

## **CHAPTER- 3**

### Interrogating and Reinventing for New Resonances: Walcott's Major Rewrites

I discovered what writers have always known (and have told us again and again), books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told.

- Umberto Eco

why do we need it?/ It's not what I set out with/ or what you carry./[...] The true story lies/ among the other stories./[...] the true story is vicious/ and multiple and untrue/[...] don't ever ask for a true story.

- Margaret Atwood

Postcolonial rewrites are often informed by imaginative challenge to cultural hegemony. They identify the mega-texts of Europe as deeply inflicted by ideological bias and exclusionary politics. Walcott, an assiduous reader of classics, was also aware of the fact that the classics not only ideologically and instrumentally validate the imperialist causes but also live on the sensibility and consciousness of the colonizer and colonized alike. With contestation and revision of such texts, the postcolonial artists did deconstruct the myths of Empire and imperial narratives. In constant imitation and dialogue with classical tradition, he endeavoured to forge an independent West Indian literary space. They identified how they could be appropriated and abrogated by the colonized in order to oppose the canon and revise its content. They are propelled by an impulse of transfiguring the master works through literary mutations; they preempt the possibility of closure. Long before the trope of 'writing back' became popular, Wilson Harris, Rhys, Lamming, Selvon and Derek Walcott appeared to contest the asymmetries of their culture and stereotypes spawned by a handful of British historian or travelers and canonical texts.

Their major artistic imperative was to explode the colonial myth and ideologies of Western superiority embedded in the mega-texts of Europe. Following the days of recently won independence, the familiar narrative or generic structure was transposed by the postcolonial artists to a strange or unfamiliar locale. As far as Achebe's novels have been identified as African invention, they use English and Western structure in response to the paradigm of the Metropolitan centre. Walcott considered drama to be suitable for counter-discursive intervention and he was aware that any re-writing of a specific colonial text requires both 'unwriting and rewriting' of the texts of the canonical discourse (Marx 89). The creative confrontation between the texts results in symbiosis of incommensurable traditions and incompatible cultures. Walcott's works by unsettling the simple binarism of 'mimicry' and 'originality', synthesized various cultural intertext. As it results in syncretist formations, Walcott's plays stage the transgression of national, racial and language boundaries and raise questions about narrative forms and ideas of character that problematize the categorical affirmation of cultural identity. Unlike the national and colonial models of binary constructions or homogenization of cultural complexities, creolized revision and counter performance evoke proliferation of differences and articulates alterity.

Since the early days of his career Walcott engaged with the European classics to nurture his creative writings; Western literature proved to be a rich and inspirational zone for the young playwright as many of his poems are widely allusive. As a young artist he had described himself a "houseboy" stealing from 'the house of literature' (*Collected Poems* 219); to "prolong the mighty lines of Milton and Marlowe" was his towering ambition. Harold Bloom, in his famous articulation about the articulation had contended that the poets engage constantly with their predecessors; the young poets wrestle with his strong predecessors or old masters before he/she can find an original poetic vision, they select the source text and is eventually urged by a desire to wrestle with them and ultimately to surpass them. Walcott embodied this quality as he was always sceptic about straightforward line of identification or what Said calls 'affiliative identifications'. Bloom identified the "strong" poet to be capable of transposing to new cultural milieu the works of his literary forefathers and thereby ridding them of authority and assumed originality. When Walcott was extending the literary and cultural traditions linked to the history of colonialism and imperialism, his unifying imagination strove hard to conciliate it with the post-colonial present of the Caribbean islands. In countering the European representation, he

sought to translate the colonial legacy and all its borrowed influences to open up an alternate cultural space. To negotiate a sense of national and cultural self-definition the past must be seen not in isolation but in continuum. In 'revisionary swerves' from his artistic father figures, his narratives progress along the past-present continuum. As Said affirms, "post-colonial writers bear their past within them... as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a new future, as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly native speaks and acts on territory taken back from empire" (31). The predecessor texts that fertilized his artistic imagination were not chronological but simultaneous because for Walcott, art appreciated chronologically will only develop separatist and ethnic cultures. Traducing linear genealogies, he argues in his much acclaimed essay "Muse of History", "But if you think of art as simultaneity... then Joyce is a contemporary of Homer" (62). Hence his literary works unsettle the notion of straight literary lineage; his motto was never "writing back" in the oppositional sense because "canonical counter-discourse is one method by which colonized cultures can refuse the seamless contiguity between a classical past and a post-colonial present that the empire strives to preserve" (Tompkins 51). Walcott's re-writes are the products of very kinetic process of transposition and transmutation. Re-writing conflates nearness and opposition, originality and mimicry, the dichotomies that were central to colonialist discourse. Like other Caribbean artists such as Rhys or Harris, Walcott repudiated the unidirectional link of the source text and its 'con-text' and created an 'opening' to subvert the closure of the text. His appropriation and adaptation of Homer, Defoe or Synge allowed him to break away from the hegemonic cultural control of the metropolitan centre. It demonstrates that the intertextual link is by no means a one-way process, but should be envisaged as plural and multidirectional. The master texts were also unstable subjects and could be constructed anew by a parodic reversal of ideological significance of the classical works. Without being combative, such works opened up fissures in the supposedly solid foundations of the 'pre-texts'. Like Harris or Carpentier, Walcott never ceased to argue against "the profound ineterpellation of the racial other into Western discourse"( Tompkins,36); their narratives are re-worked to invest them with more local relevance. In staging tension between use of European or classical tradition the conservative, unbroken authority of the European situation is critically interrogated.

In an essay entitled "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision", Adrienne Rich has argued that re-vision enables to look at the old text with a new critical look and thereby the 'hold

over” the tradition is broken/ruptured. She insists upon ‘Re-vision’ as an “act of survival’- as far as it is an issue of cultural survival; post colonial texts impede the closure of canonical texts and fragment and disperse their authority. By entering into an ambivalent dialogue with the canonical texts and by a parodic reversal of the cultural assumptions these classics are fragmented and reassembled. Transplanted in a new cultural milieu, they issue out polyphonic utterances. They fructify each other and infuse in the work hybrid energy. Belonging to the later phase of his career, Walcott’s two major re-writes, *Pantomime* and *Odyssey- A Stage Version*, take two European mega-texts as points of departure. They seek to cast a new, critical look at Defoe and Homer- expose the logic of discursive oppression, interrogate cultural values. These thematic ancestors when transported to the Caribbean present, they underwent certain alteration or mutation. As Lorna Hardwick comments, “Walcott’s later plays rework these traditions, using classical referents as the basis for new work which includes the idiom of the Caribbean”. (239) Both these works of post- workshop years marked a very important transition to creolising *Robinson Crusoe* and *Odyssey* two time-honoured cultural icons. From the late 70s Walcott entered a new phase with success both locally and internationally. Developing more sophisticated stagecraft, these works attempted creative confrontation with their ‘pre-texts’. Walcott advocated aesthetics and performance for the Caribbean “where someone could do Shakespeare or sing Calypso with equal conviction” (46). Melding of incommensurable traditions is the very essence of the process of creolisation or what may alternately be called ‘Caribbeanisation’ of the stage. His encounter with classics opened up a way to read them no longer as classics but as relevant to his own social milieu. His *Omeros* not only wrested away Homer from an exclusive European tradition and then incorporated Homer and Joyce in hybrid cultural condition of the West Indies. The acts of literary adaptation and appropriation, foregrounding of the local culture were attempts at countering the interpellation of the subject people by the dominant discourses and overhaul of the dichotomous colonial thinking. These plays may have been driven by the motto to correct the misrepresentation of their culture or through appropriation and adaptation they may have intended to confront cultural authority as self- empowering act.

