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**The recovery of ancestry in the poetry of Edward Kamau
Brathwaite and Derek Walcott**

Bobb, June D., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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A

THE RECOVERY OF ANCESTRY IN THE POETRY OF
EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE AND DEREK WALCOTT

by
JUNE D. BOBB

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Introduction

“I looked for some ancestral, tribal country”

Another Life - Derek Walcott

The history of the Caribbean has been one of turmoil and torture for the indigenous population of the region as well as the Africans who were violently removed from their own land and transported to the New World. It is common knowledge that Christopher Columbus did not “discover” the New World in 1492. This is a fact to be acknowledged in a work, such as this one, which concerns itself with two poets, Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott who are engaged in correcting the inaccuracies of history. Columbus met, in the West Indies, a native Indian culture which did not long survive the alien presence of the Europeans, and shortly after their arrival, the native population became extinct in the islands of the Caribbean, surviving only in the vast interior of Guyana. In spite of the fact that Guyana is on the continent of South America, it has always been tied to the rest of the Caribbean culturally, and it has certainly shared the same legacy of slavery and colonization.

Columbus, like later travellers was enchanted by the islands he came upon, and writing to his king from Cuba said:

The banks of the rivers are embellished with lofty palm trees, whose shade gives a delicious freshness to the air, and the birds and the flowers are uncommon and beautiful. I was so delighted with the scene, that I had almost come to the resolution of staying here for the remainder of my days; for believe me Sire, these countries far surpass all the rest of the world in beauty and conveniency.

(Parry and Sherlock A Short History of the West Indies 3)

Many travellers have been attracted to the majestic beauty of the region. But the writers and poets of the region are confronted by the region’s central paradox, the intrusion of the infernos of slavery

and colonization onto a world of such lyrical beauty. From the beginning of the European explorations into the Caribbean, they were motivated by economic concerns and the desire to amass as much wealth as possible for their respective nations. Slavery was acceptable for black people were not considered human beings; they were animals. Eric Williams describes Columbus' voyage as the "first gold rush in history," and quotes from the Journal of Columbus to substantiate his statement:

Without doubt, there is in these lands a vast quantity
of gold, and the Indians I have on board do not speak
without reason when they say that in these islands
there are places where they dig out gold, and wear
it on their necks, ears, arms and legs, the rings
being very large. (From Columbus to Castro 23)

The presence of Columbus in the New World initiated a relentless battle by the European powers over the ownership of the region. The Portuguese and the Spanish appealed to the Pope who in 1493 declared that the East belonged to Portugal and the West belonged to Spain. This did not prevent the other contenders from joining in the scramble for colonial possessions. The French, the English and the Dutch became involved in the push for new possessions. There was even a Danish and Swedish presence in the Caribbean. Before being sold to the United States in 1917, the Virgin Islands were ruled by the Danish, and Sweden ruled the island of St. Barthelemy from 1784 to 1877 (Lewis The Growth of the Modern West Indies 48). The European presence was always very visible in the Caribbean. Having from very early eliminated the native peoples from their soil, the Europeans found it necessary to provide a substitute people to be the labor force for the plantations of the region. This is the origin of the African presence in the region. As Eric Williams puts it, even "the Negro . . . was to have his place, though he did not ask for it: it was the broiling sun of the sugar, tobacco and cotton plantations of the New World" (Capitalism and Slavery 4).

Africans were transported to the Caribbean to work as laborers. The European slavers pillaged the coasts of Guinea in their relentless pursuit of a work force. After rounding up their African cargo, the slavers led these men and women to the seaports where they were inspected by potential buyers. On the slave ships they were "packed in the hold on galleries one above the other." Slaves

were chained to each other and during the long voyage to the Caribbean, the hatches were firmly secured, and “in the close and loathsome darkness they were hurled from one side to another by the heaving vessel, held in position by the chains on their bleeding flesh” (James The Black Jacobins 8).

While the African slave trade was abolished by the passage of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the British Empire in 1807, slavery continued until the Act of Emancipation was passed in 1834. This ended the practice of slavery in the English speaking colonies of the Caribbean (Ramcharan 40). But although slavery was abolished, the European forces maintained their presence as the controllers and the governors of the region’s colonial plantations. The abolition of slavery did not result in any major improvement in the social and economic conditions of the black inhabitants of the Caribbean. Etched in the memory of the Caribbean’s black population were the horrors of the Middle Passage and the degradation of their lives on the slave plantations of the Caribbean. It is not surprising then, that after Emancipation there was a mass exodus from the plantations. As a result, survival became very difficult and as Ramcharan puts it, “their new life of freedom would continue to be one of servitude and poverty subject to the fluctuating demands of a world market for the agricultural products produced on their small plots” (40). Ramcharan continues to make an important point. When the plantation system in the Caribbean collapsed and the “privileged status” of the European investors no longer existed, they immediately abandoned the Caribbean and tried to find more “profitable havens” in other parts of the world. This has been the pattern of colonial rule in the Caribbean from the early days of the European-Caribbean relationship through the period of pre-independence to the current period in the history of this relationship (Ramcharan 40).

Further complicating the Caribbean’s turbulent history was the presence in the region of other ethnic groups bent upon maintaining a separate and unequal relationship with the region’s recently freed black population. After the abolition of slavery and the mass exodus of Blacks from the plantations, it became increasingly necessary to find other sources of cheap labor for the sugar plantations of the region. Thus, the prominent planters turned to India and China for the importation of laborers. These laborers were not slaves; they were indentured servants contracted to work for approximately five years, after which they were free to return to their homelands. In addition, they were to be provided with housing, free medical attention and a fixed wage “of 1s 6d a day for a

specific number of days in each year" (Williams From Columbus to Castro 352). However, the living conditions of the indentured servants left much to be desired. It was at this time that range or barrack houses came into existence. In describing range yards in Guyana, Walter Rodney writes: "[They] were unventilated, the water supply was polluted and lavatory facilities nonexistent. . . . disease outbreaks tended to assume epidemic proportions" (History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905 37).

Immigrant labor in the Caribbean was also augmented by the presence of the Portuguese. In Guyana, immigrants from Madeira arrived in 1835. These immigrants were supposed to be examples, to the Blacks, of the dignity of hard work: "The character of the Free Labourer cannot but be raised in his own estimation, and in that of the Negroes generally when they witness free White Men willingly submit to the same employment" (Menezes Scenes from the History of the Portuguese in Guyana 20).

This was the beginning of the region's ethnic conflicts. Each group of immigrants came to the region with its culture intact, and in spite of the horrendous living conditions maintained their religious practices and the rituals and customs of their cultures. There was little or no cross-culturization between Indians from India, Chinese or Portuguese and the black population. Blacks viewed these groups as separatist, a view further enhanced, when after their time of indenture expired, these groups entered the field of commerce maintaining businesses in which only members of their own ethnic groups were hired.

In this way, the Caribbean's black population was confronted not only by its demeaning relationship to its European "masters," a relationship governed by mental and physical violence and the intention to fragment the black self rendering it into nothingness, but also by the separatist attitudes of the new immigrants to the region. Given the nature of these realities, it is not surprising that black Caribbeans remain conscious of the dark days of slavery and colonization, and their poets attempt to rewrite history in order to recreate this self and make it whole.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott, both born in 1930, grew up in a Caribbean world where there were visible manifestations of a colonial presence. Edward Kamau Brathwaite was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, the son of Beryl and Hilton Edward Brathwaite. After graduating from Harrison College, he won an island scholarship and in 1950 left for Cambridge where he

studied History. Between 1955 and 1962, Brathwaite taught in Ghana. These euphoric early years of Ghana's independence, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, were inspirational for a Caribbean man who had grown up in a colonial society, and Brathwaite was moved to acknowledge and explore his African ancestry:

Slowly, ever so slowly . . . I was coming to an
awareness . . . of cultural wholeness, of the place of
the individual within the tribe. Slowly, ever so
slowly, I came to a sense of identification with these
people, my living diviners. I came to connect my
history with theirs, the bridge of my mind was linking
Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland.

(Brathwaite "Timehri" 38)

But this sense of loss and a reaching out for "cultural wholeness" were also fermenting in the Caribbean, and Brathwaite's yearnings for African groundings were also inspired by the publication in 1953 of George Lamming's *In The Castle Of My Skin*: "Here breathing to me from every pore of line and page, was the Barbados I had lived. The words, the rhythms, the cadences, the scenes, the people, their predicament. They all came back. They were possible" ("Timehri" 38). His interest in history informs his life as well as his work, and currently, Brathwaite is Professor of History at the University of the West Indies' Jamaica campus where he has been teaching since 1963.

Derek Walcott, too, in his life and work is consumed by the forces of history, and at times displays a strange ambivalence toward the past:

I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor
who bought me I have no father, I want no such father,
although I can understand you, black ghost, white
ghost, when you both whisper "history," for if I
attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your
idea of history which justifies and explains and
expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my
memory cannot summon any filial love, since your

features are anonymous and erased and I have no
wish and no power to pardon.

(“The Muse of History” 27)

Yet, Walcott constantly struggles to bring to life the phantoms of the ancestral past. He confronts the history of the “white ghost” and as he rewrites this history, he restores the “features” of his black ancestors.

Derek Walcott was born in Castries, St. Lucia. His mother, Alix, was a school teacher and took part in “amateur theatre.” His father, Warwick, was a civil servant who also “wrote verse” and was a “good portrait painter in water-colour” (Walcott “Meanings” 303). Derek Walcott graduated from St. Mary’s College, a high school for boys. In 1950, he left St. Lucia to attend the University College of the West Indies, in Jamaica, on a British Colonial Development and Welfare Scholarship. Walcott graduated three years later with a B.A. in English, French and Latin. In 1959, he moved to Trinidad which was his home for twenty-two years, and where he established the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. Although Walcott has been teaching creative writing at Boston University since 1981, he often returns to the Caribbean, and particularly to St. Lucia, the island of his poetic inspiration.

Brathwaite, in Barbados, was strongly subjected to the British influence, while Walcott, in St. Lucia, was enveloped by British and French colonial presences. In addition, there existed in the Caribbean the remnants of the civilization of the region’s indigenous people as well as survivals of African culture, a legacy of the region’s contact with the institution of slavery. From this region of varied cultural influences emerges the poetic vision of these two men. Each poet, in his own way, reacts to the destruction of self and society that is an expression of the realities of slavery and colonization. The task of each poet becomes the rewriting of history, a kind of cultural mythmaking the purpose of which is to reconnect the severed parts of the Caribbean psyche, as Brathwaite puts it: “To make the fragments whole.” For Brathwaite, this means a recognition of an African past with an understanding of the rituals and history of the African people. It is in this past, adapted to a Caribbean landscape, that he sees the possibility of survival for Caribbean people and a reaffirmation of a Caribbean artistic sensibility.

Walcott, on the other hand, while recognizing the African presence and its Caribbean

manifestations, does not look solely to Africa for sustenance and survival; he wants to recognize all the ancestors: "I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift" ("The Muse of History" 27). While there is a difference in absorption of the region's diverse cultural makeup, both poets share a similarity of vision. Each is concerned with molding a Caribbean sensibility rooted in an awareness of its tortured past, a past grounded in the violence of slavery and colonization and the torment of the struggles for freedom and independence. At the same time, each poet celebrates the present and the vibrant spirit of the new world, and sings the praises of his island and people. In their revisioning of the historical past, they create a present in which the region and its folk become towering symbols of endurance and survival. Because of the Caribbean's history of fragmentation and destruction, and the various colonial powers to which the region has been subjected, its artists have adopted the herculean task of recreating time and space.

To accomplish this task, both poets draw upon the vernacular tradition, so much a part of the reality of the region. Out of this tradition emerge the literary techniques which enable Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott to reclaim history and memory. This reclamation of the past facilitates the recreation of a Caribbean universe. Existing at the center of this new universe, are Caribbean people reshaped and revitalized and no longer aliens in their homeland. This act of recreation by its very nature is political and becomes the conscious "soldering" of myth and history which results in the remaking of the Caribbean world, the reclamation of tradition and the renewal of faith:

For on this ground
trampled with the bull's swathe of whips
where the slave at the crossroads was a red anthill
eaten by the moonbeams, by the holy ghosts
of his wounds
the Word becomes
again a god and walks among us; . . .

(Brathwaite "Vèvè")

Chapter 1

Reconceiving Self and World

... I wear this
past I borrowed; his-
tory bleeds
behind my hollowed eyes;

--Brathwaite "Sunsum," The Arrivants

Historically, the Caribbean world has been seared by the fires of slavery and colonization. The result is a peculiar fragmentation of the psyche of its people. This debilitating fragmentation permeated the life and the literature of the region and may be traced to the racist, paternalistic attitudes and practices of the early colonists, slave holders and historians.

From the time they landed on Caribbean soil, the captured Africans were humiliated and treated as if they were inanimate beings. Kenneth Kiple in The Caribbean Slaves: A Biological History describes the process that the slaves were subjected to when slave ships landed at the port:

[Their] skins were rubbed with oil to make them shine,
rum was administered to clear the eyes and brighten the
countenance, sores were covered with iron rust and gun-
powder, lesions closed, and even anuses corked to
prevent the telitale leakage of the flux. (57)

Once they were sold to various plantations and estates, slaves were branded, generally on their shoulders, as a means of identification. In fact, as a survival of the days of slavery, today on the Worthy Park estate in Jamaica, the same brand is used to identify the cattle belonging to the estate (Patterson Slavery and Social Death (59). The Code Noir, or laws affecting the slaves of the island of Jamaica is a collection of the most dehumanizing and cruel restrictions and punishments guaranteed to reduce human beings to the level of bestiality. For example, according to the

Code, pregnant female slaves convicted of breaking the law would not be executed until after their delivery. A slave convicted of receiving stolen goods was punished by death, transportation or dismemberment (Long 485-490). In addition to laws which demoralized and dehumanized the slave population, the cycle of their daily lives was just as inhumane. Slaves working on sugar estates were “expected to open at least one hundred cane holes a day and failure to do so was punished by whipping.” The extremely strenuous nature of this work drove the overseers to hire “jobbing gangs.” These gangs were composed of slaves owned by small businessmen who then hired them out to work on various sugar estates. In addition to digging cane holes, these gangs were hired to “make and repair roads, clear forests, and . . . to do the most arduous work on the estates.” These gangs had no fixed living quarters and slept wherever the night found them. Gang members lived at most seven years (Patterson The Sociology of Slavery 65-66).

In addition to the actual physical battering that the slaves were subjected to, there was also a history of psychological attacks which colored the Caribbean person’s perception of self. Edward Long in the History of Jamaica (1774), suggests that some Africans were more closely related to the orangutan than to the white races of men, and Africans or imported Negroes were addicted to the “most bestial vices” (vol. 2, 409). Bryan Edwards in The History of the British West Indies (1793) views Africa as uncivilized and Africans as savages (vol. 2:4, chapter 3). In “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question” (1849), Thomas Carlyle sees the West Indies as a “country of idle black gentlemen each with rum bottle in hand, no breeches on his body, pumpkin at discretion and the fruitfulest region of the earth going back to jungle round him” (310). Anthony Trollope, too, in 1859, presents the world of the West Indies as exotic and its natives as carefree and simple: “He lies under his mango-tree and eats the luscious fruit in the sun; he sends his black urchin up for a breadfruit, and behold the family table is spread. He pierces a cocoa-nut, and, lo! there is his beverage. He lies on the grass surrounded by oranges, bananas and pine apples” (The West Indies and the Spanish Main 83). In addition to these views, James Anthony Froude, in 1888, suggested that the West Indian natives were lacking in intellect and incapable of governing themselves:

The negroes of the West Indies are children, and not
yet disobedient children. They have their dreams, but

for the present they are dreams only. If you enforce self-government upon them when they are not asking for it, you may turn the dream into a reality, and willfully drive them back into the condition of their ancestors, from which the slave trade was the beginning of their emancipation.

(The English in the West Indies 208)

Throughout the eras of slavery, colonization, pre-independence and even beyond, these perceptions of the West Indies and West Indians remained dominant and were etched into the consciousness of the people with devastating effects. Out of this historical climate emerged the West Indian's tendency to idolize things European and denigrate things West Indian. Just after the emancipation of the slaves, Lord Grey, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, suggested, in 1838, to the Governor of Trinidad that the freed slaves should "look to labour on the estates as their main dependence," and also suggested that schools should be established to "encourage a love of employment" (Parry and Sherlock 247).

The newly freed slaves did not experience a startling difference in the quality of their lives. The colonial powers had maintained a presence in the region since the fifteenth century, and while the abolition of slavery ended the practice of white masters owning black slaves, this was purely a technicality. White masters merely continued to subjugate the black work force as they exploited the resources of the region for the benefit of their various motherlands. Thus, when Lord Grey advocated the "encourage[ment] of a love of employment" on the part of the newly freed slave, it was solely an intellectual exercise; for education as well as employment, in the colonial context, were definitely restricted. Employment meant a careful cultivation of workers who had been educated into believing that only things European and capitalist were of value. As Walter Rodney puts it: "Colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment" (How Europe Underdeveloped Africa 264). It also encouraged the divisiveness of class. The vast black population was seen as a source of cheap labor, and, therefore, no attempt was made under colonial rule to provide an adequate education for the masses. Blacks and coloreds of middleclass standing and aspirations, were educated with local

whites according to the English public school system. C. L. R. James describes this experience in Beyond A Boundary:

It was only long years after that I understood the limitation on the spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and learning, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn; our criterion of success was to have succeeded in approaching that distant ideal - to attain it was, of course, impossible. Both masters and boys accepted it as the very nature of things. (38-39)

It was no accident that even in schools no attempt was made to include the study of African and Caribbean history and literature. Therefore, generations of West Indians emerged with ambivalent attitudes about race at best, and very often with distinctly anti-West Indian, anti-black sentiments. Léon Damas, the poet from French Guiana, captures the resulting sense of mimicry and the element of caricature in his poem, "Balance Sheet":

I feel ridiculous
in their shoes, in their dinner jackets,
in their stiff shirts, their paper collars,
with their monocles and their bowler hats.

I feel ridiculous
with my toes that were not made
to sweat from morning to evening,
in their swaddling clothes that weaken my limbs
and deprive my body of its beauty.

It is this caricature of the West Indian, fitting uncomfortably into a mold created by colonizers, that thinking West Indians struggle against, and there has been a history of resistance to this in the life and literature of the region. In fact, the Trinidadian, J.J. Thomas in 1889, published, in London, his

response to J.A. Froude's History of the English in the West Indies. The original title of his work was Froude's Fables on the Negro in the West Indies. This was amended to Froudacity: West Indian Fables by James Anthony Froude explained by J.J. Thomas. According to Thomas, Froude's immediate purpose was to present the "dark outlines of a scheme to thwart political aspiration in the Antilles" (51). Froude's basic position was that Blacks in the West Indies were inferior to Whites and lacked political skills and social graces. In spite of his grudging admiration for the women, "they might serve as sculptors' models," he remained convinced that Blacks were totally incapable of governing themselves. Thomas' repudiation of The English in the West Indies was an attempt to establish a Caribbean selfhood. He recognized the colonial outsider's intent to present the world of the colony as "other," and thus maintain a construct of difference based upon a claim of intellectual and moral superiority. Froudacity, then, becomes an important text in the development of Caribbean literary resistance; for, as Terry Eagleton suggests in Nationalism: Irony and Commitment, "nobody can live in perpetual deferment of their sense of selfhood, or free themselves from bondage without a strongly affirmative consciousness of who they are" (16). Thus, there were very early manifestations of resistance; for example, there was a shift in the subject matter of the early poets. In Guianese Poetry: 1831-1931 edited by Norman Cameron, the poet, Leo moves from a celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee: "Let Britain close / Far-reaching wings and strong / O'er her colonial throng" (108), to singing the beauty of the local sorrel tree (82). W. McA. Lawrence sings of Guyana's mighty waterfall, Kaiteur: "And falling in splendour sheer down from the height / that should gladden the heart of an eagle to scan, - / That lend to the towering forest beside thee / the semblance of shrubs trimmed and tended by man" (81). The turn of the early poets' gaze inward to sing the praises of the local flora and fauna signals a rebellion against the imposition of the alien view.

In their discussion of Caribbean literature, European critics generally focus on the presence of the all-consuming themes of alienation and dispossession without admitting that alienation and dispossession are necessary steps on the journey to reconstruction and the establishment of a personal and national identity. In the islands of the Caribbean and in Guyana, there has been the confrontation of national and colonial identities which is the result of the reality of geography and the accident of history. Very early in the eighteenth century this was recognized by the Jamaican

poet, Francis Williams: “every island’s but a prison / strongly guarded by the sea / Kings and princes for that reason / Prisonner’s are as Well as We” (Voices in Exile 12). Because of the region’s existing confinement, it is not surprising that the area’s early poetic voices were largely imitative. Williams, in 1759, in “An Ode” to George Haldane, a governor of Jamaica, utilizes the conventions of the Latin panegyric:

Oh! Muse, of blackest tint, why shrinks thy breast,
Why fears t’ approach the Caesar of the West!
Dispel thy doubts, with confidence ascend
The regal dome, and hail him for thy friend:
Nor blush, althou’ in garb funereal drest,
Thy body’s white, tho’ clad in sable vest. (Voices 11)

His poetic voice is personified as the “Muse.” Williams describes himself as a white man in a black skin, and expresses his awe in the presence of a representative of the British Empire. While the reverence for things British continued, there were dissenting voices. Vivian Vertue from Jamaica celebrates the beauty and the lushness of the Jamaican landscape:

I have seen March within the ebony break
In golden fire of fragrance unsuppressed;
And April bring the lignum-vitae dressed
In dusty purple; known pale rust awake
The mango’s boughs; the poinciana take
Immortal wound of summer. I have pressed
The cassia’s spendthrift yellow to my breast:
I could love earth for one tree’s royal sake . . .

(Caribbean Voices 141)

In this celebration of native landscape lies the roots of a poetry of national awareness. In Guyana, Vere T. Daly’s Song of Young Guiana expresses a longing to be free from colonial constraints:

We are weary of searching for hope who should not be
hopeless,
We whose faith did not fail with the failing years;

It is better by far to be wild, free men than the scopeless
And prince-governed men of tears.

(Guianese Poetry 111)

A. J. Seymour in The Guiana Book hears the drums of Africa: "The white hair like a snow cap on his head / That thin old negro had beat the rhythm for years / The Ibu rhythm, learnt in African forests / From hands as proud and serpent-veined as his" (9).

While many Caribbean poets saw themselves as inheritors of a European tradition, other voices emerged, more firmly rooted in a vernacular tradition. Because of the presence of so many ethnic groups, such as Africans, Chinese, Indians and Portuguese, intermingling in the Caribbean, the vernacular tradition has manifested itself in various forms: legends, folk tales and songs, proverbs and Anansi stories. The Africans were brought to the region as slaves providing an unpaid work force for the plantations and estates of the Caribbean. The other ethnic groups were indentured servants, working for a specific period of time before being allowed to return to their countries. Each of these groups contributed to the richness of the vernacular tradition in the Caribbean, a tradition that provided a source of inspiration and material for the region's artists. For example, the stories of Anansi, the Spider God of the Akan, when told in the Caribbean, are set in a Caribbean landscape complete with local flora and fauna.

It is out of this tradition that the works of Claude McKay, Evan Jones, Louise Bennett and later Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott emerge. Their acknowledgment of the vernacular tradition presents the Caribbean poet with a distinctive visionary world, for as O.R. Dathorne in his introduction to Caribbean Verse argues: "The dialect verse of Claude McKay and Louise Bennett could not have been written without this folk-tradition which is to do with a new way of seeing as well as of hearing" (3). This world of the vernacular provides a source of ideas, symbols and imagery which informs the art of poets and writers, and their visionary world is imbued with the beauty and magic of ancient belief and rituals. The informing presence of the vernacular tradition also adds a sense of wholeness and an appreciation of earth, labor and the simple folk from which modern society often distances itself.

In the preface to the Constab Ballads (1912), McKay discusses the "rubs" of daily life and the "rebellion" that was always in his heart. The honor of work is the theme of "Burning": "Our

trouble is dat those above / Do often times oppress: / But we'll laugh at or pity dem, / Or hate dem mo' or less." In the Constab Ballads, McKay writes about the experiences of the masses, their pain and oppression in the language of their daily lives. Jones, in "The Song of the Banana Man," captures the feeling for the land, the appreciation of the value of labor and the dignity and selfhood of the ordinary folk, and he does this in their dialect:

'I leave m'yard early-mornin time
 An set m'foot to de mountain climb,
 I ben m'back to de hot-sun toil,
 An m'cutlass rings on de stony soil,
 Ploughin an weedin, diggin an plantin
 Till Massa Sun drop back o John Crow mountain,
 Den home again in cool evenin time,
 Perhaps whistling dis likkle rhyme,
 Praise God an m'big right han
 I will live an die a banana man.

(Caribbean Verse 223)

Louise Bennett, too, follows in the direct literary footsteps of Claude McKay. Paula Burnett, in her introduction to The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English, tells the story of Louise Bennett, popularly known in the Caribbean as Miss Lou, being given a copy of McKay's Constab Ballads by a teacher. Bennett was strongly influenced by the culture of rural Jamaica and, in the tradition of the vernacular poetry of Claude McKay, concerned herself with the influences of colonization on the minds and lives of the common folk, their daily struggle for survival, and the business of politics. "Independence" discusses Jamaica's direct departure from British rule, and the attitude of the ordinary man to the imminent changes in the society:

She hope dem caution worl-map

 De stop draw Jamaica small
 For de likkle speck can't show
 We independantmiss at all!

Morsomover we mus tell map dat

We don't like we position

Please kindly tek we out a sea

An draw we in de ocean.

(Caribbean Verse 35)

Martin Carter, like Louise Bennett, is in the direct line of literary resistance to oppression established by the earlier poets. In Poems of Resistance, he reacts to the particularly deadening climate of the 1950's in Guyana, the general unrest and violence, the presence of the British forces of occupation, and the experience of a people under siege:

This is the dark time my love

It is the season of oppression, dark metal, and
tears.

It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery.

Everywhere the faces of men are strained and
anxious.

("This is the Dark Time my Love" 17)

Out of these internal and external forces, the battle for recognition of an indigenous voice, the struggle against the annihilation of the mind that is the legacy of colonialism, and an innate response to the vernacular tradition, emerge the poetic sensibilities of Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott. Both poets confront the stereotypical presentation of Caribbean people and their identity, and return to the African past and new world beginnings to inspire a present Caribbean reality.

The internalization of the negative attitudes and images which Brathwaite and Walcott attempt to erase from the Caribbean consciousness has resulted, at times, in a literature of negation and a deliberate denial of the Caribbean's African connections. This attitude is best exemplified in V.S. Naipaul's often cited statement: "History is built around achievement and creation; nothing was ever created in the West Indies" (The Middle Passage 29). The acceptance of this cultural and historical void accounts for the sense of displacement often found in the life and literature of the region. In an attempt to reclaim the past of his ancestors, Naipaul returned to Trinidad in his forties.

In questioning his mother about the form of his father's madness, she said: "He looked in the mirror one day and couldn't see himself. And he began to scream" (*Finding The Center* 70). This scream of the disinherited and the displaced symbolizes the need for a reconnection to a cultural imagination. It becomes the poet's mission to provide this linkage and be the instrument of connection to the interpretation of a past which makes it possible for the ancestral voices to be heard and enter into present history.

This is the task which both Brathwaite and Walcott undertake. There has been a tradition of resistance in the African diaspora with which both poets are familiar; indeed, they draw upon this tradition. It is important that Caribbean artists and critics undertake this task, for more often than not critics and theorists convinced of the superiority of Western literature and awed by the sanctity of Western literary traditions impose upon non-European literature a tradition of Western aesthetics. In addition, in Caribbean discourse, the Western critic, sometimes, is shrouded in a mantle of omniscience which results in closed readings of Caribbean texts. Helen Vendler, in commenting on Walcott's use of creole states that "a macaronic aesthetic, using two or more languages at once, has never yet been sustained in poetry at any length" ("Poet of Two Worlds" 26). In "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson views such omniscience as the result of a struggle for power and the preservation of certain Western world views:

. . . to read [the third world] text adequately--we
would have to give up a great deal that is individually
precious to us and acknowledge an existence and a
situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening--one
that we do not know and prefer not to know. (66)

Such attitudes condemn Caribbean literature to a certain marginality and deny the region's past and present historical realities. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said offers the following observation:

The realities of power and authority--as well as the
resistance offered by men, women, and social movements
to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies--are the
realities that make texts possible, that deliver them

to their readers, that solicit the attention of
critics. I propose that these realities are what should
be taken account of by criticism and the critical
consciousness. (5)

George Lamming, in The Pleasures of Exile, discusses these “realities of power and authority” in terms of the myth of Caliban and Prospero. Prospero gives to Caliban language and its transforming power. Language, as Lamming uses the word, means not only “English,” but also “speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way” (109). But, this gift of language can also be the vehicle of imprisonment, and this is the dilemma of the Caribbean. Brathwaite and Walcott, like Lamming, realize the ambivalence inherent in this situation. They see the necessity of going back to pre-European historical time, before the European’s gift of language to the Caribbean Caliban. This recognition of an existence and history before the European presence in the region, together with the celebration of the culture the Africans brought to the region would go far toward the annihilation of the theory of the void, that is, the prevailing view that the region has no history. Aimé Césaire in Discourse on Colonialism analyses this relationship between colonizer and colonized, and sees the relationship as one which transforms “the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production” (21). This relationship of suspicion and domination results in “societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out” (21). In colonial and post-colonial societies the artists adopt the mantle of visionaries whose responsibility it is to uphold and preserve the national culture. This national culture, as defined by Fanon, is “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (The Wretched of the Earth 188).

Both Brathwaite and Walcott, as literary griots, historians/seers, of the region, are upholders of the national culture. It is through their vision that past history is interpreted and filtered, and present realities brought to the forefront of the public consciousness. They are consumed with the writer’s responsibility in a world where imagination appears to be buried and material goods are

sacred. In an attempt to destroy the gods of materialism and return their people to a world in which the human spirit is valued and the sense of individual and communal possibilities cherished, these poets present the terror and beauty of society. This sensitivity to past and present, the ability to interpret history and to rewrite it give the poet his godlike place in society; for as Chinua Achebe puts it:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of
re-education and regeneration that must be done.
In fact, he should march right in front. For he is after
all-- . . . the sensitive point of his community.

(Morning Yet on Creation Day 59)

Ranging from The Arrivants (1973) to X/Self (1987), Brathwaite focuses on the nurturing and cultivation of community; his celebration of the customs and rituals of the African ancestors is an integral part of the struggle for liberation in which he is engaged. While his visionary world is peopled by Africans from Africa, The United States of America and the Caribbean, he is not proposing a mobile back to Africa movement; what he does envision is a Caribbean world at the center of which lie the life-affirming principles and philosophy of the African ancestors. In articulating a theory of Caribbean aesthetics, Brathwaite recognizes that at the heart of Caribbean literature is the presence of the vernacular traditions of the region. The colonial presence eroded almost all aspects of the lives and personalities of those it dominated and the culture of the people was forced underground. Brathwaite brings this to the surface of Caribbean consciousness as he reshapes a unique Caribbean identity. But this identity is not always at home in a region where colonial masters and lately, local colonists celebrate conformity and denigrate difference. It is this difference which Eagleton recognizes “must pass through identity if it is to come into its own” (The Ideology of the Aesthetic 4).

The Caribbean landscape becomes the inspirational source for this creation of identity. Brathwaite’s carefully crafted language, amalgam of customs, rituals and music are the instruments he utilizes in recarving the story of his land and his people. For him, “the basis of culture lies in the folk, and by that [he] mean[s] not in-culturated, static groups, giving little; but a people who, from the centre of an oppressive system have been able to survive, adapt, recreate” (Contradictory Omens

61). His poetics is the poetics of community, and for him, the region's survival depends upon the individual's ability to merge self into a collective consciousness, a consciousness deeply rooted in the memory of Africa. It is out of this knowledge of an ancestral culture that Brathwaite will impose the present realities of the region and rewrite its history. The results of this mission of the artist will be the reclamation of lost rights and rites and the acknowledgement of a Caribbean tradition. The dispossessed and alienated will enter history:

Should you
shatter the door
and walk
in the morning
fully aware
of the future
to come?
There is no
turning back.

("Epilogue" The Arrivants 81)

The writer's responsibility, as seen by Wilson Harris, is the inevitable confrontation of history; for "[he] live[s] in a twilight situation which half-remembers, half-forgets. As such the language of consciousness has to literally rediscover and reinform itself. . ." (Tradition the Writer and Society 64). But in the Caribbean, the writer has an added responsibility; in addition to his personal "confrontation" with history, and the individual process of refashioning, he must also engage the community at large. This engagement forms the basis of a political awareness which places the writer at the forefront of a movement involving the inclusion of the region's dispossessed. Because of the region's history of separation and fragmentation, as previously discussed, the work of its artists cannot be viewed as theoretical abstractions; it is a struggle to create an identity grounded in the historical realities of the region. In their poetry, these poets explore and come to terms with these realities. They rewrite the past, and reshape a self dehumanized by slavery and colonization. They salvage origins and offer continuity for the people of the Caribbean.

Caribbean writers, unlike their white Western counterparts, do not have the luxury of

distance and distancing. They exist at the cutting edge of their society and are close to the power of the government as well as the poverty of the masses. While many Caribbean writers complain of being marginalized, this sense of marginalization is a matter of their perception of the distance between the artistic imagination and the pragmatism of government. However, Caribbean writers, because of their prominence and the geographical isolation of their individual island societies, maintain a connection to both the authority of government and the pain of society's underclass. They attempt to lessen the distance between the powerful and the powerless. For example, in Guyana, in the flush of the post-independence sense of closing gaps and expanding horizons and possibilities, the sense, in Guyanese parlance, that "the small man is the real man," the vision of Carifesta became a reality in 1972. The theme of this festival of the arts was the role of the artist in society, third world society. There was also the recognition that the voice of artists, both public and private must be heard, for their role was crucial in the building of the nation. As Edouard Glissant states: . . . cultural activism must lead to political activism" (253). The literary is political, and in the convergence of artist and society lies the ideal union of poet and society that Brathwaite envisions. The poet carves out a sacred space in the society and through his imagination are filtered the triumphs and horrors of the historical past. Out of this union of past memory and present history will come the inscription of the region's future. The ancestors will be invoked:

Ancestor on the auction block
 Across the years
 I look
 I see you sweating, toiling, suffering
 Within your loins I see the seed
 Of multitudes
 From your labour
 Grow roads, aqueducts, cultivation
 A new country is born
 Yours was the task to clear the ground
 Mine be the task to build.

