an old house, but a perception of depth more lasting than time, the moral privilege and right of place' (GQ, p.411). Fenwick's job as surveyor involves him in the measurement of the land and the recording of the river flows, in order to collect data for a major government project. His investigations lead him to discover errors in earlier maps and surveys, which in turn brings him closer and closer to Poseidon and 'the digging up of the buried community he represented whose flight from slavery had ended right here, in the ground, under one's feet' (GQ, p.389). The indications of inconsistencies in his maps lead Fenwick to question the certainty of his surroundings and his beliefs. Earlier, in *Palace of the Peacock*, the dreaming I-narrator reveals the centrality and fragility of maps as a marker of territorial possession, when he states:

The map of the savannahs was a dream. The names Brazil and Guyana were colonial conventions I had known from childhood. I clung to them now as to a curious necessary stone and footing, even in my dream, the ground I knew I must not relinquish. They were an actual stage, a presence, however mythical they seemed to the universal and spiritual eye. They were as close to me as my ribs, the rivers and the flatland, the mountains and heartland I intimately saw. (GQ, p.24)

The narrator's insistence on upholding the 'colonial conventions' in the names of Brazil and Guyana shows a reluctance to wholly discard the vestiges of a period of colonial domination. Yet, his inscription of body to land and land to body reveals what Hena Maes-Jelinek terms, 'the equation between self and space, to be found in all of Harris' fictions'<sup>13</sup>. The map of the savannahs is a dream because it is as yet uncharted, and also because, as Harris suggests, any individual's claim to land exists and survives in the unconscious. The narrator's attachment to the names of 'Brazil

---

<sup>13</sup>Hena Maes-Jelinek, 'Charting the Uncapturable in Wilson Harris' Writing', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 92.

In 'Decolonizing the Map' Graham Huggan argues that within post-colonial literary texts there is a clear 'link between a de/reconstructive reading of maps and the revisioning of the history of European civilization'. Huggan also suggests that this link is most obvious in Wilson Harris' work 'where the map features as a metaphor of the perceptual transformation which allows for the revisioning of

and Guyana' as to his 'ribs, the rivers and the flatland, the mountain and the heartland' illustrates one of the paradoxes of identity writ large upon the Caribbean body.

In 'A Note on the Genesis of *The Guyana Quartet*' Harris suggests that one may perhaps respond to a detailed map of Guyana as 'a great magical web born of the music of the elements'<sup>14</sup>. What this suggests is a vision of the landscape as a creative, living organism, a combination of the natural and the supernatural, a vision of the land as a plural space and a signifier of a shifting temporality. In *The Secret Ladder* the narrator reveals that Fenwick 'liked to think of all the rivers of Guyana as the curious rungs in a ladder on which one sets one's musing foot again and again, to climb into both the past and the future of the continent of mystery' (GQ, p.367). This conflates spatial movement with temporal movement, and suggests too the sense of the landscape of Guyana as a scale or gauge against which consciousness is measured. *The Secret Ladder* is set on the River Canje in the interior of Guyana, which is presented as a space of myth and metaphor as well as a space of fragile human existence:

The Canje was one of the lowest rungs in the ladder of ascending purgatorial rivers, the blackest river one could imagine. Every tributary had buried its grassy head in a grave of wilderness, green as diabolic flame, with a high waving colour of fresh seeming youth belonging nevertheless to the darkest fluid of the river's age. No one lived upon, or cultivated, the Canje swamps and savannahs. On higher land where the water still appeared to possess the actual banks and definition of a river, the inhabitants wrestled with themselves to make a living within their uncertain ground which was continuously threatened by an erosive design eating slowly across the river's catchment. (GQ, pp.367-368)

The opening sentence places the river firmly in the field of the imaginary (as 'the blackest river one could imagine'), and also connects the Canje to the myth of Jacob's ladder and to the Dantesque vision of a world divided between Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise. The Guyanese landscape is associated with Purgatory perhaps because it is an in-between space in which, Harris suggests, man's repentance offers the possibility of salvation and communion in heaven. The idea of in-betweenness is further suggested in the second sentence, as images of death and diabolism are set alongside and against those of freshness and youth, hinting at the flicker of light

---

Caribbean cultural history in terms other than those of catastrophe or complex' (Huggan, 'Decolonizing the Map', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p.407).

contained within the darkness of the jungle. In the final sentences the narrator brings the contradictions of space closer to the concrete lives of the local people, first indicating the inhospitable nature of the swamps and savannahs, before then also suggesting the fragile existence of those who remain to eke out a living at the water's edge. This shows the Canje to be a space of shifting symbols and multiple temporalities, a space of dark secrets and live presences. In support of this, it is later revealed that the overarching structure of *The Secret Ladder* is at once linear and multi-linear, as the present reality of the text is consistently opened up to hidden aspects of the past:

Seven days it had taken to finish the original veil of creation that shaped and ordered all things to be solid in the beginning. So the oldest fable ran. Perhaps seven, too, were needed to strip and subtilize everything. Seven days which would run in logical succession in time but nevertheless would be appointed or chosen from the manuscript of all the spiritual seasons that had ever been. Each choice- drawn from its claustrophobic epoch- would be a sovereign representative of its age, and all would be strung together like a new immaterial genesis and condition. (GQ, p.417)

Echoing the seven days of Biblical 'Creation', the narrative of *The Secret Ladder* also takes place over a period of seven days. However, this passage makes clear how the novel incorporates a simultaneous movement backward and forward in time, and how it encapsulates a process of reverse-creation, a period when all conceptions and assumptions can be broken down into fragments in order to be re-built again later. Each day in the narrative sequence signifies a different age and has a different symbolic meaning. In addition, each moment forms part of a new vision of reality, 'a new immaterial genesis and condition'. This double, shifting sense of time is mirrored in each of the other novels of *The Guyana Quartet*. In *Palace of the Peacock*, *The Far Journey of Oudin*, and *The Whole Armour* the same open, multiple perspective operates in and around a linear time associated with a dominant, fixed colonial reality. In each novel this other temporality works to reveal another way of seeing the world.

Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is a valuable metaphor for the representation of reality in literature, and a useful term for the organisation and arrangement of time and space within the literary text. In his essay Bakhtin argues that in the chronotope, 'Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes

---

<sup>14</sup> Harris, 'A Note on the Genesis of *The Guyana Quartet*', GQ, p.7.

artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (FTC, p.84). This highlights the importance of the chronotope as a way of *seeing* time and space. It also suggests that chronotopes are perhaps best *seen* in and through the characters of the novel; for it is in and through the author's presentation of active, speaking persons that the time and space of the novel actually 'takes on flesh'<sup>15</sup>. Drawing attention to the representational importance of the chronotope, Bakhtin claims that 'The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic' (FTC, p.85). In *The Guyana Quartet*, Harris presents an image of Caribbean man as a partial and plural being, further reflecting the image of Guyana as a plural space of radical and multiple potentialities. Beginning with a partial, fractured notion of identity Harris opens individual identities up to other consciousnesses and cultures, and thus makes real the possibility for cultural transformation and renewal. In each of the four novels there are a number of characters- such as Carroll and Oudin- with uncertain or unknown beginnings, whose ancestral ambiguity points to the problematic nature of identity. Though accepted as true, Carroll's name is revealed to have been made up by his mother in order to protect him from his past (GQ, pp.68-69); whilst neither Ram nor Mohammed knows who or what Oudin is, or indeed where he comes from (GQ, pp.141-149). Harris suggests that it is a fatal mistake to believe in a fixed notion of one's origins. Instead, it is necessary to accept a certain partiality, and to recognise that there are aspects of one's identity that one cannot completely know. Just as environment and landscape in the sequence contain aspects of other realms, so too identity and ancestral inheritance are each shown to be subject to gaps and contradictions. The acknowledgement of one's partiality is at once a cause of vulnerability and a potential source of strength. On the one hand, it reveals a void or lack at the heart of one's identity. On the other, it makes plain that it is from this space of absence or loss that any process of restoration or transformation must begin.

No identity is sovereign in Harris' fictions. Rather, all of his characters interpenetrate with each other on a symbolic and psychical level, and they are bound together through a shared history. Those with mixed parentage-such as Cameron,

---

<sup>15</sup> Commenting upon this aspect of Bakhtin's essay, Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist suggest that 'Time assuming flesh is something more than a trope here, for those who en flesh categories are people. It is precisely the differing ways people are represented that determine the differences between chronotopes' (Clark & Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p.280).

Schomburgh, Magda and Fenwick- contain within themselves the question of racial and cultural intermixture that the whole community must address. Similarly, the crews assembled by Donne and Fenwick act as a microcosm of the national identity. Both crews contain characters of variously intermixed Indian, African, Asian, European (British, German, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese) and Amerindian extraction. This reflects the legacy of a history of colonialism in the region, and ties the surviving fragments of the colonial period to those from a pre-colonial age. It also establishes the connections that bind the key ethnic and racial constituencies of the nation together. In relation to *The Secret Ladder*, Jean Pierre Durix notes that via the motif of the crew 'Harris suggests that any solution to the history of ethnic oppression which has plagued the Caribbean for centuries cannot lie in one group ignoring the needs of others'<sup>16</sup>. In *Palace of the Peacock*, the importance of the crew as a collective body is made clear with the suggestion that, 'The whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were' (GQ, p.39). This highlights the symbolic status of the group and hints at their shared origins or common ancestry. The paradoxical combination of images of death and (re)birth suggests that the crew encapsulate a memorial to the past and a vision of the future, and implies that they exist on the boundary between conscious and unconscious life. Donne's crew is both alive and dead, and exactly resembles another crew that had perished on a previous journey into the Guyana's interior (GQ, p.37). In this sense, each member of Donne's crew is a double, an embodiment of a life repeated from generation to generation. In the *Quartet* as a whole, the mirroring of characters serves to question a fixed or singular notion of identity, and instead suggests a certain duality or cyclicity. In *Palace of the Peacock* Donne's crew represent the possibility of change and transformation as well as the sense of a communal want, as the narrator reflects, 'They had all come to me at last in a flash to fulfil one self-same early desire and need in all of us' (GQ, p.27). Elsewhere, Kaiser's death acts as a warning to Mohammed in *The Far Journey of Oudin*; Magda provides a vision of Sharon's future self in *The Whole Armour*; whilst the attack on Chiung alerts Fenwick to the vulnerability of his position in *The Secret Ladder*. Doubles operate in the *Quartet* as windows to another aspect of one's own character, as bearers of an alternative vision.

---

<sup>16</sup> Jean Pierre Durix, 'Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris' *The Secret Ladder*', *ARIEL*, 15 (2) (1984), 29.

In addition, each novel is structured around the relations between what might be termed 'adversarial twins'- such as Donne and the I-narrator, or Fenwick and Poseidon- who, according to Harris, 'become psychically supportive one of the other in trials of the imagination'<sup>17</sup>.

The relationship between Fenwick and Poseidon is central in *The Secret Ladder*. When the two figures meet for the first time, Fenwick soon accepts that 'he could no longer evade a reality that had always escaped him' (GQ, 370). Thereafter, Poseidon becomes 'hooked and nailed to a secret ladder of conscience' (GQ, p.371), indicating his importance for Fenwick as an other-consciousness. In *Palace of the Peacock* the close relationship and mutual dependence of Donne and the dreaming I-narrator is suggested from the outset, especially in terms of their shared vision. The novel opens with a dream in which the dreamer's blindness is compensated for by Donne's ability to see. When the dreamer dreams he awakes, he does so as though with 'one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye' (GQ, p.19), and when he first announces the reasons for his blindness he tells Donne how in his dream, 'your vision becomes the only remaining window on the world for me' (GQ, p.22). Donne and the dreaming I-narrator are twin aspects of the same partial and plural identity: one representative of an outer, material life and the other signifier of an inner, spiritual idealism<sup>18</sup>. When the dreamer first recognises himself in Donne he remarks, 'I saw him now for the first faceless time as the captain and unnatural soul of heaven's dream'; and indicates how each functions as an other for his opposite: 'he was myself standing outside of me while I stood inside of him' (GQ, p.26). This sense of complementary opposition implies that the voice of the I-narrator is the voice of Donne's inner conscience, and the voice of Donne's hidden past. It might be argued that the dreamer's blindness signifies the void at the heart of Donne's identity. It is only once Donne recognises his own blindness and hence his own otherness that he is able to transform his beginnings and return to the folk. It is notable too that after gradually disappearing into the background of the text during

---

<sup>17</sup> Harris, 'New Preface to *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p.56. Harris' interest in ideas of twinship is explored further in his essay on Jungian psychology entitled, 'Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins', an extract of which also appears in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, pp.58-66.

