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**Caribbean decolonisations: Derek Walcott's
narrative rewritings and artistic encounters**

How the merging of literary texts and artistic praxis can enhance
our understanding of literature and the wor(1)d

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*Ai miei nipoti, Cristian e Filippo
In memoria di Marisa De Bortoli in Pignoloni e Antonio Mantellato*

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Abstract / Sintesi

My Ph.D. project focuses on Derek Walcott's literary and artistic work. Western postcolonial critique has depicted the Nobel prize laureate as one of the most prominent poets writing in English in the XX century. Though this may be true, it devalues his fundamental contribution in the world of West Indian theatre and art. In the project, I also investigate whether Walcott's multimodal work, a mix of Caribbean folkloric traditions and Western oriented structures and themes, can open up towards transdisciplinary encounters within the world of arts, particularly intersemiotic dance-theatre. I analysed three works – two plays, *The Joker of Seville* and *Pantomime*, and one long poem *Tiepolo's Hound*, since they epitomise respectively a response to Spanish, English and French cultural legacies in the New World. These are *re-writings* of Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe and Camille Pissarro's stories, from a Caribbean perspective. Following Quijano and Mignolo's theoretical approaches, I applied a decolonial perspective, thus uncovering Walcott's strategies to respond to the *colonial matrix of power*, through hybrid identity representations, schizophrenic doubles, and destabilising geo-temporal shifts. Secondly, as a former professional dancer, I relied on the concept of (decolonial) *praxis* to investigate new artistic dialogues with Walcott's texts.

Questa tesi di dottorato indaga l'opera letteraria e artistica di Derek Walcott e propone una traduzione intersemiotica in teatro-danza de *The Schooner Flight*, poema-manifesto dell'autore. La critica postcoloniale di stampo occidentale ha riconosciuto il premio Nobel per la letteratura come uno dei maggiori poeti delle letterature in inglese del XX secolo. Walcott, tuttavia, ha contribuito anche allo sviluppo del teatro e delle arti nelle Indie Occidentali e pertanto, nel corso del progetto, mi sono focalizzato sul lavoro multimodale dell'autore, una mescolanza di tradizioni folcloristiche caraibiche che si intersecano a strutture e tematiche *occidentali*. A partire dagli approcci teorici di Quijano e Mignolo, ho adottato una strategia cosiddetta *de-coloniale*, focalizzandomi in particolare sul *writing back*, ovvero sulle riscritture che Walcott propone nei confronti del *canone*, attraverso rappresentazioni di identità ibride, doppi schizofrenici e mutamenti geo-temporali destabilizzanti. Ho analizzato tre testi: due opere teatrali, *The Joker of Seville* e *Pantomime*, e un lungo poema intitolato *Tiepolo's Hound*, in quanto queste opere rappresentano una risposta all'eredità culturale spagnola, inglese e francese nel Nuovo Mondo. Sono queste riletture in chiave caraibica del Don Giovanni, del Robinson Crusoe di Defoe e della storia di Camille Pissarro, pittore *francese* di origini caraibiche. Nella seconda parte della tesi, in relazione alla mia carriera da ex danzatore professionista, mi sono affidato al concetto di *prassi* decoloniale per proporre una mia personale produzione di teatro-danza sul poema-manifesto di Walcott intitolato *The Schooner Flight*. Il risultato di queste interazioni si è tramutato in una traduzione intersemiotica in danza complessa e articolata che non segue i dettami del canone teatrale *tradizionale* ma che mette in primo piano nuove possibilità di dialogo transdisciplinari tra arti, letteratura e testi.

Introduction

Investigating the work of the Caribbean writer, playwright and artist Derek Walcott (1930-2017) means adopting new, alternative and multidisciplinary strategies of enquiry. While, on the one hand, Walcott's texts are still interpreted and read from a *Eurocentric* perspective that looks back at *canonical* Western European and Northern Atlantic structures and themes, on the other, it is true that the Antillean writer – and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992 – was immediately recognised for his originality in introducing new dynamics and configurations to the “sound colonial education”¹ of his youth.

At the beginning of the new millennium, in her critical work *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry* (2001), Patricia Ismond argued that the four main studies on the Caribbean author, namely “Edward Baugh's monograph on *Another Life*, entitled *Memory as Vision* (1978), Robert Hamner's *Derek Walcott* ([1981] 1993), Rei Terada's *American Mimicry* (1992), and John Thieme's *Derek Walcott* (1999)”², focused primarily on the intertextual connections that Walcott drew from Western European literary models, as well as on his original “writing back”, a theoretical perspective that pertained to post-colonial studies. Ismond was one of the first to suggest that Walcott's work should be read from a new and alternative perspective:

Walcott's anticolonial revolutionary route turns primarily on a counter-discourse with the dominant mode of thought of the colonizer's tradition, against which he pursues an alternative, liberating order of values and meanings, generated from the different time and place of his Caribbean, New World ground³.

Only recently have scholars and critics opted for a new critical approach on Walcott's works, reflecting, in particular, on his context and on the cultures and traditions he came from. “Abandoning dead metaphors” means adopting a radical change and approach or acknowledging that the literatures of the *edge* (that is to say, literary works from former European colonies) are not to be considered minor replicas or simple interactions with the Western world, but rather original and unexpected interpretations of

¹ Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 112.

² Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 8.

³ Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 2.

today's world. In this sense, *word literatures* create and provide uncharted and authentic experiments, which can help us understand the complex global *reality* in which we live.

During the annual conference organised by the TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association), which was held at the University of Exeter in September 2019, Margherita Laera, a translator and scholar of theatre and performance in Europe, pointed out how the concept of Anglo-American multiculturalism “has allowed on the one side the representation and acceptance of multiple and articulated socio-cultural constructs, but it failed in bridging the gap that still exists between the rich societies of the West and the poor communities of the ‘Global South’, or rather ‘South of the world’”. Laera stressed how recent xenophobic and racist movements in Europe have promoted a shameful denial of the *Other*, the migrant or the refugee, as much as well-represented ethnic minorities within British society, thus allowing intolerant attitudes, unjustified tensions and cultural clashes between communities and peoples. In reality, according to Laera, it is thanks to the phenomenon of *creolisation*, which took place mainly in the former European colonies, that we have witnessed the establishment of new *identities* and *hybrid* relational systems, as much as connections and exchanges that reflect and epitomise the dynamics at work in our global and multicultural societies. Laera, along with other academics in theatre, literature, anthropology and human sciences, calls for a new wor(l)d paradigm, or better, a cultural transformation and shift in literature and the humanities in general. They see a need for new definitions and strategies which they designate as *de-colonial*.

At the start of my Ph.D. project on Derek Walcott's work, I decided to adopt a *de-colonial* methodology in an attempt to outline the unpredictable and creative transdisciplinary effort that distinguishes Walcott's way of writing and interacting with different forms of expression and the arts.

The aim of my research was to delve into Walcott's work from a new perspective, thus unravelling the puzzling and intrinsic *porosity* of his literary and artistic *borders* and constructs. Before becoming a *sign* on a page, Walcott's texts are firstly *impressions*, visions and images. Walcott does not forget where he comes from nor who he is writing for and describing.

The first chapter of this Ph.D. thesis focuses on the standpoints of the decolonial option, a set of theories which, since the 1990s, has characterised the approach of different

groups of scholars concentrated on unmasking colonial and neo-colonial structures of power. The chapter presents the revolutionary approaches of Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, María Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa and Walter D. Mignolo, to name but a few. These scholars come from Latin America, one of the *margins* proposed and drawn by Western-oriented powers. They are promoters of an epistemological shift that recognises a correspondence between the nexus *modernity/coloniality*, especially for what they identify as the *colonial matrix of power*, i.e. the neo-colonial constraints that perpetrate the influence and control of West European and Northern Atlantic dominator views on the rest of the world. In explaining the purposes of the decolonial option, which rejects pre-established dichotomies and/or pre-ordained frameworks, Mignolo points out:

Decoloniality [...] does not [only] imply the absence of coloniality but rather the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural⁴.

In theorising a shared and intersubjective thought, an open-minded approach capable of dialoguing with other cultures and relation systems, Quijano is one of the first to call into question the foundations of the Western European logocentric and dominator worldview. Indeed, Quijano suggest replacing the Cartesian equation “I think therefore I am” with a radical and proactive “I am where I do and think”⁵. Promoters of the decolonial approach believe in the need for change and in “learning to unlearn”⁶, so as to question assumptions and perspectives that we take for granted in the reception and interpretation of *reality*. Decolonial theorists foreground how their approach is not an academic discipline, nor a new pattern or paradigm to follow; it is an open space in which to dialogue, share and experiment, in an attempt to deconstruct and subvert the Western European wor(l)d order. In this regard, “[decoloniality] is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice and praxis”⁷.

Amongst the multiple strategies that theorists and scholars of this new critical approach have developed, I focussed in particular on two standpoints. My analysis of a selection of Walcott’s texts deals firstly with reworking or rather rewriting narratives and

⁴ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 81.

⁵ Quijano (2007), Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality, *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2/3, pp. 168.

⁶ Mignolo & Tlostanova (2012), *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*, pp. 1.

⁷ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 5.

stories which are considered exemplary *models* in the so-called Western literary *canon* and, secondly, with Walcott's reuse and re-evaluation of Western aesthetics and artistic practice. For Walcott, *art* represents a creative and dynamic space, a laboratory or *practice* for the representation of new, collective and unexpected relations.

While, on the one side, decolonialists feel the need to rethink stories and narratives that shaped *modernity/coloniality* societies so as to debunk allegedly free and articulated thought (as well as the “danger of a single and homologising story”⁸), on the other, they call into question the premises of art for its own sake, for they do not accept constraints and restrictions within the realm of creative imagination. The decolonial option sees *art* as an instrument for subverting current stereotypes and representations, an expression of/for the *Other*. Through art, for instance, Caribbean peoples, artists and writers were able to refer to and interpret the past through a new lens.

Moreover, the decolonial option brings to the fore the concept of *praxis* and/or practice: the need for practical and proactive action and experimentation. The aim is to re-interpret the Western dominator worldview and provide alternative and transdisciplinary challenges, which cannot be *interdisciplinary* as that would mean deciphering reality through known schemes, relations and strategies.

The chapter continues with a brief overview of Derek Walcott's life and work. From a theoretical point of view, I present his particular way of responding to the English *canon* or Western European literary tradition through strategies such as the so-called *act of naming*, the denial and forgetting of (colonial) history or the use of multiple, multimodal and hybrid languages or systems of communication. In this evocative literary journey, I also show how Walcott's *creolisation* of the New World echoes, in more than one way, Édouard Glissant's thought, and in particular his “rhizomic” view of the world or *Tout-Monde*. Moreover, my thesis takes into great consideration the work and approach of the Jewish-American anthropologist, social activist and scholar Riane Eisler. With her theory of *partnership*, she promotes a spiralling and circular thought process, which aims to rebalance the forgotten bonds between individuals, genders and communities. Eisler's

⁸ I draw on the concept (and danger) of the “single story” from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's inspiring TED TALK. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), *The Danger of a Single Story* https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (consulted on 26/11/2020).

bio-cultural approach⁹ calls for a much-needed *cultural transformation*, a way of rethinking the wor(l)d which reconnects to the theoretical background I have chosen for my research¹⁰.

The second chapter of the thesis presents a textual and artistic analysis of three Walcottian works which I believe are significant examples of *decolonialisation*. In particular, I examine *The Joker of Seville*, a play or musical produced in 1974 and one of the greatest hits of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, the first West Indian theatrical company that Walcott founded in the early 1960s. It is a rewriting of *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (1616), a Spanish play attributed to Tirso de Molina. *Joker* is paramount to the thesis as a whole for four main reasons. Firstly, because it shows the relentless and puzzling *displacement* of the main characters between different contexts (and even different shores of the Atlantic), thus calling into question Western European geo-temporal coordinates and cultural borders. Secondly, because it demonstrates how cultural *syncretism* is rooted in the West Indies, with its indefinite contours between European tradition and Caribbean folklore. Thirdly, because the production proposes the Caribbean Carnival as an interpretative model for the characterisation and psychological examination of the protagonists, thus highlighting Caribbean ambiguity and schizophrenia. In reality, the Carnival theme is a framework or *topos* which can be found in most of Walcott's plays, such as *Drums and Colours*, a commission for the opening of the first Federation of the West Indies in 1958. Finally, *The Joker of Seville* is meant to be staged in a *circular arena* to recall the bullrings or battlegrounds for *stickfighters*, who are essentially spoken-word artists or performers in Caribbean culture. In this sense, the

⁹ According to Riane Eisler: “the new interdisciplinary perspective of the Biocultural Partnership-Dominator Lens reveals how cultural beliefs and social institutions such as politics, economics, and education affect, and are in turn affected by, childhood and gender relations [...] and shows how we can use our knowledge of human development to construct equitable and sustainable cultures that maximize human well-being”. Eisler & Fry (2019), *Nurturing Our Humanity. How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ In this regard, I was also inspired by the work of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) based at the University of Udine and directed by Professor Riem since 1998. “The PSG unites scholars, research centres and universities that collaborate in interdisciplinary and transcultural projects on aspects of *partnership* across languages, literatures and world cultures. In 2014 the *Global Academy of Liberal Arts* joined the PSG network with the intent of developing further research collaborations. Since 2002 the PSG has promoted interdisciplinary studies on languages and literatures through a publishing series (ALL), which combines literary criticism, linguistics (applied and theoretical) and creative writing to create an experimental, multidisciplinary, poetic and artistic laboratory”. <https://www.uniud.it/it/ateneo-uniud/ateneo-uniud-organizzazione/dipartimenti/dill-old/ricerca/allegati-centri-laboratori/all-partnership-studies-group> (consulted on 10/12/2020). For more information on the PSG, please visit its official website: <https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it> (consulted on 10/12/2020).

play is imbued with popular songs and melodies, which evoke traditional Antillean *calypsos*. *The Joker of Seville*'s lyrics were written by Walcott, while the music was arranged by the American composer Galt MacDermot, the famous producer of *Hair*. This demonstrates Walcott's attempt to create new art *for* and *in* the Caribbean, an astonishingly creative context which he strongly believed deserved international recognition.

Pantomime (1978) is an ironic play and a rewriting of the myth of *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. It is a complex text that recalls the *theatre of the absurd* and the work of Bertolt Brecht. It is structured as a witty dialogue between the *white* owner of a dilapidated hotel on the island of Tobago, Harry Trewe, and his *black* assistant, Jackson Phillip. Trewe wants to stage a reversed version of Robinson Crusoe's story for his hotel guests. He wishes to interpret Friday, the slave, and asks Jackson to take the part of Master Crusoe. At first reluctant to embrace the idea, Phillip eventually accepts his employer's challenge, thus contributing to the changing of the story. The final outcome does not convince Trewe. Indeed, the hotel owner soon realises that modifying the identity and race of the roles may upset the audience, especially the island's *white* privileged ruling colonial class. Moreover, the exchange may call into question his *white* authority over Jackson and, therefore, at the end of Act I, the reversal is interrupted. In the performance, the (ironic) clash and encounter between the coloniser and the colonised obliterates the historical and social boundaries that separate the two. This is further emphasised by an artistic and creative duel: Jackson is indeed a former calypsonian, that is to say a singer performing a sort of liberatory poetry that used to be sung by black slaves as a reaction to white colonial domination; while Harry embodies the spirit of the American music hall of the early 1920s. Walcott meticulously works on the positioning of the body and on the mimicry of the actors. While, at the beginning of the play, Phillip is perceived as Harry's *shadow*, in the second part of the performance the black attendant starts taking control over his master, not only in terms of his gestural and interpretative embodiments but also through his witty and intelligent remarks and monologues. The play debunks socio-hierarchical relations between individuals, and reflects on how systems of colonial domination are still powerful within Western European and Northern Atlantic contexts. Indeed, *modernity/coloniality* propounds a dichotomous paradigm that recognises, on the one side, a civilised white world and, on the other, its black, primitive and inferior

counterpart. The performance brings to the fore the consciousness and intellect of the main protagonists, thus providing an insightful analysis on the concept of the solitary man, the Caribbean, who needs to confront and appease his social, ethnical, economic and cultural mix in new and unexpected ways.

Tiepolo's Hound is a long and complex poem that Walcott published in 2000, after the success and international recognition he received as a poet and voice of the Caribbean. It is a mature work in which the author reflects on the power of art in building *partnership* connections between cultures and soothing the wounds of a troubled and still unsolved colonial past. Walcott presents the story of Camille Pissarro, a nineteenth century European Impressionist who is wrongly identified as a French painter. Pissarro was actually born on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas into a Portuguese Sephardic family who escaped to the Dutch colony following the persecution of Jews in the 1500s. For Walcott, the poem is a pretext to reflect on his own condition as an expatriate poet and playwright in search of his fortune in the U.S.A. of the 1980s. The author reflects on how Pissarro's decision to make his fortune in France erases his identity as an "artist of the Antilles", an expression that is attributed instead to the painter who took the opposite journey, from Europe to the Caribbean, namely Paul Gauguin. Walcott provides a profound reflection on identity and artistic representational boundaries. Over the course of the poem, Walcott's alter-ego is constantly searching for the "slash of pink"¹¹ of a white hound he glimpsed in a painting at a museum or gallery, the name and location of which he cannot recall. Walcott wonders whether the animal that haunts him belongs to a painting by Veronese, exhibited at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, and in which the artist depicted *ordinary* people and unexpected situations in *Christ's Last Supper*. The painting portrays Moors, dwarves and animals in addition to occurrences such as a servant's nosebleed, which caused a scandal amongst the ecclesiastical and Inquisition circles. Veronese was forced to change the painting's title from "Christ's Last Supper" to "The Feast of Levi". Towards the end of the poem, Walcott understands he is wrong to attribute a privileged *meaning* to the representation. While opening the unresolved archive of his own *hybrid* condition, Walcott realises that the much sought-after hound is nothing more than a "mongrel", a black starving pup he encounters on a beach on his native island. The contrast between the *black* mongrel of the colonies and the privileged

¹¹ Walcott (2000), *Tiepolo's Hound*, pp. 7.

white dog of the banquets of European society reflects the condition of marginalised, *dispossessed* peoples who still struggle to find a place to call home, and also an authoritative partnership voice that stands up for them. Walcott proposes art, and the artistic process, as a practice for a more equitable and proactive future and a partnership society that recognises itself in beauty and in the inclusion of *Other* peoples and ways of seeing, thinking and acting.

There is a chronological gap between the two Walcottian plays I have chosen for my analysis and *Tiepolo's Hound*. Walcott wrote the first two in the middle and towards the end of the 1970s respectively, while his book-length poem came at the end of his career. If read from a decolonial perspective, though, Walcott's texts dialogue with one another in more than one way. First, they are all rewritings of Western European and Northern Atlantic stories or narratives. Second, they bestow great importance and significance on the power of West Indian art, imagination and folklore. Third, they express Walcott's desire to scrutinise the hybrid and heterogeneous legacies of the Caribbean. In particular, *The Joker of Seville* dialogues with and recalls Trinidadian Spanish heritage while referencing and reviving one of its most memorable literary heroes, *Don Juan*; *Pantomime* presents the clash between Antillean and British societies and structures of power, while reviving the adventurous story of *Robinson Crusoe*; and *Tiepolo's Hound* is a truthful account of Camille Pissarro's story, an artist who is wrongly remembered as French.

The three texts share an incessant need to bring Caribbean representational *identities* to the fore, or better, give meaning to the scattered and disjointed archives of Antillean Creole cultures. In this sense, simple definitions and identifications are rejected because boundaries are abolished in an archipelago that constantly remoulds and rebuffs its colonial legacies. The Caribbean refutes linear thinking and acting, instead embracing a circular, dynamic and fluid system of possibilities and alternatives. The opening up towards other types of expressions beyond writing demonstrates how the Antilles are creative laboratories in which writers, playwrights and artists are not afraid to experiment or challenge themselves, through music, figurative art, performance and dance, to name but a few.

In this sense, it comes as no surprise that Walcott describes his particular type of writing in this way:

I am a kind of a split writer: I have one tradition inside me going one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, the Narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other¹².

The third and final chapter of this Ph.D. thesis presents an original transdisciplinary experiment, bringing together Walcott's wor(l)d and the art of dance. In tune with the decolonial option, I have relied on the concept of *praxis* to rethink and reinterpret Walcott's verses as a dance-theatre performance. In line with my career as a professional dancer, choreographer and teacher of contemporary dance, I decided to *give voice*, through movement, to a selection of verses from Walcott's *The Schooner Flight*, his poetic manifesto and one of his most well-known and praised poems. Taking into account the framework and premise of the discipline of Performance Studies, propounded by Schechner, and the standpoints of Applied Theatre, I have created a dialogue between Walcott's poem and my own reality both in terms of my social context and as a performer. The project was produced in collaboration with a colleague and fellow choreographer, Raffaele Simoni, and a group of young dance students from a local ballet school in Pordenone where I teach, A.S.D. Passione Arte Danza, run by principal Nicoletta Moras. In addition, I worked with a costume designer from Turin, and two audio and video technicians, so as to produce a video recording of the entire work and a video-abstract which is available online on my VIMEO channel¹³.

I selected five emblematic passages from *The Schooner Flight* in an attempt to fully develop the themes and suggestions evoked in the poem and provide a coherent balance between poetry, dance, music, performance, words and text.

The Schooner Flight is a poem written by Walcott towards the middle of his career. It presents the story of one of Walcott's alter-egos, the sailor Shabine, who struggles with his own *divided* identity and cultural mix. Shabine in *patois* means "red nigger" and, through his wanderings around the Antillean archipelago, the protagonist has the chance to confront his past and present life. Shabine is one of those rejected and dispossessed Caribbean people who suffered from the shameful practices conducted through the *modernity/coloniality* matrix of power. In his redemptive journey, the

¹² Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 48.

¹³ <https://vimeo.com/364759314>

protagonist comes to terms with the people he abandoned and also with his unknown and forgotten ancestors, the African slaves who were brought to the Caribbean under the deck of colonial ships.

I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.
I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation¹⁴.

These emblematic lines of the poem were rendered in the choreography in a duet: my colleague Simoni and I embodied the *divided* figure of the sailor Shabine, who at times feels particularly involved in the context in which he lives, and at times refuses and rejects his own identity. In correspondence with Walcott's most celebrated verses, namely "I'm just a red nigger who loves the sea...", Simoni colours my white clothes with different temperas, to re-evoked the Caribbean creolisation and *hybrid* reality.

I bring Walcott's verses directly into today's world in a dialogue with my homeland, Friuli Venezia Giulia. The region, with three names, has always benefited from encounters and clashes between different languages, ethnic groups and cultures. To a certain extent, my region recalls the multiculturalism of the Caribbean island of Trinidad, the context in which the poem takes place.

The video was shot in Teatro Verdi in Pordenone, as part of the dance school's end-of-year performance, but also outside in the barren and desert-like area known as the *Magredi* in Pordenone¹⁵. The undetermined *porosity* of the performative spaces is a clear reference to the need to redraw borders. Today's societies are characterised by increasing economic, cultural and social inequalities but also by a more fluid and multifaceted

¹⁴ Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 112.

¹⁵ The name of this stretch of land comes from the Friulan language and the culture of popular country dwellers. The word *magredi* stands metaphorically for *scarce* or *poor*. The area looks like a tiny desert, made up of stones and sporadic bush vegetation. It is believed to be a very ancient natural formation deriving from the erosion of the Alps in the Northern part of the region where I was born. Under the surface of this apparently barren land, there is a complex system of concealed streams and watercourses. During the rainy seasons, the *Magredi* area floods easily and, astonishingly, separates villages and communities nearby.

heterogeneity of thought. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an intersubjective perspective and approach that debunks any attempt to build new borders between us and them, the migrant and the citizen, the legitimated and the dispossessed, the privileged and the subordinate.

Within the choreography, I also took up the challenge to disrupt and disarticulate the semantic constraints of the text. In this sense, the “soundless decks” on which Shabine’s forebears were transported to the New World were finally given a voice through the silent movements, jumps and turns performed by my young dance students. Conversely, in Walcott’s text, only the great admirals’ orders and cries can be heard:

[...] I couldn’t believe what I see:
[...] We float through a rustling forest of ships
[...] I saw men with rusty eyeholes like cannons [...] and high on their decks I saw great admirals, Rodney, Nelson, de Grasse, I heard the hoarse orders they gave those Shabines, [...] Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations, our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose, to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting. Who knows who his grandfather is, much less his name?¹⁶

In my multimodal dance-theatre work, I opted for a reversal of this scene. The colonial ships are silenced through the use of handmade masks. In this way, the young dancers themselves experienced an *internal* re-adaptation of Walcott’s text.

This overturning and destabilisation of perspectives allowed me to provide a challenging and original artistic, transdisciplinary rewriting of Walcott’s poem. In this sense, both the dancers and the audience were able to ponder on the importance of hospitality and the need to respect of all human beings. Bringing together choreographers, students and collaborators allowed me to share ideas and opinions, and also change my initial perspective on the work. We all acknowledged the importance of taking action against policies and practices that tend to divide, separate and create new borders, walls or frontiers.

The workshop between dancers and crew proved unexpected because the dancers started talking about their own problems and ambitions, also in relation to the verses they

¹⁶ Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 126-128.

were going to embody through dance and gestures. From this perspective, in our long discussions on the work, the students started to question dominator systems of thought and control. They agreed on the need to rewrite stories or give them new shades of meaning or *light*, in the words of Walcott. The hope is for a radical shift towards *partnership*, and towards a mutual, caring and equitable approach that can prevail only if people are able to rethink the Western-oriented paradigms and frameworks.

In this sense, academic research and teaching should provide the context in which women and men are able to think freely and develop critical thinking, so as to forge a more peaceful and respectful world. The arts, too, are responsible in guiding people towards change and on a journey to better understanding themselves.

In the following years, new multimedia technologies and means of communication will help us enhance peoples' awareness of the wor(l)d, the secret and concealed connection of *Tout-Monde*, and the energy that connects all of us in the web of life.

Chapter 1: Derek Walcott from a decolonial point of view: theoretical and methodological approaches

In this Ph.D. thesis I intend to analyse the literary and artistic work of the Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott (1930-2017) from a *de-colonial* perspective, which essentially emerged with the critical work of Aníbal Quijano in the late 1980s, as an original methodology and a challenging *detour* from canonical and traditional ways¹⁷ of interpreting an author's voice and production.

Considered as an alternative to Western-oriented theoretical approaches, the decolonial option focuses not only on the literary outputs of writers from the *edge* but also on their transversal and secondary *openings*, artistic visions and thoughts, thus prompting new and different understandings and interpretations of their work. In postcolonial studies Walcott is recognised as an author and an artist, yet, few monographies and studies have read his production also from an artistic point of view. This Ph.D. project presents Walcott's literary and artistic perspectives as a whole and proposes a transdisciplinary and multimodal translation of *The Schooner Flight*, one of his most celebrated poems. As a former professional dancer and now choreographer I have tried to overcome disciplinary boundaries in order to propose a decolonial intersemiotic interpretation of Walcott's *wor(l)d*.

¹⁷ Literary theory has always been interested in defining a *national* or *traditional* literature, i.e. a corpus of texts and works that epitomise sharing values and cultural viewpoints of a community or nation. The *canon*, a list of books that encompasses the most representative *voices* of a particular context or society, stands as a symbol of this endeavour. In the course of literary history, scholars and intellectuals have tried to identify a Western-based canon or, better, a number of works that were to represent European literatures at their richest and most varied. With the appearance of postcolonial writings and *literatures from the edge*, or *liminal literatures*, the issue has shifted to include former European colonies on a global scale, thus implying the need for *world literatures*. Amongst the most known publications on these issues, see: Altieri (1983), "An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon" in Von Hallberg (ed. 1983), *Canons*; Calvino ([1991] 1995), *Perché leggere i classici*; Guillory ([1993] 1995), *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*; Bloom (1994), *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*; Palumbo-Liu (ed. 1995), *The Ethnic Canon. Histories, Institutions and Interventions*; Prendergast (eds. 2004), *Debating World Literature*, & Casanova ([1997] 2004), *The World Republic of Letters*.

1.1 Introduction: the postcolonial perspective and its Western influence

In order to provide a better perspective on decoloniality and its original standpoint, I will first provide an overview of how Walcott's work has been studied and read according to Western-based critical models, then I will present decoloniality and my specific interdisciplinary and intersemiotic methodological approach.

Although various theoretical approaches have been used to deal with the 1992 Nobel laureate's production, Walcott is usually read within the context of postcolonialism, which thrived after the independence of former European colonies and the consequent twilight of the Western imperial powers.

Critical theories and methodologies need to be constantly revised and adjusted according to different contexts, places and times. Postcolonial theory began to be influential as a literary, anthropological and socio-cultural critical approach around the 1970s, thanks to the work of scholars coming from subaltern and radical groups, originally established outside of the circle of Western academia. Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha are only few of the most prominent intellectuals who studied writers and thinkers coming from the so-called *edge*, i.e. the peripheries of the territories controlled by the European colonial powers. Postcolonialism proved to be a challenging twist because, for the first time in the history of Western domination, the voices of thinkers, artists and writers from the *margins* were allowed to be heard, printed and made the subject of liberal debate and confrontation. The postcolonial revolution brought to the fore issues such as colonial subjugation, natural and human exploitation, slavery and forced migrations, and started to reflect on the perpetuation and endurance of Western-capitalist dominator order. It also bolstered the publication and criticism of *new* literatures in English, Spanish, French, Dutch and other European languages that had previously served as instruments for colonial domination, while the writings of aboriginal writers and *mulattos* were finally acknowledged and included in the lists of academic interest.

Even if these epistemological shifts nowadays are still considered as liberating accomplishments in the development and advancement of literary critique - an idea with which I agree - they often reveal influences and *readings* that look back at the same

Western-based critical thought, or that are directly influenced by its own hegemonic dominator paradigm¹⁸. I do not wish to argue that the postcolonial attempt to weaken the gap between former masters and colonised communities was a failed one, but rather that it reiterated similar strategies and viewpoints to those it aimed to debunk.

My intent here is to discuss the processes that brought about the acceptance of postcolonial views, including the perspective of former European structures of power that called for change and reform. I will focus on two highly debated concerns: the idea of *representational difference* and the presence of the *subaltern speaker*, and question whether their postcolonial application overcomes the Western-based dialectic or rather offers a revision that hints at canonical and traditional European strategies of reading literature. At the same time, I will present extracts of two Walcottian poems, *A Far Cry From Africa* (1962) and *The Arkansas Testament* (1987), to see if postcoloniality is useful in highlighting the author's main concerns in Western European and Northern Atlantic terms, or if it is a weak critical tool to propose new and alternative perspectives for studying diverse cultural backgrounds and a transmedial way of expressing ideas and communicating.

The discourse on *difference* is one of the most discussed postcolonial concerns in the field of literary theory¹⁹, and it was aptly foregrounded in the dichotomies and binary oppositions in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), such as East/West, black/white, savage/civilised or rational/irrational²⁰. In highlighting the ethnical divisions that Western European powers had established in order to maintain control over their subjects, Said echoed the ideas of post-structuralist thinkers of the 1970s and, in particular, the elaborations and *deconstructions* of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida²¹. Drawing from Derrida's idea that language and discourse were direct representations of cultural difference (in opposition to the structuralist belief that language was monolithic), Said

¹⁸ One of the main theoretical frameworks at the basis of this Ph.D. thesis and project is Riane Eisler's *partnership model*. I will later explain the key concepts and ideas at the core of this critical approach which is essentially based upon a refusal of *dominator* societies for a more equitable, caring and mutual paradigm. For more information on the *Partnership model* and Riane Eisler's work, see: <https://centerforpartnership.org/> (consulted on 20/01/2018).

¹⁹ See: McLeod ([2000] 2010), *Beginning Postcolonialism*, pp. 80-120; Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin ([1989] 2002), *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 14-36.

²⁰ For a thorough overview on Said's work and thought, see: Said (1978), *Orientalism*; Said (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*; Said (1999), *Out of Place*; Said (2000), *Reflections on Exile*.

²¹ Most critics tend to underline how Said's theoretical discourse was imbued with reverberations coming also from readings of Antonio Gramsci and Michael Foucault's perspectives and philosophies.

argues that features often attributed to Orientals were fictional representations perpetuated by European myths and thought, which were later disseminated throughout by the colonial matrix of power.

The application of Said's *divisions* on Walcottian poetry is useful in discerning one of the most emblematic issues addressed by the Caribbean poet, namely his never-ending questioning of ethnical differentiation and representation. This is particularly evident in Walcott's very first production, as in the case of the poem titled *A Far Cry from Africa* (1962), where the author openly questions his persona and his *double-sided* European and African heritage:

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?²²

The excruciating *division* affecting Walcott's representation of identity cursed him for the rest of his life. The poet underwent a complex journey of self-discovery before accepting and finding a way out towards his double-marked voice, physical appearance and cultural hybridity. Reading these verses through Said's methodology may enhance the understanding of colonial strategies to actualise racial hierarchies of social divide: a scale of arbitrary divisions assumed to be determined by a *higher*, if not divine, civilising white order. The intermingling of peoples and communities in the Caribbean prompted the growth of mixed socio-cultural *divisions*, with a majority of black people and *mulattos* whose values were extremely heterogeneous because of different traditions, religious beliefs and genealogies. This way of presenting Walcott's work is certainly useful to Western readers in order to orientate themselves through postcolonial thinking and writing, and also show the features that define the Caribbean poet's literary and aesthetic views. What might be missing though is an overview of the causes that determined this *hybrid* and undetermined space. Put simply, Western European and Northern Atlantic ways of reading postcolonial thought tend to simplify Walcott's poetry through

²² Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 32. *A Far Cry from Africa* was published in 1962. The poem explores the history of an uprising in Kenya, occupied by the British colonial powers, in 1950s.

dichotomies which do not fully account for the complexities of his work and the context in which he lived and worked.

A *decolonial* point of view would not merely focus on the poem's *divisions* but rather on Walcott's attempt to debunk and re-think traditional concepts of borders and epistemic representations, thus reflecting simultaneously on European, African and West Indian legacies and definitions. Walcott does not want to choose a side for his divided-self but rather *give back to it* what it endured and what it now represents, thus reaping the benefits that the *divide* can provide. Through these compelling verses, Walcott presents colonial domination from a wider point of view, thus including the voices of indigenous populations that were once forced into *silence* in the Caribbean through the Middle Passage. Walcott's poetry uncovers dynamics that continue to perpetuate Western dominating hierarchies of power, even after the supposed twilight of their empires. In this sense, the poem shifts between past and present and reflects on the consequences of a not yet mutual confrontation between different cultures, languages and societies. Confirmation of these aspects may be found in the very reason that led Walcott to write these lines: *A Far Cry from Africa* was published in 1962, showing the author's angst in thinking about the violent eight-year campaign of the Kikuyu tribes in Kenya against the British Empire in order to preserve ancestral land.

In this regard, Walcott's work is more than a dividing line; it is a continuous shifting and remoulding of dichotomies, binary oppositions, spaces and temporalities. It is a polyhedral type of writing, whose *order* cannot hold and whose structures and realisations urge for new and challenging analytical paradigms and perspectives.

The postcolonial Western reading of the *subaltern speaker* exemplifies a second example of how the analysis of Walcott's work has been limiting. It was promoted and employed for the first time by the Indian scholar and critic G. C. Spivak in her well-known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"²³. In forming a concept that accounted for the consequences derived from silencing colonial subjects, Spivak took as an example the female sati suppression or widow sacrifice in Indian culture, thus presenting the dynamics

²³ Childs and Williams explain that Spivak's "[...] answer to this question is in the negative, because the subaltern is only produced by the subject-effects, the inscriptions, found in colonial historiography [...]. There is no subaltern voice that can be retrieved or made to speak, only the designations of texts that constructs peasant resisters as 'criminals' or 'mutineers'". Childs & Williams (1997), *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, pp. 163. For an interactive overview of the totality of human history, see: <http://histography.io> (consulted on 28/03/20).

of a *double colonisation* at work in non-Western female subjects. This perspective or way of responding to colonial power revealed other strategies of coercion and exploitation empowered by European powers, but it also drew on assumptions that can be found in the critical work of Lacan and Derrida. Therefore, this way of reading and interpreting colonial history and its literary or expressive outputs might be limiting, if the current unaltered political situation is to be considered²⁴.

When exploring Walcott's representation of voices coming from the *margins*, Western postcolonial scholars or readers are tempted to connect the Caribbean author's descriptions and narrations with the perspective outlined by Spivak's critical work. In other words, Western academia tends to simplify the matter by viewing strategies of colonial coercion and subjugation as dynamics that are now no longer valid. A true account of today's unreversed scenario proves the contrary, as Western structures of power do still influence most of the global political agenda. Since the appearance of postcolonial thought, global scenarios have radically improved but dominator/dominee relationships have not yet disappeared, instead they have assumed new and *unpredictable* forms. Western European powers read *postcoloniality* as a way of foregrounding and responding to what it assumes to be *post-* ("past" strategies of suppression and domination) thus suggesting that, in the current world order, these issues no longer exist.

To clarify these critical perspectives, I present here an extract of Walcott's *The Arkansas Testament* (1987) where he suggests that subaltern voices should remain silent in order to survive:

In an all-night garage I saw
the gums of a toothless Sybil
in garage tires, and she said:
STAY BLACK AND INVISIBLE
TO THE SIRENS OF ARKANSAS.
The snakes coiled on the pumps
hissed with their metal mouth:
Your shadow still hurts the South²⁵

²⁴ In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak highlights the limits of Western European literary critique and comparative literature: "As far as I am concerned, [...] there is nothing necessarily new about the new Comparative Literature. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that the times determine how the necessary vision of 'comparativity' will play out. Comparative Literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders, as Derrida never cease reminding us via Kant, is a problematic affair. Spivak (2003), *Death of a Discipline*, pp. 16. See also: Larsen (2015), *From Comparatism to Comparativity: Comparative Reasoning Reconsidered* (consulted on 27/03/20): <https://riviste.unimi.it/interfaces/article/view/4929>.

²⁵ Walcott ([1987] 1988), *The Arkansas Testament*, pp. 109.

Walcott wrote the poem in the late 1980s, thus denouncing – through the use of capital letters – the perpetuation of racial segregation at the heart of the United States of America, often considered as one of the most *civilised* countries in the world. Postcolonial theory and Spivak’s argument on *subaltern voices* are meaningful tools in identifying uncivilised strategies of colonial dominance but they do not clarify how Walcott overcomes contextual, physical and social dilemmas from an alternative and decolonial perspective.

The precise reference to a character from the classical world – the Sybil – whose role it is to foresee and question the destiny and future of humanity, is Walcott’s rewriting of a Western, hegemonic and powerful narration from a universal and a-temporal point of view. The Sybil is portrayed in an unfamiliar setting, decontextualised with respect to traditional Western European representations. She has assumed the appearance of a poor, rejected person, thus becoming a *subaltern voice* in her own world. Remoulding and proposing a new identity for this mythological figure means debunking Western European standpoints and structures²⁶. It means proposing a new perspective while asserting that the silencing of black persons is still a problem haunting the structures of a presumably civilised, modern and postcolonial world. White domination has not yet been overcome in Arkansas, one of the most intolerant countries in the United States. Colonial history and legacies are far from surpassed. Black people are still seen as “shadows” who do better to hide and stay invisible in order to survive. In short, they remain *subalterns*. In this regard, Walcott’s poem also offers a challenging insight into reconsidering literature not only within defined categorisations and binary oppositions, but more as an intuitive ground to read the complexities of today’s society. The Sybil in this case encompasses new and old traditions and innovations, thus becoming the symbol of a new globalised web of interrelations, embodying the contradictions of a globalised disoriented *dispossessed*.

²⁶ Re-writing and re-thinking Western classical mythology through a West Indian perspective is a strategy that Walcott employs in most of his works. For an interesting study on this subject, see: Greenwood (2009), *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues Between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century*. In the *Introduction* to her work, Greenwood explains: “The echo of the phrase ‘new word’ in ‘new world’ neatly encapsulates the aim of this study: to look at ancient Graeco-Roman literature and culture afresh via Caribbean readings, and to examine the new words and paradigms for the study of both Graeco-Roman Classics and the Caribbean that emerge from this dialogue”. Greenwood (2009), *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues Between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 8.

A challenging strategy to look at today's world order is most certainly needed. Postcolonial theory and its Western-based methodologies and *readings* have prompted an awareness on the concept of *Other* while proposing alternatives in order to overcome racial, social, and historical issues. Nevertheless, they have not confronted the complexities that have emerged in the new global order.

These readings of Walcott's poems aim to point out how postcolonial theory might still be carrying limitations and constraints derived from its Western-oriented background and influences. Even though postcolonial thought has opened up the path to relevant epistemic and transformative processes in the field of literary critique, its Western-dominant foundations have not yet been debunked.

To conclude, I will briefly discuss the value of the term or label *post-colonial*. The prefix *post-* designates a period of time *after* or past the colonial era. The meaning of the term presupposes a definite closure of the Western European matrix of power. At the time of writing, a new globalised capitalist world has replaced the former imperial spaces of domination, while its structures are still dictated and influenced by Northern Atlantic and Western European alliances and institutions. In this respect, I do concur with Moore-Gilbert's view when he argues:

[...] the problem derives from the fact that the term has been so variously applied to such different kinds of historical moments, geographical regions, cultural identities, political predicaments and affiliations, and reading practices. As a consequence, there has been increasingly heated, even bitter, contestation of the legitimacy of seeing certain regions, periods, socio-political formations and cultural practises as 'genuinely' postcolonial²⁷.

From Moore-Gilbert's perspective, postcoloniality avoids and underestimates geo-transnational *complexities* of the modern-contemporary world, to use an expression dear to the Italian philosopher Mauro Ceruti (2018)²⁸. The political, social and economic global crisis of the last twenty years and the uncertainty derived from the *relativisation* of human sciences (as much as their basis and logics) have destabilised our way of thinking and understanding reality. Literary theories and their applications must undergo

²⁷ Moore-Gilbert (1997), *Postcolonial theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, pp. 11.