The creative confrontation between classical and post-colonial texts and contexts is a major dynamic of Walcott’s dramatic works; it operates in a way to create new aesthetics and images. His plays did not merely descend from the canonical original but are produced through

creative dialogue sought to produce what Brathwaite calls evinced “nation performance”. His literary masterpieces are informed with the uncertainty of his own desire to belong to a tradition so closely allied with colonialism. In subject matter and style, they re-defined the Caribbean stage; they sought not merely to re-present the masses commonly. They misrepresented in master-scripts but interrogate very mechanisms that continue to erase, denigrate, enslave and encrypt. Thus theatre could determine for the Caribbean subjects a style of performance that is expressive of affiliative impulse rather than filial acceptance; they could supplant the imposed theatrical tradition and violate the canonical authority. Gilbert and Tompkins have contended that in attempting to redress the situation, post-colonial performance texts often violate the canon, set up “an agonistic encounter between local and received traditions”. (21). The non-Western performances like Balinese dance, Shadow play and Yatra tradition of Bengal have revised the hierarchies implicit in the colonial texts and wrested the privileged position of the European classics. The canons of distant European centres have helped perpetuate the inferiority of the socio-cultural life of the colonized territories and thus gradually erase whatever was considered “other(ed) knowledges”(ibid20). Therefore, performance art in the Caribbean region resulted in a heightened awareness of cultural difference, cross-cultural interdependence. Such theatrical performances hybridize traditions to bring about new cultural experiences. John Theime states, “post-colonial societies have been, and are, the ever-changing syncretist outcomes of varied cultural formations and their writers of multiple ethnic, gender and communal and other backgrounds” (2). As a strong de-colonising strategy, the defining tales of the Europe were adopted and mutated and their basic assumptions were dismantled. Thus literary ‘take-over’ was in its way a bold refusal to cultural dependency. It signified that the powerful paradigms represented by Europe’s canonical texts could now be mobilized in defense of what had once been seen as secondary, deviant and primitive. When Walcott re-worked Homer or Defoe or Shakespeare on Caribbean terms, he’s staking a literary claim to European tradition from and beyond its conventional boundaries. But at the same time, rewriting the characters, the narrative, the context allows the playwright an opportunity of performative intervention and reclaim the heterogeneous and hitherto excluded elements of culture. Thus these texts articulate a tension between mega-texts of Europe and their local enunciation of the cultural content; only by specially conditioned performance differences in place, culture or language could be wiped out. A set of plays belonging to the later phase- *Joker of Seville, Pantomime, Odyssey- a Stage*

*Version, A Branch of Blue Nile* exemplify what is often termed ‘performative counter-discourse’. This chapter concentrates on how powerfully through voice, body, discourse, accents of speech - the whole semiotic network disrupt the authority of the imperial canon and creates new resonances in them. Performance has been credited with disrupting and dishonouring the traditional sanctities of the author, text, actor and also undermining the illusionist technique or realist theatre. Rather than passive engagement with their intertexts, they mobilize the awareness of cultural difference. Walcott’s plays reveal significant correspondences and differences with their “pre-text”, because he recognized that “awareness of the past can have a deadening as well as the liberating effect on poetic energy and their concern is to ensure that his energy is nurtured and released” (Hardwick 348)

In the Barthesian sense, the original meaning of the very word ‘text’ is ‘a tissue, a woven fabric’.(qtd. in Graham Allen’s *Intertextuality*159). In traducing originality, Walcott always believed a text is always woven out of the threads of the ‘already written’ and ‘already read’. Many of his dramatic texts exist in transformative relation with other text/ texts. In order to avoid the reduction to mere ‘influence’ Walcott did not only utilize previous textual units but transformed them or ‘transposed’ them into new signifying system. In fact, from antiquity to the present- from the Bible and ancient Rome to Hardy, Pasternak to Nailpaul- Walcott’s artistry embraces a rich, three- thousand year span of cultural activity dependent on Europe. Walcott’s representative object was very different and when he turned to mega-texts, he could radically alter them. *Joker of Seville*(1974, along with ‘ *O Babylon*’(of 1976),) represents Walcott’s foray into the form of the musical. With music by Galt Macdermot Walcott plunged himself into the pursuit of the musical. It was to be an adaptation of Torso de Molina’s [El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra](#) ( *The Trickster of Seville* and *The Stone Guest*) who re-created from various legends the figure of Don Juan, a hero-villain- a seductive libertine who devotes his life in seducing women taking great pride in his ability. The original was a play set in the fourteenth century Spain. Walcott re-vises the legend, commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and in an interview he explains, “I did not want to produce a play purely for the Shakespeare company or English actors and audiences. I wanted to write a play that could also be produced in West-Indies.” So, what I have done is put Don Juan, or the Joker of Seville, in a West-Indian setting and indeed, one of the runs in the story is: Don Juan is a stickman.” .

Though its first premier was given by Walcott's own company Trinidad Theatre Workshop, in Nov.1974, the budget cuts in the metropolis left the RSC unable to produce it. All these are indicative of Walcott's resolve to creolise the original and European myth of male sexuality rooted in specific Caribbean folk forms; what is produced is a cross-cultural piece testifying to Walcott's much-praised hybrid humanism. Walcott in his introductory note pointed out how the Trinidadian music and its public character had the qualities of wit, panache and elan of Tirso's period. Tirso's play came from the folk tradition and was not a part of the mainstream classic European tragedy and Walcott believed Juan as "a man who must have come from the folk imagination". To 'Caribbeanize' the play from the Spanish Golden Age, Walcott was insistent about his region's environment, language, music, dance and folk traditions. Shifting the focus away from the protagonist, Juan, Walcott's

play begins with the chorus, consisting of "a ship's crew, wedding crew, wedding guests, nuns, courtiers, ladies, slaves, fishergirls, musicians, whores, stickfighters, dancers"( Prologue). The setting is more demotic here compared to the stratification of the Spanish society. In place of Juan involved actively in his performance, here the Prologue reveals how Don Juan figure can be resurrected in any society for the re-enactment of his drama. As Rafael announces:

"This is the eve of All Souls,  
Our carnival of candles,  
When our village, San Juan, re-creates  
A legend that cannot grow old...  
... bring him across  
The ocean, with salt, real flesh  
as man, to live his loves over.  
(kneels)  
Earth, who holds him like a lover.  
Release him to us for one light... (Prologue)"

The prologue resurrects Juan as a champion stickman, a kind of jamaican folk hero. In the Tirsonian version *Don Juan* is killed towards the end of act III when he goes to supper with Don Gonzalo's statue. But in Walcott's play he is killed during the supper that takes place at Don Juan's sanctuary in the cathedral. Other than such structural changes, Walcott syncretised the original Spanish text in terms of setting, stage directions also. Musical contributions of Galt MacDarmot draw extensively from calypso and the related tradition; the re-composed plot is animated by the rhythms of language, music and dance; the text embodies the principle of dynamic intersection of signifying practices. Permeating all the scenes, the Caribbean cultural reality is evoked through the lyrics, instruments and rhythm. All performance of Rafael and his troupe, role-playing takes place before the Trinidadian audience in the frame of folk experience and it ensures a full-blooded theatrical pleasure. On the occasion of All Soul's Eve, the villagers have come to perform the annual re-enactment of the Don Juan legend in a procession where they carry candles. It has its roots in the canboulay festival, a festival of the indentured labourers in the 1880s in which drums, singing, dancing and chanting were an integral part. The festival atmosphere is intensified by calypso with familiar refrain of *sans humanite*. Set in the makeshift arena of the field of a Trinidadian village, the area is like bullring, cockpit where stickfight was used to be practiced traditionally. In the Spanish Golden Age the setting was courtyard which also allowed contact with the audience and creating scopes for lively interaction. Walcott's Juan is re-created as skillful Trinidadian stickman, the very embodiment of male virility or macho Caribbean male, frequently celebrated in many classic calypso. Errol Hill has commented that the stickfighting was as much a musical performance, martial and kalinda, a form of song sung by the sticksmen with supporting chorus (351) At the same time Juan's sexual adventures are held to be equivalent with local performance, as Edward Baugh explains, "a 'stick man' is not only a man trained in stick fighting, but also, in Trinidadian slang, a man of great sexual prowess" (122). It deserves to be mentioned that the Trinidad Theatre workshop gave it a Sunday morning performance in natural light to conform to the condition laid down by the playwright himself: "the audience should sit on wooden bleachers close to the action, as in a rural bullfight, cockfight, or stickfight"(Joker 5). Like the setting of *Ti-Jean or Dauphin*, this setting is not only bare and open-air but involves the audience in the celebration of the occasion, indicating a greater rapport with the audience to overcome the divide of the proscenium arch from the auditorium. The physical style of acting and its vigour are signature elements of Walcott's

theatrical style since the days of Ti-Jean. The calypso at the beginning and end, dances suggest how West-Indian sensibility is rooted in folk rituals. The creole rhythms of song and physical expressiveness enable Walcott smoothly transit from Spanish creole setting to folk settings. The action is also interspersed with the shout and response pattern of songs of kalinda rhythms. Thieme has called it “Trinidadian version of play’s *carpe diem* theme”(69) . The way performance re-invents the script is exhibited in two of Errol’s two prominent texts- *Man Better Man*(1985) and *Dance Bongo* (1971). Hill advanced Caribbean drama with notable innovations like melding the original composition with calypso music and voodoo practice.