<sup>18</sup> The division between materialism and idealism in *Palace of the Peacock* is suggested by Fernanda Steele, who argues that 'The novel tells of a search, of a journey where two forces confront each other: a cruel materialism and an idealism in search of a spiritual community, represented by Donne and "I" respectively' (Steele, 'Breaking Down Barriers as Genesis of a New Beginning in Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 64).

the journey into the interior, the narratorial voice of the dreamer reasserts itself once Donne encounters 'the endless void of himself' and prepares to enter the Palace of the Peacock (GQ, p.108). At the climax of the novel, this suggests the coming together of the outer and inner aspects of Donne's personality in 'the inseparable moment of all fulfilment and understanding' (GQ, p.116), and thus reiterates the alchemical vision of the narrative<sup>19</sup>.

The complex relations between characters in *The Guyana Quartet* provide the basis of Harris' cross-cultural vision. However, the main focus of each narrative is a journey inwards, a movement into the dark interior of the jungle landscape and into the interior of the Caribbean mindscape. The motif of the journey has clear chronotopic connotations and associations, which are perhaps best seen in the chronotope of the road. Replace road for river in *Palace of the Peacock* and Harris' novel may be interpreted as a novel of serial but random encounters joined together to encompass a journey through life. As Bakhtin makes clear in his essay, the road is a paradigmatic space of arrivals and departures, in which events find their meaning and along which people from a variety of racial, social and cultural backgrounds are brought together. 'On the road the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people- ... - intersect at one spatial and temporal point' (FTC, p.243), Bakhtin writes, hinting at the possibilities for interaction that the road offers. Such encounters are necessarily integral to the development of an individual character, whilst the journey along the road is richly metaphorical of his or her journey through life, as it provides the setting for a process of discovery and development. In the course of his discussion Bakhtin highlights the importance that the road has played in the history of the novel, from 'the ancient everyday novel of wandering' through to the

---

<sup>19</sup> The notion of alchemy directly relates to the ideas of change and transformation that are integral to Harris' fiction. A number of critics have drawn attention to Harris' interest in the Renaissance practices of alchemy and the 'arts of memory', and suggested that this provides another way of thinking about his work. Speculating upon questions of style, Paul Sharrad argues that alchemy 'becomes Harris' tool with which to construct the past in order to imagine a post-colonial, post-technological, post-nuclear Renaissance man' (Sharrad, 'The Art of Memory and the Liberation of History: Wilson Harris' Witnessing of Time', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 100). Commenting more specifically on Harris' use of adversarial doubles, Andrew Bundy connects Harris' construction of self to the practice of alchemy, where 'the known self occupies an intermediate position between chaos and creation, like the soul placed between two symmetries' (Bundy, 'Preface: Cross-Cultural Community and the Womb of Space', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p.73). Harris himself repeatedly refers to the work of Renaissance scholar Frances Yates, and especially her book *The Arts of Memory*, which attempts to uncover scattered elements of those lost traditions that have informed the work of the great writers of Western literature (Harris, 'Literacy and the Imagination- A Talk', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p.76).

historical novels of Zagoskin, Gogol and Nekrasov (FTC, pp.244-245). In a similar vein, it is possible to suggest that the idea of the interior journey figures large in the life of the novel as a genre, and that Harris' adoption of this key motif draws upon an already established tradition within the English literary canon. Milton's *Paradise Lost* arguably provides the paradigmatic passages to describe Western European epic's shift from the material to the inner eye; whilst Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and of course Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* each present journeys to the interior that are simultaneously psychical and physical. Written in 1899, Conrad's novella has perhaps the clearest influence on Harris' work, offering as it does a template for the symbolic quest for knowledge of that which is both within and beyond, and situated as it is on the boundary between a colonial and post-colonial impression of the world. In *Heart of Darkness* the journey into the interior leads back to a primordial world governed by a mysterious almost invisible presence. More than just a tale of African adventure, the journey inland assumes a mythical and symbolic aspect. Movements in time and space correspond to stages in Marlow's psychical development, whilst his descent into the depths of the earth bears a moral and spiritual weight, as the idea of the colonial endeavour comes up against an all-encompassing darkness and doubt. Conrad's description of the journey inland creates an impression of Marlow gradually entering a space where he is asked to confront his own sense of values, where the Old and the New World meet in a moment of contradiction. Losing his way along the river he senses himself 'cut off for ever from everything I had known once- somewhere- far away- in another existence perhaps', and finds himself enveloped by an impenetrable silence and stillness<sup>20</sup>. When he meets Kurtz, Marlow encounters a figure whose origins are European, yet whose life has moved beyond the threshold of 'civilisation'. Kurtz is too ill or mad to explain the secrets of the jungle or the meaning of the darkness. He can only express the fear of his own self-knowledge in a cry of 'The horror! The horror!' (p.111), which is illuminating and incomprehensible in equal parts, as much a comment on the Western desire for truth as it is on the failure of the colonial endeavour in Africa.

The link between Conrad's novella and Harris' *Guyana Quartet* is perhaps best indicated in an essay Harris wrote in response to a reading of Conrad's text by the African novelist Chinua Achebe. As a canonical text centred on the themes and

---

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), p.66.

symbols of colonialism *Heart of Darkness* has an ambivalent position within post-colonial literary debates. In 'An Image of Africa' Achebe famously attacks Conrad for his portrayal of Africa and Africans, and even accuses him of being 'a bloody racist'<sup>21</sup>. Harris is sympathetic to Achebe's position, especially his uneasiness at the racism that arguably supports some aspects of the text. However, he is also convinced that Achebe's judgement is in some ways wrong, in that it fails to take account of the ambivalence of Conrad's text, and merely replaces one binary opposition with another. This belief rests on the perception of a hidden potential within *Heart of Darkness* to break from conventional reality and distort those biases that govern the Western understanding of the world. Harris reads *Heart of Darkness* as a 'frontier novel', by which he means that 'it stands upon a threshold of capacity to which Conrad pointed though he never attained that capacity himself'<sup>22</sup>. He thus sees Conrad's novella as a potentially plural text, whose movement towards heterogeneity is eventually frustrated by the form of the novel Conrad inherited, which followed a logic of cultural symmetry already well established in the English novel of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. In Harris' terms Conrad's novella draws back from the intuitive insights it still gestures toward. It is though possible to suggest that the cross-cultural vision of Harris' own work emerges from this understanding of Conrad's faltering enunciation of the colonial exchange. Indeed, Harris himself describes the movement towards heterogeneity in his early novels as a sense of being involved in 'a deepening cycle of exploration ... consistent with a theory of implosion', that is to say: 'an attempt to define a deeper participation in themes of responsibility through a diversity of associations, however perilous, rather than through an apparent unity that conforms and remains static in the end'<sup>23</sup>. The idea of a 'theory of implosion' describes the inward movement of each of the novels in *The Guyana Quartet*. The implication of a world collapsing in on itself also

---

<sup>21</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, 9 (1) (1978), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, 'The Frontier on which *Heart of Darkness* Stands', *Research in African Literatures*, 12 (1) (1981), 87.

Helen Tiffin comments upon the divergent readings of Conrad's text by Achebe and Harris in her essay, 'Retrace My Steps: *Heartland*, *Heart of Darkness* and Post-colonial Counter-Discourse', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, pp.127-139. It is perhaps also worth noting that in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said offers a reading of *Heart of Darkness* that is strikingly similar to that proposed by Harris. Said argues that Conrad's text essentially presents two visions at the same time; one the conventional narrative of empire, and the other an ironized version of this that draws attention to the artificial construction of the imperial reality. He suggests that 'with Conrad we are in a world being made and unmade more or less all the time', (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.33).

suggests Harris' apparent unhappiness with the concept of realism in the Caribbean context, which in part explains his attempt to transform the nature of the West Indian novel as it was largely being written in the 1950's and early 1960's. In one of his most important essays, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', Harris speaks of his distaste for the novel of 'consolidation', that is the kind of realist novel which seeks to persuade its readers with an accumulation of facts, and instead declares his preference for the novel of 'fulfilment', which takes account of a 'native tradition of depth'<sup>24</sup>. The latter is more appropriate to the situation in the Caribbean because, as Harris sees it, both identity and environment are made up of living and overlapping languages, histories and cultures which inevitably produce ambivalence and division but which also contain the seeds of their own recovery and renewal. 'What in my view is most remarkable about the West Indian in depth', Harris writes, 'is a sense of subtle links, the series of subtle and nebulous links which are latent within him, the latent ground of old and new personalities' (Harris, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', p.28). What Harris perhaps means by this is that Caribbean identity is both the product of a complicated historical past and the bearer of an as yet unrealised future: a future that depends upon the acceptance of an inevitable cross-culturality.

In 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' Harris argues that the logic behind the novel of 'fulfilment' leads inexorably to the destruction of cultural convention (or what he terms 'the monument of consolidation') and 'becomes the need for a vision of consciousness' (p.32). For Harris 'this vision of consciousness is the peculiar reality of language', and in the *Quartet* it is language which is key to establishing the cross-cultural imagination. It is the language of the text that is always on the threshold, situated in that space between the known and the unknown world and always on the verge of becoming other than what it appears to mean. Commenting upon the linguistic fabric of *Palace of the Peacock*, for example, Mark Kinkead-Weekes suggests that 'Characters, setting and story are dissolved in a seven-day decreation by an extraordinary baffling language, whose central habit is to yoke contradictions, suggesting that one thing is also another, or its opposite'<sup>25</sup>. Echoing

---

<sup>23</sup> Wilson Harris, 'Note', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon, 1967), p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society*, pp.28-30.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'Bone Flute or House of Fiction: The Contrary Imaginations of Wilson Harris and V.S. Naipaul', in *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, ed. by Douglas Jefferson & Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), p.141.

this assertion, Michael Gilkes identifies a 'simultaneous contracting and expanding effect of the writing' in the opening novel of the sequence, and suggests that this is fundamental to the presentation of a society which is rooted in reality and fantasy at one and the same time (Gilkes, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel*, pp.26-27). Descriptions of environment and locale within the novel bear the marks of ordinary daily life, yet beneath the surface appearance of both is another reality alive with the signs of past and future meanings, as well as the surviving fragments of lost or partial cultures and traditions. This double perspective has a defamiliarising effect on the representation of Guyana, which becomes an inner zone of the narrator's psyche as well as a physical space of rivers, forests and scattered settlements. It also suggests that the world the characters move within can only ever be half-known, whilst beyond that is another world that has a hidden but enduring effect on their lives.

The opening paragraphs of *Palace of the Peacock* set the linguistic tone for much that will follow, and demonstrate how language is used to convey a sense of reality being stretched to reveal the uncertainties and partialities of life in the Caribbean. Here Harris presents the archetypal dream-work of the novel, and implicitly establishes the relationship between Donne and the Dreamer-narrator as the central concern of the text:

A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and yet far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil's smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle on to the ground.