²⁸ On Ceruti's idea of *complexity* derived from the neo-colonial globalising order, see: Ceruti & Bocchi (1981), *Disordine e Costruzione*; Ceruti & Bocchi (eds. 1990), *La Sfida della Complessità* & Ceruti (2018), *Il tempo della Complessità*.

a process of revision and redetermination that take into consideration new and complex perspectives.

This Ph.D. thesis intends to demonstrate how a different path or direction in reading postcolonial literature is possible, starting from the denial or re-reading of those same conceptions and ideas originating in and transmitted by Western European structures and thoughts.

1.2 The decolonial option and approach

The decolonial analytical perspective or methodological approach began with the innovative studies of a group of scholars and academics that merged around the critical ideas of Aníbal Quijano and Enrique Dussel²⁹ in the 1990s³⁰. While postcoloniality was influenced by theories and epistemologies from the Anglo and Northern American axis and train of philosophical thought, the decolonial slant was first adopted in Latin America, in particular in the Andes. In these territories, subaltern groups of Southern American thinkers and academics pondered, for the first time, the distorted perception Western European and Northern Atlantic structures of power had of their regional spaces. Indeed, in Western *minds* Latin America was perceived as a block country with similar features and characteristics in terms of socio-political and ethnical divisions. In order to contrast these misleading representations, decolonial groups promoted a radical shift in the definition of their diversified communities, thus pointing out how these homogenising representations were used as a justification to camouflage what they defined as “an ongoing dominating colonial matrix of power”, or better “patrón colonial de poder”, to use Quijano’s words³¹. At the heart of the decolonial approach is a concept pair perpetuated by (then) *colonial* and (today) *global* Western powers: *modernity/coloniality*.

Quijano was one of the first scholars to argue that the concept of *modernity* inherently encompasses the concepts of subjugation, enslavement, servitude and domination. Indeed, in the Western hemisphere the term is still associated with a feeling

²⁹ Aníbal Quijano (1930-2018) was a Peruvian sociologist and critical thinker. He was educated in Latin America and his research focused on the definition of an epistemology from the Global South. His first internationally famous studies appeared in the review *Perú Indígena* (1992). Amongst his most famous works and articles: *Los movimientos campesinos contemporáneos en Latinoamérica* (1966); *The urbanisation of Latin American Society* (1975), *Imperialismo y “marginalidad” en América Latina* (1977), *La modernidad, el capital y América Latina* (1991), *Raza, etnia y nación. Cuestiones abiertas* (1993), *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America* (2000), etc. From these few titles one can easily distinguish an interesting shift from local to global perspectives, in a perpetual dialogue between the Northern and Southern nations, formations and powers.

Enrique Dussel (1934-) is an Argentinian and Mexican social thinker, philosopher and academic. His critical writings on the “theory of liberation” were influential in the development of the decolonial perspective. See: *History and the Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective* ([1973] 1976); *Philosophy of Liberation* ([1974] 1985) or *The Invention of the Americas* ([1992] 1995).

³⁰ In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo explains: “Whereas Quijano began his intellectual production in the late 1960s in sociology, Enrique Dussel began writing during the same years but in philosophy. Coming from their respective disciplines and trajectories and working independently of each other, they arrived after 1990 at similar conclusions and perspectives [...]”. Mignolo (2012), *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, pp. 56

³¹ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. 8.

of advancement and progression limited to a single community or group of *civilised* nations. As Quijano has aptly demonstrated, there is a “darker side”³², or darker dominating narrative, governing the logic of *modernity* and that is *coloniality*.

Walter Mignolo, one of the most distinguished and influential promoters and founders of the *decolonial option*, stresses the distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Mignolo argues that while colonialism - as a project or era - no longer exists (for it ended with the liberation and independence of the European colonies around the globe), its hidden debris or rather subtle logics are still at work after having resisted and undergone a process of reconversion and adaptation which might be identified with *coloniality*. In clarifying his idea, Mignolo highlights another inherent difference between the two terms. While the consequences of imperialist policies were visible and tangible during *colonialism* because of physical coercion and subjugation and/or spatial and ethnical divisions, nowadays *coloniality* is far more powerful and dangerous because it is blurred and silent, thus proving to be uncertain and difficult to distinguish. For decolonial theorists, *coloniality* is the expression of a neo-liberal, neo-colonial and capitalist world order, in which the centres of power secretly detain the decisions for the upcoming global agendas. In defining “centres of power” Mignolo includes the influence of banks and financial systems, as well as the hegemony of multinational corporations and government intelligentsias. For decolonialists, these silent and unknown forces are replacing older imperial militia, operating and functioning behind the curtains of the globalising arena. Therefore, one of the worst aspects of these neo-colonialist forces is their mutability. It is impossible to fully identify them or rather point at the *real* helmsmen in charge of their powerful institutions.

Quijano further adds that “coloniality” originated through two subtle axes or structures of colonial power: at the beginning through the imposition and acceptance of conqueror/conquered or dominator/dominee racial differentiation, and secondly through the constitution of a financial and economic complex that fostered highly organised labour in order to exploit natural resources for the production of European commodities and goods.

Amongst the dynamics that furthered the beginning of the *modern* era (or rather the Western idea of an *imagined* new epoch), the theological rhetoric of salvation,

³² Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

especially influenced by Christian missionaries, played an important role. The genocide of indigenous populations across the Americas was justified as a project supported by the divine. This aspect allowed European powers, in particular Spain and Portugal, followed later by France, England and Holland, to force and transplant into their newly appropriated territories millions of enslaved Africans on the pretext of accomplishing God's will. With the establishment of the colonies, Europeans converted both slaves and the few remaining indigenous communities of the New World before forcing them to embrace their customs and ways of living and thinking. Colonised peoples were turned into a labour force because European powers established a system of plantations, which produced sugar, cotton and tobacco around the territories of the West Indies and South America. When some of these countries fought and obtained independence (as in the case of Haiti or Hispaniola), the European powers turned to indenture labour, thus favouring migration from Asia, especially India and China, and other Middle-Eastern countries.

In retracing the tragic histories of Central and Southern American territories, Mignolo points out how the colonial matrix of power encouraged the development of a new concept for the modern world: the dispensability of human life. The scholar argues that while slavery was already present in Egyptian or Greek and Roman *civilisations*, for the first time in human history it started to be perceived as an unavoidable prerogative for the advancement and progression of the civilising world, namely Europe. *Other* cultures, with their own millennial traditions, cosmologies and theologies were thus excluded from Europe's *modern* project and therefore needed to be repressed.

Simply put, for decolonial thinkers the notion of *modernity* represents no more than a narrative, a well-structured story formulated by colonial Western European powers at the dawn of the Renaissance period³³. The rhetoric of modernity justified domination and exploitation of human and natural resources in the name of God and for the benefit of a restricted *common good*. Quijano, Mignolo, Dussel, Escobar, Lugones and other thinkers argue that the *modernity/coloniality* pair does not represent an ontological moment in history nor a theological one, but rather an invention, a story that needs to be debunked. These scholars also point out how European and Northern Atlantic powers are

³³ In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* ([1995] 2003), Walter Mignolo reflects upon the beginning and spread of the Renaissance ideology and philosophy around Europe. In doing so, he evaluates how the formation of national languages and their systemic grammars prompted the constitution of an imagined and superior cultural *identity* and knowledge in the emerging structures of the European powers.

nowadays trying to remould *modernity/coloniality* into presumably reformed configurations that go under the label of post-human, post-colonial and post-modern, to name but a few.

For Latin-American thinkers, there is only one liberating possibility to overcome dualistic perceptions of modernity/coloniality, and that is *decoloniality* and a decolonial approach. In this regard, they recognise a variety of institutions, programmes and organisations that promote an awareness of the modernity/coloniality matrix of power.

1.2.1 Features and characteristics of the decolonial approach

In describing the features of the *decolonial option*, subaltern groups of Latin American scholars and theorists acknowledged how an epistemological *turn* was an inevitable consequence of the fading importance around the globe of *modernity/coloniality*.

Mignolo and Walsh argue that while *modernity/coloniality* appears as a static and homogenising body of power, *decoloniality* works in the opposite direction, presenting itself as a centrifugal and *pluriversal* force that encompasses other ways of governing, thinking and acting:

Decoloniality [...] does not [only] imply the absence of coloniality but rather the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural³⁴.

To those critics and academics who argued that the decolonial point of view reflects a further dichotomy between tradition/innovation, or rejection/acceptance of a “modern” worldview, Mignolo has aptly replied that *decoloniality* transcends the Foucauldian distinctions between words/things, one word/one thing, as it represents the final stage, the ongoing process of a three-sided continuum formed by *modernity/coloniality/decoloniality*.

Indeed, the decolonial option functions as a flux of ideas, a “serpentine movement”, to re-engage with Mignolo and Walsh’s definition, that deconstructs a long-

³⁴ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 81.

lasting global order now destabilised in every sphere of its human construction: religion, economy, science, theology, politics, ethics, aesthetics, art, and knowledge. In addition to these transversal forces of change, decolonial thinkers also focus on the various responses formulated by former colonial structures and centres of domination in order to maintain power. Strategies of “re-westernizations” on one side and “de-westernization and de-coloniality”³⁵ on the other are therefore simultaneously sharing and switching their control and influence in different contexts and cultures around the globe. As an example, Mignolo points out how European and Northern American countries are similarly sustaining financial cuts and reorganisation of labour at the expense of human wellbeing and partnership values in order to redefine and strengthen their matrix of power. In this complex scenario, Mignolo argues that the confrontation between different epistemologies and ways of thinking will not lead to a direct struggle between first-world countries and the rest of the world but rather a positive re-evaluation and reinterpretation of human histories, cultures and civilisations that were once considered less valuable and underdeveloped:

What is being claimed is not the end of Western civilization, but its crisis in the process of becoming one among many and not the one that leads the other toward growth, development, modernization, and happiness³⁶.

Another ground-breaking aspect of the decolonial option is the reconceptualisation of Western-based philosophy and way of perceiving reality. The Cartesian “*cogito ergo sum*” is denied as an expression of Western thought and self-asserting subjectivity. According to decolonialists, the formula has been useful in justifying the ambition of the self, and supremacy of a single culture, thus denying the presence and influence of different and *Other* cultures and world views. Quijano demonstrates how the Cartesian equation constituted one of the first colonial strategies to empower European domination, thus neglecting the intrinsic “intersubjectivity and social totality” of human history³⁷. Therefore, decolonial thinkers promote a sort of remapping

³⁵ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

³⁶ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. 115.

³⁷ Quijano (2007), Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality, *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2/3, pp. 172. Quijano presents three main explanations of the crisis in the Western European paradigm of knowledge: firstly, the fallacy of considering the *subject* a category solely referring to and for itself, thus denying *intersubjectivity* as an essential part of self-reflection and realisation; secondly, the objectification of what happens outside the subject, thus refuting the existence of another subject (the *Other*), and finally the denial of

of the global order of knowledge through the introduction of the formula: “I am where I do and think”:

[...] shifting from “I think, therefore I am” to “I am where I do and think” (meaning that think derives from doing in the same proportion that doing is guided by thinking) is a shift in the geo- and body-politics of knowledge that focuses on changing the rules of the game rather than its content. We can call it decolonising epistemology or, if you wish, working toward epistemic decolonial democratization³⁸.

These challenging worldviews reject the pivotal influences of the dominant *centres* of Western power. As Chinua Achebe emphasises in one of his books, when the centre cannot hold, “things fall apart”³⁹.

This dismantling framework foregrounds and explains another core feature of the decolonial option: the revision of the *global linear way of thinking* and the reconsideration - if not denial - of the Western-based division of space. The decolonial perspective opens up different possibilities and readings of spatial and temporal notions of being, performing and living.

One of the main focuses of the decolonial option is body language or body semiotics, the physical and corporeal expression of difference, change and movement. For decolonial theorists, the body represents a *text*, a performative instrument through which one is allowed to challenge canonical ways of behaving and living. In tune with this perspective, in Alessandra Violi’s comprehensive study on bodies and literatures, Western patriarchal order is seen as fundamental in establishing a gap between bodies and minds, or rational and physical spheres of knowledge. Violi argues that the Western dominator paradigm has established a corporeal literature and history that distinguishes between brute, tribal *black* and perfect angelic, *white*⁴⁰.

In discussing some of the other main aspects of the decolonial slant, Tlostanova and Mignolo have emphatically titled one of their manifestos *Learning to Unlearn*:

interconnections between structures and entities around the universe, as quantum physics, contemporary research in the field, and systemic science have conversely demonstrated. On contemporary systemic science, see also: Capra (1982), *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*; Capra (1997), *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*; Capra & Luisi (2016), *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*.

³⁸ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. 92.

³⁹ Achebe (1958), *Things Fall Apart*.

⁴⁰ Violi (2013), *Il corpo nell'immaginario letterario*.

*Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*⁴¹. In response to critics who have argued that such radical positions might undermine the basis for mutual and respectful understanding or sharing of ideas, Mignolo has argued:

Epistemic disobedience leads us to decolonial options as a set of projects that have in common the effects *experienced* by all the inhabitants of the globe that were at the receiving end of global designs to colonize the economy (appropriation of land and natural resources), authority (management by the Monarch, the State, or the Church), and police and military enforcement (coloniality of power), to colonize knowledges (languages, categories of thought, belief systems, etc.) and beings (subjectivities). ‘Delinking’ is then necessary because there is no way out of the coloniality of power from within Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought. Consequently, de-linking implies epistemic disobedience rather than the constant search for ‘newness’⁴².

Unlearning and de-linking from Western-based assumptions, philosophies and theories presupposes an effort that will eventually re-determine who we are and how we consider and see ourselves in relation to *Others*. This challenge is directed also towards our human understanding and relationship with the natural and cosmic order of the world. De-linking would mean abandoning certainties or calling into question what we consider secure positions and determinations. *Learning to unlearn* means overturning the way we look at human lives and ways of being, and calling into questions assumed beliefs and values in a constant re-evaluation and remoulding of what we have become. Only through such a journey of self-discovery and redetermination will we be able to think *outside the box* and reject renewing menaces coming from modernity/coloniality. On this difficult path towards Western European and North Atlantic re-evaluation and reconsideration, Quijano stresses the power of intercultural relation(s):

The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations: a freedom to choose between various cultural orientations, and, above all, the freedom to produce, criticize, change, and exchange culture and society. This liberation is part of the process of social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination⁴³.

⁴¹ Mignolo & Tlostanova (2012), *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*.

⁴² Mignolo (2011), Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto, *Transmodernity*, 1, 2: 45. In this same article Mignolo emphasises the importance of the *encounter*, and especially the *intercultural communication* as a way to exchange experiences and meanings.

⁴³ Quijano (2007), Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality, *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2/3, pp. 178.

In this sense, the decolonial option is not thought of as an academic discipline or a new paradigm or critical line of thought, but rather as a *space* for experimenting, devaluing, de-linking, deconstructing, remoulding, revisioning, etc. At the basis of its epistemology, “[decoloniality] is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice and praxis”⁴⁴.

The focus on practice and praxis will be particularly useful in the analysis of Walcott’s multimodal texts and in explaining my intersemiotic interpretation of *The Schooner Flight*, one of Walcott’s most renown poems. As I will demonstrate in this thesis, the work and art of the Caribbean author transcend literary and expressional spaces and boundaries in order to plunge into a diffracted description of West Indian heterogeneous and colourful archipelago. Through decolonial practices, Walcott was able to fully portray the characteristics of his diversified communities, giving his readers hope for a mutual co-existence between cultures, identities and peoples.

As Paulo Freire has argued, *praxis* is “an act of knowing that involves a dialogical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action”⁴⁵. In tune with my multimodal translation and original reading of Derek Walcott’s work, the decolonial option promotes and encourages an opening up towards transdisciplinary dialogues between different aesthetics and expressive practices.

Decoloniality aims at enlarging artistic boundaries and platforms in order to include literary, anthropological, philosophical, geographical and spatial experiments and experiences. This option is an open alternative and dynamic space rather than an enclosed one, a form of creative laboratory of expression in which the limiting and restraining principles of modernity/coloniality are analysed in order to be diverted and transformed into positive, partnership values, narrations and dialogues. In this regard, the colonial matrix of power does not only limit alternative systems of knowledge and the beliefs of its subjects, but also has an effect on their behaviour, ways of living and expression throughout the colonial contexts, which were therefore highly standardised and controlled. Artistic traditions, practices and experiments were regimented, while deviations from colonial norms were denied. In this sense, modernity/coloniality worked on the recognition and imposition of Western European socio-cultural and historical

⁴⁴ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 5.

⁴⁵ Freire (1985), *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, pp. 50.

paradigms, in order to strengthen its supposedly superior structures against what it considered to be the uncivilised and savage practices of non-Western communities and peoples.

Decoloniality, however, does not claim a centre of power or leading group to promote its agenda. The project aims at creating constant debate and assessing its very own assumptions and outputs. With this in mind, it is not only Western thought that is brought into question but also the very basis of decolonial thought itself, in a constant re-shaping and re-moulding of its ongoing perspectives and outlooks. Explanations and actions are constantly called into question, while structural dimensions considered *certain* are rejected and replaced with *alternatives* that deny any type of classification and order.

Read through this lens, the decolonial option can be seen as a *pluriversal* perspective, as it constantly reaches out in other directions and lines of investigation, or an *interversal* perspective, as it continually looks within at its own definition to re-question its very own founding assumptions.

Put simply, decoloniality is a dynamic force that works in two directions: it aims at uncovering and destabilising the influences of the colonial matrix of power and it also questions its own choices and options against the colonial or neo-colonial powers. Ultimately, decoloniality can be defined as a system of thought that looks outwards and inwards, where there is a continuous *porosity* between actions, spaces and confrontations. It questions the socio-cultural and spatio-temporal limitations shaped and forged under colonial rule. In explaining the pluriversal and interversal characteristics of the decolonising option, Mignolo and Welsh argue that:

The pluriversal opens rather than closes the geographies and spheres of decolonial thinking and doing. It opens up coexisting temporalities kept hostage by the Western idea of time and the belief that there is one single temporality: Western-imagined fictional temporality. Moreover, it connects and brings together in relation – as both pluri- and interversals – local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives, and struggles against the modern/colonial order and for an *otherwise*⁴⁶.

I will focus on strategies of narrative and temporal re-shaping in the following paragraph, but what I intend to emphasise here is the power of the decolonial option in re-imagining and re-moulding its own definitional boundaries. It might be a strategy to

⁴⁶ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 3.

overcome long-lasting perceptions of repression and subjugation, but what I find particularly innovative in this approach is the acknowledgment and empowerment of an *undetermined* and *multidimensional* force that is capable of destabilising centuries-long Western European epistemics of domination.

In this regard, borders theorisations are at the very basis of the decolonial option as they work on the renegotiation or rather redetermination of the very same idea of *border*, or the imposed fictional frontier erected by modernity/coloniality⁴⁷. Indeed, for decolonial thinkers and scholars:

Borders are everywhere and they are not only geographic; they are racial and sexual, epistemic and ontological, religious and aesthetic, linguistic and national. Borders are the interior routes of modernity/coloniality and the consequences of international law and global linear thinking⁴⁸.

The decolonial option compares the tracing of spaces and frontiers to the sketching of mental blockages and realities of thought. Undermining and reworking geographical and spatial constructions implies a re-conceptualisation of the same definition of *border* in Western-traditional terms. This aspect proposes a revision of the concepts of containment and control, imperceptible models to dominate and repress the *Other* and the unknown.

In this particular aspect, I believe that decoloniality owes much to the critical thinking of Latin-American feminist movements, and in particular to María Lugones's influential work⁴⁹. Beside her primal concerns regarding gender systems, Lugones and other feminist thinkers have focused their research and attention on re-thinking European fictional representations that depict *land* as if it were a feminine entity to be conquered by the dominant patriarchal system of modernity/coloniality. For Lugones, this idea justifies colonial exploitation of the New World territories and the consequent alteration of environmental ecosystems. Through their work, decolonial feminist scholars have

⁴⁷ Cf. on the same subject: Anderson ([1983] 1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; Anzaldúa (1987), *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*; Lefebvre ([1974] 1991), *The Production of Space*; Lewis & Wigen (1997), *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*.

⁴⁸ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 112.

⁴⁹ María Lugones (1944) is an Argentinian feminist philosopher, scholar and theorist of resistance. She is one of the leading founders of the decolonial option, particularly in the promotion of decolonial feminist perspectives. She has worked extensively also on queer theory and subaltern studies. Amongst her most famous articles: "The Coloniality of Gender" in *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* (2008) and "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" in *Hypatia* (2010).

stressed the relations between man/nature, which were inevitably mirrored in socio-cultural hierarchies of colonial subjugation. Lugones explains that, through this system, the societies of the New World were divided and hierarchised between men and women, and in particular: at the top of the ladder were white men followed by white women, and only after came black men and black women. This partition also destabilises the formations and cultures of indigenous populations living in the occupied territories, as many of them did not follow a recognised division according to gender and physical appearance. In highlighting and uncovering ancient systems of partnership cooperation between genders, and also between humans and their surrounding environment, feminist studies have encouraged a decolonial understanding of geo-political constructions based on European binary thought. As I will later point out, the decolonial slant is also connected with the *partnership model* proposed by the Jew-American scholar and social activist Riane Eisler.

The breaking and shifting of modernity/coloniality *borders* are practices of insurgency that firstly developed in the former colonial territories. Decolonisation is therefore a way to claim back the *Other* side of the story, the unrecorded stories of those who experienced and fought against the colonial matrix of power:

Decoloniality has a history, *herstory*, and praxis of more than 500 years. From its beginnings in the Americas, decoloniality has been a component part of (trans)local struggles, movements, and actions to resist and refuse the legacies and ongoing relations and patterns of power established by external and internal colonialism⁵⁰.

Besides focusing on uncovering colonial strategies of domination through a revision of history and a re-drawing of fictional and mental borders, the decolonial option also encourages *new approaches* in response to the modernity/coloniality pair. In this regard, the option relies on the power of the creative imagination. To imagine and re-mould systems of beliefs and stories of colonial contexts is a practice that allows critics, scholars, thinkers, and also writers or artists, to feel and think of themselves in another dimension, in a new dynamic world order or paradigm.

Escaping and creating a world anew following streams of imagination is not a decolonial invention. Other challenging and thought-provoking methodologies have

⁵⁰ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 16.

underlined how the concept of creativity has been useful in overcoming highly problematic contexts. In the process of undermining the colonial matrix of power, creativity acquires a fundamental significance because the colonised finally turns inwards, towards his/her own imaginative resources. Through decoloniality, imagination unbridles cognitive limitations and embraces a visionary and transformative idea of *movement* that allows continuous shifts between centre and periphery.

In this sense, *decolonial imagination* is not set to be a simple configuration, but rather a flux of complex ideas that imaginatively float and intersect between different disciplines and practices. Therefore, decolonial critics and scholars have rejected the idea of decolonial interdisciplinarity to embrace and promote instead a more undefined, blurred and unpredictable *transdisciplinary encounter*:

Decolonial thinking is transdisciplinary (not interdisciplinary), in the sense of going beyond the existing disciplines, of rejecting the ‘disciplinary decadence’ and aiming at undisciplining knowledge⁵¹.

The decolonial approach presents itself as an insurgent and transformative praxis of knowledge and action, rather than being a mere theoretical perspective that reflects and functions in abstract terms. This is a radical challenge for the world of Western academia, for the decolonial option recognises and analyses the underestimated power of the unwritten *word*, or better, the spirit of orality in aboriginal and minority cultures, with their artistic and folkloric manifestations based upon movements, dances, songs, melodies, mimes, etc. In this way, unfamiliar practices and traditions are finally acknowledged as powerful symbols of *Other* cultures, or expressions of an underground and repressed social substrate that is able to manifest *Other* cosmogonies, truths or different ways of being. If read through this perspective, the decolonial option assumes not only a *thinking of* but most importantly a *doing for*, or better, an intermingling of the two in a continuous re-moulding of its theoretical and methodological definitions:

It is in the *for*, in the postures, processes, and practices that disrupt, transgress, intervene and surge in, and that mobilize, propose, provoke, activate, and construct an otherwise, that decoloniality is signified and given substance, meaning, and form⁵².

⁵¹ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 23.

⁵² Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 34.

In detailing the features of the decolonial option, Mignolo and Welsh stress the positive and collaborative outcomes at the basis of the project, thus highlighting how decoloniality proposes a challenge and an opening *for* alternatives and diverting exchanges.

It can be argued that decolonial theorists and scholars agree in considering decoloniality not so much as *the only option* but one amongst many different options and alternatives to modernity/coloniality. In this context, postcoloniality does not fit in the picture, as it tends to reiterate Western European and Northern Atlantic alternatives. An example of decolonial thinkers' inclusive attitude might be their praise for Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea on "decolonising Europe"⁵³. Moving from assumptions that are directly influenced by postcolonial theory, Chakrabarty proposes a renewal of Western thought "from and for the margins"⁵⁴ in an attempt to read global history from a *provincial* and non-secular perspective. Chakrabarty explains that abstract and linear thinking have demystified the *real* histories of non-Western spaces, thus influencing their distorted representations in commonly accepted archives. For Chakrabarty, reopening the colonial archive is necessary, for it will allow Western European records to be rewritten, while simultaneously acknowledging micronarratives and stories that have been concealed from cultural transmission.

1.2.2 Distorting narratives and aesthetics alternatives: the danger of a single story and the geo-trans-disciplinary fractures of the decolonial option

Another way to present the decolonial option is by focusing on how it *responds* to the colonial matrix of power. This section presents some of the *decolonial strategies* that I will later apply in the analysis of a selection of texts from Derek Walcott's work.

In various interviews, conferences and articles, Walter Mignolo introduces the concept of decoloniality by referring to the inspiring 2009 TED Talk given by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie entitled "The danger of a single story"⁵⁵.

⁵³ Chakrabarty (2000), *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*.

⁵⁴ Chakrabarty (2000), *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, pp. 16.

⁵⁵ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), *The Danger of a Single Story* (consulted on 15/1/2018): https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

Adichie's presentation discredits the fictional concept of *the* single story/history which has been narrated and perpetuated by the Western European colonial matrix of power for more than 500 years:

A single story is a danger [...] because we are vulnerable and highly impressionable in the face of a single story even when recognising this is not true. [...] How stories are told, who tells them, when they're told and to whom they are addressed is a question of power. Power is not only the ability to tell the story of another person but also to make it definite.

Adichie's speech wants to delve into the core of the rhetoric on modernity/coloniality, thus questioning the basic assumptions of colonial logics. Working on narrations is a useful point of departure for prompting collective awareness of historical and cultural transmissions. Indeed, one of the main concerns of Western European colonial power was to preserve its historical truth and linear narrativisation⁵⁶.

Stories are powerful because they convey traditions and social values, and are capable of extending - and also imposing - their views on questions concerning the origin and advancement of specific communities or nations. Therefore, chroniclers and storytellers are very influential because they decide whether an event or action should be retained or erased in the global *narrativisation* of humanity. In this sense, Western historians have worked extensively on preserving their *only* truth or vision, thus avoiding dealing with European and Northern Atlantic faults and wrongs.

Most decolonial thinkers and scholars stress how the protagonists and leaders of the colonial matrix of power have skilfully constructed and promoted their own stories and versions of the beginning of the modern era. Indeed, for most Western societies, *modernity* starts with Christopher Columbus' expeditions and consequent discovery of Central America in 1492. Decolonialists point out how this narrative aims at erasing and blurring two other important events of that period, in particular: the Treaty of Tordesillas, requested and signed by Pope Alexander VI in 1494, an agreement that "created an imaginary line that divided the Atlantic from north to south and settled the dispute between Spain and Portugal for the possession of the New World"⁵⁷, and the Treaty of

⁵⁶ An insightful study on the concept of global linear thinking, envisioned by Western rationalist thought that furthered legitimised a policy of international law after the discovery of the New World, is presented by Schmitt Carl ([1950] 2006) in *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*.

⁵⁷ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. 78.

Saragossa in 1529, which determined the destiny of the “Indias Orientales”, i.e. the Asian continent and its countries, on the opposite side of the globe. This Western-oriented geographical tracing of borders promoted spheres of influence and domination that survived even after the falling of the Iberian powers, which were replaced by the imperialist powers of France, England, Holland and other European countries and institutions. Decoloniality suggests that, through this globally accepted vision of history, modernity/coloniality was able to impose its own alternatives as truth, thus debunking *Other* important occurrences and events that happened in those same years. In particular, decolonial thinkers are keen on showing how centuries-long stories, narratives and mythologies of the indigenous populations living in the Caribbean and in the American territories were brutally swept away. Therefore, one of the approaches promoted by the founders of the decolonial option is that of remembering or re-establishing forgotten stories and views, thus giving them the right to exist and be told. An example of this strategy is shown in Walter Mignolo’s book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), in which the scholar reflects upon the different perceptions of nature between colonisers and native populations of the Americas:

When in 1590 the Jesuit Father José de Acosta published *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, ‘nature’ was, in Christian European cosmology, something to know; understanding nature was tantamount to understanding its creator, God. But the Aymaras and Quechuas had no such metaphysics; consequently, there was no concept comparable to the Western concept of ‘nature’. Instead they relied on ‘Pachamama’, a concept that Western Christians did not have. Pachamama was how Quechuan and Aymaran *amauta* and *yatris* [...] understood the human relationship with life, with that energy that engenders and maintains life, today translated as mother earth⁵⁸.

Put in another words, for American indigenous populations, there was no distinction to be made between nature, land and culture because they all constituted a single united entity, a powerful force that sustained and allowed human and environmental interconnections. For decolonialists, the Western European concept of *nature* is a distorted one, a story or narration deliberately encouraged in order to justify extensive expropriation and exploitation of land.

In order to prevent the dissemination of stories written by Western-oriented structures of power, decolonial thinkers encourage the acknowledgment of *Other* stories,

⁵⁸ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. 11.

or even the recovering of ancient ones that have been concealed and deformed by the colonial matrix of power. In this sense, decoloniality is not afraid to promote, for instance, Islamic tales, or histories coming from the millenary traditions of China, the Maya mythologies or the Indian cosmogonies and histories of the world.

Another example that may clarify these issues is the imposition of the name America, given by the New World conquerors to the unknown and *virgin* lands they *discovered*. In so doing, the colonisers did not consider a whole system of symbolic practices of attribution that cultures inhabiting those territories were following.

Decolonial actions of insurgence on these aspects are nowadays promoted by numerous aboriginal groups around the world:

Abya Yala is the name that the Kuna-Tule people (of the lands now known as Panama and Colombia) gave to the ‘Americas’ before the colonial invasion. It signifies ‘land in full maturity’ or ‘land of vital blood’. Its present-day use began to take form in 1992 when Indigenous peoples from throughout the continent came together to counter the ‘discovery’ celebrations⁵⁹.

Using the aboriginal name of Abya Yala to confront and respond to the Western-imposed American naming, which the modernity/coloniality pair further enforced through other linguistic distortions, is an act of re-affirming the *unknown stories* of the continent, thus employing a decolonial strategy of rewriting. This example clearly demonstrates how decoloniality represents a dismantling practice of colonial knowledge, and also, more importantly, a positive alternative *for* those who are unaware that they are living under the colonial matrix of power. Abya Yala, taken in its aboriginal meaning, does not only discharge the egoistic and self-centred Western appropriation of land through naming (it should be noted how America strategically recalls the name of Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer who is believed to have been the first to *discover* the continent), but also highlights the infinite renewing of those cyclical lands, in a perpetual shift between humans and nature, reality and possibilities.

Apart from the geo-physical and linguistic distortions, there was another dimension that Western European colonial powers believed they needed to control in order to maintain influence and domination over the minds of their subjects, and that was the power of art, or better, the production and transmission of artistic means and forms of

⁵⁹ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 21.

expression between different groups of peoples. In this regard, a lot of studies have been carried out in an attempt to reveal artistic and folkloric legacies that were brought to the Americas through the deportations of the Middle Passage.

As I will show in this thesis, this aspect is relevant when dealing with Caribbean literature and its hybrid archipelago. Colonisation in the West Indies was different to that of other American territories, mostly for the continuous shift of power between European nations for the control of the region. The Caribbean was economically and geographically strategic as it represented an open gate between the north and south of the continent, and an easy formation to rule in terms of its dimensions and population.

Decolonial thinkers and writers try to recover and increase awareness of the few remaining traces of the tradition and folklore of the indigenous populations of pre-colonial America. They also focus on *practices* that have been imported through forced migrations or even on the mixing and syncretic formulations that have developed from heterogeneous encounters.

When dealing with the artistic visions - and distortions - that modernity/coloniality was capable of enforcing over 500 years of imperialism, a focus on what is still considered to be *art* in the Western world is long overdue. In the process of colonising knowledge, Western-based philosophy was able to transform the original Greek meaning of the word *aesthesis*, namely a sensorial perception or feeling, into *aesthetics*, i.e. a fictional and static praxis that formulates ideas on beauty and on the recognition of the artistic genius. In this way, the colonial matrix of power limited multiple possibilities of expressing and feeling through art, movements, gestures, music, melodies, rhythms, dances and so on into strict and standardised categorisations or norms. In opposition to the Western way of looking at art, decolonial thinkers have reworked the term *aesthetics* in order to include an acceptance of - or even belief in - any type of artistic expression coming from any form of creative imagination. In this sense, decolonial aesthetics prompts an awareness of artistic forms and outputs that come not only from Western-oriented centres of power, such as museums, galleries, theatres, cinemas and artistic laboratories in the wider sense, but also from different contextual and experimental spaces around the world. Mignolo, Tlostanova, Lugones, and other decolonial thinkers, have pointed out how various European and Western centres of *free* knowledge, including museums and universities, have encouraged the dictates of the colonial matrix of power, thus reinforcing its

influence and system of domination. In this respect, decolonialists are all involved in supporting different types of multidisciplinary experiments or artistic reconceptualisations in order to propose *Other* viewpoints with respect to the known schemes of modernity/coloniality.

In an essay titled *Enacting the Archives, Decentering the Muses* (2013), Mignolo presents a thought-provoking example of an inclusive attitude towards different kinds of art. In particular, he examines the establishment of two arts institutions in territories that, until recently, would have never been listed as centres of knowledge in Western terms, such as The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (Qatar) and the Asian Civilisation Museum in Singapore. For Mignolo, the opening of these museums serves as a significant response to Western European cultural domination and transmission of values. In this respect, the centres have not been conceived as symbols of technological and cultural advancement, as some Western art critics have argued, but rather as institutions for education, transmission and acknowledgement of *Other* non-Western arts forms and expressions. Mignolo adds that, even if their final goal was to assert a counter-narrative to the Western colonial matrix of power, these spaces are tangible examples of how the modernity/coloniality pair no longer has control over how and who is entitled to produce and transmit culture⁶⁰.

In presenting other decolonial practices of intervention against modernity/coloniality influences, I will now reflect upon another strategy of domination that Western European powers adopted in order to colonise the American territories.

In the process of assimilating the few remaining indigenous populations that were left in the Caribbean, and also the newly transplanted African slaves, the colonial matrix of power understood the importance of working (or reworking) the traditional and symbolic faiths and beliefs of subjugated populations. Thus, starting from the first colonisations, European powers brought missionaries to the New World to revise pagan rituals, replacing dances and songs associated with shamanic practices with Christian symbology and dogmas. Even if this topic might seem secondary in the analysis of Western colonial control, as the scarce number of studies on this subject suggests, the

⁶⁰ Mignolo (2013), *Enacting the Archives, Decentering the Muses. The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha and the Asia Civilisations Museum in Singapore*: <https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/77> (consulted on: 15/07/2019).

European *revisions* are a sign of intervention in the shared cultural and social narratives of West Indians' archives.

In an interesting study on the socio-cultural processes of *rewriting* dances and performances in Latin America and the Caribbean regions after the arrival of the Europeans, Ramiro Guerra states:

While looking for strategies to include in the processes of [Western] acculturation [of colonised subjects], the missionaries turned to the devil, a figure that along with his fellow [demons] was contrasting the good virtues of the Christian God. This strategy was chosen in virtue of the interest that indigenous populations displayed on personification ceremonies. [...] Masks representing gods, spirits and symbols of Indo-American religions were used as justifications to impose another type of symbolic imagery. Devil, demons and infernal masks were brought in colonial streets with the intent to personify the powers of evil. At the sudden appearance of God, these masks would stop and would bow in order to honour the power of God. The symbol of God was personified by the Corpus Christi⁶¹.

This example clearly demonstrates how Europeans were conscious of the power that artistic, folk and religious practices had on the populations they were conquering. Colonisers knew that physical and coercive force alone would not work. In this sense, they moved in other directions, looking at physical behaviour, artistic expression and cultural traditions.

These viewpoints may seem distant within the framework of an enquiry based on analytic models of Western-oriented research. However, in the same way, I intend to debase traditional and conventional ways of looking at practices and artistic outputs, as I believe that these features are important to fully understand and interpret literary and artistic works as a whole. This is especially the case when these works come from the *edge*, i.e. the territories of the former European colonies.

In line with the standpoints proposed by the decolonial option, my literary and artistic examination of Derek Walcott's work will move between histories and practices,

⁶¹ Guerra (1998), *Calibán danzante: procesos socioculturales de la danza en América Latina y en la zona del Caribe*, pp. 205-206. "Los misioneros buscaron la forma de incluir en el proceso aculturativo la presencia del diablo y sus huestes en contraposición al Dios cristiano, representante de la virtudes y bondades del bien. Ello se logró a través del gusto por las personificaciones del espectáculo ceremonial indigna. Las imágenes de enmascarados que representan dioses, espíritus y símbolos en las religiones indoamericanas sirvió de pretexto para imponer otra imaginería [...]. Diablos, demonios y enmascarados infernales saldrían a las empedradas calles coloniales encamando los poderes del mal que se humillaban ante Dios bajo los ojos de todos los indígenas prosternados. El esplendor del bien fue representado por su máximo símbolo: el Corpus Christi" [my translation, emphasis added].

highlighting how the author expresses himself through narrative rewritings and artistic expressions and challenges.

In summary, the first part of this Ph.D. thesis will provide a close reading of a selection of Derek Walcott's texts following primarily two lines of enquiry: the first is a focus on the re-writing(s) of Western narrations, in an effort to uncover the strategies that Walcott employed in responding to the colonial matrix of power, the second is a description of how Caribbean artistic practices and expressions helped Walcott to shed new light on his own culture, while determining a type of creative writing in which literature and art perfectly fuse together.

1.3 Caribbean theoretical influences and other methodologies

While this Ph.D. thesis adopts the standpoints proposed by the theorists of the decolonial option, it would be inaccurate and misleading not to present the critical thought of other scholars who have been paramount to determining the path for my transdisciplinary research.

In approaching Derek Walcott's work for the first time, the temptation is to read his texts through a Western-oriented epistemic framework, thus neglecting the importance of theories and ideas that, in the last few decades, have been elaborated on the *edge*, i.e. in the former colonial countries that are now less influenced by Western-European thought. Erasing and disregarding the thinking of scholars who struggled to find new ways and alternative paradigms for colonial liberation would only reinforce the attempt seen with the modernity/coloniality pair to convey and impose a single view or approach:

The possibility that indigenous people might be active agents in the making (if not the writing) of their own histories was something which was rarely if ever entertained by Western writers, and then usually in highly negative terms. One reason for this was that a principal mode of indigenous agency was resistance to Western control, while the typical Western response (historiographical, rather than political or military) was to pretend that it had not happened or was not worth mentioning, or, if that failed, to construe it as out and out treachery (the Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857) or an explosion of atavistic barbarity (the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s)⁶².

From this perspective, the Caribbean archipelago has been an influential stage for the elaboration and transmission of original thinking and *liminal* methodologies. Thanks to its geographical and historical distance from European centres of power, and also to the *hybrid* interrelations of different languages and systems of thought, the Antillean archipelago was one of the first places to think freely about decolonial alternatives and debunking strategies. In this sense, it developed something different to postcoloniality and postcolonial theory. As Mignolo points out:

In terms of existence, [postcoloniality] emerged from the experience of British colonization (of Egypt and Indian and of the Palestinian question) and, obviously, after the concept of postmodernity was introduced by the late 1970s. In that line of thought and concerns, South Asia, Australia, South-Africa, and other former British colonies naturally joined postcoloniality, but

⁶² Childs & Williams (1997), *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, pp. 26.

the English- and French-speaking Caribbean did not. In this case, there is a long tradition of decolonial thought that goes back to C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon, emerging long before French poststructuralism and postmodernism that made the idea of postcolonialism and postcoloniality possible⁶³.

The Caribbean was the birthplace of radical movements such as Pan-Africanism⁶⁴ or Negritude, but also of single-minded revolutions, such as Paul Gilroy's idea of "The Black Atlantic", which transferred the experience of the Middle Passage from a white colonial to a black African perspective for the first time.

Walcott has always maintained a certain distance from extremisms or radical movements such as Pan-Africanism. He agreed more with the concepts and views proposed by Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, the leaders and founders of the Caribbean francophone Negritude movement⁶⁵, which essentially promoted a more socialist approach to the acknowledgement of black-African and black-Caribbean cultural interconnections. This is particularly evident in *Necessity of Negritude*, an article that Walcott published in 1964, and in which he argued:

The fact that neither Aimé Césaire nor Leopold Senghor, two major poets of our time, are included in a volume I own called 'The Concise Encyclopaedia of Modern World Literature', [...] may illustrate the necessity of 'Negritude'. [...] For us, whose tribal memories have died, and who have begun again in a New World, Negritude offers an assertion of pride, but not of our complete identity, since that is mixed and shared by other races, whose writers are East Indian, white, mixed, whose best painters are Chinese, and in whom the process of racial assimilation goes on with every other marriage⁶⁶.

Another possible influence on Walcott's poetics and writings is Frantz Fanon, the Martinican activist and writer of *Black Skin and White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Seemingly, Walcott does not share Fanon's resistance to the colonial

⁶³ Mignolo (2011), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, pp. xxvi.

