

Conclusion

Rather than mirroring life passively, drama acts as an artistic mode of thinking about life, a way of categorising it. Theatre and society share a common propensity for spectacular display. Through its categories like events, characters, situations and themes, drama endeavours to understand and deal with it. Since the days of Classical plays or Shakespearean theatre, the playwrights lay bare their own status as writers of fiction and perform a hermeneutics of itself; they examine or judge or raise questions about itself or the tradition in which it stands. In its 'metatheatre', a play recognises its own status as fiction and violates the conventional building blocks of the formal composition. It is based on the sustained opposition between the construction of a fictional illusion and the laying bare of that illusion. Here drama indulges in self-absorbed form in aesthetic contemplation. Since life is already in various ways theatre-like, here the characters are aware of the theatricality of life – as they can act and play, can refuse to view themselves as predictable actors in a monolithic system with prescribed behaviours. The dichotomous nature of metatheatre is felt between the actual event of the play and the play-like qualities of the actual world. In his long career of playwriting, Walcott has regularly turned to the strategies of metatheatre and the metatheatrical impulse of his plots makes assumption that cultural identity is unstable and opens up a space for contesting the hegemonic script for collective identity. As Camilla Stevens observes, “His stage characters re(assemble), re(store) and re(present) a fragmented identity that is richer and more complex for the seams and glue that is held together”(465), but more importantly, they also rely on knowledge of current theatrical practices. Such plays also construct and define an audience which is possessed of local knowledge. Belonging to the later years, the two plays *Pantomime* and *A Branch of Blue Nile* with metatheatrical strategies put into sharp relief the problematic relationship between art/ performance and life, theatre and reality, local and classical acting. In them characters are performers too, theatre actors who are aware of the theatricality of life and refuse to be limited to the acting according to the norms of monolithic system. As S. Puri observes, “For the artistic virtuosity of their individual performance... is consistently placed within the frame of a political macro-history which includes class, race, nation, gender and sexuality.” (127).

Like many meta plays, *A Branch of Blue Nile* has the theatre and theatrical profession as its subject along with tension between current theatrical practices. Here the West- Indian theatre company rehearses a Shakespeare classic, *Antony and Cleopatra* for staging in course

of which conflicting styles jostle with each other; it is between a white director who has returned from England, a black West- Indian actor who studied in New York and Cristopher, a married Trinidadian who writes the play in dialect These plays have for their subject matter the theatre and theatrical profession about the management of the theatre, its acting company and its production history:

“If there’s disorder here, in the little world, no thrust, no center, no authority, then lunacy is correct, we’re wasting time. What is wrong in here is what is wrong with this country. Our country. And if, outside, there’s mismanagement and madness, we must go mad”.

(223)

As the plot is structured, ‘creation’ and ‘criticism’ intersect. Here in the plot, the characters like Sheila or Harvey affirm themselves as self- conscious subjects that transcended their encoded social roles. The dramatic action revolves around their response to Sheila, their play with the text. When Harvey directs Sheila/ Cleopatra to “play what you feel about Chris, not Antony” at which Sheila responds “Just leave my private life out of this, please”. This realm of private and professional life often collide and collude. In course of action, dialect speech collides with the Bardic language or performer’s natural language with the language of the staged text.”(Breslow 390) . Here, Harvey’s Americanism is parodied by Gavin. It is in Sheila’s career decisions that is realized the interface of acting and life as even after leaving her acting career, she admits, “I don’t see the concretion. It’s like the theatre. The difference is that it’s day. No spotlight now.” (289). The troupe is engaged in rehearsing not only the classical play but also the “dialect’ play and they overlap to face the West-Indian artist with the complicated choice between the two.

The comic narrative of *Pantomime*, a classic illustration of the play within the play approaches its source text for critical or ironic convergence as Harry-Jackson set to swap their roles. Time and again, the play-acting allows both the actors embody new characters and from behind the character an occasional actor emerges. Here both the characters have their background from the entertainment industries. Both are adept performers engaged in self-referential debate how much of pantomime would be a serious rendition or light- hearted, amusing skit of Robinson Crusoe. Jackson, a reluctant performer takes hold of the script improvises temporarily o shed his identity affirming “all human roles are relative that identities are learned rather than innate”. (Hornby6). Through his spirited performance, he

re-works the master-servant relation and claim relatively greater independence, explore role beyond the historically determined part or institutional tyranny. The authority is subverted:

“ You see, two of both acting a role here we ain’t really believe in, you know. I ent think you strong enough to give people orders, and I know i ain’t the kind who like taking them. So both of we doesn’t have to improvise so much as exaggerate. We faking, faking all the time” (138)

He resents that in the island, black Crusoe will only act as agents and ‘neo-colonial shadows’. In a dramatically tense scene in Act II in a role play within a comic entertainment, Jackson poses as Harry’s ex-wife Ellen, holding the photograph in front of his face in a kind of pantomime mask which replays the scene from her marriage. But the role-play is confused with reality and Harry bursts out:

“All right, I’ll tell you what I am going to do next, Ellen: you’re such a big star, you’re such a luminary, and I’m going to leave you to shine by yourself. I’m giving up this bloody rat race and I’m going o take up Mike’s offer”. (2,4-7, 150)

He bares out the acute complexity as he lagged behind as a mediocre actor in comparison with his ex-wife. Thus, Harry’s marriage breakdown, failure in show business are fleshed through the role- playing technique of pantomime and carnival. It also destabilises gender and racial stereotype; through performance is exposed fictionality. In Walcott’s dramaturgy, ‘ play’ and ‘performances’ generate refreshing and imaginative variation of the social roles, cultural identity and suspend our belief in theatre’s claim to be a faithful reflector of human interaction. In *The Last Carnival*, metatheatrical devices like role-playing, inset performance like masque lay stress on the creolised heritage which “expose cultural and national identity as theatrical representation” (Steevens 164).