

CHAPTER- 1

“A Literature of Their Own”: Narratives of Self-fashioning in Walcott’s Early Plays

To stride from the magnetic sphere of legends,
To change the marble sweat which pebbled
the wave blow of stone brows
for the sweat-drop on the cedar plank,
for a future without heroes,
to make out of these forests and fishermen
heraldic men!

- Derek Walcott

Turbulence is at work everywhere ... (millions of simple folk) have now become the subject of their own history, engaged in a global war to liberate their own villages, rural and urban, from the old encirclement of poverty, ignorance and fear....This is the most fundamental battle of our time, and I am joyfully lucky to have been made, by my work, a soldier in their ranks.

- George Lamming.

... this past, this endless struggle to activate and reveal and confirm a human identity, human authority, yet contains for all its horror, something very beautiful.

- James Baldwin.

From the outset of his career, Walcott felt the urge to deconstruct the existing colonial narratives, myths and legends since they occluded the process of self-definition for the Caribbeans. The nineteenth century theatrical texts on the Caribbean basin were replete with myths and negative stereotypes. They not only misrepresented or misimagined the indigenous

people but also reaffirmed European illusion for sovereignty and mastery. The ideological legitimization of colonialism or colonialist representation persistently denigrated the natives and Walcott lashed out at such mechanism by which the colonizer has always slighted the colonized: “Our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature” (“Twilight”, 39). As corrective, he strongly felt that the stagespace had to be re-designed so as to enable it intervene in the social organisation and critique the political structures. In Walcott’s hand drama became “the central cultural ritual in the decolonization” (Canefield 288); it was committed to “the enterprise of recovering and uncovering the contents and forms of the consciousness of the people”(Lazarus8).The inherited structures and institutions blurred the concept of the West Indian cultural reality as well as disfigured the cultural identity of the archipelagal people. To mend this disfiguration, folk festivals, cultural rituals, carnivals and other local customs were foregrounded; they were deployed to articulate the specificities of local experience. The brief period between 1957 and 1959, the years between his New York experience and founding of Trinidad Theatre Workshop marked a prolific period, for Walcott. At this time his plays saw the emergence of true West-Indian theatrical style. And no longer an isolated backwater of global cultural flows, in these years, the Caribbean was coming into its own as a cultural powerhouse.

In non-literate communities which formed the majority of West Indian population, stories have a central place to maintain and sustain its culture. Their songs, legends and stories testify to the cultural richness; they profoundly represent the Caribbean cultural reality. By concentrating the oral and mythic traditions, one could glean wealth of signifiers; by fashioning new art form the folk cultural practices could be saved from the touristic debasement. To emerge as makers of their own world, theatre -practitioners strove hard to discover unique modes of expanding and educating the local audience. For Walcott, a potent alternative to the grand narratives in the “history-orphaned islands” (8) was the unscripted and unperformed stories of the small, unheroic simplicities- the heroism of ordinary people’s survival. If the cultural void and abject poverty in the post-independence days offered little promise, the artists could still elicit the possibility of creative representation of the collective experience and assert the dignity of the disenfranchised. Theatre as art form was a socially committed vocation; it was effective in affirming the cultural substance of people of subordinated communities. The rhythm and beauty of boyhood life in St. Lucia offered him a counter-discursive space to the historical narratives and legends – an opportunity to break free from all ideological constraints and they marked Walcott’s life-long

commitment towards developing a uniquely West-Indian theatrical style of performance. His first published collection, *Dream in Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, no doubt a major dramatic achievement is described by Edward Baugh as “Walcott’s foundational contribution towards a West- Indian theatre was rooted in the experience of the common people, drawing on their arts of performance, including their language, and that in the context of the colonial experience of the region” (58).

The vitality of the folklore and the scope of communal participation through the indigenous narrative had also inspired artists like George Lamming or Wilson Harris. By jettisoning the aesthetic models of Western tradition, Walcott wanted to develop a drama within a limited orbit of reference, allusions and beliefs. In his essay “Tradition, The Writer and Society”, Harris emphasised the essential role of the West Indian writer to awaken his countrymen from the oppressive legacies of racism and colonialism, to generate a truly revolutionary life in them. Walcott also set himself the task of imaginatively transforming the “unheroic” lives steeped in elemental necessity or dire poverty; with imaginative treatment of poverty he endeavoured to place the marginal locus at the center of his texts and add new insights to Caribbean culture. These plays address in a compelling manner the concrete material conditions of exploitation of the Caribbean mass. As he states in the seminal essay “What the Twilight Says: An Overture ”: “Poverty seemed a gift to the imagination, necessity was truly a virtue, so we set our plays in the open, in natural, unphased light, and our subject was bare, unaccommodated man”(7). He was always aware that drama was the forum for heightening politico-cultural awareness as the dominant structures of knowledge refused to heed the marginal, “oppressed disempowered voices”. He was also strongly sceptic of political actions as an agency of representation of his people. Hence what was needed for his St. Lucian native people was the narrative space from which as subjects they could speak and act. The artists further needed to recognise resilience of the subjects who plied their daily activities within the limits of the imperial power. With *Sea at Dauphin* (1954) Walcott left the youthful ardor for Haitian history/ revolution - an event of great magnitude and fascination for revolutionary episode. The lacuna of “single heroic warrior figure” in West-Indies is addressed with the stories of wood-cutter, charcoal burner or fishermen- the down-trodden, solitary figure captivated the imagination of the dramatist. His early protagonists in his “folk plays” are mostly derived from local legend, popular folk tales or even village scandals. As at the early days of apprenticeship,

Walcott's preoccupation was what Lamming describes in "The Pleasures of Exile" as "lives of men and women who were never thought to be sufficiently important for their thoughts and feelings to be registered" (5). Though they belonged further down the scale of hierarchy, the St. Lucian peasants had rare moral courage and immense relish for life. The historical scars of colonial subjugation, the plight of communal life and bleak future are posited at the heart of Lamming's novels; he asserted in *The Pleasures of Exile* the possibility of restoration of the peasants to the true status of personality. It was his conviction that they will act as the agents of collective action. In drama Walcott found imaginative scope to enter and share the insider's experience of the life with which he did not have first-hand acquaintance; his upper middle class status and Methodist background had erected a wall. He sadly witnessed how the West-Indian mass had met with the indifference and contempt of the politicians in the age of globalisation. To create new culture and literature about their passion and struggle was Walcott's fervent artistic urge. Like Thiongo, he set the artistic goal to articulate the right to name the world. To stage the local lives, deploy folk culture and language; he consciously shunned legends and myths. The orbit of his plots was the communal predicament of fishermen, wood-cutter and charcoal burner. For Walcott, the still disenfranchised masses were "the common people, the salt of the earth, provide an obvious basis for defining national identity ("a new people")" (Breiner11). The Chapter12 of Walcott's lyrical masterpiece, *Another Life*, opens with the image of a carpenter, the craftsman in laudatory manner: "I watched the vowels curl from the tongue of the carpenter's plane" (CP, 294). This present chapter pays attention to both "suffering" and "solidarity", the redeeming qualities of degraded lives as embodied in Walcott's imaginative responses to the blights of colonialism. It was Walcott's conviction that by "story-ing" their lives, by transmuting them with the fire of their artistic imagination could a writer undo the colonial structure of awareness. In his Nobel lecture, he asserts provocatively that "in the Antilles poverty is a poetry with a V, une vie, a condition of life as well as that of imagination". In the early plays their daily lives assert the importance of "compassion, mutual support, and solidarity" (Burnett,55) despite the degraded conditions of poverty. In forging creative resistance to asymmetrical relations of power, they generate what can be called in Fanonian terms "basis for hope" (*Black Skin* 25). Though dismissed as "insignificant fragments of earth", deprived of the spotlights of history, they are formidable survivors- from the Columbus era to the ringing out of the bells of federation, they demonstrate zeal for survival despite scarred existence. In *Drums and Colours*,

the emerging nation is embodied through such plebian figures- “Ram, Pompey, Yette, Yu”, epitomizing bond of all races and classes. As Paula Burnett describes them, “They are poor and chaotic, but they are well motivated and deal with adversity with wit and wisdom” (ibid. 232). Although Walcott denies poverty as a virtue, he recognizes a latent mobility in the poor who cannot escape their island exile, and despite materially deprived condition, their lives demonstrate rich theatricality. The popular folk tales that demonstrated the vital earthiness animates the plots of Walcott and redeems the native population from systematic devaluation and weakening by the legacy of the captivity. Long denied of their voice, they are recovered from their state of deposition. Robert.D.Hamner in his essay “Mythological Aspects of Walcott’s Drama” highlights this very salient concern of early Walcott: “He delineates the innermost character of a people, the essence of what it means to have been born West Indian” (35). And in so doing the playwright can address the aporias of cultural representation and rebut Freud’s stricture of the West Indians having no character.