⁶⁴ The West Indian territories experienced forced mass migration firstly from Africa, then from India and other European countries. It was inevitable that Pan-Africanism would begin here: the first conference of the movement was held in London in 1900, and it was organised by Sylvester Williams, a Caribbean lawyer. It included members from Africa, Britain, the Caribbean and the United States, including W.E.B. Du Bois, the successive leader of the group.

⁶⁵ In *The Empire Writes Back* Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue: "The concept of Négritude developed by the Martinican Aimé Césaire [...] and the Senegalese poet and politician Leopold Sedar Senghor [and] was the most pronounced assertion of the distinctive qualities of Black culture and identity. But in making this assertion it adopted stereotypes which curiously reflected European prejudice". Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin ([1989] 2002), *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 20.

⁶⁶ Walcott (1964), "Necessity of Negritude" in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 20-23.

matrix of power (it should be remembered that Fanon actively engaged in Algeria's war of liberation against France after the Second World War). Nevertheless, Walcott's acknowledgement and redefinition of the *black body* as a powerful instrument for social and cultural change at large, is surely to be connected to Fanon's ideology.

In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Mignolo points out how Fanon's emphasis on the black body stands as one of the most debunking acts against Western epistemology. For Mignolo, the switch from rational mind to experiential body calls into question the imperial rhetoric of modernity, as it means recognising a new system of awareness and perception, thus decolonising the prominence of the mind over the body⁶⁷.

There is another aspect to consider when exploring Walcott's ideas alongside the poetics of his island's fellow writers and theorists: the practice of *rewriting* and responding to the *centre* through narratives and texts that re-propose the literature of the European canon from *an-other* point of view. Walcott was certainly not the first to adopt this new and challenging operative mode. Consider the 1966 ground-breaking novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Dominica-born British writer Jean Rhys, who envisioned a Caribbean version of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, thus giving voice for the first time to the Creole wife of Mr. Rochester; or Césaire's critical rereading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1969) and C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), a book that not only presents the Haitian black slave revolution between 1791 and 1804, but re-establishes the dignity of the first marginal attempt to revise the modernity/coloniality structures of power and debunk colonial rule.

Amongst the numerous influences and echoes from the Caribbean that one might distinguish in Walcott's texts and critical works, I do believe that Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (*Poétique de la Relation*) occupies a privileged position. Glissant's thought, in fact, does not only reappear in most Walcottian ways of thinking, but it is also a critical methodology that I found particularly relevant while reading Walcott's texts from a decolonial point of view. A brief analysis of Glissant's main concepts therefore reveals possible correspondences with Walcott's poetics and literary outputs and highlights several salient aspects which will be useful in the subsequent textual analysis.

⁶⁷ Of note here is the closing sentence of Fanon's masterpiece: "O my body, makes of me always a man who questions!". Fanon (1967), *Black Skin, White Masks*.

1.3.1 Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*

Édouard Glissant (1928-2011) was a poet, novelist and theorist, and like Walcott, he came from the Caribbean. He was born on the francophone island of Martinique and became famous in the mid-1950s with the publication of *La Lézarde*, an *obscure* novel which follows the adventures of a group of young revolutionaries in colonial Martinique⁶⁸. *La Lézarde*, the longest river on the island, is the spiritual and centrifugal force of the novel since its deviations and courses are direct reflections of the main characters' stories, personality and doubts. For Glissant, as much as for Walcott, *nature* represents the real signifier of a place. The environment establishes *roots* and, through the description and decoding of nature, poetry is capable of revealing connections between humans and the spaces they inhabit, thus allowing writers to gain a sense of belonging.

Poetics of Relation begins with an analysis of the colonial enterprise in the New World, showing how the European matrix of power established plantation systems and racial divisions and segregations between peoples. Glissant points out how the Middle Passage brought to the Caribbean thousands of black African slaves whose cultures, traditions and faiths needed to be repressed. One expedient that Europeans exploited was *partition*, a practice already seen on slave ships: family and ethnic bonds were severed in order to destabilise the identity and sense of community of the captives. Through dispossession, modernity/coloniality brought together people of different origins and heritages, who suddenly founded themselves *scattered* in an unknown territory. As Elisabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson and George Handley have explained in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*:

There is probably no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of human and botanic migration, transplantation, and settlement than the Caribbean. [...] For this reason, writers have often articulated a poetic relation with land that is consistent with the highest aims of sustainability⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ An interesting study on the novel is Christiane Szeps' article (2004) titled "Édouard Glissant's 'La Lézarde': Between the Magical Surreal and the Fantastic", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 15, 4, pp. 358-368.

⁶⁹ DeLoughrey, Gosson & Handley (2005), *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, pp. 1-4.

Glissant describes his admiration for the Caribbean landscape, pointing out how its rich vegetation and overwhelming wilderness expresses a sort of ritualised rhythm of the seasons. Yet, he also stresses how that landscape represents a “paysage irrué”, thus creating a new and precise adjective to convey the ideas of “irruption and outburst, and eruption as well, which are simultaneously [making it] real and unreal”⁷⁰. For the Martinican scholar, the Caribbean environment is a sort of preface to the American continent, a suspended space where *unity in diversity* is realised through the *creolisation* of languages, cultures, and identities. Glissant identifies the Antillean archipelago with a tormented, unstable and violent past: his concept of *relation* between people began with the genocide, transplantations and forced migrations seen in the area. It is only through the redeeming nature that the Caribbean environment is able to obliterate and forget what has happened in order to allow its inhabitants to start anew.

For Glissant, this aspect explains the emergence and need for a new type of memory, which reassembles past fragments through a “reconstruction by trace”⁷¹. The past being blurred, ancestral roots and heritages are recalled and renewed in *unpredictable* ways. For Glissant “trace thought” differs significantly from analytical Western thought, especially for what it is capable of bringing to the surface. A trace, in fact, cannot be geometrically defined because it washes away and follows the rhythms of the unconscious mind. From this perspective, the Caribbean archive is constantly evolving and transforming because it is governed by a process of *creolisation* that includes different dynamics and factors: languages that intermingle to form creole systems, and artistic expressions that try to balance ancestral forms with original patterns derived from heterogeneous encounters. In most of his critical writings, Glissant uses the example of jazz music, a sort of “reconstructed [form] which benefits of adopted instruments, and a reconstruction by trace of African rhythms”⁷².

Through this *unpredictable* way of thinking and recovering, Glissant aims to show that there is a distance between the process of creolisation and that of assimilation. For the Martinican scholar, assimilation is predictable and longs for order, stability and ranking, especially through blind following of the policies promoted by its dominant

⁷⁰ Glissant ([1996] 1997), *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 11.

⁷¹ Glissant ([1996] 1997), *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 16.

⁷² Glissant ([1996] 1997), *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 17.

group. On the other hand, creolisation lacks leadership and does not acknowledge hierarchy, thus expressing unpredictability and instability.

Glissant distinguishes between two types of cultures: atavistic cultures, which experienced various crossing of peoples, languages and cultures a long time ago and are now perceived as *unified* in their principles and epistemic (such as European nation formations), and composite cultures, whose representations are still *undefined* as they experience a constant process of becoming, forming and remoulding. The theorist expresses how former colonial territories share the challenge of unpredictable *relations*, i.e. the interweaving of different cultures, ways of being, expressing and feeling. In this regard, Glissant was one of the first scholars to interpret the relations occurring in the Caribbean as recurrences of a global tendency towards *diffractions* and new social configurations, which are expressed through interethnic exchanges and transcultural dialogues. Celia M. Britton clarifies Glissant's ideas by arguing:

The Caribbean is [...] an exemplary case of a phenomenon that Glissant believes is now becoming the general condition of global society, as the 'periphery', which has been so profoundly changed by colonialism, now in turn causes an equally profound change in metropolitan 'center'⁷³.

At this point in his complex reasoning and thought, the Martinican theorist associates the process of creolisation with that of globalisation, thus alluding to the existence of a double-sided unifying and contrasting force that he terms "*Tout-monde*" and whose governing force is "chaos":

I call Chaos of the World (*Chaos-monde*) the current instability of so many cultures which cross, separate, disappear, and yet survive each other, thus preserving or transforming themselves slowly or with lightning speed, whose outbursts and economies we are yet to understand and whose rage we cannot yet foresee⁷⁴.

Glissant does not consider the Chaos of the World a negative aspect or something to be afraid of. On the contrary, he asserts that through the breaking up of single-minded

⁷³ Britton (1999), *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory. Strategies of Language and Resistance*, pp. 15.

⁷⁴ J'appelle *Chaos-monde* le choc actuel de tant de cultures qui s'embrasent, se repoussent, disparaissent, subsistent pourtant, s'endorment ou se transforment, lentement ou à vitesse foudroyante : ces éclats, ces éclatements dont nous n'avons pas commencé de saisir le principe ni l'économie et dont nous ne pouvons pas prévoir l'emportement. Glissant (1997), *Traité du Tout-Monde*, pp. 22 [my translation, emphasis added].

visions and paradigms, for the first time in human history people are able to experience and acknowledge “relations”, especially through the act of imagining and tracing correspondences they were not aware of:

And I call *Poetics of Relation* the possibility of the imaginary which leads us to attain an understanding of the globality of the Chaos of the World, while it simultaneously allows us to recognise some detail from it, and in particular to sing about our enigmatic and irreversible world⁷⁵.

In order to explain the complexities of “relation”, and the power of unpredictable encounters and reflections determined by “the Chaos of the World”, Glissant chooses to focus on creole languages, thus showing the dynamics at work in one of the clearest forms of hybridisation. For the Martinican theorist, language is the manifestation of alteration, change and diversification, especially in the Caribbean. Therefore, it represents the most tangible sign of dismantled authority which was supposed to be expressed through homogeneity and uniformity. Glissant explains that these characteristics are impossible to find in languages because they are governed by a right to *opacity*: the acknowledgement of the *Other*, in fact, presupposes also a denial of a complete and entire understanding of what the *Other* is. While experiencing “relation”, and thus an encounter with the unknown, something will always remain unclear or ambiguous. It is only through irrational insight and illogical forces that “relation” is capable of fully expressing itself, and reassemble its forgotten links.

Glissant promotes the re-thinking of the boundaries of modernity/coloniality systems of thought through what he terms “archipelagic thinking” (*pensée archipélique*), that is to say decolonial perspectives that see the world as a web of unlimited interconnections and exchanges. It is a way of seeing reality as if it were composed of groups of islands that need to cooperate in order to function as a whole. The system works only if each community is allowed to express its own singularity, or rather insularity, thus being able to adjust in a circle of challenging possibilities. It also signifies a redrawing of today’s world map and epistemologies in order to encourage variety over homologation, and freedom over control. In order to clarify and visualise the distinction between

⁷⁵ Et j’appelle *Poétique de la Relation* ce possible de l’imaginaire qui nous porte à concevoir la globalité insaisissable d’un tel Chaos-monde, en même temps qu’il nous permet d’en relever quelque détail, et en particulier de chanter notre lieu, insondable et irréversible. Glissant (1997), *Traité du Tout-Monde*, pp. 22 [my translation, emphasis added].

Caribbean archipelagic thinking and European confining thought, Glissant makes a comparison between the geography of the two places:

I always say that the Caribbean Sea differs from the Mediterranean because of its openness, it is a sea which diffracts, whereas the Mediterranean is a sea that concentrates. If civilisations and the greatest monotheistic religions were born around the Mediterranean basin, it is because of the power of this sea to submit human thought towards a unity of thinking, the expression of the One, also through tragedies, wars and conflicts. While the Caribbean Sea is a sea that diffracts and thrills diversity. It is not only a sea of transit and passages, but also a sea of encounters and [different] implications⁷⁶.

In Glissant's evocative imagery there is another way of expressing the distance separating old Eurocentric visions of unity from the New World's indefinite opening of possibilities, and that is a comparison the Martinican scholar proposes between different types of *rooting*, i.e. the act of finding a sense of belonging and definition. In this sense, Glissant proposes a distinction between roots and rhizomes:

The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this [I] propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other⁷⁷.

Through this evocative metaphor, Glissant has further explained his idea of "relation", thus prompting an image that summarises his particular concept of *Antillanité*. Glissant's creolisation and archipelagic way of thinking are models of change and transformation. They are views that promote what the American-Jew anthropologist and activist Riane Eisler calls "cultural transformations" towards partnership paradigms. In a context that echoes a *Tout-monde Relation*, Glissant, Eisler and Walcott talk to each other

⁷⁶ Je dis toujours que la mer Caraïbe se différencie de la Méditerranée en ceci que c'est une mer ouverte, une mer qui diffracte, là où la Méditerranée est une mer qui concentre. Si les civilisations et les grandes religions monothéistes sont nées autour du bassin méditerranéen, c'est à cause de la puissance de cette mer à incliner, même à travers des drames, des guerres et des conflits, la pensée de l'homme vers une pensée de l'Un et de l'unité. Tandis que la mer de Caraïbe est une mer qui diffracte et qui porte à l'émoi de la diversité. Non seulement est-ce une mer de transit et de passages, c'est aussi une mer de rencontres et d'implications. Glissant (1996), *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers*, pp. 14-15 [my translation, emphasis added].

⁷⁷ Glissant ([1996] 1997), *Poetics of Relation*, pp. 11.

in an indefinite space of possibilities, in which traditional European and Western-oriented thoughts are excluded in search of new and challenging alternatives.

As far as Walcott is concerned, I believe that his works are in a constant “dialogic dialogue”⁷⁸ Glissant’s ideas. As I will shortly point out, Walcott will find most of the answers he was looking for in the Caribbean environment: the only space that gives him the opportunity to overcome his never-ending questioning of identities, legacies, naming and so on.

To confirm these assumptions, I conclude here by presenting what Walcott wrote in an essay titled *Isla Incognita*:

It has taken me over thirty years, and my race hundreds, to feel the fibers spread from the splayed toes and grip this earth, the arms knot into boles and put out leaves. When that begins, this is the beginning of season, cycle time. The noise my leaves make is my language. In it is tunnelled the roar of seas of a lost ocean. It is a fresh sound. Let me not be ashamed to write like this, because it supports this thesis, that our only true apprehensions are through metaphor, that the old botanical names, the old processes cannot work for us. Let’s walk⁷⁹.

1.3.2 Riane Eisler’s *partnership model*

Riane Eisler’s *partnership model* is an interesting and useful methodological approach that recalls many of the applications and concepts proposed by Walcott’s work and Glissant’s “poetics of relation”.

Riane Eisler is a Jew-American anthropologist, social activist and renown scholar of Austrian origins, whose family was forced to escape in order to flee from the horrors of Nazism and the Holocaust during the Second World War. From this traumatic experience Eisler derived an endlessly energetic drive for equalitarian and non-discriminatory rights, working in the formulation of challenging socio-economical paradigms and systemic debunking thoughts.

⁷⁸ On the power of the “dialogic dialogue” and “intercultural encounter”, see: Panikkar (2007), *Lo Spirito della Parola*, pp. 96-123. Raimon Panikkar was a theologian, intellectual and systemic thinker who worked on the need to overcome the dividing strength of the *scientific term* in order to re-discover the spirituality and partnership value of the *creative wor(l)d*.

⁷⁹ “Isla Incognita”, an essay by Derek Walcott written in 1972, was published for the first time in DeLoughrey, Gosson & Handley (2005), *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, pp. 57 as the authors point out in their *Introduction*.

Eisler's fundamental study *The Chalice and the Blade*, firstly published in 1988⁸⁰, is based on the astonishing archaeological discoveries led by Marija Gimbutas and other prominent scholars⁸¹ in Neolithic sites of ancient civilisations. Excavations in the Fertile Crescent and in other areas of first social organisation uncovered the existence of matriarchal and partnership societies, i.e. groups of communities whose structures were determined by gender balance and egalitarian positions and relations between individuals. Eisler explains that with the arrival of the first Kurgan wave, peripheral invaders of supposedly Indo-European origins, these peaceful societies began to experience violence, hierarchical divisions and the subjugation of women. The dismantling of partnership values, which included the worship of the fertile mother-Goddess, was carried out gradually and reached its most destructive results with the foundation of dogmatic religions.

Eisler explains how human history has always been characterised by a continuous shift between two kind of structures: *dominating societies*, based on a system of top-down rankings backed by fear and force, whose principles Eisler identifies with the symbol of the blade; and *partnership societies*, grounded by a system of beliefs that presents equal relations and mutual respect as normal and desirable. Eisler associates the caring and sharing values of partnership societies with the symbol of the chalice, the cup from which every member of a community is allowed to drink, and whose shape evokes a non-hierarchical circle. In furthering the distance between the two systems, Eisler points out:

These models take us beyond familiar categories such as capitalist or communist, religious or secular, Eastern or Western, technologically advanced or primitive. For example, as I looked at some of the most brutally violent and repressive societies of the twentieth century – Hitler's Germany (a rightist society), Stalin's USSR (a leftist society), Khomeini's Iran (a religious society), and Idi Amin's Uganda (a tribalist society) – I saw that, despite obvious differences, they all share the same dominator blueprint⁸².

⁸⁰ Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*.

⁸¹ In the *Acknowledgments* to *The Chalice and the Blade*, Eisler writes: "Some of those who from the perspective of their various disciplines read portions of *The Chalice and the Blade* as a work in process and made important contributions include archaeologists Marija Gimbutas and Nicolas Platon, sociologist Jessie Bernard and Joan Rockwell, psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller, cultural and art historians Elinor Gadon and Merlin Stone, literary comparatist Gloria Orenstein, biologist Vilmos Csanyi, 'chaos' and 'self-organizing systems' theorists Ervin Laszlo and Ralph Abraham, physicist Fritjof Capra, futurists Hazel Henderson and Robert Jungk, and theologian Carol Christ". Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, pp. xii.

⁸² Eisler (2002), *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships that Will Change Your Life*, pp. 5.

Indeed, dominator societies do share a common blueprint of authoritarianism, rigid male dominance, socially accepted violence and a set of teachings that claim patriarchal relations as normal; partnership societies, on the other hand, display democratic and egalitarian social structures, equality between women and men and less accepted violence in all relations. In all of her studies, Eisler also highlights how partnership communities do promote caring attitudes and values, stability and cultural hegemony in all artistic fields, focusing in particular on beauty, children, peace, health, communal well-being, harmony, and love. In a recent publication on her long-lasting work on *partnership*, Eisler wrote:

The new interdisciplinary perspective of the Biocultural Partnership-Domination Lens reveals how cultural beliefs and social institutions such as politics, economics, and education affect, and are in turn affected by, childhood and gender relations [...] and shows how we can use our knowledge of human development to construct equitable and sustainable cultures that maximize human well-being⁸³.

Eisler urges the world for change, or better the need for what she defines as a “cultural transformation”⁸⁴ at every level of social and cultural relationship. Eisler’s revolution does not only refer to global and international networking, but also addresses personal and interpersonal behaviour at work, within communities and in family contexts. In this sense, Eisler’s “partnership” is in tune with Glissant’s “poetics of relation”, for both scholars propose alternative ways of thinking in light of today’s complex world or global relation systems. Moreover, Glissant and Eisler do not limit their ground-breaking work to epistemic and methodological twists but they do also look at narratives and other means of communication and expression as powerful instruments for change.

In Eisler and Glissant’s views, education systems, community representations and aesthetic alternatives need to be brought to the fore in order to challenge and debunk Eurocentric views and perspectives. As Antonella Riem pointed out:

According to Eisler and other scholars, human behaviour is not pre-set genetically but is the result of a multifaceted interaction between biological and socio-cultural dynamics. In this sense, poetry, narration, music, and all other forms of art have a relevant role because they influence our

⁸³ Eisler & Fry (2019), *Nurturing Our Humanity. How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future*, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁴ Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, pp. xvii.

world-view and therefore our present and our future, and can even reconfigure our past beliefs and transform our lives⁸⁵.

Eisler begins her transformational path toward partnership by proposing “gylany systems of relation” between men and women, that is to say overcoming persisting gender imbalances. “Gylany” is a neologism created by Eisler with the intent to overcome any type of difference:

Gy derives from the Greek root word *gyne*, or “woman”. *An* derives from *andros*, or “man”. The letter *l* between the two has a double meaning. In English, it stands for the *linking* of both halves of humanity, rather than, as in androcracy, their ranking. In Greek, it derives from the verb *lyein* or *lyo*, which in turn has a double meaning: to solve or resolve (as in *analysis*) and to dissolve or set free (as in *catalysis*). In this sense, the letter *l* stands for the resolution of our problems through the freeing of both halves of humanity from the stultifying and distorting rigidity or roles imposed by the domination hierarchies inherent in androcratic systems⁸⁶.

Beyond gender relationships, Eisler’s work embraces alternatives for other types of human relations, among and with others, in order to reach a new awareness of human reciprocity and interconnectedness. In another study titled *The Real Wealth of Nations* (2007), for instance, Eisler discusses the need to reconsider financial and economic systems to acknowledge the work of *unrecognised* peoples, such as housewives or educators and non-profit organisations that take care of children, elders and destitute individuals. In this study, as much as in another work titled *Tomorrow’s Children* (2000), Eisler focuses also on the power of art as a means to overcome disparity, exclusion and alienation. Eisler reflects on how artistic expressions and creative forms have been influenced to a certain extent by patriarchal and dominator paradigms. Nevertheless, she also recognises the power of numerous *r-evolutions* against this mainstream, mentioning for instance the power of indigenous art forms and aesthetic challenges of painters, musicians and artists in general.

In this context, Eisler’s work connects primarily with Walcott’s literary and artistic *praxis*, especially in breaking the canonical boundaries between different disciplines, and also with the work carried out by the *Partnership Studies Group* founded

⁸⁵ Riem (2015), *Partnership Studies: A New Methodological Approach to Literary Criticism in World Literatures, Languages and Education*, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, 2, 1, pp. 1.

⁸⁶ Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, pp. 105.

at the University of Udine by Antonella Riem in 1998⁸⁷. This research group of scholars and academics from all over the world has worked on the application of Eisler's methodology in different areas of the humanities, such as world literatures, linguistics and educational studies, while also opening up other possibilities and interdisciplinary encounters with the world of the arts. As Antonella Riem argues:

Our research group particularly aims at investigating the relationship between dominator and partnership models within textual phenomena of different natures, because it is primarily in texts of all kinds that ideologies are institutionalised and re-produced in more or less explicit ways. The PSG therefore studies the text as a privileged 'con-text' through which changes of the status quo are envisioned⁸⁸.

Riem's methodological approach takes into consideration the analysis of transdisciplinary types of texts and expressions, prompting the need to reconsider connections between academia and its understanding of new media and art forms, which could be either exploited as a means for neo-colonial types of domination or positive and challenging discourses.

In this regard, I have been working with the Partnership Studies Group since my undergraduate studies, trying to create a mutual and multimodal dialogue(s) between my two passions: literature and dance, in an attempt to propose a reading of texts that uncovers *partnership* symbols and the power of the embodied wor(l)d. My dance-theatre *translation* of Walcott's poems follows the standpoints of the decolonial option, while drawing simultaneously from Eisler's perspective of challenging different interdisciplinary possibilities, and Glissant's modes of "relation" in new and original interactions with the texts.

⁸⁷ Partnership Studies Group official website: <https://partnershipstudiesgroup.uniud.it> (consulted on 13/12/2020).

⁸⁸ Riem (2015), Partnership Studies: A New Methodological Approach to Literary Criticism in World Literatures, Languages and Education, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, 2, 1, pp. 5.

1.4 Derek Walcott's decolonisation(s): the life and work of a visionary Caribbean poet, playwright and artist

Before presenting my textual and critical analysis of a selection of Derek Walcott's texts, I want to provide a brief overview of his life and most important works. In doing so, I will try to read the author's biography from the decolonial perspective that I have been examining so far. In particular, I will focus on events that characterised Walcott's personal life and artistic career, for I believe they too represent a sort of decolonial narration. I will also start presenting the strategies and approaches that Walcott used in order to *creolise* his world and reality, thus responding to the colonial *canon* or matrix of power in an original and creative ways.

While the first part of this Ph.D. thesis concentrates on Walcott's poetics and works and how to read them critically from a decolonial point of view, the second part presents my personal attempt to challenge the boundaries of investigation by presenting a multimodal translation through dance and theatre of one of the author's most emblematic poems, *The Schooner Flight*. My intersemiotic and multimodal translation, which fuses together bodies, gestures and movements with different languages, music and interpretations should be *read* as an artistic *praxis* and transdisciplinary experiment. In this sense, my research does not intend to provide an exclusive way of looking at and interacting with Walcott's production but rather an attempt to read his work through different means, instruments and perceptions, while also considering the growing importance of new media and technologies. I will discuss how the world of critical discourse - and the world of literary studies in particular - are challenging spaces where creative and imaginative encounters can be promoted to define and understand an authorial vision and work. Moreover, I will show how this type of multimodal project can be useful for younger generations, to approach literature in *different* and original ways, thus promoting real engagement with the works and a new inclusive type of awareness.

My brief introduction to Walcott's life will show how, from the very beginning of his career, Derek Walcott experienced and later developed a decolonial way of responding to the Western European matrix of power which surrounded and influenced many of his fellow compatriots and their contextual reality.

Born on the tiny island of St. Lucia in 1930, Derek Alton Walcott was the son of Alix and Warwick Walcott, respectively a headmistress and a public servant living in one of the British West Indian colonies in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. Walcott was born *mulatto* because both his grandfathers were white and his grandmothers were black⁸⁹. At the time of Walcott's birth, St. Lucia was part of the British empire, even though, during its history, because of its strategic military and economic position, it changed hands between the English and the French more than fourteen times until 1814, when it eventually fell under the influence of the British crown⁹⁰. The island obtained its independence in 1979, thus becoming part of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Speaking of the Caribbean in general, the wavering influence of the Western colonial matrix of power led to the creation of a complex and heterogeneous region: while the majority of the population consists of descendants of black African slaves from the dreadful Middle Passage trade⁹¹, there are also the heirs of mixed marriages, and those that Walcott has identified as *dispossessed*, i.e. the unrecognised sons and daughters of shameful abuses and/or clandestine relations between black people and white people⁹². After the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1834, half a million Indians arrived in the Caribbean as indentured labour, adding even more complexities to the *hybrid* populations of the islands. Additionally, there were also the descendants of Catholic Irish and Sephardic Jews that fled the 15th century European persecutions and famines, and groups

⁸⁹ As Paul Breslin has pointed out: "Walcott's immediate grandfathers – a Dutchman from Saint Martin on his mother's side and an Englishman from Barbados on his father's – were white and relatively wealthy, and his immediate grandmothers primarily of African descent and poor". Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 11.

⁹⁰ Because of its relentless shifting of European influence, St. Lucia was known as "the Helen of the West Indies". In this regard, F. Treves recounts: "[St. Lucia] has been the cause of more blood-shedding than was ever provoked by Helen of Troy [...]. Seven times it was held by the English, and seven times by the French [...]. Whenever war broke out between England and France, the call that at once rang out in the West was ever the same: To St. Lucia! To St. Lucia". Treves ([1908] 1928), *The Cradle of the Deep: An Account of a Voyage to the West-Indies*, pp. 109.

⁹¹ In *Scars of Partition: Postcolonial Legacies in French and British Borderlands*, William F. S. Miles argues: "Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century colonialism [...] resulted in the mass deportation of tens of millions of Africans to another continent. Slave-based colonialism created dozens of new polities sprinkled throughout the islands of the West Indies and on continental territories in the northeast corner of South America". Miles (2014), *Scars of Partition: Postcolonial Legacies in French and British Borderlands*, pp. 75.

⁹² Throughout his lifetime and career Walcott concentrated on the lives of his *dispossessed* compatriots. Most of his fictional protagonists are *doubles* of real people and when they are not, as in the case of the author's re-writing of mythological figures, they do represent *ordinary* individuals struggling with everyday problems and issues, for most of them come from the streets of his islands. The title of one of the most acute studies on Walcott's *Omeros*, written by Robert Hamner in 1997, epitomises this emblematic aspect: *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros*.

of Chinese, Lebanese and Syrian refugees and expatriates. As a consequence of this “cross-cultural pollination”, as scholars have aptly described it⁹³, the Caribbean archipelago became an interesting patchwork of all sorts of different European languages and idioms: English and English-based Creoles, French and patois, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese varieties and vernaculars, and so on.

In St. Lucia people generally spoke French Creole or Kwèyòl, while the official language was English⁹⁴. This is because, while the French were more preoccupied with colonising minds and knowledge, the British cared more about business, money and trade. Walcott’s family was part of a further minority because it belonged to a “small but important social class of English speakers, mostly Methodists, who had their own school”⁹⁵. This proved fundamental for Walcott as, from an early age, he could read and study the works of the “English canon” and achieve what he later defined as “a sound colonial education”⁹⁶.

Walcott’s father died when he was only one-year-old and so Derek and his twin brother Roderick, together with their older sister Pamela, were raised by their mother, Alix. From his father, Walcott inherited a passion for painting and he was soon introduced to the literary and artistic circles of the island⁹⁷. Harold Simmons, one of the most prominent painters of the region, became his mentor and, together with another pupil, Dustan St Omer (who later became his best friend), Walcott began an artistic journey in describing “through paint and words” the astonishing scenery that surrounded him. In

⁹³ See for example: John Thieme’s *Derek Walcott* (1999), pp. 1.

⁹⁴ Miles explains: “No Caribbean islands were split into Anglophone and Francophone zones. Several of them did, however, experience significant periods of French followed by British colonization. Notable among these are Dominica and St. Lucia, whose Creole language remains French-based. Such are the outcomes of competitive settlement, imperial rivalry, and naval battles between Britain and France in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries”. Miles (2014), *Scars of Partition: Postcolonial Legacies in French and British Borderlands*, pp. 77.

⁹⁵ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 5.

⁹⁶ In *The Schooner Flight*’s most emblematic verses Walcott states: “I’m just a red nigger who love the sea, / I had a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation”. Walcott (1980), *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, pp. 4.

⁹⁷ In *Meanings* (1970) Walcott describes his father: “[he] was a civil servant, but also wrote verse and was an excellent draughtsman. He was also a good portrait painter in water-colour. Our house was haunted by his absence because all around the drawing room there were his water-colours and water-colour portraits. [...] He died quite young. In another situation I think he would have been an artist. He evidently had a great influence on his friends. One of them, under whom I later studied painting, went on to become a professional painter. I have an immense respect, in fact, an awe, for that kind of spiritual strength; I mean here was this circle of self-civilizing, courteous people in a poverty-ridden, cruelly ignored colony living by their own certainties”. Walcott (1970), “Meanings” in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspective on Derek Walcott*, pp. 45.

Another Life (1973), a later poetic autobiographical return to the St. Lucia of his youth, Walcott describes his juvenile ambitions through these verses:

But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
disciples of that astigmatic saint,
that we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of a hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect, the ropes of mangroves
from which old soldier crabs slipped
surrendering to slush,
each ochre track seeking some hilltop and
losing itself in an unfinished phrase,
under sand shipyards where the burnt-out palms
inverted the design of unrigged schooners,
entering forests, boiling with life,
goyave,orrosol, bois-canot, sapotille.
Days!⁹⁸

The young Walcott soon realised that his country needed to be portrayed not only for its natural beauty but also, and more importantly, for the complexities of its ethnical, artistic and cultural hybridity and diversity. At school Walcott enjoyed studying Shakespeare, Marlow and Baudelaire, but it was in the streets of Castries, the capital of the island, that he truly acknowledged the significance of his *gift*. He wanted to give voice to the people of his region, the fishermen and the waitresses of his islands, while trying to include in his verses the accents and rhythm of the French Creole he was speaking with his peers. Walcott wanted to describe and dignify his countrymen and countrywomen, their humble jobs and businesses, while sketching out, at the same time, the prosperous and vital surroundings that defined the Caribbean archipelago. Soon, Walcott realised that he had to choose between poetry and painting:

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

⁹⁸ Walcott (1973), *Another Life*, pp. 52-53.

in a crystal of ambiguities,
I hoped that both disciplines might
by painful accretion cohere
and finally ignite,
but I lived in a different gift,
its elemental metaphor⁹⁹

Simmons helped him in achieving his ambitions and dreams: he encouraged the young Derek to write and brought some of his first poems to the attention of critics and scholars outside the circles of St. Lucia. In September 1950, Walcott and his brother Roderick, together with a group of friends, founded the St. Lucia Arts Guild. Two inaugural events were organised: an exhibition of paintings by Walcott and St Omer, and the staging of *Henri Christophe*¹⁰⁰, a play by Walcott on the life of a Caribbean slave liberator and later tyrant¹⁰¹. In *Meanings* (1970) the writer recounts:

I really became involved in theatre when my brother suggested I write a play about the Haitian revolution. He had read a book about it and gotten excited. So I said, all right, I'll try one, and I wrote a play, *Henry Christophe*. This was in Saint Lucia, where I was still living. We formed a group there called The Arts Guild – mainly schoolboys, and we performed this play. Then I began to write more plays for them. We performed them in Castries, my home town; the whole island's population must be about eighty thousand. The plays may have been seen by a few hundred people in all¹⁰².

The poet was not abandoning his painting passion but rather transforming it in a further creative expression (and expansion) for his later crafts and achievements. Despite most of Western-based academic critics tending to avoid or elude Walcott's artistic endeavour in picturing, imagining and sketching the Caribbean *light* and context, Bruce

⁹⁹ Walcott (1973), *Another Life*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁰ In *The Theatre of Our Lives: Founding an Epic Drama*, Paula Burnett argues: "Henri Christophe was an important play, for Walcott and for the Caribbean. With its high style, its blank verse, and its history given tragic closure, it demonstrated that the region's history could provide the theater with subjects of a high seriousness, a grandeur that was unfamiliar". Burnett (2003), "The Theatre of Our Lives: Founding an Epic Drama" in Bloom (2003), *Derek Walcott. (Bloom's Modern Critical Views)*, pp. 164.

¹⁰¹ In describing "Walcott's first substantial play", Edward Baugh argues: "*Christophe* [...] chronicles the Haitian Revolution from after the death of Toussaint L'Ouverture to the death of Christophe, [...] the tragic hero, who towers above ordinary men, and whose fall, by reason of his greatness, brings the whole world crashing down with him. The young Walcott, reaching after a theatre that would speak to and for the West Indies, is excited to see in *Christophe* a Caribbean hero in the classical Elizabethan mould". Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 61.

¹⁰² Walcott (1970), "Meanings" in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspective on Derek Walcott*, pp. 45.

King has reflected on how such a diverse artistic upbringing must have influenced Walcott's later style of writing and transdisciplinary perspective:

His interest in painting would strongly influence his poetry and theatre; the poems would be filled with descriptions, colours, perspectives, distinctions between foreground, background, and middle distance, and adapt such painterly genres as the still life. He would imagine his plays as paintings, in colours and period styles, his characters as character types in costume. He would himself draw costumes, paint scenery. His manuscripts would be filled with illustrations and visual notes [...]; as a director he would be praised for the visual interest and beauty of his tableaux¹⁰³.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Walcott moved to Jamaica in order to attend the University of the West Indies in Mona. There, he expanded his artistic and literary connections and founded two student magazines, *The Barb* and *The Pelican*. Walcott was already known in the region for his readings in a local broadcast and for a collection of poems he had published with the assistance of his mother. In order to repay his debt to her, the young Walcott took to the streets of his hometown to sell his work titled *25 Poems* (1948)¹⁰⁴. In Jamaica he also met and married his first wife Faye A. Moyston. The couple soon had a child, Peter. Nevertheless, Walcott understood that if he were to remain in Jamaica, he would have ended up as a teacher or university assistant and so he decided to leave for Trinidad. In that period, he was also commissioned to write an epic play or pageant for the inauguration of the West-Indian Federation in 1958 in Trinidad. Thanks to a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship, a grant that would later help him with other projects, Walcott left for New York. In the U.S.A. he was supposed to study with some of the most distinguished American producers and stage directors, while taking inspiration for his own West Indian productions. However, as most chroniclers point out, Walcott fell under “intense pressure”¹⁰⁵ and anxiety: he was stuck with an important deadline and he felt alienated and estranged in the city. Despite these precarious circumstances, he managed to write not only *Drums and Colours*, the pageant that opened the ceremonies for the first parliament of the West-Indian Federation in April 1958, but

¹⁰³ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 28.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Hamner recalls: “The city of Castries had no book publisher, but by the time he was eighteen, Walcott wanted to see some of his poems in print. Borrowing \$200 from his mother, he sent his manuscript off to Trinidad and then sold copies of *25 Poems* (1948) to friends and people in the streets until he repaid his mother's investment”. Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), “Introduction” in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 1.

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, the *Introduction* to Balme & Collier (eds. 2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 2: Performing Arts*, pp. xv-xxi.

also another play titled *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, a sort of folk-tale based on his native island, a title that would have later become one of his most well-known and celebrated masterpieces¹⁰⁶.

While in Jamaica Walcott met some of the people who would later be involved in his theatrical project: actors, colleagues, and artists such as Errol Hill, Slade Hopkinson and Beryl McBurnie¹⁰⁷. Yet moving to Trinidad in 1958 was, for him, the true realisation of his ambitions. Port of Spain, the capital of the island, epitomised the true essence of the Caribbean region and Walcott's belief in a cultural *hybridisation* that would prove extremely proactive and creative. In describing the city of those years, King argues:

Port of Spain had old wooden French and Spanish architecture, it had a wide variety of music ranging from Spanish to African including its own calypso and steel bands, it was multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural with British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Latin Americans, Syrians, Asian Indians, Negroes (the then current and still a common West Indian term for those primarily of African descent), and many people of mixed parentage¹⁰⁸.

Influenced by his recent experiences in New York, where he also discovered Japanese Kabuki and Noh Theatre¹⁰⁹, and drawn to the energy and physicality of McBurnie's Little Carib dance company, Walcott founded *The Trinidad Theatre Workshop*. Through this group, the playwright ventured into achieving a truly original West Indian acting style, a sort of theatrical experience that he expected to be highly visual and corporeal and in which the traditions and conventions of Western canonical theatre would fuse and intertwine with the folklore of the Caribbean archipelago. In this

¹⁰⁶ As Edward Baugh has pointed out: "*Ti-Jean* is an allegorical fable that is at one and the same time a kind of Morality play about the never-ending 'journey of the soul' between good and evil, and a review and comment on the story of the black and more particularly Caribbean person in the Western world, and the possibility of his effecting a radical change of his situation". Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 77.

¹⁰⁷ As King Bruce has explained: "McBurnie is a modern folk dancer who had studied and worked with Martha Graham, influenced Katherine Dunham, and performed in the United States before returning to Trinidad. She researched folk-dances and music of the eastern Caribbean, including the African survivals or Nation dances on Carriacou, an island off Grenada, and tried to create a modern folk style bringing together folk traditions with the principles of Graham and Dunham. She had an immense influence on Caribbean culture by showing local dancers [...] how they could create an alternative tradition to British-European ballet that was taught locally. [...] She saw that it was necessary to have a theatre devoted to dance and in 1948 established her Little Carib Theatre for her dance company". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 26.

¹⁰⁸ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 18.

¹⁰⁹ King recounts that "it was during his period in New York [...] that Walcott formed the notion of creating a West Indian drama company equal to the great drama ensembles elsewhere. It would be stylized and use dance and music like Japanese Kabuki and Noh theatre; it would be a company with an ensemble style". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 26-27.

sense, the Workshop's main concern was that of decolonising, or finding a new voice, for the *modernity/coloniality* dominator paradigm that saw West Indian theatre as insignificant, trivial and primitive. The Workshop would constitute an unprecedented alternative to its Western-oriented *refined* and conservative counterpart.

The project proved to be an open and pluriversal space for experimentation, where actors and actresses were constantly pushing themselves against traditional and familiar theatrical norms and boundaries, working hard in order to avoid clichés and Western-based interpretations¹¹⁰. For Walcott, who was aware that his productions would have to be simpler in terms of setting and technical equipment (mainly because of the lack of government support for the arts), the interpreters had to focus on their body language, gestures and movements. The use of voice was also important, as actors would have to stress Creole inflections and ruptures to distinguish them from standardised and Western-imposed languages and expressions. In later productions, actors were asked to sing and play instruments, for these aspects also displayed important legacies of Caribbean cultural heritage and uniqueness. As King reports in his attentive study of the creation of the Workshop, Walcott called upon actors "to do what the modern theatre has taught actors to forget, "using his entire body, revolving it, using his voice"¹¹¹.

Formally, the Workshop joined the Little Carib dance company led by McBurnie in May 1959. The first private productions were held at the Little Carib Theatre, but soon tensions between Walcott and McBurnie brought a definitive rupture between the companies. The Workshop had to find a new home, and that represented a big concern for its survival, for Walcott preferred to invest the group's income in new productions and did not want to build a national or communal theatrical space.

While working on his plays, Walcott kept writing poetry and also joined the prestigious *Trinidad Guardian*. As Breslin recounts: "Between January 3, 1960 and October 25, 1967, he produced more than five hundred articles on subjects including West Indian painting, theatre, and literature, movies, theatre productions from abroad, and the annual carnival and calypso season"¹¹². When, in 1962, the collection *In a Green Night*:

¹¹⁰ In *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, Bruce King titled the years 1948-1958 as "Forming a Vision". Walcott's intention was that of bringing together different types of art forms (painting, dance and movements, music and songs, Carnival masques and mimes) in one single and coherent Caribbean theatrical experience.

¹¹¹ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 20.

¹¹² Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 32.

Poems 1948-1960 was finally published, Walcott began to be internationally acknowledged as a true poetical voice of the Caribbean¹¹³.