(Vera Bell "Ancestor on the auction block")

Brathwaite, like Bell, clearly recognizes the nature and scope of the poet's "task."

While Brathwaite's muse is a composite of community and speaks in the community's many voices, Walcott's muse sings a song of selfhood. This difference may be attributed to each poet's peculiar vision of the role of history in the development of a poetic consciousness. For Brathwaite, the poet's racial memory is the key to his understanding and interpretation of history, and while the remembered past is filled with actual historical horrors, at the same time the poet's imagination leaps beyond the boundaries of the region's actual history to an African golden age:

city of gold,
paved with silver,
ivory altars,
tables of horn,
the mom-
ing sun of
seven hills
greet you best,
knows you blessed.

("Kumasi" The Arrivants 138)

In "The Muse of History," Derek Walcott appears to be sharply critical of this position: "This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think of language as enslavement and who, in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence or nostalgia" (2). But Walcott's appraisal does not ring true, and it actually undermines his own reading of the past; for he too, is concerned with the ambivalence of history, and in his role as poet/creator consciously utilizes the persona of the alienated artist battling the dualities of the past in an attempt to refashion a future. Walcott's past, however, is problematic. He conceives of a personal past peopled by his ancestors, both European and African, and a regional mythic past inhabited by the presence of all the region's peoples. In a society which has always been ravaged by divisions of race, such a philosophy has the power of healing; this is the poet's intention.

His attempt to rewrite history is an attempt to reorder the society, to make it just. As he himself puts it: "The sense of history in poets lives rawly along their nerves" ("The Muse of

History" (5). In the process of rewriting history, he creates in his poetic world, a number of concentric worlds, each one devoted to some aspect of his Caribbean world picture. He focuses on the rituals and customs of the folk, religion and its Caribbean transformations, and the appropriation and rewriting of the language of the colonizer. His poetry, as it ranges from the tentative explorations of self and landscape in 25 Poems (1949) to the pain of a divided consciousness in In a Green Night (1962), The Castaway (1965) and the autobiographical power of Another Life (1973), is a pilgrimage of reconnection, reconnection to mythic memory and a present reality grounded in a celebration of the St. Lucian folk, and by extension, the folk of the region. This all coalesces in his most recent work, Omeros (1990) which is, in spite of Walcott's denial, his appropriation and reinvention of the epic form transposed to the Caribbean landscape.

But Walcott's theorizing is not always at one with his actual poetic explorations and experimentations, and while he rails against the "apotheosis[ing] [of] the folk form," ("What the Twilight Says: An Overture" 34-35), he is constantly reshaping forms and reworking rituals in the process of creating a Caribbean aesthetic expansive enough to accommodate clashes and conflicts constantly at work in his poetic imagination. For example, in the play, Dream on Monkey Mountain, there is a gathering together of vernacular forms, proverbs, folk tales, and the rituals and performance of African religious ceremonies. Ti-Jean, too, demonstrates Walcott's skill at integrating St. Lucian folk tales, fables and street performance into his work. He is well aware of the slave tradition of camouflaging for survival, and again this is discussed in "The Muse of History": "What seemed to be surrender was redemption. What seemed the loss of tradition was its renewal. What seemed the death of faith was its rebirth" (7). Walcott appears to come to terms with the issues of history and ancestral memory, more comfortably, in the medium of the drama than he does in his poetry.

Unlike Brathwaite, who clearly articulates his position and does not hesitate to point out that Africa informs his poetic vision and his theory of a developing Caribbean aesthetic, Walcott adopts the role of poet/subvert. In fact, his description, in Selden Rodman's Tongues of Fallen Angels, of the African's response to slavery's consummation of spirit and body may well apply to his own work:

The slave masters encountered massive pliability. The

slave converted himself, changed weapons, adapted the
 masters' language, purified the soiled cult. So here,
 the poetic tradition begins: the new naming of
 things. (259)

In addition to renaming, this process is also the process of identification, an identification of shape and form. It is a bringing into being of the elusive memory of the past. The poetic imagination is the agent of creation: "What has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention" (Walcott "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry" 6). It is with the invention of the self that Walcott's autobiographical work Another life is concerned.

In the opening section, "The Divided Child," the poet presents a cast of characters mythic and folkloric at the same time: "Berthilia / the frog-like, crippled crone," "Emanuel / Auguste, out in the harbour, lone Odysseus," Helen? / Janie, the town's one clear-complexioned whore" (18-19). As the poet explores the personal landscape of his development in St. Lucia, he imposes his own order on assorted memories of people and place. This becomes a conscious act of recovery as the poet fights against the reality of rootlessness and submission to the colonial powers' historical inculcation of self-destruction and nothingness in the Caribbean mind. The poet, in the space between these extremes, creates a sacred place where recovery can go on. At times, the process of creation battles the forces of destruction, and this struggle permeates Walcott's poetic world. It accounts for the tortured consciousness of In a Green Night and The Castaway, and the pain of Walcott's most quoted lines from "A Far Cry from Africa":

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
 Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
 I who have cursed
 The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
 Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
 Betray them both, or give back what they give?
 How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
 How can I turn from Africa and live?

(In a Green Night 18)

These lines have locked critics into characterizing Walcott as a poet torn apart by divisions of self and world. In fact, according to Robert Hamner, “. . . since [Walcott] is descended from a white grandfather and a black grandmother on both the paternal and maternal sides, he is a living example of the divided loyalties and hatreds that keep his society suspended between two worlds” (22). Lloyd Brown suggests that the poet is “repelled by both the barbaric colonizer and the violent rebellion of the African; the poet is paralyzed by the feeling that he is “poisoned” with the blood of both sides” (124).

While focussing on the poet’s tortured consciousness and immediate pain, critics lose sight of the wider implications of these lines, and the poet’s conscious recreation of an elemental struggle between possessor and possessed. This does not result in paralysis however, for the poet attempts to impose an order on his world, an order denied by the forces of colonization; for a recognition of an ordered Caribbean society would mean a shattering of the mental imprisonment instituted and perpetuated by the colonial powers. For Walcott, the questions raised in “A Far Cry from Africa” are rhetorical; for while he agonizes over the possibility of submitting to the forces of destruction, he is at the same time already at work reinventing a Caribbean identity, an identity which would purge these negative forces and restore order in the Caribbean world.

Walcott and Brathwaite constantly journey back into the past in a search for origins in order to order the present and create a future of possibility. Toni Morrison, in an essay, “The Site of Memory,” explains the writer’s obsession with the past and the need to journey back to an “original place”:

. . . the act of imagination is bound up with memory.
 You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in
 places, to make room for houses and livable acreage.
 Occasionally the river floods these places. ‘Floods’ is
 the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is
 remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All
 water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get
 back to where it was. Writers are like that:
 remembering where we were, what valley we ran through,

what the banks were like, the light that was there and
 the route back to our original place. It is emotional
 memory--what the nerves and the skin remember as well as
 how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our
 "flooding." (119)

In St. Lucia, Walcott is constantly confronted by visible remnants of the past. The ruins of
 The Morne and Vigie are ever present reminders of the English and French presence on the island:

That was Vigie, and when
 The sea still beats against the aging wall,
 And the stone turrets filled with shaken leaves
 When the wind brings the harbour rain in sheaves,
 The yellow fort looks from the historic hill,
 (As it were Poussin, or fragment from Bellini)
 Its racial quarrels blown like smoke to sea
 From all that sorrow, beauty is our gain,
 Though it may not seem so
 To an old fisherman rowing home in the rain.

("Roots" In a Green Night 60)

The presence of these ruins are a visible part of the poet's present reality, and as a metaphor for
 journey, struggle and survival, they are always at the center of his imaginary landscape. Walcott is
 well aware of history's consuming power:

There must be even in a legendary sense, a reflection
 of Africa . . . in the details of a lot of things quite
 apart from the language and the way of life. [For
 example], the activity of fishing becomes more than a
 simple activity, to me in a way it becomes something
 legendary." (Interview with Melvyn Bragg 2-7)

The poet is transformed into an island fisherman. In the persona of fisherman he parts the waves of
 memory in order to commune with the ancestral presences buried at the bottom of the sea. He is the

keeper of history, and the seer who interprets the “nouns” of the past:

But, line, live in the sounds
that ignorant shallows use;
then throw the silvery nouns
to open-mouthed canoes.

(“Night Fishing” - The Arkansas Testament 56)

In his poetry, Walcott is obsessed with “words” and the writer’s craft. He sees himself as the rebuilders of a Caribbean future. In this role, history is the skeleton upon which the future is built. His poetic vision bridges the gap separating past and present, and projects a future in which the “myths” and “fables” of his people, instead of being viewed as the manifestations of the simple, will be granted their rightful place in the world of literature: “these fables of the backward and the poor / marbled by moonlight, will grow white and richer. / Our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature” (“White Magic” AK 38). The poets’ function, in the Caribbean in this century, is to recognize the tradition out of which they have emerged. Myths and folktales are already part of the collective consciousness, a tribute to the power of survival; for the experience of Caribbean people has been built on suppression and the maintenance of silence, but a silence under which the “word” was carefully preserved. It is with this contradiction that Walcott is obsessed, and is driven to see the mission of the poet as a sacred one, the giving of life to the experience and the word. Edouard Glissant, in Caribbean Discourse, makes this statement:

. . . myth consecrates the word and prepares the way
for writing; on this level, the folktale proceeds by
means of a sacrilegious approach. So what is attacked
is from the outset the sacred status of the written
word. The Caribbean folktale focuses on an experience
suppressed by decree or the law. It is antidecree and
antilaw, that is to say, antiwriting. (84)

The concept of “antiwriting” may be extended to embrace the world of Caribbean poetry. Brathwaite, for example, is violently opposed to any attempts to force the vernacular tradition

underground, and in his works he is constantly engaged in the process of bringing this tradition to life by naming the elements and forcing a rebirth which will, he hopes, grant meaning and endurance in time:

How then shall we
succeed?

The eye must heed
the meaning

the eye must be free
seeing.

What is a word
to the eye?

Meaning.

(“Naming” The Arrivants 217)

Brathwaite’s poetic purpose is visible and revolutionary and is reinforced by his conscious intention to create and identify a Caribbean aesthetic:

. . . my own aesthetic formulation for ourselves
begins with rhythm: survival rhythm, emancipation
rhythm, transfiguration rhythms and how the one, the
ego, comes to this, comes out of this, relates to this
and us and others.

(The Love Axe/l 65)

This is an exact description of Brathwaite’s engagement with his people and their history. He merges the rhythms of Africa, the Caribbean and black America into a symphony epitomizing struggle, survival and enormous strength of will. He speaks for hope and possibility and the indestructibility of community, and is always very much aware of the poet’s individual responsibility:

This . . . sense of responsibility and inter-relatedness is what I would note as fundamental to any definition of our aesthetic. But our definitions cannot evolve out of a vacuum -- wishing cannot make us be. We must therefore work to discover ourselves, to excavate from memory, if necessary. Then we must sort out, categorize, store, define and then begin the process of education, redefinition, re-discovery and re-assessment.

("The Love Axe/I" 65)

Brathwaite's voice in the Caribbean has emerged ringing with the power of the African griot and the Old Testament prophets. This too, is a reflection of the society at large, where practitioners of African religions see no contradiction in the merging of African and Christian rituals. What is important about Brathwaite's work is the unity of theory and practice which he achieves. The Arrivants is the working out of his grand design, an attempt to redefine, rediscover and reassess the history and reality of the Caribbean people. In this work, he reshapes the classical epic form to suit his purpose, and in it he celebrates the simple ordinary lives of the Caribbean masses. He celebrates their creativity and power, and the embodiment, in their existences, of the spirits of ancient African Gods. But Brathwaite is also a realist, and while Walcott remains attracted to and in awe of European and classical traditions, it is the underside of these traditions with which Brathwaite concerns himself. There is a nostalgia for European culture that surfaces in the form and content of Walcott's work which is totally absent from Brathwaite's poetic world.

Brathwaite confronts the region's history directly; he attacks the European legislators of slavery and colonization. He does not romanticize the poverty of the region. This is manifested in his constant focus on the mental, spiritual and economic devastation which is the result of the colonial presence in the Caribbean. He is concerned with the European's constant quest for power and control and the attempt to strip the colonized of all sense of self and identity. However, his poetry moves beyond the desperation and violence of Third World Poems (1983), to the acts of reconstruction that occur in Mother Poem (1977) and Sun Poem (1982) where the land becomes the source of a people's renewal and revitalization. These themes are further developed in

X/Self (1987). Here, out of the descent into confusion and negation, there emerges a flowering of selfhood in a community where the individual is concerned with a communal self inspired by ancestral voices offering healing and benediction:

touch
him
he will heal

you

word
and balm
and water

flow

embrace
him

he will shatter outwards to your light and calm and history

your thunder has come home

(“Xango” X/Self 107)

In commenting on Brathwaite’s trilogy, Gordon Rohlehr captures both the poet’s ideological stance and the aesthetic form dominating the poet’s consciousness:

In Masks, the wandering consciousness of the exiled African picks its painful way through the ruins, relics and lost cities of an identifiable but disastrous past. Yet the epic sense is there in Rights of Passage, where the archetypal themes of exile, journey, arrival and

further journey, are sustained by a network of cross references. In *Islands*, the exhausted nameless protagonist, a kind of Black Tiresias, returns home to the West Indies, and attempts to come to terms with the harsh paradoxes of life there. Arrival turns out to be a fresh departure into pain; a fresh journey into self. Home is where we start from.

(“Blues and Rebellion” 63)

It is inevitable that slavery, emancipation and the mythic vision of Africa should be such a vital part of the Caribbean literary imagination. This clearly manifests itself in Brathwaite’s work. It is not as visible in the work of Derek Walcott. In fact, layers of doubt and hereditary ambivalence must be removed before Walcott’s intrinsic connections to Africa are revealed. He adds to the complication by not being a very reliable commentator on either his theory or practice, for while there is no tension in Brathwaite’s work between theory and practice, with Walcott there is always tension and a peculiar straining as the poet struggles to come to terms with both Africa and Europe. This is most obvious when the poet confronts the history of slavery:

In the New World servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. . . . The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think of language as enslavement and who, in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence or nostalgia. (“The Muse of History” 2)

But the Caribbean situation, by the very nature of its historical experience does not lend itself to such a stark identification of oppositional forces. This is well illustrated in the following excerpt from Louise Bennett’s “Back to Africa”:

Me know say dat you great great great
 Granma was African,
 But Mattie, doan you great great great
 Granpa was Englishman?
 Den you great granmader fader
 By you fader side was Jew?
 An you granpa by you mader side
 Was Frenchie parlez-vous?
 But de balance a you family,
 You whole generation,
 Oonoo all bam dung a Bun Grung--
 Oonoo all is Jamaican!

In "Son of Guyana," Michael Gilkes also captures this blurring of race:

Doan tell me 'bout Guyana.
 I bam deh in t'irty-t'ree.
 Meh great-gran'fadda wuz a black man
 grandmudda wuz a puttagee.
 Meh gran'fadda wuz a coolie: ah draw Buck, white an'
 Chinee.
 Deh call it 'land of six peoples'
 but is seven, 'less you doan count me.

In life as well as in history there has been a forced merging of the two worlds, Africa and Europe, further complicated by the Caribbean's Asian connection. The African experience is the dominant one by virtue of the enormous weight of slavery, but the powerful influence of European forces so engulfs the Caribbean psyche, that Walcott can still present such disparate categories and refuse to acknowledge the existence, in the Caribbean, of a tradition of literary resistance. Such a refusal denies not only Walcott's own attempts at resistance; for, in spite of what he says, he does resist; but also the resistance of Brathwaite and other poets who attempt to rewrite the language of the Caribbean in the rhythms and speech patterns of the region.

The Caribbean poet's conscious or unconscious obsession with language is a part of his engagement with the theoretical concerns of his art, and the need to see himself as part of a distinctly Caribbean aesthetic tradition. It is the yearning to identify with the familiar and to foster a poetic development based on the realities of the region. In "Walcott on Walcott," the poet acknowledges the contribution of the region's novelists to the development of a particularly regional language, and in discussing the poem "The Dust" from Brathwaite's "Rights of Passage," pays homage to the novelistic tradition out of which it emerges. At the same time Walcott takes Caribbean poets to task for not concerning themselves with "structure" and depending solely on "landscape" and "pain" (80). Here, Walcott denies the existence of a Caribbean poetic tradition and the way early as well as contemporary poets have sought to reclaim the language of the region. Again, his unreliability as a commentator on culture emerges as he denies what he himself has done; for if there is a Caribbean poet obsessed with "landscape and pain," it is Walcott. Both Walcott and Brathwaite attempt to create a form vast enough and grand enough to contain the region's past and present history, and to predict its eruption into the future.

This absorption with language and form is particularly relevant at this historical time of collapsing regional boundaries and vast waves of emigration to the world's metropoli. In The Politics of Modernism, Raymond Williams discusses the obsession of the post-modernists with the "rewriting of the past," and expresses the hope that the next step would be a leap into "a modern future in which community may be imagined again" (35). He discusses the effects of immigrant cultures on the culture of the metropolis:

The preoccupying visual images and styles of particular cultures did not disappear, any more than the native languages, native tales, the native style of music and dance, but all were now passed through the crucible of the metropolis which was in the important case no mere melting pot but an intense and visually and linguistically exciting process in its own right, from which remarkable new forms emerged. (46)

In this sense, Brathwaite and Walcott have moved far beyond the modernist concerns with alien-

ation and loss and the post-modernist concern with void or nothingness, to a point where according to Rohlehr, they “must create self, style and form” (The Problem of the Problem of Form” 3). While the “crucible of the metropolis” and the “crucible” of colonial power both resulted in new creations of forms and language; in the Caribbean the relationship was far from a romantic one; it was a violent struggle to bring into being the essential Caribbean self. These poets are concerned with preservation, renewal and futurity. Walcott wants his work to be symbolic of rootedness and endurance, and in an interview with Kate Kellaway, he makes this statement:

On the island, people build their square houses on the
hill. . . . I wanted verse to stand like the houses so
that the Caribbean sunrise would hit the facade of the
stanza . . . At least, that is what I was trying to do.

Walcott’s verse, like the houses of his island, encloses the drama of the imagination of the past, the quiet and sometimes desperate endurance of ordinary lives and a people’s need to control the future.

For both Brathwaite and Walcott, their islands are, at the same time, symbolic and real, liberating and imprisoning. At the center of these oppositions is the poetic imagination which attempts to forge out of these contradictions a place where the self is inviolate and the community sacrosanct. In order to reach this place, each poet journeys back to the ancestors’ presence in history, and in the process of rewriting that history, reclaims it; thus, giving voice to the people of the region and making them visible:

In the Caribbean, whether it be African or Amerindian,
the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the
folk or aboriginal culture involves the artist and
participant in a journey into the past and hinterland
which is at the same time a movement of possession into
present and future. Through this movement of
possession we become ourselves, truly our own creators,
discovering word for object, image for word.

(Brathwaite “Timehri” 42)

Chapter 2

Africa in the Poetic Imagination

I sing
 I shout
 I groan
 I dream
 about
 Dust glass grit
 the pebbles of the desert:
 —Brathwaite The Arrivants

The memory of Africa has always haunted the Caribbean imagination and it gains a peculiar poignancy on account of the region's geographical and historical realities. Because the region was created out of the bones of history, the vision of Africa has been an ambivalent one. Dreams of the glory of its ancient civilizations battle with the pain and torment of the Africans' involuntary journey to the New World. Caribbean people have had to fight against an innate sense of alienation and displacement and the consuming forces of homelessness and dispossession. The visionaries of the region attempt to recreate a world which would recognize the region's often unacknowledged or misrepresented history. Thus, in the process of rewriting this history, the poets' engagement with Africa has been both tragic and romantic, and the poetic landscape has been informed by past glory, the degradation of the Middle Passage, the legacy of slavery and a people's desire to survive. An early anonymous poem, "Jamaica, a Poem in Three Parts, Written in That Island in the Year 1776," epitomizes the pain of enslavement and the longing for freedom as well as the attempt, often visible in Caribbean poetry, to fuse African sensibility and European form:

Here sable Caesars feel the christian rod;
 There Afric Platos, tortur'd, hope a God:
 While Jetty Brutus for his country sighs,

And sooty Cato with his freedom dies!

(Burnett The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse 111)

In "Poem," Harold M. Telemarque sings of the achievements of the ancestors:

To those . . .
 Who lifted into shape
 The huge stones of the pyramid;
 Who formed the Sphinx in the desert, . . .
 Who walked lithely
 On the banks of the Congo, . . .

(Dathome Caribbean Verse 73)

Telemarque celebrates a glorious African past. On the other hand, Eric Roach's "Ballad of Canga" celebrates the wiles of Canga, a hero in African folklore who is transported to the Caribbean:

He is a old Ashantee man
 Full of wickedness;
 Bring obeah straight from Africa;
 What he curse don't bless.

(Dathome Caribbean Verse 57)

Caribbean poets have always been enticed by the tragic, romantic and realistic manifestations of Africa, and Brathwaite is no exception. His poetic vision is entirely consumed by the presence of Africa in his imagination. He journeys back to an edenic Africa where people were close to their Gods, and their customs and rituals brought order and ceremony into their daily lives. In this transportation of people, customs, and rituals to the New World, Brathwaite sees the influences which inform a Caribbean identity.

Walcott, too, cannot escape the shaping presence of Africa in his visionary world and its concrete manifestations in daily Caribbean existence. But Africa, to Walcott, does not have the same all-consuming power of anchoring that it does for Brathwaite; therefore, in Walcott's poetic world there is always a sense of uncertainty, a longing for revelation, and the hope that somehow he can reconcile his African and European heritage. As Walcott journeys towards this reconciliation, he explores the nature of Caribbean identity and the role of the artist in carving out this identity.

Ultimately, Walcott realizes that it is impossible to escape Africa, and his vision of Africa must be at the center of this Caribbean identity he is refashioning. In spite of their differing attitudes to the place of Africa in their visionary worlds, at the center of these worlds are edenic Africa, the painful exodus to the New World as symbolized by the Middle Passage, the phenomenon of slavery as it existed in the Caribbean, and the submergence and reshaping of old customs and rituals as strategies for survival under the rule of slavery and colonization. Out of this convergence of history and circumstance will emerge the Caribbean identity.

Africa assumes several symbolic levels in Brathwaite's poetry. When opposed to the hell of the New World plantations, it is a paradise for those whose ties to Africa were involuntarily severed, a longed-for symbol of rootedness and homeland; it is a motherland of safety and plenty. In Masks, the poem "Prelude" provides an introduction to this compression of symbols. Africa leaps into time in the splendor of its kingdoms, "Mali," "Chad," "Timbuctu." At the same time, the ritual music of the drums signals a time of birth and beginnings:

Beat heaven
of the drum, beat
the dark leaven
of the dungeon
ground where buds are wrapped
twist-
ed round dancing roots (The Arrivants 91)

There is also the recalling of ancient religious rites: "take the blood of the fowl / drink." Here, Africa is source, bursting with vibrancy, vitality and promise. The New World poet, for so long cut off from Africa, the source of his being, is attempting to write himself into this historical time while using the insights he has gained in the process to inscribe a new identity in the Caribbean. Conscious of his origins and his ability to create, the poet pays tribute to "Asase Yaa, Mother of Earth." He consecrates, to Mother Africa, the tools of his craft. Africa is both place and person. As a symbol of paradise, the speaker in the poem is inspired by its beauty and splendor and the vastness of its possibilities. In this paradise, he is transformed and Africa is personified as the muse of his inspiration and the force informing his creativity:

And may the year
 this year of all years
 be fruitful
 beyond the fruit of your labor:
 shoots faithful to tip
 juice to stem
 leaves to green; . . .

But as the speaker bridges the expanse between past and present, he is confronted with the very real fears of the present moment:

and may the knife
 or the cut-
 lass not cut
 me; roots blunt,
 shoots break,
 green wither, . . . (92)

Africa, in memory, retains its idyllic intensity, but the real world of the Caribbean can be a dangerous one, and the poet fears not only the violence of his time but also the personal violence which would be the result of his inability to create. These are the forces tearing the poet apart; for as he tries to integrate the vision of Africa as paradise into his rewriting of the Caribbean identity, he is constantly battling past and present horrors.

These forces explode in “Kingston in the kingdom of this world” in Third World Poems. Brathwaite superimposes the dangers, the violence and the barren ground of Kingston on to an African landscape that is paradisaal. In the African world, his words and actions have the power of the ancestors. The ground is sacred and blessed by the performance of ancient rituals and celebrations:

my authority was foot stamp upon the ground
 the curves the palms the dancers
 my authority was nyambura: inching closer
 embroideries of fingers silver earrings:
 balancers

In spite of the powerful presence of Africa, the poet experiences, in present time, a reduction of self:

i am reduced
 i am reduced
 i am reduced
 to these black eyes
 this beaten face
 these bleaching lips blearing obscenities (55)

Brathwaite presents the evils of present circumstances as a transient condition, for he is secure in the sense of change and possibility that his belief in the force of Africa brings. At the heart of such belief is the concept of Nam which the poet describes as:

. . . the word we give to the indestructible and atomic
 core of man's culture. It is the kernel of his name,
 his nature of immanence, man in extremis, extremest
 nativeness, disguised backward (nam/X\man). It is the
 essence of our culture in the sense that culture is the
 essence what man eat (nyam, yam); and the power and the
 glory out of that: nyame, onyame, dynamo.

(“Gods of the Middle Passage” 18)

In addition to the tangible survivals of African culture which outlasted the journey of the Middle Passage, Brathwaite recognizes a more subtle link, an intuitive force, an essence which is inescapably African. The recognition of this force is crucial to the Caribbean identity which the poet creates.

For Brathwaite, the perpetuation of the myth of Africa and its presence in the memories and aspirations of Caribbean people result in an awareness of connections and gives to Caribbean people a mythology as well as a history that will redefine a Caribbean homeland. This meeting of myth and history is vital to the process of the refashioning of identity in which the poet is engaged. Such a process must not be separated from the reality of life in the region. In fact, in present times of violence together with the emergence of locally-bred colonials, the union of myth and history could possibly be the catalyst for change. Mythical and historical connections are always integral ele-

ments of national consciousness, but they assume heroic proportions in times of violence and unrest. The awareness of a motherland becomes particularly important. It offers a connection to the ancestors and an awareness of the continuities of history. What is even more important for present existence is the realization of endings in time coupled with the immortality of possibility. The poem "Springblade," in Brathwaite's collection, Black + Blues explores the tension between a past which goes unacknowledged in spite of a recognition of its healing properties and a present in which is reenacted the evils of a slave/colonial history. In this poem, Brathwaite amasses stark images of devastation and impoverishment, both spiritual and physical: "eyes fragmented by louveres / vision corrupted by crevices;" "hungry belly flattens the faeces / the milk blackens in the bread / of breasts;" "the floorboards widen / and are full of mice;" "the mattress with its history of sweat, of some- / times sweetest slavery: in- / cinerated cemeteries of sperm. . ." (47-48). He presents a dire picture of a country, and by extension, a region which has severed ties to its ancestral past. Motherland becomes a barren concept, and motherhood is unproductive. The lack of creativity, the stultifying atmosphere of the private world and the death of the individual mirror the decay and devastation of the larger community. This is linked in time to the dark days of the ancestral memory and to the suffering endured in the New World after the violent separation from edenic Africa. Brathwaite is very conscious of what is lacking in this society:

We could have rendered them [these children] painfully,
respecting themselves through their fathers,
surrendering themselves to their grandmothers'
visions
through the tales of their ancestors

they would have understood the meaning of ships
heraldic whip and armoured scar
how hostile slavery ushered in
the medieval age of the african . . . (51-52)

It is out of the recalling of the past, the cultivation of the "tales of their ancestors," that will come the creation of tradition and its resulting salvation of spirit, self and community:

spirit of the blaze
 red river of reflection
 vermilion dancer out of the antelope

i summon you from trees
 from ancient memories
 from the uncurling ashes of the dead

that we may all be cleansed ("Sun Song" 57)

In "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature," Brathwaite identifies "four kinds of written African literature in the Caribbean." The first he describes as "rhetorical." Here, the author knows very little of Africa, and uses it as a "mask" or "dream." The second is "the literature of African survival." The literature in this category examines actual African survivals in the Caribbean, but the author does not try to create a linkage between discovered survivals and "the great tradition of Africa." Third, is "the literature of African expression," which explores the transformation of vernacular material into "literary experiment." The final category is "the literature of reconnection" which is written by Caribbean writers who have actually lived in Africa, and as a result, try to connect the African and New World experiences; as Brathwaite puts it, these writers "consciously reach . . . out to rebridge the gap with the spiritual heartland" (165). This text can be read as the poet's personal manifesto; for Brathwaite, more than any other Caribbean artist, is possessed by the spirit and spirits of Africa and consciously attempts to make the connections with an African experience that would explain and give validity and meaning to a Caribbean identity. In fact, in his work, the four categories he has identified do not appear as distinct and separate, perhaps because they are integral parts of his poetic vision and necessary steps in the movement towards reconnection.

This attempt to reconnect, according to Brathwaite, is not limited to the Caribbean. He envisions a diasporic connection; thus in "Blues for Billie Holiday," he links the African-American experience to Africa:

she travels far back. ex

plores ruins . touches on old immemorial legends
 everyone but herself has forgotten . she
 becomes warrior and queen and keeper of the
 tribe . there is no fear
 where she walks (Jah Music 11)

In black America as in the Caribbean this knowledge of Africa, direct or subcutaneous, is powerful and creative and has the additional force of protection, the protection of identity. In both cases, Black America and the Caribbean, if the chasm between each of these colonies and Africa is not bridged, if the "ruins" are not explored, and put together again, the self will not be made whole. Brathwaite's conscious intention is to rebuild the ruins. The pain, terror and disintegration which result if this mission is not accomplished are clearly illustrated in Orlando Patterson's novel, An Absence of Ruins. The protagonist, Alexander Blackman, searches for a past: "There is a past here. There must be a past here" (104). But, he remains a man without connections totally alienated from self and society:

I cannot say whether I am civilized or savage, standing
 as I do outside of race, outside of culture, outside of
 history, . . . I am busy going nowhere, but I must
 keep up the appearance of going in order to forget that
 I am not. (160)

It is this warped perception of Caribbean people, as existing outside of "race," "culture" and "history," that concerns Brathwaite. Such a perception based upon a denial of the African experience reinforces the position that the black person in the Caribbean is without history and ancestral roots. Realizing this, Brathwaite places Africa, where it legitimately belongs, at the center of the aesthetic principles and cultural mythology he is developing. He reclaims the links and refashions the connections between Africa and the Caribbean. He would transform Blackman's tentative gropings into the historical past into an active pilgrimage of rediscovery, a movement from negation to affirmation; for Alexander Blackman is aware, on some level, that there is a buried history waiting to be excavated, a history that goes beyond "twisted bones of crippled, mutilated black slaves" (104):

One day I shall destroy those evil institutes with
 their corridors and shelves of lies, and I shall burn
 them to the ground. I Alexander Blackman, shall redeem
 the truth of my heritage, of my great past, that lies
 hidden somewhere. (105)

Blackman's tragedy, and as Patterson suggests, the tragedy of Caribbean people lies in this ambivalence, the desire to know and the fear of knowing; for knowing brings with it not only entrance into a hallowed community of ancestors, but also a confrontation with ancestral dread, the violent passage into the New World and the alienating experience of plantation existence. However, the historical journey must be made if the experience of the ancestors is going to be integrated into the community. The history of Caribbean slavery and colonization is one of disinheritance and segmentation. Brathwaite's cultivation of the myth of an African motherland offers spiritual unity and selfrealization.

In pursuing this cultivation, the pain of the Middle Passage and slavery's tortured realities must be confronted; for this attempt at dispossession was not entirely successful. It resulted in a camouflaging and burial of African traditions and rituals, not a total destruction. In the opening poem, of *Rights of Passage*, "Prelude," the poet ranges from the Caribbean's plantation existence, to life in the early glorious kingdoms of Africa to African slavery and the journey to the New World. In "Epilogue," the closing poem, the persona undergoes a range of experiences as he journeys from the Caribbean to Paris, Brixton, London, New York and Rome. In the persona's consciousness there is a peculiar merger of a pristine lyrical world and the everyday world of endless toil; hope is ephemeral, but the struggle continues:

but my people
 know
 that the hot
 day will be over
 soon
 that the star
 that dies

the flamboyant car-
 cass that rots
 in the road
 in the gutter
 will rise . . .
 in the butter-
 flies of a new
 and another morning . . . (81-82)

To arrive at this “New Morning,” it is necessary to recall and explore the experience of slavery; for a denial of this experience results in spiritual and intellectual death. Harold Telemarque, in his poem, “In Our Land,” shies away from naming this “stain”:

In our land
 the ugly stain
 That blotted Eden garden
 Is sunk deep only.

(Ramchand and Gray West Indian Poetry 3)

This “stain” of slavery is deeply etched in the Caribbean consciousness and cannot be washed away. In Slavery and Social Death, Orlando Patterson discusses the slave’s complete isolation in society. He suffered a dual isolation from his ancestors and their “social heritage” and from his community. Thus, there was no overt body of experience or knowledge to “anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory” (5). Brathwaite sees this as his literary and spiritual task. He must dig deep within the Caribbean existence and consciousness to recover the past; his imagination becomes the medium through which this past is reclaimed and transcended. Out of this reclamation of knowledge, the understanding of the past and the transcendence of its evils will come the new Caribbean identity.