The shot had pulled me up and stifled my own heart in heaven. I started walking suddenly and approached the man on the ground. His hair lay on his forehead. Someone was watching us from the trees and bushes that clustered the side of the road. Watching me as I bent down and looked at the man whose open eyes stared at the sky through his long hanging hair. The sun blinded and ruled my living sight but the dead man's eye remained open and obstinate and clear. (GQ, p.19)

The principle effect of this passage is to disarm the reader at the outset of the novel. The environmental fabric is literally 'stretched and torn', and this 'contracting and expanding effect' is mirrored in the language of the piece. The second sentence records the act of a shot being fired and the reverberating impact this has on the environment. The language underwrites a sense of contrast and disjunction, as the short first clause of the sentence is followed by a longer second clause in which the

words run on effortlessly filling the moment. The effect of the shot is to initiate a reverberation of key images across each of the paragraphs as well as throughout the text. When the horseman first appears on the road, he does so 'at a breakneck stride'. After the shot rings out, this finds its echo in a horse fiendishly 'snapping at the reins', and the vision of the horseman as a 'hanging man' facing his executioner. The two paragraphs also appear to echo each other in intricate and crucial ways. Whilst in the opening paragraph the horseman stiffens as the shot hits him, in the second paragraph it is as if the dreamer feels the true impact of the shot which pulls him up and stifles his own heart. The image of the hanging man appears repeatedly in *Palace of the Peacock*. With each recurring reference the image slightly shifts in meaning. Towards the conclusion of the novel the noose even appears to support Donne ('He slipped and gasped on the misty step and a noose fell around his neck from which he dangled until- after an eternity- he had regained a breathless footing', GQ, p.101). Thus, what begins as an image of death undergoes a series of transformations during the novel until it finally becomes an image of life and sustaining possibility<sup>26</sup>. Perhaps with this in mind, Gregory Shaw argues that 'the Harrisian word, the Harrisian image, tend to possess a peculiarly dialectical quality of negating themselves' (Shaw, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', 153). Shaw speaks of this 'dialectical' process as a hollowing out or emptying of meaning in the *Quartet* until 'we are left with an uneasy space: a slippery, formless nothingness, or at most an intangible something' (Shaw, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', 124). However, this suggests that the earlier or original meanings of words and images are lost in the process of dialectical contradiction, and that no material meaning is left from the interaction of various languages. Instead, perhaps it would be more accurate to suggest that both the Harrisian word and Harrisian image tend to possess a peculiarly dialogical quality, in which meaning arises out of a living fabric

---

<sup>26</sup> Commenting upon the noose image in *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris notes: 'That noose helps to give different visualisations of context. It may seem simple now to look back on it, where the noose that appears is just the noose that hangs a man, and then you have the noose that is a kind of constellation or lightning belt in the sky, and this bears upon theories of hubris in Donne. And then in the end you have Donne sustained by the noose which should strangle him, and that is when you get a link between the inferno and the paradiso because he is in a position then to see the hell on earth that he has helped to create. So you don't get a totalizing of the noose'. (Vera Kutzinski, 'The Composition of Reality: A Talk with Wilson Harris', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 23)

of texts, contexts and intertexts, always conscious of another's discourse and thus always seeking the response of another's word<sup>27</sup>.

Harris' further description of 'the peculiar reality of language' in 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel' is also instructive of the way in which language functions in the *Quartet* as a metaphor of transformation. In his essay Harris writes 'the peculiar reality of language provides a medium to *see* in consciousness the 'true' motion and to *hear* with consciousness the 'silent' flood of sound by a continuous inward revisionary and momentous logic of potent explosive images evoked in the mind' (p.32). In the *Quartet* Harris moves from the linguistic to the visual and musical in order to establish and underwrite the need for an awakening of consciousness. Windows provide the focus for the visual in *Palace of the Peacock*. The novel opens with Donne and the I-narrator looking out of the window of their home together (GQ, p.20). In the conclusion, the notion of the window is presented as a frame for Donne's vision and an opening into consciousness, as Harris 'spatializes what we expect to be narrativised temporally and lends a ritual connection to the space set in view'<sup>28</sup>. This occurs from the climactic moment in which Donne appears to be supported by a noose, positioned on the threshold between this world and the next. As he climbs the ladder up the cliff of consciousness, Donne looks into a series of 'iconic landscapes' which respectively reveal a young carpenter in a room, an animal bounding towards him and a woman standing with a young child. 'In such crucial episodes', Jean Pierre Durix notes, 'the eye contemplates scenes which wrench the protagonist from the blindness which normally limits his perception. The window assumes the same function as the frame

---

<sup>27</sup> In 'Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins', Harris provides an apposite explanation of the phrase 'live fossil nursery of language' which appears in *Jonestown*:

'Live' refers to a living language, 'fossil' bears on the great age of the language, 'Live and 'fossil' therefore seem antagonistic in that the living language is susceptible to new roots interwoven with old, fossil roots. That interweaving seems to reflect a tension and rivalry of forms. But 'nursery' implies trials of the imagination in which 'old' and 'new' become *psychically* supportive one of the other in the music of the senses.' ('Merlin and Parsifal' in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p.65.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Lou Emery, 'Limbo Rock: Wilson Harris and the Arts of Memory', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 111. In a more recent essay which concentrates on Harris' later fiction Emery suggests that the movement from the verbal to the visual in Harris' writing produces an effect where the visual almost becomes the verbal and space appears to sound. Emery writes: 'The dynamics of visual creativity figured in Harris's novels engage a conversion of verbal art into visual art, an apparent crossing from the sign system of words to that of visual images. Drawn into this illusionary transfiguration, we see vision itself refigured through and beyond the "imperial eye" of conquest, extending the senses and body of the text-reader relation in a dialogue of and about creation where "space sounds"' (Emery, 'Space Sounds in Wilson Harris's Recent Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 98).

round a picture: it encloses and focuses vision which is then invited to reach beyond appearances' (Durix, 'Paradoxes of Creation', 33). As Donne and other members of the crew enter the Palace of the Peacock in the concluding chapters of the novel it is the musical which supersedes the visual. Carroll's whistling becomes a further opening into consciousness- an opening into another world or window of reality. Donne and Schomburgh find themselves 'transported beyond the memory of words', whilst Wishrop is drawn 'out of his mystical conceit' and discovers that 'the wall that had divided him from his true otherness and possession was a web of dreams' (GQ, p.114). The effect of Carroll's voice is to provide a moment of balance and clarity, which draws the crew together. Commenting upon this aspect of the text Russell McDougall argues that 'sound becomes the means of breaching partial barriers of reality which masquerade as the absolute'<sup>29</sup>. For Wishrop, Carroll's singing provides a bridge to overcome the forces of division that have troubled his identity: 'it was a prodigal web and ladder [Carroll] held out to him that he climbed again and again in the world's longing voice and soul with his muted steps and stops' (GQ, pp.114-115). Amongst the characters of the novel, it is Wishrop who is most closely associated with the spider-imagery of Anancy, the folk figure of cunning, trickery and transformation, also described as 'the god of the threshold'<sup>30</sup>. When Wishrop falls out of the boat during the voyage up river, the whole crew becomes suddenly transfixed by the image of the spider. The boat itself seems to be possessed by Wishrop's memory and 'driven by the naked spider of spirit' (GQ, p.81). Vigilance then catches sight of a 'spidery skeleton crawling to the sky' (GQ, p.82). Donne too senses 'the traumatic spider of the sun [crawl] up and down his arms and his neck and [puncture] his side of rock' (GQ, p.83). In the midst of this experience the spider-spirit represents the possibility of transformation and release, and prefigures the movement to the creative imagination in the closing section of the novel<sup>31</sup>. It is important that Wishrop re-emerges to stand alongside Donne, Carroll and the other members of the crew in the Palace of the Peacock.

---

<sup>29</sup> Russell McDougall, 'Corporeal Music: The Scale of Myth and Adjectival Insistence in *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, p.98.

In 'The Music of Living Landscapes' Harris asks: 'Is there a language akin to music threaded in space and time which is prior to human discourse?' (Harris, 'The Music of Living Landscapes', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, p.40).

<sup>30</sup> Joyce Jonas, 'Wilson Harris and the Concept of Threshold Art', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 1 (2) (1987), 30.

<sup>31</sup> As with Brathwaite's reference to Anancy in *The Arrivants*, much can be made of Harris' use of spider-imagery in *The Guyana Quartet*. On the one hand, it is notable that Harris refers to the map of

In Harris' *Guyana Quartet*, the motif of the threshold relates to the series of boundaries that are crossed between different times and spaces, as well as to that in-between space in which all of Harris' crisis-ridden characters play out their interconnected lives. At least on one level, the idea of the 'threshold' provides signposts to the various stages of the interior journey, or marks on the map of the text. At the start of the journey in *Palace of the Peacock*, for example, the dreaming-narrator sees 'the dense dreaming jungle and forest' ahead and speaks for the whole crew when he says, 'we stood on the threshold of a precarious standstill' (GQ, p.24); the contradiction between movement and stasis indicating the tension between the need to move on and the fear of what lies ahead. Later he repeats, 'We stood on the threshold of the known world, and on the self-same threshold of the unknown' (GQ, p.75), this time indicating their passage into the uncharted depths of both inner and outer experience, and in the process highlighting the multiple meanings of the threshold within the text. In 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' Bakhtin describes the chronotope of the threshold as 'the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in life' (FTC, p.248). The word 'threshold' has both a literal and metaphorical meaning. It refers to the space between inner and outer worlds, the place between the edge of safety and the starting-point of a new experience or adventure. It is also 'connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold)' (ibid.). In his description of the threshold as a generic, plot-generating motif Bakhtin illustrates his argument with reference to Dostoevsky, in whose work key narrative events take place on staircases, in corridors, on streets and in squares. In these spaces events occur and decisions are made (or not made) that have a determining effect on the lives of those in the novels. Such spaces are also characterised by a particular notion of time. 'In this chronotope, time is essentially

---

Guyana as a 'great magical web born of the music of the elements', and therefore implies that the landscape itself is instilled with a spirit of transformation. On the other hand, it is possible to suggest (as Gregory Shaw does) that 'the spider/trickster can stand as an heraldic emblem for Harris' subversive assault on conventional form, conventional persona and conventional storyline' (Shaw, 'Wilson Harris' *Metamorphoses: Animal and Vegetable Masks in Palace of the Peacock*, *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 161). Interestingly, in 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', Harris speaks of the Anancy myth as a gateway myth, which is re-enacted in the popular Carnival practice of the limbo dance. For Harris, the limbo dancer's slow movement under a bar that is lowered recalls the experience of those who made their voyage to the Caribbean as part of the Middle Passage in the cramped conditions of the slave ships. As the dancer passes under the bar he or she passes like a spider through a gateway into another world. The limbo dance therefore recalls the tragic events of the Caribbean past at the same time as it initiates a movement towards the future.

instantaneous', Bakhtin writes, 'it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal sense of biographical time' (ibid.), suggesting the simultaneity, openness and ambiguity that is central to Dostoevsky's 'carnavalesque' fiction. Dostoevsky's use of the chronotope of the threshold is an integral aspect of his vision of the world, and particularly central to the polyphonic representation of a variety of fully independent voices and characters in his novels. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin argues that in *Crime and Punishment* 'the threshold and its substitutes are the fundamental "points" of action in the novel' (PDP, p.170). This means that the space and time of the threshold is indicative of the psychological turmoil of Raskolnikov, the central character of the novel; and also representative of a world in which nothing is fixed or certain, a world in which 'everything is shown in a moment of unfinalized transition' (PDP, p.167). Raskolnikov's life is played out in a series of threshold spaces. This sets the tone for the rest of the novel, where everything 'is pushed to its boundaries' or 'on the borderline' (ibid.), moving towards its opposite and conscious of its essential otherness. The setting of *Crime and Punishment* (St Petersburg) shifts back and forth between reality and fantasy until the city itself seems to disappear. Similarly, the characters of the novel reveal their inherent indeterminacy in their language and dreams, as the crises of their daily lives are a heightened product of their involvement in the unfinalizable dialogue of life.