The West Indian Federation ceased to exist in that same period. The idea that the growing economies of the bigger islands, such as Jamaica and Trinidad-Tobago, would have to back and support the systems of the smaller ones was putting the newly established order of power to the test. The challenging ambition of creating a larger, communal West Indian federation of nations failed and was eventually replaced by a similar greedy and *modern/colonial* authority that had dominated the Caribbean territories for more than 500 years. The protagonists were different, as they represented the descendants of former black African slaves, but the logic at the core of their thinking mimicked the Western and Northern-Atlantic colonial matrix of power. Walcott and other fellow artists and writers were worried. Walcott, in particular, had gained a lot of attention for the staging of a successful new theatrical production titled *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, which was presented in 1967 at the first Caribana Festival in Toronto. The play focused on social and ethnic issues and it was prompting West Indians to stop dreaming of a return to Africa, a land they did not know, and accept instead that they were born and raised in the Caribbean, a land of hope, and in which racial segregations were soon to be surpassed¹¹⁴. *Dream on Monkey Mountain* follows the adventures of Makak, a poor, black charcoal burner who lives at the margins of civilisation at Monkey Mountain. After experiencing a series of revelatory dreams about his seemingly African royal heritage, Makak decides to descend from his shelter along with his friend Moustique in order to reach his forgotten homeland, Africa. When Moustique gets killed, Makak is imprisoned by the *mulatto* Colonel Lestarde, a “native intellectual” who believes and represents the white colonial order. Makak imaginatively escapes from prison through

¹¹³ The setting and themes of this first internationally recognised collection of poems is foregrounded in *Prelude*, one of Walcott’s most known and celebrated poems: I, with legs crossed along the daylight, watch / The variegated fists of clouds that gather over / The uncouth features of this, my prone island. / Meanwhile the steamers which divide horizons prove / Us lost; / Found only / In tourist booklets, behind ardent binoculars; / Found in the blue reflection of eyes / That have known cities and think us here happy. Walcott ([1962] 2009), *Isole: Poesie Scelte (1948-2004)*, pp. 22. From these very first lines, Walcott expresses his ever-recurrent poetic task: re-writing and also re-imagining the Western-imposed image of the Caribbean and describing its singularity from a West Indian decolonising perspective.

¹¹⁴ In the opening *Notes on production*, Walcott states: “The play is a dream, one that exists as much in the given minds of its principal characters as in that of its writer, and as such, it is illogical, derivative, contradictory. Its source is metaphor and it is best treated as a physical poem with all the subconscious and deliberate borrowings of poetry. Its style should be spare, essential as the details of a dream”. Walcott ([1970] 1993), *Ti-Jean e i suoi Fratelli & Sogno sul Monte della Scimmia*, pp. 72.

collective dreaming, in which Lestrade challenges him to behead the White Goddess¹¹⁵, a mythical character that he had previously encountered in his hallucinations. At the end of the play, Makak returns to his mountain in order to embrace the green beginnings of his real and uncontaminated world. The work challenges the colonial matrix of power, proposing a different awareness and response to dominant colonial legacy, while simultaneously suggesting a new perspective and opportunity for the future of West Indian peoples¹¹⁶.

The representatives of the Black Power movement in the Caribbean did not seem to share Walcott's ideas. In Trinidad they organised demonstrations and uprisings against what they perceived to be as an apathetic and indifferent regime that did not account for the priorities of its peoples. As King points out: "after two decades of black rule there was still massive unemployment, extreme class divisions, a growing division between the new bourgeoisie and the poor, and much political corruption and tyranny"¹¹⁷. The situation turned even worse when protesters started to revolt against minority groups on the island, such as the Indian communities. The Workshop was also affected by this instable turn of events. Slade Hopkinson, one of the pillars of the group, accused Walcott of preferring productions coming from the West¹¹⁸ and not including plays written by black-African West Indians in the Workshop's annual programme. When Walcott replied that the Black Power represented for him another mimicking of the rhetoric of Western coloniality, and in particular that of black urban America, Hopkinson left the group¹¹⁹.

Despite these unfortunate events, Walcott kept organising tours and productions in order to expand the Workshop's recognition within and outside of the Caribbean,

¹¹⁵ Most of scholars agree on identifying the beheading of the White Goddess with Walcott's open critique to Robert Graves' 1948 successful essay on this mythical figure. See: Graves (1948), *The White Goddess*.

¹¹⁶ It is easy to identify in Makak's story echoes and reflections of Don Quixote's adventures. For most critics, the play is an original rewriting of Cervantes' novel and represents one of the first Walcottian tentative to adapt West Indian *sensibility* to one of the most celebrated European works and texts.

¹¹⁷ King (2005) *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 127.

¹¹⁸ Commenting on the productions of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, Breslin points out: "[it] made a point of combining West Indian plays not only with British and American works such as Pinter's *The Lover* or Albee's *Zoo Story*, but with a broad sampling of world theater: Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Genet's *The Blacks*, Ionesco's *The Lesson*, Soyinka's *The Road*". Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 37.

¹¹⁹ Bruce King recalls how towards the end of his life Hopkinson had changed his mind, asserting that "he was no longer obsessed by being black and was more concerned over humanness". King reports what Hopkinson had suggested during an interview to Kathy Waterman for the *Sunday Express* in June 1985: "Was the violence of Idi Amin against Ugandans of an inferior moral grade than the violence of the South African Government? I say not". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 344.

particularly in North America. He was hoping to take the company to New York, for it to be performed on Broadway to demonstrate how West Indians were capable of producing original and unique theatre, despite what some critics and fellow compatriots thought of the islands. V. S. Naipaul, one of the most distinguished and recognised voices in the Caribbean region once stated: “history is built around achievement and creation and nothing was created in the West Indies”¹²⁰.

To achieve such international recognition required a lot of work: Walcott relentlessly rewrote and improved most of his plays. This aspect led to a speculative and operational gap between his poetry and theatre, at least in their initial phases. As most Walcottian scholars have aptly pointed out, in contrast to his poetical writings which, once finished, hardly underwent a process of revision, Walcott’s plays were more *fluid* and were remodelled according to who was going to interpret them. Breslin explains: “Although [Walcott] has sometimes revised poems [and] has seldom made changes after their first appearance in a book, [...] the plays, in contrast, seem endlessly open to expansion, contraction, and tinkering”¹²¹. Walcott the playwright and director took care of every detail: he drew sketches for costumes and illustrations for scenery; he studied and checked the spaces where his productions were taking place; and he spent hours and hours rehearsing with the actors, singers and dancers. Walcott was hardly satisfied with his interpreters’ characterisations and kept changing their lines and roles according to how they acted, moved, sang and performed. He was capable of adjusting lines or giving new instructions or ideas even just a few hours before the curtain call. Some members of the Workshop complained of Walcott’s despotic and turbulent attitude. They argued with him but also admired his work ethic and the passion and effort he put in, in order to achieve something relevant for the Caribbean and its peoples. Walcott’s tireless methods allowed the Workshop to gain national and international recognition, and also outstanding and remarkable interpretations from his actors and crew. In this sense, when Northern American cities asked him to restage his plays with their companies, Walcott did not know how to manage the absence of his interpreters. For instance, when he had the opportunity to take *Dream on Monkey Mountain* to Los Angeles, he felt puzzled at the American unions’ request to engage black American actors with the excuse of keeping

¹²⁰ Naipaul (1962), *The Middle Passage*, pp. 29.

¹²¹ Breslin (2001), *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 39.

down production costs. Walcott's distress is apparent in his reply: "the play was 'the work of an ensemble', written with specific actors in mind, it is 'total' theatre of an indigenous kind, its poetry is indigenous"¹²². This displays one of the main limits of the Workshop: despite Walcott's intention to create an open space and laboratory for the creation and development of a communal West Indian theatre, he had created his *own* company, which responded to his own standards, criteria and values. This is why, in the long run, the project was destined to fail: it missed the purpose of its own vision which was to represent the ideas and voices of different nation-islands; instead, it was kept under the hegemony of a single mind. At the same time, under Walcott's direction, the Workshop reached the height of its success and its playwright was finally acknowledged as one of the best innovators and pioneers of contemporary and modern theatre. Aside from the Workshop's American tours (such as in Connecticut or in New York, where *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* was staged at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park), Walcott never forgot the importance of travelling across the Caribbean islands: the group performed in Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Grenada, Barbados, St. Vincent and in many other Antillean locations.

One of the pillars of the Workshop was Derek's second wife, Margret Maillard, whom he had married in 1960. As King recounts "[she] was in charge of properties and 'front of house'. [...] She [came] from an important black French Creole Trinidad family, had taken a university degree in England, and shocked her conservative family when she married Walcott"¹²³. Margret became one of the pretexts for the company's division and final dissolution. When Walcott had an affair with a new and younger member of the dance unit of the project, Norline Metivier (who would later become his third wife), part of the Workshop's members took Margret's side and Walcott was invited to resign.

In those turbulent years, Walcott produced two of his most remarkable and praised plays, namely *The Joker of Seville* and *O Babylon!* The first was a rewriting or adaptation of the seventeenth century play *El Burlador de Sevilla* attributed to the Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina, while the second represented a tribute to a small community of Rastafarians in Jamaica. As Bruce King reports: "[Walcott] was sympathetic to 1960s 'flower power', the Rastas were peaceful black hippies attempting to resist the pressures of Babylon. They also lacked the energy, discipline and will to confront and remake their

¹²² King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 136.

¹²³ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 35.

world”¹²⁴. These two plays benefited from an important collaboration Walcott had established with the American songwriter and composer Galt MacDermot, an artist from Broadway who was known not only for his musical hits in *Hair* but also for the scripts of significant contemporary plays and movies. Thanks to MacDermot Walcott finally fulfilled his long-awaited dream of a *total* Caribbean theatre, meaning a performance that would combine his lyrical theatrical lines with qualitative music and dance choreographies from his talented collaborators. Caribbean folk recalled and echoed some of the characteristics of American musicals because it was based on Carnival festivals, calypso performances, parang parties and many others colourful traditions from Afro- and Indo-Caribbean artistic experiences.

After his departure from the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1976, Walcott kept writing for theatre but felt more comfortable within the realm of poetry. These were difficult years for the writer: he had left Margret and his own family for a younger woman, the Workshop he founded and brought to success was quarrelling about the legacy of his productions and he felt that it was time to move on, maybe trying to succeed and gain stability in the United States as a playwright and poet.

It came as no surprise that, in 1973, Walcott published *Another Life*, a sort of autobiographical sketch of his youth in St. Lucia. Walcott was now forty and felt the need to return to his *roots* and acknowledge what he had achieved in life so far. In his overview of Walcott’s production, Edward Baugh speaks of *Another Life* in this way:

The first three books of the poem tell, in a highly selective and economical way, the story of Walcott’s life in St. Lucia up to the time when he left the island at age twenty, never really to live there again for well nigh fifty years, although he visited frequently. The fourth and final book, shaped round a return visit by the poet to his homeland, presents the autobiographer at the period of writing the autobiography. This strategy makes clear the point of view from which the story of the early life is written, and the gulf between the autobiographer and his remembered life¹²⁵.

Another collection of poems that Walcott published in this period is *Sea Grapes* (1976). For most critics, the work contains some of the most political verses of the poet’s career. Walcott makes explicit reference to the corrupt administrations of the newly established governments in the West Indies. Moreover, he suggests that European interests in the region had been replaced by American ones, and that the growing

¹²⁴ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 246.

¹²⁵ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 93.

influence of the tourism industry was prompting a distorted picture of the potential of the Caribbean archipelago. Again, an important selection of poems is dedicated to Walcott's birthplace, while the tone of his writing, as Baugh has rightly suggested, switches between "bitterness [and] mature sweetness which does not ignore the bitterness, but incorporates and transcends it"¹²⁶.

Some reflections on the uncertainties and doubts of this period can be traced, alongside some real events and *doubling* characters, in a long poem Walcott wrote in the following years titled *The Schooner Flight*, which he included in a later collection titled *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979). Appropriately considered as one of the most significant examples of Walcott's mode of composing verses, the poem represents the author's Pindaric flight over his life and career, and also his confrontation with Western colonial history and present legacy. As Baugh points out, it includes "Walcott's most sustained use [...] in his poetry, of a West Indian Creole speech, a virtuoso performance of the West Indian 'man of words', and partly on the skill of its achievements in the interplay of genres – narrative, dramatic and lyric"¹²⁷ (Baugh 2006: 109). The protagonist of the poem, the "red" seafarer Shabine, is Walcott's alter-ego. His uprooted and unstable identity and personality drive him to leave his family and lover, Maria Concepcion, in order to embark on the "Schooner Flight". In his voyages around the Caribbean islands, Shabine finally discovers and acknowledges his true *identity*. He learns the truth about his ancestors and starts to grasp the power of his language and speech, and way of living and surviving. In the end, he overcomes his internal demons thanks to the help of the Caribbean Sea and its environment, and eventually embarks on new adventures in light of a new awareness and understanding.

Despite his bitter closure with the Workshop, between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, Walcott wrote some of his most refined theatre and performances. Amongst the most renowned: *Remembrance* and *Pantomime*, published in the same volume in 1980; *Beef, No Chicken*, which premiered in 1981 in Port of Spain; and *The Last Carnival* and *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, which both premiered in 1983, respectively in Seattle and Bridgetown (Barbados)¹²⁸. Walcott's intention was to get greater attention from

¹²⁶ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 106-107.

¹²⁷ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 109.

¹²⁸ These plays are different from Walcott's first theatrical productions firstly because of the reduced number of protagonists, and secondly because of their focus on contemporary Caribbean problems and issues. Apart from *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, which is a *theatre within theatre* because it proposes a

American audiences and critics, despite his preference for premiering his plays in the Caribbean and his disapproval of American actors' interpretations. Nevertheless, as Bruce King has explained: "Americans regarded him primarily as a poet and secondarily as a playwright. In the United States his years as director of the TTW [Trinidad Theatre Workshop] counted for little [...]. It was not until the MacArthur award that Walcott's life and finances began to become stable"¹²⁹.

In the early 1980s, Walcott started to accept teaching assignments in the U.S.A., first in New York, then at Harvard University, before finally setting at Boston University. In the following years he made friends with other expatriate poets and artists like himself, such as Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney.

While teaching away from his beloved islands, where he returned whenever he could, Walcott kept writing. He published numerous collections of poems, such as *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), *Midsummer* (1984) and *The Arkansas Testament* (1987). Most of the poems of this period are set in American contexts and landscapes. Walcott did find a lot of connections between the racial segregation of his islands and the situations he founded in Northern American cities. Distinctions from the so-called progressive North and poorer South of the world were not dissimilar. Black peoples and minority groups were struggling for recognition, while an elitist *white* group continued to sustain its alleged *superiority*.

With the publication of *Omeros* in 1990, Walcott's career reached its peak. This work represents one of the most sophisticated poetic narrativisations of the last century. It may be defined as a great fresco, picturing the most varied complexities of the Caribbean archipelago. It begins in contemporary St. Lucia but soon transcends its physical and geographical boundaries to encompass stories that occur in different parts of the globe. At times the poem becomes a dream, a collection of Walcott's memories and a historical account. For these reasons, *Omeros* surpasses the confines of literary genres and it is hard to read and interpret according to traditional Western-oriented

company restaging from a West Indian perspective of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the other plays dig down into the core of Caribbean dilemmas: *Remembrance* is the story of a retired schoolmaster in Trinidad who lost a son in the so-called February Revolution of the 1970s; *Pantomime* is a modern rewriting of the Crusoe/Friday relationship from the point of view of a *white* hotel owner and his *black* butler; *Beef, No Chicken* is an ecocritical play that backs the need to respect the natural environment against the danger of government policies that pledge money and progress; and *The Last Carnival* focuses on the story of a French Creole family in Trinidad before and after the Black Power Revolution.

¹²⁹ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 289.

taxonomies. Some critics have celebrated it as an epic poem. Yet, as Baugh has pointed out, “the issue has been fuelled partly by Walcott’s own understandable resistance to the label ‘epic’, notwithstanding all the obvious and not so obvious marks of indebtedness to Homer”¹³⁰. Indeed, the poem follows the story of Achille and Hector and their struggle for the love of Helen but Walcott’s representation of these characters is far from Homer’s depiction of his classical heroes. The protagonists of *Omeros* are sailors, waitresses and handymen coming from the poet’s poor islands. They are the unwanted protagonists of Western European and Northern Atlantic narratives, the *wretched of the earth*, to use an expression that echoes Fanon’s most important work¹³¹. They are the simple, uneducated and naïve *doubles* of Walcott’s compatriots. In *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott’s Omeros*, Robert Hamner transcribes the author’s own description of his work:

The whole book is an act of gratitude. It is a fantastic privilege to be in a place in which limbs, features, smells, the lineaments and presence of the people are so powerful [...] and there is no history of the place. One reason I don’t like talking about an epic is that I think it’s wrong to try to ennoble people [...] these people are their own nouns. A noun is not a name you give to something. It is something you watch becoming itself [...]. The New World needs an identity without guilt or blame¹³².

Through *Omeros* the author accomplishes a double-sided decolonisation: he pictures anew the *light* and integrity of his fellow islanders while he redraws Occidental stereotypical thoughts and assumptions about the Caribbean. Walcott rewrites the Homeric myths by reconceptualising their Western-biased definitions. For the poet, Achille’s recovering of his forbearers’ true identity through a hallucinatory voyage back to Africa corresponds to a Trojan war victory, while the death of Hector does not echo a violent tribute, like in its classical version, but rather a singular fault determined by greed and longing for money. Hector abandons his life at sea in order to work for the growing and profitable tourist industry. He purchases a taxi and soon dies in a car accident. In order to cure their physical and psychological wounds, the characters in *Omeros* do not address gods and goddesses but rather the endurance and sacrifices of their own personal consciousness or, even more so, the power of the *nature* that surrounds them. In this regard, I believe that through this poem Walcott achieves a communal *partnership*,

¹³⁰ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 186.

¹³¹ See: Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2001).

¹³² Walcott in Hamner (1997), *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott’s Omeros*, pp. 34.

establishing *roots* in a context in which his ancestors, and most of his contemporaries, did not feel at home¹³³. A *healing* episode that epitomises this way of connecting with the Caribbean environment occurs within the rewriting of Philoctete's story¹³⁴. For most of the poem, the protagonist is suffering from a symbolic stanching wound he got from a "rusted anchor" (a reminder of the slaves' chains under colonial rule). Philoctete is cured thanks to the help of the Obeah priestess Ma Kilman, the only character who is able to decipher the signs of the Caribbean natural surroundings and those coming from her own African ancestral wisdom. Through a ritual healing bath, Philoctete is finally freed from his *pain*: a communal sense of dismay and bewilderment that is perceptible in most of *Omeros*' main characters.

From the opposite perspective, Walcott does not forget to depict the stories of those *white* former colonial rulers for whom now the Caribbean islands also represent home. In particular, the poem recounts the adventures of an old married couple who do not have children. The Plunkett's are in constant search of their own *roots*: Major Plunkett is busy on a quest for a legitimate heir in the annals of the island's history, while his wife Maud is trying to overcome her sense of displacement by embroidering a cloth that portrays the island's natural beauty.

Other diverse and hybrid characters are presented in Walcott's complex structure in *Omeros*. Amongst the most important: Catherine Weldon, a nearly forgotten Swiss-American artist and advocate of the rights of the Sioux tribes led by Sitting Bull in the American Great Plains, and the blinded Seven Seas, an ever-recurrent character that recalls the figure of Homer. Furthermore, an aspect that furthers *Omeros*' difficulty is the presence of Walcott's alter-ego. The author appears and disappears in this work, expressing opinions on the role of art and literature in the Caribbean. Robert Hamner points out how:

¹³³ In an article I published in 2018, *Rooting Identities: Derek Walcott's connection(s) with the Caribbean Environment*, I discuss Walcott's connections with the Caribbean environment in *Omeros*. In particular, I presented two episodes of the poem suggesting how the power of nature is essential in helping Walcottian protagonists to recover ancestral wisdom and overcome dilemmas related to the definition of *identity* or *communal roots*. See: Mantellato (2018), *Rooting identities: Derek Walcott's Connection(s) with the Caribbean Environment*, *Le Simplegadi*, 16, 18, pp. 191-204.

¹³⁴ For an extensive account of the power of healing colonial wounds in Walcott's *Omeros*, see: Ramazani (1997), *The Wound of History: Walcott's Omeros and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction*, *PLMA*, 112, 3, pp. 405-417.

Walcott brings into question not only the venerable epic genre but also the rights of the historian and artist to confiscate and colonize reality [...]. [*Omeros*] illuminates, focuses and intensifies aspects of reality that might otherwise be marginalized in our personal quest for meaning¹³⁵.

Some of the poem's most emblematic episodes deal with Walcott's own confrontation with colonial history and with his own personal story: in one passage Walcott *meets* the ghost of his father, Warwick, which prompts him to write about the forgotten peoples of the islands (including the work of the *unnamed* black female charcoal-carriers in St. Lucia under colonial rule). Towards the end of the poem, Walcott circumnavigates his island's *inferno*, through an episode that reminds us of Walcott's indebtedness to the work of Dante¹³⁶, and simultaneously suggests the poet's own understanding of his own destiny.

A final note on *Omeros*: despite the critical attention the poem has received because of its inventiveness and originality in responding to the colonial matrix of power, in my Masters' thesis I stressed how the work encompasses traditional ways of depicting female characters in order to present their endeavour to fulfil their own stories and help others in connecting with their true self-conscious. In my opinion, the female subaltern speakers are the true protagonists of the work, because it is only through their wisdom and courage that the Caribbean peoples are capable of appeasing their tormented souls. In this regard, as a former professional dancer and now choreographer, I was inspired to work on an intersemiotic translation that, through the language of poetry, dance and movement, wants to embody the sacredness of the feminine easily identifiable in some of *Omeros*' most powerful passages¹³⁷. In order to make clear these assumptions, I propose here one of the extracts that I chose to translate during the project. It is a lyrical passage in which a Greek expatriate girl teaches the fictional character of Walcott the correct pronunciation of the word "Omeros" (which means "Homer" in Greek). The articulation

¹³⁵ Hamner (1997), *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros*, pp. 7.

¹³⁶ Professor Maria Cristina Fumagalli has aptly foregrounded the links that intertwine the work of the Caribbean poet with that of Dante in her critical study titled *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante* (2001).

¹³⁷ A full account of this study and interdisciplinary project is available in an article I published in 2017 titled *A choreographic dialogue with Caribbean poetry: The Sacredness of the Feminine in Walcott's Omeros (1990)*. See: <http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/lingueilinguaggi/article/view/16801> (consulted on 20/07/2019) or Mantellato (2017), *A choreographic dialogue with Caribbean poetry: The Sacredness of the Feminine in Walcott's Omeros (1990)*, *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 21, pp. 145-157.

of this *wor(l)d* discloses the poet's imagination, producing a series of images that are connected with the power of his native island and with the sacredness of the feminine¹³⁸:

I said: "Omeros",

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

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes
that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed¹³⁹.

The hope for a better and communal future of partnership for *Omeros*' protagonists is emphasised by the impending birth of Helen and Hector's child. The association is explicit when Achille agrees to take care of the newly born after his rival and friend's sudden death. The theme of the *unborn* or of new life, which becomes a symbol for Caribbean regeneration, is commonplace in Walcott's work: a leitmotif the author had already used in *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* through the character of the Bolom, a not-yet formed child that stands between good and evil, and eventually becomes a new opportunity and hope for Caribbean communities¹⁴⁰.

Omeros is not the only work in which Walcott recalls and rewrites the mythical stories that look back at the Aegean archipelago. In 1993, the author published a play titled *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*, an original representation of the adventures of Ulysses in his voyages back to his island, Ithaca. In his rewriting of the work, Walcott emphasises the need for narrative decolonisations. In this respect, he foregrounds Ulysses's wet-nurse Egyptian origins because, as Eurycleia suggests: "[it] is Egypt who cradle Greece until Greece mature"¹⁴¹. When the Cyclops asks Odysseus his real name,

¹³⁸ In putting together this choreography I was also inspired by a study published by Antonella Riem in an article on the power of the creative Goddess. Riem suggests: "The worshippers of the Ancient Goddess believed that she had created the universe through its magic dance [...] by moving rhythmically in circles and spirals, thus organising the non-yet formed matter (Mater)". Riem (eds. 2007), *The Goddess Awakened: Partnership Studies in Literatures, Language and Education*, pp. 16.

¹³⁹ Walcott ([1990] 2003), *Omeros*, iii, II, book 1, pp. 28.

¹⁴⁰ In summarising the structures and themes of the fable play of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, Edward Baugh describes the Bolom as "the Devil's messenger and servant", while explaining that "the term in St. Lucian folklore [stands] for the aborted foetus of a first pregnancy [...]. St. Lucia being overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, it is not surprising for abortion to be identified with evil in folk belief". Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 77.

¹⁴¹ Walcott (1993), *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*, pp. 9.

the latter provokes the monster by replying “Nobody”, thus re-establishing Walcott’s endless quest for Caribbean recognition and identity acknowledgement.

Towards the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, Walcott published other collections of poems. Amongst the most known: *The Bounty* in 1997, which he dedicated to the memory of his mother Alix; and *The Prodigal* in 2004, which Walcott described in these terms:

Look at it any way you like, it’s an old man’s book
whenever you write it, whenever it comes out,
the age in your armpits in the pleats of your crotch,
the faded perfumes of cherished conversations,
and the toilet gurgling its eclogues, resurrecting names
in its hoarse swivelling into an echo after.
This is the music of memory, water¹⁴².

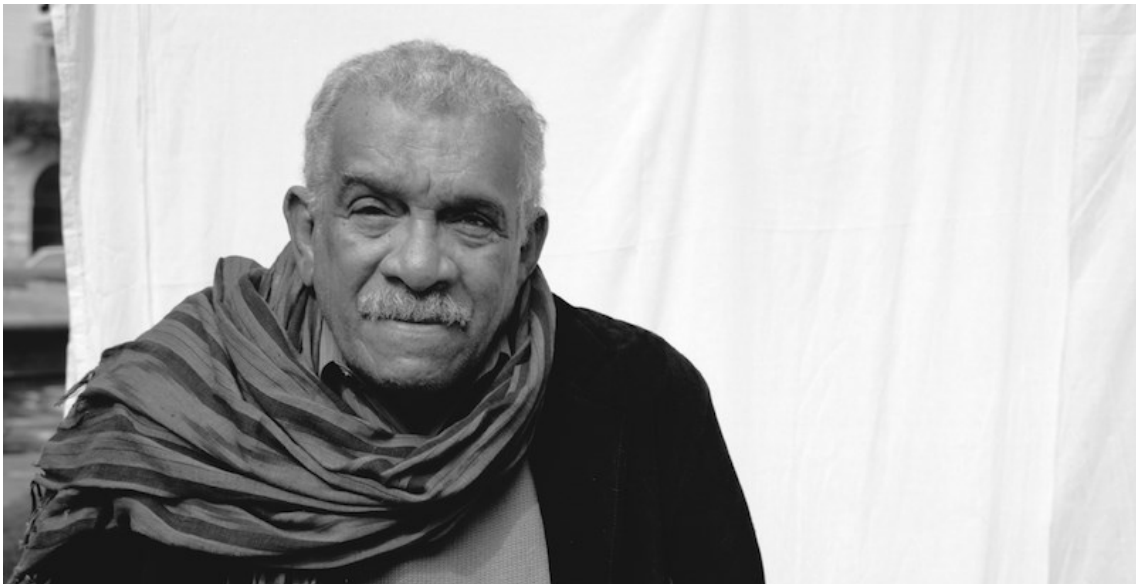


Fig. 1: Derek Walcott.

Particularly important for the purposes of this Ph.D. thesis is the publication of *Tiepolo’s Hound* in 2000. The work may be read as a tribute to the life and work of the Impressionist painter Camille Pissarro. Nevertheless, the poem transcends easy identification as it encompasses Walcott’s own experiences as an artist and it reflects on the ideas of *representation* and the role of *art* in a wider sense.

¹⁴² Walcott, ([2004] 2005), *The Prodigal*, iii, 1, part 1, pp. 8.

During his lifetime, Walcott was awarded an impressive number of international prizes. In 1966, he received the Royal Society of Literature Award for *The Castaway*, a book of poems he published in 1965; in 1971, he was awarded the prestigious Obie Award for most distinguished play on Off-Broadway with *Dream on Monkey Mountain*; and in 1981, he received the MacArthur Prize Fellow Award which would radically change his life. As Bruce King has explained:

Suddenly Walcott's life changed. He no longer had to worry as much about money or having a roof over his head. [...] In June 1981 Walcott received a five-year John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship of \$ 248.000. The Foundation's press release described Walcott as a 'West Indian poet and dramatist whose work deal with man's relations with God and society'¹⁴³.

The coronation of Walcott's career occurred in 1992, when he received the Nobel prize for Literature "for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment"¹⁴⁴, according to the Swedish Academy. Walcott's Nobel lecture titled *The Antilles* is a celebration of his West Indian multi-ethnic and cultural background, and its future legacy. It is also Walcott's proud declaration of the birth of a fresh, new and *mixed* literature¹⁴⁵, a sustained affirmation of the power of the *encounter* and on the need to legitimise and give voice to all minorities. In this sense, Walcott's talk surprisingly opens with a description of a Hindu ritual performance or epic called *Ramayana* in the village of Felicity in Trinidad. The author admits his own negligence in not having fully expressed the diversity of practices and arts in his home region, and even more so for having tried to read this particular Indian ritual through his trained *theatre* lenses, thus delegitimising its own powerful valence:

They were not actors. They had been chosen; or they themselves had chosen their roles in this sacred story that would go on for nine afternoons over a two-hour period till the sun set. They were not amateurs but believers. There was no theatrical term to define them. [...] They believed in what they were playing, in the sacredness of the text, the validity of India, while I, out of the writer's habit, searched for some sense of elegy, of loss, even of degenerative mimicry in the happy faces of the boy-warriors or the heraldic profiles of the village princes. I was polluting the afternoon with doubt and with the patronage of admiration. I misread the event through a visual echo of History - the cane fields, indenture, the evocation of vanished armies, temples, and

¹⁴³ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 401.

¹⁴⁴ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 537-538.

¹⁴⁵ For example, Walcott does not forget to mention "St John Perse, [...] the first Antillean to win this prize for poetry. He was born in Guadeloupe and wrote in French [...] a privileged white child on an Antillean plantation". Walcott (1998), *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, pp. 77.

trumpeting elephants - when all around me there was quite the opposite: elation, delight in the boys' screams, in the sweets-stalls, in more and more costumed characters appearing; a delight of conviction, not loss. The name Felicity made sense¹⁴⁶.

Walcott's speech is an inclusive homage to all the colours and peoples of his home islands. It speaks of their *broken* speech and of their hybrid cultures, and it supports the need to dismiss the burden of colonial history in order to turn the page and highlight the expressiveness and originality of the West Indian intercultural hybrid. *The Antilles* is a public statement, a manifesto, and a guide to the Caribbean and how to view and read the Antillean region specifically, a land that has always been misinterpreted and an archipelago that has much to say in the dialogue with today's world:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. [...] It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles [...]. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its 'making' but its remaking, the fragmented memory¹⁴⁷.

After the Nobel prize, Walcott did not stop writing. He kept teaching, composing and collaborating with artists, scholars, universities and cultural institutions from all over the world. In 2010, he published his fourteenth collection of poems titled *White Egrets*, in which he meditates on art, nature, poetry and the passing of time. In 2013, he premiered *O Starry Starry Night* at the Lakeside Theatre at the University of Essex in England, an account of Van Gogh and Gauguin's stay together at Arles in 1888. In 2016, he published an original double-hand art and poetry book with the Scottish figurative painter Peter Doig, who now lives in Trinidad.

After the publication of *Omeros* Walcott spent more and more time in St. Lucia, the island of his golden years. As Paula Burnett has pointed out:

[St. Lucia] is the place in which he spent the first eighteen years of his life, to which he has returned whenever he could, and in which he has, since the Nobel, built his own house. In Walcott's geography, the island space is first and foremost a privileged place of origin because

¹⁴⁶ Walcott (1998), *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, pp. 67.

¹⁴⁷ Walcott (1998), *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, pp. 69.

of its natural beauty and the humanity of its people. It evokes elation, independently of any comparatives or any dialectics¹⁴⁸.

Derek Walcott died in St. Lucia in March 2017. In his epigraph there is a passage from *Sainte Lucie*, one his most powerful tributes to the island where he was born and that has been the privileged setting for most of his work:

moi c'est gens Ste. Lucie.
C'est la moi sorti;
is there that I born¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁸ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 28.

¹⁴⁹ Walcott (2009), *Isole: Poesie scelte (1948-2004)*, pp. 260.

1.5 Key features in Walcott's work: standpoints for reading a complex type of writing

In tackling and questioning Walcott's unique mode of responding to the hybrid reality of his Caribbean, it is first important to understand his life and upbringing. From a very young age Walcott experienced a tremendous sense of loss: he was born fatherless, in a neglected stretch of land belonging to the British Empire. He had seen the atrocities of the Second World War and dreamed of an exciting federation project that aimed to bring together his islands, which would prove inconclusive. He left St. Lucia not only to study but also to escape the devastating consequences of a fire in 1948, which had destroyed much of Castries, his birthplace and the capital of St. Lucia. In brief, we can assume that he had a juxtaposing perception of *construction-destruction*, a floating state of vitality and endurance and a feeling of *in betweenness* that was embracing and abandoning him at the same time.

It is not by chance that some critics and scholars have agreed in defining this continuous shift of experiences as the *schizophrenia* of the Caribbean: an aspect that should be not read in negative terms but rather as an attempt to give meaning to a commonly perceived state of mind, which refuses to be determined and classified according to a traditional Western framework. It is the emblem of the not yet recognised, that is to say the culture of the uncanny and undefinable *Other*.

In *Codicil*, a poem that Walcott published in a collection titled *The Castaway* (1965), the Caribbean author writes:

Schizophrenic, wrenched by two styles,
one a hack's hired prose, I earn
my exile. I trudge this sickle, moonlit beach for miles,

tan, burn
to slough off
this love of ocean that's self-love.

To change your language you must change your life¹⁵⁰.

¹⁵⁰ Walcott ([1965] 1972), *The Castaway and Other Poems*.

The precariousness and instability that characterises the origins and lives of most West Indian writers is also reflected in their literary and artistic work. Traditional or canonical literary genres are sidestepped because experimentation, revision and fragmentation are aspects more in tune with Caribbean languages, folk stories, ways of living, expressing and feeling reality.

Caribbeans are known for sharing stories of losses and recoveries, departures and returns, exile and migration. They bestow meaning on the cultures of the open sea, and reopen wounds attached to tormented historical legacies. The people of the Caribbean represent the scattered lives of the *undetermined*, the embodied archives of overloaded cargoes of slaves, whose identities have always been unknown and unrecorded.

The aim of this section of my thesis is to reflect upon the characteristics and forms of expression that are common to most West Indian writers. I will underline the key words or aspects that contribute to constructing strategies of survival, acceptance and resistance. In short, I will try to highlight decolonial practices and aspects that can be seen across the lives of West Indian peoples and in their responses to the Western European and Northern Atlantic matrix of power. In particular, I will focus on Walcott's decolonial strategies and debunking approaches in order to group his poetics into five different key concepts or lines of enquiry which can be broadly defined as: language, naming, history, identity and art.

1.5.1 Language, or the power of multilingual Caribbean

In reading Walcott's poems, one of the most emblematic characteristics of his writing is the power and influence exerted by transnational and vernacular languages. Caribbean authors constantly experiment with and rework an intermix of their variegated idioms. In this regard, Paula Burnett has rightly suggested: "Caribbean language provides a striking example of heteroglossia, distinctively in process, unfinished, evolving"¹⁵¹. Accordingly, for West Indian authors, the process of writing responds to physical and momentary feelings and sensations. It is a creative type of wording that picks up on and selects images in order to recall precise smells, tastes and experiences from the region.

¹⁵¹ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 127.

For Walcott, language is scent, “the smell of our own speech”, as he wrote in *Another Life*¹⁵², a way of expressing that refutes Western-imposed semantic cohesion and norms, which are implicitly no longer valid in the Caribbean¹⁵³.

Walcott continually reinvents lines, phrases and words. Most of the time, he uses standard English but he does not disdain corrupt forms, neglected grammatical correspondences or altered syntactic order. He uses French Creole and most of his poetic verses are reflections of *orality*, meaning reproductions of sounds that come from the spoken words, accents and tones of voice of his fellow compatriots. During an interview with Maria Cristina Fumagalli, the author explained:

In the Caribbean we are all lucky as writers, because we are in a context in which so many languages are available to the writer. I have had access as a St. Lucian writer to Barbadian dialect or Jamaican dialect [...]. But certainly, my melody and rhythm also come from French, and from Spain, and from other languages that are in the Caribbean [...]. Although the major thing, the thing that counts is *tone*. [While writing *Omeros*] I sort of reminded myself that what was important was not the language but the *tone* of the language and that speaking in English with the right tone would have been the same as speaking in Creole¹⁵⁴.

Walcott knew that most Caribbean peoples were illiterate and relied more on the spoken word than on writing. His compatriots are the heirs of *slaves* which, under colonial dominance, gathered together in the evening around a fire to recount stories and tales. They would also sing, dance and perform to the rhythm of the moon. They would play African-like instruments and carry out Obeah rites, while the younger members would compose calypsos.

In light of these assumptions, as Paula Burnett has reported in citing Walcott’s own words, the author refuses to draw a definitive dividing line between the written and the oral:

Walcott regards his guiding principle as to be true to the tone of the language, which is oral: ‘There is no difference in the Caribbean between oral and written. No matter what the anthologists and the anthropologists may say, they are the same thing. Nor are there two languages; there’s

¹⁵² Walcott (1973), *Another Life*, pp. 75.

¹⁵³ *The Smell of Our Own Speech: The Tool of Language* is the title of an insightful chapter in Burnett’s work *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*. The author addresses the issue of Caribbean languages and idioms, and their way of combining and responding to the colonial matrix of power. See: Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*.

¹⁵⁴ Fumagalli (2001), *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante*, pp. 279-281.

only one, one melody'. The 'sound of the vernacular', [...] is the natural vehicle for a democratic art¹⁵⁵.

In most of the videos available online showing Walcott reading and interpreting his verses, it is surprising to note how the author is keen to give the rhythm by tapping his feet on the floor. Walcott knows how to reinvent words, prosody and accents. His language is intricate, sophisticated but also surprisingly simple. In an interesting article titled *The Language of Exile*, Walcott's long-standing and esteemed colleague and friend Seamus Heaney comments on Walcott's use of language:

[Walcott] has found [for the Caribbean] a language woven out of dialect and literature, neither folksy nor condescending, a singular idiom evolved out of one man's inherited divisions and obsessions that allows an older life to exult in itself yet at the same time keeps the cool of 'the new'¹⁵⁶.

Heaney's considerations validate Walcott's refusal of metropolitan and colonial homologation and standardisation of language. By playing and working with languages, dialects and varieties that are not part of the imposed idioms, he calls into question the strategies of the Western colonial matrix of knowledge. It is a way of responding to the power of the dominator *centre* in inclusive and mutual ways, thus using different modes of communication. Walcott speaks for his inner and outer world, thus including countless inflections he perceives in his ancestral *within* and in the streets of the neighbouring islands. His plays are filled with characters that speak all sorts of languages and vernaculars: in one scene we may find expatriates talking in English, while in the next a group of slaves or mulattos are conversing in Creole. Some of Walcott's poems are difficult to read because their end goal is not to be understood but rather to evoke the *unknown* and the shades of a New World. As J.D. McClatchy has suggested:

Walcott [...] is a poet who wants to be both read and listened to. His style could be called English speech with a West-Indian inflection; or, as he himself might describe it, he thinks in one language and moves in another. Even his 'standard' poems have a peculiar loping quality to their lines, a slower rhythm than those of his peers¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁵ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 138.

¹⁵⁶ Heaney in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 304.

¹⁵⁷ McClatchy in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 357.

The poet's imagery is not fixed but rather composite and blended. Walcott's theatre expands traditional frames in order to include stories of characters who are simple and modest or have not yet been defined. Walcott's narrations are micro stories and the intent is more universalistic rather than domestic. During an interview Walcott argued: "The more particular you get, the more universal you become"¹⁵⁸.

In this regard, Walcott is a visionary poet and a playwright who brings to the fore the idea of *partnership*. His aim is to *speak* for the unknown or the *Other*, and his original writing portrays double meanings, as well as the most common experiences of humanity. In this sense, different nations, cultures and languages are united in a *continuum* where the boundaries are undefined and blurred. Walcott's aim is to reach a better and interconnected wor(l)d, in which linguistic and cultural barriers are abolished. Joseph Brodsky, one of Walcott's dearest friends, has rightly suggested how:

[He] acts out of the belief that language is greater than its master or its servants, that poetry, being its supreme version, is therefore an instrument of self-betterment for both; i.e., that it is a way to gain an identity superior to the confines of class, race, or ego. This is just plain common sense; this is also the most sound program of social change there is¹⁵⁹.

1.5.2. The coming of a second Adam, or the act of naming

Taking advantage of accents and tones from different languages is a strategy that overcomes linguistic boundaries and tries to bestow a new *shade* or *nuance* on the languages involved in the process. It is also a way to radically change the perception and enunciation of a word, or group of words. Authors and writers from the *edge* have used this way of expressing and talking extensively, in order to open up new possibilities and channels of interchange. Most of them have termed this particular practice *re-nomination* or better the act of naming.

In Walcott's poetics *naming* is central. It is an act that provides him with the opportunity to present and rewrite the stories and contexts of the Caribbean from *an-other* point of view. For Walcott, the practice of naming is similar to that of baptism, meaning that it legitimises a word or term that enters a community for the first time. In postcolonial

¹⁵⁸ Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 31.

¹⁵⁹ Brodsky in Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 129.

contexts, *naming* is also an act of renewal, a strategy that aims at giving *new light*, to use an expression dear to Walcott, to the reality imposed by modernity/coloniality:

The stripped and naked man, however abused, however disabused of old beliefs, instinctually, even desperately begins again as craftsman. In the indication of the slightest necessary gesture of ordering the world around him, of losing his old name and rechristening himself, in the arduous enunciation of a dimmed alphabet [...] is the whole, profound sight of human optimism, or what we in the archipelago still believe in: work and hope. It is out of this that the New World, or the Third World, should begin¹⁶⁰.