The early plays, mostly ‘folk’ in character investigate through myths and archetypes the timeless values of Caribbean life, the emotional realities of the social life and the undivided man-nature association. Walcott firmly believed that the racial and cultural blight of several centuries have failed to undermine the dignity of New World of individual or the status of fallen Eden or the vernal space of man, nature and animal. Sometime classified as “folk plays”, Walcott’s early works valorize how his people continue to assert cultural freedom within the confines of history. Rather than fostering the spirit of anti- colonialism, they narrate the stories of resistance to deformation of the Afro-Caribbean culture. In post- independence days, the Caribbean artists were resolved to search new ways to inveigh the constraints and controls of colonial authority and its on-going exploitation and oppression. In the Caribbean, the colonial legacy laid bare wretchedness, hardship of dismal poverty. Walcott, in his native island of St. Lucia found lives of the black majority stuck in grinding poverty and sufferings of the brunt of racial injustice- what Plunkett describes in *Omeros* as “[t] here’s is too much poverty below us” (63). The suffering of the mass was Walcott’s unflagging concern ; at the same time their life rich in theatrical potentiality could be laid bare through imaginative rendering of existential struggle. These plays of the late 1950s foreground the individual life, marked by the tension of self-definition and ascription of identity by others. It was in his plays that Walcott found an opportunity to pay homage to his native countryman and affirm their personhood : “to save the

salt light of the island, to protect and exalt its small people” (*Another Life*, 56). It was in a strong desire to articulate his outward instinct for action that Walcott was drawn to the lives of unheroic simplicities: “Poverty seemed a gift to the imagination, necessity was truly a virtue, so we set our plays in the open, in natural unphased light, and our subjects was bare, “unaccommodated man” (“Twilight”, 7). Walcott was always convinced that the task of the artist is to give creative articulation to collective suffering and solidarity and affirm the Caribbean as a differentiated stage of the history of humanity. In conformity with the realities of impoverished lives Walcott set the actions of his dramas in open, natural settings. Meager props were intended to be resistant to the cheap commercialization of public shows or touristic exhibition of various folk forms; Breiner has described them as ‘poor theatre’ in terms of material resources- stripped of decorative establishment and frugal material for representation, Walcott was contravening the cheap commercialization of the folk arts. The entire action of The Sea at Dauphin is set in the open, littered beach with bamboo pole and canoe named *Our Daily Bread*. It is here that the actions start two hours before the sunrise. Spanning from early dawn to sunset hour, the dramas of the life of fishermen take place in natural light. While in *Ti-jean and his Brothers*, the action alternates between the hut and the wood; in these bare settings all the encounters take place between the brothers and the devil. Here, again the open, bare natural setting embodies the lives of stark necessities. Also in *Malcochon or, The Six in the Rain* the scene is set in “A disused copra house” on the edge of a bamboo forest. All these remind us of eminent Indian dramatist Badal Sircar’s dramaturgic reduction of stage props, set, costumes and reliance on the movements of human body embodied in open-air performance. Like Walcott, Sircar also fervently believed in the role and responsibility of the writer as the initiator of change and development in his own community. He himself was aware that facing such unpromising conditions, the small island people were used to “a precious resignation to fate” (“Twilight” 8). Instead of blind submission to pre-determined fate, their sustained resistance propels them to achieve what Edward Baugh terms “selfhood” or self-fashioning. If the world around us is a world of constant change and irreducible diversity, it is no doubt, a world of becoming, also. Around 500 B.C. Heraclitus wrote “Everything flows and nothing abides; everything and nothing stays fixed”; in the late nineteenth century Nietzsche developed the vision of a chaotic world in perpetual motion and change and becoming which undermined the notion of fixed, sovereign subject. From the early days, Walcott’s focus was on little places, the backwaters, a place like

Dauphin which Afa describes, in a violently bitter utterance : “The land is hard, this dauphin?(Caps) land have stone/ Where it should have some heart” (5-8, 61).

For Walcott the very adverse conditions to which they are born, the very parochiality that determines their lives proved to be enabling condition for producing culturally vibrant forms. In resilience and persistence in the choir of daily lives could be sought the ways to emerge from the darkness. The earthy simplicities of life, the elemental conditions faced in the daily experiences endowed the common man with heroic stature, as Walcott describes them, “A woodcutter or charcoal burner. To me this figure represented the most isolated, the most reduced, race-containing symbol”. (“Twilight’48) They merited an alternative stage/space, a theatrical language that “went beyond mimicry”, the model for which was ‘oral culture of chants, jokes, folk-songs and fables” (ibid17). Naming the “new world”, both in terms of landscape and people was a very strong artistic imperative for Walcott. “Faith in elemental man”, rather than splendor of ruins is an admirable quality in true New World Poets, like Neruda, Whitman. What drew Walcott to them was their avowed act of “adamic naming” of native region. St. Lucian life- this region with its very rawness, cultural dispositions, folk customs, carnivals, local legends, story-telling endow upon his dramaturgic practice a new significance. Local people, local custom, local legends were to be staged as corrective to the defamatory stigma of cultural mediocrity of the West-Indian subjects: “It did not matter how rhetorical, how dramatically heightened the language was of its tone were true, whether its subject was the fall of a Haitian king or a small island fisherman, and the only way to re-create this language was to share in the torture of its articulation” (“Twilight” 17). Within these narrative frameworks, this impulse of sharing is quite palpable; here all the ‘ordinary’ heroes interrogate unequal power relationship and shake the very basis of ascriptive identities. The present chapter pays attention to how life can be made worthwhile; how the peasants or working class characters exemplify “the process of self-discovery and self-renewal” (Dabydeen 89). While living in the midst of adverse natural and social environment they embody what Schopenhauer calls “affirmation of will”. In *Omeros III*, Walcott avowed to celebrate the moral and spiritual strength of those who were discarded and erased by history:

... Look, they climb and no one knows them;
they take their copper pittances and your duty

from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house
as a child wounded by their power and beauty
is the chance you now have, to those feet a voice (69-74).

The ordinary, earthy lives revolving around the arduous toil of coal carrying women are emblematic of collective suffering which preoccupied Walcott in *Another Life*. Here he has left behind the figures like Dessaline or Cristophe of the early plays- the commanding figures of grandeur, size and mania and their gripping stories of their rise and fall. His early protagonists, in Edward Baugh's phrase, "home-grown heroes" (58), struggling to survive and maintain dignity in the face of exploitation and domination. His early dramatic works are rooted in the quotidian experience of the ordinary and marginal lives; his "heraldic men" will oust the mythic "heroes". As Edward Baugh describes it, "A central motive in this endeavour was to address the apparent or supposed absence or dearth of home-grown heroes" (45).

To negotiate with this absence, Walcott, like Brecht, chooses ordinary, resilient and often non-conforming individuals as heroes who relentlessly interrogate the structures of domination. In Soyinka's early tragedies like *The Swamp Dwellers* (1959) or *Camwood on the Leaves* (1969), massive, monolithic system of colonialism are set to challenge by the young people; here, the youthful antagonists are overpowered by the structures of powers, the authoritative figures, apparatus of oppressive regime. Modelled on folk-tale heroes or Anancy figures of cunning and wit, they impress upon us as challengers to the dictatorship and tyranny- emerging from the deep, dark shadow of non-entity. Though his characters do not encounter the vices of the town life, Walcott's dispossessed inhabitants demonstrate the moral and spiritual strength and their culture survive and thrive despite the traumatic wounds of Middle Passage. With youthful ardour gone for the slave- heroes, he became preoccupied with concerns were the "heraldic men", affirming the humanity and personhood in Caribbean man. From the earliest days of artistic career, Walcott's creative works, like that of Synge and Lorca sought to translate the language of the fishermen, peasants or ballad singers. In "What the Twilight Says" he states that as there were no heroes and daily life experience was only grim encounter with poverty, hunger and unemployment around, West- Indians sought to glorify "revenge". Determined not to idealise "poverty" or ethics of "revenge" or produce strident protest in the social forum of drama,

Walcott took up the “theatre of daily lives”, the small drama and all its minutiae. Walcott’s ire is roused by the trading and bastardization of “folk” culture through state-sponsored tourism and lack of organized support for serious theatre. When he undertook the production of “serious theatre” with Caribbean Theatre Workshop, Walcott attempted a trenchant critique against the White Lord, God, planter who devised the mechanism of oppression, plight, of the people who teem the plot of these early plays. In dismissing history, Walcott sought to dramatise “the history of emotion” which welled up through the cravings for elemental necessity. Aesthetically and thematically, these narratives are hinged on indigenous material and cultural contexts. Always sceptic towards the grand version of “history”, “great actors” or “subjects of history”, he reinstated the small narratives of struggle and survival. Because such narratives can only interrogate the consensuality of political discourse or identity paradigms rooted in politics of polarity. If grand narratives promise knowledge secured on the basis of consensus, little narratives show how knowledge is both decentralized and localized.