Walcott’s treatment of women has been castigated by Elaine Savory as it re-inforces negative stereotypes. She in her much-cited article “Art and Macho Attitudes: The Case of Derek Walcott” charges Walcott to have treated the issue of male infidelity “lightly and stylishly” and Juan’s attitude to women to be ‘tinged with disgust (249)’. But the three women- Isabella, Tirso and Anna whom Juan seduces and conquers one after another are not mere inert victims of aggressive male lust. Walcott’s re-composition of Juan’s ventures celebrate victory male cunning and intelligence or the superhuman energy of men. Isabella who has been deceived by the disguise of Juan of beggar women has been sentenced to a year’s penance in the convent. To the oppressive patriarchal authority, she retorts:

“a woman, yes! That was my wrong,  
Born to this privilege of debasement,  
Ordered to keep a civil tongue  
Locked in its civil ivory casement,  
When you re pious, she’s a wife,  
And when appropriate a whore,  
Now that you’ve simplified my life  
To silence, I will speak no more.”

(1.1.10-17.115)

In attempting to voice the ‘mutedness’ of the Caribbean women, she also interrogates the codes and norms upheld in the society. Women are shut up within courts, castles or convents enveloped in dominant discourse. And again when she describes Juan with these words “He, the great joker of Seville, / whose mischief is simply a boy’s/ has made us women that is all”. (2.2), she strikes as independent voice rather than a pitiable victim. All the women that Juan seduces are endowed with strong individual viewpoints despite imprisoning roles in cramped societies. In Erna Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa Will come Home* women struggle for voice amidst small societies’ too many dictum/ strictures. As Anna’s father has been killed in the hands of Juan, she nurtures/ spells out a revenge wish and cries out for justice:

“... With my last breath  
I’ll pray for justice, and for both  
Of you, until he pays that debt”.

(2.2.14-16.119)

Her combative zeal is Walcott’s own re-interpretation of the theme of justice and revenge. Isabel credits Juan to have exonerated her from the false propriety and moral virtues of a wife. Tiseba, another well-read and intelligent woman seeks to improve her lot in marriage. Bound to tradition, they are un-silenced from the iron clutches of material and cultural oppression. By violating the prescribed code of chastity, Juan allows freedom to satisfy desire of love without moral validity. Patricia Ismond describes Juan as the rebel- courtier who “brings out into the open of the libido, the inordinate appetite which is the root element of all desire” (252). No less than the ladies, Juan displays devilish charm and defiantly challenges the strictures of his society. His charm is so irresistible that he can “change to elation each grave situation”. It is he who has exposed the travesty of pretension to propriety and respectability, formality and sophistication: “I/ fought for the freedom delivered/ after Eden” (2.6, 250). He sees himself as an agent that causes others to reveal their true selves. A passionate opponent of hypocritical society, he commits unflinchingly to the obligations of marriage, the orthodoxies of the establishment of state and church. As Robert Hamner describes him, “Juan embodies an irrational force- the spirit within man which urges him to obey subconscious impulses and to defy prohibitions such as those imposed in Eden and society. He is existential, post-Adamic man,

outside the pale of institutional values” (123). As a force, he not only points out the wrongs of the society but as an arch-rebel he claims to be a deliverer. Noticeably, the play concludes with the whole company joining together in a song about the possibility of freedom for a caged bird. The early heroes of Walcott also did not shrink from the imperatives of their moral choice and spurned moral guidelines. They stand apart from the pale of cultural establishment and defy its constraints. In the post-independence years, the Caribbean people had to assert their subject position and negotiate the ravage and collapse of the old world civilization. It is not for nothing that Edward Baugh has described Walcott’s Juan to be “a hero with a mission for change” (122). He has emancipated his victims by enunciating their powerlessness, to a new belief in themselves and re-claiming their identity:

Don Juan sings:

“Seville give me the honor  
of calling me Don Juan, the Joker,  
and its true what I do may undo a  
woman, but I renew her  
and honor her with dishonor”.

(2.1,4-9.117)

Revisiting Tirso’s original plot and characters, Walcott’s drama finds ample scope to pointedly critique the existing patriarchal code and hypocrisies directing the sexual politics. Breaking away from the authoritative canonical text and by the coalescing local and European traditions reflected in its indigenous syncretic practices, *Joker of Seville* demonstrates imaginative amplification rather simple transplantation. Decidedly more complex through the re-composition, the original undergoes literary mutations and re-interpretations. Long before in a preface to one of the programmes of the performance of *The Joker*, Walcott pointed out these “legends find their own vessels, when one oracle is exhausted, they may spring up in unexpected ground, just as vital, real, vulgar and apprehensible as they were when they first sprang to life”(16)

## ***Pantomime:***

Dramatists borrow the theatrical idioms across traditions, time and space, in order to reread the historical present and socio-political state. Cultural dialogue therefore, generates the possibility of performance in recontextualising and translating the source text. In Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*, Greek storyline has been adapted to the political, cultural circumstances of post-independence Nigeria and in the process of transposition the text is hybridized ; it interrogates the “ primacy of the Western tragic mode”( Tompkins,39) .Walcott was always convinced of the transformative and transpositional potential of the theatre. When he took over and adopted the defining tales of Europe, he found the need to syncretise the performances and give a Caribbean meaning to *Robinson Crusoe* on stage. Here, performance threatens the integrity of author, text and actor and rescues the dramatic text from deadly strategies and revivifies them in striking production. It is the startling potential of stage production to subvert the polarities of the dominant discourse -the salient quality of Pantomime. *Robinson Crusoe*, the ‘mega-text’ of English fiction, it has excited the Caribbean imagination by establishing and maintaining the tropologies of the New World. By a generic transposition, by a re- enactment of the original myth and by corrupting original script as Gilbert and Tompkins describe it, could such “tropologies be challenged and changed” (38).Revisiting Defoe's tale, Walcott's choice of the title of play reveals that the European travel and adventure story may be retold through facial, gestural acting. Often with the intention of ridiculing Pantomime was popularly practiced even in ancient Greece and Rome. The idea of role-playing, so common a strategy in Walcott set the pace of the narrative; at the background of stage, musical performance permeates the whole action. In his 1965 lecture on the figure of Crusoe, Walcott had quoted Yeats, “Give a man mask, and he will talk of the truth”. The post-colonial re-writes have always sought to confront the claim to absolute knowledge and truth and displace hierarchical arrangements of identity. Thus performance bears out a new system of signification because it “... stages an especially rich and reciprocal relationship amongst cultural hybridity, staged performance and political opposition” (Puri 107). As a fluid cultural mode it seeks to overturn the dominant aesthetic, linguistic, narrative and cultural codes. For over two decades, Walcott was involved in directorial business and production of performances and was aware that representation in drama and theatre does not always indicate a fixed referent or determinate position of the object represented. It can be

strategic, exploratory and re-creative/ inventive and it may generate an alternative fictional archive. The marginality of the cultural location enables the writer question the ideological basis of canonization and ideological bias such canon-formation reveals. Achebe has also insisted that such re-composition of classics or counter-hegemonic texts can go a long way to reclaim the self-belief and dispel the sense of denigration and self-abasement. They provide a useful way to analyse the relationship between the imperial past and its legacies in the present and stresses how the social relationship needs to be divested of the memories of slavery and colonization. So far as they re-write the characters, the narrative and context of the canonical perspective, they offer what may be called “renewed opportunities for performative intervention”. (Tompkins16). This intervention helps forge what Said describes as “... a geography of other identities, people and cultures/... and then to study how despite their differences they have always overlapped one another through unhierarchical influence, crossing, incorporation, recollection, deliberate, forgetfulness and of course conflict”(330-331).