Abandoning and remoulding Western and Northern Atlantic ways of being and *naming* would mean stripping out colonial strategies of power. It is a way to establish different connections and recreate the wor(l)d anew, thus finding a new shade of meaning in the heterogeneity of expression and in diverse socio-cultural stratifications. It is a revolution that destabilises traditional aesthetics and philosophies, while undermining the basic assumptions of colonial theology. Walcott indeed announces the coming of a second Adam, a new prophetic voice, whose aim is to debunk the premises of his progenitor in order to redefine the boundaries of his paradisiacal New World:

It is this awe of the numinous, this elemental privilege of naming the New World which annihilates history in our great poets, an elation common to all of them, [...] they reject ethnic ancestry for faith in elemental man. [It is the] belief in a second Adam, the re-creation of the entire order, from religion to the simplest domestic rituals¹⁶¹.

Walcott associates his naming *praxis* to the art of crafting, an ever-recurrent image in his production. Most of Walcott's protagonists are portrayed in a process of modelling their world, like artisans, thus searching for new definitions and/or subjectivations. In a paper that Walcott presented orally at the University of the West Indies in 1965 titled *The Figure of Crusoe*, the author furthered these aspects by comparing the crafting of Crusoe to that of West Indian writers:

Poets and prose writers who are West-Indians [...] are in the position of Crusoe, the namer. Like him, they have behind them, borne from England, from India, or from Africa, that dead bush, that morphology [...], but what is more important is that these utterances, these words, when written, are as fresh, as truly textured, as when Crusoe sets them down in the first West Indian novel. The

¹⁶⁰ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 13.

¹⁶¹ Walcott (1998), *The Muse of History*, pp. 40.

exhilaration that still carries across, like a gust of salt air, from the most putrid West Indian writing owes its health to this¹⁶².

By mentioning Crusoe, one of the most known and celebrated characters from Western European literary tradition, Walcott stresses an important aspect connected to the act of naming and rewriting. Crusoe was able to *name* his world only after abandoning his older one, or better only after acknowledging that his Western *nomination* – the older European vocabulary he was taking with him – was no longer valid in a new and uncorrupted world. Walcott-Crusoe is using a strategy of revision, a reassessment that is in tune with the light of the New Wor(l)d, through the depiction of a new beginning. As Walcott furthered explained:

Crusoe is no lord of magic, duke, prince. He does not possess the island he inhabits. He is alone, he is a craftsman, his beginnings are humble. He acts, not by authority, but by conscience. It is his and Friday's children who have generated this disturbing society. Disturbing to others, because on one hand there is resolution in landscape and in faith in God, and on the other a desperate longing to leave these island prisons forever and to survive on nostalgia¹⁶³.

These aspects are recalled also in *Omeros*' opening lines: "This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes" (Walcott 1990: 3). Cutting down trees is a rite of initiation for the protagonists of the poem, because the tree trunks can be used to build pirogues and fish in the open sea. The baptism of canoes represents another fundamental moment for the islander communities. When the island's priest smiles at Achille's misspelling choice "*In God We Troust*", the latter replies: "Leave it! Is God's spelling and mine"¹⁶⁴. Another recurrent image and emblematic *name* appears in these first opening scenes of *Omeros*: the "sea-swift", the name of a sea bird, later called also the "*hirondelle des Antilles*" or "*ciseau*". The term, which appears in different idioms, refers to a particular type of migratory bird that has been associated with the symbol of the cross because of its plumage and wings, which resemble the shape of a cross when outspread. The bird materialises in some of the most important episodes of the poem, such as

¹⁶² Walcott (1965), "The Figure of Crusoe" in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 36. As a preface to Walcott's article, Hamner explains: "This paper was presented orally at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 27 October 1965. Derek Walcott has graciously allowed its publication for the first time as edited by Robert Hamner".

¹⁶³ Walcott (1965), "The Figure of Crusoe" in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 37.

¹⁶⁴ Walcott (1990), *Omeros*, pp. 8.

Achille's hallucinatory voyage back to the forgotten Africa of his ancestors, and even during the cutting of trees. Pinpointing the precise names of animals and plants from his regions for Walcott is a way of establishing a mutual connection with his natural surroundings, thus giving them new meaning and discrediting old practices of exploitation and human devaluation. Walcott does not forget to underline the cyclical process of this two-way exchange:

Where have cultures originated? By the force of natural surroundings. You build according to the topography of where you live. You are what you eat, and so on; you mystify what you see, you create what you need spiritually, a god for each need¹⁶⁵.

The process of naming is not limited to defining natural and contextual scenarios or settings, nor to finding alternatives to colonial designations or paradigms. It is also a process of discovery, or rediscovery, that brings to the fore the means and traditions at the core of diaspora communities¹⁶⁶. In this sense, West Indian writers foreground the names of dances, songs, rituals and traditions that have longed been repressed and forgotten. Walcott names – and thus rehabilitates – the meaning of Carnival masques, calypsos and folk instruments; he evokes Obeah practices and the medicinal use of plants; he highlights nicknames given to places, mountains and shores that are known only to Caribbean peoples, thus destabilising Western European topography and its control of space. To give an example: Walcott constantly recalls that his birth island, St. Lucia, is commonly known as the “Helen of Caribbean”, for its rich natural variety and tormented historical legacy. In Walcott's poems, the reader is accustomed to reading names for which the referents are seldom known or which are glossed and explained. Walcott's aim is to instil curiosity in the reader regarding the heterogeneity of his region and the recovered traditions of its communities. As King has pointed out: “Walcott's plays and poems concern the need to be a new Adam, a Crusoe, the need for dedication, struggle, and conflict to build a new ‘home’ in the West Indies”¹⁶⁷.

Even the names of some Walcottian protagonists are reflections of these assumptions. Hector, Achille, Helen and Philoctete, for instance, are choices that do not

¹⁶⁵ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 12.

¹⁶⁶ According to Charles W. Pollard “Walcott envisions an ironic New World classicism that represents a provisional cultural wholeness emerging from the different diaspora cultures of Europe, Africa, and Asia”. Pollard (2004), *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite*, pp. 9.

¹⁶⁷ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 358.

echo their Aegean doubles, but rather they are the names that slave traders used to attribute to imported African prisoners according to the temperament and physical appearances they displayed. In this way, the act of naming also becomes a form of redemption, an act of forgetting or reclaiming dignity for the suffering endured by the people of the Caribbean.

1.5.3. Amnesia, or how to read Caribbean history

On the path towards decolonisation, Walcott elaborates a complex response to Western European thought and belief as regards linear history and progress. For him, looking back at his colonial past means dealing with grief, despair and sorrow. Therefore, he opts for *amnesia*, or rather the loss of personal and collective memory. Walcott does not feel the need to revive his ancestors' tormented past nor to confront the brutality of Western-European dominators. As Paula Burnett has explained: "His revisiting of the past leaves the great and terrible truths of Caribbean slavery assumed rather than explored"¹⁶⁸. Walcott is aware of how historical implications have left both tangible and psychological wounds on the bodies and in the minds of the people of the Caribbean. In *Laventville*, a poem that he published in *The Castaway* (1965), Walcott asserts:

Something inside is laid wide like a wound,

some open passage that has cleft the brain,
some deep, amnesiac blow. We left
somewhere a life we never found,

customs and gods that are not born again,
some crib, some grill of light
clanged shut on us in bondage, and withheld

us from that world below us and beyond,
and in its swaddling cerements we're still bound¹⁶⁹.

Walcott believes that loud recriminations or mutual accusations are not going to change what happened. The author prefers to focus on the present, while treating the past

¹⁶⁸ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 77.

¹⁶⁹ Walcott ([1965]) 1972, *The Castaway and Other Poems*, pp. 35.

as if it were a sort of blurred and distant event. In this respect, he begins an article titled *The Muse of History* with an incipit quoting James Joyce: “History is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake”¹⁷⁰. In this critical essay, Walcott expresses deep concern about some of his colleagues’ attachment to the “muse of history”, that is to say, their way of seeing the past as if it were an inheritance to be fought for:

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. Because this literature serves historical truth, it yellows into polemic or evaporates in pathos. The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. 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 nostalgia¹⁷¹.

Walcott does not pick a side in disputes that aim at determining what Caribbean literature should be dealing with: he does not agree with writers who believe in bitter responses to the barbarity of the Western European dominating past, nor with those who advocate milder alternatives. Instead, he supports *compromise*, a balance between a vague recalling of experiences from the past, and a simultaneous overcoming of them through a new mythicisation or narrative that avoids falling into desperate tones. Talking about his epic writing, Paula Burnett has added: “As [an] epic poet, Walcott is concerned to revisit the past only if it can help to deliver his people for a better future”¹⁷².

Most of all, Walcott does not share feelings of regret or revenge. As he pointed out in the essay *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* “We know that we owe Europe either revenge or nothing, and it is better to have nothing than revenge. We owe the past revenge or nothing, and revenge is uncreative”¹⁷³.

Some writers from the archipelago, and groups of fellow compatriots, have argued that Walcott should have taken a stronger position in regard to Western European structures of power and cultural domination. They read his work as if it were a dialogue mimicking *high* European literature, thus misreading and undermining Walcott’s original appropriation of Western forms in order to propose a new aesthetic for his islands. From

¹⁷⁰ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Muse of History* pp. 36.

¹⁷¹ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Muse of History*, pp. 37.

¹⁷² Burnett has given some interesting insights on Walcott’s complex views on historical amnesia in her essay titled: “Where Else to Row, but Backward? Dealing with History”. See: Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 66.

¹⁷³ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 12.

his point of view, Walcott has always maintained the importance of dealing with the debris and fragments left by *white* colonial history, especially in consideration of his personal background as a *black* writer from the *edge*. Nevertheless, he also understands that those colonial *traces* are more ideal than real, if former colonial mansions or disused sugar factories are to be excluded. Walcott excludes the existence of a striking difference between Caribbean and European communities and peoples. As Burnett has aptly conveyed: “Walcott refuses to allow race to be essentialized as good or bad: his white characters, like his black characters, have good and bad qualities”¹⁷⁴.

The Caribbean author upholds a sense of historical oblivion in order to see his New World through different eyes, yet he is also conscious of the advantages of the little that remains of that Old World. In these terms, Walcott does not devalue or reject European literature and its models but rather engages with them in a sort of creative challenge in search of alternatives. In this regard, the author is particularly interested in the power of *metaphor*. He soon realises that a return to imagination, as an act of creation, is what is needed. To use Walcott’s words:

In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid; but because it has never mattered, what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as a necessity, as an invention¹⁷⁵.

It is through imagination, and the power of creativity, that Caribbean authors can take a positive *detour* from history. This is a way to overcome colonial wrongs and propose new and constructive interpretations of reality. Walcott invalidates history in order to set free and reinvent characters and stories based on everyday life experiences on the islands. He firmly believes that through “amnesia” his society will be able to learn how to elude and escape from its past: “In time the slave surrendered to amnesia. That amnesia is the true history of the New World. That is our inheritance”¹⁷⁶.

Another dimension that Walcott dismantles in order to begin a process of positive transformation is Western-oriented confidence and almost absolute faith in historical limitless *progress*. As Walcott argued in *The Muse of History*:

¹⁷⁴ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 75.

¹⁷⁵ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 6.

¹⁷⁶ Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 39.

The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as a sequential time, of a dominated future. Its imagery is absurd. In the history books the discoverer sets a shod foot on virgin sand, kneels, and the savage also kneels from his bushes in awe. Such images are stamped on the colonial memory, such heresy as the world's becoming holy from Crusoe's footprint or the imprint of Columbus's knee. These blasphemous images fade, because these hieroglyphs of progress are basically comic¹⁷⁷.

Walcott rejects deterministic ideas of Western linear thinking. He does not believe in a unilateral dominating future, led by a presumably superior community or group of peoples. On the contrary, he feels a profound connection with the fragilities and weaknesses of the human soul, as much as with its ever-changing disposition.

As I have already pointed out, Walcott feels in tune with the environmental richness that surrounds and embraces his archipelago, i.e. an animistic energy that encloses the Caribbean in an undetermined spiral of perpetual renewal. Indeed, Walcott's poetical journey is cyclical and follows the rhythms of the changing of seasons. In most of his plays, the author portrays ever-changing protagonists whose aim is to survive current problematic situations and whose stories are evoked in order to reflect on possible openings and new beginnings. Walcott's poems are more intimate and follow a privileged dialogue with Caribbean environment. Nature is viewed as a continuous floating energy that dismembers and reassembles itself, a dynamic presence with a fluidity that recalls the power of water, the element of regeneration and rebirth. In this regard, it comes as no surprise that Walcott manages to connect history with the sea. In one of his most well-known poems titled *The Sea is History*, he wonders:

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 History¹⁷⁸.

Throughout this poem, Walcott reflects on the power of the commonly acknowledged *histories* of humankind. He mentions the Bible by explicitly recalling it through words such as "Genesis" and "New Testament", but, towards the end, religion is discredited and belittled: "but that was not History, / that was only faith"¹⁷⁹. Moreover, Walcott makes an interesting connection between the imported communities in the New

¹⁷⁷ Walcott (1998), *The Muse of History*, pp. 41.

¹⁷⁸ Walcott (1980), *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, pp. 25.

¹⁷⁹ Walcott (1980), *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, pp. 27.

World and the “Exodus” of the Israelites out of Egypt in search of the Promised Land. Indeed, both groups dreamed of settling down and starting their own stories for many years, before finally doing so. When an unknown voice wonders “where is your Renaissance?”, thus implicitly suggesting that Western European temporal framing should be considered as an unquestionable historical paradigm in order to understand and catalogue the past, Walcott replies:

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

stop on these goggles, I’ll guide you there myself.
It’s all subtle and submarine,
through colonnades of coral¹⁸⁰.

The association of history with water and with its perpetual renewing energy places Walcott in a dialogue with scholars and philosophers whose ideas challenge static and immutable ways of looking at reality and the past. Zygmunt Bauman, a Jewish and Polish philosopher and sociologist (1925-2017) drew on the idea of “liquidity” to explain the complex dynamics that govern today’s postmodern and consumerist societies. Walcott and Bauman agreed on viewing *modernity* as a period of time in which a privileged side of humanity tries to overcome instability through order and division. Bauman recognises, in today’s *instabilities*, the outcomes of those perilous hierarchies of power, because if, on the one side, Western civilising *progress* sustained freedom and wealth for a restricted circle of people, on the other, it functioned as an uncontrolled and unjust exploitative force. Bauman argues that contemporary “liquid societies” have made floating and drowning in their chaos a part of their *unrecognised* self, i.e. the marginalised *Others* or dispossessed individuals, such as migrants or minorities¹⁸¹. For Bauman, as much as for Walcott, the most devastating consequences of these uncontrolled and irrational exploitations are discernible in the lost relationship between humans and the natural environment. In Bauman’s view, humanity will be able to overcome its permanent

¹⁸⁰ Walcott (1980), *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, pp. 26.

¹⁸¹ On Zygmunt Bauman’s philosophical thought, see: *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2007).

sense of loss and enduring precariousness only through a more caring and inclusive attitude towards nature and ecosystems.

In a similar way, Walcott was convinced that the environment (in its broader sense) is capable of remembering and retaining the memory of tormented Caribbean history. Therefore, in his view, birds, trees and rivers are bearers of the *scars* of colonial bloodsheds and exploitations. As he pointed out in his Nobel speech *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*:

It is not that History is obliterated by this sunrise. It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians, the ancestors of Felicity, are still serving time¹⁸².

In most of his poems, the Caribbean writer has demonstrated how *nature*, in direct opposition to human beings, is capable of healing, curing and transforming itself. Nature is the true custodian of the Caribbean land and its sea. West Indians can rely on its unbounded and scared energy when they are lost.

For Walcott, having to deal with history implies an effort that is twofold: on the one hand, it means recalling and recording past events, on the other, contemplating their value in light of other, new, and alternative perspectives.

Walcott concludes his reasoning on the meaning of history by imagining the turning of a page, like he expressed in *The Sea is History* when he argued: “[...] the ocean kept turning blank pages / looking for History”¹⁸³. In the final section of *The Muse of History* he sketches out his future intents and addresses a strange “thank you” to his divided ancestors:

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’ [...] I have no wish and no power to pardon. You were when you acted your roles, your given, historical roles of slave seller and slave buyer, men acting as men, and also you, father in the filth-ridden gut of the slave ship, to you they were also men, acting as men, with the cruelty of men, your fellowman and tribes man not moved or hovering with hesitation about your common race any longer than my other bastard ancestor hovered with his whip, but to you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers, I, like the more honest of my race, give a strange thanks. I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two

¹⁸² Walcott (1998), *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, pp. 81.

¹⁸³ Walcott (1980), *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, pp. 26.

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 gift¹⁸⁴.

1.5.4. “Caribbeing”, or a blurring definition of Caribbean identity

As I have already pointed out, one of the most evident issues in Walcott’s work is the definition of a Caribbean or West Indian *identity*. The author is conscious of his ethnical and socio-cultural *divisions*. He knows that his fellow compatriots come from different backgrounds, believe in different faiths and are split into mixed and hybrid communities. Nevertheless, Walcott is convinced that the people of the Caribbean have more elements in common than they do differences. Most of them had a hybrid upbringing, and they reflect each other in communal stories and destinies, which are essentially *blurred* and not easily discernible.

For most of West Indian writers and artists, Caribbean means “Caribbeing”, which is essentially a sort of perpetual state of indeterminateness and instable representation. In his introduction to *Caribbeing: Comparing Caribbean Literatures and Cultures*, Kristian Van Haesendonck has argued that the concept stands for “a continuous, creolizing process of becoming that extends beyond the Caribbean region”¹⁸⁵. It is true that the heterogeneity and diversity of West Indian peoples prefigure and foreshadow the schizophrenic chaos of today’s world, i.e. the intermingling of different communities and societies in most national and international configurations. Yet, while Caribbeans are used to this *diversity*, which is perceived as part of their inevitable process of creolisation (that started with the arrival of Europeans colonisers and the importation of slaves), in Europe and Northern-American countries *Otherness* is still viewed as an issue to be overcome through *assimilation*, namely through a presumably indispensable process of ethnical and cultural preservation. From this point of view, “caribbeing” puzzles and destabilises assumed Western-oriented categorisations, because its defining boundaries are constantly renegotiated in light of a vaguer and more ambiguous sense of being and belonging. As Paula Burnett has pointed out in her essay titled *Becoming Home: Modelling the Caribbean Subject*:

¹⁸⁴ Walcott (1998), *The Muse of History*, pp. 64.

¹⁸⁵ Van Haesendonck (eds. 2014), *Caribbeing: Comparing Caribbean Literatures and Cultures*, pp. 13.

To unite or to divide are not, after all, the only options; the continuum between them offers many median positions partaking in part of both one and the other. A region such as the Caribbean, fragmented as its communities are, geographically on small islands, historically by dislocation from ancestral communities, and culturally in terms of language, race, class, and background, nonetheless also exhibits shared sensibilities, its hugely various people having more in common than they have dividing them. It is therefore a case of both difference and sameness, simultaneously. It involves the recognition of otherness specifically as the point of sameness, of identification - of what I choose to call the sharedness of difference¹⁸⁶.

According to the West Indian *refracted* mode of thinking, diversity is perceived as an element that unites and enhances creativity and imagination. See reality from different standpoints allows a broader acknowledgement of world relations, and also their inevitable *indeterminacy* in terms of interpersonal and socio-cultural paradigms. In explaining the value of “caribbeing”, Van Haesendonck adds:

Caribbean territories are viewed as a paradigm of indeterminacy, as either third or first worldish, postcolonial or colonial, and, ironically, as a signifier for any term from either the economic, cultural or political field preceded by the prefixes *pre-*, *trans-*, or *post-*¹⁸⁷.

In these contexts of historical and geographical *erasures* and undetermined boundaries, Caribbean individuals are torn between extremely hybrid languages, traditions and backgrounds. I have already stressed how Walcott was raised in a Methodist community that dwelled on a British colonial island where the majority of the population was Catholic, black-skinned and spoke French Creole. Despite his internal *divisions*, Walcott was deeply inspired by the various accents and colourful expressions of the peoples of the Caribbean. In Book 1 of *Another Life*, which is emblematically titled *The Divided Child*, Walcott describes some of “[St. Lucia] tragi-comic street characters, [...] in the frame of the young child learning his alphabet as well as being already enchanted by the classical mythology and bedtime stories on which he was nurtured”¹⁸⁸. Walcott soon understood that finding a *balance* between European literary models and West Indian cultural and artistic hybrid expressions was the key to establishing a new and challenging type of writing, a poetry and a theatre that would overcome canonical Western-literary classifications and open up new possibilities on the author’s never-

¹⁸⁶ Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Van Haesendonck (eds. 2014), *Caribbeing: Comparing Caribbean Literatures and Cultures*, pp. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 94-95.

ending journey towards finding a Caribbean definition. As Baugh has aptly argued: “Both his social position and racial identity were crucial in helping to determine his particular creative angst”¹⁸⁹.

Walcott took inspiration from the vibrant and dynamic life of his birth places, as much as from his entourage and the thriving vegetation that surrounded him. As a voracious reader, he appreciated European literature and its sophisticated art, yet he also felt the need to become a spokesman for the Caribbean, even if this meant trying to forget and go beyond internal differentiation and intricate external divisions. As John Thieme has argued:

From the outset he promoted a cross-cultural - as opposed to an Afrocentric or Eurocentric - reading of Caribbean, and other, social formations and all his work to date is predicated upon an aesthetic which emphasizes the cultural cross-pollination that he sees as characteristic of the Caribbean region¹⁹⁰.

In this respect, Walcott’s works move between opposites, twofold points of view and various perspectives. The author is interested in explaining the *divisional* unity that characterises the life of his *Caribbean* archipelago. This is particularly evident in Walcott’s plot choices for his plays and also in the depiction of the characters. The playwright is capable of sketching the life of an old disillusioned middle-class West Indian professor, like in *Remembrance*, and then switching to portray a group of Rastafarians, such as in *O Babylon!*¹⁹¹. One of the works that best exemplifies the need to depict the complexities and socio-cultural *partitions* of Caribbean peoples and their territories is *Drums and Colours*. In this carnivalesque play, Walcott portrays the lives and destinies of four emblematic characters: although coming from different periods of time, Christopher Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, Toussaint L’Ouverture and George William Gordon have all helped to shape the perception and *identity* of the Antillean islands. Columbus and Raleigh are mostly remembered for their adventurous expeditions of discovery to the New World. Toussaint and Gordon are less known in the Western

¹⁸⁹ Baugh (1978), *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision: Another Life*, pp. 9.

¹⁹⁰ Thieme (1999), *Derek Walcott: Contemporary World Writers*, pp. 1.

¹⁹¹ As Bruce King has pointed out: “*O Babylon!* was the third Walcott – MacDermot musical [...] and was bound to be controversial. The Rastafarians are a cult specific to Jamaica; they have their own history, social context, rituals, music, beliefs, and version of English. [...] Through the international popularity of Bob Marley and reggae music, ‘Rasta’ became trendy”. King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 245.

hemisphere as they represent a part of the resistance to the European colonial order. Toussaint L'Ouverture was one of the leaders of the first historical black revolt against *modernity/coloniality* oppression, while Gordon embodied one of the few tolerant *creole* politicians from Jamaica, who encouraged the end of slavery and the acknowledgement of universal human rights. On the contrary to what one might expect, Walcott's portrayal of these stories seems to share some of the characteristics of an unmasking *decolonial* narration. The author gives life to unknown and hidden episodes that highlight the disillusionment and defeat of these *heraldic* protagonists. Columbus is presented in chains while he travels back to Europe, rejected and forgotten by his own peoples; Sir Walter Raleigh is depicted in his foolish and inconclusive search for El Dorado, a voyage that would end with the death of his son; Toussaint L'Ouverture is portrayed after the victory of the Haitian slave revolt, when he is forced into a reversing of roles, from liberator to persecutor; George William Gordon is portrayed while rehearsing a self-defence speech to be made in front of his compatriots, who later sentence him to death. Walcott's aim is to debunk commonly acknowledged *history*, in order to call into question its Western colonial representation and transmission. This is a way of decolonising the Caribbean and proposing new and challenging ways of looking at the past. The play is also a great fresco of Caribbean identities, because it displays the mixture and variety of West Indian peoples. Besides the focus on historical figures, the plot explores the adventures of a carnivalesque theatrical group, a play within the play, taking on the role of the various characters while interacting with them. The final scenes of the play portray the unwritten stories of heroes who fought for the independence of the region: amongst them, Walcott describes General Yu, a Chinese cook; Ram, a West Indian tactician; Pompey, a shoemaker; Calico, a ruined landowner; and Mano and Yette, former slaves and now leaders of the rebels.

Drums and Colours is one of the best examples of how Derek Walcott was capable of describing the particular *in-between* position of his fellow islanders. Walcott speaks of *intermediate* identities, i.e. peoples and communities who are stuck in being either "nobody or a nation", to quote one of Walcott's most famous lines from *The Schooner Flight*. The voices of the hybrid and cross-cultural Caribbean have long waited to be heard and recognised. As Paula Burnett argues: "Empire had a horror of the hybrid, because in the mixed-race person it recognized the destruction of its systems of racial classification,

the trampling of boundaries”¹⁹². Walcott represents one of the symbols of West Indian redemption and liberation, as much as one of its prominent spokesmen in terms of international acknowledgement and appreciation.

On the path to describing the various nuances of his Caribbean, Walcott never forget to question and lay bare the complexities of his persona. In most of his works, he discusses and plays with an *alter-ego* figure, the purpose of whom is to determine his individual and representational confines and definitions. Walcott’s *doubles* are numerous and varied, and they are present in most of the author’s plays, poetry and epic, such as in *Omeros* or *Tiepolo’s Hound*. In some productions secondary characters are reflections of Walcott’s personality and thought, and they display his never-ending questioning on identity, art, politics and society. In *Pantomime*, for instance, Walcott is simultaneously the white master and owner of a hotel in Trinidad, and his black butler and handyman. The *partition* of identity, in this case, serves as a pretext to reflect upon divergent opinions and perceptions, in a constant remoulding and interfacing of human possibilities, destines and mutual awareness.

1.5.5. The creative wor(l)d, or how to debunk colonial aesthetics

Walcott believed in a cultural revolution that would change the course of Western colonial history through the power of art and creativity. This transition was to happen when epistemic and aesthetic boundaries are broken down, in order to allow peoples to express themselves freely and find new ways of connecting, interacting and developing. As Walcott once wrote:

Where history is being made now, in these islands, is not in the quick political achievements, not in the large agricultural schemes, but in the deepening stream of the way we are now learning to think. To see ourselves, not as the others see us, but with all the possibilities of the new country we are making¹⁹³.

The role of art, especially in terms of artistic *praxis*, is particularly important for Walcott. He does not see himself merely as a poet and playwright, but also as an artist,

¹⁹² Burnett (2000), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 19.

¹⁹³ Walcott (1957), “Society and the Artist” in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 15.

and most importantly as a painter. Walcott acknowledges how art has the power to re-examine and re-think itself through experimentation and subversion, and also by questioning perceptions and representations. For Walcott, an artist is the true decoder of reality, someone who is able to predict and decipher cultural, social and historical change, a foreseer of destiny, who knows where societies are leading to, and how to express their need for revolt, alteration and revision.

Amongst the numerous forms of art that Walcott employs throughout his work, painting or the art of *seeing* occupies a privileged position. In almost all of his works, there are continuous references to painters and paintings from a range of contexts and historical periods. Walcott's endeavour in the realm of artistic expression is paramount. To give some examples: *Another Life*, his most celebrated autobiographical poem, has been defined as a complete fresco of Walcott's juvenile period. The verses of this work are indeed comparable to brush strokes, like the one that is metaphorically mentioned in depicting Simmons' sudden death. Moreover, most Walcottian critics have found explicit recurrences to a number of words that are connected to the act of painting: infinite hues and colours that are used to portray the *bliss* of Caribbean reality.

Even in *Omeros*, painting plays a significant role, such as in the episode in which Walcott's alter-ego finds a black slave depicted on an abandoned raft in the middle of the open sea, in an art gallery in Boston. Walcott feels a connection between his life and that of the protagonist represented in the painting. Soon he discovers that the painting was by Winslow Homer, an artist whose name echoed that of the storyteller Homer, and the name of its homonymous masterpiece.

For Walcott, art becomes a neutral ground, a space where he can dismantle and challenge Western European and Northern Atlantic aesthetic boundaries and structures of power. Walcott does not recognise limits and restrictions within the realm of the imagination. Instead, he feels liberated to express and recover the inner correspondences that connect his peoples to the totality of the world. As McCarthy & Dimitriadis have argued in their article titled *Art and the Postcolonial Imagination*:

Postcolonial art forms - and we include the work of novelists, playwrights, painters, and musicians here - are products of colonial histories of disruption, forced migration, false imprisonment, and pacification. These practices are of such an extreme and exorbitant nature that the claim of

authority over knowledge and of narrative fullness can only be treated as a hoax intended to deceive its audience and produce self-denial¹⁹⁴.

Art is also a space for comfort and condolence, a place where the imagination creates a new reality. After the failure of his islands' Federation project, Walcott felt disillusioned by the promises of West Indian politics. He felt that every island-nation had wrongly protected its own interests, thus missing out on a great opportunity for Caribbean unity. Walcott understood that art was the only way to bring his peoples back together. In *The Schooner Flight*, the alter-ego of his persona states: "I had no nation now, but the imagination". Creative impulses are, for Walcott, a means to escape from failures and breakdowns in order to reimagine and rebuild his Caribbean world. For Walcott, the foundation of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop epitomised a move towards these intents. The aim of the group was to convey the complexities of multifarious Caribbean expression. In this regard, the company was firstly associated with the Little Carib dance company led by McBurnie, and defined as a "workshop" for its main goal was to become an artistic laboratory for West Indian communities and their artistic practices and legacies.

In order to further explain the importance of art in Walcott's poetics, it should be noted how part of his works are set during carnival or feature carnivalesque themes. In the Caribbean, carnival represents an art form. In this sense, the author employs the premises of disguise and camouflage to rewrite and rethink Western European and colonial traditions. Carnival scenes and festivities are presented, for instance, in the epic poem *Omeros*, when Philoctete and Achille dress up in androgynous dresses in order to recall "something older; something he [Achille] had seen / in Africa, when his name had followed a swift"¹⁹⁵, or in the pageant play *Drums and Colours*, where Mano, a masquerader and leader of a Carnival band, opens the prologue by stating: "Ram, Pompey, Yette, Yu [...] I got a plan, boys, we going change round the carnival"¹⁹⁶. Walcott challenges his characters in representing the *fluidity* of a geographical, social and cultural space in which new perspectives and views are possible, even though not needed or requested. As McCarthy and Dimitriadis have pointed out: "In the cultural form of

¹⁹⁴ McCarthy & Dimitriadis (2000), *Art and the Postcolonial Imagination: Rethinking the Institutionalization of Third World Aesthetics and Theory*, *ARIEL*, 31, 1/2, pp. 233.

¹⁹⁵ Walcott ([1990] 2003), *Omeros*, ii, LV, book 6, pp. 466.

¹⁹⁶ Walcott (2002), *The Haitian Trilogy: Drums and Colours*, prologue.

postcolonial artists, quite literally and metaphorically, the eye of the third world is turned on the West, and the horizon of view is deliberately overpopulated with polyglot angles, perspectives, and points of view”¹⁹⁷. Destabilising carnival settings and contexts are where decolonial points of view can finally be expressed and embody the *heteroglossia* or “heterotopia”¹⁹⁸ of the hybrid, in an incessant remoulding and reformulation of forms, arts, languages, traditions and ideas.

Walcott works with paintings, music, instruments, dance and gestures in order to convey a new and stimulating meaning for, and image of, his islands. In my analysis of Walcott’s works, I will stress how artistic references, concepts and means are paramount in defining a decolonial literature that responds to the call for change. As Walcott pointed out in an article:

There is a phase through which every colonial culture passes, when its poets prefer to look like poets rather than to write poetry, and when its theatre consists of accurate reproduction of the accents of its metropolitan country. If some curious anthropologist of our colonial phase examines the work done in the arts two hundred years from now, he will probably be more angry at, than understanding of, the amount of energy wasted in falsifying our true selves by the productions of West End comedies, execrable Shakespeare, elocution contests, and pretentious pamphlets in praise of rotten verse¹⁹⁹.

In this regard, Walcott works on recovering ancient traditions, original dances, songs, and rites, such as the limbo²⁰⁰ or the calypso(s)²⁰¹, in order to propose *Creole aesthetics* and new strategies of counteraction against Western rigid and dominator rationalisations and presumed artistic hegemony and control.

¹⁹⁷ McCarthy & Dimitriadis (2000), Art and the Postcolonial Imagination: Rethinking the Institutionalization of Third World Aesthetics and Theory, *ARIEL*, 31, 1/2, pp. 234.

¹⁹⁸ Michel Foucault proposed the term “heterotopia” in order to identify *Other* spaces of representation(s), meaning utopian contexts where a “different reality” is possible. See: Foucault & Miskowiec (1986), pp. 22-27.

¹⁹⁹ Walcott (1957), “West Indian Writing” in Collier (2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 1: Culture, Society, Literature, and Art*, pp. 158.

²⁰⁰ On the importance of limbo dances in Caribbean literature, see: Gikandi (1992), *Writing in Limbo. Modernism and Caribbean Literature*.

²⁰¹ On the practice of *calypsos* and their symbolic role within Caribbean cultures, see: Cowley (1996), *Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso: Traditions in the Making*.

Chapter 2: Narrative and artistic *decolonisations* in Derek Walcott's work

Having presented the theoretical framework which forms the basis of this Ph.D. thesis, in this second chapter I will analyse three of Derek Walcott's works, adopting a decolonial approach to his complex, multimodal and transdisciplinary work.

My analysis shows how Walcott's texts are not limited in their expression to Western-oriented models of references, because they are essentially *visual* and because they give voice to an intercultural *compromise*²⁰², which is defined as a balance between vernacular and national idioms of the Caribbean, and textual forms that mix folk aspects of West Indian cultures with canonical Western literary structures, such as the classic metre or the accuracy of rhetorical figures and syntax.

I study Walcott's work from a wider transdisciplinary perspective, thus transcending the first critical interpretations which focused primarily on his poetry and regarded him essentially as a poet. Still today, poetry is believed to represent the most refined manifestation of human imagination and creative power, thus surpassing what some may consider as less sophisticated expressive forms such as theatre, music, figurative art or dance, to name but a few. Walcott's poetry also consists of folkloric tones and *embodied* accents, and his epic is the expression of his countrymen, simple people, sailors and shoemakers, who represent more authentic ways of being and living, expressing oneself and surviving in the tempests of life²⁰³. Painting and figurative arts were Walcott's primal source of inspiration and the best instrument he had to depict the distinctive light of the Caribbean with its bright shades and intense gradations of colour²⁰⁴. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Walcott spent much of his life and career forming

²⁰² See: Thieme (1999), *Derek Walcott: Contemporary World Writers*; Burnett (2001), *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*; Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*; Bloom (2003), *Derek Walcott: Bloom's Modern Critical Views*.

²⁰³ In a conference held at the University of Udine in October 2018 titled *Epic of the Caribbean: Derek Walcott's Omeros*, Italian scholar Professor Maria Cristina Fumagalli emphasised how the Caribbean writer's production reflects the *shoemaker's view*, or better, the life and work of common West Indian peoples with their humble yet heterogeneous ways of living and expressing themselves.

²⁰⁴ In *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, Patricia Ismond suggests: "[Walcott's] revolutionary route, undertaken through this metaphorical enterprise, is definitively a philosophical and epistemological one; and its substantive, countering mission - the search for fresh metaphors from his newer, different ground - is the search for an alternative, 'another light' of humanist intelligence". Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 5.

a West Indian theatre with a specific acting style, thus experimenting with his colonial upbringing, dominator impositions and models. In the world of Antillean theatre and experience, and in particular in Caribbean dance, Walcott perceived the possibility of starting his own artistic and cultural (r)evolution:

I had seen the dancers of the Little Carib Company in Trinidad and I felt that what would spring from our theatre need not be a literary thing – not the word, not the psychology – not the *detailed* psychology of character so much as a mimetic power, in the dance particularly. I had a company in mind who would be both dancers and actors... a dance company mixed with an acting company²⁰⁵.

Walcott was looking for what Raimon Panikkar has termed the “creative word”²⁰⁶, a form of expression that transcends the exact “scientific term”, in order to focus on the intuitive, musical, sacred power and spirit of the *word* creating Other-worlds. Panikkar argues that “in Western societies, the subordination of the word to reason [*logos*] is at the root of our oblivion of the body”²⁰⁷. Indeed, body language or expression through gestures, movements, gazes and actions is often much clearer than indirect speech or spoken discourse. In Walcott’s plays, the physical *body* is not merely an accompanying instrument, but rather the preferred means of interaction between actors and their inner *reality* or soul-truth. Through our bodies we can speak and interact, move and bring to the fore our qualities and unique characteristics, and this was clear to Walcott, who wanted to embody the distinctiveness of Caribbean expression and cultural syncretism.

It is therefore undeniable that Walcott’s texts need to be studied from a new perspective based on a different metaphorical background. This is well described by Patricia Ismond in her introduction to *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: the Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott’s Poetry*:

Walcott’s anticolonial, revolutionary route turns primarily on a counter-discourse with the dominant mode of thought of the colonizer’s tradition, against which he pursues an alternative, liberating order of values and meanings, generated from the different time and place of his Caribbean, New World ground. The engagement with the colonizer’s tradition is, effectively, a dialectical one, and it subserves the purpose of exploring and defining his native world. Of equal importance is the fact that this interfacing of older tradition and native world is engaged through

²⁰⁵ Walcott (1970), “Meanings” in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 46.

²⁰⁶ See: Panikkar (2007), *Lo Spirito della Parola*, pp. 96-123.

²⁰⁷ Panikkar (2007), *Lo Spirito della Parola*, pp. 26 [my translation].

metaphor: a dialectical, subversive argument with the Old World European tradition of metaphors, and the generation of fresh ones from his New World setting²⁰⁸.

Ismond foregrounds Walcott's intention to re-name the contours of his referential reality through *new metaphors* and alternative aesthetics and/or paradigms. "Abandoning dead metaphors" is a strategy to re-read Caribbean writers and their productions through a different lens and from a proactive viewpoint. Western European and Northern Atlantic literary critics are reluctant to include in their dominator systems of thought the interdisciplinary and multimodal connections and endeavours that the authors of the global South or Third World have been able to achieve through their imaginative and creative works. This would mean recognising *Other* interpretations of postcolonial texts and acknowledging the growing importance of alternative slants and systemic science-thinking²⁰⁹ in studying and assessing challenging literary outputs and works.

In the introduction to *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, Bruce M. Knauff argues that, in the territories on the *edge*, or rather in the former colonies, commonly perceived to be underdeveloped, "the process of becoming modern is contested and mediated through alter-native guises"²¹⁰, namely alternative and vernacular *modernities* that overcome dichotomic and divisive views between global economies and traditional histories.

In Knauff's terms, Walcott is an "alternative modern"²¹¹ type of writer because, through his work, he was capable of re-evaluating Western-oriented traditions through new forms of public culture. Indeed, Walcott's texts are based on practices of narrativisations that are disempowering and engaging, while his artistic *openings* and encounters are more dynamic, fluid, and creative rather than strictly classificatory.

In tune with Ismond and Knauff's analysis, I intend to read Walcott's wor(l)d from a *decolonial* perspective, adopting a twofold strategy and interpretation of his texts. On the one hand, I will focus on his narrative deconstructions or "counter-narratives", as Ismond suggested, and, on the other, I will investigate his artistic and multimodal forms

²⁰⁸ Ismond (2001), *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: the Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 2.

²⁰⁹ On systemic thinking and science, see: Capra (1982), *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*; Capra (1997), *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems*; Capra & Luisi (2016) *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*; and also: Maturana & Varela (1992) *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*.

²¹⁰ Knauff (2002), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, pp. 1.

²¹¹ Knauff (2002), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, pp. 3.

of expression and experimentations, which he achieves by bringing together different types of artistic practices, such as figurative art, music and dance. Firstly, I will explore Walcott's re-writing and re-moulding of Western European and Northern Atlantic influences and inter-texts, and, secondly, I will address his idiosyncratic way of using different creative insights and folk expressions in order to sketch *anew* his Caribbean context.

I aim at renegotiating the Western-oriented critical evaluation of Derek Walcott's work, adopting a point of view that reverberates the postcolonial technique of "writing-back"²¹². I will also implement a more ethnographical, anthropological and transdisciplinary perspective that examines multimodal, artistic and folkloric forms as a means for comprehending identities and cultures from a holistic or systemic perspective.

These two converging directions and fields of enquiry align with my personal selection of Walcott's texts. I have chosen to concentrate on what is defined in Western literary critique as three secondary or minor productions, specifically two plays and a long poem. This choice follows the decolonial perspective discussed about in its "pluriversal" and "interversal" features (see Chapter 1, pp. 35), so as to recall decolonialist principles and represent a multi-directional variety of texts, in order to better depict Walcott's multifaceted and extensive contribution to literature and the arts. During his lifetime and career, Walcott devoted himself to theatre, poetry and painting in equal terms. Therefore, it would be wrong to exclude any one of these means of expression from my analysis of his original style of writing, composing and directing. As Walcott himself suggested:

I am a kind of split writer: I have one tradition inside me going in one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, the Narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other²¹³.

Walcott's own definition of his multimodal type of writing validates the critical standpoint of this thesis. Walcott uses textual references and intertexts from different

²¹² On the postcolonial strategy of *writing back* to the Western European coloniality/modernity canon, see: Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin ([1989] 2002), *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, pp. 14-36, and also 58-114; McLeod ([2000] 2010), *Beginning Postcolonialism*, pp. 162-196; Thieme (2001), *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon*; Thieme (2016), *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place*.