It is here in early dramas that performances could revert to naïve traditions, or draw cultural energy from local ritual and superstition. By passionate engagement with true imaginative rendering of “local” and “folk” culture Walcott was resisting the neo-colonial appropriation of them: “The folk arts have become the symbol of a carefree, accommodating culture, an adjunct to tourism, since the State is impatient with anything which it cannot trade” (“Twilight” 7). Walcott was relentless in his strictures against the effects of neo-colonialist and imperial practices; he excoriated the appropriation of folk entertainments in state-sponsored tourism. As tourism industry seeks to add ethnic flair with some indigenous cultural traditions for the consumption of the north/ richer nations, Walcott mounted imaginative challenge drawing from the folk repertoire. His was the challenge what Naipaul had lamented in *Middle Passage* as the failure of West-Indian writers, to articulate his own place and position. In an atmosphere of cultural degradation. Walcott was keen to share the Brechtian view of man as determined by social and material forces though fixity of human nature might be unsettled. What embodies in these small but remarkable plays is cultural uniqueness of the islanders despite lingering exploitation, inequalities. His dramatic art would be one of native simplicity and integrity. Errol Hill’s dramas articulated lower class West-Indian oral tradition, street communities and street festivals in the early 60s. The essential motivation may be summed up in the words of Benitez

Rojo: “In the Caribbean, we are all performers.[...] we try to act the roles our skin reads to us” (236).

1.1. Ti *Jean and His Brothers*

Walcott’s early plays cluster around the experiences of death, loss, hunger and unemployment- the very conditions that threatened to make theatre a “luxury” in the new nation. They do not only generate native response to colonial oppression but are informed with a tension between “anger” and “compassion” as sentiments which may be the “basis for hope” (qtd. in Burnett 25). Their simple allegorical structure of colonial binary has axis on the antagonism between “white rulers” and “black, disadvantaged mass. In foregrounding a native style, a medley of story-telling, song and dance, Walcott espouses a positive mode of being that clamoured for expression in the marginal lives of native island. *Ti- Jean and His Brothers*, written in the extremely prolific decade of the 50s, thematises transformation of life under the colonial lordship and eventually secures dignity in the midst of hopeless material situations.

His “early” plays investigate the very conditions of subjection and brutality and it also calls into question global order which imprisons the two-third world in economic hardship. Here, how the narrative posits the restorative unity of Man, Nature and Animal in face of ruthless racial injustice. In a characteristic Walcottian manner the narrative closes with a new vision of humanity. Read from the perspective of Mother, the story asserts power over oneself than power over others, espoused by masculinist ideology. The plot is constantly marked by tension between the material and spiritual claim to supremacy. Towards the end, it is the figure of Bolom, a disfigured fetus who celebrates his birth towards the end:

“I am born, I shall die! O the wonder and pride of it! I shall be a man! Ti-Jean, my brother!”

(17-19,164)

The quality of compassion, to be able to feel human emotion can also redeem the devil and helps him achieve humanity as he listens to Ti-Jean's singing, inspired by the death of his mother:

“What is this cooling my face, washing it like a Wind of morning. Tears! Tears! Then is this Magnificence I have heard of, Man, the chink of his armour, the destruction of the Self? Is this the strange, strange wonder that is Sorrow/ You have earned your gift, Ti-Jean, ask!”

(21-23.162-163)

Long after it was actually written, Ti-jean was described by the playwright himself as his “most- West-Indian play”. Walcott must have meant it to be distinctively and recognizably West-Indian in both form and content. Set in motion by the bird-beast narrator, the plot plunges us into harsh actualities of the lives of the West-Indians, the “naked, voluble poverty” that surrounded Walcott's own childhood experience. When the Bird asks “How poor their mother was?” the Frog answers:

“Oh that was poverty, bird! Old hands dried up the claws Heaping old sticks on sticks, Too weak to protect her nest. Look, the four of that family [Light shows up the hut] Lived up in a little house, Made up of wood and thatch, On the forehead of the mountain, Where night and day was rain, Mist, cloud and white as cotton Caught in the dripping branches”.

(13-25,288).

Exposed to cold and rain, the mother or the old woman struggles to lift the family out of impoverished state. She is left with meager hope to alleviate the melancholic life; in the dialogue of Frog and Cricket her plight is foregrounded in stark details. Again, inside the hut the homely conversation of mother and three brothers focuses on the regular experience of hunger, starvation:

“One time again it have nothing to eat, But one dry bread to break”

(6-7.90)

At the beginning, Gros, the elder brother is found to have failed first to procure wood, dampened by weather. And Mi-Jean also returned empty handed from fishing venture. A deeply melancholic air hovers over the needy house of the family. This “starving” condition and struggling are attributed by the mother to the planter’s exploitative system; a stark contrast is outlined between them:

“Here all of us are striving, While the planter is eating From plates painted golden”.

(8-10. 91).

The contrast between riches and poverty lays bare how serious material damages have been inflicted by the plantation economy. The cricket describes her little house on the brow of the mountains where it was so cold that it would not make the frog stop singing only but all the creatures were unable to function. As the Frog narrator tells us, the pain is exacerbated by the presence of Devil living in close vicinity of the mountainside. Their life is perpetually insecure as the Devil uses to appear in different guise as emissary of death. He’s wrecked havoc on the world. He claims to be the owner of half the world and the seat of evil, intrigue and destruction. As Bolom introduces him as the prince of the “kingdom of night”, also

The devil my master Who owns half the world, In the kingdom of night, Has done all that is evil Butchers thousands in war, Whispered his diseases

(3-8, 99).

The devil’s estate is the very diametric opposite of Mother’s hut, kept warm by love and warmth of feelings. As Gros Jean describes his journey “Well I walked up through the bush then I came onto a large field. Estate-like, you know, sugar, tobacco, and a hell of a big white house where they say the devil lives” (109). He accuses the “big, white man” (109) to be cold, inhuman who coerce the black slave to most grueling toil. Like his mother, he has portrayed the planter devil as possessor of land, house, all the riches and as the supreme authority over the labouring blacks. Resentful, he interrogates/asks: “Black people have to rest, too” (109). A little later, Ti-Jean observes: “Hey, all you niggers sweating there in the canes!

Hey, all you people working hard in the fields!” (7-8.148)

The apparent binary structure of black/ white, man/ devil and their confrontation is often said to have been a literary analogue of the slave revolt. On the moral plane three encounters embody the shortcomings of brute power or bookish knowledge and the triumph of practical wisdom and earthy common sense. Gros Jean feels slighted to be considered “common man” and asserts that he can prove to be powerful and reminds him “all could be mine”. It attests to racial/ adversarial politics which professed to be in the first place as equal of white. In course of verbal duel the Planter continues to call him by names like Mac, Jo, Gross Chien, Horace, Hubert, Benton and Francis, despite his repeated reminder of his original name. This violence of naming is central to the mechanism of colonial authority. Kamau Brathwaite states in his essay “World Order Models” that the erasure of name works as a metonym for crossed out identity. The Caribbean islands were named after the name of the Christian saints like St. Martin, St. Lucia and St. Vincent as their native names were cast out. Violence, fraud and erasure of the name are commonly experienced in the Caribbean as sign of imperialist pedagogy which Bhabha calls “the right to signify” through “the power of naming” (Bhabha 33). Breslin in his nuanced analysis in *Nobody’s Nation* has read the play as the story of successive attempts to respond to colonial oppression. The first contender of the Devil is the eldest brother, Gros-Jean who is overconfident of his “arm of irons” and is subject to more oppressive toil dictated by the planter. Mi-Jean follows him and as he is proud intellectual, in his oratorical passion, he has shown signs of identification with white culture. He has no respect for the native animals and birds. Like all mimic man, he continues to beat the masters at their own game, with the self-awareness to assert the ‘difference’. In this allegorical tale of the brother-devil encounter, physical strength and intellectual ability- both have proved too inadequate responses, and empty blasts

The last challenger of the White Planter is the youngest of brothers, Ti-Jean who immediately strikes with humble and courteous gesture. His name Ti-Jean is symbolic of West-Indian little man, ordinary but rich in practical wisdom. As he leaves behind the hut, unlike others, he listens attentively to his mother and also asks for his blessing. He is befriended by animals and birds. While his brother Gros set out by kicking away the frog as : “Get out of my way, you slimy bastard!” (104). His attitude to the Frog is diametric opposite of his brother: “Why should I laugh at the frog and his base voice?” And the Frog assures him “if you need us, call us, brother, but/ you understand we must move” (138) or again, “If you need us, call us, brother, but You understand we must move” (148)

When he meets the Devil disguised as Old Man, he lectures him: “What counts in this world is money and power” expressing quintessential ethos of neo-colonial venture and market economy. It is a strident claim of the mechanism of material exploitation and Ti- Jean is empowered with common and native wit who count on nothing else on his way to overcome temptation. But capitalistic proclamation, exploitation of human and environment are triumphed over by the rapport of Ti-Jean and the bird and beast; they recreate the vision of the ordered universe. As Albert Ashalou observes, “ Fully equipped with his mother’s advice and blessings, the knowledge acquired from the smaller animals, his humility and natural instincts, and an invincible determination, he successfully beats the devil in his own game, outwitting him at every point”(123).