This is the poetic achievement of Brathwaite’s trilogy Mother Poem, Sun Poem and X/ Self. The poet consciously interweaves the Caribbean’s African and colonial histories together with its postcolonial and present political experiences. His excursions into the past inform the present Caribbean identity he is involved in shaping. In his preface to “Mother Poem,” Brathwaite states:

“This poem is about porous limestone: my mother, Barbados: most English of West Indian islands, but at the same time nearest, as the slaves fly, to Africa.” *Mother Poem* is a distillation of female essences and principles. “Mother” is Africa and Barbados and the women of the island as they struggle to survive and to maintain ancestral connections. The persona, mother, speaks in many voices, public and oratorical, and private and personal. “Alpha,” the poem introducing the volume, is a gathering-up of forces, a celebration of strength and survival, a praise-song to mother, mother country, and ancestral mother. Here we see at work Brathwaite’s theory of “tidalectics.” A “tidal dialectic moves outward from the center to circumference and back again” (“Caribbean Culture: Two Paradigms” 42). This poem, dedicated to Barbados, cannot possibly escape this association. Here, in an endless tidal pattern, the poet returns to sources and remembered places. He recalls the slaves’ journey to the New World and the plantations of colonization even as he goes back in time to “ancient watercourses” which are linked to the ancestral memory.

These are the experiences hovering over the poem which converge in the inspiring presence of the mother who “rains upon the island with her loud voices / with her grey hairs / with her green love” (3). She sings of wisdom and hope and connections making possible the survival of the father who “swims through the noise / through the blankets of jute on his lungs” (4). These are the spirits of creation out of whose union a new order will emerge. But before this can happen, there are many battles to be fought and at the heart of the turbulence is the mother icon with powers of consecration and damnation, a composite of ambiguities. In “Hex,” she “sings,” “quarrels,” “rattles,” and “shakes.” These actions signify her many roles as historian, warrior, keeper of the dead and preserver of religious ceremony and rituals. In her public role as mother/island/home, she guards and maintains the connections with history past and present:

she will remember the floorboards of a cabin
how there was a grave there
where she buried her children
their skin drilled to screams . . . (47)

and:

she wears on her wrist the shadow of the chain
history of the flesh

written by whip of torture

legacy of bribe

Mother is also healer, diviner and arbiter:

from the sicknesses of the plantation

she gathers sticks

gutters them to fashion pipes flutes siphons

rambles of herbs she touches and sniffs

offering them prayers and names:

mint nunu kema-weed shamar

pem-pem piaba fall-down-bush

and she crumples words into curses: (47)

While this mother is guardian of history and protector of culture, she is confronted by the rape and devastation of the island mother, Barbados. On the plantations of the present, there is a negation of history: "They learn to smile with Keats and Milton . . . / but know nothing of the men who marched / from Congo rock / from Belleplaine / from Boscobelle . . ." (50). At the heart of this bombardment the mother remains bent on her mission of preservation. In his personal wasteland the narrator struggles for wholeness and survival:

for the mind is dry

where there are no rivers

the sky of hope shines high with barren metal

where there are no watercourses

i struggle through the silver thorn

and cannot find the pool (51)

But the mother will lead the narrator back to "ancient watercourses" and "rivers," to the circle of the "pool." This movement away from the metallic to the circular is central to the poet's thought. Brathwaite views the metallic and the circular as central oppositions which identify essential

differences between African and European cultures. He employs the two central symbols of capsule and missile to epitomize these differences. The metallic is linked to the missile representing technology, profit and aggression while the circular is aligned to the capsule representing the preservation and containment of culture. According to Brathwaite, "we came across the Atlantic in this space capsule within the missile of the Europeans, and . . . we enshrined our memories, our rituals, our histories within this life-supporting schema" ("History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self" 33). A space capsule thus becomes the symbol for Caribbean history, both past and present:

. . . our history was carried to us by our
conquistadores, by the people who came to possess us
all, by Columbus, Drake, Raleigh, and all of those who
came afterwards, by the educators and the missionaries
. . . the ship was a form of missile and . . . our own
experience was the space capsule within the missile.

("History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self" 32-33)

But the history of the "space capsule" continues to be one of bombardment in time, and in Mother Poem it is the mission of the mother/priestess as symbol, as icon, to maintain the culture intact. In "Nametracks," the conflict is between colonizer, symbolized by O'Grady, and the colonized, symbolized by the voice of the narrator. In the deceptive world of a childhood game familiar to Caribbean children, the poet places this battle for identity. O'Grady with the force of the colonizing power insists that the narrator "say name." But in African culture, the name is sacred. In Muntu, Janheinz Jahn quotes from the Yoruba priests: "There is nothing that there is not; whatever we have a name for, that is" (133). Thus, the act of naming, of breathing life into words is a creative act and becomes linked to the preservation of culture:

she lisper to me dat me name what me name
dat me name is me main an it am is me own an lion eye mane
dat whinner men tek you an ame, dem is nomminit diff'rent an nan
so mandingo she yessper you nam (62)

The mother speaks for cultural preservation and history in the language of the Caribbean which has its African roots. The child must acknowledge his cultural history and name his Caribbean experi-

ences and their connection to the ancestral experiences if he is to refashion the history of the doomed:

the child
is born to splinters

broken islands
broken homes

(“Mid/Life” 108)

While Mother Poem feminizes Brathwaite’s imaginative world with its emphasis on protection and nurture, and the mother speaks in the voice of priestess, provider and guardian of the African past, in Sun Poem, the male principles emerge. But “sun” is also “son” of “the dark muse his mother,” and, as a result, inherits her intuitive qualities and is drawn toward past history and ancient African memories in an attempt to understand the present condition in which he finds himself. The introductory poem to the volume, “Red Rising,” goes back to origins in a peculiar mixture of the African and the Caribbean. Mount Soufriere is paired with Kilimanjaro; Jah and Isis and the father/narrator/persona offer a lyrical song in the voice of a griot who sings of beginnings and possibility:

and the trees on the mountain be-
come mine: living eye of my branches
of bone; flute
where is my hope hope where is my psalter

my children wear masks dancing towards me the mews of their
their origen earth (1)

But the mood soon changes in spite of the idyllic setting in which the poet places the central character, Adam. His battle with Batto the bully, hints at the existence of other evils. The sea becomes a source of remembrance and pain. Adam attempts to escape from Batto as they struggle in the sea; and in the consciousness of Adam’s sister, fishes are transformed into birds “trying to leave the dark heavy water dragging the links of the chains of the water,” but are unable to leave the

“prisoner sea.” Ever present is the memory of slavery and plantation Barbados where black people struggled for survival: “the sons of the earth working in long rows / in long chains / in long queues” (SP 39).

In “The Crossing,” as Adam goes on a Sunday school excursion to Cattlewash, the poet reverses the Middle Passage journey, thus rewriting history in the song that the children sing:

we’re going to a won der ful place
we’re going to a wonder full place
over the hills and far away
we’re going to a wonderful place (SP 40)

As the bus slowly winds its way up Hearse Hill, Adam is filled with terror, fearing that the bus will “slip-back-down-to-the- gully,” but it reaches the top, and “below . . . was the promised land.” But the promise remains unfulfilled, and in “Noon,” Adam is confronted with the story of slavery’s beginnings on his island. At the same time, the poet introduces Adam’s sources of liberation, the African gods and the warrior/hero Bussa. He meets Legba, the “divine intermediary” and “interpreter” (Marks 59). He is also introduced to Shango, the warrior God of thunder and Ogoun, the God of war and metals. Brathwaite carefully introduces the African Gods as he charts the route to Caribbean salvation and wholeness. However, this self/sun he is creating is fragile, and the forces of history are often overpowering; therefore, the journey to salvation is full of obstructions, not the least being the perversion of relationships and the impotence of black men in a society in which they have no visible power except over their women and children. Adam is faced with this reality: “But our heroes were in books / and few of our fathers were heroes.” In fact, Brathwaite provides a catalogue of fatherly and husbandly deficiencies in a world of unfaithfulness and child neglect. For example, the Christian father is described in this way:

temperate discrete ruthless perhaps at noon with naomi
but all between the four white walls of moderation
and not squeezed in against the backseat igloo roof of the toyola

(“Clips” SP 67)

The landscape is bleak and apparently hopeless: “. . . a man cyan be / faddah to faddah if e nevva get chance to be son/light” (SP 71). This bleakness also permeates what initially appears to be a

lyrical, playful interlude between Adam and Esse. She is wreathed in sunlight and “son” light and perched in a “duncks” tree, and they are playing the game of flirtation; but the mood is transformed from the playful to the malevolent. First she pricks her hand on a “pimpler,” then, the poet uses the mechanized image of driving a lorry to describe their attempts at a sexual encounter and its possible consequences: “an aftha yu finish drive bout like yu like . . . / an fuhget bout de bill when a / accident come an de lorry dey pun de dump/heap” (79). Esse’s youthful world of innocence and sexual initiation is threatened by worldly realities of accidents and despair. Ultimately she is sacrificed at the altar of male pleasure. Lovers vanish; her husband “died in his testicles,” and she is left to sing “the hymn without tune without words” (84). Esse’s future is tied to the endless numbers of women singing the song of broken promises.

However, inherent in this landscape of pain, is a female source of consolation and renewal:

for mothers stood in the light of the door
way mothers stood at the end of the yard

mothers were loa were stone crabs were fish traps of no
they were pebbles of sound down the floor of a well

(“Return of the Son” *SP* 77)

The image of mothers as loas offers the possibility of unity and recovery. Possessed by the spirits of the Gods, these women can recharter their lives and rewrite their history. Her flirtatiousness and sensuality link Esse to the loa/Goddess of love, Erzulie. In this guise love can remain the game Adam wants to play, and Esse can remain distant and in control. But this too remains a promise.

In the final poem of this volume, “Son,” Brathwaite returns to beginnings. Out of the nothingness, the darkness and the silence before creation “came nam / nameless dark horse of devouring morning.” This essence “nam,” which the poet describes as source or essence or “the indestructible and atomic core of man’s culture, is personified and transfigured and is associated with the thunder of Shango. There is a mighty gathering of the forces of light and darkness and thunder and a lyrical description of the origin of things:

with a slow rising light of leviathan
with a thunder called firmament

and the salt became stars
they say

and the light grew

and opened the eye of its flower

("Son" SP 97)

It is in this world, created by new and powerful Gods, that the new Caribbean self will come into being:

and my thrill-
dren are coming up coming up coming up
and the sun

new ("Son" 97)

But this new being, the Caribbean self that Brathwaite attempts to reshape and bring to life is extremely fragile and struggles to survive in a Caribbean landscape where the forces of history are constantly warring, where the Babylons of poverty and oppression are deeply rooted and, in the words of Bob Marley, there is a movement toward "total destruction." In the epigraph to X/Self, the poet asks: "without reason, ail you hope gone / ev'rything look like it comin out wrong. / Why is dat? What it mean?" The poet's unconscious task is to reorder the elements of consciousness and to make meaning, to propose an alternative to destruction, to replace despair with hope. In an effort to do this, the poet journeys back in history. "Salt" opens with the statement: "Rome burns / and our slavery begins." The pain of the enslaved is expressed in an all-inclusive roar embracing all of history's slaves as well as current "liberators . . . guillotined from heaven":

the slaves groan
cerements of bone
and alabaster

rises in hellelluia (X/Self 7)

Thus, the poet sets the stage for the vast sweep of history upon which his sight will gaze. In *X/Self* this ranges from the destruction of the Roman Empire, the beginning of Western civilization and the origins of slavery to present-day revisions of slavery and colonization:

there is a crack within the uttar stone of ethiopia
watch where the mediterranean sea comes seeking through

where cleopat unummied peachskin coloured chick
floating to harvest in her berth of hippo milk
loves anthony her sallow diver of the olive groves
the widowed nipples of her breasts pout north to slavery

(“Edge of the Desert” 11)

The poet embarks on a journey from slavery’s past to present as he examines the various historical influences that chip away at the self; but even as he breaks apart this self that he examines, at the same time he hints at strategies of survival and salvation. “Phalos” calls for the abandonment of materialistic European values and a return to the religious beliefs of ancestral Gods and the wisdom and cultural practices of the elders, a movement back to a knowledge of “herbs” and “naked saviours.”

In “Dies irie,” the poet’s voice thunders the message of destruction and violence; his personal apocalyptic vision includes the violence of both nature and man, and in this worldscape, Brathwaite speaks for the oppressed of all humanity. The poet, as the voice of the rebel who represents the people’s desire for change and a new order, will attempt to reorder society by the power of the “word”:

day of thunder day of hunger
bring me solace bring me fire
give me penance bring me power
grant me vengeance with thy word (*X/Self* 39)

“Word,” in this context, is imbued, by the poet with the special spiritual qualities of the African “Nommo.” In his discussion of the concept of “Nommo,” Janheinz Jahn makes the following statement: “All magic is word magic, incantation and exorcism, blessing and curse. Through Nommo, the word, man establishes his mastery over things” (*Muntu* 132). Brathwaite constantly

returns

to ancestral sources for the inspiration and power to transform his society and to exorcise the evils which plague it. To achieve this transformation out of which new meaning will come, the poet must create symbols that speak to the experience of the Caribbean people and that attempt to make sense out of the clash of the African and European worlds. This is the achievement of X/Self, where the poem, "The visibility trigger" explores this cataclysmic confrontation in history: "i offered you a kola nut / . . . and you broke it into gunfire" (48). At the heart of this poem which explores the violence of conquest, Brathwaite goes back to precolonial time, creating a moment which he hopes to recapture in present history:

and unprepared and venerable i was dreaming mighty wind in
trees / our circles talismans round hut round village cooking
pots
the world was round and we the spices in it
time wheeled around our memories like stars . . .
and i beheld the cotton tree
guardian of graves rise upward
from its monument of grass (49)

It is in such a circle, a spot sacred to the ancestors that the self the poet is so carefully nurturing can be made whole. Here under the protection of the silk cotton tree, a tree sacred to the ancestors, the wisdom of the Gods will be made manifest. This tree exists in Guyana and the Caribbean, and in West Africa, is revered as a place where the ancestral spirits feel an affinity. It is never tampered with or cut down without special rituals and prayer. In Guyana it also brings to memory the horrors of slavery; for the Dutch masters would bury their treasure under the silk cotton tree and kill a slave leaving his spirit to protect the treasure. In the poet's revisioning, this tree, "our great odoum," witness to the lamentations of the past becomes the "nam," symbolizing, simultaneously, the eternal African spirits and new Caribbean beginnings, and thus allowing for the rewriting and validation of the Caribbean's cultural history:

and our great odoum
triggered at last by the ancestors into your visibility

crashed

into history (50)

This sense of violent beginnings and continuities permeates the poetic landscape of “nam.” The tortured South African Blacks and the oppressed Rastafarians of the Caribbean are linked in their struggle for liberation. Here, in the rhythms of the Caribbean, Brathwaite’s narrator gives voice to the “dread” experienced by the Rastafarians. “Dread,” as Gordon Rohlehr describes it, is “the image of naked elemental survival and the mythical sense of Apocalypse with which the Rastafarian lives day after day” (“West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment” 134).

This “dread” and its resulting tortured fragmentation and disintegration is at the center of “X/Self’s Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces.” In a space that is almost overpowered by a modern sense of imminent destruction, and a realization that the Calibans of the world remain dispossessed, X/Self attempts to write the Caribbean self into history. The landscape of the poem is broken and disjointed, but X/Self struggles to “write” and be “rite”:

a fine

a cyaan get nutten

write

a cyaan get nutten really

rite

while a stannin up here in me years & like I inside a me shadow

like de man still mekkin i walk up de slope dat e slide

in black down de whole curve a de arch

i

pell

ago (X/Self 86)

This self that the poet describes is a mixture of resilience and fragility, and the fragmentation of words reflects a communal fragmentation which the poet fights against. He tries to understand the Caribbean predicament and its meaning and returns to the questions posed in the epigraph:

why is
dar?
what it
mean?

To answer these questions, the poet introduces Caribbean heroes, African Gods and sacred places into the imaginary landscape. In "Stone," the Maroon town of Palmares is such a place. Palmares, led by the legendary hero, Zumbi, was established by runaway slaves in the seventeenth century and survived against attack for sixty-seven years (Freyre The Masters And The Slaves 38). In the poet's imagination, Palmares is transformed into a mythic homeland and a source of renewal and strength, a timeless symbol of freedom and achievement: "everything looks inwards to this centre" (93). Brathwaite suggests a kind of cultural self-exploration, and he erects signposts which would guide the self to recognition and awareness.

Palmares, like Accompong, the Maroon village in Jamaica is an important site for Brathwaite on his exploratory journey back in time. He reconstructs these landmarks and tries to unearth truths relevant to today's Caribbean society. He reconstructs a place and a history that would offer hope and a sense of wholeness to a people constantly battered by colonization and slavery and their contemporary re-visions. For example, the island people are oddities to tourists in their own islands, and the plantations of slavery have shifted to North and South American cities:

tourists let inwards by the sweeper at the market gate
rush in and shoot us with their latest nikons and many of
our men / are lured away to work at chipping ice in sin
cinnati cutting the canal at christopher
columbus place in panama . . . ("Stone" 94)

Accompanying this panoramic sweep of history is the refrain "runagate / runagate," from Robert Hayden's poem of the same name. This is another return, a return to the African-American experience of "dread." But, the poet suggests that such "dread" can be overcome and freedom achieved.

His recreation of Palmares is ceremonial and ordered and the effect is very powerful:

High up in this littered world of rock. stone. . .

wind we know always sharp slant sleet howl but warm
as your lips and gentle as a mother with her baby cheek
to cheek misty mornings high noons spectacular sunsets

at the bottom of this high world high above it all we
draw / the lion . . .

("Stone" 93)

Palmares, filtered through the poet's imagination, becomes a celebration of community. It appears to be impregnable, a haven of the spirit surrounded by the evil forces of man and nature. Again, for the poet, salvation comes in the recovery of ancestry as he returns to the past and the Lion of Judah, Haile Selassie Emperor of Ethiopia. Here, Brathwaite captures, for the first time, the essence of Palmares in a peculiar merger of "language and spirit" (Brathwaite, personal interview, 16 March 1991). This reaching back into the past brings the fragile self at the heart of X/Self out of a troubled privacy and into a beautifully ordered community life.

"Xango," the final poem in X/Self, is a song of praise to Shango, the warrior God of fire, thunder and lightning. He represents "control over enemies and obstacles" (González-Wippler 16). The poet invokes him here as the "magician-king" (Murphy Ritual Systems in Santería 72). The landscape of X/Self is a mixture of "dread" in various forms, existing on various islands and continents. It is peopled by heroes as well as the hopeless and those struggling to survive, the inhabitants of the Trench towns of the Caribbean and the Americas. The unknown self of the Caribbean, the self struggling to discover its sources must negotiate this dangerous landscape which threatens to devour it. It is not surprising, then, that the poet calls upon the "magician-king" to offer possibility and hope. In his notes to X/Self, Brathwaite describes the "dub riddims and nation language and calibanisms" as his "magical realism" (113). This gathering together of the religious and the profane, the invocation of ancient African Gods and the spirit of Bob Marley

achieves a peculiar harmony; for it is out of the assimilation of these elements that the Caribbean identity will emerge accepting its tortured past and present reality. Shango offers reconciliation and healing:

touch
him
he will heal
you

word
and balm
and water
flow

embrace
him
he will shatter outwards to your light and calm and history

your thunder has come home (111)

In rewriting the Caribbean's history and restoring its Gods, heroes and sacred places, Brathwaite anchors and protects the renewed self as it struggles to emerge into selfhood and ultimately participate in community, a community symbolizing achievement. In this way, Brathwaite refutes entrenched theories of the region's presumed existence in a state of void and historical nothingness.

Brathwaite and Walcott epitomize the duality of the region's relationship to Africa. Brathwaite, having lived in Africa, comes into contact not only with its history, but experiences the civilizing grandeur of its ceremonies and rituals. For the poet to have embraced Africa so entirely was a courageous and sometimes painful act for a man of his time in Caribbean society, a society deeply enamored of all things European and as Gordon Lewis puts it, a society in which the average Caribbean person is "the uneasy possessor of a pseudo-European culture in an Afro-Asian environment" ("The Caribbean: Colonization and Culture" 40). Walcott is drawn to the dark side of Africa

and the pain of being faced with dehumanizing European myths, and while he experiences no epiphany, he comes to a gradual awareness of the place of Africa in the Caribbean world that he is inventing. This vision of Africa is one dominated by the trauma of the Middle Passage and the resulting enslavement of African peoples and their descendants. As he recreates a history for his people, he comes to an awareness of the ennobling power of Africa in his visionary world and in the Caribbean he is refashioning.

In his early poetry Walcott's voice is one of separation and alienation: "For these lands belong to no one but the luckless; / (Not to the conquering teeth of foreign engines) / to lost red and black tribes" "Black and White live apart." Yet, the poet prays: ". . . might God and His wise machines elect to cross / With a shower of blossoms, and make if no Eden / Then such peace as traveller expects of islands" ("Travelogue" 25 Poems 17). But the poet is a long way from achieving this "peace," and the implication is that such "peace" can only be granted to strangers to the islands, strangers entranced by their beauty and oblivious to the searing pain underneath the islands' edenic appearance. Haunting his visionary world are two monumental tragedies, the destruction of the Amerindians and the destruction and enslavement of the Africans:

Long, long before us,
those hot jaws like an oven
steaming, were open
to genocide; they devoured
two minor yellow races, and
half of a black; ("Air" The Gulf 69)

In "Ruins of a Great House," this sense of destruction is coupled with an awareness of creativity. Decay and degeneration have enveloped what was once a monument to human accomplishment and elegant living; but achieved at the expense of the lives of slaves:

A spade below dead leaves will ring the bone
Of some dead animal or human thing
Fallen from evil days, from evil times.

(In a Green Night 19)

Walcott juxtaposes the pain of "exiled craftsmen" and the conquest of "ancestral murderers":

“ . . . men like Hawkins, Walter Raleigh, Drake.” This is the dual relationship that resonates in the Caribbean literary imagination:

The world's green age then was a rotting lime
Whose stench became the charnel galleon's text.
The rot remains with us, the men are gone. (20)

The poet is engaged in rewriting this text. He is driven by a sense of loss for an African past often distorted or omitted from history; it is out of this past that the spirit of struggle and survival is distilled, and becomes the center of the history he is engaged in rewriting. It is the spirit of the ancestors, and Walcott, while recognizing them all, will ultimately acknowledge both the dominance and visibility of the region's African legacy. Very often critics discuss Walcott's poetry in terms of a frantic search for identity and a fragmented consciousness (for example, Brown 124, Hamner 49, Lyn 24). To support this view, they quote the well-known lines from “A Far Cry From Africa”:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live? (18)

But as the poet himself explains, the poem was written about the Mau Mau uprisings and when he wrote the poem, he “felt that what was going on there was mutually horrible. That is the atrocities of the Mau Mau and the atrocities of the English” (Caribbean Contact interview 1973). What is crucial to the understanding of the poet's sensibility is an understanding of the rhetorical nature of his final question. Africa is necessary for both his personal survival and that of the public identity which he is defining as well as creating. This is not a denial of Africa and African culture, but a reiteration of the inescapable power of Africa in the poet's life and imagination.

However, before Africa can be integrated into the Caribbean psyche, the poet has to destroy

the myths of darkness, ignorance and excessive sexuality perpetuated by Europeans and Caribbeans alike. "Goats and Monkeys" is an attempt at such destruction. Here, Walcott's source is Othello:

... His earthen bulk
 buries her bosom in its slow eclipse.
 His smokey hand has charred
 that marble throat. Bent to her lips,
 he is Africa, a vast, sidling shadow
 that halves your world with doubt. (27)

The poet appropriates the narrative of Othello and expands it into a narrative of colonization. Othello is Africa; he is also the enslaved and the colonized. In reinforcing the terrors of these conditions, Walcott creates a surrealistic world where racism and sexuality, coupled with the horror of miscegenation, become palpable fears. In this world, where such apprehensions of the "other" loom larger than existence itself, colonial fears are transformed into irrational and ludicrous actions, "a bestial, comic agony" (28). This is the agony that Walcott attempts to confront and alleviate by demystifying Africa and the colonized Caribbean world. He peels away the layers of terror and the fascination with which Africa has been shrouded in the European and Caribbean imagination to expose the simple reality: "... this mythical, horned beast who's no more / monstrous for being black" (28).

However, Africa is not always buried in myth and mystery; its soul is made manifest in the Caribbean, "this further shore of Africa" ("The Almond Trees" 36). The poet moves beyond apparent nothingness, "There's nothing here / ... no visible history," to an intricately woven tale of existence and vitality. What is visible in the Caribbean is the obvious colonial heritage, but as the poet realizes, the vibrant African ties exist underneath the surface. In this poem, the almond trees are personified. Walcott transforms them into slaves: "their writhing trunks ... / Their bodies fiercely shine! / ... they endured their furnace." Superimposed on this history, is the superficial picture, in present time, of "the forked limbs of girls toasting *their* flesh / in scarves, sunglasses, Pompeian bikinis." The poet journeys back in time to other "limbs," the limbs of slaves "lashed raw ... washed / out with salt and fire-dried" (37). Because of their survival, the soul of Africa is reborn in the Caribbean strengthened by the crucible of the Middle Passage.

The Middle Passage as symbol of endurance and the transmission of history is central to the poet's thought. However, this history is a mixed one, a combination of the exhilaration that comes from a grounding in African custom and rituals and the painful reality of slavery and plantation life. "Laventille" is a meditation on the Middle Passage. As the poet climbs a hill to attend a christening, he is surrounded by deprivation:

we climbed . . .

where the inheritors of the middle passage stewed
five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,
breeding like felonies, . . . (32)

The confines of the slave ship have been exchanged for the desperate poverty of the tenement. In these dismal surroundings a child is baptized. On the surface, there is no sign of hope or vitality or future promise; but what links slave ship and tenement is the presence of the "hot, corrugated iron sea / whose horrors we all / shared . . ." (33). Again, the poet finds strength in the slaves' survival, and suggests that this is a fitting gift for the new born as he enters the collective memory of the race. The sea, peopled by the bones of the ancestors makes the connection between the violent African exodus and this life in the New World. As a result, the sea is a symbol of the ancestral memory and it becomes a matter of spiritual survival to explore its depths in order to recover "customs and gods that are not born again" (35). The poet suggests that Caribbean people are faced with a choice; they can be imprisoned or liberated by the sea of memory. African customs and gods cannot survive in their initial purity; for they have been affected by the movement from the Old to the New World. However, in their new forms they have inhabited the Caribbean world and are an integral part of the movement of liberation.

It is these new forms that concern the poet; forms that have their origins "where Africa began: / in the body's memory" (*Another Life* 24). *Another Life*, Walcott's autobiographical work, explores the poet's journey of artistic awareness and his "re-searching of the personal history for an idea of human destiny, an order of truth" (Ismond "Another Life: Autobiography as Alternate History" 41). At the same time it is a very sensitive exploration of the poet's attempt to bring to reality the ineluctable memories of an ancestral African past. Walcott recognizes the legacy of this

past in the folk culture of St. Lucia. It is a culture threatened by the cynicism of the middle and upper classes who associate folk customs and rituals with the poor and country folk and see the obeah-man as an associate of the devil. Walcott's mentor, Harold Simmons was very much aware of this reality. According to him, expressions of Caribbean folk tradition are "at variance with established authority, orthodox religion, upper class morality, law, and other cultural forms having the sanction of authority" ("Notes on Folklore in St. Lucia" 41). But it is in the folk culture of St. Lucia, rooted in its African past, that Walcott finds the humanizing graces of the Caribbean which are so necessary to the identity he is engaged in fashioning.

In *Another Life*, Walcott carefully nurtures and protects this identity he is bringing into existence. He goes back in time to an African past of lyrical beauty and vitality, and this past speaks to him clearly:

I looked for some ancestral, tribal country,
I heard its clear tongue over the clean stones
of the river, . . (41)

The poet's sense of rootlessness does not lead him to a state of total alienation and despair; for he channels these feelings into the positive effort of reconstruction in which he is engaged. It is this focus on rebuilding and reconstruction that Walcott's friends and contemporaries, Dunstan St. Omer, the St. Lucian painter and George Odlum both admire. In fact, Odlum believes that a constant critical focus on Walcott's "divided self" denies the development of the poet and his efforts to transform the "dross" of street and country life in St. Lucia into the "vivid tableau" that emerges in the landscape of his poetic world. St. Omer sees Walcott as St. Lucia's "foremost national hero" who "holds up the spirit of St. Lucia to the world" (Walcott celebration, St. Lucia. May 1990). Both these men recognize the poet's mission as the refashioner of his island's reality.

Walcott gives voice to this mission in "Homage to Gregorias;" Gregorias is his name for Dunstan St. Omer. He identifies their common purpose: ". . . we would never leave the island / until we had put down, in paint, in words, / . . . all of its sunken, leafchoked ravines, / every neglected, self-pitying inlet / muttering in brackish dialect, . . ." (AL 50). To accomplish this mission, the poet must return to the island's African connections. He must delve beneath the surface of things to discover hidden realities and truths. On this journey underground, he must conquer

“history thickening with amnesia” (AL 51). This “amnesia,” Walcott views as the “true history of the New World” to which “the slave surrendered.” The result of this was a “tribal memory . . . salted with the bitter memory of migration” (“The Muse of History” 5-6). Walcott’s task becomes that of moving back in time beyond the confinement of the Middle Passage to an African tribal existence:

so that a man’s branched, naked trunk,
its roots crusted with dirt,
swayed where it stopped, remembering another name;

breaking a lime leaf,
cracking an acrid ginger-root,
a smell of tribal medicine stained the mind . . .
here was a life older than geography. . . . (AL 51-52)

Walcott’s concern here is not with a glorious epic of the Africa of conquest and tragedy; but of the Africa of folklore and farmers, the preservation of culture and customs and their transmission and transformation in the Caribbean. The memory of the past is used to inform and shape present Caribbean history.

In Sea Grapes, Walcott goes to the heart of history to forge a connection to a past that will offer rootedness and hope for Caribbean people, particularly the poor and the dispossessed. Rastafarians are living manifestations of the poverty and dispossession of the region’s black masses in post-colonial, post-independence times. The Rastafarian presence in Jamaica, in particular, and in the Caribbean, in general, is a visible reminder of the pull of the forces of exile and return that exist, acknowledged or not, in the Caribbean soul. The alienation of the Rastafarians in Jamaican society, and their desire to return to Africa, literally, is an example of this duality. Rastafarian beliefs are grounded in their interpretation of the scripture. Therefore, African slavery and the horrors of plantation life are analogous to the “Scattering of the twelve tribes of Israel and the Exile in Babylonian captivity.” In addition, the Jews’ return to the Promised Land is analogous to the Rastafarians’ wish to return to Africa (Nettleford Dread xiii). At the center of Rastafarian theology is the “experience of dread.” This is “the awesome, fearful confrontation of a people with a primor-

dial but historically denied racial selfhood” (Owens 3). The Rastafarian’s relationship to Africa—Africa as myth, religious center and place—epitomizes the subconscious longing of the Caribbean’s Black people for cultural wholeness and the recognition that Africa, not in its physical presence, but in visionary form exists at the sensitive point of Caribbean existence:

This Africa is a presence, a dialectically given
 existential presence. And this Africa in a white
 racist colonial era became the burden and the
 possibility of black manhood. The absence of Africa
 became the presence of Africa. A persistent, nagging
 aching possibility. (Owens 6)

Walcott’s “Dread Song” captures, on the one hand, the essence of Rastafarian existence, the purity of belief: “Forged from the fire of Exodus / the iron of the tribe;” and, on the other hand, he presents “the dreams and the lies.” The poet confronts the ambivalence of the Rastafarian existence, an ambivalence that also goes back to embrace the exodus from Africa as well as its economic justification:

Economics and Exodus,

 embrace us within
 bracket and parenthesis

 their snake arms of brotherhood
 (the brackets of the bribe). (SG 25)

The microcosmic world of the Rastafarian intensifies and mirrors the larger black Caribbean world complete with its contradictions. Here, Walcott speaks out against separation, “bracket and parenthesis,” and suggests a “brotherhood” which, while rooted in past mythology and history, at the same time reflects this past in the actuality of the Caribbean.

Walcott calls for the end of superficiality at all levels of society, and he advocates a depth of “vision” and a return of “faith,” not blind faith, but a faith based on the knowledge of the region’s fragmented history, and the belief that it can be made whole. He recognizes that a symbolic return

to Africa does have its place; for such a reversal of the original journey would be an exploration and an excavation of history, a recognition that the region is an historical entity, and not a “mimicry” of European societies. Such “mimicry” in colonial and post-colonial societies, according to Homi Bhabha, “conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” (“The ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” 129). Walcott sees the necessity for cementing form and content, destroying the mask and revealing the recreated history of the region. He is well aware of the Caribbean’s obsession with “the loss of history, the amnesia of the races.” Imagination replaces “loss” and “amnesia,” “imagination as necessity, as invention” (“The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry? 6). Walcott recognizes these dual acts of destruction and creation in the work of Eric Roach, the poet from Trinidad and Tobago, and celebrates Roach’s achievement in a lyrical tribute, “The Wind in the Dooryard.” In 1974, Roach committed suicide by drowning. In an amazing poem, “I am the Archipelago,” Roach compresses the story of the region’s past and present history. But even as he presents the region’s convulsive periods of slavery and colonization, his vision of the region is one of reconstruction and hope:

I am the archipelago hope
Would mould into dominion . . .

Moving from this grand and prophetic opening statement which asserts a future for the region, Roach then descends to the depths of the region’s suffering and expands the circle to include the world’s dispossessed ranging from the shanty towns of the Caribbean to the shanty towns of Africa and America:

. . . And now
My language, history and my names are dead
And buried with my tribal soul. And now
I drown in the groundswell of poverty
No love will quell. I am the shanty town.
Banana, sugarcane and cotton man;
Economies are soldered with my sweat
Here, everywhere; in hate’s dominion;
In Congo, Kenya, in free, unfree America.