After its first production, *Pantomime* was immediately recognised as remarkably relevant and timely work; it unleashed a candid commentary on post-independence social and racial politics in the West Indies. *Robinson Crusoe* has a particular significance for the Caribbeans since the white man on whom Crusoe is generally considered to have been based, Alexander Selkirk was cast ashore at his own request in a far less hospitable climate. Crusoe- Friday have been considered for long as the archetypes of the colonizer and colonized. It might have been fairly justified to have accorded Friday a centrality in counter-hegemonic response. Appropriating the story of encounter between a white castaway and local native, Walcott transfigures the adversarial relation into a comic two-hander; here, the narrative authority is wrested from Defoe’s narrator because Walcott was always attuned to the conflicting voices, the dialectic present in the source text. Rather than monologic discourse of Eurocentrism, Walcott is fascinated about how the text is riven with tensions and conflicts. Walcott has stated Crusoe to be “a figure from schoolboy reading. He is a part of mythology of every West-Indian child.” (Hamner,37). West Indian poets and prose writers have tended to identify with Crusoe, the castaway as a protean and contradictory figure. Walcott also lays main stress on the protean mutability of the Crusoe figure, one who is chameleon like and extremely adaptive to changing situations. To Walcott, the poet’s task is not to resolve these contradictions, to impose ‘explanation, justification and order’, but to embrace them, to reveal in the contrariety. As a

result, when he revisits the Crusoe story it is neither to exonerate nor to seek recrimination, but to explore the castaway's predicament and the dynamics of his proto-colonial relationship with Friday. It may also offer in the way of insights into, firstly, Caribbean experience and secondly to the poet's role in mediating this experience. Walcott, so often embraces this conflict, identifying with both the name-giving Crusoe in whose language he wishes to immortalize his Caribbean island and mimicking Friday, whose language and culture have been suppressed. In a paper presented orally at the University of West-Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 27 October, 1965, titled '*The Figure of Crusoe*', Walcott clearly states "If we read the commentary of exiles, we will think my position which is that of Crusoe or Friday, or more truly, a mixture of their imagined progeny, has been made defensive when it is in fact logical." (39). To empathize with the both would seem to defy the reality of colonialism. All such identifications, he seems to suggest, are no more than role-playing, adopting masks and mere poseurs. The problematic of the dynamic between Crusoe and Friday is never really explored in the three Crusoe poems. In those poems, Walcott mainly focuses upon the isolated position of the Caribbean poet and his creative process. In them, Crusoe is re-imagined as the hermetic poet whose craft is essentially solitary, something to be recognized for 'another's praise'. On the solitary beach, the poet feeds the 'detritus of the past' into a great bonfire by whose 'light he contemplates himself'. Crusoe is essentially a maker, re-deployed by Walcott to present art as craft, an honourable toil, requiring patience and humility:

“even the bare necessities  
Of style are turned to use,  
Like those plain tools he salvages  
From shipwreck, hewing a prose  
As odorous as raw wood adze”

(*Castaway*, 51)

The remoteness from the metropolitan world proves not to be inhibitive but favourable for the artists to initiate a Caribbean aesthetics.

The play maintains the features of classical pantomime. The pantomime genre with its cross-dressing and festival, role-playing/ masquerading, suspension of the ordinary social rules set in tune a pure carnival atmosphere. Played out by two men cast, Harry and Jackson, seeking a boost of the hotel trade in the imminently arriving season devises a pantomime on Crusoe-Friday theme. Harry discloses that he has scripted the panto version of Robinson Crusoe with two characters. But their roles are reversed to give the audience a share of satiric laughter. The adoption of their respective masks (Friday/ Crusoe) provides the necessary cover for Jackson and Harry to give emotional free rein to the sentimentality lurking behind their more accustomed roles of employer and employed. As soon as they began rehearsing their show, the comedic, playful nature of the performance runs off the track. Fun slips into satire and fake situation trips into the actual of the two. It is not for nothing that the play has been described by Paula Burnett as “carnavalesque teasing of Defoe’s and Western culture’s assumption” (119). It includes comic skits, clown routines and other slapstick effects. Both the players/ characters are from performance backgrounds; Harry is a retired British actor and Jackson, a hired Trinidadian, Calypsonian and carnival maestro. Drawing from disparate English and Caribbean popular performance tradition, this comic two-hander seeks to displace the authority of the voice of Defoe’s narrator and foreground the local performance tradition. Through shifts, turns and twists, involving all kinds of acting- “classical acting and creole acting”, their continuum creates a theatrical practice syncretized- a key feature also of the other two major Robinsonades, Coetzee’s *Foe* and Sam Selvon’s *Moses Ascending*. In this rich text, as Patricia Ismond has contended, “Walcott shows great skill and artistic resourcefulness in his use of the pantomime convention” (Theatre,13). The structure is no doubt complex fabric of classical and creole artistry- two incompatible traditions. The two performers complement each other perfectly, engaging in clown routines, ironic repartee and other slapstick effects. As Jackson himself describes, “So both of we doesn’t have to improvise so much as to exaggerate. We are faking, faking all the time” (1.85-86). Both British pantomime and the carnival acts are popular forms, both feature traditions of masking, humour that is often bawdy. Besides, cross-dressing, hybrid and variety of shows, frequent combinations of music, song and dance continue to improvise scripted panto. Improvisation admits unpredictability as well as creative manipulation of those unpredictabilities as part of the process. The playful, entertaining character of the performance does not diminish critical enthusiasm for political allegorizing in the plot. As the American

productions of the play tended to overemphasise the racial bitterness and hostility, Walcott pointed out how it may replicate imperialistic structure.

“The point is very simple. There are two types. The prototypical Englishman is not supposed to show his grief publicly. He keeps a stiff upper lip. Emotions and passions are supposed to be the things that a troubled Englishman avoids. What the West-Indian character does is to try to wear him down into confessing that he is capable of such emotion and there’s nothing wrong in showing it”(214-215). The continuum of classical and creole acting, slapstick comedy and psycho-confessional drama, jocular and serious acting, creates possibilities of mutation of the host texts. And in the process, it deconstructs the figural binarism of the master/slave, black/ white, colonizer and colonized embedded in the colonial “pre-texts”. Here, the narrative casts light on the open dialectic of the voice of the ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ and displaces enclosed discursive mode.

There is a consensus among the readers that of the two performers, Jackson’s is a completely outstanding achievement. Pouring out his ‘creole’ energy Jackson gets “freed from the shackles of the subservient “Friday’ role, now strides masterfully across the stage: his domination of Harry is effortless, and it is he who adopts the position of teacher” (Minford 130). The tension between the masterscript and self- mastery of the script fleshes out in Jackson’s role. His transgressive performance is at once entertaining, enjoyable and also thought- provoking; his deft role-playing overturns hierarchization of identity categories. He is assertive, bold, challenging, uncondescending. His flair for acting trips beyond the scripted part so much so that Harry has to disrupt the performance;

“we’re trying to do something light, just a little pantomime, a little satire, a little picong. But if you take this thing seriously, we might commit Art, which is a crime in this kind of society” (I, 41-43,140). From the beginning it is evident that Jackson’s humour has a sharp sting and he is equally adept at playing Columbus or Francis Drake. He is the very embodiment of critically resistive discourse of cultural hegemony of the West. He argues how the act of appropriation is a tool for correcting the hidden ideological assumption from the position of marginality: “Shakespeare, Robinson Crusoe, the classics, and so on and when we start getting as good as them, you can’t leave halfway” (I, 40-41,140). Playing the role of black Crusoe, Jackson

paddles his canoe, mimes a shipwreck and then proceeds to teach his white slaves in African language. He is not simple black Crusoe; his role is fraught with complexities. By his constant improvisations, he's manipulated his pre-defined social role in Harry's script. In the opening situations, he's not only brought the timely breakfast for his master but he confronts him with a reminder of historical reality of servitude as the act of placing master's foot upon the head:

“ three hundred years I served you breakfast in... in my white jacket on a white verandah, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib... in that sun that never set on your empire I was your shadow, I did you what you did, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib... that was my pantomime” (I:I,112)

Jackson is astutely critical of the constructedness of pre-scripted role and refuses to remain within the limits. After being reduced to mere shadows, the colonized can only act as mere performing animal swayed by the task master. Instead of adopting the master's values and abrogating the power of naming, he calls his role 'Thursday'. Through his constant improvisation, he proves that for all practical purposes, passivity must be sloughed off. Harry's script for Crusoe starts with lazy reflection: "O silent sea... from this complete desolation" and Jackson reminds him that Crusoe was above all a practical man who devises survival after shipwreck than a mere nature lover. He believes that a creole identity "grows from the unaided self- confronting hunger, shipwreck and solitude and creating what it needs" (Breslin123). Time and again he re-does Harry's script assertively. It is he who discovers that Harry's Crusoe- mania has resulted from bitterness of loneliness, separation from family and ex-wife's re-marriage. In a scene in Act II Jackson takes a photograph of Ellen and confronts Harry, and his role plying is so deft that it may easily be confused with reality:

“All right. I'll tell you what I'm going to do next, Ellen: you're such a big star, you're such a luminary, I'm going to leave you to shine by yourself. I'm giving up this bloody rat-race and I'm going to take up Mike's offer, I'm leaving "he theauth", which destroyed my confidence, screwed my marriage, and made you a star" (162, 4-7).