Ti- Jean is much more sensitive to call the beasts and birds friends and seeks their help to reach the estate of the old man. Contrasted to him, the Devil curses all “fish, flesh and fowl”. When Ti-Jean eventually wins the battle it attests to the victory of qualities like pity and fellow-feelings; it is very much antithetical to the dehumanizing proclamation of the Devil at the beginning “Give the Devil a child for the dinner!”(89). It is his song that finally moves the Devil to tears. Very appositely remarks Edward Baugh: “Ti- Jean enacts the humanity and personhood of the Caribbean subject in the response to the tradition of discourse that would deny him or her those attributes” (77). No longer a messenger of the Devil figure, Bolom’s appearance as a new born child is obviously symbolic of the emancipation of the slaves from the iron-clutches of the devil. Its coming into life is indicative of emerging West Indian consciousness- decolonized and assertive. A miscegenated offspring, an embodiment of white male’s response to the allure of exotic sexuality was described by the Mother as “child of the Devil” (94). A recurrent figure of the West-Indian folklore, this unborn fetus lives in corner or near the bed and harm at the command of its master. Possessing the folk values in abundant measure or guided by instinct, he outwits and humbles the Devil. Greed and exploitation will be replaced by native and liberatory stratagem capable of ushering “green beginning”. Such celebratory and highly affirmative moments can be said to effect transmutation of consciousness in which the straitjacket of identity looks to be worn-out. Robert. D. Hamner has this to say: “the advice of his aged mother (experience) and of lowly animals (instinct) from whom he learns to respect nature and to use his wits” (47). Native wit, compassion, earthy common sense can overturn the politics of domination and expansionism. In such figure, the West- Indian man “possesses the possibility of rich,

complex and integrated self which is his by virtue of his experience” (285). True to his name, Ti-Jean’s victorious feat becomes “little man’s” triumph over the big power class in society and he proves to be “fool like all heroes”. In a story of a folk fable, by regenerating the myth of native heroism, Walcott placed stress on transformation of consciousness. As Thieme describes the play as “an allegory of the dispossessed of the Caribbean peasantry’s fight for survival under colonialism and gradual movement towards the independent consciousness represented by Ti-Jean’s stance” (60). Through vibrant and colourful performative strategies, punctuated with song and music, it humanises the ruthless Devil.

Available critical readings of this play have shed little light on the figure of the Mother in the plot of *Ti-Jean and Brothers*, so far, casting it as a morality play of the encounter between three young black sons and the white planter. But she deserves comments as strong presence, a mixture of frailty and staunchness beside all male figures; she is far from a stereotype in Walcott’s overwhelmingly male art world. Feminist critics like Elaine Savory in an article entitled “Value Judgements on Art and the question of Macho Attitudes: The Case of Derek Walcott” takes Walcott to task for portrayal of the women as mere clichéd, stereo-typical and negative. She notes that Walcott’s women are shorn of individuality, playing auxiliary part to the male-centred drama. She contends that as passive creatures they await male appreciation and by condescending roles, they help re-enforce the male hegemony. Patricia Ismond in a kind of rejoinder in *Woman as Race-containing Symbol in Walcott’s Poetry* argues that in the work of the late 70s, Walcott began to cast women in a more positive light and in a more active role. But here much earlier in this play of 1959, appears the figure of Mother whose home-bound persona speaks in a dignified voice. She is the perpetuator of myths and stories and communicator of feelings. African and Caribbean literatures celebrate mother-figures, ones who nurture, protect and also possess secret knowledge. Catherine Obianuju Acholonu argues that the mother is at the spiritual heart of the African family with the abiding power of love, tolerance and service. Here also we find it is motherhood that stands out amidst male antagonism, her motherly role is counterpoint to the lust, greed of the devil. In absence of husband, mother tries to exert authority and dignity; she is the centre of the mother-headed family. They carry well as a family unit and interact with each other to hold out against the threatening surrounding. Though home-bound, rooted in her place, the home, for her, is an extremely vulnerable place, far removed from the place of safe, secure living. She can be easily be read as victim figure ; her instructive role in

posing spirited challenge to the Devil as they face him in succession can hardly be overlooked. Like the heroine of Armaha's *The Beautiful Ones are Not yet Born*, she is the "symbol of patient suffering". Of course, the mother is the grassroot West-Indian, a quintessential victim figure of West-Indian society. Here in the play, she is introduced as the centre in the dialogue of Frog and Cricket as pitiful mountain dweller without her husband, insecure and in the clutches of abject poverty. Denied of minimum subsistence, she stands out as the figure of composure - rock-solid in defense against the threatening devil. To quote Patricia Ismond, "Walcott here extends into the plight of women at the extreme pit of disadvantage and degradation in the society to project the image of woman as its arch-victims and underdogs" (Theatre 9). She is at the lowest rung of the society- beleaguered by the oppressive circumstances and worn-out by the hardship of daily life. She interferes as soon as her sons get locked in argument. She keeps up the hope that "God will send us something" (92) against the irreverent attitude of her sons. It is she who senses the Devil's approach, crying out "Death death is coming nearer" (94). When Bolom accuses one mother for deformed condition, she consoles her with the words of wisdom:

"Look, perhaps it is luckiest

Never to be born,

To the horrors of this life

Crowded with shadows"

(1-4,96)

Its immediate inter-text is recognized to be the line of Sophocles:

"Never to have been born is best".

The Greek God Silenius taught that life is not worth living. It is the extreme standpoint of pessimistic outlook that stresses the futility and pointlessness of human existence. Voltaire even believed life to be a bad joke, not obviously preferable to nothingness. Schopenhauer never ceased to stress that suffering is not only inevitable in life, in fact, an essence of it. She clearly understands that elimination of poverty and misery in this world is impossible and therefore it is better to wish not to have been born at all. To be born is to experience decay, decrepitude, disease and eventually death. In spelling out this ultimate futility of human existence she does not appear to be a starkly "a "nay-saying" character who must negate all values of life.

Guided by experience, age and wisdom, she corroborates an independent role in the male-dominated world of the drama. In *In The Castle of My Skin* Lamming also emphasizes on the role of mother in maintaining paternal authority in the absence of father at home. In *Omeros* Ma Kilman embodies organic connection with natural life-science, as human personification of the very landscape. She is the fostering mother, provider of the herbal magic potion to the festering ankles of Achille. Like her, the Mother of Ti-Jean, is moulded by her native soil, guided by earthy wisdom. She is, to quote Patricia Ismond, “embodiment of a regenerative, nurturing landscape” (Theatre,84). She is not beaten down by the loss and worries but makes a fine adoptability as she tells Gros Jean, “Woman life is so. Watching and Losing”; but it does not confirm her as defeatist. (102).With the passage of time, she has carried well the burden of motherhood. Love is her very forte against the terror and despair that surrounds her hut, a counterpoint the estate of the devil. Bolom sums up this quality:

“The house looks warm, old woman,
Love keeps the house warm,
From the cold wind and cold rain”;

(14-16,98)

For all her ill-fate, she is not a mere withdrawn, self-effacing figure. Rather she represents the West-Indian “Wretched of the Earth” figure, as struggling as the coal carrying women in *Another Life*, carrying loads down its “hemophilic hills’. In a life plagued by poverty, in the extremity of suffering, her loving, protective care and earthy common sense resist the greed, violence and exploitative stratagems of the Devil. Ti-Jean, in her words is “last of my chickens” (6,132) after the loss of two sons and his fate/ future is in deep insecurity. But it is Ti-jean who reminds her how it was she who taught them to be strong in adversity and be in love of god. She does not only pray for the safety of Ti-Jean but wishes “let him die as a man”.(10,158) The way she maintains her dignity marks her out as resilient and formidable mother figure. In course of the action her role appears affirmative and instructive as her sons set out to encounter the devil. She reminds Gros to praise God and seek the help of bird and insects. Helene Cixous consistently upholds the view that women inhabit a pre-civilizational world which is closer to the pulse of nature and rhythm of sensuality. She has staked a claim for true female identity by

linking women's position with that of people outside Western culture. Moreover the mother tells/warns her sons about the various impersonations of the Devil by which it deceives its opponents. And Ti-Jean profits from her practical suggestions on his way to face the devil. Thus she manages to overcome the inhibiting conditions to self-realization. Like other plays about St. Lucia, here Walcott has explored both the possibilities and limitations of the marginal lives.

1.2. *Malcochon or The Six in the Rain*

I am morality itself, and nothing beside is morality:

-Nietzsche.

(man) is ... free from all outside authority in the determination of his fate... he has nothing to lean on which to lean for support but himself.