For the most part, the threshold spaces in Dostoevsky's novels are the public spaces of an urban, metropolitan environment. In Harris' *Guyana Quartet* the interior landscape figures as the predominant space of the threshold experience, that in-between space that reveals another way of seeing the world. In one sense the jungle and forest landscape of Guyana is a void space. It is a dark impenetrable mass of trees connected by a web of rivers, which stands as a symbol of an unknown and forgotten past. However, as Harris shows, it is also a gateway to another world, alive with hidden or forgotten languages, traditions and cultures. Key narrative events take place in the interior landscapes of Harris' novels. In *Palace of the Peacock* the journey through the jungle leads to Donne's reconnection with the ancient Amerindian folk; and in *The Far Journey of Oudin* Oudin and Beti find sanctuary in the savannah. Similarly, in *The Whole Armour* Cristo is saved by what appear to be a lost tribe of Arawaks as he moves inland; whilst, in *The Secret Ladder* Fenwick's movement along the Canje brings him ever closer to his confrontation with Poseidon.

Commenting upon the significance of this threshold space, Maes-Jelinek notes that in each novel, 'the forest plays its formative role', as 'the theatre of an ordeal, the setting which stimulates their dreams and provokes their fears and uncertainties'<sup>32</sup>. As Oudin and Beti flee from Ram and Mohammed, for example, the enveloping landscape seems to reflect Oudin's journey into an eclipsed native consciousness and ultimately leads to a shift in roles as Beti becomes the bearer of all hope for the future. During their flight the ground turns 'soft and treacherous with the residue of enormously old stricken forests before the sea had stood on this very ground, and had retired to leave it as it was' (GQ, p.212). The air darkens and encroaches around the pair, and Oudin tastes the fear and terror of a hunted man. Yet, at the moment of greatest terror, Oudin and Beti come together in an act of sexual union and the nature of their relationship changes. The importance of this episode is demonstrated by the fact that after their sexual exchange, Beti realises 'that Oudin is unwell and that the initiative in continuing the journey rested with her alone' (GQ, pp.215-216). As Maes-Jelinek observes, 'the flight through the forest becomes a 'second birth'' (Maes-Jelinek, 'The Myth of El Dorado in the Caribbean Novel, 126). The journey into the savannah enacts a process of transformation as first Oudin and then Beti come to realise the possibility of their freedom, and gradually accommodate themselves to the living potential of their native landscape.

As Oudin and Beti's flight into the savannah illustrates, each novel in the sequence emphasises the need to enter the threshold space of the Guyanese interior in order to confront and overcome the hierarchical biases native to the Caribbean psyche. Mid-way through Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow informs his listeners that, 'Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings' (p.66). Likewise, in Harris' writing of the interior journey each spatial movement corresponds to a similar movement backward in time: a process of retracing one's steps to the ancient past. The further inland one moves the deeper into the past one gets and the closer one comes to confronting the paradoxes of self. 'Retracing one's steps is the process in which Harris' protagonists have been involved in from *The Guyana Quartet* onwards', Maes-Jelinek asserts:

---

<sup>32</sup> Maes-Jelinek, 'The Myth of El Dorado in the Caribbean Novel', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 6 (1) (1971), 126.

Through their experiences and encounters with a vanished past, lost cultures or deprived individuals and groups (...), his protagonists confront "areas of tradition that have sunken away and apparently disappeared and vanished and yet that are still active at some level".<sup>33</sup>

In his own essays Harris has commented upon the importance of establishing a sense of simultaneity between times past, present and future, and suggested that this confluence of different times is a vital part of the restorative impulse within contemporary Caribbean fiction<sup>34</sup>. Interestingly, it is this aspect of Harris' work that Brathwaite draws attention to in 'Timehri', where he argues that Harris' emphasis on the ancient Amerindian history of the Caribbean offers a reminder of the primordial nature of Caribbean culture<sup>35</sup>. Highlighting the importance of converging temporalities and spatialities within the contemporary Caribbean consciousness, Brathwaite describes 'the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture', as 'a journey into the past and hinterland which is at the same time a movement into the present and future' (Brathwaite, 'Timehri', p.42). He thus implies that a movement into the past will lead to an accommodation of the past and a re-negotiation of one's partial origins and identity. Quite clearly such a process is central to the narratives contained in the *Quartet*. In addition, in Harris' novels the process of retracing steps to the past is presented as a threshold experience, a process of entering a void, or of opening oneself to the contradictory impulses of other times and spaces. A pattern is established in *Palace of the Peacock* as the few surviving members of Donne's crew attempt to climb the waterfall also known as 'the

---

<sup>33</sup> Maes-Jelinek, "Numinous Proportions": Wilson Harris' Alternative to All Posts', in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. by Ian Adam & Helen Tiffin (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.52.

<sup>34</sup> In 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror', Harris writes: 'To arrive in a tradition that appears to have died is complex renewal and revisionary momentum sprung from originality and the activation of primordial resources within a living language. We arrive backwards even as we voyage forwards. This is the phenomenon of simultaneity in the imagination of time's past and future that renews time in its imaginary response to gestating resources in the womb of the present and the past. It is unlike the linear biases that prevail in conventional fiction.'

Harris, 'Quetzalcoatl and Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition', *Wasafiri*, 20 (1994), 38.

<sup>35</sup> The importance of the Amerindian in Harris' work is seen clearly in *Palace of the Peacock* in the search for the folk, and in *The Secret Ladder* in the figure of Poseidon. In the *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris* Andrew Bundy points out that Amerindian names dominate the environmental fabric of Harris' fiction, and also makes plain that Amerindian tribes are part of a larger Central and South American tradition, which links them to Maya, Aztec and Inca communities (pp.19-22). This connection perhaps explains the apparent abundance of 'magic realist' elements within Harris' fiction; such as the use of dream, mystery, myth and surrealism. Bundy even claims that 'Harris' study of the fabric of the imagination sets his writing apart from the concerns of West Indian Caribbean writers'; and instead favours 'Harris' particular and intuitive kinship with the Central and South American literatures in Spanish' (p.7).

universal cliff of consciousness', and stare into an abstract 'mirror of absolute nothingness' that is really only 'the void of themselves' (GQ, pp.101-106). Donne's first step on the ladder takes him back to the time when he built his first house in the savannahs. His memory of the house provides a series of windows into his inner self that effectively strip him of his earlier assumptions and beliefs. In *The Secret Ladder* Fenwick also recognises the need to return to an earlier self, when he writes to his mother of his meeting with Poseidon: 'I wish I could truly grasp the importance of this meeting. If I do not- if my generation do not- leviathan will swallow us all. It isn't a question of fear- it's a question of going in unashamed to come out of the womb again' (GQ, p.384). This last remark disturbs and annoys Fenwick, and he immediately crosses it out. However, the idea of returning to the womb provides a powerful example of the need to engage with the past, and particularly establishes Fenwick's unconscious desire to (re-)trace a connection to the kind of native history represented by Poseidon. Re-entry into the womb enacts a descent into both the space and time of one's origins, and in this sense the womb is clearly a highly chronotopic space. Here, the notion of the womb refers to an abstract space of cultural beginnings, to the interior landscape of Guyana and, of course, to the maternal womb itself. The suggestion is that the meeting with Poseidon offers Fenwick the chance of being 'born again'. Almost explicitly this requires Fenwick to reflect upon who he is and where he has come from. It is perhaps no accident that he is forced to do this in the jungle zone of the Canje basin, which is an inner space of destiny and discovery.

Fenwick's passing remark is important not just because of what it reveals of his unconscious desire to question his identity, but also because of how it captures his dilemma in a language common to other parts of the sequence. The motif of the womb functions in the *Quartet* as an archetypal symbol of the frontier or threshold, whilst various images of pregnancy, birth, death and rebirth underline the importance of continual cultural renewal. In *Palace of the Peacock* the entire crew is said to have emerged from a single womb, perhaps representative of the birth of the modern nation. In *The Whole Armour* the narrator suggests that Cristo 'had been reborn and spilt' from the womb of Abram (GQ, p.284), indicating how Abram's death offers Cristo the opportunity to heal himself and his community. Images of death are often mirrored by images of birth in the *Quartet*. In *Palace*, Carroll's loss of a child is

followed by his mother's revelation that she is pregnant (GQ, pp.72-73). Likewise, in *The Far Journey of Oudin* Muhra's miscarriage is shadowed by Beti's pregnancy, whilst in *The Whole Armour* the death of Peet's wife during labour is compensated for by the birth of Sharon and Cristo's baby. Pregnancy is seen in the novels as a sign of hope, of the possibility of making a new start, of creating a new life. Thus when Beti has a premonition of her pregnancy the narrator makes clear that it is to be seen as an opportunity for release and a chance for liberation, rather than the doomed legacy of a constricting environment:

This was, for her, another flicker and signal of inner life superior to the police of the jungle. She saw the necessity to save herself and the unborn child, and to do something before Mohammed closed in on them, or Ram brought his empire of revenge toppling in ruins about her ears. It was the same grotesque kernel, in two shells, confronting her, that she must crack and consume to survive. (GQ, p.226)

Like Mariella, Sharon and Catalena Perez, Beti initially functions in the novel as a symbol of societal abuse. She is more of a possession than a person. However, her pregnancy shows that she is an important vessel and support for Oudin as he attempts to free himself from a contractual obligation and, as this passage suggests, it also provides the catalyst for the constructive accommodation of a host of agonistic forces and cultures within herself. Beti's act of consumption is effectively also an act of consummation, as it indicates her wish to consume those biases (i.e. Mohammed and Ram) that have thus far governed both her and Oudin's existence. This says much about the role of women in Harris' fiction, and perhaps even shows how a female other is repeatedly deployed in the *Quartet* in the construction of Caribbean identity.

In Harris' fiction the consumption of bias is a fundamental precursor to the initiation of a process of psychical recovery and cultural restoration. In his essays too Harris traces a similar arc of recuperation and re-birth, and argues that the consumption of cultural bias often takes place within 'the womb of space', by which he means a fluid space of conflict and creation. Harris' notion of 'the womb of space' is a metaphor for the meeting of previously opposed traditions and beliefs upon a threshold of creation, and a motif for the diversity and complex mutuality of cultures within the cross-cultural imagination. The phrase itself suggests a (possibly gendered) space of conception and birth, and is evident in embryo in early essays such as 'The Writer and Society', in which Harris identifies 'a certain void or misgiving attending every assimilation of contraries' and argues for the need to enter

into that void<sup>36</sup>. In his second collection of critical essays, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*, the concept is tied more closely to the notion of the cross-cultural. In the introduction to this study Harris makes clear his intention to map 'a horizon of sensibility upon which a capacity exists to begin to transform claustrophobic ritual by cross-cultural imaginations that bear upon the future through mutations of the monolithic character of conquistadorial legacies of civilization'<sup>37</sup>. In this context, 'the womb of space' emerges as a threshold space of cultural interaction that fractures apparently whole or unified totalities by conceiving gaps within a one-sided reality. The importance of this process of mutation lies in its insistence on the plurality of cultures, and the concurrent belief that the identification of such plurality impacts upon our understanding of the future. 'The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination,' Harris argues, 'the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community' (Harris, *The Womb of Space*, p.xvii). This implies that any process of cultural transformation starts with an appreciation of the cross-cultural dimension that bears upon all civilisations or ruling systems of thought, and turns on the recognition of a 'ceaseless dialogue' that connects all cultures together, not in a seamless whole but in a fluid notion of 'community'. For example, when Beti breaks the 'grotesque kernel' of her earlier existence and consumes the legacies of Mohammed and Ram, she sets in train a process of transformation that is based on enrichment rather than the substituting of one thing for another. In Bakhtinian terms, Mohammed and Ram are representatives of a monologic mode of being, whilst Beti might be said to display a desire for dialogue. Beti's act of consumption is important because it does not simply signify the rejection of monologue for dialogue, but rather shows the need to incorporate both the monologic and the dialogic in a ceaseless and cyclical exchange. Similarly, Fenwick's unconscious desire to return to the womb (and come out again) may be seen as an early sign of his sense that an other indigenous culture is already infiltrating his modern beliefs. Poseidon represents an aspect of his ancestry that

---

<sup>36</sup> Harris, 'The Writer and Society', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon Books, 1967), p.62.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), p.xv.