²¹³ Walcott (1970), "Meanings" in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 48.

Western European colonial legacies, and challenges their textual valence within a wider perspective of re-definition that *redeems* the Caribbean archipelago from its turbulent past. Walcott's protagonists overcome traditional characterisation in order to encompass hybrid and cross-cultural identities, which move and interact in uncharted and *undetermined* surroundings that recall a mythical and almost a-temporal and timeless space.

Walcott's *crossings* in terms of narrative and aesthetic revisions mirror the debunking processes promoted by decolonial thinkers and border theorists. Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, in defining the concept of "border", which they essentially consider to be an ever-shifting and multifaceted space, suggest that:

'Borders' are not only geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and, contrary to frontiers the very concept of 'border' implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power [...]. Borders in this precise sense, are not a natural outcome of a natural or divine historical process in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (i.e. in the imaginary of Western and Atlantic capitalist empires formed in the past five hundred years)²¹⁴.

Crossing borders means acknowledging the existence of *Other* perceptions and traditions, which speak through non-canonical and indigenous, traditional, native, local or simply different *expressions*, such as rites, chants, movements, gestures and oral stories. The act of erasing what are commonly believed secondary or trivial aspects of one's heritage and folk culture may represent a fear of decolonisation by Western and Northern Atlantic dominator structures of power or a fear of legitimising practices and forms of expressions that have always been defined as inferior and unimportant. In a challenging study on musical forms intersecting with religion and identity in Jamaica and Haiti, Melvin L. Butler argues:

In part because of its long history of transnational flows, the Caribbean region presents a dilemma for anthropologists and other researchers of expressive culture. I believe this dilemma stems, in part, from the need to attend adequately to both local and global contexts of practice. [...] Michel-

²¹⁴ Mignolo & Tlostanova (2006), *Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9, 2: pp. 208.

Rolph Trouillot laments the fact that ‘few students of Caribbean culture (especially Caribbean-born or African-American scholars) dare to cross linguistic or colonial borders’²¹⁵.

In the early stages of his career, Walcott experimented primarily with the world of theatre, while his poetry continued to be influenced by the dominator imperial values stemming from his strict colonial education. In forming and building a West Indian theatrical experience, Walcott felt freer to question the boundaries and limitations of canonical Western and Northern Atlantic dictates. In fact, it took him a long time to decolonise his poetry, which became more original and multimodal much later in his career. These aspects are clearly foregrounded in *Meanings*, a critical statement in which Walcott reflects on his *divided* poetics, and also on his ever-lasting dream to form a West Indian theatre company:

Our most tragic folk songs and our most self-critical calypsos have a driving, life-asserting force. Combine that in our literature with a long experience of classical forms and you’re bound to have something exhilarating. [...] In the best actors of the company [Trinidad Theatre Workshop] you can see this astounding fusion ignite their style, this combination of classic discipline inherited through the language, with a strength of physical expression that comes from the folk music²¹⁶.

This essay, written in the 1970s, exemplifies Walcott’s creative imagination in mixing together language and music, word embodiments and tribal rhythms. It was during this period that he first began experimenting. As a playwright Walcott was still struggling to find his own, original West Indian texture and voice, because he felt pressured by his Western-oriented educational constraints. The turning point in his poetics and career came with *The Joker of Seville* (1978), and later with *Pantomime* (1980), the two plays at the core of my analysis, while the overcoming of traditional borders in the realm of poetry is present in his epic masterpiece *Omeros* (1990) and later in *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000), one of his most recent book-length poems, and the work that concludes my textual analysis of Walcott’s productions.

²¹⁵ Butler (2008), “Dancing around Dancehall: Popular Music and Pentecostal Identity in Transnational Jamaica and Haiti” in Henke & Magister (2008), *Constructing Vernacular Culture in the Trans-Caribbean*, pp. 63.

²¹⁶ Walcott (1970), “Meanings” in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 50.

2.1. Decolonial narratives and artistic alternatives: selecting three of Derek Walcott's works

In my personal selection of Derek Walcott's texts for my analysis, I focussed on narrative de-constructions and artistic extensions of Western-oriented traditions and models.

As far as Western European narrations are concerned, Walcott re-writes the works of numerous names from the European literary *canon* (see Chapter 1, pp. 18): Homer, Cervantes, Shakespeare and Defoe, to name but a few. He draws on their stories and plots, re-contextualising and re-assembling them in a new *light* and from a different perspective, or remoulding them according to his own sensibility and his peoples' problems, issues and concerns. As I have already demonstrated in Chapter 1, re-reading the Caribbean is not an easy task because the region presents a cultural and social fragmentation and *unpredictability* that is difficult to grasp, understand and describe. In *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo suggests that the Antillean archipelago is a "meta-archipelago" lacking fixed boundaries and centres of control:

An island that 'repeats itself', unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and the lands of the world, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. I have emphasized the word *repeats* because I want to give the term the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness²¹⁷.

As my analysis intends to demonstrate, the practice of rewriting the *canon* implies a continuous shift between retaining elements from Western European cultures, and omitting or distorting them according to the multifarious and multimodal West Indian perspectives. It is a syncretic process in which tradition and innovation intertwine or, to use Benítez-Rojo's words, a kind of "praxis" in which "the foreign interacts with the traditional like a ray of light with a prism"²¹⁸.

The idea of crossing or stepping from one culture to another, and from one system of knowledge and thought to a more destabilising and unpredictable reality, is a movement that occurs also in the world of the arts or aesthetic practices. In this sense,

²¹⁷ Benítez-Rojo (1996), *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, pp. 3.

²¹⁸ Benítez-Rojo (1996), *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, pp. 21.

liminal literatures experiment with forms and structures and simultaneously try to find new and stimulating ways of interacting and creating through voices, gestures, movements, songs, rhythms, musical instruments and original artistic means.

In *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, Tobias Döring argues that Caribbean “poetics of passages”²¹⁹ can be traced and mapped along the lines of intertextuality, in which scholars and readers can distinguish references and allusions that constitute the core meaning and archive of a text. From Döring’s perspective, the act of dis-membering and simultaneously re-membering Western-oriented traditions and forms is an act of transgression that offers a “third space of postcolonial remapping”²²⁰. In other words, the *decolonial* author or artist who re-writes and opens up possibilities of interaction with canonical English texts needs to clarify and substantiate the *passage* – or *passages* – between older systems of belief and actions and newer options. It is only by understanding this transfer that decolonial practices can effectively occur and work as *intermediary* forces between former colonial *partitions* (see Chapter 1, pp. 37 and 50) and their dominant impositions. Döring argues that the process of exchange among cultures is a sort of “Middle Passage in literature”:

Intertextuality is not an innocent concept, no matter how widely it has come to be used. The crossing of textual terrain works as a Middle Passage in literature, transforming and transferring meanings onto new literary maps. To follow intertextual traces is a highly charged adventure. When we set out to discover intertexts, we engage in a field of conflicting forces that involve the politics of reading no less than the history of culture²²¹.

Döring adds that decolonial strategies of narration within Caribbean literature are particularly recognisable in verbal and visual interactions, such as ekphrastic approaches or “picture poems”²²² that try to destabilise Eurocentric representations of the region through challenging *alternative gazes*.

Walcott’s recurring use of visual metaphors can be connected to the world of figurative art and to the world of aesthetic expression in general, for the author is convinced of the unique, empowering force of the schizophrenic West Indian artists:

²¹⁹ Döring (2002), *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, pp. 7.

²²⁰ Döring (2002), *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, pp. 18.

²²¹ Döring (2002), *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, pp. 14.

²²² Döring (2002), *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*, pp. 19.

The schizophrenia that is part of the West Indian artist's personality will be with him for some time, but it can be of creative value. While he respects those important stylistic and technical advances made by the great Western artists, even to the point of direct imitation, he can try to develop his self-expression. The split exists in his pattern of speech. He speaks two languages and therefore he is torn between two forms. They can be reconciled or beaten into one shape, but he must not feel that he is behind the times or out of date²²³.

Walcott knows that Caribbean artists, writers, painters, performers, novelists, poets and playwrights are living in a dizzying continuum of paradoxes and alternatives, wanting, on the one hand, to fully express the creative possibilities of their *hybrid* communities and, on the other, to follow and respect the constraints of Western-transmitted canonical forms:

A certain four-squareness, a nearly pompous solidity is the impression created by most West Indian art. Structure and form are important to the West Indian painter and novelist, and obviously to the West Indian playwright, because he may still be trying to reconcile his education to his background. The painters were brought up on post-Impressionism, or on early Expressionism. Their masters were, during their apprenticeship, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Degas, and Lautrec. The novelists were trained on humanists like Faulkner, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Saroyan, and Hemingway. The playwrights who worked in prose used Ibsen, Synge, O'Casey, and Chekhov as models. The poets hung behind, preferring the Romantics. No one should say that their directions were wrong, but the most serious damage done so far to West Indian art is from a sin of omission, an ignorance of the achievements of a nearer America: Central and Latin America²²⁴.

Walcott is conscious that Caribbean and Latin American regions and contexts had been disregarded and ignored, and also prevented from fully expressing their cultures and folkloric traditions. In this sense, he attempts to destabilise spaces for investigation, thus discrediting ideologies and poetics that only look at the hegemonic epistemologies of Western centres of power. This is a strategy for recognising *Other* analytical slants and ways of thinking, and also acknowledges the challenging and growing partnership between countries around the world, especially in the ever-shifting and cross-cultural global context of opportunities, alternatives and options. In this sense, his type of writing does not limit itself to the realm of literature, but instead includes the work of artists such as painters, musicians, dancers and performers, because they also represent the *soul* of a

²²³ Walcott (1966), "West Indian Art Today" (Trinidad Guardian, May 8, 1966: 8) in Collier (2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 1: Culture, Society, Literature, and Art*, pp. 49.

²²⁴ Walcott (1966), "West Indian Art Today" (Trinidad Guardian, May 8, 1966: 8) in Collier (2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 1: Culture, Society, Literature, and Art*, pp. 47-48.

community or region. Walcott feels a need to talk about his countrymen and regional writers, scholars and artists because he firmly believes that, through their work, a radical change can occur in literature, politics, philosophy, science, the arts, etc. In this regard, he does not shy away from praise and talks about painters such as the Brazilian Portinari and the Mexicans Rivera, Orozco and Tamayo, while in literature he admits a fascination for the works of Borges, Neruda, Carpentier and Wilson Harris, “the first to explore the truth”²²⁵.

Walcott’s kaleidoscopic and transformative sense of enquiry is particularly manifest in his Nobel speech, which he gave on one of the most influential and powerful world stages so as to promote a geo-transdisciplinary shift of interest away from neo-colonial structures of power. During his speech, in tune with Eisler’s *partnership* values and in recognition of a communal West Indian dialogic future, Walcott significantly focused on his colourful archipelago from a wider perspective and with a grateful attitude:

Ours are not cities in the accepted sense, but no one wants them to be. They dictate their own proportions, their own definitions in particular places and in a prose equal to that of their detractors, so that now it is not just St. James but the streets and yards that Naipaul commemorates, its lanes as short and brilliant as his sentences; not just the noise and jostle of Tunapuna but the origins of C.L.R. James’s *Beyond a Boundary*, not just Felicity village on the Caroní plain, but Selvon Country, and that is the way it goes up the islands now: the old Dominica of Jean Rhys still very much the way she wrote of it; and the Martinique of the early Césaire; Perse’s Guadeloupe, even without the pith helmets and the mules; and what delight and privilege there was in watching a literature - one literature in several imperial languages, French, English, Spanish - bud and open island after island in the early morning of a culture, not timid, not derivative [...]. This is not a belligerent boast but a simple celebration of inevitability: and this flowering had to come²²⁶.

Walcott emphasises the flourishing – and astonishing – beginning of a new literature, culture and art. He mentions renowned Caribbean writers and colleagues and questions whether their work and talent sustained and favoured his personal writing path and career. Walcott’s acknowledgement of his colleagues’ influence and inspiration is based on a communal aim to re-define geographical and temporal spaces of imaginative wor(l)ds.

²²⁵ Walcott (1966), “West Indian Art Today” (Trinidad Guardian, May 8, 1966: 8) in Collier (2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 1: Culture, Society, Literature, and Art*, pp. 48.

²²⁶ Walcott (1998), *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, pp. 72-73.

The innate *indeterminacy* of Caribbean communities allows for creative passages, interwoven narrations and stories that respond to the ever-recurrent fluxes of the sea's tides. The debris carried over by the Atlantic Ocean becomes essential in compiling an authentic Caribbean archive. The memories of the Middle Passage, the echoes of distant drums and the unheard voices of those who perished on slave ships are fragments of stories or narratives that try to re-emerge from the oblivion of colonial erasing history.

Antillean literature redraws its own geography and time, thus prompting a new wor(l)d view that finally recognises the spiritual forces of *another* dimension, encountering order and chaos. In this sense, Walcott elaborates and establishes a unique relationship with his former European masters and their narrations, while simultaneously drawing on his countrymen's superstitions, cosmogonies and expressions to create something new, original and unexpected. In this regard, it comes as no surprise that St. Lucia, Walcott's island of birth, is one his favourite story settings:

There is [a] strange thing for me about the island of Saint Lucia; its whole topography is weird – very conical, with volcanic mountains and such – give rise to all sort of superstitions. [...] the earth emanated influences which you could either put down as folk superstition or, as a poet, accept as possible truth. I think that is why a lot of my plays remain set in Saint Lucia, because there is a mystery there that is with me from childhood, that surrounds the whole feeling of the island. There was, for example, a mountain covered with mist and low clouds to which we gave the name of La Sorcière, the witch²²⁷.

At the beginning of his career Walcott built imaginative wor(l)ds within the safety and reassuring contexts of his familiar spaces. His first poems are dedicated to St. Lucia, with its rich vegetation and powerful natural environment. Walcott spends his days studying and describing the multifarious personalities and cultures of his peoples, which to a Western dominator mind could appear as *incoherent*. In his first plays he reflects upon colonial history and his ancestors' destiny. At the same time, he starts questioning his own *divided* identity and inner-soul because, while in his own mind he feels connected to English culture and European models of reference (especially in literature), in physical and corporeal terms he perceives himself as a true Caribbean, specifically a *mulatto*.

The play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* represents a milestone in his production because, for the first time, Walcott starts digging into his Antillean archive, thus

²²⁷ Walcott (1970), "Meanings" in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 50.

understanding the need for a shift in his literary and cultural quests. He plunges into West Indians' schizophrenic mind, and realises that most of his compatriots' issues are related to distorted perceptions and representations of *reality*²²⁸.

Walcott's direct involvement in celebrating the first federal government of the West Indies is another step towards better understanding his complex archipelago. Through his pageant play *Drums and Colours*, Walcott decolonises the lives and commonly accepted stories of Western European heroes, such as Christopher Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh and Toussaint L'Ouverture. In this sense, he understands the importance of creating an "alter-native" narrative²²⁹ for these historical protagonists and their influential, less-represented West Indian counterparts. With *Drums and Colours*, Walcott broadens the scope to sketch the hybrid reality of his compatriots and recount their *unknown* stories. In this way, he recovers and re-discovers (even for himself) his forbearers' traditions and artistic legacies, thus dignifying their unheard voices, practices and cultures²³⁰.

These very first experiments encouraged Walcott writing and rewriting his texts according to an ever-growing need for a Caribbean cultural (r)evolution. He acknowledged that West Indians had not yet taken the chance to fully express their intrinsic theatricality and sense of performance. As a result, he established the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, through which he guided Caribbean actors and actresses in recognising their own expressiveness and originality, also by interpreting Western European theatrical masterpieces. In reflecting upon the beginnings of his Workshop or theatrical *vision*, Walcott explains:

²²⁸ As Bruce King suggests: "Much of the play is about manipulation of [the main protagonist] Makak and others, about the master/slave relationship. The master depends on having a slave, the slave on the master. They need each other. As soon as Makak stops accepting the view of others about himself, he is free to live in reality. Makak is Walcott's second Adam, the Adam of the New World who can name the world, create his identity, and reintegrate with the natural world. But there is the danger of wanting to become a Negritude black Adam, of wanting to return to a pre-European past [...]. The answer then is not political, it is spiritual, within the self". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama: Not Only a Playwright but a Company. The Trinidad Theatre Workshop 1959-1993*, pp. 204-205.

²²⁹ As Bruce M. Knauff suggests: "[...] the way people engage the ideologies and institutions of a so-called modernizing world provides a valuable vantage point for understanding contemporary articulations of culture and power. So, too, the ethnography, theorization, and critique of alternative or vernacular modernities provide a stimulating point of departure to address these issues while also rendering a productive target for reflexive examination and critique". Knauff (2002), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, pp. 4.

²³⁰ See my essay on Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours*: Mantellato (2020), "'We going change round the carnival': decolonial narratives and partnership encounters in Derek Walcott's *Drums and Colours*" in Riem & Thieme (eds. 2020), *Ecology and Partnership Studies in Anglophone Literature*, pp. 57-74.

When the improvisations began, I saw that there was something extra about the West Indian because of the way he is so visibly, physically self-expressive. If that were combined with the whole self-annihilating process of who you are and what you're doing, which you get from method acting – if those two were fused together, you could get a terrific style. [...] So I was after... and am still after... a theatre where someone can do Shakespeare or sing Calypso with equal conviction²³¹.

To equate calypso performances with Shakespeare means grasping the *incoherent* creativity of West Indian cultural expression(s). The Caribbean theatrical stage becomes an *in-between* space, where West Indian playwrights, costume and set designers, composers and choreographers can interact in order to portray the schizophrenia of their region, while at the same time drawing on Western-oriented techniques and artistic methods.

Walcott is aware that creative insight comes mostly after a revelatory or epiphanic moment, and this is precisely what happened to him while he was in New York for the first time. Looking for inspiration to write his epic play *Drums and Colours*, he experienced a moment of crisis. As I previously stated in recounting his life in Chapter 1, he did not leave his hotel room for a couple of days. Nevertheless, it was during this self-imposed meditative isolation that he wrote one of his most renowned theatrical masterpieces, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. This aspect is fundamental in understanding Walcott's wor(l)d, especially in his personal quest for a West Indian theatrical voice. As Walcott points out:

The first real experience I had of writing a stylized West Indian play was in New York. It was a West Indian fable called *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. For the first time I used songs and dances and a narrator in a text²³².

Walcott was capable of overcoming his creative *stasis* only through an authentic and true self-recognition of his double-marked identity, personality and imagination. In this way, it became necessary to include song and dance in Caribbean theatrical events and performances, for they are part of people's reality, mixed consciousness and heritage.

Walcott's acceptance of this continuous shift of experiences – between European and Northern Atlantic alternatives and Caribbean practices – allows him to constantly re-

²³¹ Walcott (1970), "Meanings" in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 46.

²³² Walcott (1970), "Meanings" in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 46.

shape and redraw wor(l)d maps and views. This aspect was probably favoured also by his own personal journey as a globetrotter or *wanderer*. Walcott's life and works are indeed characterised by a relentless sense of displacement. A close reading of his texts reveals these aspects, also towards a communal and intricate web of interactions and interrelations between his personal experiences and those of his fictional (or real) protagonists.

Starting off from his beloved island St. Lucia, Walcott began to travel, first in the labyrinths of his own imagination and then throughout his Caribbean archipelago. With the passing of time, these recurrent circular routes became even broader and more frequent, until he decided to abandon his birthplaces in order to settle in North America. However, this migration or displacement did not translate into putting down *roots* elsewhere, because Walcott kept returning – physically and mentally – to his islands. On the contrary, it provided him with an opportunity to experience and challenge his worldviews, perceptions and feelings. In this sense, Walcott began to intermingle different geo-temporal spaces of inquiry, thus blurring the definition of national boundaries and frontiers. He became a citizen of the world, even though he kept drawing images and symbols from his native islands and kept returning to their uncontested beauty whenever he could. Walcott's mature production reflects this continuing *repetition* of journeys, on a spiralling path that recalls the power of Eisler's *chalice* or a circle of possibilities. As an example, *Omeros* (1990) reflects these aspects because it starts in St. Lucia, moves to Africa and returns to the Antilles, while *in-between* it explores the Great Plains of America, moves to Europe, and concludes where it started, on the poet's own island of birth.

Walcott's perpetual displacements, movements and shifts do not only *redraw* geographical constraints but also corporeal or physical homogenising representations. One of the most debated aspects of Walcott's texts is precisely their stepping *into* and *across* borders, representations, practices, events, actions and creations. Walcott's texts are artistic, mosaic puzzles in which different layers, hues, expressions and forms can mix, transform and exclude one another. It is a type of writing and imaginative art that tries to overcome centuries-long divisions, *partitions* and rhetoric of Western domination. In tune with Eisler's perspective, Walcott's work is a practice of *encounter* and mutual dialogue between Northern Atlantic and Western European privileged countries and

poorer Southern ones; an attempt at building bridges of cooperation against cultural and racial seclusion, and also aesthetic and creative freedom. As Edward Said suggests in *Culture and Imperialism*:

Western cultural forms can be taken out of the autonomous enclosures in which they have been protected, and placed instead in the dynamic of global environment created by imperialism, itself revised as an ongoing context between north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native. [...] As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is being narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominant discourse acts²³³.

Walcott substantiates Said's arguments by proposing decolonial narratives of Western-oriented texts and artistic *openings* or experimentations that also draw on non-textual expressions and dimensions. In this sense, Caribbean chants, dances, rites, folkloric instruments and masks can intermingle with and colour Walcottian decolonial rewriting.

In line with Walcott's worldviews, Benítez-Rojo and Döring point out the distinctive and original Caribbean ways of composing and responding to modern/colonial structures of power, especially by stressing the power of West Indian *performativity*. It is through the striking force of improvisation that Antillean rhythm is finally juxtaposed with songs, poems and dances, thus becoming a "metarhythm" that is capable of encompassing the whole system of West Indian expressions. As Benítez-Rojo argues:

It would [...] be a mistake to think that the Caribbean rhythm connects only to percussion. The Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc²³⁴.

The stress on Caribbean dance, performance and improvisation is particularly relevant for the aims of this Ph.D. thesis and project. Walcott has always been interested in the power of West Indian body semiotics and the culture of dance. According to Bruce King, it was only after his encounter with the dancer and choreographer McBurnie that

²³³ Said (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 50-51.

²³⁴ Benítez-Rojo (1996), *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, pp. 18.

Walcott “saw the possibilities of using the West Indian body rhythms, movements, and gestures that the dancers had developed as the basis for an acting style”²³⁵.

It comes as no surprise that Walcott’s plays and lines are framed within Caribbean dances, movements, corporeal expressions and gestures. Similarly, Walcottian poetry is capable of evoking and expressing its physical emotions and spiritual energy, thus identifying itself as a sort of embodied *wor(l)d*.

The final section of this Ph.D. thesis addresses this particular aspect of Walcott’s multimodal form of expression, through an intersemiotic, or dance-theatre, translation of one of his best-known poems entitled *The Schooner Flight*. My work as a former professional dancer and now performer and choreographer, who has tried to embody the powerful *wor(l)d* of Walcott’s physical imagery and semantics, proposes and encourages an *alternative* approach or artistic praxis in studying and interacting with Walcott’s texts. My personal *inter-action* with Walcott’s *The Schooner Flight* is justified by the author’s own opinion towards the secret power of the corporeal and physical symbology, which is capable of bridging secular divisions within Caribbean hybrid communities:

I think that an archipelago, whether Greek or West Indian, is bound to be a fertile area, particularly if it is a bridge between continents, and a variety of people settle there. In the West Indies, there are all these conditions – the Indian heritage, the Mediterranean, the Lebanese, the Chinese, etc. I don’t want to look too far ahead, but I think there will be a playwright coming out of the Indian experience and one out of the Chinese experience; each will isolate what is true to his own tradition. When these things happen in an island culture a fantastic physical theatre will emerge because the forces that affect that communal search will use physical expression through dance, through Indian dance and through Chinese dance, through African dance. When these things happen, plus all the cross-fertilization – the normal sociology of the place – then a true and very terrifying West Indian theatre will come. It’s going to be so physically strong as to be something that has never happened before²³⁶.

Walcott suggests that even if Caribbean people speak and interact through different languages and cultural heritages and traditions, they are capable of understanding each other through a non-verbal dimension and form of expression such as dance, gesture and movement. The dances of West Indian heterogeneous communities, thanks to their corporeal and energetic strength, are silently linking *modernity/coloniality* divisions in a transnational space of body-fusions and encounters. As is the case with a

²³⁵ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 25.

²³⁶ Walcott (1970), “Meanings” in Hamner ([1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 49.

piece of dance choreography, whatever its style may be, the ensemble or *corps de ballet* (which stands as a community of people) moves rhythmically following the same pattern of gestures, *repeating* an internal structure until it extends into a communal awareness and unifying force and entity. West Indian communal destinies and mutual desires are thus re-united, also through the denial of individual expression or characterisation. Where singular views are not abolished, it is because they serve as counter-discourses to evoke alternative structures of meaning or reject dominant views. The non-verbal dimension of dance has the power to bring people together without omitting the participants' personalities and internal differences, and without forgetting the spiritual energy of the *silent* body, which it urges to prevail with its own rightful physical presence and determination.

My analysis shows how Derek Walcott makes extensive use of body semiotics and corporeal and embodied meanings both in his poetry and theatre. In characterising his actors and actresses' personalities and identities, Walcott works on a precise structuring of gestures, rhythmical movements and improvisations. In Walcott's poems these features are less evident but can be easily found in the continuous *passage* between formal, more structured literary forms and *Other* artistic and expressive means, such as figurative art, musical melodies and carnivalesque performances, so that the reading of these texts becomes less private and more participatory and inclusive. In this sense, I agree with Benítez-Rojo's description of Caribbean writing in general when he argues:

The Caribbean text is excessive, dense, uncanny, asymmetrical, entropic, hermetic, all this because, in the fashion of a zoo or bestiary, it opens its doors to two great orders of reading: one of a secondary type, epistemological profane, diurnal, and linked to the West – the world outside – where the text uncoils itself and quivers like a fantastic beast to be the object of knowledge and desire; another the principal order, teleological, ritual, nocturnal, and referring to the Caribbean itself, where the text unfolds its bisexual sphinxlike monstrosity toward the void of its impossible origin, and dreams that it incorporates this, or is incorporated by it²³⁷.

Given this perspective, I was guided in my selection of Walcott's texts by this intrinsic bifurcation between *profane* transposition or reversal of Western-oriented canonical texts, and their artistic and expressive reformulation and transdisciplinary fusion. I will now briefly introduce each of the works I have selected for my analysis,

²³⁷ Benítez-Rojo (1996), *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, pp. 23.

before exploring the features and characteristics that reverberate through their conception, production and realisation, and highlighting their divergent structures and/or thematic differences.

The first text to be examined is Walcott's *The Joker of Seville* (1974), a West Indian theatrical experience and musical adaptation of Tirso de Molina's masterpiece *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (1616). As Walcott explains in the opening *Notes* at the beginning of his creative rewriting:

This play is my first attempt to adapt the work of any author, ancient or contemporary, and what I hope I have drawn from the original – Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla* – is primarily the pace of its scenes and its meter. I have no Spanish whatsoever and was never in awe of the archaic or heraldic tongue of Tirso's language may be²³⁸.

The play follows the adventures of Don Juan, the forerunner of a series of notorious male tricksters that appear in late-seventeenth-century European and Spanish literary texts and artistic productions. Walcott's captivating adaptation reinterprets the main protagonists' personality and their adventures, crossing physical and geographical boundaries between different shores of the Atlantic. Walcott's *Joker* is less serious than his European double. The protagonist does follow his irrepressible instincts and is not afraid to show his troubled human fragility and *shallowness*, especially when he has to deal with love bonds and inner emotions. One of the most interesting aspects of the play is Walcott's accurate re-staging and dramaturgic restructuring. He creates a sort of participatory theatrical-event or engaging performance as the piece is performed in a circular arena. Walcott eradicates the distance between the actors and the audience to reflect on and compare with *theatre of life*. Spectators and actors become part of the same performative act and artistic *praxis*. In doing so, Walcott makes explicit reference to the bull rings or stick-fighting arenas of his folkloric Antillean regions, thus calling into question the fundamentals, codified techniques of Western European *collective* representations. The abolition of borders and epistemic frontiers is foregrounded through a recurring circle symbol which re-traces the repetitive, cyclical choices of the play's protagonists. In this circular experimental space, Walcott is also sure to include Caribbean dances, chants and expressive practices such as the Trinidadian calypsos. The intent is to

²³⁸ Walcott (1978), *The Joker of Seville and O Babylon!* pp. 3.

reflect on Antillean destabilising syncretism, thus providing a coherent dialogue between traditional West Indian forms and Western-oriented artistic practices such as Hollywood musicals or British pantomimes.

A similar creative and artistic synthesis between European and Caribbean art can also be found in my second text, which is a re-writing of one of the most emblematic canonical texts from English (and European) literature: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719). Walcott sets his play adaptation in the symbolic *Castaways Guest House* on the Caribbean island of Tobago, which, according to numerous critics, may have inspired the creative imagination of Defoe when he first visited the Antilles. The protagonists of the play are the *double* characters of Harry Trewe, the *white* fidgeted British owner of the hotel, who represents Master Crusoe, and his butler and resolute *black* servant Jackson Phillip, who represents the colonised and subjugated Friday.

Mr Trewe is a retired actor and music-hall player who tries to convince his employee, who is in turn a retired calypsonian, to put on a role-reversal pantomime of the Crusoe-Friday relationship to entertain hotel guests in the evening. The role reversal turns out to be a perilous undertaking: the schizophrenic couple keeps on arguing about different *readings* and interpretations of the story. The rewriting of the Western-European colonial and historical archive take on an ethnical, historical and socio-cultural dimension. At the end of Act I, Mr Trewe withdraws his plan and decides to step back, ordering Jackson to leave things the way they are, and “to return where they were”²³⁹. Upset by the fact that he was initially forced to play with the role reversal because of his employer’s tiresome requests, Jackson is now determined to carry on with his own *history-less* version of the Crusoe-Friday relationship. The black protagonist is the witty, intelligent and down-to-earth character in the play. He knows that his white employer’s demand hides a deeper life quest for more self-awareness, or better, represents an attempt to overcome repressive and unnatural human distancing between the two personas.

It is through the power of their partnership encounter and role-reversed dialogue that the protagonists finally shake off their stereotypical positions in order to embrace a reciprocal human understanding and indispensable mutual recognition. Their Western-oriented modernity/coloniality *representation* ceases to exist when they start to look

²³⁹ Walcott (1980), *Remembrance & Pantomime: Two Plays*, pp. 128.

frankly into each other's eyes, thus recognising that their divisive everyday journey is, in reality, a spiralling circle of identical occurrences, problems, hopes and desires.

The last text that I will present is a long and complex multimodal poem that Walcott published towards the end of his career. *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000) is Walcott's homage to the world of figurative art, and one of his most successful experiments in bringing together poetic writing and art forms in a single work. As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, when dealing with poetry, Walcott was driven by a strict and formal approach. For most of his career, he felt that his poetic verses needed to follow the precise patterns and conventional rules of Western European classical rhetoric and stylistics. On the contrary, Antillean theatre constituted the privileged stage for subversion, revision and alter-action. Obviously, there were exceptions, such as his *most* West Indian Creole poem *The Schooner Flight*, in which he makes extensive use of elliptic structures, technical innovations and Creole words in order to convey the rhythms and accents of his Caribbean islands. In this regard, it would be wrong to associate the original *deviations* that Walcott achieved throughout his plays with his restricted views on re-forming the wor(l)d of high literature, and that of poetry in particular. For Walcott, the genres of theatre and poetry belonged to different aesthetic domains, not so much in terms of their themes, subjects and the issues addressed, but rather their internal structures, organisation and arrangement.

Given this perspective, *Tiepolo's Hound* represents one of the few exceptions because it qualifies as a continuing and fluctuating poem of unexpected designs, intricate plots and revelatory encounters. Despite its logical and punctual division into four books and twenty-six chapters, the poem embarks on a cyclical and repetitive quest-like journey into the role of poetry, art, vision and life. It defies and challenges canonical disciplinary boundaries in order to become a self-fulfilling, blurred representation or painting, whose familiar framing is hardly recognisable: an opaque artistic and literary output for both art lovers and scholars alike.

This work is an unexpected rewriting of Camille Pissarro's story and his commonly accepted European biography as a French painter and artist. It is an attempt to recount the true life of a man who *belonged* and was born in the Caribbean, precisely in the former Dutch colony of St. Thomas. *Tiepolo's Hound* is also a provocative endeavour to call into question Western European cultural *hegemony* or presumed artistic

superiority. Indeed, Pissarro was one of the leading figures, if not the pioneer according to some art critics, of the Impressionist (r)evolution as a challenging aesthetic re-writing or artistic reversal of the nineteenth century.

This was not the first time that Walcott had rewritten a historical truth, or even re-worked one of the modernity/coloniality erasures. He achieved something similar with the play *Drums and Colours*, uncovering *an-Other* dimension of his *heraldic* protagonists. Nevertheless, *Tiepolo's Hound* presents a series of relevant and yet unprecedented differences in Walcott's poetic journey. Firstly, because Pissarro was a painter and, secondly, because he must have drawn his transformative energy not so much from the Western *progressive* life he founded in Paris but rather from his own self-expatriate feelings and nostalgia for his islands. In other words, in recounting Camille Pissarro's life, Walcott achieves a twofold decolonisation of the Western-influential matrix of power, because he is capable of destabilising its dominant *centre* through a centrifugal and spiralling renewing energy coming from its *edging* territories or liminal literatures. It is thanks to Western-historical unrecognised outcasts or the dispossessed, who were capable of *seeing* differently, that Europe was able to enjoy a new and renovated *light* and also reform its old canonical structures and views. It is thanks to the work of *liminal* artists such as the Caribbean Camille Pissarro that Western art stepped into a new altering and challenging re-thinking of itself.

The complexity of the poem is furthered by a series of doubles. First, Walcott's alter-ego, the self-reflecting image of the author who goes in search of the *real* Tiepolo's hound; second, Pissarro's double, who sometimes crosses over with Walcott's alter-ego, in an incessant re-tracing of their mutual heritages, truths and stories; and third, the hound's *counterpart*, namely its filthy and dirty reflecting black mongrel, whose representation serves as an instrument for self-revelation, both for the dogs and the protagonists of the poem.

Finally, the work encompasses twenty-six water-colour reproductions of Walcott's original paintings, which are in turn *doubles* of Walcott's own eyes, but also alternative references to and intertexts of the Caribbean landscape, sea and colourful life. Most literary critique has devalued the significance of these art-works, labelling them merely as attachments to the poem. The Italian edition of the work, for instance, does not include them, as though they were part of the poet's whimsical passion for the world of

arts. I believe that this is a mistake, as the paintings are the true protagonists of the poem, as they continue the dialogue, at a distance, with its contents, topics and themes.

2.2. Decolonial features: the common threads at the core of the analysis

As I have already pointed out, the *fil rouge* that brings together the majority of Walcott's texts is the *decolonisation* of Western European influences and wor(l)d structures and themes. In light of this assumption, in this section I will underline the specific aspects that link the three Walcottian texts I have chosen for my analysis, which all represent challenging re-writings and original responses to Western European and Northern Atlantic literary narratives or *canons*. Specifically, *The Joker of Seville* re-works the Spanish canon as it proposes a Caribbean version of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla*. *Pantomime* recalls British imperialism as it represents the ironic theatre adaptation of Daniel Defoe's *Crusoe* and his relationship with Friday. *Tiepolo's Hound* is connected in more than one way with French tradition, as the text tries to re-establish Pissarro's true *identity* as a West Indian expatriate, despite being commonly known as a French Impressionist artist.

In tune with Walcott's *unpredictable* wor(l)d, which evidently tries to encompass the majority of influences and worldviews that crossed and became established in the Antillean archipelago, I propose a similar, yet *destabilising*, circular path of enquiry within his own texts. In this sense, I will not focus on one particular culture or historical period of the "Caribbeing" experience (see Chapter 1 pp. 97), but rather engage with its heterogenous and un-defined communities, languages, cultures and arts, thus providing a comprehensive overview of Walcott's complex response to his schizophrenic and *hybrid* region.

This is also the final aim of Walcott's own work, bringing together, under "one nation" or perspective, the different slants and heritages that developed under the violent colonial *division* of peoples, cultures and practices, thus recovering the bio-cultural power of life through *partnership*, or the sharing of values, experiences and expressions.

Before analysing this macrostructural decolonial intent, I will first explore some recurrences, features and themes which are easily identifiable at the core of the texts.

Firstly, there is recurrent physical *displacement* and circular wandering of Walcott's main protagonists, in a context in which geo-temporal coordinates imposed by modernity/coloniality structures are abolished. Walcott's characters are constantly

moving, experiencing and fluctuating in *undetermined* spaces, in which boundaries are re-drawn and re-imagined. Walcott's Joker, for instance, moves between different shores of the Atlantic, and Pissarro keeps going back in his mind to his beloved Caribbean island of St. Thomas while he is in France.

In tune with this aspect, the opening *alteration* of Western-colonial narratives and aesthetic practices is discernible in Walcott's *creolisation* or *indigenisation* of language expressions, cultural forms and artistic syncretic experiments, such as the mixing of Creole and Western European acting in *Pantomime*, i.e. the clash between calypso and music hall performances.

Secondly, the idea of definitive and precise *representation* is absent, meaning that Walcott's characters are on a perpetual quest to *define* their true self or the image that they want to project to the outside world. The Joker is unsure of his life goals and purpose; in *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott's alter-ego blurs his persona with that of Pissarro; in *Pantomime*, Harry and Jackson are each other's *double* and the interplay of their artistic, cultural and historical *roles* and definitions is present throughout.

Thirdly, the theme of *doubles* or the practice of mimicking a pair is a preponderant aspect in all of these works. It is most evident in *The Joker of Seville*, in which the protagonist splits himself into multiple, mostly incoherent, *selves*, and also in *Tiepolo's Hound*, where the themes of the poem mirror the double identities of Walcott's alter-ego and Pissarro.

Along the same lines, the three texts are linked by the idea of an ironic reversal, which is a feature that connects back again to the practice of re-writing. The reversing of roles, definitions, structures, and writing or artistic practices functions as a creative experiment in which different possibilities and representations are played out, evoked, re-moulded and re-thought.

Finally, the significance of *bodies* or corporal movements, gestures and poses is recurrent in the texts. Indeed, while *The Joker* and *Pantomime* are both performances and/or embodied theatrical plays or experiences, *Tiepolo's Hound* is a poem in which Walcott evidently works on the power of corporal sensing, feeling and experiencing, which is not only expressed through the exactitude of the smell of plants and banquets, but also through the rotting stench of dogs' dirty flesh and the degrading inner-city conditions (like Paris during the Industrial Revolution). The details of corporeal

movements and gestures are fundamental also in *Tiepolo's Hound* because the protagonists of the poem (whether humans or animals) *physically* leave their framing representations in order to become *real* and acquire new meanings.

This is an aspect that Walcott takes into account quite early on in his writing career, and a central element foregrounded by Brown when he tries to give a coherent meaning to the figure of Makak in his reading of *Dream on Monkey Mountain*: “when he [Makak] is released from prison the regaining of physical freedom is analogous to a birth, to revolutionary beginnings for Makak and his people”²⁴⁰.

This sense of *re-birth* is a common feature in the texts I have selected, as it is only by challenging and destabilising *new* beginnings that older hierarchical structures can be broken down and leave space for transdisciplinary encounters and multimodal experiments.

This is the last feature that I will underline in my analysis, at the end of each text: Walcott's unexpected *opening* towards *Other* types of expressions and arts within his own powerful wor(l)d. In this regard, for *The Joker of Seville* I will analyse one of the most famous songs performed during the play; in *Pantomime* I will explore the corporeal semantics of the protagonists' *shadow* dancing in one of their most symbolic exchanges; and in *Tiepolo's Hound* I will describe Walcott's inclusion of twenty-six of his own water-colours in the structure of his poetry-art book.

In short, Walcott proposes a new transnational or trans-Atlantic social and cultural geography between his inspiring worlds: on the one side the Caribbean and on the other the Western European and Northern Atlantic cultures and nations. He defines a point of connection between their divergent and yet similar contexts in a challenging shift that eradicates *roots* in order to recognise a suspended and un-formed Matter made of a-temporal and puzzling syncretism.

In this sense, one of the final characteristics common to the texts is their un-defined form, which is also the basis for their destabilising plots. The characters are continuously evolving, calling into question their assumptions, background and ways of living. They reverse, try new paths, remould, react and re-imagine the contexts into which they are plunged. The narrations are not linear, but circular and they follow the stream of

²⁴⁰ Brown (1997), “Dreamers and Slaves – The Ethos of Revolution in Walcott and Leroi Jones” in Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 195.

events, and their literary, historical and social changes. Walcott's writing is continuously experimenting, attempting to create new voices, and interacting with different expressions.

In conclusion, what really brings these texts together is their sense of *repetition*, meaning that their characters and events are perpetually returning to and/or mimicking one another, in a never-ending circle of departures and returns, findings and losses. In this sense, Don Juan *repeats* himself in different shapes, costumes and masks, thus assuming and abandoning different and yet similar roles, while Pissarro and Walcott sometimes are the *reiteration* of each another (and at a certain point of the poem they also intersect and mix together). Finally, Jackson and Harry are the continuing self-exploration of each another and, during the entire performance, they repeat the same (yet not the same) phrases, opinions and arguments.

Walcottian writings are a literature of the *beyond*, an uncertain and a-typical type of literature that speaks through symbols, images, paintings and embodied words: a real transdisciplinary *praxis* which defies centuries-long Western-oriented *traditions* and eventually proposes a new and unpredictable mirror of today's hybrid and globalised wor(l)d.