Eugene O'Neill

- Another significant work of this period, *Malcochon or Six in the Rain* narrativizes the life of a tough and non-conformist wood-cutter, one in whom struggle is affirmed as creative force and whose identity eclipses social assumption. It proffers a life beyond the conventional moral binaries like good and evil. Chantal, the wood-cutter hero is defiant to the inflexible moral laws. Like Afa and Makak, he leads a solitary life without family; he is resolute in challenging the morality of custom. No wonder, he is described variously by those whom he chanced to meet- 'madman', 'enemy of god', 'Tarzan of the apes', 'Tiger of the Forest'(195). The popular identification of stories and folk tale -all the common appellations are subject to intense scrutiny in course of action. By revelation of the murder of Regis the planter, the plot destabilizes the much cherished values of 'truth', 'justice', 'judgement' and interrogates their eternal validity.

Instead of using truth as the highest standard of value, Nietzsche argues individuals need to develop their own power of judgement and produce ideas and ethics that will strengthen and help them live. Far from being immutable, moral values are an historical product, contingent creations of particular group of people; they are designed to serve their interests. The plot of *Malcochon* poses disquieting challenges to the established moral laws. Walcott's use of Sophoclean epigraph is clearly suggestive:

“Who is the slayer, who
The victim? Speak!”

Nietzsche also believed our every act is finally ‘unknowable’. Intention and consequence are not absolute determinant of action as ‘good’ or ‘evil’. He contended that which is conventionally regarded as good and evil in fact are relative categories or cannot be held as absolute or rigid. Finding the ethical implication analogous to the final part of the Greek tragedy, Thieme observes, “there is a movement beyond a cycle of crime and punishment, as Kuroswa’s moral relativism”(68). Walcott himself has acknowledged his debt to Kuroshwa’s classic *Roshoman*. The intention of the two murderers- one that of the Planter that took place before the start of the action and one that culminates at the end - murder of Chantal are more the acts of saving than brutal aggression. Thus Walcott’s plot unsettles the ‘slayer’-‘victim’ dualism; it seeks to revalue all values. Nietzsche claims, “an action is in itself perfectly devoid of value: it all depends on who performs it. One and the same ‘crime’ can be in one the greatest privilege, in another a stigma”(338). The Conteur who introduces the play seems to re-tell a popular tale of Chantal’s brutal murder of Regis, the planter but he offers his own version;

“Don’t believe all you heard or read
Chantal the tiger cannot dead”.

(7-8,171).

It seems that Conteur, the traditional West-Indian story-teller is resistant to the attempt to impose certain ‘true’ stories upon all. Used to a life without prestige, honour and wealth, Chantal lashes out at those who are at the helm of power. Chantal’s self-introduction stamps him as offender, a violent opposer of the law and judiciary, reminding us of Makak’s smashing of the café:

“And just because I hawked and spat
In the eyes of the magistrate
That give me a year in jail”

(18-20,172)

Chantal, as Theodore Colson describes him, is “a perpetual fugitive, with a reputation of violence and crime, a man whose name has been used to frighten the children” (128). He is degraded wood-cutter and like Makak, he has resorted to violence; as demonized figure he is ostracized from the human society. Truth and values are man-made and more often than not they are absolutist in their claim. Facing the abyss of despair, he can demonstrate positive force of will and strength. He is maligned to be monstrous and uncanny, unleashing only destructive energy; all his actions are expressive of pent-up energy/ anger against the crushing force of dominant structures and social institutions. Though some of his utterances are overtly hostile and hateful against power structure of the society, they lay bare their reluctance to reconcile to the dominant ideology.

Chantal is no doubt the one who illustrates powerful individuality, instinct and passion. In the Nietzschean sense, he actualizes himself in ways that the ‘herd morality’ of Christianity forbids. The society built on the Christian ethics or political ideologies seeks to produce dull, conformist society. Moral codes are imposed externally and reinforced with harsh punishment and discipline. In the dying minutes he refuses to be comforted by the priest; “Priest? What priest? What the priest can do now? What the priest knows that Chantal don’t know already?” (7-8,204). He will die with the peace of soul inside the forest, rather than leaving it. The vision of ‘home’ in the Monkey Mountain awaiting to greet Makak is anticipated in Chantal’s final wish. An anti-social solitary, he finds to his heart’s content a glimpse of nature’s beauty before his death. The elemental life of forest is a sign of his secure rootedness. As it is spelt out in moving utterance of Chantal:

“And look at the sun making diamond on the wet leaves. That’s all the money I ever had in this life. A man should not leave the forest,eh?”

(6-8,205).

Forest is his domain, the place of his final rest, not only a physical but a kind of spiritual home. Despite all material constraints, forest has bestowed upon him a sense of belongingness. Thus his folk heroes articulate the spirit of challenge to the money- power league/ collusion and proclaim unshakeable association with nature. As Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty' forces the spectator to confront the harsh facts of a cruel world and his or her isolation, Walcott's heroes journey back to their solitary dwelling. As Artaud also believed that civilizations had turned humans into a sick and repressed creatures and the true function of these theatres was to rid the humankind of these repressions and liberate each individual's instinctual energy. These individuals explore the contradictions and hypocrisies of bourgeois society and give free rein to the 'primitive' impulses. And they also confront us with the received notions of 'savage', 'cruel' and so on. Leaving behind the social power structures, like Yank affirming the imposed identity of 'ape' in *Hairy Ape*, they affirm a primitive status. Living in the urban world, world of machines, Yank also lost the harmony with nature. After his deviation from reasonable values of good nature and social intelligence, he finds himself in the woods, stripped to barest of means. As in life, in death also, Chantal is all alone and posited 'outside' the pale of society.

This 1959 play continues incisive analysis of the Caribbean society and at the same time a universal human situation. Like the earlier play *Ti-jean and His Brothers*, poverty and hunger permeate the actions; all the characters are the victims of the material exploitation. The nephew, soon after his appearance bitterly describes his own condition as 'hungry like hell'. Chantal has spent three weeks in the forest, "eating bird, small animal and green plantain" (176). Now assembled inside a copra house the storm and rainy conditions have forced them into physical ordeal:

"Cold rain, dead leaves, cold winds, old bones.

Why time can't leave old people alone"?

(9-10,179)

Nature in all its harshness adds to the trials and tribulations. Poverty as in other plays is chiefly attributable to the exploitative of machinery of colonialism. As the Nephew sings;

"Listen, old man,

One, two, three, the white men have plenty,

When thunder roll is a nigger belly empty”.

(13-14,173)

But scars of poverty cannot thwart their zeal for self- discovery and renewal of energy. Nothing can curb their elemental and primitive forces. By Chantal’s self- confession, he’s been used to stealing and getting imprisonment. Hence the community identifies him with all the ‘immoral’, ‘unjust’, guilty acts. By all moral consideration Chantal is a notoriously ‘bad’ man; as Nietzsche defines in his *Beyond Good and Evil*:

“As a bad man, one belongs to the ‘bad’, to a mass of object, powerless men who have no communal feeling” (47). By opting for a self-chosen course of life, by stepping aside from the shared values of society, Chantal is misunderstood by the society. All other characters associate him with the legend- as a figure of terror, aggression and cruelty. Even before the action begins, Chantal is indicted as murderer; though the intention of his crime has hardly been discussed. Walcott’s play seriously questions the easy assumptions and presuppositions of morality. His protagonists are strong-willed people who resist the categories of thought foisted upon them. Julia Davis in her study on folk plays makes a very important observation, seldom approached by early critics and scholars; “The reality is that Chantal disturbs the value of western culture, by stripping the veil off the other ‘good’ citizens. He stands morally above the searchers of truth... he is the symbol of the superior moral values of the truly honest self-accepting man” (64). The vortex of the plot is the murder of Regis, the planter and the motif reveals what is contrary to public knowledge- as it was carried out to save the deaf-mute Moumou who stole the silver spoon from the brutal white planter. Conventional morality too easily condemns the act of murder, categorising all actions as either ‘bad’ or ‘good’. If the violent act were motivated by a spiteful and resentful will then the violent act is contemptible, but if it were motivated by a healthy will, then the violent act is possible. Soon after the action opens, those who have assembled in the copra, seeking shelter from rain and storm, nephew, uncle, husband and wife are locked in bitter acrimony. They accuse each other; bring charge of infidelity in marital relation. Such serious moral issues will be cross-examined by Chantal who calls himself the ‘other’ of law. Hence he assumes the role of ‘judge’ rather playfully and seeks to settle the issues between them by a mock-trial. This role-playing contravenes the normative/ moral codes , unsettles the claims of ethical ideology. Before all are given hearing, or any indictment is passed,

Moumou plunges knife all of a sudden in the back of Chantal. He misread the intention of Chantal and posed to be the savior for all the fellows present there. Thus the intention and action congruence are found to be at odds. It is Chantal who aptly expresses it: “You see how a man can have good meaning and do the wrong thing?” (202). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche argues what we think of as the conscious intention behind a moral act is needed to be interpreted further. The final/ moral judgement is suspended to the end when Chantal echoes the Sophoclean epigraph in his dying moments:

“Who is the murder, who the dead, eh, tell me...what use the truth is?”