He exhumes the “tribal soul” and, later, acknowledges the power of his New World religion, not

only to unify the disparate elements of his ancestry, African and Caribbean, but also to provide salvation in present history and release in time:

The cock, the totem of his craft, his luck,
 The obeahman infects me to my heart
 Although I wear my Jesus on my breast
 And burn a holy candle for my saint.
 I am a shaker and a shouter and a myal man;
 My voodoo passion swings sweet chariots low.

(Voiceprint 196)

What the obeahman, the shaker, the shouter and the myal man have in common is the incorporation, into their religious practices, of some of the elements of traditional African beliefs and customs (Patterson The Sociology of Slavery 182-195 and Simpson Black Religions in the New World 117-121). The “sweet chariots” of the negro spiritual are not “coming to take [him] home” in the traditional Christian sense, for “home” here is Africa. His inherent “voodoo passion” draws him home to Africa. This celebration of Roach’s ancestry and New World creativity blends the essences of his dual existence, African and Caribbean, and attempts to form out of this mixture a Caribbean individuality that Derek Walcott acknowledges in “The Wind in the Dooryard.”

“The Wind in the Dooryard,” while it confronts Roach’s tragic death even as it celebrates his life, explores Walcott’s own journey toward an understanding of the region’s complex history. Initially, he confronts and dismisses the grotesqueness of death:

I didn’t want this poem to come
 from the torn mouth,
 I didn’t want this poem to come
 from his salt body, . . .

Next, Walcott creates a beautiful myth to explain the poet’s death:

He went swimming to Africa,
 but he felt tired;
 he chose that way
 to reach his ancestors.

The despair of suicide and its lack of control is transformed into a moment of conscious choice, a renunciation of pain and an affirmation of life, ancestral life and history. The unity of death and life, escape and return, body and spirit leads to peace and a homecoming. Walcott puts his myth to work as a vehicle of salvation. In the process of naming this “home” and the return journey, the “stone barracoons” and the grinding poverty of peasant existence are transcended, thus offering hope and the “freshness of life” (Sea Grapes 60).

The sea is the central symbol linking Walcott’s exploration of these journeys of death and rebirth. It is the keeper and guardian of the ancestral memory. In Caribbean Discourse, Edouard Glissant discussing Caribbean history quotes the phrase, “the unity is submarine,” with which Brathwaite concludes his study on “cultural diversity and integration” in the Caribbean. Glissant explains Brathwaite’s phrase in this way:

To my mind, the expression can only evoke all those
Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown
overboard whenever a slave ship was pursued by enemy
vessels and felt too weak to put up a fight. They
sowed in the depths the seeds of an invisible
presence. (66-67)

It is this “invisible presence,” Brathwaite uses the term “submarine,” that dominates The Star-Apple Kingdom:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History.

(“The Sea is History” 25)

The poet must open the “vault,” make history visible and point out its relevance to the New World, and as a result, achieve healing and create an identity steeped in the region’s history. In this poem, Walcott embarks on a submarine journey. It is interesting that Walcott, like Brathwaite, actually uses the term “submarine.” When the persona is asked: “but where is your Renaissance?” He replies:

Sir it is locked in them sea sands
 out there past the reef's moiling shelf,
 where the men-o'-war floated down:

 strop on these goggles, I'll guide you there myself.
 It's all subtle and submarine,
 through colonnades of coral,

 past the gothic windows of sea fans
 to where the crusty grouper, onyx-eyed,
 blinks, weighed by its jewels, like a bald queen;

 and these groined caves with barnacles
 pitted like stone
 are our cathedrals,

 and the furnace before the hurricanes:
 Gomorrah. Bones ground by windmills
 into marl and commeal, . . . (26-27)

To answer the question posed, Walcott creates an underwater world of enchantment which lulls the reader and questioner into a feeling of well-being until suddenly faced with "bones ground." The periods of history do not get any pleasanter, for with emancipation comes the "congealing into towns;" the "white sisters," dispensers of charity and faith, are the legacy of colonization, and independence brings its own horrors in the shape of politicians who mimic colonial powers. But, in spite of the dismal landscape, the poet continues with his submarine explorations; for there is hope in his rereading of his text, the sea. In discussing the role of the artist in our time, Robert Elliot Fox writes: "Whereas, in the past, the artist was a kind of priest, today's artist is something like an archeologist of the soul, uncovering lost or hidden meanings" ("Derek Walcott: History As Dis-Ease" 331).

This statement, quite clearly, describes Walcott's role as New World poet; for he retraces the steps of history moving beyond present and past times of turbulence to discover:

. . . in the dark ears of ferns

and in the salt chuckle of rocks

with their sea pools, there was the sound

like a rumor without any echo

of History, really beginning. (28)

The "rumor" that Walcott hears is the "rumor" of the existence of Africa in both the real and the symbolic landscapes of the Caribbean. D.S. Izevbaye suggests that "Walcott's interpretation of the West Indian experience emphasizes the termination of the African phase at the time of the slave-ship" ("The Exile and the Prodigal: Derek Walcott as West Indian Poet" 75). Such a reading denies the poet's clear obsession with the sea as memory and cultural receptacle and his constant desire to salvage the Middle Passage's legacy and transform it to fit its New World home. While his focus is on the journey of the Middle Passage, the slave ship becomes, in his imagination, not only a source of separation and pain but also the means of transporting and preserving the culture of Africa.

It is not by chance then, that Shabine, the persona of The Star-Apple Kingdom embarks on a journey across the Caribbean sea. Lloyd Brown describes this journey as "a kind of spiritual odyssey, one in which [Shabine] rediscovers history in memories of the Middle Passage and in which he recounts the history of the Caribbean from the slave trade to the new nationhood" (140). In the opening lines of "The Schooner Flight," the poet creates a haunting feeling of timelessness while at the same time he creates the sense of an ending of a personal existence and the beginning of a mythical one:

In idle August, while the sea soft,
and leaves of brown islands stick to the rim
of this Caribbean, I blow out the light
by the dreamless face of Maria Concepcion
to ship as a seaman on the schooner Flight.

ian of the region's history insists upon a return to origins; "history is memory" ("Caligula's Horse" 142). History, as memory, when filtered through the poet's imagination offers inspiration even as it pays tribute to survival. Walcott's obsession with origins, the role of history in the struggle to establish a Caribbean identity, and the liberating power of the ancestral memory in the poetic imagination, all come together in the play Dream on Monkey Mountain, facilitated by the presence of New World gods.

Handwritten in Walcott's Trinidad Theatre Workshop's copy of Dream is the following:

Our stage technique must create magic, power, tricks
hallucinations - Remember the visual theme of the
play - smoke, mist, fire, coal, fog, heat, coal. Now
link these metaphors - perhaps cloud, mist at the base
of the mountain - or actual smoke - perhaps these could
be linked by images that are the play's (poem's)
beginning. (Walcott papers. U.W.I., St. Augustine campus)

This insistence on "magic" and "power," and a sense of the amorphous allow the poet a certain indefinite quality of time and space in which to work his own magic of transformation, and, as a result, liberation. Dream can be read as a narrative poem which fits Patrick Taylor's definition of a "liberating narrative":

It lifts human agents out of their closed realms to
bring them into universal history, insisting on the
fundamental unity, even in diversity, of all humanity.
Any attempt to deny or negate human possibility,
slavery and racism being primary Caribbean examples of
such denial, is rejected by liberating narrative. (3)

Together, these two statements suggest a way of entering into the strangely haunting dream world of Walcott's play. His emphasis on magic, hallucination, smoke, fog and mist creates an atmosphere beyond rational comprehension. Walcott's use of these theatrical conventions of smoke, mist and fog is a physical manifestation of his own possession by the forces of history. In the imaginary world of the theater where participants in the drama can leave the world of reality behind

and enter the realm of imagination, Walcott is liberated, and is able to engage, vicariously, through his character, Makak, in the ritual of possession. He is possessed by history and historical forces; therefore, it is not surprising that hovering over this play and entering Makak's subconscious are the gods of Africa and the loas of the New World.

Makak, the protagonist is a coal-burner, ugly, old and black who lives on Monkey Mountain. Lloyd Brown makes the connection between monkeys and ugliness, Blacks and ugliness and Blacks and monkeys ("The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's Makak" (59). Jan Uhrbach, too, views the connection as "dehumanizing": "Makak becomes macaque, a monkey of the genus *macacus*, originally including a large number of African and Asian species. . . . In the European context he is simply "an African monkey" ("A Note on Language and Naming in Dream on Monkey Mountain" 578). These reductionist interpretations sever the African connections. In The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates tells of the Fon myth where Legba, the creator becomes the father of the monkey (17). This is the monkey who crosses the Atlantic and surfaces in the folk tales of the Caribbean. The Fon Legba is both creator and trickster. He is also the "protector of crossroads and doors, the protector of the herd. . . . He is the interpreter of the gods, who translates the requests and prayers of men into their language." In Haiti, he is a crippled old man with a cane (Jahn Muntu 42-43).

Walcott's characters are wonderful mixtures of both worlds thus reflecting the New World history that he is engaged in rewriting. Moustique, the cripple is not only Makak's friend, in some ways he is an extension of Makak as archetypical Legba, and he embodies the trickster element. Makak links the worlds of the rational and the imaginary. Wakened one morning by Moustique, Makak tells of a dream in which a beautiful white woman appears to him. She advises him to change his way of living for he "comes from the family of lions and kings," from Africa (Dream 236). This is Erzulie, the "mother of man's myth of life--its meaning" (Deren 138). She is the vodoun goddess of love, beauty and the world of dreams:

She is the dream impaled eternally upon the cosmic
cross/roads where the world of men and the world of
divinity meet, and it is through her pierced heart that
man ascends and the gods descend. (Deren 145)

In pictures, according to Janheinz Jahn, she appears “as a white woman . . . and is identified with the Blessed Virgin” (Muntu 45). But to Alfred Métraux, she has all “the characteristics of a pretty mulatto” (110), and to Milo Rigaud, Erzulie is “represented as a dark-skinned Ethiopian woman.” Rigaud also stresses the relationship between Legba and Erzulie. Legba is the “male prototype” and Erzulie, the “female prototype” of vodoun. He is the “Christ” and she is the “Virgin.”

Walcott plays on all of these elements and characteristics as he delineates the relationship between Makak and the woman who appears to him. Thus, Walcott presents the Caribbean’s deep-seated obsession with race, color and the alienation existing between races even as he transforms this into a ritual of possession through which this obsession will be eliminated. Makak symbolizes the dispossessed of the Caribbean who see no hope in the present world. The apparition lures him into a dream world of possibility where achieving a place in a symbolic Africa, and being given identifiable and regal ancestors are the initial steps in healing his tortured being. But Makak does not fully understand the apparition’s message. In his simple, childlike approach to the world around him, he interprets the message literally and embarks on a personal idealistic quest which is thoroughly at odds with the society in which he lives. Makak mounts his horse and, together with Moustique, sets out on his Journey to Africa. Soon they encounter a community of wailing people. At the center of the group is a sick man being carried by four men and accompanied by Basil, a “tall frock-coated man in [a] black silk hat, his face halved by white make-up” (243). He is “the carpenter, and cabinetmaker,” and by implication the coffin maker (246).

Basil is a manifestation of Baron Samedi, ruler of the cemetery and the crossroads. He is a symbol of life as well as death, facilitating entry into the immortal life or the crossing over from one state of being into another. At Makak’s intercession the sick man is healed. Basil is present in the background hovering over the ritual of healing. The sick man is the epitome of the evils afflicting the mass of society. In this encounter between evil and good, Makak is the instrument through which this element of society is healed. Walcott suggests that healing comes through the understanding of and the identification with the gods and the ancient rituals that remain alive in the memory of a people. When the rituals are warped and used in the service of false gods, communities are destroyed and death results. Moustique, in his capacity as trickster, pretends to be Makak, the healer and is unmasked by Basil. He is beaten to death by the crowd.

As the play begins, Makak is in jail in a cell with two thieves, Souris and Tigre. He was put there, by Corporal Lestrade, a mulatto, for “drunk and disorderly” behavior. He “mash up Alcindor cafe” (215). Corporal Lestrade attempts to place himself in a white world even as he denigrates the black world. He laughs at Makak’s vision of himself as a “King of Africa” (214), and refers sarcastically to him as “the Lion of Judah” (217). In Lestrade’s mind Makak, because he is black and poor, is no more than an animal. This diminishment of self and race occurs at all levels of the society; for example, the thieves pretend to believe in Makak’s aberrations in order to gain access to his money. Makak, in his simplicity, cannot see through the mask of corruption enveloping the thieves, for he is still possessed by his vision: “I feel I was God self, walking through cloud. In the heaven on my mind” (227). Lestrade views Makak’s possession as “the rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad” (228).

But Makak’s possession allows him to enter another world, to escape from the world of poverty and deprivation which he knows only too well. He becomes a god. Métraux, in discussing the transformative power of possession, mentions the new role of the possessed person as advisor, healer and foreteller of the future. The possessed person also advises himself (124-125). Makak, in his role as god/loa, will reorder the world around him and rewrite the history of his people. To achieve this, Walcott returns Makak to the world of dreams where, accompanied by the two thieves, Lestrade is overcome and wounded, and as the trio escapes, he says: “[They are] attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That’s the most dangerous crime. It brings about revolution” (287).

Walcott utilizes the religious possession of vodoun in order to facilitate Makak’s release from “the prison of [his] life,” and also, to inscribe in the memory of Caribbean people, revisions of their New World history. Religious possession, because of its transformative powers, becomes the ideal spiritual medium for accomplishing such change. This is particularly important as the “function and purpose of [the] divine manifestation, [during possession], is the reassurance and the instruction of the community” (Deren 30). Walcott hopes to rid his community of the effects of a total acceptance of colonial history, a history which views Caribbean people as colonial imitators who, in such roles, dismiss their ancestral heritage and perpetuate the divisions of race, color and class etched into their consciousness by their European masters. New World religious possession,

crafted by the poet as a means of repossessing the region's history, is the source of knowledge, healing and reconciliation. Harold Courlander, in The Drum and the Hoe, discusses the phenomenon of possession. According to him, the person possessed by a loa "may talk about . . . community ancestors, about intimate affairs of the community, or about how things are going back in Africa. Sometimes they utter words or phrases recognized as 'African language'" (20). This language of religious possession would be described as "nation language" by Kamau Brathwaite. Nation language is that aspect of Caribbean language which is informed by the African experience. The language of possession allows this "submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility" to come to the surface of consciousness (History of the Voice 13). It is essentially an African experience emanating from the vernacular tradition, a tradition in which sound and movement and the collective ancestral experience envelop the members of a community making them conscious of the individual's place in the continuity of the communal experience.

Makak's possession functions in all of these ways. He is transported to Africa, discovers ancestors and becomes the voice of the community of the dispossessed. All this occurs in the play's second dream vision. Makak stabs Corporal Lestrade and, with his jail companions Souris and Tigre, finds himself in Africa. The journey becomes, for Souris and Tigre, a journey of discovery. For Souris, being out of Africa, existed in "darkness" and "God was like a big white man, a big white man [he] was afraid of" (290). In the Africa of Makak's imagination Souris will lose his fear and emerge out of the darkness of ignorance and into the light of knowledge. The experience is a mystic one in the African Eden of Makak's imagination:

. . . after many moons, after many songs, we will
see Africa, the golden sand, the rivers where lions
come down to drink, lapping at the water with their
red tongues, then the villagers, the birds, the sound
of flutes. (291)

In this idyllic setting, Souris is possessed by the myth of Africa and is transformed. He says: "Yes, yes, I see it. I see it!" and Makak replies: "When your eyes open, you will be transformed, as if you have eaten a magic root" (291). While Walcott does not advocate the acceptance of mythic Africa in isolation from a New World past, he does realize its importance as the inspiring force in the

Caribbean imagination.

This is a necessary stage in Caribbean historical recovery. In this stage, believers are possessed by the myth of Africa, and this results in a new level of consciousness. They regain a sense of self and possibility, and they are able to embark on the journey of recovery and psychic healing. Makak, the poor, ugly charcoal burner is transfigured. Through his mouth, the loa of New World history speaks: "Makak will destroy" (295). What Makak destroys is the paralyzing hatred of self and race and the belief, literally and figuratively, in white gods. Recovery is made possible.

Presiding over the process of recovery is none other than Baron Samedi in the form of Basil. This is a highly appropriate setting for the Baron's appearance, for he usually appears to his followers in a dream (Métreaux 145). Baron Samedi possesses powers of healing and is the "last recourse against death" (Deren 113). Walcott brings Makak to this awareness: "Death is the last shadow I have made. The carpenter is waiting" (304). The fact that Basil as representative of Baron Samedi hovers over the proceedings leading up to and culminating in Makak's transfiguration is no surprise. Walcott identifies this section of the play as an "apotheosis" (308). Here, Makak is exalted to divine rank or deified. Such a monumental change, a leap into past history, has to be approved by the loa of the crossroads. This scene, scene three, as Walcott depicts it, is one of unfolding splendor and ceremony. There is a procession of warriors and chiefs and the stately roll of drums. Makak appears in kingly glory as the leader and protector of his people, and of old world history and culture. But, Walcott's purpose is to make the connection to present history; therefore, the recreating and mythologizing of the African past has its relevance for present Caribbean times. Corporal Lestrade now sees Makak as the "inventor of history" (311). This is the realization that the poet wants to achieve. It is necessary to recognize an African past and its importance as an integral element in the shaping of Caribbean history.

But, at the heart of such recognition and its resulting transformation of the self is the awareness of a personal identity, a sense that the individual, secure in his own self-knowledge, is of value to his society. Makak still wavers. He sees himself as a "shadow," a "hollow God," and a "phantom" (311). However, he is urged by Corporal Lestrade to right the wrongs of past and present history, and he is presented with a list of offenders to be hanged, ranging from Noah and Abraham Lincoln to Sir Cecil Rhodes and Horatio Nelson (312). Moustique, already dead, is also

presented for hanging. In addition, the apparition, the white woman who initially appeared to Makak is a member of this society of the doomed.

The act of execution introduces a peculiar twist in the poet's working out of the themes of regeneration and reconciliation. Patrick Taylor believes that Baron Samedi, as healer and giver of life" presides over the death of the apparition and ensures that "death is transformed into life," and this death results in Makak's "renewal of life." Baron Samedi becomes a "symbol of liberation" (214). Taylor's interpretation of Makak's act of execution is an idealistic one, for Makak actually kills his dream. The apparition, as a manifestation of the loa, Erzulie, is the loa of "impossible perfection" (Deren 144). However, Makak's ritual execution of the personalities representing society's evils cannot eliminate evil from his world. The execution of the apparition forces Makak to return to the world of the present, and to recognize his own name: "My name is Felix Hobain . . ." (321).

To Robert Hamner, with the act of execution Makak is "finally free to be himself. The visionary goddess may have been white, but the inspiration she brought of African identity was as inauthentic and limiting as the one she was replacing" (87). It is Hamner's analysis which is limiting. Makak's confrontation of the past, his meting out of justice to historical figures alien to the concept of black survival and self-knowledge is analogous to Fola's examination of the past initiated by the Ceremony of Souls in George Lamming's *Season of Adventure* (39-46). Both Fola and Makak come to accept past terrors and re-enter present time free from the constraints of the past.

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming in discussing the role of the living in the Ceremony of Souls writes:

The living demand to hear whether there is any forgiveness, for redemption; whether, in fact, there may be any guide which may help them towards reforming their present conditions. . . . They are interested in their future. (9-10)

Walcott and Lamming are transposing Makak and Fola into the future, a future which offers redemption. This redemption is possible when Africa finds its inevitable location at the center of Caribbean history. The apparition, the bringer of the message is executed, but the message sur-

vives. It is this message which will bring Corporal Lestrade out of his prison life, and will ensure Makak eternal life in “the dream of his people”:

Let me be swallowed up in mist again, and let me be
forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up,
at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal
of smoke, and say, ‘Makak lives where he has always
lived, in the dream of his people.’ (326)

Walcott’s Makak epitomizes the dreams of the dispossessed. In his psyche, the myth of Africa is united with the development of New World history, offering to Caribbean people a new reading of this history which brings with it the knowledge of an actual African past and its informing and inspiring presence in today’s Caribbean society.

Dream on Monkey Mountain shows the convergence of the visions of Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite. In Dream, Walcott brings together Africa and the Caribbean, and in their union offers to Caribbean society a history peopled with old and new world ancestors. In spite of his denials, Walcott liberates the ancient gods and anchors them in Caribbean soil: “I am pounding the faces of gods back into the red clay . . .” (Another Life 69). This is the vision Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite share.

Chapter 3

Language as Salvation

I
must be given words to shape my name
to the syllables of trees

I must be given words to refashion futures
like a healer's hand.

(Brathwaite "Negus" The Arrivants)

Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott, as inheritors of the legacies of slavery and colonization, share a passion and a commitment to change. Each poet wants to remake Caribbean society and, through the transformative power of language, attack the stereotypes and lies embedded in the society as a result of its historical confrontation with Europe. Their determination to perform this task is a result of their rootedness in a vernacular tradition which is responsible for each poet's concern with remembering his ancestry. As a result, both poets are engaged in recreating self and world. Brathwaite and Walcott appropriate the language of the colonizer and transform it by incorporating into the language the manifestations of the African experience in the New World. They share a revolutionary tendency to correct the distortions of history, and in the process of correction bring life to this new identity of the Caribbean self and community which they are engaged in rewriting.

While each poet is engaged in the business of repossessing the language, each one views his relationship to his task differently. Derek Walcott was once asked: "Do you think there is an aesthetic reconciliation or synthesis of [your] British education and [the] Caribbean landscape?" His reply was: "Are you saying how do you relate Wordsworth's poetry to coconut trees?" (Callaloo 2:1, Winter 1988: 83). Clearly, the implication here is that the Caribbean poet may attempt to transform himself into something he is not by adopting the language trappings of the

colonizer, to become, in other words, a British poet in black face. But the Caribbean experience is a peculiar one, and both Walcott and Brathwaite stretch and bend language so that it reflects the unique history and reality of the Caribbean experience. It is the history of the inhumanity and degradation of slavery, the alienating experience of plantation existence and the colonial effort to erase all sense of identity and selfhood. It is also the reality of the power and memory of Africa. It is an attempt to move out of the pain of self negation and dispossession and into a new world of affirmation, a visionary world. For Walcott, the first step in this movement toward regeneration is the recognition of the humiliation of his people. This is the "first act of recovery." Because of its colonial past, the Caribbean world has been plagued by differences of race and class, and its people have internalized the worthlessness of things indigenous. According to Walcott, Literature is a response to this "doctrine of humiliation" (Walcott lecture, Medgar Evers Black Writers Conference 26 March, 1988). Literature, then, becomes an act of subversion in order to serve as the instrument of regeneration in the struggle for the liberation of a people. Walcott adopts the mantle of the individual leader/visionary, and his role becomes that of the educator of the public consciousness.

On the other hand, Brathwaite submerges the individual self, and his voice expresses the general realities shared by the community. Through his voice the pains and possibilities of his community, in present time, are distilled and are added to the archives of ancestral memory. Brathwaite adopts the mask of the African griot, the seer who is the repository of a people's wisdom, culture and vision. He is the memory and the consciousness of the race, and he speaks in language which draws its power from its African legacy and its New World transformations. Brathwaite describes this language as "Nation Language":

[It is] the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English: but it is often English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time.

(History of the Voice 13)

Brathwaite's definition of "Nation Language" can easily be applied to the language of his poetry. It is a gathering together of forces, African and Caribbean to sing of survival, to howl of pain, and to shout of liberation. Out of this clash of sounds will emerge the songs of freedom, freedom of self, community and nation. In the language of the visionary world of his poetry, Brathwaite moves beyond the retelling of past and present pain to create a world of possibility for Caribbean people and society. This is the poet's sacred mission; it is diametrically opposed to society's insistence on the worship of the present and the material, and the numbing effect of erasing the past from memory.

This has been the plight of Blacks ever since their forced and torturous exodus from Africa. Melvin Dixon, in discussing the Negritude movement, celebrates the resulting "birth" of literatures in the African diaspora:

[These literatures] although established along lines of national language and culture, created an arena where blacks throughout the world could articulate their presence and condition. Each was a separate river remembering its source; each created a significant flow of theme and political passion ever circling the ancestral landscape, moving outward for independence and transformation of traditional oral forms of expression, and returning for renewal, regeneration, reunion with the past made present through language. (26)

This is the power and the passion of Brathwaite's symbolic use of language. He returns to an African source for inspiration, "renewal," "regeneration" and "reunion with the past." In the process he creates a Caribbean identity which is a unique merger of the intuitive African experience and the reality of the Caribbean existence. In the world of his poetry, he creates spiritual and physical landscapes which offer solace and inspiration, and he peoples these landscapes with human and spiritual presences, presences which become symbols of endurance and survival for the Caribbean community. These conscious creations are the poet's antidotes to the pain of past and present history, and a source of new life and identity.

In “New World A-Comin’” the lyrical and physical landscapes confront each other. The journey to slavery’s plantations has left the poet’s people crying for help:

O who now will help
us, help-
less, horse-
less, leader-
less, no
hope, . . . (The Arrivants 10)

Brathwaite, unlike Walcott, firmly identifies with a communal body. He places himself at the center of both celebration and pain. Here, the pain is immediate and present and is reinforced by the visual display of the poet’s words on the page. Brathwaite is a creative user of language and the written word. The physical wrenching apart of words mirrors the trauma of a people’s separation from their homeland. It is this homeland that Brathwaite attempts to maintain in the memory of the New World inhabitants. But it is a homeland transformed by the New World experience. Paule Marshall, in discussing the language of Barbadian immigrants in America, shows how its power to transform and to be therapeutic becomes a coat-of-armor offering protection against the strangeness and the isolation of existence in a new country. She quotes the words of Czeslaw Milosz, the emigré Polish writer: “Language is the only homeland” (“From the Poets in the Kitchen” 7). Brathwaite, too, is concerned with “language as homeland,” a homeland reflecting both the African and the Caribbean experiences and a homeland which symbolizes the preservation of the region’s culture and identity. Brathwaite writes the African homeland into Caribbean history. He creates a place which can fire the imagination of the dispossessed:

This sacred lake
is the soul
of the world;
winds whirl
born in the soul
of this dark water’s world.

(“Chad” The Arrivants 105)

For the dispossessed, the recreation of a sacred place, a place of mystery, heightens the sense of longing and loss; but the poet insists that the place of Africa must be inscribed upon the collective memory. Its splendors must be remembered: “[the] brilliance where our mosques / mock ignorance, mock pride, / burn in the crackled blaze of time, . . .” (“Timbuctu” The Arrivants 106).

The word, “Africa” in Brathwaite’s poetry is transformed into a multi-dimensional symbol, but this symbol is always connected to the Caribbean experience and the poet prays that

... [his] children’s eyes
will learn

not green alone
not Africa alone
not dark alone
not fear
alone
but Cortez
and Drake
Magellan
and that Ferdinand
the sailor
who pierced the salt seas to this land.

(“Tom” The Arrivants 16)

Africa is the epitome of all Old World experiences, both the glory and the pain. At the same time, the poet insists upon recognizing the power of the New World experience. Brathwaite blends the old and the new worlds. He insists upon hearing the voices of his past, recognizes their power to preserve a culture under attack and their ability to heal the wounds in the psyche of the colonized. These themes, poetic intentions and the poet’s prescriptive use of language come together in a remarkable way in the companion pieces, “Wake” and “Negus” (The Arrivants 208 & 222).

A wake is a mourning ritual. Friends and relatives of the dead person stay awake throughout the night before the deceased is buried. They sing songs both sacred and secular and tell jokes

and stories mostly about the life of the dead person. It is a ritual of consolation for the alleviation of grief. It brings the community in touch not only with the spirit of the recently dead, but also with the ancestral spirits. Brathwaite's "Wake" honors the African ancestors and their Caribbean descendants, and the poet prays for the power of "words" to initiate change. The landscape of the Caribbean is arid: "... the land is unbearably dry / ... the hedges are dusty, ... the tubes of the cane are dry / let there be rain" (209). Current desolation is linked to the desolation of the original journey, and the "ship / house on the water" is not only the vehicle transporting the recent dead, it is also the slave ship transporting Africans to the New World.

The poet appeals to all the ancestors, and the "ninth night" ceremony of the dead is used to intensify the appeal:

bless me with shadows
white calico of mutters;
mother me with words,
gems, spoken talismans of your broken tongue. (210)

He asks for blessings from his "Ibo" ancestor whose "broken tongue" will offer nurture and healing and will move the poet out of his dark world of pain and despair into a new world of creativity. The process is a searing one mirroring the metaphysical need for creation out of destruction: "kill, destroy, restore me" (210). He will be restored by the miraculous power of the ancestral word. At this crucial moment on the threshold of his deliverance, he cries out to Attibon Legba: "Ouvri bayi pou' moi," open the gate for me (211). Here, Brathwaite brings together the spiritual and physical worlds, for Legba is the link between the supernatural and the real.

But the union he craves is not easily achieved for the island world lacks substance; the gods are dormant. The word has been shattered into "syllables" and has been transformed from an agent of creation into an agent of destruction. The poet is "stoned with syllables" (212). At the end of "Wake," there is no rest. The struggle continues:

We seek we seek
but find no one to speak

the words to save us;

search

there is no destination;

our prayers reach

no common sun. (212-213)

“Negus” begins with the poet’s statement concerning the impotence of the “word” with which “Wake” ends. For the poet, words are the transmitters of memory; and, if they are not revived and brought into being, the connections to the past, to history and culture will be lost. This is the precise intention of the colonizer, to relegate the colonized to a state of cultural oblivion. Albert Memmi expresses it this way: “The colonized seems condemned to lose his memory” (102). This is the collective memory of the race, its culture and institutions extending through time. The “word” that Brathwaite constantly invokes is the instrument of preservation and continuity.

“Negus,” according to Gordon Rohlehr, “was one of Haile Selassie’s titles which Rastafarians freely employ as a substitute for Jesus” (*Pathfinder* 262). Brathwaite recasts the Christian God to fit the Caribbean landscape. However, this is the God he ultimately rejects as he calls upon Legba, the link between the gods and humans. The poem is divided into two parts, the negation and the affirmation. Looking at the historical present, the poet laments the loss of the “word”:

it is not

it is not

it is not enough

it is not enough to be free

of the whips, principalities and powers

where is your kingdom of the Word? (222)

By “word” the poet means a certain morality, a certain truth, a recreation, in present time, of a period when words were the sacred bond uniting the individual to the community and through which the identity of both individual and community were expressed. In the poem’s first section, the negation, there is a certain hesitation. The poet focusses on one word and repeats it; then, he adds words transforming the initial word into a phrase and repeats the phrase: “it / it / it / it is not /

it is not / it is not enough.” The repetition of word is also the repetition of sound, for behind the words the African drums are beating. This results in a certain unity of creation and action. The poet names the wrongs and limitations of his society and invokes the power of the word to initiate changes. Freedom is not enough if society undergoes no apocalyptic change. In fact, the poet identifies the unacceptable: the worship of material possessions, the lack of fear of environmental and natural disasters. This leads to a disrespect of gods and custom and the freedom to “bulldoze god’s squatters from their tunes, from their relics / from their tombs of drums” (223). In other words, what the poet speaks out against is the wanton separation of a people from their sources of identity; for it is by returning to these sources, by recalling ancestral customs that the Caribbean world will identify its values, discover its identity and find its salvation.

Brathwaite’s emphasis on values and the ethics and morality of freedom is critical to his purpose of identity formation. Wa Thiong’O Ngugi makes this connection between values, language and identity:

Values are the basis of a people’s identity, their
sense of particularity as members of the human race.
All this is carried by language. Language as culture
is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience
in history. (*Decolonizing the Mind* 1986)

To Brathwaite, language is the symbol of a people’s “sense of particularity.” He uses language to maintain this “particularity” and to recognize and give validity to the national experience.

In the second movement of the poem, the affirmation, the poet, as the messenger of culture and history, invokes the power of the word: “I must be given words to shape my name / to the syllables of trees / I / must be given words to refashion futures / like a healer’s hand” (223-224).

The poet is healer, savior and creator. As creator, he remakes the world:

I
must be given words so that the bees
in my blood’s buzzing brain of memory

will make sky, will make heaven,

the heaven open to the thunder-stone and the volcano and the
unfolding land. (224)

Brathwaite is bringing into existence a new world, but in order to do this, he must name the memories in his “buzzing brain,” a brain teeming with relics of his Old World experiences. The instrument of creation is the “word” which the poet associates with light and sound and matter. It is the opposite of silence and the void. It is significant that at this point the poet becomes a supplicant of Legba; and, as he has already done in “Wake,” he prays to Legba to open the gates for him. These are the gates connecting the gods and mortals:

Att

Att

Attibon

Attibon Legba

Attibon Legba

Ouvri bayi pou' moi

Ouvri bayi pou' moi... (224)

These words of intercession, the invocation at the beginning of a vodoun ceremony, rise from the depths of the soul and are appropriately rendered in vernacular speech, in Haitian creole.

In this poem of renunciation and the affirmation of faith, it is fitting that Brathwaite invokes Legba at the moment of annihilation and creation; for he is the god who is there in the beginning of the world; he continues to be “at the threshold of every decision and offers the options that decide our future” (Edwards and Mason 8). In this New World, the poet as the messenger of Legba will renounce the state of being “semicolon” and “semicolony” and give voice to wholeness. Anne Walmsley objects to Brathwaite’s use of the words “semicolon” and “semicolony.” She says that they are “an annoying, not an illuminating play on words” (“Dimensions of Song” 163). But the poet’s words capture exactly the Caribbean’s half and half condition, half colonized and half free, half Caribbean and half European. The poet will “raze” or eliminate the dualities, “blind” the God of Europe and pray to Legba for wisdom and sight/insight:

find me the rage
 and I will raze the colony
 fill me with words
 and I will blind your God. (224)

His words will be weapons for the initiation of change. After the destruction of colonial ways, the poet must necessarily rebuild his society, he must rename it.