2.3 The Joker of Seville

The Joker of Seville (1974) is Walcott's first attempt to rework a text from the so-called Western literary *canon* from a Caribbean and, more broadly, decolonial perspective. The Royal Shakespeare Company commissioned Walcott²⁴¹ to write the play, which was supposed to be an English translation of Tirso de Molina's seventeenth-century masterpiece *El Burlador de Sevilla* for a British audience²⁴². However, the playwright ended up transforming and adapting the text in such a way that the performance never got the chance to be staged in England. Walcott's *Joker* eventually became a Caribbean *classic*, for it not only epitomised the verve and innate sense of performance of West Indian peoples but also provided a truly comprehensive sketch of Caribbean society, with its ethnical and political concerns and divisions.

Although Walcott followed the plot and themes in Tirso's original, the backdrop to his version appeared immediately alternative and unexpected, especially because of his extensive use of traditional West Indian practices, music and dances. As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, in previous years, Walcott travelled extensively to the United States and was mesmerised by the mixing of music, physical dances and acting in Broadway musicals. He soon realised that Caribbean people may also benefit from their creative background and folklore legacies. In those years, Walcott wrote *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, two West Indian plays that depicted the colourful *reality* of his homelands, drawing heavily on their artistic and highly evocative heritages. *The Joker of Seville* enters into a dialogue and interacts with these productions, both on an artistic and psychological level. While the production's colours and relentless geo-temporal shifts may evoke *Ti-Jean's* magical world, Walcott's insightful

²⁴¹ As Bruce King recalls: "The story of the commissioning of the translation of Tirso de Molina's play by the Royal Shakespeare company and its subsequent history, including its effect on the Trinidad Theatre Workshop and Walcott, is remarkable. [...] There was talk of the Royal Shakespeare Company perhaps doing *El Burlador de Sevilla* and Ronald Bryden, their literary advisor and himself from the West Indies, was asked by Peter Hall and Terry Hands to find a modern poet with a Shakespearean style to write a verse translation that could be the basis for a script. As no British poet had such a style, Bryden approached Walcott, who as he progressed with the translation kept adapting the original into a new West Indian play". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 211.

²⁴² In presenting Walcott's *Joker*, Hamner argues: "When Derek Walcott was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company to write a modern version of Tirso de Molina's seventeenth-century masterpiece *El Burlador de Sevilla*, Walcott-, saw no incongruity, - he an English-speaking West Indian adapting an Old World Spanish play". Hamner (1998), *Jokers' Worlds, Old and New: From Tirso to Walcott*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 44, 3/4, pp. 151.

representation of Don Juan, and other characters, is a direct reflection of Walcott's puzzling personality and unpredictability. Despite these similarities, *The Joker of Seville* represented a step forward in Walcott's decolonisation of the Caribbean world. In unexpected ways, he was called to remould the Western European literary canon from the inside, for Tirso's play was written in Spanish, while he was supposed to write in English, his mother tongue, which was also the language of the former European coloniser. Walcott was aware that the legend of Don Juan had inspired thousands of versions and adaptations at the core of the Western European cultural, literary and artistic space²⁴³; what he did not know was that he would become so deeply involved in the task that he would end up creating his own (Caribbean) version of the story.

On this unforeseen decolonial journey, Walcott followed one of the markers of Caribbean cultural heritage and tradition: the power of its rhythmical and musical pace. In the written version of *Joker*, published later, Walcott explains in his *Notes*:

This play is my first attempt to adapt the work of any author, ancient or contemporary, and what I hope I have drawn from the original – Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla* – is primarily the pace of its scenes and its meter. I have no Spanish whatsoever and was never in awe of the archaic or heraldic tongue that Tirso's language may be, but as with most romance languages, one can be swept along in a narrow torrent of powerful lyricism, without comprehension, propelled by the passion of its sound²⁴⁴.

Music, sound and rhythm are undoubtedly the governing forces that Walcott pursued in his adaptation of *Joker*. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that some postcolonial and Western-oriented critics agreed on listing the work as a *musical* and not as a *real* theatrical play²⁴⁵. While, on the one side, I agree that Walcott's play was far

²⁴³ In *The Argumentative Old Git*, a literary blog on the web, I read: "In the decades following the first performance [of Tirso de Molina], there were – in those copyright-free days – any number of variants. Further variants continued to appear at a dizzying pace: Armand E. Singer, Professor of Romance languages at University of West Virginia, has listed no less than 1,720 of them. And the myth has attracted the attention of some of the greatest creative minds of the Western world – Molière, Mozart, Pushkin. Indeed, Molière's version appeared a mere 35 years after the publication of Tirso de Molina's. Clearly, there is something in this story that resonated powerfully, and, given the undiminished popularity of various works based on this myth, continues to resonate still". N.D. (2017), '*The Trickster of Seville*' by Tirso de Molina – the first Don Juan, The Argumentative Old Git. <https://argumentativeoldgit.wordpress.com/2017/02/21/the-trickster-of-seville-by-tirso-de-molina-the-first-don-juan/> (consulted on 30/10/2020).

²⁴⁴ Walcott (1978), *The Joker of Seville and O Babylon! Two Plays*, pp. 3. All subsequent references are to this edition and the page numbers are provided in brackets.

²⁴⁵ As an example, in his overview on Walcott's works, Edward Baugh describes *The Joker of Seville* as follows: "The first masterstroke of his adaptation of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*) is the conceiving of it as a musical. This allowed

from traditional Western theatrical outputs – take its staging in a circular arena, for example – on the other, I believe that this type of *representation* is what Caribbean peoples assumed to be *theatre*, since the blending of lines with sounds, movements and gestures is highly recurrent – if not the norm – in the Antilles. This is *another* way of producing and experimenting with plays or texts, for the focus is equally distributed between narrative and artistic or multimodal means, such as music, dance, performance, costumes, lights, and so on²⁴⁶.

In a similar way, I agree with those scholars who have read the play as a clear and refined example of *total theatre*, following the examples of innovators and avant-gardists from the beginning of the last century, such as Bertolt Brecht. In this regard, Bruce King argues:

Joker tries to bridge the gap between high and popular culture. Walcott regarded the American musical with its use of dance, music, and lyrics as a form of total theatre and a way to reach larger audiences, while offering a play that was highly stylized, anti-naturalistic, like Oriental theatre, like Brecht²⁴⁷.

Working on transdisciplinary connections and encounters allowed Walcott to portray the unique and diversified shades of West Indian personalities, identities and arts, thus gaining the esteem and approval of his compatriots. *Joker* is at the same time high and popular literature, for it re-writes the issues at the core of Tirso's narrative, while emphasising specific and highly ironic West Indian stereotypes, such as the concept of the untameable Caribbean *man*. The merging of various linguistic and cultural registers or styles is probably another key to Walcott's success. Don Juan Tenorio moves between royal palaces, fishing villages and the countryside, thus mocking the systems of power governing both aristocratic and lower-class societies. Juan's tricks and actions destabilise the modernity/coloniality order, for Walcott wants to liberate and free his peoples from the subjugation of the colonial and neo-colonial matrix of power. This aspect is relevant when taking into account the political scenario in the West Indies in those disquieting years. As King points out:

for the action to be carried by an ebullient variety of Caribbean, largely folk, largely Trinidadian music". Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 121.

²⁴⁶ In her article *Adaptation or Translation? Walcott's 'The Joker of Seville' for a Caribbean Audience*, Doreen Preston talks about a "piece of transadaptation". Preston (2004), *Adaptation or translation? Walcott's 'The Joker of Seville' for a Caribbean Audience*, *Palimpsestes*, 16, abstract.

²⁴⁷ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean life*, pp. 322.

Some governments were pro-Cuban, some pro-American, some were black nationalist, others were not, but many were tyrannical, jailed, and killed their opponents, and prevented free speech. In such a context, *Joker* was interpreted as a cry for individual liberty, for personal freedom, against the repressive state²⁴⁸.

Despite Juan's jokes and mockery, the play may be read as an act of liberation and freedom from control and silence, for Caribbean men and women alike. As I will show in this analysis, the play debunks Tirso's depiction of women, thus offering a challenging, feminist reading of most of its female protagonists.

Because of his lack of knowledge of Spanish, Walcott read Molina's play through an English translation by Roy Campbell. From a stylistic point of view, Walcott did not translate the text but rather adapted its content from a West Indian perspective²⁴⁹. Another coincidence that prompted him to accept the arduous task of transposing this particular play was the fact that he saw an astonishing correspondence between Tirso's Golden Age Spain and the Trinidad of the 1970s. In Tirso's lines, Walcott saw the typical attitudes and vitality of Trinidadian communities, with their exuberant and turbulent style of living and their puzzling behaviours. In this sense, Walcott felt immediately an overwhelming connection between Trinidad and Spain, thus making him want to bridge the gap between the two shores of the Atlantic. Walcott was aware that the problems and issues occurring in the Old World were similar to those occurring on his archipelago; what differed was the reaction and attitude that people took to find solutions, especially for existential concerns.

Tirso de Molina (1579-1648) was a Catholic monk who denounced the hypocrisies and moral wrongs of Spanish society. He was a prolific writer and a member of the religious Order of Mercy. Today, he is widely considered as one of the most important playwrights of the Spanish Golden Age. Tirso's *Juan* brought to the stage theological and historical issues such as the problem of free will, predestination and the everlasting battle between good and evil. The play focuses also on the concept of honour, which was an essential concern in Tirso's world. *Don Juan* is widely known for being

²⁴⁸ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean life*, pp. 323.

²⁴⁹ As Doreen Preston points out: "In the case of Walcott and *The Joker of Seville* there is no question as to whether the playwright adapted the work or whether he translated it. His poor knowledge of the Spanish language meant that he simply adapted a play already translated by Roy Campbell". Preston (2004), *Adaptation or translation? Walcott's 'The Joker of Seville' for a Caribbean Audience*, *Palimpsestes*, 16, pp. 3.

one of the first texts to deal with the disruption of social, religious and cultural *order*, which is not condemned at first, but only at the end of a long, explorative journey into the self, and into peoples' mindsets and beliefs²⁵⁰.

In terms of specific narrative strategies, Walcott concentrates firstly on Juan's character, and secondly on the role of women. As I will show in the second subsection of my analysis, Walcott's rewrites Tirso's female protagonists in order to decolonise their attitudes and responses to the colonial matrix of power. Walcott's heroines are tricked by Don Juan, but they also engage with him, thus showing a change with respect to attitudes of the time, and a sense of responsibility also on their part. Walcott's female protagonists are not mere tools and commodities in the hands of men, as in Tirso's original, but rather independent and highly conscious troublemakers. They reject and destabilise the Western European dominator paradigm which forces them to stand aside and assume the role of manipulated puppets.

Throughout his narrative decolonisations, Walcott also delves into his own poetic standpoints. As I will discuss in the analysis, he criticises Western religion, self-righteous morals and the modernity/coloniality practice of naming; most of all, he proposes one of his first geo-temporal dislocations, thus allowing the play to reach the Caribbean shores. In this regard, Don Juan's seduction of the fishergirl Tisbea occurs (symbolically) in New Tarragon, and therefore in the New World. I will explore this particular episode in depth, since I believe that it epitomises one of the most successful and evocative re-writings of Walcott's entire career. Apart from presenting an unexpected and original shift in context from Tirso's original, Walcott's episode in the New World responds to the need to discuss colonisation and re-write Western European myth. As I will later point out, Tisbea repeatedly draws on images and metaphors from Homer's epic, not only in positive terms but also to highlight European cultural flaws and categorisations. In this sense, Tisbea *corrupts* mythical episodes, firstly by misinterpreting them and secondly by voicing them in the local dialect. Eventually, European colonisers are no longer depicted as saviours of the Caribbean peoples, but rather as tricksters exploiting them.

²⁵⁰ In comparing Tirso and Walcott's productions of *Joker*, King argues: "The basic concepts of honour and vengeance in the Spanish play refer to family honour, one's name, sexual honour, and a blood code of revenge. *Joker* [...] concerns problems of free will, choice, good, and evil. Walcott's Don Juan can be seen as being like Shakespeare's Richard III, an amusing villain who beats all the self-pitying goodies, but he is also a rebel, an Existentialist, a liberator, another version of Walcott". King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 322.

In the second section of the analysis, I will focus on Walcott's multimodal and artistic *openings* within the play. While music represents the most sustained means for the development of the plot, it is also true that the costumes, scenery and dance also contribute to making Walcott's *Joker* one of the most sophisticated theatrical productions in the history of West Indian theatre.

It was one of the few productions in which Walcott was capable of bringing together a multitude of talents and professionals from both the Caribbean and from abroad. Most importantly, Walcott collaborated with Galt MacDermot, who was famous in America for his musical *Hair*²⁵¹. MacDermot took inspiration from Walcott's lyrics for writing the play's music. In a similar way, Walcott paid extreme attention to the structuring of his actors' movements and embodiments, and also to the creation of choreographic dances for the intervals between different scenes. As Bruce King explains:

Walcott saw song as a part of story telling and the lyrics as a means of advancing the plot. Verbal significance is complemented by gesture the way it is in Calypso. Speeches can be cut, deleted, or rewritten, but what is left in the script has to be spoken clearly and with attention to West Indian speech rhythms, so it does not sound unnatural like 'poetry'. [...] Body language replaces the textual as communication and as symbolism; [therefore] there would be a more complete integration of text, song, dance, and gesture as a means of advancing the story²⁵².

Joker required musicians, skilled West Indian performers and a *corps de ballet*. The production counted "a cast of twenty-three, including a number of dancers who would rapidly join the TTW [Trinidad Theatre Workshop] following Noble Douglas, Carol La Chapelle, and Norline Metivier"²⁵³. These were all pioneers trained abroad, both in classical and modern ballet, who wanted to mix their Northern-American or European experiences with the creative and rhythmical nuances of Afro-Caribbean dance.

With *The Joker of Seville*, Walcott was able to present the *carnivalisation* of West Indian life, for he displayed the true *spirit* of Caribbean peoples, with their traditions, artistic sensibility and cultural legacies.

²⁵¹ As King recalls: "Walcott's evenings at the Public Library, besides providing publicity for his forthcoming premiere of *Joker*, introduced MacDermot to Trinidad and allowed people to become accustomed to the notion that a white foreigner could write calypsos and other island music for a Trinidad theatre company". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 210.

²⁵² King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 201.

²⁵³ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 211.

In Trinidad the production was compared to *parang*, a particular type of Carnival celebration that is usually held at Christmas²⁵⁴. This is a performance in which a group of people gather together to sing out loud in the street, accompanied by musical instruments. *Parang* resembles *calypso* but it is usually carried out in the countryside or in villages, and is therefore more *rural*. In this sense, Walcott's *Joker* is more *ordinary* and informal than its original Spanish counterpart. As King recalls: "it was staged arena style with seating in bleachers. This allowed the playing arena at various moments to be used as a cock-fight ring, a bullring, and a stick-fight ring"²⁵⁵. These are all Carnival re-enactments of song contests or performers' *battles*, where two or more artists challenge each other in witty and humorous exchanges.

Given these premises, it comes as no surprise that the premieres of the play occurred between the end of November and the beginning of December (1974). The ten inaugural evening performances sold out immediately, and the audience was soon asking for more. Trinidadians were enthusiastically enraptured by Walcott's *Joker*, firstly because they felt that the play embodied a quintessential Caribbean texture and quality, both in its scripts and in the various artistic means presented, and secondly because they could attend a real West Indian event, which detached significantly from Western European and Northern Atlantic theatrical experiences. In this regard, King recalls:

In keeping with the Christmas season, on Sunday 1 December there was a 'Parang' performance which included the serving of breakfast (shark and 'bake' hot rolls, souse, coffee, oranges, and sweetbread) and beer along with songs performed by Pat Flores for an hour before the performance. [...] Because of the bleachers the audience was advised to wear casual clothing and many brought cushions with them²⁵⁶.

King's short description of the production exemplifies the reasons why I believe the play should be considered as one of Walcott's first attempts to decolonise the Caribbean world. Indeed, the play offers innovative features when compared to Western European and Northern Atlantic productions.

²⁵⁴ According to Taylor, *parang* is a custom belonging to Trinidad's Hispanic heritage. "It is the colloquial term for 'parran', the abbreviation of 'parranda', the Spanish word which means a spree, a carousel or a group of more than four people who go out at night singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments". Taylor (1977), *Parang of Trinidad*, pp. 8.

²⁵⁵ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 211.

²⁵⁶ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 212.

Firstly, the prologue functions as *theatre within theatre*, as it presents a company of actors, led by Rafael, “the village elder” (7), who gather during “the eve of All Souls [...] / to [re-create] / a legend that cannot grow old” (8). This is a common theme in Walcott’s productions, since the strategy of the re-enactment allows him to use the same actors to play different characters, and also to provide personal views on the original source of the performance.

The play is set “on a Caribbean estate” (7), therefore Rafael directly addresses his (former) European masters, wondering whether *their* literary heroes are entitled to appear in a West Indian re-writing of the myth of Don Juan. This ironic request hints at the history of colonisation, and also at how the Western myth has indirectly – or voluntarily – influenced the Caribbean wor(l)d:

RAFAEL

[...] You New Andalusian estates,
Valencia, moonlight Aranquez,
whose oceans of sugar cane thresh
in the night wind, bring him across
the ocean, with salt, real flesh
as man, to live his loves over.

(*Kneels*)

Earth, who holds him like a lover,
release him to us for one night,
(*Don Juan appears, the villagers stir into life*)
that, with candles like fireflies on
this night of his resurrection,
we stickmen can challenge our champion,
the greatest stickman: Don Juan!
(8)

Rafael’s first lines are clear examples of Walcott’s remoulding of the Western *canon*, and Tirso de Molina’s *Joker* in particular. First, Walcott suggests that his protagonists will travel from one shore of the Atlantic to the other; second, he gives Don Juan a West Indian mask or disguise, as he calls him “the greatest stickman” (8), which is a term to identify a spokesman or spoken word artist in Caribbean Carnival; third, Walcott introduces traditional Antillean folklore, as the play is set in Trinidad on the eve of All Soul’s Day.

In short, Walcott introduces and simultaneously substantiates a *decolonisation* of his Caribbean wor(l)d, for he breaks up, or re-moulds, the epistemic borders in order to

intertwine the voices and customs of his peoples in his theatrical space, without forgetting their hybrid cultural archive and what they have experienced across history.

Reading a text such as Walcott's *The Joker of Seville* is a challenge because various, mostly *unpredictable* points of view must be taken into consideration. The complexity of the performance is furthered by Walcott's insertion of Caribbean folklore and specific artistic means. In light of this perspective, in the first part of the analysis I will summarise what I believe are the key rewritings of the characters from *Joker*. Firstly, I will present the figure of Don Juan, as, in a sense, he represents Walcott's *double* and, secondly, I will describe his relationship with the Caribbean female world. In the second part, I will briefly address Walcott's decolonial standpoints, and conclude with a short analysis of his use of artistic means within the performance. The last paragraph will explore one of the play's most emblematic songs, so as to demonstrate that, aside from literary devices, critics are also called on to investigate the power of Walcott's creative, highly artistic imagination.

2.3.1 A Caribbean re-writing of Don Juan

Don Juan Tenorio is one of the most puzzling characters in Walcott's entire production. Don Juan is the joker of Seville and therefore substantiates the title of the play: he plays tricks, jokes and escapes any kind of imposed *role*, thus denying fixed representations or identity contours. In Walcott's version, Don Juan comes to life because of Rafael's appeal. The trickster needs to revive his story of rebellion to teach the Caribbean communities a lesson. In this sense, Don Juan plays a double role. While, on the one side, he epitomises the stereotype of what Walcott believes to be a *true* West Indian *man*, that is to say an energetic, vigorous and uncontrollable seducer and teaser; on the other, he represents an ideal not to be followed, for he discards and does not believe in the power of relationships and *partnerships*, even if most of his encounters are based on respect, care and love.

I believe that through Juan's complex portrayal, Walcott provides both a model and an anti-hero par excellence. In light of the political instability in the Caribbean regions around the 1970s, it could be argued that Walcott's intent was to drive his communities to behave in a similar way to the Joker. Don Juan is not afraid of going

against the imposed, established order or the neo-colonial matrix of power. He challenges and destabilises social norms and rules, thus embracing a renewed and challenging sense of freedom. In this sense, Juan's story is proactive and inspirational. At the same time, though, Walcott demonstrates how Juan's liberty and extreme individualism, if not selfishness, does not pay off in the long run. The Joker is destined to fail because he is blinded by his own eagerness and unreachable desire to get what he longs for. Therefore, the act of rebelling and defying the constructed *order* may be counterbalanced by community and *partnership* values, which deny conflictual and tyrannical behaviours or viewpoints.

Don Juan seems not to care about the consequences of his actions. The people around him are left to make amends for his subvertive deeds. At the beginning of the play, he tricks Isabella, Duchess of Naples, making her believe he is the knight Octavio, her lover. Isabella is sent to a "convent / of barefoot nuns" (20), while Juan, with the help of his uncle Don Pedro, is able to leave Naples unscathed. On board a slave ship, together with his slave assistant Catalinion, he reaches the shores of the New World. Here, he meets Tisbea, a "fishergirl of mixed blood" (34). In the same way as Tirso's female protagonist, Walcott's Tisbea cannot resist Juan's charm and courtship. Nevertheless, when the fishergirl asks Juan to marry her, he reveals his true nature as a trickster and soon mistreats her. Tisbea runs away and drowns herself, while Juan comes to the misogynist conclusion that "Old World, New World. They're all one!" (48).

Following Tirso's original, Walcott reaches the Spanish court. Having heard about Juan's tricks, the King of Castille calls off the marriage he had arranged between Juan and Donna Ana, Don Gonzalo's daughter. The Joker will be exiled in Lebrija, while Donna Ana will marry Octavio.

In reality, Donna Ana loves the marquis De Mota, one of Juan's old friends. When De Mota and Juan meet by chance (after the latter has returned from the New World), they start discussing their past adventures. De Mota reveals to Juan that he has changed his attitude towards women because he has fallen deeply in love with Donna Ana.

This revelation pushes Juan to trick Donna Ana, firstly because he wants to demonstrate to his friend De Mota that Ana is "another just as true as her" (78), and secondly because he wants to destabilise the King of Castille's will, i.e. that Juan is to marry Isabella. In an attempt to save his daughter's honour, Don Gonzalo decides to fight

Don Juan. Nevertheless, the old knight is wounded and soon dies. De Mota is eventually persuaded to change his opinion when he discovers that Ana was already promised to the trickster. Don Juan is able to flee again from Seville, thus escaping the chaos he has caused.

Act II begins with another joke. Don Juan bursts into the wedding of Aminta and Batricio, two humble peasants who are celebrating their union. Catalinon persuades his master to stop, but Juan wants to win over Aminta. He tricks Batricio by making him jealous of his wife, who does not reject Don Juan's attentions, and by pretending to have known her before their relationship. Batricio believes him and asks the Joker to give Aminta his wedding ring back. When Juan presents himself at their wedding bed, Aminta is shocked by Batricio's behaviour, but soon accepts the Joker as a replacement, who in turn promises to name her duchess. After spending the night with her, Juan runs away and decides to return to Seville. Here, he sees that a statue of Don Gonzalo has been erected in the square to celebrate his honour and devotion as a valorous knight. The Joker ironically invites the statue to dine with him inside the cathedral, where he decides to hide. Unexpectedly, the statue accepts the invitation and Don Gonzalo, in the form of statue, takes the chance to discuss the Joker's deeds with him, as well as the many sufferings he has caused. At the end of the play, Don Gonzalo drags Don Juan to hell, for his sins are by now too dishonourable to be forgiven or forgotten.

From this short sequence of adventures, it may be said that Juan is a greedy and self-centred dominator misogynist character. Indeed, he does not hesitate to debunk the allegedly *just* chivalric code. At the same time, Juan is the only character in the play who is not afraid to criticise and call into question the designated order or modernity/coloniality structure of power. His actions are driven also by an instinctive, intuitive energy. Juan does not believe in religion or in marriage, or indeed in any other imposed representational constructs his compatriots want to chain him to.

One of Juan's most sincere and revelatory moments occurs when he confronts his father, Don Diego. The latter questions his son's behaviour, being himself one of the closest and fairest counsellors to the King of Castille. Don Diego is ashamed of him and considers the King's decision to exile Juan to Lebrija most appropriate: "There / I pray its parched desolation / will turn your ecstasy to prayer, / your joy to holy isolation" (67). Juan soon tones down Don Diego's enthusiasm. He explains that he does not understand

why he would agree with the others, when in reality everyone is like him: “I am their image, / [...] They smile, I smile. They rage, I rage. / I feel nothing” (66).

When Don Diego asks the Joker to think about his mother, who passed away when he was a child, Juan replies that he is sure that she would not have condemned him. Hearing this answer, Don Diego slaps him, because he feels that Juan has lost his reason, honour and sensibility. Some critics read this episode in Freudian terms, suggesting that Don Juan misbehaves with women because he is searching for the image of his mother, as a replacement for his premature loss. I do not agree with this interpretation as I believe that both Tirso and Walcott have shaped their hero according to a principle of renewal in the cycle of destabilisation-deconstruction-rehabilitation. In this sense, Don Juan represents a spiralling force that has the power to challenge the inevitable course of the presumed linearity of life, and to propose a new unpredictable narrative, which draws on the chaos and mutability of reality.

In this regard, Don Juan blurs the definition of the Joker as a character and as a playing card. This last suggestion is not arbitrary but responds to the cast of Walcott’s play itself. Amongst the protagonists of the play, Rafael also introduces a pack of cards in the prologue:

RAFAEL

(Sings)

*Now of all the cards in the pack,
Ace, King, Queen, Joker, and Jack,
of all the royal cards in the pack,
Ace, King, Queen, Joker, and Jack,
The Ace is the dead man, of course,
but the Joker is really the boss;
he can change to elation each grave situation,
sans humanité!*

(9)

The cards are in reality Rafael’s actors and their aim is to reinforce Walcott’s *theatre within theatre* strategy. When they meet Don Juan, after he has returned from the New World, they start rehearsing their piece of theatre. As soon as he sees the troupe, Juan gets annoyed because, as he explains to Catalinion, “I hate actors! Because they refuse / to accept the reality / they live in!” (53). Juan is particularly attracted to Jack, “who is dressed like a girl” (53), and soon asks Rafael whether Jack is a boy or a girl.

Rafael replies that the card represents “Betrayed Love” (53). Juan is unable to accept that he must stand before an *undermined* or undefined character and prompts Jack to sing or kill himself/herself. Jack disappears on the pretext of finding an instrument for his/her acting. Soon though, the Ace of Death announces that “the boy has gone” (55), thus increasing Juan’s doubt as to the identity of the card. The episode ends with Rafael singing out loud:

RAFAEL

[...] (*Sings*)

In Sevilla, they give you the honor

of calling you Don Juan, the Joker,

and I call you too, El Burlador,

But for me, now, that means the butcher.

One day you will be the butcher no more,

one day you will be the butcher no more.

(56)

I take the episode to highlight Juan’s blurred or *divided* personality. He is not afraid of the Ace of Death or the Queen of Hearts as they are easy to distinguish and recognise; he is instead puzzled and bothered by Jack, because he rejects fixed roles or representations. In reality, I believe that in this case Juan is afraid of his own *shadow* because Jack is very similar to the Joker, as they are both a disguised representation hardly identifiable as a man or woman (especially if they are thought of as cards). In short, I assume that Juan’s denial of this hybrid, fluid character may be interpreted as a self-conscious denial of his own figure and behaviour. It is in this sense that I read Rafael’s last song as a warning. The old actor anticipates that Juan will be a victim of his own self-destructing attitude, which will provide in turn a model for accepting and opening up towards *other* unexpected options and views.

Despite efforts to give meaning to his role, Juan stands as one of the most powerful decolonial examples in Walcott’s play. Because of his continuous shifts in perspective, location and outlook, he escapes any type of constraining border and, in this sense, resembles Jack in his representation as a card. Don Juan is therefore a magician, a trickster and a fool²⁵⁷. He epitomises the broader Caribbean temperament, or *Caribbeaning* par

²⁵⁷ In an insightful study on Jung and tarots, Sallie Nichols argues: “The fool [...] expresses the spirit of play, footloose and fancy-free with boundless energy, wandering restlessly about the universe with no specific goal. [...] The Fool and the Magician are both at home in the transcendental world. The Fool dances about in it like an unconscious child; the Magician journeys through it as a seasoned traveler. Each is related

excellence, to use an expression coined by Van Haesendonck (see Chapter 1, pp.). In an interesting interview on the role and mythology of the trickster, Joseph Campbell has argued:

There is this [...] figure in American Indian myth that represents the power of the dynamic of the total psyche to overthrow programs. [...] This is called the trickster. It is a very important figure in American Indian mythologies. In the east, in the forest lands of the Northeast and Southeast, it is the great hare, a rabbit. When you go west the Mississippi, in the Plain Lands, it is coyote. You get up in the North-West coast and it is raven. These are smart, clever birds and animals. [...] The trickster hero [...] is both a kind of devil, and fool, and the creator of the world. He comes in as an upsetting factor; he breaks through; he even breaks through the notion of what a deity ought to be [...]²⁵⁸.

Read from Campbell's perspective, Don Juan may represent the mythical figure of the trickster in which good and evil, and life and death merge and coexist without one prevailing over the other. This is precisely how Walcott depicts Don Juan. Despite his attempt to positively destabilise the modernity/coloniality order, Juan is also capable of hurting, killing and controlling people at his own will. This is particularly evident through Walcott's depiction of his assistant/slave Catalinion. Indeed, the latter may be interpreted at times as Juan's positive *double*, and also as one of the most powerful representatives of subjugated individuals. When Tisbea's friends believe him to be "a runaway slave" (44), Catalinion replies:

CATALINION

I was a Moor. Before this death,
it was conversion or the grave;
I was seized by your Christian faith.
[...]
After a battle, as the sun
went down, I walked among the dead
[...] my master crept up with his knife
and christianized me with the threat
that I should serve him all his life.
I'm paying off that little debt.
(45-46)

to the Trickster archetype, but in different ways. [...] The Fool plays tricks on us; The Magician arranges demonstrations for us". Nichols (1980), *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*, pp. 45-46.

²⁵⁸ Campbell (1987), *Mythology of the Trickster*. YouTube. [my transcription]. "This video is a brief excerpt from interviews filmed with Joseph Campbell shortly before his death in 1987, previously unreleased by the Joseph Campbell Foundation - <http://www.jcf.org>". Please click on the following link to view the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM10AvJ3bsM> (consulted on 10/10/2020).

Catalinion becomes one of the denouncing voices of the colonial matrix of power. As I will discuss later, he is not afraid to speak the truth and unveil the stratagems at the heart of the modernity/coloniality rhetoric of domination. When, at the end of the play Don Juan dies, Catalinion is free:

CATALINION

Joker, you have played your last joke.
[...] Nobody would believe that you,
Joker, were tricked by a statue.
Smile, that I served you with honor
till honor freed me. I'm gone, sir.
(148)

Not all the other characters in the play are as lucky as Catalinion. Tisbea's suitor, the fisherman Anfriso, tries to kill Juan, which leads to his own death. As I will discuss in the following paragraph, amongst the women that Juan tricks, only Isabella acknowledges the positive and liberating sense of freedom that the Joker brought to their lives. Despite his mockery, Don Juan allows the female protagonists to ponder their condition and constraints, thus showing how the world is ruled by an unjust and prevailing male order.

In this regard, I also believe that it is the male world order that Juan is mocking and destabilising the most. Even though Octavio and De Mota regain their honour, as the King of Castille decides that "Donna Ana to her Marquis. / Octavio to Isabel" (149), it is only after Juan's death that the old dominator *order* can finally be re-established or rebuilt.

In this sense, the Joker's behaviour and deeds serve as a pretext to dig into the characters' personalities, fears, sense of justice, and acceptance or denial of social and cultural stereotypes and structures. As Marilyn Jones suggests: "Juan uses his position, but he is also a rebel from his class who recognizes the injustices of his time"²⁵⁹.

Juan is a true decolonial hero, because he runs against tradition, calling everything into question and embracing anti-establishment positions and points of view. In this

²⁵⁹ Jones in King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 213.

regard, he epitomises the different colours and masks of the Antillean archipelago, especially because of his unstable and schizophrenic ways of living and acting²⁶⁰.

Juan does not believe in religion or socio-cultural constructs. He wants to follow his desires and live without constraints and responsibilities. At times, he is lascivious and lecherous; he does not feel ashamed of it for his goal is to bring to the fore human vulnerability and weaknesses.

To understand the Joker's personality, it is important to focus on the way he tricks his friend marquis De Mota. After having recalled their youthful years with irony and joy, De Mota explains to Juan that he now feels changed because his love for Ana is governed by a higher spiritual force rather than corporeal or physical attraction. The trickster does not believe him and thus decides to teach him a lesson. After sleeping with Ana, the Joker asks De Mota: "Tell me, was her soul violated? / And tell me, don't you know it now / that she loves you, in soul and body?" (80). In this way, Juan achieves his goals, as he discredits social conventions and idyllic images of love and, at the same time, destabilises his friend's beliefs.

Towards the end of the play Juan explains to Octavio that during his life journey he has followed and "served [his] nature" (138). Octavio replies with an oversimplified dichotomic worldview, stating that:

OCTAVIO

Nature produce the scorpion
as well as the rose; that doesn't mean
that I should nestle a scorpion
in my shirt. There are vicious men
and noble; there's a difference
between majesty and vermin.
(138-139)

If read through the lens of the Western dominator paradigm, Octavio's perspective is accurate because the modernity/coloniality matrix of power pushed its subjects to make a distinction between symbols that it considered positive and negative. By way of example, according to Catholic religion the serpent is a negative sign because it is

²⁶⁰ According to Ismond: "Juan, although a vibrant personality in the play, is more of an animated force than a character, and action is realized in ritual modes. The plot thus moves through a series of major musical sequences which present what are essentially moments of spiritual confrontation and recognition. They are enacted in powerful orchestrations of choral and physical performance". Ismond (1985), Walcott's Later Drama: From 'Joker' to 'Remembrance', *Ariel*, 16, 3, pp. 90.

associated with sensual desire and lust. This denies other interpretations of the sacred power of this animal. Indeed, in some aboriginal and ancient cultures, serpents are venerated because they represent transformation and regeneration²⁶¹. It is precisely from this *Other* perspective that Juan's reply can be interpreted:

JUAN

Vermin? No. I remain a Prince
of Spain, but I can laugh because
your kind of mildewed, moldering
chivalry suits a place like this.
Which is God's tomb, not mine.
(139)

Juan does not only discredit the Catholic religion but implies that Octavio's interpretation of the symbols and images of life is limited, as it responds to one truth or system of power, which he is unconsciously sustaining and promoting. Through his witty and ironic use of language, Juan degrades the chivalrous world and belief system in which he lives, instead praising a rewriting of the imposed roles, and accepting *Other* morals as ways of thinking and acting *differently* in the world.

In short, the Joker calls into question homologising views, thus demonstrating how one should be always driven by a quest for new life alternatives, paths and challenges. This particular type of thinking also represents Juan's ruin and debacle. Driven by an uncontrolled and selfish sense of freedom, he ends up alone and despised by everyone. This is Juan's limit, for he is conscious of being a cold-blooded individual, without affection and empathy for others. As King suggests:

Don Juan liberates others from the social order by his violation of it, but he destroys those who do not use their freedom. He himself, however, is destroyed by an inability to love, to care for, and to give to others. His freedom is negative, rebellion, rather than creative. While asserting an existentialist freedom he does not know what to do with it and finds life empty²⁶².

This is particularly evident in Juan's last encounter with Isabella before his death. After sustaining her belief in the positive value of the Joker's tricks for the emancipation of women and their leadership, she decides to question Don Juan alone. This is a contested

²⁶¹ On this subject, please see: Campbell ([1959] 1992), *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology. Volume I*. Penguin: London.

²⁶² King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 324.

exchange with other female characters mocked by Juan, who disagree with Isabella's belief in the positive sides of his misbehaviour as regards their emancipation. Isabella asks him only one question:

ISABELLA

I have no hope of happiness
on this earth without you. All I'm
asking is if you can love. Yes
or no. 'No' will not change my love,
but I'm torn by my need to know.

JUAN

I cannot answer. Not from pride.

ISABELLA

And I expected nothing less.
And I am not dissatisfied [...].
(136-137)

Juan's response goes against the principle of partnership and human nature in general. Human beings are genetically linked in relationships that they mostly forget or pretend to forget. It is not by chance that when we when we do something for someone else or with someone else, we feel good and satisfied. Humans need to feel the power of partnership, because they cannot afford to live, act and survive alone. Moreover, it is the power of compassion and love that helps us to overcome difficult periods or situations. In this respect, freedom relies on accepting the other and promoting collective and supportive actions, for children, elderly people, people in need and so on. In his behaviour, Juan is the opposite of this. He is cynical and sceptical, even though it is precisely this attitude and dominator-like approach that will determine his ruin.

Through the character of Don Juan, Walcott provides a powerful message that freedom should not be dictated by repressing the Self, or a blinding belief in individualism. On the contrary, it should be a long process of acknowledgement to understand the power of sharing and living with others. Riane Eisler's biocultural transformation and *partnership* process works precisely in this sense, meaning that it tries to demonstrate how selfish attitudes and approaches are capable of leading to negation, lack of trust and loneliness.

2.3.2 Decolonising *Joker's* female world, voices reclaiming freedom

In addition to re-writing the character of Don Juan, it is in the representation of the female wor(l)d that Walcott applies a radical shift with respect to Tirso de Molina's play. While Tirso's women are mostly silent and even when they speak show great respect for (if not devotion to) their male counterparts, in Walcott's adaptation they are all bearers of thought provoking decolonial messages and partnership standpoints.

Walcott follows the original plot and adventures for the women in his adaptation; nevertheless, he depicts not only their weaknesses but also their staunch refusal of the patriarchal dominator male-governed system in which they live. As occurs in Tirso's version, Walcott presents both higher and lower class female protagonists. However, in a rather destabilising way, he also shows how their misfortunes with Juan become a sort of redeeming or acknowledging passage, from youth to adulthood, and also from innocence to self-conscious growth.

The first woman to fall into Juan's arms is Isabella. She is tricked into sleeping with Juan, who is disguised as Octavio. Unlike in Tirso's original, Isabella does not remain silent when her father, the King of Naples, discusses her destiny and pretends not to see her. The King maintains it is her fault if she lost her virginity and dignity with Juan, mostly because she is a woman. In contrast with Tirso's Isabella, in the Walcottian version, she does not accept this misogynist dominator stereotype and replies:

A woman, yes! That was my wrong,
born to this privilege of debasement,
ordered to keep a civil tongue
locked in its civil ivory casement.
When you are pious, she's a wife,
and, when appropriate, a whore.
Now that you've simplified my life
to silence, I will speak no more.
(19)

At the beginning of the play, Isabella chooses silence and accepts to be "robed as a nun" (20). It is only towards the middle of the performance that she rebels against the dominator patriarchal system of power and proclaims that Juan's mockery has in reality freed her. When she later meets with Donna Ana, she recalls with joy the epiphanic self-conscious phase that brought her to this new awareness:

I went in silence to my cell,
 stripped of bodily desires,
 prepared, as Sister Isabel,
 to be lost among novices
 [...] Then came those nights my prayers would grow
 into a monstrous wind that hissed
 obscenities, whipping me round
 and round, until in that tempest
 I fell from a whirlwind.
 [...] and I passed
 into that after-storm-serene
 light that makes the heaving tempest
 more beautiful from its breakdown.
 I sailed into a calm of love
 deeper than man's. My heart was drawn
 into the holiness of life.
 (112-113)

Isabel's traumatic experience is slowly transformed into a chance to better understand herself. Without fear, she embraces the power of the feminine, that is to say a hidden strength and comprehension she did not have of herself. This represents an important detour from Tirso's narrative. Walcott decolonises his female protagonists' *inner* world. From the outside, they may not get the opportunity to benefit from full emancipation and freedom, but at least they have started a process that denies their representation as merely instruments in the hands of the patriarchal, male-oriented worldview and system of domination.

Donna Ana De Ulloa is less emotional and sensitive than Isabella. After Juan tricks her, pretending to be De Mota, Ana claims her revenge and shouts out loud "Kill him! Kill..." (76). However, when Juan takes De Mota's place, Ana immediately starts doubting his identity because of his hoarse voice and appearance, but eventually allows him in to spend the night with her.

Despite her strength and bold attitude, Ana is a victim of and prey to the modernity/coloniality system of power. Indeed, at the beginning of the play, it is her father, Don Gonzalo De Ulloa, who introduces her to the King of Castille:

Seville is rich only if she,
 like my own daughter, still obeys
 God, King, and Father
 [...] For her to lose her faith,
 her dowry of virginity,

to venal pride is to court death.
(28)

Like her father, the King also treats Ana like a commodity or a good to be traded in order to maintain good relations at court and within his male-oriented system of domination.

There's a fine, vigorous chevalier
to whom I give your daughter's hand:
a young and supple-tempered blade,
Juan Tenorio, Diego's son,
now on that rigorous crusade
in our dominions overseas
which God our Heavenly Father's given,
to bring the New World to our knees
for a new earth, and a new heaven,
to kiss this cross, the sword of Christ.
(29)

Ironically, Juan spoils the King's plans, thus shaking up everyone's destiny in order to show that life cannot be predetermined, and that alternative paths are unexpectedly possible. In this regard, Walcott agrees with Tirso's choice to transfer Juan to a different background and social context. Apart from mocking the self-righteous, snobbish and aristocratic milieu of Isabella and Donna Ana, Juan also beguiles lower-class women, so as to show that their life and way of living is no different from that at the court.

While Aminta is a poor peasant girl, Tisbea is a Creole and naïf fishergirl, completely mesmerised by the rhetoric of the colonial matrix of power. In this sense, I believe that Tirso and Walcott's female protagonists epitomise a sort of chiasmic structure that wants to portray four different perspectives, which are in reality connected to one another in a circle of possibilities. Indeed, Aminta reflects Ana, and Tisbea recalls Isabel. This strategy is used to show different attitudes and reactions to the same condition, which is that of being tricked by the Joker. This framework of stories is also vivifying, bringing into play allegedly different and yet recurrent occurrences.