When Harry sounds maudlin from all the past setbacks and disasters, Jackson goads him to overcome the trauma of past and raise self-esteem: "Crusoe must get up. He have to face a next day again" (164). While Trewe is insecure, driven by specters of failure, Jackson is in full

command of self. He even can help Harry recover from the inferiority complex compared to his ex-wife who used to outperform him on the London stage. Full of self-dignity, he gradually brings his master to self-knowledge; he batters him out of his stiffness. He is the stark opposite of Friday of source text, self-expressive and eloquent or verbally proficient. With a voice, character and purpose of his own, he embodies “the spirit of independence that has been gradually taking root in the region”. (Theatre Ismond16)

From the beginning, Jackson is aware that they two are staging ‘history of imperialism’. By energetic role- playing, role reversal and parodying, he cuts thorough the myth of racial superiority. By revising Harry’s script, by zealous acting, Jackson mounts an attack against cultural system and codes of the metropolitan centre or occludes the violence of power relations. Towards the end, Harry even recognises an adroit performer and addresses him as Mr. Philip. He describes the colonizing mission of recasting the natives in his own image which now boomerangs and haunts the colonizer himself in the form of the shadow and makes him insecure:

“But the shadow don’t stop, no matter if the child stop playing the pantomime... while h praying, the shadow pray too, when he turn round frighten, the shadow turn round too... And that is why all of them Pakistani and the West-Indians in England... driving all you so crazy. In that sun that never set, they’s your shadow, you can’t shake them off” (1. 25-27.137). Earlier, Harry had stigmatized the third-world people as incapable of originality and creativity which echoes Naipaulian dismissal in the *The Mimic men*: “We pretend to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World” (113). The charge often pinned against the writers from the periphery was one of sterile imitation, imperfect mimicry of metropolitan paradigms. Walcott, always distrustful of originality, did never tire of pointing out mimicking as instrumental in displacing the structural non-equivalence, the discourses and logic of superiority. In *Pantomime*, creole art has been held up as capable of manipulating the performance and interrogative of the racist stereotypes, jokes and myths. Harry’s parrot imitates the name of its former German owner Herr Nigger with a creole accent. And the phrase sounds very much like “hey nigger”- a phrase of derision, a stock racial slur that startled and confronted Fanon during a train ride with his abject ‘otherness’. At this Jackson gets revolted and calls it ‘prejudiced’- the very same charge commonly leveled against the colonized. In his ground-breaking analysis of mimicry, Bhaba has described it as threatening to the strategies of

domination and other forms of disciplinary mechanism. Jackson's improvisational creativity renegotiates the relation of the two men and also uproots the established notions of history, race and social standing. Creative performativity can be oppositional to the essentialist politics and can problematize the dualism of copy/ original. At the outset the West-Indian islands is evoked by Harry as a tourist' paradise. He sings:

“Just picture a lonely island  
And a beach with its golden sand  
There walks a single man  
In the beautiful islands.”

(1. 6-9.132)

To cater to the demand of entertainment of the guests during the season, Harry devises a comic skit on the English classic Robinson Crusoe hinged upon role reversals. But the association of 'golden sand', naked footprint and the idea of Carnivalisation are constructs of the tourism industry and Jackson frankly opposes the idea and thus asserts his freedom:

“I tell you, I ain't no actor, and I ain't working in front of a set of tourists naked playing cannibal. Carnival, but not Cannibal.”

(I: 9-12.132).

The myth of cannibalism is a testament to the West's claims of moral superiority. By refusing to walk naked before the tourists, he resists the interpellation of commercial tourism. He also objects to the proposed role-swapping which will ask Harry to play 'white cannibal' in front of his own people. This reversal is further developed when Harry unfolds a scenario in which Friday, now called Thursday is the Christian cannibal who has to unlearn his barbarous Christianity in order to be taught in African faith. Thus the opposite poles of the savage/ civilized are a myth constructed to justify the epistemic violence of the colonizer. Harry assures his servant about not contemplating suicide and the reason he offers is full of colonialist clichés and stereotypes:

“ Attempted suicide in a Third World country. You can’t leave a note because the pencils break, you can’t cut your wrist with the local blades”. (I , 31-34/133).

Jackson reminds that his ‘Third world’ is doing better ever since the English people are gone. Thus, time and again they confront each other with racial prejudices and colonial stigmas.

George Lamming has argued that to assert a different identity is never enough. Because, the history of Caliban is a history of development, growth and maturity. So it is true of Friday and Crusoe in the context of the play. Here Walcott’s staging of the encounter allows both Harry and Jackson grow and develop and overcome the *stasis* of their individual identity. They go through an elaborate pantomime and recognize in each other kindness and compassion. Paul Breslin in his perceptive analysis also mentions that the dynamic of the colonizer and colonized, master- servant is maneuvered effectively by the players to produce ‘a new text’- a text that through performance has translated the polarities of the relation and opposition into what Thieme has called “renegotiation of the roles in the post-independence period” (130). Neither Harry nor Jackson could foresee how their performance will release them from the straitjacket of racially inflicted identity and the re-positioning after the rehearsal of racial reversal. Harry with much of his suppressed rage now released has come to appreciate in his factotum an extremely talented actor. And with all play-acting over, Jackson at the very end reminds his employer, “starting from Friday, Robinson, we could talk about a raise” (170). This is, according to Partrick Taylor, not a mere demand for a salary hike but a claim for recognition and dignity. The oppressive material condition of daily lives never left Walcott’s artistic concern. Beside it may also be noted that Makak’s return home, as Walcott himself explained will see him resume his trade on another marketing day, in case of Jackson may well be a purely practical and material imperative. After all, Jackson has never ignored the duty of catering to the needs of the employer. Though there has been no material change in their position at the end of the play but they explore new understanding, rapport and mutuality after playing for so long ‘the history of imperialism’. They metamorphose themselves to assert beyond their singular identity and in the process, all hierarchies and privileges are suspended. And this is made possible by carnivalising the Crusoe-Friday myth. Thieme contends: “ultimately the play propounds a view of the character as a fluid, endlessly mutating process rather than an essentialist entity, a view which can be seen as a postcolonial conception of subjectivity irrespective of the period under consideration.”(127).

Both Harry and Jackson, by stripping away their prejudices can claim to a new identity; with colonial yoke left behind, they have successfully restaged their identity. Having negotiated with all perceptions and prejudices, both arrive at a common shore of understanding and respect. As Jackson's final calypso puts it:

“Well, a limey name Trewe came to Tobago  
He was in a show business but he had no show  
So in desperation he turn to me  
And said: “Mr. Philip” is the two o’we,  
One classical ctor and Creole,  
Let we act together with we heart and soul,  
It go be man to man, and we go do it fine,  
And we go give it the title of pantomime.  
La da deed a da da  
Dee da da da da da da...”

(2 .36-45 151-152.)

After structural oppositions are dismantled, the cultural forum may generate possibilities for redemption. Walcott also underlined that this reconciliatory notion of living together may appear “facile solution’ to many but the possibility cannot be ruled out. In an interview he tells Edward Hirsch:

“I’ve had people say they think the ending is corny, but generally that criticism has come when I’m in America. The idea of some reconciliation or some adaptability of being able to live together that is sometimes rejected by people as being a facile solution.” , (119)

Harry and Jackson’s role playing testifies to the destabilizing and interruptive function of performance art. They do not merely represent reality but undergo self-transformation. Central to the plot of *Pantomime* is the confrontation of performance text and the literary text. Here several unpredictable and improvised performance destabilize the source text. As Shalini Puri observes,

“Neither Harry nor Jackson can foresee the full consequences of their rehearsal or performance” (133). As the role of Crusoe- Friday is translated into linguistic and other codes of carnivalization, the performance text is emancipated from the literary text. Jackson’s performance is highly transgressive and evolves in total disregard. the design of the plot in terms of textuality or performative is never consistent. Abandoning the faithfulness to the literary, it becomes a ‘new’ text with alternate dimensions, both temporally and spatially. Here, Harry also redeems himself redeemed jealousy and both the performance artists undergo self-transformation. Besides enactment of individual stories, the performance foregrounds a collective history- as they enact a more collective history.- the history of mastery and servitude, racial oppression Thus, primacy of the text, as in post-dramatic theatre, is undermined. The non-linear, fragmented narrative, play-within-a a play, transgresses the border of life and art and blur their boundaries.