To Filoteo Samaniego “naming becomes not only the initial act but also the obligatory road of poetry” (97). This process of “naming” is also a way of perceiving, of investing the object with meaning. As Brathwaite puts it: “What is a word / to the eye? / Meaning” (“Naming” The Arrivants 60). Named, the object has a life of its own:

The tree must be named.
 This gives it fruit
 issues its juices. (218).

The poet returns to an edenic place as if to carve out a new landscape which would offer promise and peace. The physical landscape comes alive; there is a sense of anticipation as the natural world awaits renewal:

So the eye waits,
 the sun’s gold weight
 lightens

 rain remakes trees
 leaves brighten the colour
 the drying fish flies

 in the pool. (218)

The “eye” of the poet benefits from this awakening in nature and his creative power, initially stifled, begins to soar, finding its inspiration in the “pool” of memory.

The preservation of memory, to the poet, is a sacred female task, and it is through the collective wisdom of the women that the culture will be preserved and the race saved. Brathwaite’s

women are survivors. They celebrate the ways and wisdom of the folk: “Eveie, chile? / You tek dat Miraculous Bush / fuh de trouble you tell me about” (“The Dust” The Arrivants 62)? In this world of personal and community deprivation, these women form a circle of protection. They examine the physical and spiritual devastation around them, and by giving voice to these realities hope to transcend them, by finding solace, if not solution in the female collective. These women discuss “How Darrington Mule? / He still sicky-sicky” (64). Not only are the animals sick, but the vegetables “swibble up” (64). These are viewed as omens and symbols of the general sickness of the society and a manifestation of godly displeasure: “Pastor / say las’ night in the Chapel / that the Writin’ Han’ pun the Wall” (65). To further illustrate the possibility of imminent destruction, one of the women, Olive, retells a story from the past, a story told to her by her grandmother. This is the narrative of a volcano’s eruption in a neighboring island and the resulting disaster for the inhabitants of the region.

One woman’s act of narration brings together past and present and expands to become a meditation on the cyclical nature of pain and a search for meaning:

An’ then suddenly so
widdout rhyme
widdout reason

you crops start to die
you cant’ even see the sun in the sky; (68)

But the instinct for survival is strong and “God sen’ ev’ry month / a new moon” (68). Olive epitomizes female strength and power and the always present female voice which may go underground in times of disaster but always emerges stronger and more powerful:

praise God that yuh body
int turmin’ to stone,

an’ that you bubbies still big;
that you got a good
voice that can shout

for heaven to hear

you: . . . (68)

Speaking for all women, Olive thanks God for life, sexuality and the power of words to write the past into present history.

“Dust,” the poem, becomes for Brathwaite a powerful symbol of continuity and the unity of community. The word “dust” in the poem is not only the volcanic ash of Olive’s grandmother’s story, but also the dust of Africa as it moves from the continent to the Caribbean. Brathwaite refuses to acknowledge any “separation between Africa and the Caribbean.” He tells the story of living in St. Lucia and looking out on the Morns in December, January and February and seeing a haze in the sky. According to the poet, the haze enveloping the Caribbean “was really the harmattan dust from the Sahara blowing across the Atlantic.” The poet describes this as “geo-psychic history”:

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

(“History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self” 29-30)

It is this intuitive history, with its deep connections to Africa and the African experience, that the poet preserves through the line of women, women who remember the past and tell the stories of their grandmothers. It is the recording of this history, through the reality of the word and its assimilation into the psychic consciousness of Caribbean people, that will aid in the process of recovery.

Language, for the poet, is not only a symbol of the assimilation and preservation of the cultural past, it is also an instrument of rebellion and revolution. Brathwaite sings the song of rebellion and revolution in the speech of his people. The destruction of society and relationships is

tearing apart the fabric of present Caribbean society. In “Manchile” (Third World Poems 32), Brathwaite tells the story of relationships destroyed or perverted. Young girls are raped: “the girl raped comin’ home from school / . . . the girl raped in her home, in her own bed / . . .” (32). The landscape of the poem is unremittingly desolate. An act of love becomes a mechanical exercise as the harshness of the public world intrudes upon the private world:

. . . she is locked still in her island
 your key will click, responsive to its prick
 of hear; the gear will shift, its metal tendons
 scraping,
 wheels tearing the gravel as darkness explodes in the
 engine,

 an de long track a night tick tickin tickin
 machine pedal clatterin on
 and de clock stuck at 1.35 1.35 1.35 1.35 (33)

Surrounded by the metallic and the mechanical, the poet captures the woman’s moment of frozen impotence. Time stops as she journeys back to a past no less brutal, with relationships just as degrading:

an de man say mek i go wid im
 and a can barely stan to look pan im . . . (34)

Here the recognition of pain is cathartic, but there is no active call to revolution. The poem ends on the woman’s plaintive cry: “. . . i sitin down here wid dis fine toot’ comb / trying to scratch out de lies dat a tell” (34).

In “Manchile” Brathwaite’s female persona gives voice to the pain in her personal life. “Springblade” expands to include the narration of communal pain and a call for change and action: “But there is goin’ to be a revolution” (34). There is no doubt or hesitation; this is a statement of fact. By naming it the poet gives life to the concept of revolution. As Brathwaite says, “the word (nommo or name) is held to contain secret, power” (“The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” 236). It is this power which he taps in order to present the stark reality of oppressive conditions in

the Caribbean, and, in this way, to initiate change. In the world of this poem, the environment is harsh and unrelenting:

the garbage knows it
festering the silver sidewalks
providing carrion for the crows and pigs
the mountains have lost their green battle of innocence
invaded by cut stone and crooks (34)

The poet is pained by the absence of heroes: Cuffy, Tacky, Bogle and Garvey. Even the women of the Caribbean whom he associates with endurance, bravery and the continuity of the race are beaten down: "The milk blackens in the bread / of breasts, in the raisin of the nipple" (35). Sexuality is perverted and lovemaking becomes a mechanical and deadening enterprise:

the mattress with its history of sweat, of some-
times sweetest slavery: in-
cinerated cemeteries of sperm . . . (36)

Women become prostitutes in order to survive in this wasteland. But finally, the poet must sing of endurance, perseverance and hope in the form of the "hope of revolution." Brathwaite's voice as the vehicle of revolution calls to mind the Guyanese poet, Martin Carter and his poem "Words." Words for Carter work in almost the same way; they bring revolution into being and in this sense they are precious transmitter's of a nation and a people's historical and contemporary reality:

These poet words, nuggets no jeweller sells
across the counter of the world's confusion
but far and near, internal or external
burning the agony of the earth's complaint.

(Selected Poems 91)

Carter, perhaps because of his experiences in the politically turbulent and riot-torn Guyana of the fifties and the sixties, and particularly his imprisonment, is personally aware of the poet's role as a revolutionary who speaks out of the reality of his own harrowing experiences. It is this sense of urgency and commitment that both Carter and Brathwaite share: "Who will unlock must first himself be locked / who will be locked must first himself unlock" (Carter SP 91). In a

world of corruption, the poet is the visionary and the bearer of truth.

“Irie” is the title Brathwaite gives to the final section of the collection, Third World Poems. The poems in this section reflect the poet’s conscious imposition of hope over despair. Ranging from the freneticism of “Guns” and “Fever” to the powerfully evocative world of “Shango” and the painful chronicle of the revolutionary blown to bits in “Poem for Walter Rodney,” Brathwaite rewrites the past by writing his people and his region into history. By naming this section “Irie,” the poet captures the ambivalence of life in the region. The word “irie” to a rastafarian is “an ultimate positive.” It means that all is well in his world; it is tantamount to heaven or a strongly uplifting spiritual feeling” (Nicholas 39). The idyllic beauty of the islands and the endless vision of the Caribbean sea are a stark contrast to the simmering passion of the poverty and oppression of the region’s masses.

“Guns” becomes an appeal to Ogun, the god of war and metal. The poem not only reflects the ambivalence of a Caribbean existence, it also addresses the dual nature of the god Ogun to whom the poem appeals. The poet literally writes the god into his text and world: “and the cannibal eyes of the fiery mourners / are beautiful beautiful beautiful beautiful / o gun shot stigmata of song” (TWP 49). The gun shot, the mark of Ogun is branded into the region’s history. In Flash of the Spirit, Robert Farris Thompson quotes the following praise-chant for Ogun:

Hoe is the child of Ogun
Axe is the child of Ogun
Gun is the child of Ogun

Ogun, salute of iron on stone
The blacksmith of all heaven. (53)

These are the aspects of Ogun that the poet evokes. The hoe and axe are instruments of survival. They clear the land and aid cultivation. The gun is a symbol of protection as well as destruction.

But after the destruction there is hope, and the poet calls upon Shango, the god of thunder and lightning: “There is new breath here” (Shango” TWP 49). In the first movement of this poem a new world is created. Initially, the poet focusses on sounds and intuitively senses the beauty of this new world: “hah / there is a sound of sparrows / ... ah / there is wind here” (50). Africa is

written into the world at the supreme moment of creation:

i take you love at last my love
my night my dream my Africa

softly of cheek now
sweat of pillow, thigh of thorn
tender to your fire

we make with salt this moisture
vision
we make from vision: black and bone and sound

However, creation is incomplete without the gift of words, words that identify and bring objects into existence:

listen
his vowels taste of wood

of cedar lignum vitae phalanx
those gutturals are his own (50-51)

With the gift of language comes the power to initiate change.

While Shango is the presiding deity in the poem, the New World god, Damballa Wedo hovers over the text's first movement. Damballa is "identified with the rainbow and is symbolized as a snake," and in the Caribbean he is "associated with rainfall, earth-water and fertility (Brathwaite "Gods of the Middle Passage" 43). The first movement's emphasis on creativity, fertility and possibility is an apt prelude to the poem's second movement where the poet ranges back in time in an attempt to understand the past: "the statue of liberty's never been born / manhattan is an island where cows cruise on flowers" (51-52). In these worlds of the past and the present, the old and the new, Africa and the Caribbean, it is Shango who is the ordering principle. According to Brathwaite, Shango is the "Pan African god of thunder, lightning, electricity and its energy, sound systems, the locomotive engine and its music" (X/Self 130). Shango brings creation

into being and the experiences of the New World, honed in time, are ritualized and ordered into music:

after so many twists
 after so many journeys
 after so many changes

bop hard bop soul bop funk
 reggae new thing soul rock shank
 bunk johnson is ridden again

Brathwaite utilizes repetition to establish sound. His belief in the power of the word is linked to the reality and substance the word achieves when it comes into being through the reality of the spoken word, its sound. The poet's concern with sound, the energy generated in its creation, and the naming of sound in music and words is directly linked to his search for origins and beginnings. His journey to the heart of the ancestral experience, and the recapturing of this experience in language which grasps the very essence of the experience, thus bringing it into reality, is Brathwaite's special gift.

Brathwaite relentlessly pursues his appointed task of naming the African experience in the New World and thus offering to its inhabitants both place and identity. He is musician, writer and recorder of history:

with this reed i make music
 with this pen i remember the word
 with these lips i can remember the beginning of the
 world ("Kingston in the kingdom of this world" 53)

In this way, the poet is more than the creator of words; he is the creator of worlds as well and is analogous to God: "... i suffer the little children / i remember the lilies of the field" (53). He has expanded the poetic self to include godlike powers of creation in an attempt to stamp his words upon the world and to generate fundamental changes in community and society. But, this is no easy task, for the environment is hostile and alien and the poet is "reduced / to a bundle of rags / a broken stick" (54). The poet's staff of knowledge is "broken;" his music is silenced. There is a confronta-

tion between poetic intention and the pull of the past:

your authority is these chains that strangle my wrists
 your authority is the red whip that circles my head
 your authority is the white eye of interrogator's
 terror: (55)

The poet's wrist must be untied. He must be free to reenter the past and move beyond it. He cannot remain frozen by its iniquities. He must move beyond "the dreadness of the avalanches of unjudgement" (55) and give voice to possibility and hope. The poet is well aware of this, and the landscape of "Kingston in the kingdom of this world" becomes the battleground upon which the forces of destruction and the forces of creation struggle for supremacy. At the end of the poem there is no clear victory or defeat. The poet remains in a state of anticipation awaiting the return of his poetic voice. This, for Brathwaite, is firmly linked to the community of which he is a vital part. This community is going to be the source of his rebirth and inspiration:

awaiting the water of sunlight
 awaiting the lilies to spring up out of the iron
 awaiting your eyes o my little children (56)

Out of the "iron" existence of Kingston, the reduction of the poetic self to a "driven rag" will come the renewal of soul in community. The stifling atmosphere of unyielding metal will eventually give way to hope as the poet regains his creative spirit and can once more write his people and community into a present of possibility.

The sense of urgency increases in "Fever." The land anticipates rebirth; senses are alive: "Everywhere there were lips: bubble and bud . . . / everywhere there were eyes . . ." (60). The community is waiting for this poet/savior. Brathwaite carefully prepares for this moment of reconnection. As the persona/poet descends from the visionary world to enter the real world of pain, Brathwaite creates, in the poem, a center celebrating this sacred union of poet and community:

everywhere there were eyes: dressing me in robes
 placing sandals under my feet: praising me

 everywhere there were hands: building the temple

i was a door opening

i was a window: looking onto a tree

and there was a landslide of memories ("Fever" 60)

At this sacred spot, the meeting place of poet and people, the past is recaptured in a "landslide of memories." As the poet journeys closer and closer to present time, he chronicles his people's journey through time. They had lost the drum and the dance. Some had died "crossing;" others had discovered other forms of escape: "rum" and "the long drag of the thighs of their women." In view of the present conditions of hopelessness and the seeming failure of past freedom fighters, the djukas and the maroons, the poet moves to remedy the situation, to offer salvation. The djukas of Surinam, like the maroons, were fearless fighters and preservers of the African way of life. The ancestors of the Djukas were slaves who fled the plantations of "coastal Surinam" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After prolonged fighting in the 1760's, they signed peace treaties with the Dutch government (Price 293). In moving towards salvation, it is not surprising that Brathwaite recalls these freedom fighters of the past. He invokes them as symbols of struggle and possibility, even as he carves out his own path to salvation. He "move[s] down into the old watercourses" searching for the wisdom of the past and the vision of the ancestors. But, Brathwaite always comes back to present realities, and to reinforce the urgency of current time, he lists the daily concerns of ordinary people: bills must be paid; food is expensive; a roof destroyed in the last hurricane must be replaced. Finally, after listing these urgent and pressing matters, the poet, almost as an afterthought, and, in nation language, utters the poem's final statement: "an i mussn't forget that i ax the teacher to stop in and see / me tomorrow" (62).

This deliberate use of nation language is Brathwaite's way of exerting control of place and space. In his poetic world as he moves between the spaces and places of the colonizer and the colonized, he creates a place where it is possible for his people to transcend physical and mental battering, and continue with the threads of their lives. This is possible because the poet stores and preserves the memory of the race and restores this memory through the medium of the language of the people. Thus, the poet is not only seer and visionary; he is also political activist, and language becomes a tool as he attempts to initiate political change. Brathwaite's "poem for Walter Rodney"

is a fine example of the unity of politics and language.

In this poem Brathwaite celebrates the life and work of Walter Rodney, the Guyanese historian/socialist/revolutionary, even as he speaks out against the destructive political forces alive and flourishing in the region, forces responsible for Rodney's violent death. The manner of Rodney's death--he was "blown into fragments"--is also a symbol of the region's social and political disintegration. His life and work are eternalized in Brathwaite's poem; but this is no simple personal tribute. The violence of the poet's language mirrors the violence present in the desolate political landscape. He utters a desperate cry of rebellion: "POR CYAAAAN TEK NO MOORE" (64). But at this moment of desperation and rebellion, the rebel leader is destroyed:

the well
of flame drilling aeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee through your
flesh
drrrrrrraaatat drrrrraataaatat drrraataaatat tat
tat tat taataaaaat (63)

The visual and auditory impact is striking. Here, the cacophonous combination of consonant and vowel sounds mirrors the real sense of discord and violent disintegration present in the society at that time. The sounds of destruction and the inhuman, mechanical movement of the flame as it consumes the body focusses on the impersonal nature of organized violence. Rodney is eliminated physically, but the poet carves his memory into history. The heroism of his life and death becomes a motivational force empowering the region's dispossessed:

so that each man on his cramped restless island
on his backdam of land in forest clearing by the
broeken river
where berbice struggles against slushy ground
takes up his bed and walks

in the power and the reggae of his soul/stice
from the crippled brambled pathways of his vision
to the certain limpen knowledge of his nam (67)

Man, having endured the extremes of oppression, will survive. Here the poet plays on the words solstice/"soul/stice." When pushed to the extreme limits of endurance, strength comes from the power of the spirit of the people. His vision, once "crippled," will expand in the awareness of his "nam," the essence of his existence, and as Brathwaite puts it, "the core of [his] culture" ("Gods of the Middle Passage" 18).

In this poem of darkness, violence and the elimination of a life, the poet ultimately transforms death into new life: "he was cut down plantation cane because he dared to / grow and growing/green . . . because his bridge from man to men meant doom to / prisons of a world we never made" (68). Rodney's mission was to educate his people and to eliminate the "prisons" of oppression and poverty. His death remains a reminder of the absolute power of oppressive governments to create, physically, the political climate they desire and want to maintain. In this drive for control citizens are dispensable and human lives worthless. As Martin Carter puts it: "Men murder men, as men must murder men, / to build their shining governments of the damned" ("After One Year" *Selected Poems* 83). But Brathwaite, even as he narrates the direness of the situation, carves the message of Rodney into the public consciousness. In his death there is constant renewal, for the "dreadren" will disseminate his message: "but there are stars that burn that murders do not know / soft diamonds behind the blown to bits" (68). Rodney's memory is precious, and the poet imbues it with the fragile yet durable creations of the natural world.

"Crab," the final poem in this section, is Brathwaite's testament to the endurance of his art. The crab is a symbol of the artist at work. The crab, emerging from the depths of his native sea and sand inscribes his poem on the beach: "and alone, my hand following / the crab's poem, stalked / the inheriting ghosts" (70). Like the crab, the poet must collect the history of his people, their glories and pain. In the poet's words these experiences are transformed into sources of inspiration for the community of the present. His words have the power to heal and make whole: "the crab knows it all / kernel of grit / knowledge of the eaten edges of disaster / . . . crustaceous epitaph" (72). The poet, like the crab, memorializes the region's past; however, his intention is to move beyond veneration of the past. The past must be used as the foundation upon which the new history of the region is going to be built. This is no simple task. According to Rohlehr, "it involves . . . erecting spirit on a foundation of encrusted materialism, rediscovering or recreating the lost idea of

the holy" ("Out of the Skeleton" 27). This is the task that Brathwaite has set himself.

Like Brathwaite, Walcott fights the battle against the Caribbean's worship of material gods, and he too attempts to create a Caribbean whose citizens have a definite sense of self and place. But, unlike Brathwaite, whose imaginative ingenuity creates in the reader a direct involvement in the ensuing exploration of emotion and situation, Walcott achieves a certain distancing from which he evaluates the ways of his region and people as he writes them into history. Brathwaite, by repeatedly conjuring up the landscapes of psychic and physical pain, forces these realities upon the reader's consciousness. Walcott does not delve into the heart of the community and become enveloped in its pain in quite the same way Brathwaite does. Brathwaite's world is dominated by community while Walcott's world is dominated by self. Walcott constantly attempts to move beyond the communal world, the world of the senses and into the world of abstraction and ideas. It is through language that this movement will be achieved, and Walcott is fully aware of its redemptive qualities. To him, "language is a vocation," and its power lies in its ability to move "beyond race, politics and time" (Walcott on Thirteen Live Feb. 1991). Yet, the region's awful history always brings him back to earth. He engages himself in reordering this history and in this role as leader/visionary constructs a past utilizing his intellect and art to redeem the inherited evils of the region.

Out of the landscape of the region emerges the figure of the "castaway," the persona of one of Walcott's earlier poems. Here, castaway and poet exist apart from society in a world of apparent nothingness: "A net inches across nothing. / Nothing: the rage with which the sandfly's head is filled" (The Castaway 9). The poet meditates upon the inevitability of death and the miracle of rebirth, and is led to a consideration of his role as creator and maker and remaker of worlds: "I make thunder split." As he becomes fully aware of his creative powers, he resolves to "abandon dead metaphors," symbols of the absence of a vibrant creative life. He dedicates his own life to correcting the "gospel." The "gospel" here is the colonizer's negative message of the region's lack of creativity and promise; thus, the region's future is stifled by past history: "That green wine bottle's gospel choked with sand, / Labelled, a wrecked ship, / Clenched seawood nailed and white as a man's hand" (10).

As poet/creator, and speaking in his public voice, Walcott is willing to be sacrificed for the

benefit of the public sensibility; for this clearly links him to divinity. But his private voice is not as strident, and the internal voice of the poet speaks of hesitations and divisions. He is “schizophrenic, wrenched by two styles” (“Codicil” The Castaway 61). Walcott attributes this to a certain “ambiguity of language.” By this he means the opposition between the “language of authority” and the “dialect of rebellion” (Writers and Company CBC Toronto n.d.) While claiming that he never felt repressed by language, Walcott is very much aware of the relationship between language and the circumscribed world in which he lives, and the ways in which living in this peculiar world informs the language of his daily existence: “To change your language you must change your life” (61). But in “Codicil,” there is a strain of despair permeating Walcott’s poetic world. He is disillusioned: “I cannot right old wrongs.” Disillusionment comes not only from the inequities of the past, but also from the servile curryfavoring of the present:

Once I thought love of country was enough,
now, even I chose, there’s no room at the trough.
I watch the best minds root like dogs
for scraps of favour. (61)

Walcott remains on the periphery; yet he is deeply aware of the scramble for connections, power and the literal and spiritual deaths surrounding him. However, he imposes on this bleak landscape some semblance of life and renewal.

The poet is always the source of this renewal and vibrancy. He views the poetic self as the universe in miniature, and in spite of his moments of desolation, he firmly believes that this self is in tune with the timbre of the universe. The poet and the act of creation are one: “Resisting poetry I am becoming a poem” (“Moon” The Gulf 12). In the process of transformation, he gains in wisdom and sanctity and moves towards language:

Slowly my body grows a single sound,
slowly I become
a bell,
an oval, disembodied vowel,
I grow, an owl,
an aureole, white fire. (12)

But the journey toward language is not smooth and the poet is “gripped by demons of inaction.”

These “demons” are slain as the poet struggles to discover “. . . truth, the style past metaphor / that finds its parallels . . . in simple, shining lines, in pages stretched / plain as a bleaching bedsheet . . .” (67). He destroys the inaccuracies and misrepresentations of history and creates new “pages” where he gathers together the lush richness of the Caribbean islands, their folk and folklore, and ever present in the background is the history-laden Caribbean sea.

“Tales Of The Islands,” the sonnet sequence appearing in *In A Green Night*, illustrates the very detailed way in which the poet makes the landscape come alive. Ranging from the beauty of the Doree river, the stone cathedral at Choiseul to Cosimo de Chretien’s boarding house, a relic from an earlier time, to the eccentric Miss Rossignol who “sang to her one dead child,” Walcott places the islands in time and history. He captures both the nostalgia and the pretense of Miss Rossignol’s time, Miss Rossignol who “had white skin / And underneath it, fine, old-fashioned bones,” and “flew to vespers every twilight;” yet, “tipsy as a bottle when she stalked / On stilted legs to fetch the morning milk” (27). Walcott has a snail’s head sensitivity to nuances of feeling and manages to catch the mixture of forced gentility, repression and the awareness of color and class that are all part of the legacy of the region’s encounter with colonization.

However, not all of the characters in “Tales Of The Islands” are in Miss Rossignol’s category. In “Chapter VI” of the sonnet sequence, the persona describes a “fete,” a Caribbean party. Here, Walcott utilizes the language of the islands, the peculiar mixture of standard English and its Caribbean transformation as a part of his attempt at the preservation of the national culture:

Poopa, da’ was a fete! I mean it had
 Free rum free whisky and some fellars bating
 Pan from one of them band in Trinidad
 And everywhere you turn was people eating
 And drinking and don’t name me but I think
 They catch his wife with two tests up the beach
 While he drunk quoting Shelley . . . (28)

Walcott brings into being the lyrical speech of the islands. In this vignette, he presents carefree islanders enjoying the music of the steelband. Yet, the description has touches of unrest. There is

the hint of marital infidelity, and past corruption of African religious practices in the narrative of the child sacrificed by “practitioners of native art.” But the poet distances himself from any form of evil that threatens the serenity of the island vision he is presenting. What is important to Walcott’s persona is the “jump and jive.” However, it is not possible to erase the memory of the past from the consciousness of the present, and the practice of African religions lives on in the Caribbean.

While Kamau Brathwaite integrates the religion of Africa into the life of the Caribbean, Walcott’s involvement with African religious practice and folklore is not as open and public; but it does form an integral part of his poetic world. Generally, his connection to the African experience is overshadowed by critics who focus exclusively on his classical and European influences; but, as Michel Fabre puts it, he does present “the authentic tone of Caribbean folk sensibility” (93). It is not possible for Walcott to achieve this authenticity without recognizing the Caribbean’s rootedness in African custom and ritual. There is an air of mystery and exoticism and a sense of delving into the unknown whenever Walcott hints at the existence of this African ritual world in the Caribbean:

They lead sheep to the rivulet with a drum,
Dancing with absolute natural grace
Remembered from the dark past whence we come. (GN 28)

In this poem Walcott satirizes the attitude of Europeans to African religious practices. A “fete” is put on for a visiting anthropologist, who ultimately views it as “great stuff.”

Walcott’s choice of language is a camouflage protecting the sanctity of the religion. By adopting the mask and language of a public performance, the true meaning of the ritual is protected from alien eyes; for it is the alien eye that desecrates, encouraged by those who are willing to peddle the customs of the ancestors. Walcott is against this view of customs and rituals as commodities: “. . . our art objects are not sacred vessels placed on altars but goods placed on shelves for the tourist. The romantic darkness which they celebrate is thus another treachery, this time perpetuated by the intellectual” (“What the Twilight Says” 8).

Walcott, in his role as artist/creator, views the preservation of island culture as his personal mission. He molds the customs and rituals of the island bringing them to life in the language of the Caribbean, and, in this way, he preserves a culture and shapes a region’s identity. But for this to

happen, the artist must continually go back to his ancestral roots, roots which are the source of these powers of transformation. The evidence of the ancestral connection is always present.

"Pocomania," for example, is a poem that celebrates the Afro-Caribbean religious experience of Pocomania. Pocomania is a religion of possession, and a mixture of African/Caribbean and Christian religious beliefs. It brings together "the Christian Trinity, the Angels and Saints, the Prophets and the Apostles, combining these . . . with the spirits including the ancestral dead . . ." (*Seaga Revival Cults in Jamaica* 4). Walcott captures the vitality of movement as the participants strive toward possession. Edward Seaga, in his discussion of Pocomania, mentions that "at the moment of possession [possessed] individuals are all considered to be located as a group in the spirit world" (8). As they journey through the spirit world, obstacles are met and overcome. Translated into the physical world, this suggests that salvation is only possible in community.

This poem is an example of the possibilities of the Caribbean cauldron. Religious symbols have been transformed into their uniquely Caribbean forms by the merger of African and Christian symbols; for example, "the lamb bleeds on the Coptic cross," and the sacrament of the eucharist meets the feasting table of Pocomania. The rhythm of the verse moves towards a joyous crescendo, a release of pain and the achievement of freedom of the spirit in spite of the recognition of earthly turmoil and deprivation and human physical degeneration:

Lower the wick, and fold the eye!
Anoint the shrivelled limb with oil!
The waters of the moon are dry,
Derision of the body, toil. (35)

Walcott is very much aware of the imperfections existing in Caribbean society both past and present, and it is this awareness that drives him to animate the world of his present reality. But, Walcott's confrontation with the imperfections of Caribbean society is different from Brathwaite's. Brathwaite descends into the alleys and yards of the region's poverty-stricken, gathering together their songs of pain. While Walcott, too, sings the songs of pain, his songs lack the immediacy and raw terror of Brathwaite's depiction of life in the region's Trench Towns and Tiger Bays. However, this is not to question his commitment to the region. He too seeks to alleviate pain, but because of the space he creates between himself as distant artist and the region's poor and oppressed, the pain

described is not as wrenching; it becomes etherealized. Still, Walcott wants to bring to life the Caribbean world as he sees it; therefore, the process of naming, so central to poetry, under Walcott's pen, becomes a process of animation and intellection.

This process is a creative act which gives the poet power over his world. Endowed with this power, he can return to his origins. He can also command the world and change it. "Origins" is Walcott's *cri de cœur* (*Collected Poems* 12). The Greek archipelago and the odyssey cast an imaginative veil over this work. This is the power of the imagination which Walcott explains in this way:

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

("The Muse of History" 25)

Similarly, Walcott sees in the Caribbean archipelago and the African odyssey the same appeal to the imagination that the Greek experience generates. He feels the need to carve the great tragedy and the heroic survival of the African experience into Caribbean life and history.

As "Origins" begins, the persona enters the world "nameless" and without memory. But this position is not acceptable and with a recall of memory "a gap in history closes" (12). The poet remembers the rivers of the African continent. In the African period, the poet is "an infant Moses," but he grows to adulthood and his function in this phase is to "rechristen...trees." What he actually does is to rename the flora and fauna of the New world and mythologize the act of memory:

Now the sibyl I honour, mother of memory,
Bears in her black hand a white frangipani, with berries
of blood,
She gibbers with the cries
Of the Guinean odyssey. (12)

This black sibyl carrying "berries of blood" is going to be an eternal reminder of the journey of the

Africans to the New World. This is the poet's intention. In the third section of the poem, Walcott apostrophizes the Troumassee river in his native island, St. Lucia. The river, a "brown tongue," embodies in its depths, the different stages of the region's history. As a symbol of eternity and timelessness, it constantly preserves the story of the region's tortured past and long-suffering present as it journeys through poverty-stricken villages to the sea.

The sea is a powerful symbol in this poem about beginnings in the New World. The poet searches the "shallows" of the coast to find his "name" and identity, for the transplanted people have learnt the colonizer's "alphabet of alkali and aloe," alkali and aloe symbolizing the bitter, painful process of the acquisition of an alien language. At the same time, the poet himself writes the memory of the Guinean ancestors into history in the language imposed upon the colonized:

We praise those whose backs on hillsides buckles on
the wind
To sow the grain of Guinea in the mouths of the dead,
Who, hurling their bone-needle nets over the cave
mouth,
Harvest ancestral voices from its surf, . . . (16)

Walcott's legitimate obsession with origins permeates the world of his poetry. His poem "Names," dedicated to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, begins in this way:

My race began as the sea began,
with no nouns, and with no horizon,
with pebbles under my tongue,
with a different fix on the stars. (32).

Here, the poet acknowledges the infinite origins of his people, the openness of the New World and the ability of its people to absorb and transform the world around them. At the same time, he also acknowledges, through the metaphor of "pebbles," both the presumed "imperfection" of Caribbean speech and the sense of a new and powerful language waiting to explode. Walcott, here, reiterates Brathwaite's powerful statement in "Pebbles": "You cannot crack a pebble, / it excludes / death" (*The Arrivants* 196). Both poets shatter the myth of the limitations of Caribbean language. Pamela Mordecai, in "The Image of the Pebble in Brathwaite's *Arrivants*," views the pebble as a "powerful

missile which `will slay / giants” (63). The pebble here is the “capsule” which Brathwaite endows with missilic force to shatter misconceptions about Caribbean speech and language. Walcott’s “pebbles” have the same transformative force. In this new space, the possibilities for language are vast and the poet creates a persona, the new Caribbean person who will fill this space, enter history and name the disparate elements of the past:

Have we melted into a mirror,
leaving our souls behind?
The goldsmith from Benares,
the stone-cutter from Canton,
the bronzesmith from Benin. (32).

Naming becomes a necessity for the poet who “began with no memory, / . . . began with no future.” Yet, this is not quite accurate, Walcott himself is always conscious of the layers of memory hidden in the unconscious area of the mind. In this poem, he is both creator and created:

and my race began like the osprey
with that cry,
that terrible vowel,
that I! (33).

This “terrible vowel,” “I” is fraught with the awe and wonder of creation, the power to animate and to make new. In addition, there is a certain feeling of expansiveness as the poet attempts to filter through his imagination the immensity of the New World, the intense beauty of its landscape and the strength of the ancestors, the survivors of the crossing. These are the sources of a Caribbean identity: “Identity really begins with a recognition of the spirit of place, and the network of one’s relationships with those actually present as well as those who still survive in living memory” (Fox 338).

The creation of identity in the Caribbean has been a particularly traumatic experience. It has been a battle between the colonizer and the colonized as Caribbean people fought against the reduction of self and world which their European colonizers always sought to perpetuate. In this battle, the process of naming plays an important part; for naming can function in a number of ways. To the colonizer it is an act of power and control over an alien world that has been conquered. By

naming the elements in this world, the colonizer exerts control over the lives and actions of the colonized and demands their total allegiance. Joyce Jonas describes the process in this way: "A colonized world, people, psyche—even landscape—is a function of the controlling Word: hegemony finds its ultimate strength in language" (*Anancy in the Great House* 130). But the relationship between colonized and colonizer is not without its ambiguities and paradoxes. When faced with the colonizer's insistence upon the right of everything to be a noun, "the African acquiesced, / repeated and changed them" ("Names" 34). The African inhabitants of the New World adopt the persona of the trickster figure, Anancy, and while appearing to conform to the colonizer's use of language and meaning, develop strategies to protect their cultural heritage. Thus, these New World inhabitants impose upon this world their sense of power over the world in which they are forced to exist:

Listen, my children, say:
 moubain: the hogplum,
 cerise: the wild cherry,
 baie-la: the bay,
 with the fresh green voices
 they were once themselves
 in the way the wind bends
 our natural inflections. (34).

Walcott's "pebbles under [the] tongue" have preserved and protected his people's "natural inflections." While Walcott stresses the vibrancy and the music of the language of his people, the voice here is one of command: "listen" and "say." In other words, the poet is the leader of this movement to reclaim the language and renew the self and the universe. By commanding his community to rename the "nouns," the poet envisions a pre-slavery, pre-plantation world where it is possible to be in control of the environment and one's existence. This idealized poetic creation becomes the source of the renewal of self and world that the poet undertakes. The visionary landscape must be prepared for the reception of the word and its magical, transformative powers.