Fenwick has denied. Fenwick's movement into the interior thus inevitably leads him to accept his place in a complex and enriching cross-cultural community.

Harris' inscription of a regenerative 'cross-cultural capacity' within *The Guyana Quartet* finally underlines the importance of the chronotope of the threshold in the four novels. At the close of each novel Harris presents a vision of a community on the verge of newness, at the threshold of a moment of radical transformation, and introduces the concept of freedom into a society seemingly governed by the legacies of violence and colonial domination. This thematic refrain establishes a point in each novel when the possibility of change is at least posed, if not yet realised. The final chapters of *Palace of the Peacock* indicate a spiritual aspect to this process, as Donne's crew enters the mythic house of their salvation. The Palace of the Peacock is an El Doradone vision, a house of God and gold, symbolic of the universe and humanity. It is also a signifier of creation, and represents what Maes-Jelinek terms 'a coming to consciousness which makes the crew see themselves as whole' (Maes-Jelinek, 'The Myth of El Dorado in the Caribbean Novel', 125). Such a vision is implicitly echoed in each of the other novels in the sequence. In *The Far Journey of Oudin*, Beti's survival heralds the future of 'a race that was being fashioned anew' (GQ, p.238). In *The Whole Armour*, Sharon and Cristo proclaim themselves 'the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral house' (GQ, p.335). And, in *The Secret Ladder*, a vision of the future is captured in the 'impossible union' of Bryant and Catalena Perez (GQ, p.455). Interestingly, fragments of this vision are also contained in Harris' reading of *Heart of Darkness*, in which Harris extends the logic behind the 'intuitive insights' of Conrad's novella and suggests that 'within or beneath' the colonial need for conquest of other lands:

is a vision of mysterious regeneration that apprises us of our limits and in so doing awakens a capacity to dream beyond those limits, a capacity for infinite conception for life and of humility, a capacity for complex risk, creativity, and dialogue with others through and beyond institutions inhibited by, or based on, the brute conquest of nature from which creation has recoiled again and again over long ages to leave us and our antecedents bereft and yet intensely aware of the priceless gift of being that begins all over again in the depths of the animate perception. (Harris, 'The Frontier on which *Heart of Darkness* Stands', 88)

In this context, the 'frontier' or 'threshold' is seen as a marker of man's capacity for transformation and change, and a sign of man's 'capacity to dream beyond' the limits of understanding or move beyond the constricting bounds of certain dominant social institutions. The threshold is described as a shared zone of 'risk, creativity and

dialogue'. In Harris' early fiction this 'vision of mysterious regeneration' works to reveal the presence and importance of the Other in the formation of contemporary Caribbean cultural identities.

## 7. A Cross-cultural Approach to the Work of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris

It is perhaps now somewhat surprising that when in 1968 Louis James wrote the concluding chapter to *The Islands in Between*, he did not know whether he was writing the 'epilogue or prologue' to the story of Caribbean literature (James, *The Islands in Between*, p.154). James dedicated his collection '[t]o the writers of the new West Indian nations', yet even as he made this declaration he could not be sure what events would shape the development of the newly-independent islands of the Caribbean archipelago, nor could he be certain that the recent 'boom' in Caribbean literary production would last. In the intervening thirty years much has changed in the social and political landscape of the islands, as the influence of America has increased while that of the former colonial powers has gradually receded. At the same time, little appears to have changed in terms of the issues that are central to the writers of the Caribbean, which are the issues central to the emergence and development of a Caribbean community and identity<sup>1</sup>. Just as projects such as Donnell and Welsh's *Reader in Caribbean Literature* have served to remind interested parties of the need to widen the 'canon' to include the voices and views of women writers or Indo-Caribbean writers. So too, it is clear that many of the writers discussed in *The Islands in Between* have continued to dominate the creative and critical landscape. Indeed, this is nowhere more true than when speaking of the work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris, which stands as a record of over fifty years endeavour in the search for identity and belonging. In this study it has been the intention to trace a connection between the work of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris, and to use this as the basis of a discussion of the practice of reading Caribbean writing, or more specifically to introduce a Bakhtinian framework to my reading of Caribbean writing. The former task has revolved around the gradual elucidation of a theme common to each of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Rhonda Cobham makes a similar point in the concluding paragraph of her introduction to the history of the Caribbean and its literature to be found in Bruce King's *West Indian Literature*. The salient paragraph begins with the sentence: 'Change is still the only constant in Caribbean society', and ends thus, 'But, in spite of this diversity, West Indian writers are held together by a background of dispossession and migration, nostalgia and desire which they share with the entire Caribbean community' (p.26).

four writer's work. The latter task has been actively demonstrated in the close reading of the key works around which the thesis has been structured. It is by no means the intention that this should be seen as the only way of applying Bakhtin's ideas to the reading of Caribbean writing, nor that this should in any way represent a Bakhtinian theory of reading. Rather, it is hoped that my Bakhtinian reading of Caribbean writing will demonstrate the relevance of a number of Bakhtinian concepts to what may broadly be termed 'post-colonial studies'.

Since the emergence of an identifiable body of Anglophone Caribbean writing in the 1950's and 1960's, the literature of and about the Caribbean has largely been read in terms of a search for identity. In the preceding chapters, I have argued that at least in the work of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott and Harris, a key aspect of this search for identity is manifested in a thematic, formal and stylistic preoccupation with writing and reading. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry is characterised first and foremost by a thorough-going linguistic performance in which the diverse voices of Caribbean past, present and future are heard. Brathwaite's representation of the various languages and dialects of the Caribbean underlines his concern with the authentic presentation of Caribbean identities on the page. The poet of Brathwaite's early trilogy, *The Arrivants*, is an Ananse-figure, a 'world-maker, word-breaker, / creator ...' (A, p.167). This description applies too in later work, such as 'X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces', where the poetic personae of X/Self exists in a Twenty-first Century landscape of multicultural associations and interactions. Throughout his work Brathwaite's masking and unmasking of language underpins the construction of a Caribbean Other intent on claiming language back. In this context, the writer is conceived as a playful, inventive and purposeful figure, urging his people to see language as the mainspring of cultural survival and renewal. Brathwaite's writing may be seen as determinedly outward-looking, insistently seeking a response from a community of readers. In contrast, V.S. Naipaul's vision is predominantly inward-looking, and solely devoted to the individual at the centre of the text. Of the four writers considered in this study, Naipaul's work perhaps displays the clearest and most long-standing preoccupation with the figure of the writer. Numerous key characters in his novels are writers themselves, and thus each concerned with the material process of writing. In recent works Naipaul has sought to reflect upon his own status as 'writer', and has mixed autobiography, history and fiction to present the image of a writer who shares his

own identity in all but name. As a self-exiled writer equally uneasy in the Caribbean, England and India alike, Naipaul's writing has for a long time concerned itself with the issues of cultural belonging and arrival. One aspect of this recurring refrain is the notion of the writer's arrival. In *The Enigma of Arrival* the reconstructed narrative of the writer's life suggests an insistent assertion of identity bordering on the dominant. In *A Way in the World* there is perhaps a greater acceptance of the essential fragility of narrative to ever tell the truth and a willingness to leave the gaps in each story open, allowing the reader to more easily enter the fragmented world of the text.

Naipaul's obsession with the image of the writer is reflected in the title of his latest collection of essays- *The Writer and the World* (published in Britain in September 2002). Derek Walcott too is no less obsessed with the act of writing, and shares equally the sense of coming to writing as if called to a vocation. Walcott's need to write is perhaps best shown in the self-financing of his own locally-published early poems- *25 Poems* (1948), *Epitaph for the Young* (1949) and *Poems* (1951). In *Another Life*, his first major long poem, he recounts the tale of his own arrival within the world of words, and joins his own historical becoming to the emergence of his native island from a history of negation and loss. Walcott's vision of the writer is that of a redeemer and restorer. In *Omeros* he returns to the subject of his island, and engages in an art of restoration as a vibrant picture of the island's present is built from the surviving fragments of its divisive past. In *Omeros* the figure of the poet crosses the boundary between creating and created worlds and interacts with the fictional characters he has established in the text. The poem also contains an act of reading, as the poet reflects upon his own and Major Plunkett's reading of Helen, who symbolises the island, its history and the desire to render this as myth, or who may simply be the name of a fine local beauty. Walcott's readiness to blur the boundary between the inner and outer worlds of the text suggests that he wants his readers to face the same issues in their reading of the poem as a Caribbean epic, as both the poet and Plunkett face in their reading of Helen. The closing movements of the poem make clear that for Walcott the contradictions of the Caribbean should be allowed to reveal themselves naturally- 'Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture / is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor, // deeper than it seems on the surface ... the mirror of History / has melted and, beneath it, a patient, hybrid organism // grows' (O, pp.296-297). These last remarks indicate the seams of subconscious change growing within the sub-strata of Caribbean society, and it is for

this reason that Walcott's poem perhaps assumes a nation-building aspect. Similarly, in *The Guyana Quartet*, Wilson Harris argues that beneath the surface of reality in the Caribbean are primordial forces of remembrance and survival that make the future of the nation possible.

In the *Quartet*, Harris presents a vision of Guyana on the threshold of reality- its landscape is a threshold environment, and its people live threshold lives- and uses this vision to move toward a notion of psychological and cultural transformation. Another threshold more or less implicitly operating in all of Harris' texts is the frontier space shared by writer and reader, where Harris challenges his readers to participate in the process of renewal so fundamental to the text. The character of the dreaming I-narrator in *Palace of the Peacock* provides an archetypal example of a fictional reader within Harris' work, whose main role is to contribute to the re-writing of Donne's identity. The I-narrator is both reader and writer at the same time. This duality suggests both that the Harrisian author is happy to give up his position of authority over the text, and that the reader has a full part to play in the unfolding drama of cultural and psychological restoration. It seems clear that this intratextual exchange is a key aspect of Harris' re-writing of Caribbean identity as a cross-cultural identity. In later fiction, such as *The Carnival Trilogy* (1993), comprising *Carnival* (1985), *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (1990), this act of co-authoring is even more an integral and explicit aspect of the text. In *Carnival* Harris attempts a re-writing of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, whilst *The Infinite Rehearsal* provides a loose re-working of Goethe's *Faust* and Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, and *The Four Banks of the River of Space* a version of Homer's *Odyssey*. In each of these novels the central character makes an inner psychological journey through their pasts in colonial Guyana, and in each the main protagonist is accompanied by a spiritual guide returned from the dead, who embodies an awareness of both oppressor and oppressed. In *Carnival* Everyman Masters leads Jonathan Weyl back through his childhood in New Forest in order to reveal the complexities of the post-colonial condition to him. Similarly, in *The Infinite Rehearsal* the figure of Ghost emerges to aid Robin Redbreast Glass, whilst in *The Four Banks of the River of Space* Lucius Canaima arrives to help Anselm. Each of the main protagonists is involved in a process of re-writing their identity through the vision of another, and it is this act of fictional (auto)biography that provides the basis of Harris' multi-dimensional understanding of text, history and the self. In addition,

the text itself contains an act of reading within its very structure that is instructive of the way the process of joint authorship develops through the narrative.