(203)

In order to overcome this moral dictum, man must create extra- moral values; Nietzsche demanded that ‘free spirits’, ‘strong-willed’ individuals need to have resilience. As for him, the ethical question is really what sort of person or character one is. The oppressed community of St-Lucia poses challenge to values taken for granted, mere willless act of conformity. By accepting his ill-fated end, Chantal has confronted the “proven wisdom of the tribe” (Nietzsche 67). Chantal like Afa or Makak demonstrate the freedom of will, an independence from the stranglehold of moral lives. He displaces the presumed values of our ‘moral’ values. Without rank and status, these ‘lower’ type of individuals spurn the slave morality. They are strangers to weak and slavish nature. The final comments by the Conteur again questions the ‘beast’, ‘man’ dualism; ending of Chantal and the compassionate stay of the Old Man teases all – the characters and the audience out of the easy identification. When all other witnesses slip away from the site only the Old Man stays with him. It illuminates the understanding of suffering and the quality of compassion:

“The rage of the beast is taken for granted,

Man’s beauty is sharing his brother’s pain”

(206)

The closing moment throws a new light on the crime committed and underscores the contrasting emotional responses of ‘rage’ and compassion- an issue which receives a more poetic treatment in the next short play *The Sea at Dauphin*.

1.3. *Sea at Dauphin*

I am content to live it all again

And yet again.

-W. B. Yeats: A Dialogue of Self and soul

Was that life? I want to say to death. Well then! Once more.

- Nietzsche

We, however, want to become those who we are- the ones who are new, unique, incomparable, self-legislating, self-creating.

-Nietzsche.

Walcott's early plays command our attention to creative re-presentation of St. Lucian life and its existential crisis of living on the margin. Tension of hope and despair, negation and affirmation, weakness and strength animates the plot here. His imaginative treatment transfigures the Caribbean island world as self-inventing location and it no longer remains outpost of empire. The present section aims to study his one-act play *Sea at Dauphin* as creative affirmation of pain and suffering and seeks to validate how the harshness of the realities of this fishing community's life becomes a metaphor for calm acceptance and fortitude. And it aims to show how by eliminating the stigmata of non-scripted or 'unstoried' lives a fishing community can affirm the hidden potential within them even in the midst of grim encounter with death and nothingness.

Moulded after Synge's classic text *Riders to the Sea* and considered to be a masterpiece of his early years, here the plot spotlights the life of the fishermen mired in 'naked, voluble poverty'. Turmoil and perils are inalienable in their daily life in the remote village; without any organizing principles of life, illusion and promises are denied to them. Falling short of ideals, life of these fishermen appear be worthless here. Its protagonist, Afa is very commonly read by Walcott scholars as 'blasphemous' 'bitter' and 'misanthropic'. But to see him as vituperative despiser of all positive things and values, a mere 'nay-sayer', will be extremely reductive and over-simplification. Far from being the voices of *resentiment*, god-denying, hard-hearted race, the fishermen compel our attention by mastering the wild, destructive emotions. In so doing, they

evinced an ethical imperative to lead a life which cannot be dismissed as merely unjust or miserable. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche contended that life is a continuum of creation, entwining past, present and future. And the sermonizing of Christianity to say 'no' to life drains away all life-enhancing drives. It is in the ways of continuous change and passing that our earthly life may be constructed and re-constructed. In *Sea at Dauphin* what permeates the plot are the experiences of death, mishaps: for the local fishermen, terror strikes with every new sailing. The very means of survival becomes the death trap as the impoverished fishing folk regularly put out to sea, facing dire challenge for survival. Here, the plot seeks to create a meaning and value in an existence in which all hopes of redemption and transcendence have fallen away. Stripped of security and dignity, they embody the spirit of self-overcoming. Inhabiting cold, inhuman world, the 'unaccommodated' fishing folk does not merely figure as some victims of some 'nihilistic disorientation'; a group of mute sufferers in face of perilous seas. It is in grim, daily encounter with hostile and other elemental forces they re-define life as ongoing process of becoming. Afa, the domineering figure of the fishing folk seems to fulfill the affirmative purpose of creating values; though most critical reading over-emphasizes his bitterness and fuming rage.

Sea has always been a significant axis of Walcott's artistic creation. And the life of fishermen measured against sea has preoccupied him in his poems, too. In *Omeros*, the crowning glory of his poetic career, the focus is on the fishermen vying for a beautiful local St. Lucian Helen. In his early plays the narrative is grounded in the marginal, dispossessed lives- charcoal burner, the wood-cutter or the fishermen; the protagonists are quintessential West-Indian men; they are materially and culturally 'nobody'. Within the daily encounter with terror, experiences of pain and anguish, Walcott's play breaks open new modes of being for these obscure, shadowy lives. Life, as described by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, is eternal war, polarity and tension. Willing and striving are the essences of all living and as Schopenhauer believed, "willing is a sufficient condition of suffering, because all willing arises necessarily from a want or deficiency, and to experience a want is to suffer"⁴²). The life of the fishing community is riddled with dire wants as Afa broods over it: "I born and deading in this coast that have no compassion to grow food for children, no fish enough to buy new sail, no twine". (58). This nothingness of human struggle and existence reminds us of Nora's brooding in *Riders to the Sea*: "And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and a

fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking”. (101) But the fishing community’s life in Walcott’s play is not a tragic story in a negative sense, ending in failure and frustration. Instead, it is affirmatively tragic in revealing that human lives are not designed or pre-scripted, but a process of becoming. The fishermen can transcend the pointlessness of existence not by acceding to the Christian morality and by leading life “now” and “innumerable times more” and they will return though knowing that “there will be nothing new in it”, While the weak might have discovered worthlessness and loss in such life, Afa and his mates, a gritty band of sailors begin exemplifying their readiness to embrace all inevitable return of all past experiences, however repelling:

AFA: [looking to the sea] Last year Annelles, and Bolo, and this year Hounakin... And one day, tomorrow, you Garcia and me ... And Augustin...

(17-18.80)

What is spelt out here is no mere apprehension of weak-spirited sailor or a mere defeatist submission. Facing up against mortality, Afa and his mates do not only oppose subjection of life but also look forward without hope, promise or end. Instead of unhealthy obsession with the past, his rumination stresses how times are knotted together: how the present never leaves behind its past and how it is also tied to a fated future. By reminding themselves of the finiteness of life, by stripping them of illusions can they embrace all the past experiences and negotiate with the chaotic world. Resignation, defeat and clear submission to fate mark the ending of *The Riders to the Sea*, but here the ending transforms the experience of suffering into something essential and positive, a stimulant to action. Withdrawal and passivity without confronting the ordeal of life occlude the process of self-making. Dauphin life described by Afa is bleak and hopeless caught up in existential cycle of toil, pain, frustration and failure: “Every day sweat, sun and salt, and night is salt and sleep, all the dead days pack away and stink is Dauphin life” (53).

In his study of Nietzsche’s doctrine of ‘over-coming nihilism’, Bernard Reginster finds the action of Sisyphus of pushing the rock up on the mountain as life-affirming, rather than futile. Dauphin people are regularly subjected to both physical and psychological suffering; battered by loneliness, hunger, life is to them is only an ocean of suffering. In life, as Schopenhauer has also contended that it is far more correct to regard work, privation, misery and

suffering, crowned by death, as the aim and objective of our life. Striving, hindrances and failure make their daily life a never-ending ordeal. Two hours before sunrise, in the “sleep-tightened village”, the fishermen arrive barefooted, tattered- cloaked. Little late to arrive is Hounakin, appearing a picture of weakness and misery, devastated from the recent loss of his wife. Wind is ‘savage’ and early October chills at the daybreak face them with inhospitable climate. They are hurrying for an early departure with their canoe, significantly named Our Daily Bread. Almost photographically truthful, and brutal in realism, the central inspiration of the story is the ordinary lives of the ordinary people. Before they set out to sea, their body is exposed to inclement conditions, stressing needs, wants and necessities:

Afa: “poverty, dirty woman, dirty children, where all the prayers? Where all the money a man should have and friends when his skin old?”

(9-10.73)

Here Afa indicts life as painfully inadequate as it offers no hope of deliverance or redemption. Poor and outcast, the fishermen face the challenges to claim their humanity. Afa is lonely, having no wife or children and confronts too many adversaries- Sea, God, Church and White man. Trapped in oppressive circumstances, life appears only sordid and disgusting. He pours out bitterness against all who surround him; fierce hatred is so entrenched in him that he sounds almost a ‘nay-sayer’ trying to come to terms with nihilistic crisis. Beset with painful experiences, Afa broaches hard, fatalistic view of life; he broods over defeat at the hands of external forces epitomizing human predicament in general:

“Don’t ask me why a man must work so hard

To eat for worm to get more fat”.