Brief comparison may be invited of *Pantomime* with two major re-writes or Robinsonades of Z.M. Coetzee and Sam Selvon. The African writers in their constant re-doing of the Western canon have sought to emphasize their own differences and unique qualities and endeavoured to uproot the myth of Western Superiority. Like Walcott, Coetzee unwrites the colonial intertext and in using his raw material transforms Crusoe fable. Without being overtly oppositional, his *Foe* seeks to subvert the ethics of the pre-text in a rather oblique way. In Coetzee’s novel Friday appears to be silent with his tongue ripped out and becomes the very centre of Susan Barton’s contestatory narrative. Her Crusoe is further marginalized and gives away the narrative authority to Susan. The silence/ muteness of Friday is deemed the allegory for victimhood in the days of apartheid. Like the Walcottian text, Coetzee finds the means to question the authority in the precursor discourse and investigate the power dynamics, political oppression and ethical responsibility. If in *Pantomime* Jackson claims a cultural space for the hitherto marginalized/ excluded group, *Foe*, too, rests upon one ethico-discursive principle- the right of formerly misrepresented human groups speak for and represent themselves. Like Walcott’s play, it finds the means to question the authority the precursor discourse, investigate the power dynamics, political oppression and ethical responsibility. The Crusoe of the host text original is remade into weak minded Cruso with few tools, no gun and in a completely abandoned state. The only woman Ellen in *Pantomime* is only a background figure, existing only in Harry’s representation/ account of the past and Jackson only by cross- gender acting brings

her to the fore. But Coetzee foregrounds Susan, an English woman, marooned for a year on the island with Crusoe and Friday. As Jackson switches his role and impersonates to expose the gender identity as fictive construct, Foe also refrains from asserting narrative authority, no narration can be said to have monopoly over the 'truth'. The novel at the end envisions a future when people exist as full individuals and when an equal exchange will be possible among races. As the narrator, Susan Barton puts it:

“We are all alive, we are all substantial, we are all in the same world”(152).

Unlike pantomime, Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, the second of his 'Moses Trilogy' offers a direct adversarial response to Robinson Crusoe. Here the inversion of the relationship is rather straightforward and the novel moves between storylines in a manner that displaces the framework offered by the Friday-Crusoe opposition from the centre. Moses who cannot sustain for long in the role of either Friday or Crusoe is a man poised between English identity and loyalty to Caribbean roots. Like Jackson in his 'Memoirs', he attempts a form of writing which mixes creole, Caribbean vernacular and stilted Standard English. Thieme rightly calls him 'a linguistic magpie' forging 'uniquely hybrid register'(61). Selvon's Moses, like Walcott the artist stoutly resists the essentialist rhetoric of 'black brotherhood'. Here Moses indoctrinates the white servant Bob and deploring the illiteracy teaches him alphabet. The strategy of writing like Crusoe's journal seems to underline his hold of the narrative authority. Moses's possession of money and Bob's lack of it overturned the unquestioned superiority conferred on the white men by race.

### *Odyssey- A Stage Version*

Classics can console. But not enough .

*Another Life.* (Collected Poems, 297)

Classics act as imaginative stimulus; they are believed to be the source of light. Homer, even in the present century has been viewed as the fountainhead of Western literature, its defining author. Writers from all the corners of the world have re-worked the Homeric tale. No wonder then, connections have been woven between St. Lucia and the ancient Mediterranean. In reinventing Homer, Walcott has often picked from the Greek past and placed him in the postcolonial Caribbean context. And as a result, Homeric receptions have undergone cultural cross-pollinations and. Homer, as Grazios, Barbara and Greenwood Emily(eds) describes, “is a good starting point for thinking about epic and its generic transmutations, for integrating challenges to and redefinitions of canonical literature and for reflecting on the politics of reading Homer”(5). Writers working in post-colonies have re-imagined the classics and read them in strategically un-canonical ways. Thus classical referents have enabled ‘new cultural forms and processes to emerge’(Hardwick 242) Theatre-practitioners, poets, sculptors- all alike used, abused, rewrote and adopted the texts and images of the ancient world. They have been recognized as a source of resistance and liberation as well as or even rather than suppression. Postcolonial Caribbean writers have used their artworks to facilitate the transgression of boundaries and subversion of hegemonic rigidities previously mapped out in precursor canonical texts with the island stories at their heart. When Walcott undertook to re-write Homer at the behest of Royal Shakespeare Company, he knew that it will not be another Omeros but a stage product exploiting “the possibility of the theatre of the piece”(Burnett 282). Here Walcott was not driven/ goaded by the imperative of “transformation or translation”.(ibid). In his own words, “In a sense, my plays are large poems that are transformed before an audience”. He also argued that the modern dramatic poetry has raw, comic power and it does not merely seek an alliance/ to be an extension of the tragic tradition. Hence the transposition through mounting a stage version came too easily to Walcott’s Drama. Post-independence Caribbean writers have elicited from the myths and various traditions; Odyssean figure has been altered through various appropriations. As Laura Hardwick observes, “ the reception of the Odyssey in Anglophone literature in the modern Caribbean is an example of a text that was appropriated by colonial writers to underwrite empire, and has subsequently been revisited and rewritten to undermine the empire and to rewrite the region’s history”(193). Unflagging enthusiasm for Homer informs many of Walcott’s poems and plays. It has become a commonplace of West-Indian literary criticism to describe Walcott as ‘Caribbean Homer’. Finding many analogues and affinities between the Aegean and

the Caribbean archipelago, between Greek and Anglophone cultures, he categorically refused to be seen as 'second rate Aegean'. It is only through literary take-over that the temporal, historical and cultural distance between them could be wiped out. In his seminal essay *The Muse of History*, he emphasized the vision of the New World man as elemental being, one freed from the shackles of sequential time and capable of generating the possibilities of change. Always an upholder of 'history as myth', Walcott argued that time past and time present were not dichotomous but the Aegean world lived in simultaneous reality with the Caribbean. Therefore, a Caribbean artist should cultivate a sense of the present as 'at once a re-enactment of the past'(Brown.165). Without the baggage of the past, the classics can be appropriated for articulating polymorphous cultural reality. In his essays Wilson Harris also has repeatedly stressed that texts of the past might be initiated in theatre and performances. In his essay, "Creoleness: the Crosswords of a Civilization?" he has contended time past and future are continuous and this is the phenomenon of simultaneity exists in the imagination; times past and future share the same narrative space. Both these artists denied any tension between originality and tradition and thus the reception of *Odyssey* meant exploring a new cultural space through encounter with the other myths. The subjects hitherto separated by historical junctures meet on new cultural territory As in the very opening line of *Sea Grapes*(1976), a speculation is made:

"a schooner beating up the Caribbean/ for home, could be Odysseus,/ home-bound on the Aegean"

Translating the epic poem and its romance narrative into a theatrical text was indeed an exciting challenge for Walcott. He himself described the assignment as "a technical challenge to construct a dramatic poem as close as possible to the original poem" (Walcott on The Arts Programme, introduced by Florance, BBC Radio2, June 26, 1992). For the purpose of dramatization of the epic, Walcott compressed the poem into two acts of fifteen and six scenes, suitable for three hour performance narrative. And the verse form that he employed here is the alexandrine form of twelve syllables and the popular form of stichomythia or the continuous exchange of line and half lines. The young director of this production, Greg Doran also underscores the use of flexible hexameter line divided in a way that everybody speaks only a line at once. Separate episodes are threaded together with symbolic links and thus maintain a symmetrical structure. Instead of changing the original poem or finding the Caribbean namesake

of the epic/ Homeric characters of the original, he re-invents it in the Caribbean. In emulating the Western master narrative, Walcott was not merely articulating the progressive cultural development or merely conferring glory or honour on the backwaters of empire. Recasting the Homeric narrative, Walcott creolises the original and gleans out of it a smooth traffic between cultures, an enhanced variety of characterization. As Edward Baugh comments, “ In adapting *The Odyssey* to the stage , then Walcott naturalizes and demystifies Homer, and writes a play for Homer, and writes a play for his time, one which nevertheless stays substantially close to Homer”(197). The model of Homer is carefully negotiated, manipulated, edited and wrested away from an exclusive European tradition. Homeric poem is so strong in performative elements and so informed with the tension of contradictory voices that it proved to be conducive for the performance aesthetics of Walcott and a kind of continuum was found possible, as surfaces in a conversation between Odysseus and Demodocus:

ODYSSEUS: That’s a strange dialect. What islands are you from?