In their introduction to *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh claim that '[p]ost-colonial theory with its foregrounding of cultural difference as a key determinant within evaluation has been enabling to both the analysis and production of Caribbean literature' (p.9). This may seem something of a commonplace, a statement of the obvious. However, Donnell and Welsh are quick to point out that the application of critical theory to Caribbean literature is a problematic business and not the least because 'theory is perceived as a means through which to re-assert the dominance of European cultures- a neo-cultural intellectual device' (ibid). Donnell and Welsh attempt to traverse this issue by arguing for 'a broad definition of theory' (p.10), and later exploring ways in which Caribbean writer-critics (including Walcott and Harris) have sought to work against the central paradigms of Western theory (pp.440-443). In this study, it has been argued that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin provides a valuable adjunct and resource with which to discuss the key issues presented in the work of four major contemporary Caribbean writers. In the introductory chapter the link between Bakhtin's discussion of linguistic hybridisation and post-colonial theories of hybridity was explored, and shown to be a connection based on sharp relevance as well as blunt coincidence. It was suggested that as well as being identified as a point of origin for the concept of hybridity, Bakhtin's work may also provide a corrective to certain theories of post-colonial hybridity. As discussions of the notion of hybridity have become increasingly self-reflective, it is perhaps inevitable that critics should stop to consider the complicated route by which the idea has travelled. It is also the case that such a moment of reflection has a significance in itself, and possibly heralds the point at which post-colonial debates cease to be exclusively about the 'post-colonial'. The concept of hybridity is no longer merely conceived as another discursive marker for the colonial or post-colonial Other, a signifier of the intermixture of a variety of peoples and cultures, of what happens on the margins where two or more societies meet, though that is clearly still the most important aspect of its life. The concept of hybridity is also now a marker of the West's own understanding of itself, a signifier of the intermixture that is now central to culture, and of what happens when margin and centre consistently and repeatedly cross over into each other. In this context, Bakhtin's essays and ideas offer a means of

approaching the complexities of cultural, linguistic and literary hybridisation, as they present themselves within individual literary texts. Bakhtin's wide-ranging discussion of the nature and effects of cultural exchange and interaction can also help to inform questions of cross-cultural reading.

In the chapters that follow the introduction an emerging thematic develops out of the opening discussion of Bakhtinian hybridisation and post-colonial hybridity. The chapter on Brathwaite's linguistic performance, for example, establishes the basis of Bakhtin's approach to language, and hints at the impact this approach has on our understanding of the relationship between author, text and reader. It is here too that the importance of adopting a position of linguistic outsideness is first posed- both as the means by which a writer creates what Bakhtin calls 'images of languages' and as the basis of a theory of dialogue. Artistic devices such as hybridisation, stylisation and parody display the notion of social languages being set against each other in a dialogue, that may be more or less naïve according to the subject, tone or register of the languages being opposed. The languages concerned are forced to view themselves from the perspective of another language, through the 'outsideness' of another language. Indeed it is via this process that languages change and develop. In his poetry, Brathwaite uses linguistic outsideness as the chief means of abrogating and appropriating language for the purpose of establishing a specifically Caribbean aesthetic. Language in *The Arrivants* becomes an arena of contest, a key determinant of community and identity. The way that Brathwaite uses language also reveals the identity of the poet, and establishes the distance between the figure of the poet and the other voices of the text. Bakhtin's discussion of linguistic outsideness may be seen as the cornerstone of his theorisation of how discourse operates in social life and of how it is presented in the novel. It is also at the centre of his ideas on authorship, and integral to his understanding of understanding. In the chapter on Naipaul's arrival, Bakhtin's discussion of the relationship between author and hero in a literary work reveals how the author must remain outside the hero in order to consummate the hero as a determinate whole. In the chapter on Walcott's *Omeros*, Bakhtin's notion of 'active understanding' establishes the importance of viewing the (literary) utterance as a verbal act which is orientated toward the alien conceptual horizon of another at the same time as it represents its own conceptual beliefs. The latter clearly indicates the dialogic potential of Bakhtin's sense of linguistic and cultural exchange

(‘Outsidedness creates the possibility of dialogue, and dialogue helps us to understand culture in a profound way’, Morson and Emerson note in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, p.55). Alongside the notion of ‘creative understanding’, it also represents the closest that Bakhtin comes to intimating a practice of reading in his work.

Bakhtin’s general reluctance to engage with the topic of ‘the reader’ is shown in the concluding stages of his chronotope essay, where he belatedly turns his attention to the chronotopes of author and listener or reader. Here, he argues that author, text and reader are inevitably involved in a continuing exchange as both real and imagined worlds come into contact with each other:

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers. (FTC, p.254)

He calls the time and space of this exchange, the process which ‘constitutes the distinctive life of the work’ (ibid), the ‘creative chronotope’, and then goes on to briefly discuss the distinctive contribution of the author. However, he has little or nothing to say about the specific role of the reader as a co-creator of the work:

In the present work we will not consider the complex problem of the listener-reader, his chronotopic situation and his role in *renewing* the work of art (his role in the process of the work’s life), we will point out merely that every literary work faces outward away from itself, toward the listener-reader, and to a certain extent thus anticipates possible reactions to itself. (FTC, p.257)

Such intentional abruptness at the end of an essay nearly two hundred pages long certainly seems a little out of place. It is perhaps indicative of Bakhtin’s awareness of the difficulties inherent in speaking about ‘the reader’ in any meaningful way, without surrendering to abstraction or individualism.

## Select Bibliography

### 1. Primary

#### Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. by Vadim Liapunov & Michael Holquist, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993)

Bakhtin, M.M. / Medvedev, P.N., *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, trans. by Albert Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978)

Voloshinov, V.N., *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka & I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986)

Voloshinov, V.N., *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*, ed. by I.R. Titunik and Neil R. Brass, trans. by I.R. Titunik (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987)

## Edward Kamau Brathwaite

### Poetry

Brathwaite, Edward, *The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973)

Brathwaite, Edward, *Other Exiles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *Mother Poem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *Sun Poem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *Third World Poems* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1983)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *X/Self* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *Middle Passages* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1992)

Brathwaite, Kamau, *The Zea Mexican Diary, 7 Sept 1926 - 7 Sept 1986* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993)

Brathwaite, Kamau, *Dream Stories* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1994)

### Essays and Prose Writings

Brathwaite, Edward, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971)

Brathwaite, Edward, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Kingston, Jamaica: Savacou, 1974)

Brathwaite, Edward, 'Timehri', in *Is Massa Day Dead: Black Moods in the Caribbean* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1974), pp.29-43

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, *Roots* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de Las Americas, 1986)

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel', in *Roots* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de Las Americas, 1986) pp.55-110

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau, 'Caribbean Critics', in *Roots* (Havana, Cuba: Casa de Las Americas, 1986) pp.111-126

Brathwaite, Kamau, 'History, the Caribbean Writer and *X/Self*', in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp.23-45

## Wilson Harris

### Poetry

Harris, Wilson, *Eternity to Season* (London: New Beacon Books, 1978)

### Novels

Harris, Wilson, *The Eye of the Scarecrow* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965)

Harris, Wilson, *The Waiting Room* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967)

Harris, Wilson, *The Sleepers of Roraima* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970)

Harris, Wilson, *Ascent to Omai* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970)

Harris, Wilson, *The Age of the Rainmakers* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971)

Harris, Wilson, *Black Marsden* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972)

Harris, Wilson, *Da Silva Da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness & Genesis of the Clowns*  
(London: Faber & Faber, 1977)

Harris, Wilson, *The Tree of the Sun* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978)

Harris, Wilson, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985)

Harris, Wilson, *The Carnival Trilogy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)

Harris, Wilson, *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)

Harris, Wilson, *Jonestown* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996)

Harris, Wilson, *The Dark Jester* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001)

### Essays and Prose Writings

Harris, Wilson, *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon, 1967)

Harris, Wilson, 'Tradition and the West Indian Novel', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon, 1967), pp.28-47

Harris, Wilson, 'The Writer and Society', in *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon, 1967), pp.48-64

Harris, Wilson, 'The Frontier on which *Heart of Darkness* Stands', *Research in African Literatures*, 12 (1) (1981), 86-93

Harris, Wilson, 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas', in *Explorations* (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1981), pp.20-42

Harris, Wilson, *The Womb of Space, The Cross-Cultural Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983)

Harris, Wilson, 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity', *New Left Review*, 154 (1985), 124-128

Harris, Wilson, 'A Note on the Genesis of *The Guyana Quartet*', in *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), pp.7-14

Harris, Wilson, 'Quetzalcoatl and the Smoking Mirror: Reflections on Originality and Tradition', *Wasafiri*, 20 (1994), 38-43

Harris, Wilson, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. by Andrew Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999)

Harris, Wilson, 'The Music of Living Landscapes', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. by Andrew Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.40-46

Harris, Wilson, 'New Preface to *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. by Andrew Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.53-57

Harris, Wilson, 'Merlin and Parsifal: Adversarial Twins', in *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris*, ed. by Andrew Bundy (London: Routledge, 1999), pp.58-66

## V.S. Naipaul

### Novels

Naipaul, V.S., *The Mystic Masseur* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964)

Naipaul, V.S., *A Flag on the Island* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Naipaul, V.S., *A House for Mr Biswas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Naipaul, V.S., *The Mimic Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Naipaul, V.S., *The Suffrage of Elvira* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Naipaul, V.S., *Miguel Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

Naipaul, V.S., *In a Free State* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)

Naipaul, V.S., *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)

Naipaul, V.S., *Guerrillas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976)

Naipaul, V.S., *A Bend in the River* (London: Penguin, 1980)

Naipaul, V.S., *Finding the Centre* (London: Penguin, 1985)

Naipaul, V.S., *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel in Five Sections* (London: Penguin, 1987)

Naipaul, V.S., *A Way in the World* (London: Minerva, 1995)

Naipaul, V.S., *Half a Life* (London: Picador, 2001)

**Essays, Prose writings and Travel writing**

Naipaul, V.S., *The Middle Passage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962)

Naipaul, V.S., *The Loss of El Dorado* (London: Readers Union, Andre Deutsch, 1970)

Naipaul, V.S., 'London', in *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert Hamner (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.5-12

Naipaul, V.S., 'The Little More', in *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert Hamner (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.13-15

Naipaul, V.S., 'Jasmine', in *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert Hamner (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.16-22

Naipaul, V.S., 'Images', in *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert Hamner (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.26-29

Naipaul, V.S., 'The Writer', in *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Robert Hamner (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp.30-33

Naipaul, V.S., *The Return of Eva Peron with The Killings in Trinidad* (London: Penguin, 1981)

Naipaul, V.S., *Letters Between a Father and a Son* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999)

## Derek Walcott

### Poetry

Walcott, Derek, *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* (Barbados: Advocate, 1949)

Walcott, Derek, *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972)

Walcott, Derek, *The Arkansas Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988)

Walcott, Derek, *Omeros* (London, Faber & Faber, 1990)

Walcott, Derek, *Poems 1965-1980* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992)

Walcott, Derek, *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992)

Walcott, Derek, *The Bounty* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997)

Walcott, Derek, *Tiepolo's Hound* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000)

### Plays

Walcott, Derek, *The Odyssey* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)

### Essays and Prose Writings

Walcott, Derek, 'Leaving School - VIII', *London Magazine*, 5 (6) (1965), 4-14

Walcott, Derek, 'History and Picong ... in *The Middle Passage*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.18-19

Walcott, Derek, 'The Figure of Crusoe', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.33-40

- Walcott, Derek, 'Tribal Flutes', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.41-50
- Walcott, Derek, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.51-57
- Walcott, Derek, *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998)
- Walcott, Derek, 'What the Twilight Says', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp.3-35
- Walcott, Derek, 'The Muse of History', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp.36-64
- Walcott, Derek, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp.65-84
- Walcott, Derek, 'The Garden Path: V.S. Naipaul', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp.121-133
- Walcott, Derek, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', in *The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives*, ed. by Gregson Davis, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (2) (1997), pp.229-246