Upon this landscape, Walcott superimposes the beauty of his own land, St. Lucia. He celebrates the villages and the people who endure and survive there. He presents a litany of place names thus eternalizing the "sun-bleached villages "Laborie, Choiseul, Vieuxfort, Dennery"

("Sainte Lucie" 35). All this is a part of the poet's effort to write the region into history. After listing the native fruit of the island, the poet prays: "Come back to me / my language" (36). Walcott is not only praying for the recall of words, words that describe the elements of his homeland, St. Lucia. He is praying for inspiration, vision and the ability to absorb himself totally in the New World landscape; for out of his complete absorption will come the ability to view this world with new eyes. This landscape is the poet's text out of which will burst the songs which can only come into being through the power of his voice. These songs celebrate and preserve the experience of his people in the New World. Walcott truly captures the essence of the land and the beauty and fluidity of movement of his people. A young woman, any young woman, walks down steps "as spring water eases over shelves of rock . . . her smile like the whole country, / her smell, earth, / red-brown earth" (39).

In "Sainte Lucie," there is a unity of people and place which is achieved as a result of the poet's ability to capture the rhythms of his people and their intimate relationship with the land upon which they exist, a relationship bred out of reverence. Because of this deep reverence for the land, and this extends to the entire region, the poet finds the words which shatter the view of the Caribbean as "other," and creates, in poetic language, a place blessed by the poet's vision which bestows a special identity upon the people of the region, an identity completely at variance with the identity bestowed by its colonizers. Walcott claims his St. Lucian identity in the creole of his island: "moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie. / C'est la moi sorti; is there that I born" (39).

This identity that Walcott is so carefully crafting is no where more clearly visible than in Section V of "Sainte Lucie" subtitled "For The Altarpiece of The Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia." At the heart of this poem is a mural painted by Walcott's childhood friend, Dunstan St. Omer. St. Omer, in the mural and Walcott, in the poem celebrate the intrinsic beauty of the St. Lucian folk:

and the massive altarpiece
like a dull mirror, life
repeated there,
the common life outside
and the other life it holds;

a good man made it. (46)

In this hallowed spot “the common life” is sanctified and memorialized. What is interesting is the manner in which the poet balances the beauty and terror of human life. He juxtaposes the fecundity of the valley and its destitution. In this valley “fat with things,” exist “broken mules,” “swollen children,” “dried women” and “their gap-toothed men.” Walcott, like his friend St. Omer, captures the St. Lucian peasants’ blind perseverance in the face of suffering, and in his text, etherealizes them for all time. These are the faces of St. Lucia, “the real faces of angels” portrayed, here, by Walcott with love and compassion. When Walcott portrays the folk of the Caribbean and the region’s haunting beauty, his poetry is most powerful. He captures the essential qualities of his people and region and eternalizes them in the visionary world.

However, Walcott is not always content as he looks back on earlier poetic stances. In Midsummer, a more mature Walcott, burdened by the weight of years, looks back with dissatisfaction at the almost imperial stance of his earlier work:

When I was greener, I strained with a branch
to utter every tongue, language, and life at once.
More skillful now, I’m more dissatisfied.
They never align, nature and your
own nature. Too rapid the lightning’s shorthand,
too patient the sea repeatedly tearing up paper,
too frantic the wind unravelling the same knot,
too slow the stones crawling toward language every night. (19)

With age has come the tempering of the poet’s craft. The earlier enthusiasm, vibrancy and mobility of his “pebble” image, in his later years, have been transformed into weighty and almost immobile “stones.” The movement toward language becomes ponderous and hesitant. Walcott equates history with time, and is therefore ever conscious of its transient nature. The changes he has envisioned are achieved very slowly in time. In addition, there is the conflict between natural creation and human nature as the poet tries to embrace the world of nature in order to preserve it, and thus make it into a vital part of his visionary landscape as a suitable and sympathetic background for the story of his people’s existence in the New World. The task the poet has set himself is

so vast that it is almost overwhelming. He realizes that if language is to be the agent of transformation in the process of rewriting the history of the region, the poet must seize the elemental memory of Africa. This memory is reshaped and informs the rewriting of his own new world history. Such a reshaping acknowledges the pain of the Middle Passage and the dehumanization of colonization. In addition, this reshaping recognizes the unique interaction between the old and new worlds and the way in which it informs the Caribbean's identity. In "The Muse of History," Walcott puts it this way: "Exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another and that was my inheritance and your gift" (27). It is this inheritance that Walcott attempts to preserve.

He comes to realize that preservation implies the recognition of the value of this inheritance; this means acknowledging the reality of race, for as Walcott himself puts it: "a raceless critic is a primate's dream" ("LI" Midsummer 71). The poet embarks upon a restless penitential journey towards a discovery of his place in the world. He must discover the beauty of his New World homeland and break through the barrier of race. He has to write this world into existence, for "the earth drinks / language as precious, depending upon the race" (71). With this realization comes the determination of the poet to create a new world which will be a composite of the ancestral African world and the edenic Caribbean. The poet, in his role as visionary/creator, will eliminate political barriers and rising above the deadening arena of politics will "on dank ground, using a twig for a pen, / write Genesis and watch the Word begin. / Elephants will mill at their water hole to trumpet a / new style" (71). Walcott is very concerned with the concept of the poet as the maker and the bearer of language. Here, in this poem, he officiates at the sacred moment when the "word" comes into being. The poet as word-maker and interpreter has the power to bring his visionary world into being as well as to interpret it for the uninitiated.

In the process of interpreting this world of his creation and focussing on the nature of Caribbean identity, Walcott must inevitably explore the nature of the artist and his relationship to his craft. Very often, to Walcott, this relationship is analogous to that of God and creation:

If my craft is blest;
if this hand is as
accurate, as honest
as their carpenter's

every frame, intent
 on its angles, would
 echo this settlement
 of unpainted wood

as consonants scroll
 off my shaving plane
 in the fragrant Creole
 of their native grain;

from a trestle bench
 they'd curl at my foot,
 C's, R's, with a French

or West African root. ("Cul de Sac Valley" AT 9) The artist as

carpenter shapes the language and brings new words and worlds into being. Walcott's "fragrant Creole" is intended to capture the beauty and delicacy of a new language which is informed by the poet's sensitivity to the physical environment of the New World. The letters achieve their own peculiar grace and a life of their own as they "curl" at the "foot" of the poet/carpenter.

"Cul de Sac Valley" is a poem central to the understanding of the mind and work of Walcott. It is a blend of the poet's extreme sensitivity to the beauty of the natural world around him, his regard for the creole of his island and his determination to establish a Caribbean identity. According to Walcott, "a panel of sunrise / on a hillside shop / gave these stanzas / their stilted shape" (The Arkansas Testament 9). Inspired by this effect of nature, he meditates on the unique language of the Caribbean. The words might be English, but an English that reflects the particular realities of existence in the Caribbean: What you wish / from us will never be, / your words is English, / is a different tree" (10). To maintain the sense of difference, the Caribbean landscape that Walcott describes becomes a closed text to the outside world, a world in which language is used to control and to imprison.

Within this circumscribed landscape, people go about the business of surviving: a young

woman “sits to a supper / of bread and fry-fish,” “shack windows flare” and in the warmth of the tropical night, an “odour of saltfish” permeates the air. Walcott creates a sense of normalcy. Debates about language and superiority may continue, but ultimately what survives is the spirit of the people in the language upon which they have inscribed their own experiences, experiences rooted in the African past and New World present. This is the special quality of the language of the Caribbean: “. . . although the language employed is English, the experience recorded is not, and . . . the new experience may profoundly alter the language and the form employed” (Griffiths, A Double Exile 141).

This combination of English and the creole of the Trinidadian calypso is clearly seen in “The Spoiler’s Return” (The Fortunate Traveller 53). In addition, Walcott utilizes both the rhythm and the conventional rhyme scheme of the calypso:

I sit high on this bridge in Laventille,
watching that city where I left no will
but my own conscience and rum-eaten wit,
and limers passing see me where I sit, . . . (53)

The entire poem is written in the AA, BB pattern. The free flowing movement of the rhyme scheme suggests a certain aimlessness and a concern with the frivolities of life. This sets the scene for Spoiler’s return from hell to critique the society where he had lived. While Stewart Brown insists that Walcott’s Spoiler “is only marginally based on the figure of Spoiler the real calypsonian,” the connections are in fact much deeper (“Spoiler, Walcott’s People’s Patriot” 14). Walcott, like the calypsonian is aware of his responsibility as the conscience of the nation. The audience of the calypsonian, while caught up in the jazzy rhythms of the music and the ambiguities of the language, is always very much aware of the calypsonian’s sense of public responsibility, and his need to sing about societal needs and inadequacies. He must do this in the language of the people. Thus the link between poet and calypsonian is obvious. Keith Warner puts it this way: “The calypsonian as folk poet and repository of the oral tradition shows a keen sense of language pattern and rhythm” (43).

The calypsonian’s facility of language and quick wit, and his ability to extemporize gives him a false sense of power over his world and the people in it. Here, the persona, Spoiler, the calypsonian, like Walcott, the poet, is very much aware of the limitations of this power. Ultimately,

power and the real ability to change the lives of the people remain the purview of the region's politicians. Rohlehr remarks on this contradiction of which calypsonians have always been conscious:

If on one level calypsonians seemed to be over-compensating, through grandiose rhetoric, for their real social and political impotence, it should always be remembered that within their own group they were the most grounded persons who, because of their role as spokesmen, commentators and men-of-words, had developed a subtle consciousness of language.

(Calypso 65)

In "The Spoiler's Return," Walcott experiences deeply this sense of "social and political impotence," and his choice of persona is no accident; for "in calypso after calypso, Spoiler presented himself as the victim of an absurdity over which he had little control" (Warner 113).

On the other hand, Walcott through his persona, Spoiler, attempts to reassert this control using the power of the Trinidadian creole to raise the issue of Caribbean identity so central to the region:

. he send me
back up, not as no bedbug or no flea,
but in this limeskin hat and floccy suit,
to sing what I did always sing: the truth,
Tell Desperadoes when you reach the hill,
I decompose, but I composing still. (53)

On one level, this is a reference to Spoiler's calypso "Bed Bug" in which Spoiler states that after death human a being returns to earth as "an insect or animal." Spoiler chooses to live his second life as a bed bug (Warner 112). Walcott actually quotes from the calypso: "I'm going to bite them young ladies, partner, / like a hotdog or a hamburger" (53). On another level, it is a reference to poetic integrity, commitment and the desire to uphold the "truth." These are difficult tasks, and when faced with the gnawing advance of corruption, it is no wonder Spoiler shouts: "I see these

islands and I feel to bawl / 'area of darkness' with V.S. Nightfall" (54). This is a not so subtle reference to Naipaul's statement concerning the Caribbean's permanent condition of darkness and ignorance as he sees it. Utilizing the invective of the calypsonian, Walcott's Spoiler attacks the politicians:

Is crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel,
and going round and round in the same barrel,
is sharks with shirt-jacs, sharks with well-pressed fins,
ripping we small fry off with razor grins; (54)

Walcott uses the language of the calypso to launch a scathing attack on the politicians of the region. The image of politicians like crabs all trying to get to the top of the same barrel heightens the poet's distaste for the selfish, useless activities of many Caribbean politicians. According to Stewart Brown (13), even Dr. Eric Williams does not escape:

the slime crab's carapace is waterproof
and those with hearing aids turn off the truth,
and their dark glasses let you criticize
your own presumptuous image in their eyes.
Behind dark glasses is just hollow skull,
and black still poor, though black is beautiful. (55)

This is an attack on the rhetoric of the politicians who lure the masses into a false sense of well-being by pushing self-pride, determination and sacrifice for country while the poor continue to exist in poverty, and radicals are eliminated: "All those who promise free and just debate, / then blow up radicals to save the state" (55). This is a reference to the assassination of the Caribbean historian and revolutionary, Walter Rodney.

Spoiler speaks with authority about the "hell" of Trinidad having just returned from hell. The entire poem is Walcott's attack on the evils of the historical past and its manifestations in current time. In each era, it is left up to men of vision to fight the battles of the dispossessed while all around them people and islands suffer immensely because of the corruption and greed of those in power. Walcott suggests, as he has done before, that the region has merely exchanged the original colonizers for a new breed in shirt-jacs. Walcott puts the language of the calypso to good use.

After his intense attack on the region's politicians, Spoiler ends his song without fanfare and in the language of the people: "All you excuse me, Spoiler was in town; / you pass him straight, so now he gone back down" (60).

Walcott effectively utilizes the calypsonian's language of vicious and strident attack as he addresses the greed and corruption existing in the Caribbean. But these attacks are not mindless; for Walcott channels his language towards the initiation of change, and while he is often despairing, he is never hopeless. Language remains a sacred gift which has the power to transform. It is also a vessel of dissemination. As the poet brings his words to life, they become a testament, a tribute to the New World experience of endurance and survival and a written record of the poet's own journey from elemental memory to a sense of identity grounded in history. This urge to record experience for the purposes of preservation and change is the poet's particular mission, and it is no where more clearly seen than in his description of the land and the people of St. Lucia.

"Roseau Valley" moves between an almost romanticized past, (even the suffering of the island people is romanticized) and a present dominated by the government and unions. The poet captures the changes undergone by the inhabitants of Roseau Valley and the change of production from sugar to bananas, the unrest of the workers and the fact that very little changes for the island's poor. Here, the poet's voice is almost despairing, for he can write his land and people into history, but he is uncertain of the power of his art to effect permanent change. For example, the chapel at Jacmel "stays old as the valley," while the workers remain "gently chained" in poverty. Roseau remains "connect[ed] to heaven," but "breath went out of the mill" (AT 17).

In spite of the poet's momentary despair, the symbol of "breath" as a life-giving force may be used as a metaphor for the task that Walcott has set himself. His poetry breathes life into the land and lives of his people, and sings of triumph and possibility: "From this village, soaked like a grey rag in salt water, / a language came" ("Gros-Ilet" 34). This is English that uniquely captures the sights and sounds of the Caribbean and the language that Walcott utilizes in his poetry. He quickly points out that the language gains its power from its ability to absorb and preserve the customs of the Caribbean:

There are different candles and customs here, the dead
are different. Different shells guard their graves.

There are distinctions beyond the paradise
 of our horizon. This is not the grape-purple Aegean.
 There is no wine here, no cheese, the almonds are green,
 the sea grapes bitter, the language is that of slaves. (34)

Walcott's insistence upon difference merely emphasizes the particularity of the Caribbean experience, and it is precisely because of the element of bitterness, the reality of slavery, that Walcott's people have grown in strength. In the idyllic setting of the Caribbean the remembrance of slavery continues to haunt the literary imagination.

In the Caribbean, folklore, a legacy of the oral tradition continues to flourish, and in a poem ironically entitled "White Magic," Walcott celebrates this aspect of the region's culture.

"White Magic" is peopled by well-known Caribbean folk characters. The names of these characters may change from island to island, but their abilities generally remain the same. Walcott introduces the "gens-gagee" or old higue who has the ability to slip out of her "wrinkled skin," suck the blood of sleeping children, and turn herself into a ball of fire. Other creatures of the night are the "half-man wolf" and the fairmaid, "a pale woman" who flies to her "forked branch" and Papa Bois, ruler of the woods.

Walcott makes the point that these creatures and their tales, figments of the Caribbean imagination, are dismissed as the superstitions of a simple people or merely the characters of European mythology transported to the Caribbean:

Dryads and hamadryads were engrained
 in the wood's bark, in papyrus, and this paper,
 but when our dry leaves crackle to the deer-
 footed, hobbling hunter, Papa Bois,
 he's just Pan's clone, one more translated satyr. (38)

The inclusion of characters from the world of Caribbean folklore into Walcott's poetic world may be viewed as the poet's attempt to preserve the culture of his people, a culture which is always under attack both from within and outside of the society. In fact, Harold Simmons' comment, in 1963, on the decline of the folk arts in St. Lucia is still very relevant today, and not only for St. Lucia, but the entire Caribbean as well. He said:

Increased literacy, the coming of newspapers and radio
 have combined with better transport to lessen the
 authority of the "older heads" in their homes, the
 torch bearers of tradition. . . . one might say
 that economic and social changes have undermined
 the function of successive parts of the folk
 tradition, and that their place has been taken
 by the practices of the larger society, or the
 sophistication motivated by magazines and movies. (42)

This tendency of present generation Caribbean people to be influenced by the beliefs and prejudices of North Americans and Europeans, seriously works against the traditional cultural forms of the region. It is a modern reworking of the need of eighteenth and nineteenth century Caribbeans to pattern themselves after the colonials of the time. Walcott fights against this growing movement, which results in the demigration of the ways of the folk. But this battle has always existed. The Caribbean folk tradition has been attacked, over the years, by established churches, governments and people who view themselves as the "upper-crust" of Caribbean society. By including these vital folk figures in the world of his poetry, Walcott aims, not only at preserving a dying culture, but also at giving Caribbean cultural forms the respectability they deserve. In doing this, he fights against the stereotypical perceptions of both Caribbeans and Europeans:

these fables of the backward and the poor
 marbled by moonlight, will grow white and richer.
 Our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature. (39)

Walcott has long been involved in this movement of preservation. To him, the folklore of the Caribbean is a living, breathing entity which enriches the life and literature of the region. The language of the region must be the vehicle of preservation as well as deliverance honoring and protecting the culture of the ancestors, and the transformation of this culture in present day society:

What would deliver the [New World person] from
 servitude was the forging of a language that went
 beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force

of revelation as it invented names for things, one
 which finally settled on its own mode of inflection,
 and which began to create an oral culture of chants,
 jokes, folk-songs and fables; this, not merely the
 debt of history was his proper claim to the New World.

(Walcott, "What The Twilight Says: An Overture" 17)

In his own way, the New World person is the guardian of history. He must protect the past by inventing new names for the elements of this new world and his own experience in it. In this way he ensures the survival of the folklore and its informing presence in the life and literature of the region.

In the process of achieving this, however, there is a certain idealizing and anesthetizing of immediate pain and suffering that goes on. For example, the epigraph to "The Light of the World" comes from a song by Bob Marley: "Kaya now, got to have kaya now, / Got to have kaya now, / For the rain is falling" (AT 48). Kaya is another name for marijuana, and its invocation at the beginning of the poem sets the tone of the piece. The voice of the poem is the poet's voice, and he is on a "sixteen-seater transport" plying people and their belongings between Gros-Islet and the Market. Marley's song of the epigraph is blasting forth on the transport's stereo, but for the poet the journey is contemplative and nostalgic. While his eyes are occupied with two women, one he admires who was "like a black Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People," and the other "in a yellow bodice / and yellow shorts, with a flower in her hair" whom he lusts after, his mind goes back in time to his childhood experiences. There was the same traffic, the same busyness, the same enduring quality of labor. In the present, an old woman "hobbled" toward the transport with a basket, leaving behind a heavier basket that she was unable to carry:

She said to the driver: "Pas quittez moi a terre,"
 which is in her patois: "Don't leave me stranded,"
 which is, in her history and that of her people:
 "Don't leave me on earth," or, by a shift of stress:
 "Don't leave me the earth" [for an inheritance]; (50)

It is as if the suffering of the peasants, of the simple folk has been frozen in time. The poor are

always “stranded;” the era is irrelevant, and the poet is consumed by his own sense of inadequacy:

I had left them on earth, I had left them to sing
Marley’s songs of a sadness as real as the smell
of rain on dry earth, or the smell of damp sand, (51)

Walcott is aware that as much as he would like to embrace the folk and change their lives, he is apart from them, separated by his position as poet/outsider, and while he might want to change their situation, this is not possible. As he himself puts it: “There are things that my craft cannot / wield, and one is power” (116). The poet’s power lies in his insight and awareness. All he can do is to utilize the power of his language to bring the reality of his people’s existence to the public consciousness. “Kaya,” the poet’s symbol for the public amnesia provides no solution; it merely maintains the status quo.

The poetry of Derek Walcott ranges from joyful, lyrical celebrations of his people and region, to harsh attacks on the destructive nature of Caribbean politicians, meditations on the past and the history of slavery. But, whatever his subject, like Edward Kamau Brathwaite, he is constantly exploring the language and rhythms of the Caribbean, and returning to its ancestral roots. Both poets utilize the shaping power of language to forge and preserve a uniquely Caribbean identity.

Chapter 4

The Search for Epic in the Caribbean

making

with their

rhythms some-

thing torn

and new

-Brathwaite The Arrivants

[he] scanned the opening line / of our epic horizon

-Walcott Omeros

In "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas," Wilson Harris makes the following statement:

. . . the apparent void of history which haunts the
black man may never be compensated until an act of
imagination opens gateways between civilizations,
between technological and spiritual apprehensions,
between racial possessions and disposessions in the
way the Aeneid may stand symbolically as one of the
first epics of migration and resettlement beyond the
pale of an ancient world. (17)

Here, Wilson Harris addresses the Caribbean's central problem which is its relationship to the past and to history; for in spite of the view of historians and writers, mainly alien, Naipaul being a notable exception, the Caribbean is not without its history. A native Indian civilization existed

before the advent of the Europeans, and the Africans who were brought to the Caribbean shores by force did not leave their customs and rituals behind them. In addition, the Chinese, East Indians and the Portuguese, despite their status, came to the Caribbean in the early eighteenth century grounded in their history.

The urge to write and rewrite this history, and the beginnings of a Caribbean epic voice are a part of the literary history of the region. A.J. Seymour's "The Legend of Kaiteur" which was put to music by Philip Pilgrim and produced as a "choral fantasy" in 1944 is a part of this effort. Here, Seymour immortalizes the myths and legends of Guyana's indigenous people. He sings of ancestral spirits like Kaie, who sacrificed himself for his people, the great spirit, Makonaima, the father of the Akawaio Indians and the beauty and majesty of the towering Kaiteur falls on the Potaro river in Guyana's interior. As the narrative begins, Seymour captures the grandeur and the mystery of the falls and the power of the spirit, Makonaima:

Now Makonaima, the Great Spirit dwelt
In the huge mountain rock that throbbed and felt
The swift black waters of Potaro's race
Pause on the lip, commit themselves to space
And dive the half mile to the rocks beneath.
Black were the rocks with sharp and angry teeth
And on those rocks the eager waters died,
Lost their black body, and up the mountain side,
Above the gorge that seethed and foamed and hissed
Rose resurrected into lovely mist.

(The Guiana Book 8)

While Seymour's legend is firmly rooted in the Amerindian ethos, Wilson Harris in Eternity to Season returns to a Greek classical world. This makes him a forerunner of Derek Walcott. Harris, in this work, does what Walcott will do later in Omeros. He superimposes Homeric figures from the Iliad and the Odyssey onto the Guyanese landscape. As Seymour himself puts it, in The Making of Guyanese Literature, "for [Harris] in these poems, the central figure is Ulysses, mastering time and space and bridging the world from eternity to season" (45). In Harris's work Greek

names are juxtaposed with Guyanese names. One poem in the collection is entitled "Troy," while another is called "Canje." Ulysses surfaces in Cumberland, a village on the Courantyne coast in Guyana. Harris meditates on history, time, human fate and freedom, themes of particular concern to the Caribbean's black population.

The problem in the Caribbean has always been the position of the black man in society; for slavery's shadow emerges from the past casting its pall over the present. The existence of slavery and its role in shaping the Caribbean identity must be acknowledged. This means that the black experience in the Caribbean must be affirmed, not negated; the African connections celebrated.

Harris realizes that this task requires "an act of imagination." The Caribbean situation is analogous to that of ancient Greece and Rome. In their wanderings in search of roots and stability, Odysseus and Aeneas never lose their connections to history and community, for History is never separated from the process of migration in the imagination of Homer and Virgil. Perhaps this is what attracts Derek Walcott to the Greek experience, although he insists that in Omeros he is not writing a Caribbean epic ("A Conversation with Edouard Glissant and Derek Walcott" N.Y. 4/11/91). Clearly he is attracted to the Homeric wanderings and the pull of the sea and sees in the Caribbean experience the same mixture of tragedy and triumph, the survival of the human spirit, and the inevitability of the force of history.

On the other hand, Kamau Brathwaite in The Arrivants more clearly aligns himself to the tradition of African oral epic. This is described by Isidore Okpewho, in The Epic in Africa, as follows:

[It is] a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or
men endowed with something more than human might and
operating in something larger than the normal human
context and . . . of significance in portraying
some stage of the cultural or political development
of a people. (34)

Derek Walcott, too, recognizes the epic's origins in the vernacular tradition: "Epic was compressed in the folk legend. The act of imagination was the creative effort of the tribe" ("The Muse of History" 13). The Arrivants is Brathwaite's Caribbean epic. He brings together past and present

time in a powerful portrayal of his people's existence in the old world, their exodus and their survival in this new world in which they find themselves. As these experiences are filtered through his imagination, he invokes the gods of Africa and their new forms in the Caribbean and calls upon them to offer guidance, inspiration and hope. Both Brathwaite and Walcott utilize elements of the epic genre to suit their individual purposes and to create a distinctly Caribbean form. For example, Erich Auerbach in discussing courtly epic writes: "Only members of the chivalric courtly society are worthy of adventure, hence they alone can undergo serious and significant experiences" (121), and to Walter Ker, "whatever epic may mean, it implies some weight and solidity" (4). The inhabitants of the epic worlds of Brathwaite and Walcott are very far removed from "chivalric courtly society," classical Greek or Roman society, the Teutonic world of *Beowulf* or the weighty and solid world of the Miltonic epic. Yet, the spirit of epic permeates their worlds. They write of the exodus and the massacre of a people, of thousands of dead Africans interred in the depths of the Caribbean sea; they eternalize their songs of endurance and survival on the literal and symbolic plantations of the Caribbean; they celebrate the life of the simple worker and peasant and sing of the ethereal beauty of the landscape and the mystery of the sea. Out of this revisioning of place and history, comes the creation of a unique Caribbean identity.

The creation of this identity is a very tenuous process and Brathwaite and Walcott approach the process quite differently. Bakhtin, discussing the epic genre, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, makes the following statement:

One may, and in fact one must memorialize with artistic language only that which should be preserved in the memory of descendents [sic]; an image is created for descendents and this image is projected onto their sublime and distant horizon. (18-19)

Both poets are imbued with a strong sense of past history, but at the same time each is conscious of present time and the way in which past and present cast their shadows on the future. Brathwaite wants to recreate, for the descendants of the Africans, the glory of African kingdoms, the power of the African gods, the pain and degradation of the Middle Passage and the existence of the ancestors on the slave plantations of the Caribbean. In *Omeros*, Walcott comes closest to this vision of

Brathwaite's. In addition, both men are conscious of the reworkings of slavery and colonization in the present-day Caribbean. Out of their conscious "act[s] of imagination," that is, the deliberate rewriting of the past in their imaginative poetic worlds, will come into being a truly Caribbean identity.

Brathwaite's approach is rooted in a sense of the communal while Walcott, though very conscious of community needs, is always aware of his role as creator and shaper, and because of this, the presence of the poet/artist is always a powerful force within his work. But the emphasis on community is crucial given the region's fragmented history. It is by acknowledging the communal voice that the process of healing and rebuilding can begin. In fact, Glissant, very much aware of this, makes the following statement: "A new epic voice is needed [in the Caribbean] not one of individual identity, but of common, human identity" ("A Conversation with Edouard Glissant and Derek Walcott" N.Y. 4/11/91). Brathwaite's voice is the voice of "common, human identity." His imagination ranges through historical time and reconstructs both the history of his people and their sense of achievement and possibility. Brathwaite has created a word for this entire concept of reinvention and recreation and the belief in the limitless possibility of the human soul. He names this concept "nam." The notion of "nam" is at the very center of Brathwaite's visionary world, and on a symbolic level it epitomizes the poet's determination to create a Caribbean identity that is truly Caribbean, an identity that reflects the history of the region and the experiences of its people. To achieve this formidable task, Brathwaite adapts the epic voice to serve his Caribbean purpose, and Joan Dayan's words on X/Self can aptly be applied to The Arrivants: "Brathwaite's epic tells the story of the colonizing of minds, the costuming of souls" (507). But beyond this, his first trilogy tells of human strength and the survival, in the face of immense odds, of the Caribbean soul. He shows how, by returning to ancestral sources, minds may be decolonized and souls find harbor in the sanctity of familiar ancestral experiences. Brathwaite has defined his concept of "nam" in several places, but no where more powerfully than in his discussion of history and X/Self:

[Nam] is then able to expand itself back from "nam"
to "name," which is another form of "nam": the name
that you one had has lost its "e," that fragile part of
itself, eaten by Prospero, eaten by the conquistadores,

but preserving its essentialness, its alpha, its “a”
 protected by those two intransigent consonants, “n” and
 “m.” The vibrations “nmnmnm” are what you get before
 the beginning of the world. And that “nam” can return
 to “name” and the god “Nyame.”

(“History, the Caribbean Writer and X/Self 34)

The word “nam,” in the poet’s visionary world expands to embrace the glory of past history, the immensity of origins and the power of the ancient gods. It also contracts to ward off the sterility of the periods of colonization and slavery, and between these two poles is the fragile Caribbean self that the poet preserves and celebrates. This self is a self that can only exist and survive in community.

The Arrivants is Brathwaite’s story of Caribbean community in which he presents a new awareness of the region’s reality. To do this, he focusses on the essential elements of community: a people’s history, their customs and rituals, the heroism of their daily struggle for survival and their relationship to divinity.

Brathwaite, as so often in his poetry, seriously ignores the concept of chronological time. He ranges from the time of early African kingdoms and the beginnings of slavery to the Africans’ journey to the New World and the New World experiences of colonization and its resurfacing in present time. As Christine Pagnouille puts it:

... time is a labyrinth in which there is no fixed
 centre; time is a mesh of overlapping lanes, avenues
 and blind alleys that have to be explored without any
 preconceived idea and connected in new, visionary ways
 if the world (and the word) is to make sense. (449-450)

Brathwaite’s blurring of the line of time allows him space to correct the misreading of history that has relegated his people to virtual obscurity. Like the epic poets of old, he brings to the forefront of the public consciousness not only the glory of his people, but also their degradation in all its ugliness. Unlike the epic poets of old, however, this emphasis on the seamy aspects of European colonization is not a response to the need to be realistic or to gratify the lower human instinct for graphic brutality. It is the poet’s conscious descent, with his people, into a world of evil

and pain in order to reconstruct a new world of possibility and hope.

“New World A-Comin’” reflects this merger of time and space, glory and pain. Hawkins and Cortez are memorialized along with the “imprisoned” Prempeh, the Asante king and his sister, Asantewa. Here, into this collection of personages, illustrious and infamous, the poet also adds Geronimo, the Maroon, Tackie and Montezuma. This range across continents points out the common tragedy of the dispossessed. In the second section of the poem, Brathwaite, with much sensitivity describes the enforced exodus of the African. He contrasts the warmth, the lushness, the fertility of the old land with the coldness, the aridity and the barrenness of the Middle Passage journey. But, as usual, out of the pain will come renewal and strength. In spite of enslavement, the old world will be remembered and out of the clash between old and new, a new form will emerge:

..... this ship floats
to new worlds, new waters, new
harbours, the pride of our ancestors mixed

with the wind and the water
the flesh and the flies, the whips and the fixed
fear of pain in this chained and welcoming port. (11)

The paradox of “chained and welcoming” emphasizes the duality of the New World experience. Out of the apparent destruction of the African soul, emerges the new spirit of the Caribbean.

Brathwaite’s tendency to weave in and out of various historical periods brings a certain reality to the public consciousness. It seems that regardless of the time in history, what remains fixed in time is the constant attack and diminishment of the soul of his people. The character “Tom” who keeps reappearing in “Rites of Passage” illustrates this reality. “Tom,” with its associations of “Uncle Tom,” conjures up in the reader’s imagination, a figure subservient and servile, a figure without a true understanding of the realities of existence as the “other” or the outsider in society.

However, this is not really so. Tom is an archetypal figure representing the memory of the tribe. His mind moves from “the “screams” and the “lashed sore” to earlier times and heroic men:

..... Atumpan talking and the harvest branches,

all the tribes of Ashanti dreaming and the dream
 of Tutu, Anokye and the Golden Stool, built
 in Heaven for our nation by the work
 of lightning and the brilliant adze: . . . ("Tom" 13)

But even as the poet recalls heroic moments, by a linguistic twist, he carves his people's fragmented past into memory: "branch- / es." This is the split of a separation from traditional history and culture.

While Tom formally "sing[s] / nothing / now," "remember[s] / nothing / now," "suffer[s] / nothing / now," this is merely a protective ploy: "and hold my hat / in hand / to hide / my heart" (15). It is also the poet's utilization of the epic technique of combining both the heroic past and present time. Tom appears again in "All God's Chillun." Here on the plantations of America's south, he is mocked and hated by both Blacks and Whites. For Whites, he is a measure of their degradation, and for Blacks he becomes a constant symbol of their powerlessness and servility. But Tom remembers a glorious past, and the poet's merger of this glorious past with times of dehumanization allows for the possibility of change; for if no alternative is presented, if the narrative of heroism and achievement is consigned to a dead past, then, a people lose their memory and accept the conditions of the present as a living reality. This eliminates the possibility of revolutionary action, change or creativity.

Brathwaite's purpose, then, is to transform Tom into a legendary figure, preserving in his memory, the memory of a people. Therefore, as Tom surfaces wandering through London, once more he becomes the symbol of mass degradation and despair: "I died alone, without the benefit of fire" (22). This is the fire of knowledge as well as of comfort. Again, as so often happens in Brathwaite's poetic world, after he has piled up endless images of utter hopelessness, there is a lyrical moment of peace where, by re-entering the past, the mind and body are refreshed and gain strength for the struggles ahead:

Bring me now where the warm wind
 blows, where the grasses
 sigh, where the sweet
 tongue'd blossom flowers

where the showers
 fan soft like a fisherman's
 net thrown through the sweet-
 ened air (23)

It is a moment of rejuvenation as the poet transposes Tom, in time, to a time in which he can find hope and peace in the beauty of natural creation far removed from "the fire trail / of fear" (25).