DEMODOCUS: A far archipelago. Blue seas. Just like yours.

ODYSSEUS: So you pick up various stories and you stitch them?

DEMODOCUS: the sea speaks the same language around the world’s shores.

(2: 4, 9-12,122)

One of Walcott’s inventive changes in the art of characterization is the acknowledgement of the significance of the peripheral characters- those who surround the white characters. Despite being social subordinates, they occupy multiple subject positions and interrogate the privilege of the leading white characters. They contribute considerably to Walcott’s process of creolisation of the European *ur-text*. While in the Homeric original she was an absent figure, Walcott draws Euriclia as a bearer of old culture and wisdom, comparable to Ma Kilman of Omeros- the practitioner of Obeah and herbal treatment, She is imbued with a superior consciousness, a dignified voice in the Ithacan palace- “this house’s foundation”(184). Her role as a nurturer has benefited two generations. Directed/ commanded by the queen, she reluctantly asks why she should wash the dirty legs of a beggar;

Lord, missis, me must wash this man foot?

(2:6,136)

While washing his feet, she notices the scar and cries out in total dismay: “oh god, is you, Master”? Before she discloses it publicly, she is checked by the returning king. She also acts as a catalyst in the reunion of father and son. When she looks at the massacre of the suitors she utters a cry as a sufferer and prays for the eternal rest of the departing soul. Like the old nurse, Eumaeus sees herself as a member in the royal household. She claims a familiarity with both son and father. Beside being a nurturer, she’s been a teller of old nurse’s tales as was popular in the West-Indian society. Another maid, Melantho appears much more spirited and less servile to exhibit class resistance. At the end when Odysseus threatens her with death, both Eurycleia and Penelope intervene to protect her. With these sketches of the two black maids, Walcott “revolutionaizes the elitist assumption of the Homeric treatment” (Burnett 303). Along with the figure of Billy Blue, Walcott also re-affirms of the role of Homer as an oral poet. It recalls a time when the bard was the chief entertainer. As Walcott himself stressed that in such culture the bard became “ the evening’s entertainment,... who probably was singing while people were having dinner, and had to be loud and clear, may be ignored while he was singing those stories...an itinerant person, poet, moving around the islands and to different cities”.( Walcott, interview with Burnatt, Stratford- on- Avon, July1,1992). As Nausicaa mentions, “ My father love stories, he rew. their singers”. In his figure, Walcott combines black American blues singer and ancient bard and stitches various episodes together. Like Eurycleia, he is marked out for Egyptian origin and part of a still-existing African culture. Thus his racial and cultural othernesses occlude the assumptions of monoculture. The blind singer, Billy Blue is a combination of part Greek chorus and part of Griot of the African tradition. It is he who opens the play, laying on its place in the oral tradition transmitted down the centuries:

“Gone sing ‘bout that man because his stories please us,  
Who saw trials and tempests for ten years after Troy,  
I’m blind Billy Blue, my man’s sea-smart Odysseus,  
Who the God of the Sea drove crazy and tried to destroy”.

(1.4.1)

Playing a part of the modern day anchor, he comments on the action and presides over almost the whole action. At the end of the action, he reminds us of the role of a wandering bard,

a figure whom John Theime describes as ‘a Caribbean Homer’. (188). At the end of the action, he reminds us of the role of wandering bard who circulates back to the centre of the story;

“I sang of that man against whom the sea still rages,  
Who escaped its terrors, that despair could destroy,  
Since that first blind singer, others will sing down the ages.”

(2.5.6-8.160)

All these characters are strategic users of creole speech, assimilators of disparate cultural traditions. As the Homeric texts are remade, the classic Western view of ancient Greece as the fountainhead of civilization is confronted. The spirit of the original, its vigour and zest has been repeated with difference in what may be called a ‘new’ text. Thus Walcott’s re-composition and complex manoeuvre distributes the narratorial responsibility among the black figures.

One of the several episodes which testify to recasting of Odysseus as a West-Indian legendary trickster figure of Anancy is the Cyclops episode/ encounter. His intellectual resource is aptly pointed out by the First Sailor “You must have some ideas; you’re famous for scheming” (2.1. 66.9-11). In this encounter, like his Homeric namesake, he wins with practical wisdom and quick presence of mind. Halfway through the play, he enters the grotto of Cyclops and there in the closed-off space sitting at a dinner table, he begins conversation with the monster . The episode of confrontation is overtly political; in the post-independence West-Indies the divisive and authoritarian governance had roused Walcott’s ire. The political realism of the scene has compelled the critics to see the episode s an allegory of the post-colonial writer’s “resistance to totalitarianism” (Giannopoulou, 4).

Estranged from all human experiences, the cyclopean island is “an iron island. Sunless. Cold(1.8.59-60). As thoughts are forbidden here, it is also intellectually sterile. Compared to it, the Homeric island is rich, well sustainable and paradisal. Stripped of all entertainment shows, it is oppressive:

EURYLOCHUS:

There is no art, no theatre, no circuses even

PHILOSOPHER:

There is the care of the grey colonels.

EURYLOCHUS

So one cold eye is all these Greeks know of heaven.

PHILOSOPHER

Their statues weep with grime over history's ruin.

(1.7.7-10)

Walcott's Cyclops is a "shepherd" wresting passive submission from his native people; his is the society of coercive control and mechanism. If he nourishes the sheep, it is only in order to eat them at a later stage. As Eurylochus describes the one-eyed monster, "The Eye's their shepherd, and the nation are his sheep?"[1.8.61.].The name he bears as Eye is strongly redolent of panoptican authority of all the islanders; all modes of independent thinking is censured in Cyclop's regime. It is often pointed out that Walcott's Cyclops is Orwellian Big Brother who is actively engaged in the act of seeing, keeping surveillance over all citizens to wield total power. Cyclop's Eye is so tyrannical that it is unknown to pity or compassion and does not know how to weep. Thus, the entire episode is a testament to the perversion of xenia(hospitality) and Walcott knew the alarming symptoms of divisive politics and autocratic separatism of the state leaders. This affinity is succinctly put by Lorna Hardwick in her essay *A Diadolos in the late-modern age? Transplanting Homer into Derek Walcott's The Odyssey: A Version*, " So, Walcott's redrawing of the otherness of the Cyclops in terms of political tyranny and lack of human feeling both dissolves the distance between Homer and the 20'th century and denies that it is 'natural' to exploit ethnic difference as a criterion for "otherness"(9). Odysseus counter argues mentioning visual organ as a pair rather than single and implying that human feature is indicative of the bond of solidarity and fellow feeling. Contrasted to his totalitarianism of Cyclops, Odysseus's pair of eyes suggests compatibility and moral sanity "For balance, Proportion. Contrast. Mortals need two.. Left, right. Good, bad. Heaven,hell"[68.7-8]. In *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake had written, "Without contraries there is no progression". Walcott's artistic vision entailed all the contraries and the opposites of culture to forge new dramatic tradition/ practices in the Caribbeans. Soon Odysseus introduces him as 'Nobody' renouncing of his nominal identity.

His adaptation of the pseudonym “Nobody” is brilliantly inventive- a negation of any identity or empty signifier which prevents Cyclops from getting help when hurt. Walcott’s Don Juan had taken the pseudonym of Nobody and before him Shabine, the red-nigger sailor-protagonist had described himself: “Either I’m nobody or I am a nation”. And Walcott’s Juan, when asked by Isabella, replies, “I’m nobody, that’s all you know;/ my name is Nobody, or you’re dead”(14). Having such indefinite/ indeterminate identity expresses the Caribbean cultural crisis in the land where they were settled. When Cyclops demands his identity, Odysseus supplies him all negative answers. He is nobody, comes from nowhere, does not know where he is going and believes nothing. Paul Breslin pointed out that Walcottian assumed identity/ persona is actually an elusive trick to be limited by the names thrust upon by others. Finding a correspondence with West Indian identity question, it is described as Robert. D. Hamner as “[ The West-Indians] strategic adaptability allowed them to survive in the New World in the same way as Odysseus’ pretending to be nobody assisted his escape from the Cyclops”. ( Ref.8). When Odysseus has blinded him, the monster cries out that ‘Nobody’ has hurt him, it ironically helps Odysseus flee. As retaliation and in futile rage, Cyclops hurls drum after drums. Though drums were became instrument in musical accompaniment in the hands of the slaves and banned by the white lords. Here again, Walcott resists easy markers of identity for both the colonizer and colonized. While fleeing, odysseus divulges his ruse to Cyclops: “MY NAME IS NOBODY! IT’S ODYSSEUS! AND LEARN, YOU BLOODY TYRANTS, THAT MEN CAN THINK”( 1.9. 6-8. 72). Again, here Odysseus, the outsider has thrown off the mantle of tyranny. Easy identification of Odysseus/ Cyclops with victim/ victimizer is problematised in Walcott’s re-working.