(14-15.96)

Every time they put out to sea, the sea faces them as destroyer of human and family relation. With every sailing, they stand on the edge of disaster. Here the ever present sea stands as symbolic of the “timeless repetition of life and death” (“Twilight”). The narrative is designed to negotiate between affirmation and negation, between hope and frustration. It denies any closure or a teleological end; instead, it implies a cycle, a motion without end. Afa asks

Augustin, “Because one old man dead, the sea will stop?”(75) The mood evoked here resembles the last line of *Omeros*: “When he left the beach the sea was still going on”. The ever-flowing sea, evoking a counter version of linear time, creating “a tenseless space” may be taken as a metaphor of the Cyclical nature of existence. The sailors embody a different ethics from the individuals who come and pass and leave behind only a faint memory. It testifies to the unshaken faith to the earth, rather than craving for otherworldly realm. The central exhortation of Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathursta* is this: “I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of other worldly hopes!” (3)

Having found no possibility of organizing life around some ultimate purpose like ‘God’ or ‘social justice,’ Afa appears for the most part as confirmed cynic, an unmasker/ debunker of authority, divine or secular. More often than not, Walcott scholars have described him as ‘misanthrope’ or ‘blasphemous’. Through a major part of the action, he savagely attacks Christian morality and falseness of the Christian doctrine. He scathingly opposes prayers, ritual and reverence. His God is not ‘dead’, missing or lost but rather a ‘big fish’ eating ‘small fishes’, an inflictor of pain, a pitiless tyrant. The Dauphin life, as he bitterly describes it is mercilessly hard “the land is hard, this Dauphin land has stone/ Where it should have some heart” (61). In stark deprivation and dismal daily existence, he lashes out at the mechanism of oppression and injustice, conducted by the God or the white rulers. Immersed in pain and toil, he hits out at religious teachings and transcendental hope offered by Christianity. He has the audacity to curse ‘God’ for all ill-fate his people are used to undergo. In an altercation with the young priest, he bursts out in deep scorn against church and the vocation of the priest and all forms of moral values. Without recourse to moral values he shines in terrible loneliness, comparable to the sages only. When it comes to put out to sea, he is fearless enough to proclaim “If none going, then I will go alone.”(61) When Augustin accuses him “You have no respect for man, animal, sea or God. (61), he also explains how years of experience have turned his “heart so hard” (61). Only with a fiercely independent streak, this spirited individual can distance himself from the surrounding world. By vigorously repudiating the general and abstract system of values, he takes an important stride towards complete self-assertion or what Nietzsche calls the spirit of *ressentiment*. As a non-conformist, he questions the validity of conventional moral categories like ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Rather, he appears to have created the value of strong will. As a self-determining man, he spurns the values of morality. Desperately sad and distressed by the news of

Hounakin's death, he proclaims that no prayer or ritual can palliate the distress of such lives. His gesture of defiance, [as he "tears a scapular from his neck and hurls it to the ground] (73)" in the presence of the priest is no doubt irreverent. This sacrilegious act is suggestive of disaffiliation from ecclesiastical order, a profanity that characterizes extraordinary daring to challenge the pious life recommended by Church and the priest.

The hope of salvation, as Nietzsche contended in *Beyond Good and Evil*, will only rob the individual of his free spirit. The true noble spirit does not only live beyond every established ideal of good and evil but also remains indifferent to slights and injuries. Tame, civilized social animals believe in acquiescence but as a self-determining man, Afa decides the course of his action by creation of his own values. Nietzsche believed that only noble nature can impose their own values in the world as they are spurners of conventional morality or 'herd morality'. It is here that the powerful beings can separate them from the weak and virtuous. As Lee Spinks observes in his commentary on *Beyond Good and Evil* "The noble nature, by contrast, is not 'made for pity' because it has the strength spontaneous to affirm its own nature" (90). In course of the plot, all of Afa's words and acts may be said to "take a moral formula in a supra moral sense", a marker of Nietzschean higher man. Afa picks up a quarrel with the young priest once he mentions that the old man (Hounakin) 'had God'. As conventional Christianity espouses, death as a gateway to enter into the blessed life of eternity is immediately contradicted by Afa. In a more blistering speech, he equates God with white man:

"God is a white man. The sky is his blue eye,
His spit on Dauphine people is sea." (9-10.61)

As Afa curses 'God', it is quite obvious that his unmitigated aversion is directed at both religious and secular authority. Ziauddin Sardar in his *Orientalism* contends: "White men as God syndrome" (55) was fairly common in the colonies, especially in such recorded events as when Captain Cook was greeted by the native Hawaiians as the God Leno, upon his arrival on the shore. It seems fairly reasonable to say that the thrill and wonder associated with those events are subverted by Walcott's sailor protagonist. The colonial fantasy that equates white man with God is subverted when he describes them to be in league, engineering oppressive mechanism. Thus, the wonder and valediction at the arrival of white people have been held up to question. What it

stresses moreover is that the values associated with God or 'white men'; like all values are the products of power struggles and they are imposed onto the group of the dispossessed. He unyieldingly argues that hardships of quotidian life cannot be redeemed by any spiritual salve. Anxiety and terror of living are so familiar that they may be said to be leading what Empodcles calls "un-life". Both Afa and Garcia demonstrate the worth of life in negotiating with the phenomenal world of ceaseless striving and pain, rather than resenting pain. One way to overcome contingency and pain, as Richard Rorty has stressed in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, is to recognize it.

Now it remains to be answered, how may life be affirmed in the depth of abyssal suspicion? How can one go on loving life with so much scorn or affirm a communal life bereft of divinity? What practices guide them through the chaotic and disenchanting world? How can an individual cobble together meaning out of the nothingness of existence? This section attempts to find answer by scrutinizing parts of Afa and Augustin in the play. The futility of life has been so overwhelming that Afa scornfully rejects any moral or ethical position. But his is not merely the voice of all resentful or frustrated sentiments. As opposed to falling into resentment, he maintains dignity in venting his own views. Regret and remorse suggest an unwillingness to live life again as exactly it was. And here, Afa never appears apologetic for all his gestures and actions; his moral stance is never that of a pessimistic rejecter of life. He promises to stand by his old East-Indian sailor friend in his crisis and loss; he does not only console him in a moment of grievous loss but also advises how he will regain self-control to overcome this personal tragedy: "old man, your wife is dead and sorry make you mad. Go on the morne and count the birds like Ragamin and play bamboo under the wood-trees for you' goat... go on the morne behind the presbytery, watch goat, talk with priest, and drink your white rum after the night came"(10-12.64). Unlike the earlier impressions of his remorselessness, he sounds tenderly caring and compassionate. By forging creative unity of nature, individual and society, life may be redeemed or made more worth living. Such small gestures of compassion help us see him involved in the process of self-formation, bringing new values into being. After the day's sailing he even returns with a pail of fish and Augustin with a shell for their mate Hounakin. To call him a cynic to extreme is to endorse Augustin's observation that he is irreverent, a stranger to all common human emotions. He accuses him, "You don't have no love, no time, no child, you have a hole where man heart should be, you have no God, no dog, no friend (6-8.51)". In *Beyond Good and*

Evil, Nietzsche contended that goodness is often defined in terms of moral terms like self-restraint. The positive moral virtue is identified with weakness. More often than not, weak and insecure people stay content with traditional belief. To be good often demands suppression of free will and instinct. Nothing can tame Afa into a 'civilized animal' or curb his drives and passions. Weakness and humility are morally justified and the young priest describes Afa and his community as "hard race" (74) and in need of spiritual help. Morality, is said to be "the residue left when the constant battle of the contraries is rigidified into the religious and life-denying opposition of good and evil". Afa is deeply distrustful of inflexible moral laws as he argues that if they are imposed, it will subordinate the being of 'man' to a mere abstraction or dogma. Asserting himself over ethical restraints, Afa embodies powerful individuality of instinct and passion. All his bitterness and disgust and a degree of ruthlessness do not undermine love and compassion. This quality in Afa is stressed by Edward Baugh in his analysis: "The compassion and tenderness that cannot be altogether suppressed by Afa's hardness are crucial markers of his humanity" (69). Hounakin, a recent widower has surrendered to the chaos and confusion of his personal life; unable to shake off the despair, exhaustion, he kills himself. But what prevails over loneliness and perpetual suffering is vision of bonding between the fishermen- in their daily recreative hours of jokes, rum and meeting at Samuel Café after return from the daily chore of fishing. Meaninglessness and sense of futility can be transcended in such affirmative gestures and intensification of fellow feelings. The painful end of Hounakin cannot blur such glimpses of fraternity and bonding. It is here that we find aptness of Paula Burnett's observation when she points out how endemic condition of poverty can forge bond among the powerless which may counterpoint solidarity advocated by the ethics of globalization: "... poverty can remind us that we share a predicament with our neighbor, and it confirms the importance of compassion, mutual support and solidarity" (55). Such solidarity can only warm up the early morning chill of October. When Afa motivates the boy Jule, the son of Habal to join them in future expedition, a contrasting vision of a new beginning comes apparent. Hounakin's self-destructive end is redeemed in Jule's decision to step in her father's shoe. Moreover, it indicates a continuum between past, present and future. As the day moves towards the close, old challenges give way not to new day of untroubled calm and security but to even grimmer challenges. Death, loss can be counterbalanced by the eternally recurrent patterns and customs in life. Nietzsche upheld the Dionysian point of view which regards suffering as desirable and pain