Yet, the "fire trail" is always present, and when Brathwaite specifically addresses the Caribbean situation, the blaze becomes an inferno. "Calypso" captures the violence of the Caribbean's introduction to the plantation system: "The islands roared into green plantations" (48). This "roar" into existence means profits for the European colonizers and poverty for the Blacks of the region: "it becomes an island dance / Some people doing well / while others are catchin' hell" (49). At the end of "Calypso," Brathwaite has his people 'nigratin' overseas . . ." (50), thus continuing their epic wandering. They have become the world's "niggers," homeless and selfless.

They are found at the ports of the world "with their cardboard grips, / felt hats, rain- / cloaks" ("The Emigrants" s" 51). In a tremendous leap of time Brathwaite moves back to the advent of Columbus and the birth of destruction: "hot splintered courage, bones / cracked with bullet shot, / tipped black boot in my belly, the / whip's uncurled desire?" Brathwaite focusses relentlessly on the tragic history of his people. It is a tragedy that cuts across time and place in his attempt to rediscover the truth of his people's existence from their days in the Old World to their existence in the new.

Wherever they journey in time, the questions concerning identity surface:

Have you no language of your own
 no way of doing things
 did you spend all those holidays
 at England's apron strings? (55)

Even the drum, the instrument of identity and connections loses its power: "Our colour beats a restless drum / but only the bitter come" (56). Brathwaite moves his wandering tragic people from Africa to the Caribbean back to the European capitals of the world, and to The United States. But their fate remains the same. They exist in "Castries' Conway and Brixton in London, / Port of

Spain's jungle / and Kingston's dry Dungle / Chicago Smethwick and Tiger Bay" (40). Migration does not bring relief; in fact, it intensifies the hopelessness:

Never seen
a man
travel more
seen more
lands
that this poor
path-
less harbour-
less spade. (40)

But, Brathwaite finds a path and a harbour for his people. "Wings of a Dove" moves from acceptance and desperation to hope and renewal. Here, the poet attacks the rising tide of materialism sweeping over the region. Jamaica as Babylon can be any island in the Caribbean. The wandering Tom has been transformed into "Brother Man the Rasta / man" (42), but in spite of his religion and the "pipe of his ganja," he can find no peace. His mind is consumed with the vision of the desperation of his people. The poet places his wanderer at the center of a very surrealistic experience. His mind, clouded by ganja, transforms his surroundings:

. . . the mice
eyes, hot pumice
pieces, glowed into his room
like ruby, like rhinestone
and suddenly startled like diamond. (42)

In the sudden brilliance, he is transfigured. He adopts the mantle of prophet and guardian, and, from the depths of his soul, his voice rises in lamentation as he sings the sorrow songs of his people. He catalogues the agents of destruction as well as the agents of hope, and, finally, lifts his voice in a rising crescendo in a final appeal to his God. This God is the God of his African heritage celebrated by drumming: "So beat dem drums / dem, spread / dem wings dem, / watch dem fly / dem, soar dem / high dem, / clear in the glory of the Lord" (45). The scene is set; the Rasta Man

has resorted to the safe harbor of ritual to provide comfort and salvation. He is convinced that the destruction of the material world is imminent and that the new world is at hand:

So beat dem burn
 dem, learn

 dem that dem
 got dem nothin'

 but dem
 bright bright baubles

 that will burst dem
 when the flame dem

 from on high dem

 raze an' roar dem

 an' de poor dem
 rise an' rage dem

 in de glory of the Lord. (45)

The poet's use of sound symbolism is an integral part of the meaning of his words. The repetition of "dem" captures the insistent roar as the sound of the drums rises unrelentingly to a frenzy.

This is the setting for Brathwaite's apocalyptic vision of the uprising of the poor and downtrodden in the society. His words increase in power and force as he moves his people through various stages of rebellion: "burst," raze an' roar" and "rise an' rage." The "baubles" are ephemeral and will be consumed by "rage," here, meaning both the violence of God and that of society's dispossessed. The poet implies that there is going to be a sudden spontaneous uprising, the culmi-

nation of a history of various forms of mental and physical violence against the poor. This is the poet's prophetic vision of ultimate doom. However, he does suggest ways of avoiding the tragedy. Over and over again, he insists that salvation lies in the acceptance and performance of customs and rituals, and while the drums here summon the poor to revolution, in Brathwaite's visionary world, drums also transmit messages between the gods and their people and are essential instruments in the ritual of healing.

However, the drum in African culture has more than revolutionary and religious functions. It exists as a symbol of origins, and as Maureen Warner-Lewis suggests, the drum has "come to symbolize Africa itself":

... the drum is closely linked in learned African
philosophy with the Word, in the sense in which St.
John the Apostle used it at the start of his Gospel--
the original utterance which created life out of
nothingness and chaos, and then established order in
that creation. The drum is therefore a divine tool of
the Supreme Being, a womb or beginning of created life.

(Notes to Masks 16)

It is not surprising, then, that drums play a major role in The Arrivants. Brathwaite merges its ritual and symbolic functions in this work dedicated to the African narrative of origins and journeys, Old World history and New World reality.

"The Making of the Drum" details the mechanical motions of the ritual, but underlying the mechanical is the deeply spiritual yearning for connections to the African deities:

we have killed
you to make a thin
voice that will reach

further than hope
further than heaven, that will
reach deep down to our gods where the thin

light cannot leak, where our stretched

hearts cannot leap. (94)

The poet calls for a descent into the self, a descent that reaches beyond hope and religion. Brathwaite is suggesting a move beyond the imposed religions, a legacy of the period of colonization. This journey into the self will reveal the presence of the African gods, and it is their presence that will offer anchoring and a sense of identity to “stretched hearts.” “The Making of the Drum” is a ceremonial act and a part of the poet’s overall ceremonial performance in The Arrivants. Here there is a formality and precision of vocabulary resulting in a grandeur of tone which is entirely in keeping with the epic world the poet creates.

In “The Barrel of the Drum,” the selection of the wood is a part of the ritual process. It comes from the “tweneduru tree,” “hard duru wood.” In making the drum, the participants are engaged in a sacred task; for the drum will bring sound to silence and identity into being:

Here in this silence
we hear wounds
of the forest;
we hear the sounds
of the rivers;

vowels of reed-
lips, pebbles
of consonants,
underground dark
of the continent. (95)

The drum gives voice to the spirit of Africa. Its “womb” is a place sacred and secure, housing and protecting the history of a people at the same time that it transforms this history into sound and therefore meaning. The act of giving voice is a creative one and leads the poet back to God: “God is dumb / until the drum / speaks” (“The Gong-Gong” 97). Once more the poet returns to origins and the ancestral memory. He returns to the original place, the ancestral home. New World

Africans must “walk . . . through the humble / dead to meet / the dumb / blind drum / where Odomankoma speaks” (97).

Odomankoma is the sky god, the creator. In “Atumpan” he speaks. According to Brathwaite’s notes, he begins the poem by imitating the sound of the drum: “Kon kon kon kon / kun kun kun kun” (98). This merger of sound and symbol takes the poet and his people back to the past to beginnings, and, in the Caribbean context, to awakenings. They must return to the African past to find the source of their New World identity. They must allow the past to speak to them, to share its secrets; only then will they succeed in shaping the new Caribbean identity: listen / let us succeed / listen / may we succeed . . . (99). Brathwaite addresses the profound human importance of the Caribbean’s struggle for identity in a world largely alien to Blacks. He celebrates blackness and, according to Marina Maxwell, “Brathwaite’s crystallization of the interior dialogue of the black [person] today is the emergence of a confidence of existence and of potential wholeness . . .” (44).

The journey towards “wholeness” is not an easy one for a people displaced from their original home and relegated to the periphery of New World society. In the visionary world of his poetry, Brathwaite’s people wander throughout the world and find no peace. Even their journey to Africa is fraught with ambivalence. In “The New ships,” after an exodus of three hundred years, the narrator returns to Ghana:

I travelled to a distant town
I could not find my mother
I could not find my father
I could not hear the drum

whose ancestor am I? (125).

The poet’s rhetorical question merely points to his solution to the problem of identity and ancestry. Separated for so long from the ancestral home, Caribbean people are not simply transplanted Africans. The culture of Africa is firmly rooted in their souls. Therefore, the identity being forged cannot be complete without the recognition of its African lineage.

Brathwaite paints a dire picture of the consequences of the loss of connections to Africa. The Caribbean becomes a wasteland of divided people alienated from their ancestors: “the / eyes /

of our elders / are dead" ("Masks" 130). The silence of ignorance envelops the landscape. The picture is one of death and disintegration. But, underneath the mask of silence and ignorance lies a yearning for life and new beginnings: "hearts / rustle their secrets, / blood shiver like leaves" (131). There is a cry for guidance: "Will / your wood lips speak / so we see?" But the path to sight/insight is a violent one, and in "The Golden Stool," the clash between the reverence for history and tradition and the mercenary nature of society erupts. The poet castigates the African slavers for their part in the destruction of a people. For such a transgression there is no forgiveness: "no elder to lead you / again through the branch- / es. through the path- / ways of prayer, / to Onyame's now / leafless air" (145). The "pathways" to knowledge have been destroyed. Such a sin causes the wrath of Onyame, the creator and the only way to salvation is further destruction. The god must destroy in order to renew:

And when the cycle is ripe
I, giver of life to my people,
crack open the skull, skill

of shell, care-
fully carved craft
of bones, and I kill. (146).

What is being destroyed is the New World vision of history which negates the African experience and reinforces the view that the self of the black Caribbean is worthless. Once this occurs, the poet can carefully rebuild the structure of self and society, building on the new awareness of the past and the wisdom of the reclaimed ancestors.

It is this building that the poet has been gradually moving towards as the trilogy unfolds. In the final section, "Islands," Brathwaite brings together the Caribbean transformations, a result of the clash between the old and new worlds. He shows how the new gods and rituals inform the identity of his people and offer strategies for renewal and survival.

In Brathwaite's recreated Caribbean, God is Jah, the name used by the region's Rastafarians. "Islands" begins with the poem, "Jah." This sets the tone of the final volume of the trilogy, for Rastafarians "reject Western 'Babylonian' culture" (*The Arrivants* 273). The poet as

God is reordering the New World:

God is glass with his type-
writer teeth, gospel
jumps and pings off the white
paper, higher and higher, (162)

The aim of the new gospel is to recall the memory of the past: "For the land has lost the memory of the most secret places" (164). The religious places of the ancestors have been desecrated. In this barren landscape where there are no sacred places and the "gods have been forgotten or hidden," the poet speaks out against empty rituals: "A prayer poured on the ground with water, / with rum, will not bid them come back" (164). But, Anancy, the spider/spirit is at work. Here, Brathwaite focusses on his godlike powers before he fell from grace. He adopts the persona of the spider-god and in his role as trickster "spin[s] webs in the trees" as he waits for the right moment to put his creative powers to work.

As a New World figure, Anancy brings with him the gift of language. He is able to remove himself from dangerous situations. Brathwaite's Anancy "prefers to spin webs in the trees." Joyce Jonas's interpretation of the image of the spider spinning its web is a particularly interesting one which makes excellent sense in the understanding of Brathwaite's purpose:

[It is a] symbol of the artist at work--creating a whole world from his own substance. Like Anancy, the artist escapes the disastrous prospect of nonbeing by weaving a (fictive/narrative) thread and climbing it to freedom. He takes the strand of linearity (oppressive history or plot) and complicates it by making a patterned web of connections and interrelationships--a woven "text" that turns history/his story into oracular myth, an infinite play of signifiers. (2)

The artist as spider/creator is a particularly relevant symbol for the new world, as he weaves the disparate strands of the region's myths and history into a holistic text, which is the source of new perceptions, and therefore new strengths. It invites a new reading of the past and history and

inscribes upon the imaginary landscape the poet's epic vision of his people's struggle for visibility and identity.

The artist brings this struggle into existence. In "Ananse," he is the keeper of the language, and therefore the collective memory. He is also the keeper of sound: "he spins drum- / beats, / silver skin / webs of sound / through the villages" (165). Ananse's sounds bridge the gap between worlds. The drums call to African chiefs as well as New World heroes. He is also an integral part of the present society and maintains his function as "world-maker, word-breaker, creator. . ." (167). Brathwaite utilizes the duality of the Anancy figure. In the New World, Anancy, wearing the disguise of the trickster who plays with language and works to conceal meaning, creates a sacred space in which to lodge the New World history.

In discussing the artist's dual role as bringer of truth and trickster, Wilson Harris states:

He stands therefore at the heart of the lie of
community and the truth of community. And it is here,
I believe, in this trickster gateway -- this gamble of
the soul -- that there emerges the hope for a
profoundly compassionate society committed to freedom
within a creative scale.

("History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guyanas" 16)

Harris believes that the Caribbean's limbo dance "reflects a certain kind of gateway or threshold to a new world" (6). Limbo originated on the slave ships of the Middle Passage. As Harris tells the story, space was so limited that the slaves were forced to twist themselves into shapes as flexible as spiders. The limbo dancer moves under a stick which in the course of the dance, narrows the space between the stick and the floor. The object of the dance is for the dancer to spread his limbs as close to the floor as possible in order to dance under the stick without knocking it over. Both Harris and Brathwaite see Anancy, the spider in the dancer's flexibility of limb and ability to enter exiguous space. Limbo becomes the symbol of the space, or "gateway" connecting Africa and the Caribbean (Harris "History" 6).

It is quite fitting then, that the second section of "Islands" is entitled "Limbo." In this uncertain space the connections to Africa are submerged. The inhabitants of the islands are isolated

from custom and tradition, and they find themselves in the precarious position of reaching back to Africa at the same time that they try desperately to give their lives substance and meaning in the New World. For the poet, the state of limbo is a crucial part of the journey towards wholeness. Caonoba, in "The Cracked Mother" represents the "other," a victim of the vagaries of history. She stands in fear at the threshold of a New World existence unable to cast away the terrors of the colonial experience. But, Brathwaite moves his people away from the terror of the past, and in "Shepherd," there is a growing awareness of new beginnings and hope. The poet takes his people through various stages of recovery, and in "Caliban," they come to realize the saving grace of history. However, the shattered psyche of the New World person cannot be made whole until it is possessed by the reality of the New World existence. The longing to return to an idyllic Africa has to be transformed into a recognition of the Africa within. Consumed by this reality, the Caribbean can, in "Jou'vert," see its new day.

"The Cracked Mother" addresses the fragmented and tormented psyche of the Caribbean person subjected to the culture and religious beliefs of the colonizing powers. Here the colonizing force is the Spanish, but this relationship between colonizer and colonized is representative of all such relationships. Caonoba's mother sees Columbus as a powerful force and he becomes for her a symbol of achievement. Gordon Rohlehr, in *Pathfinder*, quotes Brathwaite's comments on "The Cracked Mother" in his notes to the recording of "Islands":

We now hear the sea-saw effect of the imposition of an alien god on an integrated personality. Caonoba, the Carib daughter of this section, trapped in a convent garden, surrounded by black-robed nuns, experiences the collapse and fragmentation of her world through a series of water-images ending in hurricane and emotional blindness. (207)

The perception of Caonoba's mother is "cracked." Unable to see clearly, she believes her daughter's salvation and that of her people will only be realized if they adhere to the new customs and religion. Caonoba is more perceptive. The christianity of the colonizer only divides the indigenous population: "Christ on the Cross / your cruel laws teach / only to divide us / and we are

lost" (182). The natural violence in the form of a hurricane with which the poem ends merely mirrors Caonoba's personal mental turmoil. But out of this violence will come a new awareness. The old ways of domination will be destroyed; "new Maps" will be "drafted" and there will be a new "dawn." The questions with which the poem ends are rhetorical, for the poet is slowly moving towards the creation of a landscape of hope:

... How will new maps be drafted?
 Who will suggest a new tentative frontier?
 How will the sky dawn now? (184)

"Shepherd" moves the Caribbean people closer to possession and trembling toward speech. Initially, the voice of the narrator is silenced: "Dumb / dumb / dumb / there is no face / no / lip / no moon" (185). The messenger, the woman in "white calico" prepares the way for the entrance of the African gods. Libations are poured, and, in the silence, "the drum speaks" bringing into existence the voice of the gods. The poet creates, in the New World, symbols of the old gods:

The orange on the table,
 the grapefruit, the cashew
 nut: these are our votive offerings (189)

These gods are liberated. They do not remain consigned to the depths of the sea with the casualties of the Middle Passage; "they . . . walk up out of the sea / into our houses" (190). But, they have to be recognized and their voices heard.

Brathwaite moves his people towards this recognition in "Caliban." Here, the poet/narrator sings of the sorrows of his people: their dire poverty, their mindless slaughter over the years, the worldwide, barren cityscapes created by men. At this point in the poem, Brathwaite embarks on a backward excursion into time and history:

It was December second, nineteen fifty-six.
 It was the first of August eighteen thirty-eight.
 It was the twelfth of October fourteen ninety-two.
 How many bangs how many revolutions? (192)

Moving from the date of Fidel Castro's initial steps towards revolution, to the date of Emancipation and finally to the date of Columbus's violent and disruptive entrance into the Caribbean, Brathwaite

suggests that what remains constant is Caliban's position as "other" and enslaved both mentally and physically. However, in the poem's second and third section, the poet moves toward regeneration and healing. He dances the limbo towards a new consciousness. Caliban goes through the process of dancing the limbo without any awareness of its significance; but in time he is transformed, and the limbo "stick is the whip / and the dark deck is slavery." Caliban descends into the darkness of the unconscious, and as he emerges, he undergoes an epiphany:

out of the dark
and the dumb gods are raising me

up
up
up

and the music is saving me

hot
slow
step

on the burning ground. (195).

For Caliban, history has come home. The past has been seared into his conscious memory, and this will be the foundation upon which the New World identity will be built.

"Jou'vert" signals the beginning of this new day in the Caribbean. Jouway, originating from the French "Jour overt" meaning "opening day" is an integral part of Trinidad's carnival ritual. In the hours before dawn, people find their bands and begin the journey to Independence Square. Members of the Jouway bands cover themselves in mud, oil, dirt and paint or dress themselves in old clothes. The ritual of Jouway commemorates the past and the days when "slaves lit the night with their torches." Libations are poured honoring the ancestors. The spirit of Jouway goes back to the original rejoicing of the slaves at the end of the cane season. After the cane was burned, the

slave masters would permit the slaves to celebrate. This meant “freedom, emancipation, no more work.” Jouvay provides the passage into Carnival, and into an existence removed from harsh realities. According to John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, “the mixture of Soot and oil that coats the players symbolizes that passage” (*Caribbean Festival Arts* 87-88).

Brathwaite, in “Jou’veert,” brings together Old and New World experience and out of this amalgam comes the distinctive Caribbean identity he has been intent upon creating. The drum remains the central symbol, not only connecting mortals to the gods, but also binding together the New World community. It also brings together the deities from both worlds: “Christ will pray / to Odomankoma / Nyame God / and Nyankopon” (267). In the powerful force of this merger, “sorrows / burn to ashes.” Images of new life and renewal people the newly created landscape and “flowers / bloom along the way.” The images embody the merger of the two worlds:

flowers bloom

their tom tom sun

heads raising

little steel pan

petals to the music’s

doom (269)

There is a certain inevitability to this Caribbean awakening. The poet uses “doom” here in the sense of destiny, for in spite of the region’s history and its intense encounter with the devastation of slavery and colonization, there is movement beyond the “black and bitter / ashes.” As Michael Dash aptly puts it, [“Jou’veert”] represents the dawn of the risen god/word and the poetic vision retrieved with all its positive and healing resonances” (223). “Jou’veert” celebrates survival beyond immeasurable odds, and a tone of jubilation pervades the poetic landscape. Pamela Mordecai expresses it this way: “. . . the verse is sweet with the sweetness of flesh that is close to the bone” (“The Image of the Pebble in Brathwaite’s *Arrivants*” 77). Brathwaite succeeds in filtering his people’s history through his poetic imagination and places their experiences and history in an epic landscape that will preserve the vision of wholeness and identity that he has so carefully created.

At the end of The Arrivants, the poet has succeeded in creating a new Caribbean world inhabited by people who have explored the torturous past and have come to an awareness of the meaning of history and their place in their New World homeland. They are:

making
with their

rhythms some-
thing torn

and new (270)

Walcott, too, is engaged in creating “some- thing / torn / and new” out of the various “rhythms” of the Caribbean. This is the purpose of his epic work, Omeros. In a conversation with Lewis Lapham, Walcott suggests that his new work is not merely a “layover of Homer, pretentious or pompous,” for people are often named, but have no real awareness of what their names mean. This is operative in Omeros reflecting quite an ordinary occurrence in the Caribbean. What the poet focusses on are not the Homeric analogies, but the meaning of human existence and history in the Caribbean. This is of epic proportions, and central to this experience is slavery. The epic war of the Caribbean is the battle against slavery in its various manifestations, and this war is at the heart of Omeros. Haunting Walcott’s literary imagination are the experiences of the Middle Passage, the slave plantations of the Caribbean, their post-emancipation substitutions and the Caribbean’s modern-day brand of colonialism. Omeros brings together these past and present experiences. By bringing these experiences to life, Walcott, as epic poet/narrator hopes to transform them and make them whole, thus removing from these experiences their ability to numb and deaden the spirit of a people. The poet/artist remains at the center of the struggle to reconcile the values of the past and the present and their implications for the future. He constantly struggles to create and to achieve artistic and moral truth.

This is not a simple task, for under the poet’s pen, the work of art becomes the medium that reshapes the world and reveals a new order, which the artist envisions and brings into existence by giving it tangible form. Walcott is intensely aware of the awesome nature of this task that he has set

himself. But he believes in the messianic role of the poet, and in his Caribbean world where, because of the nature of its history and experience, it often seems fragmented and alienated from other worlds, Walcott, the poet assumes control, provides direction and brings together the fragments of history and experience. Therefore, the adaptation of the epic form provides the vast framework needed; for in order that the work have life and meaning it must become public and shared. As a result, the poet must move his people beyond history and literature to a space where their souls, having absorbed the experiences of life and history, can ascend to selfhood. As the poet himself puts it, the error of his narrator is to “dignify people through literature, and Major Plunkett’s mistake is to “dignify people through history.” It is necessary to move beyond literature and history to “a simplicity which sees people without adornment” (conversation with Lewis Lapham, Bookmark Channel 31 2/14/91). Walcott moves beyond the veneer to disclose both the historical wounding and the present rehabilitation of his people.

In Omeros, Walcott celebrates the life and history of the people of St. Lucia in particular, and the people of the Caribbean in general. Omeros is a long narrative poem in seven books. The protagonist, Achille, a simple fisherman is engaged in the elemental struggle for survival in the face of a not always benevolent nature and a present corrupted by history. He is surrounded by simple people: Helen who loves him, but abandons him to live with Hector; Hector who follows the road to modernization and surrenders his fishing boat for a jitney; his friend, Philoctete whose leg has an incurable sore and Ma Kilman who operates the “No Pain Cafe” and protects and cultivates the memory and the wisdom of the African ancestors. In addition, interacting with the native population are Major and Maud Plunkett representing the colonial presence on the island and in the region. Major Plunkett had fought with Montgomery in North Africa and spends much time engaged in historical research. Weaving in and out of the narrative is the figure of Omeros. He is blind Seven Seas, the African griot; he is also the derelict who is refused sanctuary in St. Martin-in-the-Fields’ church in London. Throughout the text, Omeros remains a constant symbol of the necessity of the quest for revelation and survival.

Walcott as epic poet adopts the persona of prophet, and returns his people to his perception of a Golden Age through Achille’s reverse journey to Africa. Thus he creates for the modern reader a myth of Africa complete with heroes, which informs the establishment of the Caribbean home-

land. But this Caribbean homeland gains a special visibility when the poet removes himself from the epic distance he creates and enters the poem in a very real way. In the middle of the world of Achille and his friends Walcott inserts a beautiful tribute to his mother:

She floated so lightly! One hand, frail as a swift,
gripping the verandah. The cotton halo fanned
from her shrunken crown, and I felt that I could lift

that fledgling, my mother, in the cup of my hand
and settle her somewhere else: (XXXII 165)

Walcott does “settle her somewhere else.” In his imagination, the amnesia that accompanies his mother’s advancing years is linked to the amnesia of his people; people who “had forgotten a continent in the narrow streets.” He transposes himself to another time and wills the spirits to speak:

Now, in the night’s unsettling noises, what I heard
enclosed my skin with an older darkness. I stood
in a village whose fires flickered in my head

with tongues of a speech I no longer understood,
but where my flesh did not need to be translated;
then I heard patois again, as my ears unclogged.

(XXXIII.1 167)

Whenever the poet or his wandering alter ego, Omeros, enters the work, a moment of revelation or truth is experienced. Here, the poet is covered with the mantle of an “older darkness,” Africa, and his body understands intuitively the nature of the experience even though the language is alien to him as a man of the present time. This moment of voiceless recognition forces the poet to an appreciation of the beauty of his native patois and its African connections.

The entrance of the poet’s dead father into the work presents another such moment. This encounter occurs on a beach, a “mud-marked seafront” where “people took evening walks.” In this unlikely setting, the poet’s father appears. In their conversation, the poet discloses to his father his

longing to belong, to be a part of a great tradition, a tradition which would offer a sense of identity and public pride, and would “carry [him] over the bridge of self-contempt . . . when [he] felt diminished” (XXVI.III. 187). The father also offers advice to his son and all other Caribbean wanderers and exiles: “Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere, / cherish our island for its green simplicities, / enthrone yourself,” and above all, do not forget that “in its travelling all that the sea-swift does / it does in a circular pattern” (XXXVI.III. 187-188). Born in the Caribbean and assaulted by the forces of history, it is impossible to completely deny a Caribbean identity. It is this distinct awareness of place, history, and the region’s “green simplicities” which will empower the people of the Caribbean. The quest for identity might lead to other harbors, but inevitably these harbors prove to be alien and provide no peace. Therefore the quest becomes a mythic one, and the journey is the journey of the Caribbean soul to its African homeland in order to reconcile itself to its new homeland in the New World.

In an epic sweep of time and space, Walcott returns Achille to Africa, the homeland of his ancestors. In a variation of the classic descent into the underworld, Walcott places Achille in a trance-like situation where the landscape of Africa appears to him “like the African movies / he had yelped at in childhood” (XXV.I. 133). The experience shakes him to his soul, and in one second he experiences a vision of his place in time, both its origin and its culmination. He is also overwhelmed by feelings of pain and shame. But this is the first step towards the attainment of self-respect, and, as a result, recovery. The awareness of his own inadequacies forces him to find strength in a mythical Africa that has always existed in his imagination.

Walcott very carefully constructs this interaction between the world of reality and the world of myth. He brings together Achille and his father, Afolabe, and out of this meeting of past and present Achille’s sense of loss is heightened. He feels alienated from a culture and a tradition. His interaction with his ancestors causes him to recognize his lack of an historical base, and he yearns to achieve his father’s sense of self and grounding in history. During this period, he is exposed to the customs and rituals of his people and hears the griots sing of their exploits, their sorrows and their joys:

..... but he learned to chew
in the ritual of the kola nut, drain gourds of palm wine,

to listen to the moan of the tribe's triumphal sorrow

in a white-eyed storyteller to a balaphon's whine,
who perished in what battle, who was swift with the arrow,
who mated with a crocodile, who entered a river-horse

and lived in its belly, who was the thunder's favorite, . . .

(XXVII. 139)

This is a transcendent moment for Walcott's protagonist and a searing emotional experience. It involves more than an individual search for identity and a personal affiliation with his original home. For Walcott this experience of his protagonist guarantees continuity and a sense of history, as Achille confronts the historical past and realizes the extent of his deprivation.

This sequel in Omeros is reminiscent of "The New Ships" in Brathwaite's The Arrivants. Brathwaite's narrator, like Achille, is returned to the past to experience the history and wisdom of his people. In both instances the result is a new awareness and knowledge. Again, while both poets focus on the past and history, each one leads his protagonist back to the present, but endowed with the wisdom of the past. It becomes their sacred mission to use their new knowledge to shape the identity of their comrades in the New World.

In creating this myth of rediscovery, Walcott uses Achille to bridge the gap between humans and the gods:

and he climbed a track of huge yams, to find that heaven
of soaring trees, that sacred circle of clear ground
where the gods assembled. He stood in the clearing

and recited the gods' names. (XXVII. 140)

At this sacred spot, Achille deprived of tradition and culture, in present time, can give voice to the names of his gods. Walcott's manipulation of time in this section of the work is extremely skillful. Afolabe and his people speak of a future already experienced by Achille: "the future reversed itself in him. / He was his own memory" The confrontation between past and future brings him no

peace: "Make me happier, / make me forget the future" (XXVI.II. 141). This, however, is no solution, and Walcott's purpose is not only to make Achille remember, but also to discover the meaning of what he remembers. He does discover meaning, but this brings him no peace. Transported to Africa, Achille is entrapped between the past and the future, and becomes fully conscious of the horror and the terror of his people's experience in the time in between. The juxtaposition of past and present shocks Achille into an awareness of the connections between his African heritage and his New World existence. His people dance the dances of the African warriors. He discovers the sameness of things:

the same chac-chac and ra-ra, the drumming the same,
and the chant of the seed-eyed prophet to the same
response from the blurring ankles. The same, the same.

(XXVI.III. 143)

Walcott also returns Achille to the past to experience the actuality of his people's early history. He experiences a slave raid which "yielded fifteen slaves / to the slavers waiting up the coast." In the aftermath of the raid "Achille walked the dusty street / of the barren village. The doors were like open graves." But the griot sings his song of a future time and a "sorrow that would be the past." He sings the songs of the ancestors from Benin and Guinea who endured the crossing and survived. Walcott creates the incredible sense of loss and separation resulting from this forced exodus. The simplicity of language as the poet lists everyday articles missed by the displaced Africans, increases the pathos. The hunter cried for his lance, the fisherman for his river, the weaver for his straw fishpot. In addition, "they cried for the little thing after the big thing. / They cried for a broken gourd" (XXVIII.III. 151). The "broken gourd" becomes the symbol of both the displacement of a people as well as their attempt to protect their cultural heritage in their painful, forced journey to the New World.

The fact that Walcott is a dramatist is clearly evident in this section of the work and returns to the concerns raised in his plays. His emphasis on ritual, and the role of the griot in recalling the exploits of the ancestors, creates, in the work, a ritual space at the heart of which is Achille, the wanderer. First, he must come to terms with the original displacement and alienation. Second, he must make sense of his return to the African homeland. It is in this space between the actual exodus

from Africa and the mythic return that Walcott offers his protagonist psychic healing and an understanding of history. As Lillian Feder puts it, “the vitality of myth” lies in its power “of expressing a variety of contemporary approaches to the inherited past, to time, history, and the yearning for order and meaning ...” (4).

It is the vision of this “inherited past” enveloping both the symbolic and real worlds of Omeros which gives to Walcott’s Caribbean world coherence and meaning. The sense of belonging and identity which the Caribbean person seeks will come through an understanding of this “inherited past,” and the African gods who are the life forces in both past and present worlds. When a hurricane descends upon Achille’s island, all that the people of the village can do is “listen to the gods in session.” Walcott consciously invokes the African gods. Here, the drums of Shango, the god of thunder and lightning are heard throughout the land. Walcott presents both the old gods and their New world counterparts in a grand merger of the two worlds. At this demonstration of supernatural force, Shango is joined by Erzulie, the New World goddess of love. The music of her ra-ra joins the grand symphony of the gods. Ogun and Damballa also take part in this ceremonial show of power and force:

Fete start! Erzulie

ratling her ra-ra; Ogun, the blacksmith, feeling

No Pain; Damballa winding like a zandoli

lizard, as their huge feet thudded on the ceiling,

as the sea-god, drunk, lurched from wall to wall, saying:

“Mama, this music so loud, I going in seine,”

(IX.III. 52)

The poet brings together the music of both worlds thus integrating The African and the Caribbean elements of the New World identity. Ogun, the god of war and iron is the “patron of hunters and warriors” (Bascom 82). It is interesting that here Walcott places him in the company of Damballa, the Haitian god associated with the rainbow, “which in ancient Dahomean lore was thought to be the great serpent come out from the underworld to drink after a rain” (Courlander 20). Walcott includes Damballa here as a symbol of hope and the promise of the integration of the two worlds,

Caribbean and African. Achille, “in his shack,” experiences this display of the power of the gods. Valleys are destroyed also the “year’s banana crop.” The gods consciously imprint the memory of their power on the minds of their subjects in an attempt to keep the past always at the forefront of their consciousness: “Too much had been forgotten” (IX.III. 54).

In Omeros, Ma Kilman, the owner of the “No Pain Cafe” is the memory of the past and the connection between Africa and the New World; Philoctete, with the festering sore on his ankle, is a constant reminder of the burden of slavery and its legacy in the New World, and the realization that unless the new world’s black inhabitants come to terms with this legacy they will remain mentally enslaved. Philoctete’s physical wound is a manifestation of slavery’s historic wounding of the Caribbean’s psyche:

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles
of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor’s

but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage,
then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir.

(III.III. 19)

Walcott’s use of animal imagery is very telling. Philoctete and his people are like animals without power, and forever anchored in a world where the black man generally remains powerless and the only certainty is the inevitability of death. It is this wounding, slavery’s indelible mark, that Walcott attempts to heal by using Ma Kilman as an instrument of restoration and healing. Ma Kilman represents the wisdom of the African elders, but in the Africans’ journey to the Caribbean, the wisdom and knowledge of the ancestors was forced underground. In order to heal Philoctete, this wisdom and knowledge must be rediscovered.