The way Odysseus overpowers his opponent may be read as victory of civilization over brute strength. Thus the fixity of cultural quality, community identity is again called into question. Therefore, Zina Giannopoulou describes the episode as articulatory of “vision of post-colonial emancipation” or a “universal parable of humankind’s resistance to totalitarianism”. Odysseus is not a liberator in the sense of being an enlightened outsider who manages to impose order from outside. Rather than upholding the grandeur of the past, his theatrical imagination transforms the past events into the ever-present possibility as Odysseus says: “ The future is where I begin”( 1 .7, 12.). Only the power of thinking can re-define the distant and mythicized past; by deploying the Homeric episode Walcott scathingly attacks the contemporary politics of

despotism, ideological repression. In Walcott's hand the politics of post-coloniality becomes a narrative of struggle against the totalitarianism.

Besides assuming an understanding of race and class, *The Odyssey- A Stage Version* radically alters the gender role and resists the reduction to stereotype of its female figures. One single episode- the denouement of the play- the scene of visceral slaughter and bloodbath will adequately explain this claim. The repercussion of the act of slaughter on the hero is so unsettling that it revives the memory of Troy:

“Troy's mulch! Troy's rain! Wounds. Festering diseases”.

(2.6, 13.151)

Though he wants to convince Penelope that the slaughters were committed for the sake of her defense, (To Kill your swine, Cierce”) , her response is one of revulsion and pacifistic rejection of all forms of cruelties. She questions the justification of the bloodbath: “You had to wade this deep in the blood”?(2.6.7,153) In Act II, Sc.V, she lays bare before disguised husband the excruciatingly long days of suffering:

“My own bed is besieged by a hundred suitors”.

(2.5 ,5,130).

For keeping the sanctity of marriage bed intact, she has outmanoeuvred and thwarted the suitors. As Hamner comments, “... she demonstrates that she is Odysseus' intellectual equal”. (107). By weaving Laertus's shroud, she has occluded the advance of her suitors She blames the men folk for gratuitous/ indulgent acts of violence.

“ these butchers that dyed the whole Aegean's basin”.

( 2.6.11,154)

From Troy to Ithaca the futile violence committed by Odysseus and his army and the codes of heroic tradition is thus called into question. It is, as Peter Burian contends, “a criticism of the heroic tradition as a whole, as well as of Odysseus himself, for Penelope such glorification is inhumane” (Ref. 49). In Margaret Atwood's retelling in *Penelopiad* (2005) also Penelope

refuses to be made an example of considerate, trustworthy and all- suffering wife. Here Penelope has suffered threats from all the male relations- her father, her own son, her husband. At the point of slaughter, she desires another war to be started which will propel Odysseus and his crew to sail away from the Ithacan home again. After their departure, she wants to regain control / command of the kingdom. Thus the archetypal image of devoted, faithful and soulless wife is subverted in the retelling of Atwood. Besides, the twelve maids slaughtered in the main work is given voice through lyrical interludes. Thus the grand narratives of the war are relocated in the micronarratives of women at home. In this modern retelling the maids replay the role of the Greek chorus, a group of lowly characters commenting on the mighty figures and appear to take the centrestage of the action. As in their jump-rope rhyme they describe it:

“we had no voice no name

We had no name

We had no choice

We had one face

One face the same

We took the blame

It was not fair

But now we're here

We're all here too

The same as you

And now we follow

You, who find you

Now, we call

To you to you”.

*(Penelopiad, 195-196)*

Penelope’s assertive role, Euricylia’s dignified part have been underscored in T. Mauve’s analysis in *Derek Walcott’s Voyage of Homecoming*. He contends that they help flesh out the feminist perspective of the playwright. They by articulating independent views, propound the alternative to the heroic militarism and triumphalism. The downright rejection and deglorification of butchery and refusal to accept it as tribute to love reminds us of Yeats’ *No Second Troy* where the poet refuses to admit Irish nationalist struggle as spiritedly heroic or noble. Here, too women appear as the voices of reason, sensitivity and opposers of the patriarchal authority. When Odysseus commands the execution of the traitorous kitchen maid, Melanthos, the other two, Eurycleia and Penelope invert to desist/ thwart him. Walcott also drops the mass hanging of women. Compared to men, women have impressed with non-violence, intelligence and morally sensitive choice. This potential transformative justifies their claim to be recognized as agents in their world. Paula Burnett has also described the Ithacan house as “site of female domination” (309). Domestic sphere of home and hearth have not proved to be constraints for them. Thus Walcottian “con-texts” explore the alternative and resistant position for the women.

Walcott always conceived West-Indian identity to be processual, in flux and motion. While he showed fidelity to the host text, he recast the trope of voyage/ wander and homecoming in sync with the Caribbean reality. As Julia Sanders also contended that myth is never transported wholesale into its new contexts; it undergoes its own metamorphosis in the process” (64). Moreover the poetic persona of Walcott, as John Theime in his study touches upon in the Ch.5 Of his study, is foregrounded through the dialectics of motion and stasis which may be explored further. The axis of the plot is the never-ending tension of outbound voyage and homecoming. In Nobel-acceptance speech Walcott described himself as primarily a Caribbean poet/ artist but also at the same time as “homeless, circling satellite”. This has continued to be a major

concern of all of Walcott's work; this contrary artistic pull has been best symbolized by the Homeric hero. Eager for further exploits and new experiences, a "sacker of cities", Odysseus states/ claims, "[a]t the back of all men's minds is a rented room". Penelope's love for her husband is a 'harbouring heart', denoting security and protection. Upon return home, Odysseus finds their marriage bed is unshakable as olive tree. Towards the end their exchange is a testament to loyalty and mutual faith:

ODYSSEUS: keep me embraced in your arms, your harbouring heart.

PENELOPE: take root, my pine, my shade, my patience's pardon.

(2.6. 14-15. 157)

Time and again, Odysseus is identified with sea-animals like crab and sea-turtle as they carry their home on their back. Home is more symbolic than a physical reality. When Odysseus meets his son, Telemachus in disguise, both having experienced exile reveal their impulse for home in a very interesting exchange between them:

ODYSSEUS: And where you come from, young man?

(Silence)

TELEMACHUS: I'm from where everybody comes from. From my home".

(2.7.15-16.160)

In the middle of his career, Walcott went to America but regularly returned to the St.Lucian home. His thriving literary prestige could not undermine his literary in-placeness. By the end of *Omeros*, while Walcott extends his wanderings to North America and Europe, all events rhyme with a Caribbean counterpart. This wisdom of dynamic relationship of root/ route, voyage/ home-coming is best summed up in the words of Seven Seas;

"there are two journeys

in every odyssey, one on worried water,

the other crouched and motionless, without noise.

for both, the "I" is mast; a desk is a raft

for one , foaming with paper, and dipping the beak

of a pen in its foam, while n actual craft

carries he others to cities where people speak

a different language, or look at him differently".

(BookXI 295)

The New World identity is constructed around these contrary impulses.

First performed in 1992, Walcott's *Odyssey-A Stage version* reaffirms how imaginative reconfiguration can remake and translate an ancient text. Revisiting the Homeric subject, Walcott explores connections between the two archipelagos - Greece and the Caribbean-rejecting one's primacy over other. He's culturally trespassed in order to creolise the original. And thus it becomes a rich fabric of a variety of voices, speeches and dialogues. Walcott's plays have presented powerful alternatives to monolithic conceptions of society and culture and homogenizing discourses of identity. Individual and collective performances mutate the literary text as polysemic, plural and multi-dimensional. Like his poetry, his dramas also traverse the boundaries of time, place and affirms the spatial and temporal co-presences of subjects in the object newly fashioned. And in so doing he was not merely passing on the tradition but as Adreinne Rich demanded, also breaks its hold over the writer.