## 2. Secondary

- Achebe, Chinua, 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literature*, 9 (1) (1978), 1-15
- Adams, Rolston, 'Wilson Harris: The Pre-Novel Poet', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 13 (3) (1979), 71-85
- Adlam, Carol, 'In the Name of Bakhtin: Appropriation and Expropriation in Recent Russian and Western Bakhtin Studies', in *Exploiting Bakhtin*, ed. by Alastair Renfrew (Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Strathclyde, 1997), pp.75-90
- Adler, Joyce Sparer, 'Wilson Harris: An Introduction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 8-11
- Allis, Jeanette B., 'A Case for Regional Criticism of West Indian Literature', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 28 (1-2) (1982), 1-11
- Anon., 'Palace of the Peacock', *Bim*, 9 (33)(1961), 76
- Anon., 'How far are Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite similar? Is it impossible for the Caribbean to choose between the two, if so, which way should they choose and why?', *Busara*, 6 (1) (1974), 90-100
- Arteaga, Alfred, 'Beasts and Jagged Strokes of Color: The Poetics of Hybridisation on the US-Mexican Border', in *Bakhtin, Carnival and Other Subjects: Selected Papers from the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference, University of Manchester, July 1991*, ed. by David Shepherd (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp.277-294

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998)
- Baugh, Edward, 'Rights of Passage', *Bim*, 12 (45) (1967), 66-68
- Baugh, Edward, 'Towards a West Indian Criticism', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14 (1-2) (1968), 140-144
- Baugh, Edward, *Derek Walcott, Memory as Vision: Another Life* (London: Longman, 1978)
- Baugh, Edward, ed., *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978)
- Baugh, Edward, 'The Poem as Autobiographical Novel: Derek Walcott's *Another Life* in Relation to Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Joyce's *Portrait*', in *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, ed. by C.D. Narasimhaiah (New Delhi: Sterling, 1978), pp.226-235
- Baugh, Edward, 'Painters and Painting in *Another Life*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.239-250
- Baugh, 'Ripening with Walcott', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.278-285
- Bennett, Tony, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 1979)

- Bernard-Donals, Michael F., *Mikhail Bakhtin: Between Phenomenology and Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994)
- Bhabha, Homi, 'Introduction: Locations of Culture' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.1-18
- Bhabha, Homi, 'Signs Taken for Wonders' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.102-122
- Bhabha, Homi, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.139-170
- Bhabha, Homi, 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.171-197
- Bhabha, Homi, 'Culture's In-Between', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall & Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), pp.53-60
- Blaber, Ronald, & Martin Gilman, *Roguary: The Picaresque Tradition in Australian Canadian and Indian Fiction* (Springwood: Butterfly Books, 1990)
- Blundell, Margaret, 'Caribbean Readers and Writers', *Bim*, 11 (43) (1966), 163-167
- Breiner, Laurence, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Breslow, Stephen, 'Trinidadian Heteroglossia: A Bakhtinian View of Derek Walcott's Play *A Branch of the Blue Nile*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.388-393

- Britton, Celia, 'The Dialogic Text and the Texte Pluriel', *Poetics: Occasional Papers* (Colchester, University of Essex Language Centre, 1974), pp.52-68
- Brizan, George, *Grenada: Island of Conflict, From Amerindians to People's Revolution 1498-1979* (London: Zed books, 1984)
- Brown, Stewart, ed., *The Art of Derek Walcott* (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1991)
- Brown, Stewart, 'The Apprentice: 25 Poems, Epitaph for the Young, Poems and In a Green Night', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1991), pp. 13-33
- Brown, Stewart, ed., *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite* (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1995)
- Brown, Stewart, 'Sun Poem: The Rainbow Sign?', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1995), pp.152-162
- Bruckner, D.J.R., 'A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp. 396-399
- Bundy, Andrew, ed., *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999)
- Burnett, Paula, 'Omeros', *Wasafiri*, 14 (1991), 32-34
- Burnett, Paula, 'Where Else to Row, But Backward? Addressing Caribbean Futures Through Re-visions of the Past', *ARIEL*, 30 (1) (1999), 11-37
- Burris, Sidney, 'An Empire of Poetry', *Southern Review*, 27 (3) (1991), 558-574

- Carr, Robert, 'The New Man in the Jungle: Chaos, Community and the Margins of the Nation State', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 133-156
- Carroll, David, 'The Alterity of Discourse: Form, History and the Question of the Political in M.M. Bakhtin', *Diacritics*, 13 (2) (1983), 65-83
- Casteel, Sarah Phillips, 'Autobiography as Rewriting: Derek Walcott's *Another Life* and *Omeros*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 34 (2) (1999), 9-32
- Chaudhuri, Amit, 'Lure of the Hybrid: What the Post-colonial Indian Novel Means to the West', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5031, 3 September 1999, 5-6
- Clark, Katerina & Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1984)
- Collier, Gordon, 'Multicultural Self-Definition and Textual Strategy in the Poetic Prose of Derek Walcott: The Nobel Prize Speech', *Kunapipi*, 15 (2) (1993), 86-103
- Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1987)
- Coombes, Orde, ed., *Is Massa Day Dead: Black Moods in the Caribbean* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1974)
- Cowley, Jason, 'The Long Road to Happiness', *The Times*, 11 May 1998, 17
- Craig, Siobhan, 'Monstrous Dialogues: Erotic Discourse and the Dialogic Constitution of the Subject in *Frankenstein*', in *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*, ed. by Karen Hohne & Helen Wussow (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1994), pp.83-96
- Crowley, Tony, 'Bakhtin and the History of Language', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop & David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.68-90

- D'Aguiar, Fred, 'Ambiguity Without a Crisis? Twin Traditions, the Individual and Community in Derek Walcott's Essays', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren books, 1991), pp.157-171
- Dash, J. Michael, 'Psychology, Creolization and Hybridization', in *New National and Postcolonial Literatures*, ed. by Bruce King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp.45-58
- Davis, Lloyd, 'Reading Irony: Dialogism in 'A Modest Proposal'', *AUMLA*, 77 (1992), 32-55
- de Grandis, Rita, 'Pursuing Hybridity: From the Linguistic to the Symbolic', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers*, ed. by Anthony Wall (Calgary, University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)
- de Lima, Clara Rosa, 'Walcott, Painting and the Shadow of Van Gogh', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1991), pp.169-190
- Dentith, Simon, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- Donnell Alison & Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996)
- Durix, Jean-Pierre, 'Paradoxes of Creation: Wilson Harris' *The Secret Ladder*', *ARIEL*, 15 (2) (1984), 27-38
- Eliot, T.S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp.13-22

- Eliot, T.S., 'Philip Massinger', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp.205-220
- Eliot, T.S., *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974)
- Emery, Mary Lou, 'Limbo Rock: Wilson Harris and the Arts of Memory', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 110-124
- Emery, Mary Lou, 'Space Sounds in Wilson Harris' Recent Fiction', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 98-103
- Fabre, Michel, 'Wilson Harris', *Kunapipi*, 2 (1) (1980), 100-106
- Faerna, José María, ed., *De Chirico*, trans. by Diane Cobos (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1995)
- Figueroa, John, 'Omeros', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales, Seren Books, 1991), pp.193-215
- Figueroa, John, 'Some Subtleties of the Isle: A Commentary on Certain Aspects of Derek Walcott's Sonnet Sequence *Tales of the Islands*', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.139-167
- Fletcher, John, "'The Intimacy of a Horror": The Tradition of Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Commonwealth Literature in the Modern World*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Brussels: Didier, 1975), pp.43-50
- Fludernik, Monika, 'The Constitution' of Hybridity: Postcolonial Interventions', in *Hybridity and Postcolonialism: Twentieth Century Indian Literature*, ed. by Monika Fludernik (Tubingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1998), pp.19-53
- Fox, Robert Elliott, 'Derek Walcott: History as Dis-ease', *Callaloo*, 9 (2) (1987), 331-340

- Freise, Matthias, 'After the Expulsion of the Author: Bakhtin as an Answer to Post-structuralism', in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West*, ed. by Carol Adlam, Rachel Falconer, Vitalii Makhlin & Alastair Renfrew (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp.131-141
- Fumagalli, Maria Christina, *L'Alto Volo and the Return to the Real: The Poetical Journey of Dante, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 1997)
- Gardiner, Michael, *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Gilkes, Michael, *Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* (Trinidad & Jamaica: Longman Caribbean, 1975)
- Griffiths, Gareth, 'Post-colonial Space and Time: Wilson Harris and Caribbean Criticism', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1991), pp. 61-69
- Halasek, Kay, 'Feminism and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading in the Academy', in *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric and Writing*, ed. by Frank Farmer (Mahwah, New Jersey: Hermagoras Press, 1998), pp.51-62
- Hamilton, Ian, 'Gambling Against History', *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 May 1994
- Hamlet, Desmond, 'Renewal in a Far More Resonant Key: Reflections on the Mad, Sin-Eating Relics of Fire in *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 84-89
- Hamner, Robert, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. By William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) pp.21-33

- Hamner, Robert, ed., *Critical Perspectives on V.S. Naipaul* (London: Heinemann, 1979)
- Hamner, Robert, *Derek Walcott* (New York: Twayne, 1993)
- Hamner, Robert, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993)
- Hamner, Robert, 'The Odyssey: Derek Walcott's Dramatization of Homer's Odyssey', *ARIEL*, 24 (4) (1993), 101-108
- Hamner, Robert, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997)
- Hassan, Dolly Zulakha, *V.S. Naipaul and the West Indies* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989)
- Hayward, Helen, 'Tradition, Innovation and the Representation of England in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 32 (2) (1997), 51-65
- Hearne, John, 'The Middle Passage', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 8 (4) (1962), 65-66
- Hearne, John, 'Fugitive in the Forest: Four novels by Wilson Harris', in *The Islands in Between*, ed. by Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 140-153
- Hirschkop, Ken, 'M.M. Bakhtin / P.N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*', *Scottish Slavonic Review*, 6 (1986), 145-146
- Hirschkop, Ken, 'Is Dialogism for Real?', *Social Text*, 30 (1987), 102-113
- Hirschkop, Ken & David Shepherd, eds., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989)

- Holquist, Michael, 'Bakhtin and the Formalists: History as Dialogue', in *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson & Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Centre for International and Area Studies, 1985), pp.82-95
- Holquist, Michael, 'Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Translinguistics', in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on his Work*, ed. by Gary Saul Morson (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.59-71
- Holquist, Michael, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Martin Hammond (London: Penguin, 1987)
- Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by E.V. Rieu (revised by D.C.H. Rieu & Dr. Peter Jones) (London: Penguin, 1991)
- Howard, Jacqueline, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)
- Howard, W.J., 'Wilson Harris' *'Guiana Quartet'*: From Personal Myth to National Identity', *ARIEL*, 1 (1970), 46-60
- Huggan, Graham, 'Decolonizing the Map', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.407-411
- Hughes, Peter, 'Tropics of Candor: V.S. Naipaul', *Contemporary Literature*, 38 (1) (1997), 205-12
- Ismond, Patricia, 'Walcott Versus Brathwaite', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.220-236

- Ismond, Patricia, 'Another Life: Autobiography as Alternative History', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 4 (1) (1990), 41-49
- Jaggi, Maya, 'The Impure Norm', *The Guardian, Review*, 2 May 1998, 10
- Jahshan, Shaun Kelley, 'Reader-oriented Polyphony? Zhang Zhupo's Commentary on the Jin Ping Mei', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 56 (1), 1-29
- James, Louis, '*Rights of Passage*', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 13 (1) (1967), 38-41
- James, Louis, ed., *The Islands in Between* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)
- James, Louis, 'Reply to Dr Ramchand', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 10 (1970), iv
- Jauss, Hans Robert, 'The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding', in *The Identity of the Literary Text*, ed. by Owen Miller & Mario J. Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp.146-174
- Jonas, Joyce, 'Wilson Harris and the Concept of Threshold Art', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 1 (2) (1987), 29-34
- King, Bruce, *V.S. Naipaul* (London: Macmillan, 1993)
- King, Bruce, ed., *West Indian Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1995)
- Kinkead-Weekes, Mark, 'Bone Flute or House of Fiction?: The Contrary Imaginations of Wilson Harris and V.S. Naipaul', in *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, ed. by Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1992), pp.139-158
- Kortenaar, Neil ten, 'Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V.S. Naipaul and *Guerillas*', *Contemporary Literature*, 31 (3) (1991), 324-334