Ma Kilman understands that in order for the ancient powers to be restored, she has to recapture the memory of the ancestors. Because of the nature of her mission, she remains, in a way, a certain distance from society. The villagers sense her untapped powers. To function in her role as healer, Ma Kilman must reach deep down into the ancestral memory from which the healing powers

emanate. She finds herself in a “dark grove . . . in which the bearded / arms of a cedar held council” (XLVII.II. 237). In Yoruba belief groves are “sacred and secret.” They are found in forests where the trees grow tall and the leaves are so thick that the sun is often blocked out. Some trees are viewed as the homes of spirits and very often ceremonies of worship take place at the “foot” of these trees. According to Omosade Awolalu, “because of the singular air of strangeness and quietness about them, they instil a sort of awe even in the minds of the worshippers” (116). In discussing the symbolic nature of the sacred place and its function as the connecting link between the world of the real and the world of the supernatural, Awolalu quotes the following statement by Mircea Eliade:

[The sacred place] constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld. (117)

Here Walcott utilizes the mythology of the sacred grove. He creates a space which will link Ma Kilman to two worlds, the real world of her existence in St. Lucia, and the mythic world of ancestral Africa. In this space, the sacred grove, Ma Kilman discovers a flower “whose odours diverted the bee from its pollen;” this flower has the properties to cure Philoctete’s wound. The flower has a history. A swift had carried the seed in its stomach from Africa to the New World: “She aimed to carry the cure / that precedes every wound” (XLVII.III. 239). Walcott is suggesting that while the journey to the New World was fraught with horrors, the Africans carried with them the seeds of their own deliverance. Ma Kilman has to come to the realization that the ancestral memory is not dead, but simply waiting to resurface. As Walcott puts it, Ma Kilman “glimpsed gods in leaves, but, their features [were] obscured.” He captures the feeling of growing awareness on Ma Kilman’s part as she waits for the moment of recognition when the gods will grant her knowledge:

. . . . the deities swarmed in the thicket

of the grove, waiting to be known by name; but she
had never learnt them, though their sounds were within her,

subdued in the rivers of her blood. Erzulie,

Shango, and Ogun; their outlines fading, thinner

as belief in them thinned (XLVII.I. 242)

Walcott creates a myth to explain the dying power of the gods in the New World. As belief in the gods declined, their power was concentrated in the evil smelling flower Ma Kilman discovers. In discovering the flower and its potent powers, Ma Kilman once more calls into existence the latent power of the gods. Walcott, shrouded in the mantle of the artist and engaged in the act of recreation, fully realizes that a world cannot be remade with flawed systems. Therefore Ma Kilman, in discovering a cure for Philotcete's illness, facilitates the recovery of his body and spirit, and this is symbolic of his people's recovery. As he emerges from the healing bath in which Ma Kilman had immersed him, the "tears trickled down his face": "So she threw Adam a towel. / And the yard was Eden. And its light the first day" (XLIX.II. 248).

But the Eden of the Caribbean, its new day, like the Golden Age of Africa is a part of the grand myth that the poet is creating; for the Caribbean can never escape the dark night of its separation from Africa, the Middle Passage, slavery and colonization. What the poet does is to create another place and time, an African Golden Age and a Caribbean new day which would provide sustenance for the Caribbean imagination. The presentation of a mythical, glorified past adds strength and endurance to current situations even as it shapes the future existence of the Caribbean people. In his grand scheme, as he deliberately blurs the lines between myth and history the evils of the past are not eliminated; the realities remain, but the pain is not as great. For Walcott, the invention of myth in the Caribbean is closely associated with memory. It is also a cultural and a political act intended to influence current and future history. Its objectives are the attainment of freedom and dignity. The creation and preservation of myths, and their passage from generation to generation, is therefore a liberating act.

Thus, for example, when Walcott describes his childhood memory of women, virtually enslaved, crawling up the hills of St. Lucia with baskets of coal on their heads, it becomes not a narration of pain and hardship but a moving account of female strength and endurance, a celebration of the female spirit and an act of liberation:

Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet
and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,
one bare foot after another in ancestral rhyme.

(XIII.II. 73)

The women of St. Lucia join the circle of ancestral survivors. The image of ascent suggests the possibility of freedom and escape as in the Negro spiritual "We are Climbing Jacob's Ladder." This is a metaphorical escape into the company of the ancestors. But the reality is infernal:

"Hell was built on those hills. In that country of coal
without fire, that inferno the same colour
as their skins and shadows, every labouring soul

climbed with her hundredweight basket, every load for
one copper penny, balanced erect on their necks
that were tight as the liner's hawsers from the weight

The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex.
Instead, they were darker and stronger, and their gait
was made beautiful by balance, ... (XIII.II. 74)

This description of their strength and the purity and beauty of the women's movements is all part of Walcott's general purpose to move beyond the terror and the pain of his people's experience on the plantations of the Caribbean, and to celebrate endurance and survival: "But they crossed, they survived. There is the epical splendour" (XXVIII.I. 149).

In "The Muse of History," Walcott makes the following statement:

The epic-minded poet looks around these islands and
finds no ruins, and because all epic is based on the
visible presence of ruins, wind-bitten or sea-bitten,
the poet celebrates what little there is, the rusted
slave wheel of the sugar factory, cannon, chains, the
crusted amphora of cut-throats, all the paraphernalia

of degradation and cruelty which we exhibit as history,
not as masochism, ... (9)

What concerns the poet are not the physical ruins, history's obvious statement, and Walcott's work is strewn with references to the Caribbean's visual historical relics, the ruins of Vigie and the Morne, for example. His interest is in the internal, mental ruins, the vision of slavery and colonization firmly planted in the Caribbean memory. Therefore in spite of his statement, it is possible to find more than a "little" to celebrate and Walcott is very much aware of this, for as he says later in the same essay: "The epic poem is not a literary project. It is already written; it was written in the mouths of the tribe, a tribe which has courageously yielded its history" (9). But this unwritten epic must be brought into existence; it must be given voice and meaning; it must be written. It is this task that Walcott performs so well.

In *Omeros*, Walcott, in attempting to bring life to the unwritten past, manipulates time in a very ingenious way. For example, Achilles is transposed to a past time in which he meets his African ancestor and gains a new vision of his past and his present place in society. On the other hand, Ma Kilman who represents the wisdom of age and the ages is forced on a journey, in the present, to discover the past in the present. This has crucial implications for the future, for Ma Kilman and the people of her village, like the rest of the Caribbean population, are the inheritors of an ambivalent past. They must come to terms with an African past, largely unknown, which includes the Middle Passage journey, but is very present in the spirit, and the memories of a colonial period which extend its negative influences into the present. To rewrite this history, and to create a vibrant, positive Caribbean identity is the poet's massive task.

Ma Kilman is at the center of this project. In the circle of her existence the worlds of the past, present and future meet and confront each other. It is her presence which brings together the lives of the powerful and the powerless. The lives of the Plunkett's as well as the ordinary villagers are brought together as they all attempt to channel her powers for their own good.

The Plunketts are the representatives of colonial power in the Caribbean. On an intellectual level, Major Plunkett, who had fought in North Africa with Montgomery, and is married to an Irish woman, is well aware of the devastating effects of colonial policy and arrogance:

. . . . We helped ourselves

to these green islands like olives from a saucer,

munched on the pith, then spat their sucked stones on a plate,

like a melon's black seeds. (V.I. 24)

Walcott's resident colonist, Major Plunkett is presented very sympathetically. Attracted to the beautiful Helen, once the Plunkett's maid, and now a waitress, "he felt a duty / towards her hopelessness, something to redress / (he punned relentlessly) that desolate beauty / so like her island's" (V.III. 30). Without fully understanding the nature of Helen's pain, Plunkett sees himself in the role of benevolent, well-meaning patriarch. Ironically, he wants to write her into history, but clearly a history viewed through male, white colonizing eyes: "Helen needed a history, / that was the pity that Plunkett felt towards her. / Not his, but her story" (V.III. 31). Helen, having been written out of history by the Plunketts of the world, is now to be recreated according to the perceptions of the colonizer. This is typical of Plunkett's arrogance. It is only Walcott's narrator, from his distance to the movement of the unfolding narrative who can see "the rage of her measuring eyes" (36), and the suppressed violence ready to erupt.

The relationships between the Plunketts and the people of the island have been colored by the inevitability of the facts of history. The powerful presence of history towers over the poem. Ranging from the history of Africa's involvement with Europeans and the slave trade to the European presence in the Caribbean, to the decimation of American Indians, Walcott sets the scene and amasses the evidence for the continuing antagonisms between the colonizer and the colonized. Plunkett relentlessly pursues his historical research on the European presence in St. Lucia, not too pleased by the realization he comes to that "[History] will be rewritten / by black pamphleteers, History will be revised, / and we'll be its villains, fading from the map . . ." (92).

The relationship between Helen and the Plunketts mirrors the uneasy relationship between the islands of the Caribbean and their colonizers. The colonizers, secure in their belief in Christian right and might, are nevertheless attracted by what they view as the exoticism of the islands. Plunkett associates Helen with this exoticism and "otherness" and is obsessed by the beauty of "this Judith from a different people" (97). He masks his lust with benevolence: "My thoughts are pure. / They're meant to help her people, ignorant and poor" (XVIII.II. 97). Maud Plunkett, too, has

learned the lessons of empire very well. Helen is in the servant class and is supposed to be subservient and suitably awed in the presence of her mistress. Both women are consumed by suppressed rage and are forced to mask their true feelings. Helen, pregnant, has to ask Maud for the money to have an abortion. Her poverty chains her to a dependent relationship with Maud Plunkett. But even when she must beg, she refuses to grovel, and after receiving the money, "she was down the track / with the arrogant sway of that hip" (125). Maud, like Major Plunkett, believes that there is really no hope of transforming the nature of the relationship between themselves and the island's powerless natives. To them the relationship remains one of patronage.

But both Plunketts are imprisoned by history and circumstance. Major Plunkett clearly sees himself as a representative of the British Empire whose responsibility is the custodial care of the natives. He has moments when he becomes uncomfortable in this role, but if he relinquishes this power, he will be diminished. Maud Plunkett, too, is imprisoned. She finds herself living in an alien country, and while she feels herself superior to the natives with whom she comes into contact, she lives a life of isolation. She is isolated from the natives and from the inner life of Major Plunkett. Her life is one of passive female existence: "She preferred gardens to empires" (254). But she really has no choice, for in her culture men amass "empires" while women cultivate "gardens." Her reaction to Helen is also laced with envy. She is aware of Helen's power over men, including Major Plunkett. But both Plunketts clothe, with politeness, their basic reactions to the people and the society in which they find themselves. Sometimes, however, the true reaction emerges and the veneer of civility evaporates. For example, when he narrowly escapes being forced into a ditch by Hector's jitney, and is cursed at by a passenger, Major Plunkett responds in the following manner: "I am not a honky. / A donkey perhaps, a jackass, but I haven't spent / damned near twenty years on this godforsaken rock / to be cursed like a tourist" (L.I. 256).

Plunkett's wife dies, as she must, for the poet allows no room for her growth in the environment in which she finds herself. In fact, at her death, the poet/narrator forcibly enters the narrative:

I was both there and not there. I was attending
the funeral of a character I'd created;
the fiction of her life needed a good ending (L.III.II. 266)

In this new world, where the poet is shattering the old fictions of inequality and supremacy, as a representative of the old order of colonizing forces, she must be eliminated; for although in her personal world she lacks power, in the Caribbean she remains a symbol of the unattainable.

But Walcott's vision is one of hope. In the history which he is engaged in rewriting, he reshapes the colonizing mind. He leads Major Plunkett to Ma Kilman and the "No Pain Cafe" in search of solace and a reconnection with his dead wife. He wants the opportunity to ask forgiveness for the pain he had caused her in life, for Maud Plunkett's position in her husband's scheme of operations was no better than the position of the native. Major Plunkett was always in control. However, he is deeply affected by her death, and wants to assure himself that she is in "heaven." Ma Kilman gives him this assurance, and for this he is "bound . . . for good to another race." Before he leaves the Cafe, Maud's apparition appears to him. The entire incident - his contact with Ma Kilman and her mysterious African powers - affects him profoundly. He is transformed: "He discovers the small joys / that lay in a life . . .," and "he began to speak to the workmen / not as boys who worked with him, till every name / somehow sounded different" (LXI.III. 309). Walcott suggests, here, that the force of colonialism needs to meet with the force of the colonized in an arena beyond the ordinary reality of everyday living, an arena where faith is supreme and the tempering presence of the ancestral memory of Africa can assert its civilizing influence.

Yet, Walcott more than ever is aware of the difficulty this entails. In a region where technically slavery and plantation society are memories of the past and independence is the mood of the times, the reality is quite different. In the beautiful and lush landscape of Omeros, poverty is endemic, and the historical attitudes and antagonisms between colonizer and colonized still flourish. But over and over again, Walcott sings of the simple lives of his people and their power to continue to survive against both human and natural evils. He captures their passions and their pettiness, and their daily attempts to assert selfhood and claim a Caribbean identity which recognizes its African connections.

This is all played out in the other world of Omeros, the world of the local folk. Here, Achilles and Hector are rivals for the love of Helen. But the two worlds of Omeros are not distinct and separate. The lives of their inhabitants are inextricably interwoven. Achilles works on the

Plunkett's pig farm during the hurricane season. Helen, at one time was the Plunkett's maid, and her beauty entices the men of both worlds. It destroys the friendship between Achille and Hector. While these relationships unravel, the life of the island continues.

Helen adds her troubling presence to the unfolding histories of the people with whom she comes into contact. Walcott creates in Helen a figure who embodies all of the island's ambiguities. She is a survivor who adapts to the changing life of the island and at the same time attempts to maintain a sense of selfhood. Achille resents any adaptations on her part. He also resents the growing capitalist influence on the island, the "Soul Brothers" singing but "losing their soul," and "the smell of fresh bread drawn from its Creole oven, / its flour turned into cocaine, its daughters to whores . . ." (XXI.I. 12).

Achille's resentment, while it is focused on Helen, is not the traditional European battle of superiority between the sexes, between the traditional male perception of a self-effacing passive female and the dominant aggressive male. Helen is trapped between the old simple ways of the island and new alien patterns of behavior which are in conflict with the values of traditional Caribbean society. Therefore, what is at work here is Achille's distaste for the changes sweeping over his island. With a growing capitalist influence, the evils of industrialized society encroach upon the lives of the island people. People are discarding traditional occupations and becoming involved, usually in menial tasks, in new capitalist enterprises. Helen is a waitress; Hector abandons fishing to become the owner and the driver of a jitney transporting the island's people between the city market and their homes in the countryside.

These changes in the society affect the entrenched vision of the woman in society, and lessens the distance between the ideal and the real. In the life and poetry of the region, the woman has always been presented as a person of great strength and endurance, the epitome of survival and the preserver of the region's culture. For example, in Brathwaite's Mother Poem, the woman represents Barbados, survival, the connections to Africa and the continuation of the race. By presenting the black woman in this idealized way, she becomes superhuman and distant, the embodiment of steel and strength, and as a result not built for love or passion. While this may not be the poet's intention, it leads to a problem that surfaces in Walcott's work where women of a darker hue are associated with violence, revolution and the darker side of passion, while their sisters

of a lighter color are linked to love's lyrical moments. Walcott transforms the black woman into a mechanical force, totally lacking in human feeling, but driven by the passion of revolution.

Walcott's black woman is "shawled like a buzzard;" she "was as beautiful as a stone in the sunrise, / her voice had the gutturals of machine guns, . . . her sex was the slit throat of an Indian" (The Star-Apple Kingdom 50-51). In "The Light of the World" in The Arkansas Testament, Walcott's persona sits on a bus admiring a black woman and fantasizes about making love to her: "I wanted her to change / into a smooth white nightie that would pour like water / over the black rocks of her breasts" (50). Even here, at a projected moment of ultimate tenderness, Walcott compares the woman's breasts to rocks with the connotations of indestructibility and unyielding strength.

On the other hand, in contrast to this portrayal of the black woman, *Ama*, Walcott's representation of love and beauty has "mellowing breasts" a contrast to the rocklike breasts of the black woman and arms "like ripening pears," obviously not the local avocados which darken as they ripen (Another Life 94). But both portrayals of the black woman, Brathwaite's Mother Africa and Walcott's metallic revolutionary, are responses to the stereotypical presentations of the black woman by early European and Caribbean writers. Walcott, however, does not make the final leap toward total liberation until he creates Helen in Omeros. Walcott's earlier presentation of the black woman is part of his colonial heritage, which associates whiteness and lightness with beauty and desirability. This image has to be written out of history. On the other hand, however, Brathwaite's idealized vision of black womanhood must be reshaped to include all aspects of Caribbean black womanhood if the total humanistic picture is to emerge.

In "Caribbean Cannibals and Whores," Joan Dayan suggests the adoption of Erzulie, the Haitian goddess of love as an appropriate symbol of the Caribbean female's response to the numbing effects of colonization. This would then initiate the creation of "a new ethics of voice" (46). But the duality of Erzulie is just as problematic as the exclusive images of woman as rabid revolutionary or divine "Mother Africa." Erzulie, both in her role as "mother of man's myth of life" (Deren 138) and as the epitome of sensuality and sexuality, reinforces both past and current limited visions of the Caribbean woman. Images which focus on superhuman strength, (and female strength is always superhuman), or an all-consuming and stifling sexuality are also misrepresentations. In fact, Dayan makes the following statement:

Female strength is fundamental to Caribbean society.
 And although an "official" image-making culture,
 increasingly supported by the mass media, projects
 the mystique of an ideal woman--pale, diffident,
 refined, and at home--the daily lives of women in urban
 ghetto or countryside defy such stereotypes of
 femininity. (56)

This image of the "pale" and "refined" lady of leisure is evidence of the new wave of post-independence colonization which has its roots in the movement to Americanize the Caribbean. The Caribbean has become the dumping ground for America's outdated images of white women. The intent of the new image builders, generally politicians indebted to American business and politics, is to again destroy the links to Africa, and to substitute American dependency for European dependency. Grace Nichols in "Caribbean Woman's Prayer," beseeches God to give politicians courage and to

mek dem see dat de people
 must be
 at the root of di heart
 dat dis
 place ain't Uncle Sam backyard (Caribbean Women Writers 2)

Dayan suggests that the strength and endurance epitomized in the lives of the region's vast numbers of poor and working poor citizens negate the stereotypical images. However, while this is so, the tragedy is that the new waves of the Caribbean's elite brown middle and upper classes are being seduced by their perceptions of the glitter and materialism of the United States. They refashion the old stereotypes in order to foster difference and to maintain their false sense of superiority and power.

In this sense, Walcott's portrayal of Helen in Omeros is an attempt to address both these past dualities and current misconceptions. He attempts to present the reality of the black woman's existence in Caribbean society, and to capture the heroism of her simple but epic struggle for survival. When Helen makes her first appearance in Homeros, Walcott writes:

"I felt like standing in homage to a beauty / that left, like a ship, widening eyes in its wake" (24-25).

While at this point Helen appears to be the traditional distant beauty set on a pedestal by the adoring male eyes, very soon it becomes obvious that this is far from the reality. Helen is also a fighter and a survivor, a woman who wants to assert her independence: “she dint take no shit / from white people and some of them tourist--the men only out to touch local girls” (33). In a confrontation with Helen, Achille realizes that “he had startled a panther” (39). This is a re-envisioning of the black woman and an acknowledgement of her beauty, a contrast to her portrayal as servant and whore. While Major Plunkett lusts after Helen, to his colonial mind, when he is not being patronizing and feeling regret for the errors of history, she remains to him his wife’s servant and a whore. Thus Walcott pays tribute not only to female beauty but also to the woman’s right to self-determination. Dayan suggests, in looking at the images of women in the Caribbean, that women appear “in varying texts as a sign of a lost ideal or a pressing reality” (51). This is generally true; however, Walcott, in his portrayal of Helen addresses both the ideal and the real. Such an attempt is certainly new for poets of his generation. Helen is not only Helen, lover of Achille and Hector, servant of the Plunketts and the object of Major Plunkett’s lustful gaze, she is also a woman fighting for the survival of self and identity in a world in which black women are generally discarded and debased. In addition, she is St. Lucia, the “Helen of the West.” This is a St. Lucia that Walcott is remaking which allows for the freedom of the female spirit in spite of struggle and survival. It is the essence of this struggle that Walcott captures and immortalizes in his epic work. Helen is not wealthy; in fact, far from it; but Walcott’s portrayal in Helen of the subtleties of womanhood merely emphasizes the “pressing reality” of the region.

As the intensity of passions develop in *Omeros*, Achille, Hector, and Helen become more than characters in the unfolding drama. Each begins to symbolize warring forces at work in Caribbean society. Achille, the simple fisherman represents the old ways and a return to simple values and ancestral wisdom. Hector is impatient with the past, and the present is not moving as rapidly as he would like into a future over which he has control. The sale of his canoe and the purchase of the “Comet, a sixteen-seater passenger van” solidifies his movement away from the old ways, but the new ways bring him no peace, and he dies violently driving the Comet along the winding roads of his island. Helen survives, and her pregnancy signifies continuity in time.

In making these various lives touch each other and move beyond common tragedy, the poet

celebrates the spirit of continuity, survival and rebirth: "Through the year, pain came and went. Then came Christmas" (LV.I. 272). Walcott focusses on the celebrations that occur in the Caribbean the day after Christmas, Boxing Day. On this day of masquerades, Achille transforms himself:

Today he was not the usual king-fish fighter
but a muscular woman, a scarf round his head.
Today was the day of fifes, the prattling skin

of the goat-drums, the day of dry gourds, of brass bells
round his ankles, not chains from the Bight of Benin
but those fastened by himself. He was someone else

today, a warrior-woman, fierce and benign.
Today he was African, his own epitaph,
his own resurrection (LV.I. 273)

Again, the poet focusses on transformation not only for survival, but also as a vehicle in the search for and claiming of an identity. Unlike the celebration in Britain, the Boxing Day celebrations in the Caribbean are not part of the religious celebrations of Christmas. These celebrations have their origins in the time of slavery. At that time, the day after Christmas was one of the four holidays slaves were given annually. On this day, the slaves' dress, manner and their relationship with their masters were transformed. As Orlando Patterson puts it: "Their relationship with their masters . . . assumed the character of a kind of ritual license." In addition, as part of the "temporary metamorphosis" they even adopted what were called "gala day names" which were the names of local Whites of standing and substance (*The Sociology of Slavery* 236). This is all part of a ritual of transformation and a passage of escape from the pain and monotony of their daily existence as slaves. Their musical instruments, calabash rattles and drums, cement the link to Africa, but their existence is firmly rooted in the Caribbean.

It is this presence of Africa in the Caribbean that Walcott stresses in Achille's transformation. He is Mother Africa, a "warrior-woman, fierce and benign. / Today he was African, his own

epitaph, / his own resurrection" (LV.I. 273). This is a sacred moment in Walcott's text, full of the transformative power of ritual. The preparation for, and the enactment of the ritual move Achille out of the everyday world of struggle and survival into a world of the spirit which offers him and his people comfort and hope. Achille is now teacher and leader. Initially, Helen does not take the ritual seriously, but he explains its importance and its connection to Africa and she "did not laugh anymore, but she helped him lift / the bamboo frame with its ribbons and spread them out / from the frame, and everything she did was serious" (LV.II. 275).

Walcott has identified Achille's rebirth as Mother Africa with the resurrection myth thus removing Achille from the world of reality and adding him to the company of mythic figures. The poet, at the moment of Achille's transformation is offering Mother Africa as the source of healing for colonial wrongs; for the dispossessed, in order to assume an identity and to claim selfhood, must be exposed to their own mythic world peopled by figures familiar to the unconscious mind of the community. In his masquerade costume Achille is "resinous and frightening. He smelt like trees / on a ridge at sunrise, like unswaying cedars" (LV.II. 276). Achille becomes one with a mythic and elemental memory. The dance he is about to participate in with Philoctete returns them to the Caribbean's heart of darkness, the initiation into slavery and the Middle Passage; it also moves them out of this darkness:

All the pain

re-entered Philoctete, of the hacked yams, the hold
closing over their heads, the bolt-closing iron,
over eyes that never saw the light of this world,

their memory still there although all the pain was gone.

(LV.III. 277)

This is a dance of remembrance and expiation. Walcott uses the ritual of the dance, the myths of recreation and rebirth to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the colonial erasure of self and worth. In this way he brings the Caribbean people back to a sense of rootedness in the past.

Walcott hopes that connections to their origins, his rewriting of history and his creation of

myths will be the salvation of his people, and that claiming their Caribbean identity will provide an antidote to the region's new form of colonization and corruption. More than anything else Omeros celebrates the simple life of the Caribbean peasants and their history of endurance and survival in spite of almost insurmountable obstacles both metaphorical and real. The life of Walcott's protagonist, Achille, epitomizes this psychic struggle. But Achille learns his lesson:

Measure the days you have left. Do just that labour
which marries your heart to your right hand: simplify
your life to one emblem, a sail leaving harbour

and a sail coming in (XIII.II. 72)

Walcott's epic is an epic of spirit. Achille looks out towards the horizon and his vision expands to embrace his ancestors, those who survived in Africa as well as those, the casualties of the crossing, whose bones are buried in the depths of the sea. It is this expansion of his personal horizon to include his African past that gives grounding to his Caribbean identity, an identity that Walcott then moves from its marginalized position and places firmly at the center of human consciousness.

In going back to the sources, the history and the mythology of the African people, both Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite provide a spiritual home for the Caribbean people. In the visionary world of their poetry folk traditions are preserved and they form an integral and humanizing force in the Caribbean identity each poet is recreating:

The drums beat from the blood, the people danced
and spoke their un-English English until our
artists, seeking at last to paint themselves, to
speak themselves, to sing themselves, returned, . . .
to the roots, to the soil, to the sources.

(Brathwaite Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica 34)

Conclusion

“let the deep hymn of the Caribbean continue my epilogue;”

Omeros -Derek Walcott

Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott as the Caribbean's most prominent poets are both deeply aware of the nature of their poetic responsibility. Emerging out of an historical tradition which negated the selfhood of the Caribbean person and insisted that the region lacked a history and was definitely without culture, it has become the task of these poets to write the region and its people back into history. Brathwaite and Walcott however, have not appeared out of a void, for in the Caribbean there remains the existence of a vernacular tradition out of which the poetic consciousness of these contemporary poets have emerged. A.J. Seymour in Window on the Caribbean quotes from Columbus' letter to Spain written upon his arrival in the New World:

It is a land to be desired, and once seen never to be
abandoned. . . . I assure Your Majesties that there
is no better land or people. They love their
neighbours as themselves, and their speech is the
sweetest in the world. (29)

The irony of these words becomes obvious when viewed in retrospect; for Amerindian culture existed and flourished before the presence of Columbus initiated their mass destruction. There existed an oral tradition which preserved and transmitted Amerindian folklore from generation to generation. However, in their confrontation with the men of Europe and their machinery of war, the Amerindians lost in their struggle to survive and to keep the land that belonged to them. They were found by the Europeans to be physically unsuitable for the rigors of life under slavery, and therefore expendable.

Unlike the Amerindians whom the Europeans met in this new world, the Africans who were brought to this region by force survived. Their survival was a tribute to the power of the vernacular tradition which kept sacred the region's ties to Africa. The reality of Africa, the folk

tales and myths of the various tribes that found themselves existing painfully on the Caribbean's plantations were kept safe through the medium of African voices. This collection of myths, legends, songs and tales that informs the vernacular tradition provides literary and spiritual sources for the region's artists. The tradition celebrates struggle and conquest over immeasurable odds. It suggests that by hearing the voices of the ancestors and interpreting their songs of happiness and sorrow, it will be possible to achieve the supremacy of the Caribbean self. It is a tradition which recognizes the region's deep connections to Africa in its reality as well as in its mythic life.

Brathwaite and Walcott explore and reshape these connections to meet the needs of present-day Caribbean society. They create a spiritual base upon which the Caribbean self can build and which is then substituted for the void that early Europeans and some Caribbeans insisted was the nature of Caribbean identity.

While both poets are involved in the struggle to create a viable Caribbean identity, Brathwaite more than Walcott is at the center of the struggle by his very presence in the region. He teaches in the History Department at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies and continues to battle critics and writers who still question the centrality of Africa in the life and literature of the region. Walcott, always obsessed with the Middle Passage, in his later works, particularly *Omeros*, returns his people to ancestral sources of survival and strength. In spite of a literary return to the ancestral community, Walcott remains the visionary secure in his belief in the possibilities of the Caribbean. But he despairs of the region's new native colonial powers who remain isolated from the lessons of history and seem bent on absorbing the point of view of the early colonists. They become obsessed with power and the acquisition of material wealth; they look to America for the importation of products and values and move further and further away from the ancestral values Brathwaite reveres. Brathwaite remains firmly rooted at the center of his community, promoting the ancestral values of Africa as they have been transformed in modern Caribbean society.

The search for identity, order and permanence remains the focus of the literary minds of the Caribbean. In this sense, the younger poets of the region have inherited the mantle of their prominent forebears, Brathwaite and Walcott. This is clearly indicated when the anthology of St. Lucian poets, *Confluence*, is examined. Kendel Hippolyte, poet/editor has this to say: "[Current poets] are

more comfortable in their own skins than the previous generation of writers - who in fact helped to make this condition possible" (i). Hippolyte in "Birthright" addresses the failures of the region's leaders who, more interested in personal profits, sell out their islands to the "U.S.A":

so
 the people's leaders, in the upper chamber
 broke bread, broke faith, poured blood
 and minced their words and our flesh into the pottage
 then they began to eat, slowly, without appetite
 their last supper. (10)

Jane King, in the same anthology, in a poem entitled "Sahara Spell" reaffirms the region's spiritual connections to Africa:

When the rains come,
 they will tramp the African soil
 Into our earth
 And there will be greening again.
 There will be a growing again. (29)

Melchoir Henry addresses the role of the poet in society in "The Poets speak of Fire":

they ask
 now they ask
 that the toiling thousands
 know their strength;
 they ask
 now they ask
 that their ancestors' voices
 be heard;
 How come?
 How come now
 The Poets Speak Of
 FIRE? (43)

And the poets do speak of "FIRE." Building on the groundwork of the earlier poets, the new poets of the Caribbean seek to extend their world. No longer are the concerns focused solely on the Caribbean self, but they expand to include the black people of the world. In this regard, Brathwaite is the griot of the region who has always sung the songs of his people everywhere they remain oppressed. Jane King in "Intercity Dub, for Jean"--this is the dub poet Jean Binta Breeze--looks at the situation in Brixton:

Brixton groans -
 From the horror of the hard weight
 Of history
 Where the whites flagellate
 In their ancestry
 And the blacks hold the stone
 And they press it to their hearts
 And London is a hell
 In many parts. (23)

More and more the region's poets see their connections to a world wide struggle for black survival and identity in the face of the new waves of modern day colonization sweeping over the world. Black nations, although independent, face the problems of economic and political dependency on the world's superpowers, particularly the United States of America, which is virtually the unchallenged world power today. In this new wave of colonization, where Caribbean leaders in pursuing their own personal aggrandizement sell out their people and countries to Western economic powers, the underclass of the Caribbean remains virtually entrapped in worlds of poverty and hopelessness. Again, the new poets continue to address these evils. In "Riddym Ravings (The Mad Woman's Poem)," Jean Binta Breeze looks at the total breakdown of self and sanity that occurs under conditions of physical, social and economic deprivation (*Voice Print* 40). Jean Binta Breeze concerns herself with the new waves of colonization sweeping through the region and the havoc it wrecks on the lives of the region's poor and dispossessed. Olive Senior, in "Colonial Girls School," shares these concerns, and she looks back at the history of colonization in the region and its devastating effects on the psyche of the people:

Borrowed images
 willed our skins pale
 muffled our laughter
 lowered our voices
 let out our hems
 dekinked our hair
 denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers
 harnessed our voices to madrigals
 and genteel airs
 yoked our minds to declensions in Latin
 and the language of Shakespeare

Told us nothing about ourselves . . .

(Talking of Trees 28)

Senior moves beyond a cataloguing of the ills of colonization to the reality of an awakening and growing consciousness; she moves towards empowerment:

So, friend of my childhood years
 One day we'll talk about
 How the mirror broke
 Who kissed us awake
 Who let Anansi from his bag . . . (27)

Lorna Goodison in "Some Nights I Don't Sleep" sings of world wide oppression, of "awful chips of information / lodged in [her] memory / separating [her] from rest":

I don't sleep some nights
 because I once saw a photograph
 of my son's double.
 He lives in Soweto.
 They both have eyes ancient
 long as the Nile

eyes that are witness
 to every fall every rise
 of our people's fortunes (Heartase 24)

The African experience in the Caribbean having been written into the history of the region is now a source of inspiration for the region's contemporary poets who are aware of the importance of the African legacy. In a poem for Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Pamela Mordecai acknowledges the teaching and influence of Brathwaite, whose constant struggle is to bring his people to a new awareness based on the African power of the "Word":

the drums sound
 but no spirit starts

 Until
 the fingers of the blood
 assort the images
 the wind remembers
 sifting the long grass
 the womb impulses
 summoning
 the beast

In
 a new testament
 the Word (Journey Poem 41)

Contemporary poets, like their predecessors Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott are concerned with the concept of empowerment and the power of the word in the struggle to gain control of self and society and in the rewriting of the errors of history. These are all crucial concerns in the Caribbean where, because of the errors of history, it is necessary to re-envision the position of the individual in society and consider his particular burdens as he attempts to establish

his true identity. Both poets, in the words of Derek Walcott, attempt to “enter that light beyond metaphor.” They explore the inner world of feeling even as they rediscover the outer world of the Caribbean, its landscape and daily reality in a search for truth and permanence. It is in this sense that each poet moves “beyond metaphor,” that is beyond the search for abstract truth to establish order and, as a result, permanence. Given the monumental nature of the task they set themselves, it is not surprising that ultimately each poet appropriates the epic form transforming it into a suitable vehicle to accommodate his grand design. Each poet confronts the ambiguities and dualities of the Caribbean experience in an effort to create an identity for the Caribbean which brings together not only the tormented African past, but also the glory of ancient African kingdoms. The prison of the plantation is made bearable by the survival of African religion and ritual. Thus built into the experience of New World slavery and colonization were the tools of survival. The New World inhabitants appropriated the language and religion of their masters and breathed into them new life and meaning by inspiring the new reality with the memory of the African experience. This combination of myth and history, coupled with the enduring presence of the intuitive racial memory, inspires their literary imaginations and creates a visionary world that offers healing and rebirth to the Caribbean soul.

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