as enabling condition to the affirmation of life. The real dignity of life is not in empty vanity of pleasure and happiness but in striving, toils and struggles. The Greeks also upheld the values of *pathei mathos* (“learn by suffering”) in social life. It is the closing moments of the action that is the centerpiece of the whole work as it interfaces death and life, stasis and motion. Past, present and future are interlocked here to create a recurrent pattern. At the sunset hour, just before leaving the sea beach, Afa recalls his lost partners whom the sea has swallowed up- Annells, Bolo, Hounakin and also broods over the uncertainties and insecurities of the island natives. Gacia reminds his friends “Tomorrow again” and Afa sets the time at four o clock – the final interaction, seemingly routinal has a deep resonance. It is not indicative of end of the day’s expedition but opens out into uncertain future. And their final action “They furl the sail” points forward to the daily chore of fishing to be continued on the next day. Afa has also mockingly reminded Augustin saying that they will return on the next day only if he does not go the church. It attests show pain and suffering can work as stimulant rather than foiling it. Thus the life portrayed here in this death-saturated atmosphere is also full of drive, forces and energies. Their final promise and commitment amply suggest how they have recognized that each passing moment is an echo for eternity rather than one brief episode in pointless succession of events. What the playwright himself calls “fatal adaptability” of the race of the fishermen seems the ability to arrive at a state of reconciliation with fate. To put it in Nietzschean terms:

“it is shown to my satisfaction that pain contributes to the nurturing of the human species as much as pleasure does, I shall say ‘yea’ to pain” (*Thus Spake Zarathrusta* iii).

Their ethical imperative is to live life by tearing off the shackle of past and to persist in their struggle- a decisive life-affirming gesture. In getting concerned with future they can act with responsibility to become what they are. This recognition of the inescapability of suffering and struggle endow upon them a positive mode of being. Since time is cyclical and each time returns in exact repetition, they appear ready to live and re-live it over and over again. In course of their conversation and action what surfaces is the consciousness of the future that already was and the past that will return with eternal inevitability. We find at the end Afa and Gacia are not merely resenting the injuries of the past but willing a return of the same. They will continue to negotiate with the phenomenal world of ceaseless striving and pain. The chaos and confusion of the daily life will be overcome in their willingness to relive such life over and over again. Afa

does not only mourn the death of his mates but knows the grim insecurity that they will undergo the very next time they sail out to sea. Thus, the motif of Afa, in course of the plot may be said to straddle between 'dying consciousnesses and 'awakening consciousnesses' which Nietzsche believed to be constitutive of continuum of a human life. The ending of the plot is underlined by this different stratum of consciousness, recalling the lost lives, yet also looking forward to early morning departure to sea. Each passing moment of life is an echo for eternity, rather than fleeting moment of life, since time is cyclical and each time returns in exact repetition. While Hounakin has ended life prematurely, others have opted for life to repeat eternally; it is through life-affirming gesture that may be staved off suicidal nihilism. Reconciliation with fate asks us to tolerate the eternal recurrence – a counterpoint to meaningful and ordered world of the religious life. Notwithstanding Afa's sustained attack on value or belief system, the narrative affirms an existence, though without promise of material change. The grim experiences of fishing community have induced in this community a complete will-lessness or indifferences to goals and purposes. Without standards and values to anchor their lives, the only ethical imperative that drives them still is the present life engulfed by 'dirt' and dismal 'poverty'. In accepting its unchanging futility, a new existential confidence is instilled in them. As old challenges will return on a new day, only the beings with exceptional strength will neither regret nor deplore his fate. In his seminal essay "What the Twilight Says", Walcott had also observed that: "that in the new Aegean the race, of which these fishermen were the stories, had grown a fatal adaptability" (17). Restless, ceaseless movement, constant striving and endless suffering endow upon their wretched lives a new meaning: "No possible satisfaction in the world can suffice to still the cravings of the will, to set a goal of its infinite aspirations and to fill the bottomless abyss of his heart" (Beer, 31). Life-denying skepticism and worthlessness of existence gradually give way to a desire for living life in its painful and horrible aspects. In the cold, inhuman world of Dauphin, in the world of its death and degradation a great amount of energy is expended over the possibility of survival. Above death and change the fishermen pose the challenge to become what they are. Their ethical imperative is only in willing the 'eternal recurrence', to welcome the return of all aspects. Nietzsche believed that the strong individual is able to embrace the inevitable and eternal return of all his past experiences- both good and evil. The Dauphin fishing community by pledging return to daily toil begins a process of self-realisation. What becomes apparent here is man's fate and freedom inextricably woven with the totality of the cosmic fate.

If evil and wretchedness are everywhere, the future is as dark as the past and the way to redemption does not lie in complete will less inaction. The ideal type of Nietzschean 'strong' man is the only being worthy of consideration as he fights the harder when fate is hostile. Dauphin fishermen have learnt to live without hope, without illusion and endured buffets of misfortune. Abundance of the adverse conditions inspires the strong man to fight with no desire to yield. Notwithstanding certain cruelty and ruthlessness, Afa has startled us with complete self-assertion. He has counseled Houkain against complete recoil from the chaotic and the disenchanted world. To tolerate the meaninglessness of the world, the response must be one of strength and not weakness. Their understanding of the chaos and confusion is corroborated by their undaunted confrontation with the world and experiencing it at its most threatening. In the process of becoming, they free themselves from the chains of the past and manage to bridge the past with future. At the end the young boy Jule who is asked to accompany them in their next sailing. Here we find their attempt to bridge the past and future. When past and future are recognized to be knotted together any individual can cast off all ill will towards the past. The sea stands as the dominant symbol of never ending cycle of life and death. It is not by evading the horrors that one can expect to cope with life. Rather in embracing the unalterable pattern of creation and destruction, we must relive the past and go on with expectation of nothing. Thus the play attests to the value of creating values, and the need to create a new, positive vision of being. In the words of the Conteur in *Malcochon, or the Six in the Rain*:

“The rage of the beast is taken for granted,
Man’s beauty comes from enduring pain” (18-19.175)

In *Thus Spake Zarasturshtha*, Nietzsche claimed that an individual life is a continuum of creation and that life is in need of being constructed and reconstructed. Here the fishermen, a highly marginalized society also exemplifies not only weariness and exhaustion but demonstrates life as ongoing process of becoming. The despairing resignation in the face of the valueless world; a sort of 'passive nihilism' is what Hounakin may have resorted to by ending his life. But what truly affirmed here is the strength which allows others to love it in the moments of hatefulness, accept the meaninglessness. Immersed in the organized flux of life they have complied with 'law of life' and willingly submitted into its decrees and thereby evincing what Nietzsche calls "formula for greatness in a human being"(12). He fervently argues that the

experience of eternal recurrence gives life meaning , makes suffering meaningful. As demanded by Nietzsche, we can contend that there appears in the final gestures and moves Afa and his mates is an acceptance of certain meaninglessness, muteness, instead of wishing such conventional solutions in “God”. By releasing drives and passions, they can liberate themselves from the moral constraints. Walcott in his analysis of the WestIndian psyche has emphasized this quality in his 1980 essay “Meanings”: “Our most tragic folk songs and our most self-critical calypsos have a driving, life-asserting force”.(50). This healthful affirmation is a kind of Nietzschean “ Yes-saying”- where life is affirmed as beautiful in spite of everything” (Kaufman 507). By strong articulation of a desire of eternal repetition what have been affirmed are love and life.

Without gilding their bleak life with metaphysical hopes, grounding it upon any belief system or determinism, they have conceived life differently, attained Olympian detachment. They move beyond their existent position and surpass the limitations of temporal life. Their life is a testimony to Nietzschean process of overthrowing the old values and restoring to life’s new meanings. By the time they leave the beach behind, they have created their own values and also a new valuation has been underlined by their recurrent experience of futility. Even after the disappearance of ‘highest values’, life may still be endowed with meaning and value. Without banishing suffering, without pre-appointed end, the sailors exemplify how to risk life and happiness while remaining absorbed in the interest of the moment. And here lies the significance of Walcott’s artistic alternative, as Nietzsche also believed how every art work deals with the realities of suffering and mortality as they make human life both understandable and bearable.