- Kristeva, Julia, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon Roudiez (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), pp.64-91
- Kutzinski, Vera M., 'The Composition of Reality: A Talk with Wilson Harris', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 15-32
- Lamming, George, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960)
- Lane, M. Travis, 'A Different 'Growth of a Poet's Mind': Derek Walcott's *Another Life*', *ARIEL*, 9 (4) (1978), 65-78
- Lefkowitz, Mary, 'Bringing Him Back Alive', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1996), pp.400-403
- Lernout, Gert, 'Derek Walcott's *Omeros*: The Isle is Full of voices', *Kunapipi*, 14 (2) (1992), 90-104
- Levy, Judith, *V.S. Naipaul: Displacement and Autobiography* (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995)
- Liderman, Laurence, 'New Poetry: The Muse of History', *Yale Review*, 63 (1) (1973), 113-122
- Lodge, David, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, 'West Indian Writing', *London Magazine*, 8 (4) (1968), 96-102
- Lundberg, Patricia Lorimer, 'Dialogically Feminized Reading: A Critique of Reader-Response Criticism', *Reader*, 22 (1989), 9-37

Lundberg, Patricia Lorimer, 'The Dialogic Search for Community in Charlotte Bronte's Novels', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 20 (3) (1990), 296-317

Mackey, Nathaniel, 'Other: From Noun to Verb', *Representations*, 39 (1992), 51-70

Mackey, Nathaniel, 'Wringing the Word', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1995), pp.132-151

Maes-Jelinek, Hena, 'The Myth of El Dorado in the Caribbean Novel', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 6 (1) (1971), 113-127

Maes-Jelinek, Hena, ed., *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination* (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1991)

Maes-Jelinek, Hena, "'Numinous Proportions": Wilson Harris' Alternative to All Posts', in *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*, ed. by Ian Adam & Helen Tiffin (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.47-64

Maes-Jelinek, Hena, 'Charting the Uncapturable in Wilson Harris' Writing', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 90-97

McDougal, Russell, 'Corporeal Music: The Scale of Myth and Adjectival Insistence in *Palace of the Peacock*', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1991), pp.92-105

McGuirk, Carol, 'Burns, Bakhtin and the Opposition of Poetic and Novelistic Discourse: A Response to David Morris', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 32 (1) (1991), 58-72

- McWatt, Mark, 'The West Indian Writer and Self: Recent 'Fictional Autobiography' by Naipaul and Harris', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1) (1987), 16-27
- Mordecai, Pamela, 'A Crystal of Ambiguities: Metaphors for Creativity and the Art of Writing in Derek Walcott's *Another Life*', *World Literature Written in English*, 27 (1) (1987), 93-105
- Morris, David, 'Burns and Heteroglossia', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 28 (1) (1987), 3-25
- Morris, Mervyn, 'Some West Indian Problems of Audience', *English*, 16 (94) (1967), 127-139
- Morris, Mervyn, 'Walcott and the Audience for Poetry', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp.174-192
- Morson, Gary Saul, ed., *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on his Work* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1986)
- Morson, Gary Saul & Caryl Emerson, eds., *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989)
- Morson, Gary Saul & Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990)
- Musa, Mark, *Dante's Vita Nuova: A Translation and an Essay* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973)
- Mustafa, Fawzia, *V.S. Naipaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

- Papastergiadis, Nikos, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, ed. by Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), pp.257-281
- Parry, Benita, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1-2) (1987), 27-58
- Parrinder, Patrick, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Uses of Literacy', *Critical Quarterly*, 21 (2) (1979), 5-13
- Pearce, Lynne, *Reading Dialogics* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994)
- Pearce, Lynne, 'I The Reader: Text, Context and the Balance of Power', in *Feminist Studies, Multi-Media Cultural Methodologies*, ed. by Penny Florence & Dee Reynolds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- Pearce, Lynne, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997)
- Pechey, Graham, 'Bakhtin, Marxism and Post-structuralism', in *The Politics of Theory: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1982*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen & Diana Loxley (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), pp.234-247
- Pechey, Graham, 'On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogisation, Decolonisation', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop & David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.39-66
- Pechey, Graham, 'Not the novel: Bakhtin, Poetry, Truth, God', *Pretexts*, 4 (2) (1993), 68-86
- Pechey, Graham, 'Bakhtin and the Postcolonial Condition', in *Exploring Bakhtin*, ed. by Alastair Renfrew (Strathclyde: Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Strathclyde, 1998), pp.29-37

- Phillips, Caryl, 'The Guyana Enigma', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 November 1999, 26
- Pollard, Velma, 'The Dust'- A Tribute to the Folk', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 26 (1-2) (1980), 41-48
- Ramchand, Kenneth, 'In-Between', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), 126-127
- Ramchand, Kenneth, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (Sunbury-on-Thames: Nelson Caribbean, 1976)
- Rao, Judy, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Self-destructive Novel', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (2) (1989), 53-66
- Renfrew, Alastair, ed., *Exploiting Bakhtin* (Dept. of Modern Languages, University of Strathclyde, 1997)
- Richter, David, 'Dialogism and Poetry', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 23 (1) (1990), 9-27
- Roberts, Peter A., *West Indians and their Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Robinson, Jeffrey, 'The White Goddess and *Palace of the Peacock*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 2 (2) (1988), 15-22
- Rohlehr, Gordon, 'Islands: A Review', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 16 (4) (1970), 29-35
- Rohlehr, Gordon, *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite* (Tunapuna, Trinidad: Gordon Rohlehr, 1981)

- Rohlehr, Gordon, 'Rohlehr on Brathwaite', in *Hinterland: Caribbean Poetry from the West Indies and Britain*, ed. by E.A. Markham (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1989), pp.109-116
- Rohlehr, Gordon, 'The Ironic Approach: The Novels of V.S. Naipaul', in *The Islands in Between*, ed. by Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.121-139
- Rouse, Ewart, 'Naipaul: An Interview with Ewart Rouse', in *Conversations with V.S. Naipaul*, ed. by Feroza Jussawalla (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), pp.10-13
- Rushdie, Salman, 'V.S. Naipaul', in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.148-151
- Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994)
- Sander, Reinhard, 'The Impact of Literary Periodicals on the Development of West Indian Literature and Cultural Independence', in *Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Brussels: Didier, 1975), pp.25-32
- Savory, Elaine, 'Returning to Sycorax/Prospero's Response: Kamau Brathwaite's Word Journey', in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1995), pp.208-230
- Scanlon, Mara, 'By the People, For the People: Walcott's Epic and the Hetroglot Nation', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers*, ed. by Antony Wall (Calgary, University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)
- Scanlon, Mara, 'In the Mouths of the Tribe: Omeros and the Heteroglottic Nation', in *Bakhtin and the Nation*, ed. by San Diego Bakhtin Circle [Barry A. Brown,

- Christopher Conway, Rhett Gambol, Susan Kalter, Laura E. Ruberto, Tomás F. Taraborrelli, Donald Wesling] (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), pp.101-117
- Shakespeare, William, *The Tempest*, ed. by Anne Righter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
- Sharrad, Paul, 'The Art of Memory and the Liberation of History: Wilson Harris' Witnessing of Time', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 94-108
- Shaw, Gregory, 'Art and Dialectic in the Work of Wilson Harris', *New Left Review*, 153 (1985), 121-128
- Shaw, Gregory, 'Wilson Harris' Metamorphoses: Animal and Vegetable Masks in *Palace of the Peacock*', *Callaloo*, 18 (1) (1995), 158-170
- Shepherd, David, 'The Authority of Meanings and the Meanings of Authority', *Poetics Today*, 7 (1) (1986), 129-145
- Shepherd, David, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop & David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp.91-108
- Shukman, Ann, 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language', *Language and Style*, 12 (1) (1979), 54-55
- Sophocles, *Electra, Antigone, Philoctetes*, trans. by Kenneth McLeish (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)
- Souris, Stephen, 'The Architectonics of Multivocality: A Bakhtinian/Iserian Analysis of Recent American Multiple Narrator Novels', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of*

- Papers*, ed. by Antony Wall (Calgary, University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Steele, Fernanda, 'Breaking Down Barriers as a Genesis of a New Beginning in *Palace of the Peacock*', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 17 (2) (1997), 63-66
- Steiner, George, *Homer in English* (London: Penguin, 1997)
- Suleri, Sara, 'Naipaul's Arrival', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 2 (1) (1988), 25-50
- Szmetan, Ricardo, 'Bakhtinian Interpellations in the Discourse of the Other: On Reader Response Criticism', in *Dialogue and Culture: Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin. University of Calgary, Canada, June 20-25 1997, Conference Programme and Summaries of Papers*, ed. by Antony Wall (Calgary, University of Calgary, 1997) (abstract of paper, unpaginated)
- Terada, Rei, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992)
- Thieme, John, 'Thinly Veiled Autobiography', *Third World Quarterly*, 9 (4) (1987), 1376-1378
- Thorpe, Michael, *V.S. Naipaul* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1976)
- Tiffin, Helen, 'Rites of Resistance: Counter-discourse and West Indian Biography', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1) (1989), 28-46
- Tiffin, Helen, 'Retrace My Steps: *Heartland, Heart of Darkness* and Post-Colonial Counter Discourse', in *Wilson Harris: The Uncompromising Imagination*, ed. by Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundulstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1991), pp.127-139

- Titunik, I.R., 'Bakhtin &/Or Volosinov &/Or Medvedev: Dialogue &/Or Doublethink?', in *Language and Literary Theory*, ed. by Benjamin A. Stolz, Titunik & Lobomir Dolozel (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1984), pp.535-564
- Titunik, I.R., 'The Formal Method and the Sociological Method (M.M. Baxtin, P.N.Medvedev, V.N Volosinov) in Russian Theory and the Study of Literature', in V.N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp.175-200
- Torres-Saillant, Silvio, 'The Trials of Authenticity in Kamau Brathwaite', *World Literature Today*, 68 (4) (1994), 697-707
- Vaughan, Alden T. & Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- Vice, Sue, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)
- Walder, Dennis, 'V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order: Reading *In a Free State*', in *Recasting the World: Writing After Colonialism*, ed. by Jonathan White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp.82-19
- Walmsley, Anne, 'Dimensions of Song: A Comment on the Poetry of Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite', *Bim*, 13 (51) (1970), 152-167
- Walsh, William, *V.S. Naipaul* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973)
- Warner-Lewis, Maureen, 'Odomankoma Kyerema Se', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 19 (2) (1973), 51-99
- Werbner, Pnina & Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London: Zed books, 1997)

Werbner, Pnina, & Tariq Modood, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), pp.1-26

White, Hayden, 'The Authoritative Lie', *Partisan Review*, 50 (2) (1982), 307-312

Wilmerding, John, *Winslow Homer* (London & New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972)

Wilson-Tagoe, Nana, 'History and Style in *Another Life*', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, 1991), pp. 51-66

Xie, Shaobo, 'Writing on Boundaries: Homi Bhabha's Recent Essays', *ARIEL*, 27 (4) (1996), 155-166

Young, Robert, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Young, Robert, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Zavala, Iris, 'The Manuscript and Its Interpreters: Notes on the Omniscient Reader of the Poetics of the Lyric', in *Approaches to Discourse, Poetics and Psychiatry. Papers from the 1985 Utrecht Summer School of Critical Theory*, ed. by Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, Teun A. Van Dijk & Iris M. Zavala (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1987), pp.131-148

Zbinden, Karine, 'Traducing Bakhtin: and Missing Heteroglossia', *Dialogism*, 2 (1999), 41-59