Aminta, like Ana, is confident, strong and courageous. Readers and spectators meet her in Act II when she marries Batricio. The peasant couple lives in the Spanish

countryside. Their manners and language are coarse and vulgar; they stand for the *ordinary* Caribbean people, and, in this sense, Juan explains to Catalinion:

JUAN

Look at them! Simple, country folk,
[...] but give them a chance, and they'll juck
your eyes out, just like the bourgeois.
There is no different from the court.
Look at Batricio, drunk as hell
[...] My freedom isn't for the weak
(91-92)

Don Juan decides he wants to win over Aminta. He starts flattering her, while Catalinion entertains the groom playing cards. At the banquet, Juan promises Aminta to name her "duchess" (97). As in Juan's courtship of Ana, Aminta's behaviour is ambiguous. She does not denounce Juan's seductions nor his invitation to dance, while the Queen of Hearts performs a loving song. Eventually, Juan convinces Batricio to tear up their wedding contract. He convinces him that even though he has "bought her" (102), she was already "slightly used" (102) a year earlier, when "I passed here, I met Aminta / I was a prince, and she..." (103). Batricio believes the Joker and asks him to give Aminta his wedding ring back. When Juan reaches the bride, Aminta is at first reluctant. Nevertheless, when she hears that Batricio has escaped, she argues:

AMINTA

Then let my husband's will be done,
because God has blest me. I'm still
a bride, but more: a royal one.
(109)

After sleeping with her, Juan leaves and returns to Seville. Nevertheless, Aminta does not hesitate to appear at the royal court to reclaim her new position. In this sense, she is the opposite of Ana, who instead pretended not to understand the course of events to save her face. Right after learning from Isabella and Ana that she has been mocked as much as any other woman, for Juan promised to marry each one of them, Aminta replies:

AMINTA

Laugh! If I were differently dressed,
you'd see a different spectacle!
I'd have ripped this whole damned palace

to shreds. But that's too comical!
(116)

Aminta is the only woman who reacts with irony to what has happened. She deliberately takes life as it comes and does not regret Juan's behaviour, only the fact that she has "spent [money] to get here" (118). At this crucial moment of confrontation among women, Isabella has the last word as she says:

ISABELLA

Listen, Ana, don't you see
that what he's shown the lot of us
is that our lust for propriety
as wives is just as lecherous
as his? Our protestations
all marketable chastity?
Such tireless dedication's
almost holy! He set us free!
(117)

The trio takes leave with different opinions, even though they all know that Isabella has spoken the truth for all of them²⁶³. The only female protagonist who represents an exception in the play and does not benefit from the redemptive journey of her fellow peers is Tisbea. This comes as no surprise as Walcott assigns a specific decolonial role to her character. In contrast to Tirso's original protagonist, Tisbea is the symbol of the New World, the emblem of the Caribbean peoples and creole identities in a broader sense. When Juan and Catalinon are shipwrecked on the "coast of New Tarragon" (35), she introduces herself by saying:

TISBEA

O what is more refreshing than this image of a sun-browned
fishergirl with literary pretensions, descending through the
golden almond leaves, past the lecherous, gummed eyes of
old trees, bulging with amazement like those who watched
Helen walk the battlements of Troy, even though books are
hard to come by, and for me, Tisbea, to be that image? [...]

²⁶³ In this respect, I agree with King when he argues: "For some viewers or readers there is the problem that freedom is portrayed in terms of a male seducing a woman, but, many women see Isabella as a feminist given the choice between feeling violated or free. She is the one in the play who most fully develops, and gains control of her life. Like much of Walcott's work *Joker* is politically liberal; individual freedom is what counts. Repression is bad. It is clear from West Indian reviews on several of the islands that the *Joker* was seen as the voice of the people against oppression". King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 324.

Yet if I were Nausicaä
 and there, sprawled on the crumpled satin of the beach at
 Tarragon... oh, that's too good, too good, I must remember
 it [...] I am not Nausicaä, that shell-
 gathering princess, I am humble Tisbea on the wrecked coast
 of New Tarragon and I am simply going to walk along this
 beach singing my innocent song [...]
 (34-35)

While Tirso de Molina's Tisbea is a highly responsive and proud Spanish fishergirl, Walcott's *double* is rather naïf and innocent, as she believes she is a literate woman and draws parallels between herself and several mythical heroines from Western European Aegean literature²⁶⁴. In this sense, Tisbea makes reference to Helen of Troy and Nausicaä, just as if she wanted to revive or re-experience their stories. This should come as no surprise given that Walcott's production is filled with characters who mimic or try to rewrite classical Western literature. Through his works, and especially *Omeros*, Walcott has achieved his goal of providing the New World with its heroes and heroines, who are different from their Western counterparts because they represent the peculiarities and characteristics of his *Creole* compatriots: *ordinary* heterogeneous identities who recall the colours and vitality of the ancient Aegean civilisations.

On this premise, Tisbea becomes one of Walcott's first examples of decolonial heroines: a character that shows how the rhetoric of the colonial matrix of power worked on enslaved subjects. We are told that she gained a vague colonial education and Walcott stresses how she read few books (which were hard to find in the New World) and also how she assimilated the wrong idea of being *free*. The reference to Nausicaä is also not arbitrary in that, for critics and scholars alike, Nausicaä, the girl who helped and cured Ulysses during his voyages, is one of the first literary examples of unrequited love, just like Tisbea, who is mocked and then rejected by Juan.

To conquer the fishergirl's heart, Juan recalls that "shipwrecked Ulysses [...] was not luckier than when through salt-seared eyes he saw dawn-nimbused Nausicaä" (36). Simply because Juan knows "Homer", Tisbea feels attracted to him. The trickster also asks her if he can "borrow [her] basket to contain [his] immodesty" (37), pretending to

²⁶⁴ In analysing the character of Walcott's Tisbea, Hamner argues: "His Tisbea is still inordinately proud of her classical education, but in her excitement, her pretentious language occasionally slips into the local dialect". Hamner (1998), *Jokers' Worlds, Old and New: From Tirso to Walcott*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 44, 3/4, pp. 153.

be shy and respectful in front of her. Juan flatters Tisbea by saying that he has never heard such an eloquent speech from where he is from, even if the girl speaks Creole and not *standard* English:

TISBEA

You speak well, sir, for someone who's just been shipwrecked.
I had no idea that you were overhearing what I was saying to
myself. But you need succor like Narcissus, and I stand here
talking
(37)

Through Tisbea's character, Walcott is able to show the shameful Western European exploitation of the New World. Indeed, through flattery and promises, the trickster slowly gets closer to his prey. Eventually, he compares Tisbea to Eve and himself to the serpent who tricked her in the Garden of Eden. This reference to Catholicism and its sacred texts is again not arbitrary. As I will explain in the following paragraph, it stands as further reinforcement of the idea of the modernity/coloniality rhetoric of domination, in which religion was a powerful ally.

This episode involving Tisbea differs from the rest of the play not only because it is set in the New World but also because it is the only passage written in prose. As King has aptly argued:

The Tisbea section is written in prose because prose is rational, which suggests that Old World ways of thinking were brought to the New World. Tisbea, for all her innocence, is also pretentious; reading has gone to her head. Making a parallel between Juan's shipwreck and Ulysses, she sees herself as Homer's Nausicaä and this makes her vulnerable²⁶⁵.

As is the case with other female protagonists, Tisbea eventually falls into Juan's arms. After being sure of having found the love of her life, Tisbea asks Juan to marry her. When the trickster reveals his joke and calls her "weak" (48), she cannot bear the truth and finally drowns herself, thus re-evoking the same destiny of her brave and courageous Spanish *double*.

The *Joker of Seville*'s women are amongst the most powerful rewritings in Walcott's play. Despite their lower status and destiny, Walcott's female characters stand as a more hopeful and refreshing version of their Western European models. They

²⁶⁵ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 215.

epitomise the first trigger for a new and powerful world order, a caring partnership worldview that values their presence and does not deny them a voice nor a choice to be free.

2.3.3 Reworking modernity/coloniality issues in *Joker*

Apart from rewriting Tirso's protagonists, in *The Joker of Seville* Walcott presents his proactive way of responding to issues at the core of the modernity/coloniality matrix of power.

Despite Western European and Northern Atlantic critique focusing on how Tirso's masterpiece bestows particular attention on the problem of morals and ethics in religion, Walcott's adaptation clearly debunks Christian faith, as much as the rhetoric behind it. Particularly, Walcott re-evokes episodes from the Garden of Eden, with Eve and the serpent as symbols of innocence and wrongdoing. Juan talks about biblical episodes not only with Tisbea²⁶⁶ but also with other characters in the play. When De Mota praises God for having allowed him to meet Donna Ana, the trickster replies:

JUAN
God? The New World that I saw
wasn't Eden. Eden was dead,
or worse, it had been converted
to modesty. No Indian goes
naked there; they're all dressed to kill
while the incense-wreathed volcanoes
hallow genocide. Eden was hell.
Men, earth, disemboweled for gold
to crust the Holy Spanish Cross.
[...] those homilies from her Book of Hours
engraved by succubus-ridden
monks, dragons, Castles Perilous,
and the Just City, always hidden
round the next crag, are just as fake
as that Leviathan that was curled
round the horizon; [...]
The mystic Rose, the Quest, the Dragon

²⁶⁶ Knowing that Tisbea is fascinated by literature, Juan recalls the biblical episode in the Garden of Eden by arguing: "Sweetness, I've metaphors I haven't used yet. Oh, Eve of this / new Eden, make me a suit of fig leaves. The serpent stirs. / Do you know the first metaphor of Eden, Tisbea, the serpent? / Do you know the winking one-eyed snake? Oh, let us pray the / serpent (are you a Catholic? good) does not violate this sea- / sprayed paradise (40).

were used to tame and scare us! Tricks!
[...] De Mota, pal, we've been betrayed!
(61-62)

Though Juan's monologue, Walcott is explaining the coercive dynamics at work in the modernity/coloniality system of domination. Not only were the people of the New World tricked and enslaved so as to be exploited and fuel the imperial system of trade that eventually enriched European cities (and the holy Church alike), but Western centres of power also encouraged a utopian image of the Americas that did not correspond to reality. In this sense, Walcott discredits the literary *canon* and, in particular, travel writing of the eighteenth century, which portrayed the New World as a territory or *terra nullius* to be conquered and dominated, and in which indigenous communities were to be subordinated and converted in the name of God.

As I have already pointed out, Walcott's Juan does not believe in God, nor in religion. In response to Tirso's original protagonist, he seizes the opportunity to denounce Christian conventions and systems of power, which were, in reality, a means to control. As an example, when Isabella is forced to become a nun for having slept with Juan, he argues:

JUAN
Now I've seen what they do to her!
I knew they'd punish her with God.
She marries Him and save their honor.
(22)

Juan is a spirited and lively character. In a sense, he can behave freely because the modernity/coloniality system of power allows him to do so. He is rich and belongs to the higher hierarchical ranks of the patriarchal order. In contrast, he tries to mock and discredit that same system which safeguards his position. Juan is a free individual and bestows great importance on individual choice. When Tisbea falls in love with him and asks the Joker to marry her, he replies:

JUAN
God, you beasts must love your cages!
Marry a man, Tisbea; I am a
force, a principle, the rest
are husbands, fathers, sons; I'm none

of these.
(48)

Apart from discrediting Western Catholic religion, Walcott's *Joker* reflects on the power of colonial *naming* as a form of domination and control. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, this is one of Walcott's poetic standpoints; his aim is to unmask the Western European modernity/coloniality matrix of power.

In tune with the ironic structure of the play, as soon as Juan tricks a new girl, he plays on the idea of being a *nobody*. Generally, he is disguised so that no one can distinguish his real identity²⁶⁷. Walcott's approach, though, assumes another meaning when he contextualises this strategy in the New World. When Juan and Tisbea meet for the first time, they both introduce themselves as *nobody*:

JUAN
I didn't ask your name.
TISBEA
Me? Oh, I ent nobody, sir. Tisbea. A poor fishergirl. [...]
And yours?
JUAN
Nobody. A shipwrecked prince. A poet.
(38-39)

The reader or viewer who is familiar with Walcott's production knows that *nobody*, for Walcott, represents the most appropriate term to designate his fellow compatriots and their *nations* or homelands²⁶⁸. For Walcott, West Indians are not identifiable through Western European and Northern Atlantic designations, for they are *different* and epitomise a new identity. Thus, they exemplify *nobody* within the configurations of the modernity/coloniality matrix of power. This apparent contradiction is in reality a pretext to reflect on the *instability* and unpredictability of *hybrid* Caribbean cultures, traditions and identities. Walcott's Juan replies to Tisbea that he himself, like her, is "nobody", thus accepting that he is included in her *unstable* reality. Moreover, the

²⁶⁷ The strategy of masking recalls Carnival. Disguise is already present from the beginning of the play, when Juan appears as a "crone" (11) to persuade Octavio to give him his cloak. Soon after cheating Isabella Juan explains: "To hide in the open; a skill / I learned from the chameleon" (21).

²⁶⁸ In this regard, the last chapter of this thesis deals with Walcott's poetic manifesto *The Schooner Flight*, a long self-conscious journey in which the Caribbean poet acknowledges his *true* identity: "I'm just a red nigger who love the sea, / I had a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 112.

trickster also replies that he is a prince and a poet, thus demeaning the pretentious stereotypes of canonical Western literature, with its historical heroes and enchanting storytellers.

Juan's schizophrenic reply allows him to draw a parallel between his disguised character and his *double* creator-writer Walcott. In this scene in fact, Don Juan resembles the Caribbean author, because he takes advantage of the innocent and naïf West Indian context to unmask the standpoints of Western European control of the New World.

There are numerous examples of these particular ways of responding to the mechanisms of colonial *naming* in the play. When Anfriso, Tisbea's lover, tries to avenge her suicide by attempting to kill Juan, the Joker asks him: "Who are you?" Anfriso replies, "Nobody. A man" (70), thus showing that he has understood Juan's trick. Nevertheless, he does not succeed in his exploits and dies in a duel. This allows Juan to carry on with his mockery and farce. Indeed, when he takes De Mota's place and meets Ana for the first time, he uses the same strategy again. The girl hears him talking with someone, and believing him to be De Mota, she wonders with whom he was speaking. The Joker replies: "To no one. Nobody. That's his name" (70).

A final yet fundamental decolonial strategy that Walcott employs in *The Joker of Seville* is to create continuous geo-temporal shifts in the locations in which his characters experience their adventures²⁶⁹. This is particularly evident when Catalinion and Juan's travel to the New World where they meet Tisbea and her fellow fishermen, but also in most of the scenes that emphasise a development or sudden twist in the plot. As I have already pointed out, at the beginning of the performance, Rafael symbolically asks Juan to come back to life in order to recount and revive his wrongdoing. The leader of the theatrical group knows that Don Juan is a Western European character and *model* (as is commonly seen in Spanish literature) but he needs him to teach the Caribbean people a lesson, by becoming their anti-hero.

Juan materialises through Rafael's world; nevertheless, he keeps on moving from place to place. First, he is in Naples, courting Isabella; then he flees to the New World, taking passage on a slave ship. After tricking Tisbea, he returns to Seville. Here, he confronts his father and mocks his friend De Mota by sleeping with Ana. He then escapes

²⁶⁹ In this regard, Michel-Rolf Trouillot recalls that in the Caribbean "boundaries are notoriously fuzzy". Trouillot (1992), *The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory*, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22, pp. 19-42.

to the countryside after killing Don Gonzalo and arrives at Batricio and Aminta's wedding. His voyages conclude in Seville, where he invites the statue of Don Gonzalo to dine with him. It is the same statue that later drags him to hell. In this bewildering and yet extraordinary life journey, Juan travels around the world, searching for his true self and also allowing others to discover who they really are. In discussing the compelling task of following the Joker's fictional wanderings, Baugh argues:

If part of the pleasure of the theatrical experience is to be transported to the courtly society of seventeenth-century Seville, a crucial aspect of that pleasure is that we are always aware that we are in a Seville and a Naples that are being *performed* and signified upon by contemporary Trinidad²⁷⁰.

As already stated, the theme of *theatre within theatre* plays a significant part in Walcott's *Joker*. The presence of the pack of cards, the references to familiar Trinidadian places, and the continuous, frenetic code-switching between acting, singing and dancing, allows readers and spectators alike to enjoy a multimodal and multifaceted Caribbean experience which defies Western European theatrical borders.

In tune with the decolonial approach, Walcott's *Joker* abolishes boundaries not only within its representational space but also between the spectators and the actors. The play is in fact thought to have been performed in an arena structure that recalls the performance spaces at Carnival or traditional stick-fight battle camps. As King explains:

The seeming unfused, disorganized movement of the play is like Carnival in which events do not follow a logical chronology, but in which there is a unity of the disparate. You do not need to understand all the words; as in Shakespeare you can follow what happens through the action. As a West Indian he felt no need to work within traditional notions of Don Juan imported from Europe. [...] What he wants is a similar 'exuberance of performance', especially a vulgarity found in the popular theatre of the past that has been lost and refined away in later theatre²⁷¹.

Despite an endless swapping of spaces and locations, Juan does not change his personality and character. Instead, he keeps on tricking the people around him, since he is convinced that he has the right to do so. In this sense, Don Juan is a monotonous protagonist who keeps on re-evoking his own ideas and beliefs in different places, thus epitomising the *repetitive* characterisation of the Antillean archipelago at large. As I

²⁷⁰ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 121-122.

²⁷¹ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 215.

discussed in Chapter 1, taking as an example Benítez-Rojo's approach, the Caribbean space is a continuous, open replica of its own territories that are divided and yet linked by the widening Caribbean Sea. These regions keep on *repeating* their decolonial narratives of struggle and survival, always drawing on their colonial history and folkloric archive.

Walcott's Juan escapes traditional depictions of Western European and Northern Atlantic heroes, for he is not afraid to embrace unpredictability and uncertainty. Thus, Walcott actualises his dis-locations not only in terms of geo-temporal shifts but also within the protagonist's own characterisation.

2.3.4 A West Indian musical: the mixing of theatre, music and dance

In *The Joker of Seville* Walcott starts accomplishing one of his life dreams, bringing together literature and the arts in the same creative and imaginative production²⁷².

As I pointed out in the introduction to this analysis, *Joker*'s theatrical lines follow a precise rhythmical pattern which Walcott derived from Caribbean music and Trinidadian *parang* in particular²⁷³. The play is characterised by songs and moments of solo or chorus chanting in which the protagonists explain their feelings and emotions. Despite commonly acknowledged stereotypes regarding the lyrics and themes of *parang*, I agree with Taylor when he argues:

The songs of *parang* contradict a general concept that the lyrics of popular songs of Trinidad are lewd, unflattering to womankind and lacking in a sense of poetry. The lyrics of *parang* songs do

²⁷² In presenting Walcott's *Joker*, Luigi Sampietro argues: "One always gets the impression that the starting idea he [Walcott] has in mind is of an open-air theatre in which words must be underlined through the actors' gestures or mimes, the sound of instruments or the dynamism of dancers, from all those forms of expression – like the dances of the *batonnier* (or stickfighter), the rhythms of calypso (street poets) or Christmas *parang*, and the costumes of Carnival – which are typical of the Creole society of the West Indies. A theatre in which emotions are public and drama is always explicit as in a duel or a bullfight [my translation]. Sampietro (2006), "Il Don Giovanni di Derek Walcott" in Pertile, Syska-Lamparska & Oldcorn (eds. 2006), *La Scena del Mondo: Studi sul Teatro per Franco Fido*, pp. 318.

²⁷³ In this regard King explains: "For Walcott a vital interest of *Joker* was to create an equivalent to Tirso's rhymes and rhythms in a modern English verse that can be spoken naturally. The pentameter of the calypso gives him a living oral folk tradition of rhymed, vulgar, contemporary pentameter verse which is not available to poets in the United States (except in the blues) and England". King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 215.

not embrace language that debases or ridicules women [...]. Apart from calypsos, no other songs have become so strongly a part of Trinidad²⁷⁴.

As I will later demonstrate, one of the songs in *Joker* that best exemplify this particular type of communal and partnership value is *La Divina Pastora* (The Holy Shepherdess), a song in which Walcott attributes to a lonely Octavio, who understands that justice will eventually admonish Juan for what he has done to his victims, and to women in particular. Aside from this song, many others in the play convey messages of appeasement and reconciliation, as if music represented a way of going beyond reality and rejoicing together in the carnival of life, as much as in the cyclical power of existence. In this respect, before singing *La Divina Pastora*, Octavio declares to his servant Ripio:

OCTAVIO

Things go in cycles, Ripio. Shock
and readiness. Well, the circle
that's the New World brought him right back
to where it started, in Seville.
(121)

The Joker of Seville is an authentic, lively and exuberant musical play, in which episodes of theatrical fiction are constantly interrupted by music, solos or group dances, and even a Carnival parade or *theatre within theatre*, where a pack of cards, led by the wise actor Rafael, are rehearsing their performance. As King recalls:

Rafael, like Walcott, had led a theatre group for fifteen years, and there is a play within the play. *Joker* is about acting, theatre, disguise, role playing. Unlike previous Walcott plays there are not many long speeches, and the speeches are different in manner according to character and situation. Apart from costumes *Joker* does not require much in the way of scenery, props or equipment. The set itself is minimalist, a theatre of poverty, and the text contains much visual description. [...] There is much mime, use of freezes, spectacle, song, and dance, and costumes²⁷⁵.

Joker's music is certainly the most distinctive element of Walcott's production, and most probably what led to its success amongst Caribbean peoples. As I have already pointed out, the music was scored by Galt MacDermot²⁷⁶, with the lyrics and texts written

²⁷⁴ Taylor (1977), *Parang of Trinidad*, pp. 24.

²⁷⁵ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 322.

²⁷⁶ As King recalls: "MacDermot had Canadian, South African, and Caribbean connections. In school in Canada he had had a steel band, he had studied music in Africa, and he was related to Tom Redcam, one of the founders of Jamaican literature. MacDermot led a jazz band, wrote music for films, and his classical

by Walcott himself. Once again, this demonstrates what it meant for Walcott to produce *theatre* in the West Indies, shaping an experience or *praxis* in which the Antillean archipelago could express its own individuality and originality, in response to Western European canonical representations. As Baugh suggests in his detailed anthology of Walcott's works:

The first masterstroke of his [Walcott's] adaptation of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*) is the conceiving of it as a musical. This allowed for the action to be carried by an ebullient variety of Caribbean, largely folk, largely Trinidadian music, memorably scored by Galt MacDermot²⁷⁷.

Given this, it is only natural that, in the play's prologue, the first voices that spectators are able to distinguish are those of a CHORUS singing in Spanish (7). When Don Juan appears, he also pronounces his first lines by singing, thus immediately providing an alternative and challenging detour from his European *double*. In reality, this is a pretext to further reinforce the theme of re-writing and reversal in the performance, for the Joker himself argues:

JUAN
(Sings)
*Sevilla gave me the honor
of calling me Don Juan, the Joker,
and it's true what I do may undo a
woman, but I renew her
and honor her with dishonor.*
(8)

The Joker introduces his character through song, while moving, acting and singing. The same strategy is employed by other characters, who are introduced by Rafael in a festive and colourful mood. The gap with respect to Western European aesthetics and representation is emphasised by Rafael's chant in which he urges "*majestical time, / [to] teach our bodies to move in rhyme*" (9), and also by the way he explains that "*our swords are all sticks and our duels just stickplay, / sans humanité*" (10).

music was frequently performed. He was one of those taking the Broadway musical in new directions, and while his music from *Hair* was top of the pops he wanted the musical, and the cinema, to become a new form for developing towards oratorio. He was a serious composer who retained roots in the 'vulgar' that Walcott thought necessary to his own art, and he had the contacts with big money producers that Walcott needed in the United States". King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 315-316.

²⁷⁷ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 121.

Apart from embracing – once again – Eisler’s *partnership* approach to the power of art and creative imagination as a means to promote comprehension and understanding, and avoid war or conflict, Walcott allows some specific Carnival practices into his performative space. He brings to the fore Trinidadian stick-fighting and chants, which replace “swords and [...] duels” (10). As Peter Mason explains in his study on Carnival culture in Trinidad:

In the early days of slavery almost every plantation in Trinidad had own its *gayelle* or stickfighting ring, where fighters would do battle with their 4-5 foot long sticks of hard poui wood, driven on by the sound of drums and the singing of the early *chantwells*. Much African mystique and spirituality surrounded stickfighting; ‘bois men’ (from the French ‘bois’ for wood) were known to bury their sticks in dead relatives’ graves and to leave them there three or four days until they were infused or ‘mounted’ with their spirit²⁷⁸.

After the abolition of slavery, stickfighting continued beyond the plantations to become part of Carnival celebrations. West Indian communities slowly reinvented it, remoulding the violent and aggressive struggles of the male stickfighters with a more ironic, verbal and performative *battle* between different contestants. This is indeed the way in which *Joker* should be read, as if it were a battle-joke, a competition between different players trying out different options to make fun of each other, and also criticise reality and the *order* of the wor(l)d. In this sense, Don Juan is the *stickfighter* par excellence, for he is not afraid to go against socio-historical conventions and structures throughout the story, even if this eventually leads to his defeat.

Apart from music and folklore, one of the most substantial innovations in Walcott’s *Joker* is the background or scenery against which the performance takes place. Walcott abolishes the traditional frontal perspective of Western theatre and takes the performance into a circular arena. Reducing the distance between the actors and spectators means enhancing the encounters and relationship between the seemingly different parties. In this sense, Walcott takes his audience centre stage, as if they were part of the performance itself. The audience must have felt truly involved in the story and able to identify or even empathise with the characters because of the typical West Indian roles and stereotypes they knew and saw represented on stage. This is a communal and partnership approach that subverts Western-oriented perceptions of theatre. The play was

²⁷⁸ Mason (1998). *Bacchanal! The Carnival Culture of Trinidad*, pp. 148.

a sincere performative event, re-writing a well-known and celebrated narrative of European literature - that of Don Juan - to reflect on contemporary issues and problems.

The abolition of boundaries between spectators and performers, and the way Caribbeans experienced the event, provoked European centres of power, particularly London. In this respect, King explains:

Terry Hands of the Royal Shakespeare Company saw a Sunday performance with the audience eating, drinking, and chatting and said it was the kind of theatre Brecht and Peter Brook wanted to create with actors and audience joined by the 'event'. It was very Trinidadian, so much so that after he left he decided that it could not be duplicated in England. He did not have available such a group of black West Indian actors, singers, and dancers; if he did it was unlikely that there would be a British audience for them of that the audience would understand most of the West Indian cultural allusions²⁷⁹.

The performance does not only use music, dance and folklore specifically linked to the Antillean context, but also imagery, colours and expressions that represent the standpoints of a decolonial perspective or point of view. In this sense, the narrative is filled with images of snakes, spiders and scorpions that are defeated by powerful decolonial symbols. The image of the cobweb is also very much present in the performance, as it reminds us that the protagonists are constantly being tricked and cannot escape from their destiny. The labyrinths of the self are foregrounded by statues and moments of stillness, in which the characters look *inwards* into their own consciousness. Take, for example the reference to the grey weather changing in act I, scene VIII, which pre-announces Don Gonzalo's transformation into a statue. In this uncanny and magical scenario of jokes and artifice, the presence of a pack of cards must also be taken into consideration. These cards remain hard to interpret in the overall meaning of the performance. They perhaps reinforce the Carnival theme or the play's *theatre within theatre*. They may also simply refer to the Joker's gambling with the other protagonists in the play. As King summarises:

There are many symbols and adaptations of symbols as European materials become Caribbean. The sword fight becomes a Trinidadian stick fight; a shipwreck stands for the Middle Passage; the seduction of Tisbea shows the Old World possessing and corrupting the New World; Don Juan is the arch rebel, human libido and desire challenging limits and God, but he might be seen as the West Indian male, macho, dangerous, cunning, enjoying the playing of roles, unattached to society, irresponsible, and ironic²⁸⁰.

²⁷⁹ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 212.

²⁸⁰ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 323.

Another fundamental artistic strategy that Walcott includes in the play is certainly dance. As I have already explained, Walcott collaborated with some of the most important performers and choreographer of his time²⁸¹. Group dances were visible throughout the performance; however, today we can only imagine what they looked like as it would seem that there are no available recordings of the play. Moreover, because of its complex plot and the number of characters involved in the performance, *The Joker of Seville* is a difficult play to put on.

By way of example, from the captions at the end of Act I, scene IV, “the frenzied, revivalist dance, the chorus of FISHERGIRLS” embodied to express the “lament [of] Tisbea’s seduction” (42) can be visualised. Or again, to an even greater extent, at the end of the play, when Walcott calls all the characters back on stage to acknowledge Juan’s departure, the captions suggest: “JUAN is laid on the tomb. The QUEEN OF HEARTS crosses, dancing, to his body, unpins a heart from her corselet, and lays it on his” (150).

As in most of his plays and theatrical texts, Walcott’s directions are precise and accurate. Walcott believed in the power of corporeal embodiments and West Indian performativity. In discussing *Joker*’s extensive use of movements and gestures, King suggests these are used “to get away from long poetic speeches, tell story through action, dance, and song. Walcott felt that words must be supported by gestures. What is lost by the ear can be picked up by the eye through body movement, mime, and dance”²⁸².

These specific characteristics of the play can be more clearly distinguished in the photographs and magazines of those years. The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto in Canada has preserved some of the rarest archives of Walcott’s

²⁸¹ Amongst the numerous dancers Walcott collaborated with, Bruce King recalls in particular Carol La Chapelle and Noble Douglas: “Carol La Chapelle [studied at] the London College of Dance and Drama and simultaneously attended the Dartford College of Education. When she returned to Trinidad in 1973 she joined the Repertoire Dance Theatre as a teacher, choreographer, and dancer. Her idea of dance is similar to Walcott’s notion of theatre and poetry. She wants to take the ‘row, rustic folk dances... and combine them with... foreign elements or ballet’ to create a ‘national dance style’. [...] Although Douglas and La Chapelle have both studied classic and modern dance, they are physically opposites. Douglas has broad hips and works more in the ‘black’ tradition of strong pelvic movements. La Chapelle has the long, thin physique typical of English ballerinas, and her work is based more on classical ballet. [...] They would soon enable Walcott to make full use of dance in his productions. King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 202.

²⁸² King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 323.

production, including original sketches and drafts of Walcott's *Joker*²⁸³. As part of my Ph.D. project, I was due to travel to Canada in spring 2020 to research this material but I could not, because of travel restrictions during this time. In this respect, I think that these features of the play need to be further investigated in order to delve deeper into Walcott's conception of theatre as a "total" event or decolonial *praxis*.

Walcott also worked on producing colourful drawing and sketches for the costumes in his performance. Because of his background as painter, the playwright personally designed the costumes and scenery for the premieres of the play. As King explains:

For the first production Walcott designed period costumes, but during 1975 Richard Montgomery redesigned the set and costumes. There are many images of clothing, capes, disguise, and impersonation, because society is itself wrapped in falsehood²⁸⁴.

In addition to the set, costumes, dance and mime, *Joker* is a play about music. Almost all the main characters sing or play a song. Catalinion, Juan's servant, introduces his character through the lyrics of a song and, also during the narrative, he uses this device to explain or comment on what is happening on stage.

CATALINION

[...] *It's my job to stand by with these horses,
I'm his servant Catalinion,
and since duels are worse than divorces,
just watch the conqueror run.*
(13)

Even the procession of nuns taking Isabella to the convent is singing, and in Latin:

NUNS

(Sing)

*Brevis est amor
in nostra vita.
Certis es dolor,
sed in te, Mater,
in te, Sancta soror,
crescit felicitas.*

²⁸³ For further information on the collection, please visit the following link: <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/nobel-laureate-derek-walcott-dies-u-t-s-fisher-library-has-160-boxes-his-drafts-notes-and> (consulted on 30/10/2020).

²⁸⁴ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 322-323.

(20)

Apart from these marginal yet interesting occurrences, it is in the voyage on board of a slave ship that Walcott uses music and dance to mock and rewrite the legacy of the modernity/coloniality matrix of power²⁸⁵. Indeed, as Juan and Catalinon traverse the Middle Passage to reach what they believe to be a “free / [...] New World” (32), a dance begins “with CAPTAIN, MATE, CREW, and SLAVES” (32).

As in other episodes in the play, the musical scene (and its score) becomes a way to reflect on the brutality and shameful practices happening in the imperial and colonial era.

CATALINION

[...] *El cargo was a reeking lot
of Negroes, coon and bimbo,
who screamed the blues, when they were not
up practicing el limbo.*

(SLAVES do a limbo dance, and are beaten. CATALINION begins to undress. The sea gets rough)

[...]

CAPTAIN and CREW

(Sing)

*Theese ees a Spaneesh sheep, señor,
and they do not speak Spanish!*

(32)

Walcott takes the chance to reinforce the idea that no language or European power – be it England, Spain, France or any other – prevented the exploitation and suffering imposed on *Other* humans. This is why he combines and mixes languages in this episode. The playwright recalls also how slaves were forced to dance and sing to keep fit for the slave markets once they disembarked in the New World. This aspect is furthered emphasised by what follows:

CAPTAIN

(Sings)

²⁸⁵ Talking about this episode of the play, Hamner argues: “Walcott transports him [Juan] and his servant Catalinon to the New World. Paradoxically, their escape vessel is carrying a boatload of slaves. The mood is set by their ‘Ballad of the Middle Passage’ (the titled used in a typescript but omitted from the published play), the anachronistic chorus of which reads, ‘Hey, hey, hey, / Is the U.S.A. / Once we get dere, / we gonna be O.K.!’ [...]. This comic turn does not violate Tirso’s spirit”. Hamner (1998), *Jokers’ Worlds, Old and New: From Tirso to Walcott*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, 44, 3/4, pp. 153.

*Out of great suffering, we know
they make their songs and dances.
These galley slaves who learn to row
in time will bless their chances.
Listen:*

SLAVES
*Hey, hey, hey!
Is the U.S.A.
Once we get dere,
we gonna be O.K.!
(32-33)*

Persuaded and tricked by the rhetoric of the colonial matrix of power, many captives ignored what was waiting for them in the colonies. The episode ends with the shipwreck. Only Juan and Catalinion survive and reach the shores of New Tarragon. The shipwreck is another of Walcott's reminders of what happened during the Atlantic crossings, in addition to the numerous cases of slaves who took their own lives by jumping off the ships into the open sea.

In what follows I am going to analyse in detail one of the songs that Walcott included in the performance. This represents an attempt to study the play from an artistic point of view which well embodies the decolonial perspective. Indeed, Walcott's production does not respond to the epistemic structures of Western European and Northern Atlantic critical approaches. *The Joker of Seville* contains an important number of songs and performative acts which are equally distributed throughout the play and together serve to rewrite Tirso's theatrical verses. This is an original type of *Creole* or multimodal writing that includes diverse forms of artistic expression. It is another type of literature and a transdisciplinary *praxis* which defies Western European structures and expressive constraints. Talking about *Joker's* music and songs, King adds:

Walcott would like the musicians mobile to take part in the action. He wanted to use stickfight chants and would send some. Walcott sent eighteen pages of song lyrics. Some were then backed by 'traditional music'. The songs included 'Sans humanité', 'Little red bird', 'Whatever happen to big-foot Bertha', the stickfight 'Better watch yourself, old man', 'Let resurrection come', 'There is a sower in the sky', Raphael's 'Now whether Juan gone down to hell', and Juan's farewell. These are lovely lyrics; it is a shame they are not better known. Walcott is an excellent songwriter and there is a need for a volume of his songs, accompanied by melodies, from his many published and unpublished plays. It is another side of his work that still needs to be discovered²⁸⁶.

²⁸⁶ King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 318.

2.3.5 La Divina Pastora: analysing one of *Joker's* songs

This last paragraph of my analysis of Walcott's *Joker* focuses on one of the most emblematic songs in the play, *La Divina Pastora* (The Holy Shepherdess). The song is performed by Octavio, after he has returned from "Santa Cruz" where he retired amongst the "Capuchins [...] to cure the unseen wounds that bled / for love" (120). Octavio explains to his servant Ripio that, once he had arrived at the monastery, the monks "took [him] into their cool chapel, / and there the gentle brethren laid / [his] body out in oil" (120).

This specific reference is not arbitrary. By mentioning the "cool chapel", Walcott foregrounds a well-known and venerated site in Trinidad which houses the sacred statue of La Divina Pastora. Even if Walcott mentions Santa Cruz, a village in northern Trinidad – where there is an area or district called "La Pastora" – I believe that here he is referencing the southern rural town of Siparia. Here, a Roman Catholic Church hosts the holy black statue of the Virgin Mary called "La Pastora". Two references led me to this conclusion. First, the statue is a pilgrimage destination during the Feast of La Divina Pastora and, most notably, during Carnival season, which is the background to *Joker*. Second, through Walcott's lyrics, and MacDermot's music, Octavio is able to praise the symbolic value of this icon, thus suggesting that La Divina Pastora's halo and mysticism has the power to appease souls, heal bodies and emotions and bridge divisions, tensions and conflicts.

In this sense, it is important to remember how Trinidad and Tobago are the most *hybrid* and heterogenous islands in the Caribbean, in terms of their religious, ethnic and cultural mix. As Steve Bennett explains on his blog:

Roman Catholics and Hindus are the most prevalent groups. Among Protestants, you have Anglican, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist. The Muslim and Buddhist communities are not too far behind, and there are even small groups of Shouter Baptists, Orisha, Jehovah's Witnesses, and followers of the Jewish father²⁸⁷.

²⁸⁷ Bennett (2019), *La Divina Pastora: Centuries Transcending Trinidad Religion*. <https://www.uncommoncaribbean.com/trinidad/la-divina-pastora/> (consulted on 22/10/2020).

In this astonishing melting pot of cultures and traditions, La Divina Pastora is a Goddess symbol of reconciliation and partnership, for she is venerated by all groups without distinction. In particular, for Catholics she is the manifestation of the Virgin Mary, while for Hindus she represents Sipari Mai, the Mother of Siparia or the Goddess Kali. Each community or religion has created its own myth about the arrival of the statue to the island. As Bennet suggests:

The statue was originally brought to Siparia by a Spanish priest travelling from Venezuela who claimed that La Divina Pastora had saved his life, the miracle forever cementing her sacred importance among Christians in T&T [Trinidad and Tobago]. Early Hindu settlers in Siparia were also touched by the statue. According to legend, Sipari Mai herself appeared as a small child in the Church early one morning, some say to grant wishes to indentured East Indian workers suppressed by the ruling colonial powers. As the day wore on, the child grew older, eventually becoming an old woman before finally disappearing as night fell on the town²⁸⁸.

The song, which is available on YouTube²⁸⁹, was written by Walcott and set to music by MacDermot, as is all the music in the play. It starts with an invocation to La Divina Pastora, so that she may bring peace “in time of stress” (121). Octavio addresses the sacred statue to help him, and indirectly his people, to “leave emotion / far behind” (122):

OCTAVIO

[...]

(*Music*)

(*Sings*)

O Divina Pastora,
Holy Shepherdess,
I see that valley still
in times of stress,
seas of bright grass
where, like a pearl, my soul
sleeps in its shell of grace.
Ah Pastora Divina,
Holy Shepherdess.
Let my heart find
that peace that leaves emotion
far behind.
Let my mind
lie in that sea-green valley with no motion
but the wind.

²⁸⁸ Bennett (2019), *La Divina Pastora: Centuries Transcending Trinidad Religion*. <https://www.uncommoncaribbean.com/trinidad/la-divina-pastora/> (consulted on 22/10/2020).

²⁸⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q2EuQowC40> (consulted on 30/10/2020).

I am a driven gull,
seeking those seas
past restlessness,
where every rolling hill
is like a wave which stays
stilled by the hand of grace.
O Pastora Divina,
Holy Shepherdess.
O Divina Pastora,
Holy Shepherdess.
(121-122)

Octavio's solo becomes a prayer and shared chant that calls for peace, harmony and understanding. This partnership idea and conception of life is emphasised by Octavio's repetition of the central refrain, "*Let my heart find / that peace that leaves emotion / far behind*", and also by the unexpected appearance, towards the end of the song, of a female choir that further reinforces the hopes expressed by the protagonist.

Once again, Walcott expresses a partnership-oriented view of existence, as he praises and brings to the fore a highly symbolic feminine symbol. In this sense, the Holy Shepherdess, an allegedly *ordinary* symbol, becomes the spiritual and mythical guide for the Caribbean peoples, who are able to meet, interact and pray together because of her, regardless of whether she represents the Virgin Mary or Sipari Mai. This is a highly significant episode in the re-writing of Tirso's narrative and also in Walcott's original use of Caribbean artistic and folkloric references. Indeed, by alluding to a sacred icon for Trinidadians, Walcott has foregrounded (once again) the meaning and worth that West Indian theatre has for him, to bridge divisions and promote the erased or lesser-known folkloric legacies of the New World. Through the figure of La Divina Pastora, Walcott praises multiculturalism and the *creolisation* of his home territories.

Beyond the thematic and symbolic value of the statue, the lyrics of the song convey the open and proactive mode of acting of the Caribbean people, within their astonishing surroundings. Walcott emphasises the power of the Antillean vegetation and sea to appease the agonies of human souls. In this sense, valleys and maritime waves become manifestations of the cycles of life, which relentlessly remould the psychological and physical traumas of the Caribbean peoples.

Despite the floating and spiralling vitality of the Antillean land and sea, Octavio, and all the West Indians he stands for, is like a seagull in search of shelter, or unifying

symbol that encompasses their differences. La Divina Pastora thus becomes the Holy Mother Goddess, the ancestral beating heart of the human womb that welcomes and recovers all its daughters and sons in its “shell of grace”.

From a musical point of view, the song is slow and peaceful. It has a blues texture, with instruments that range from a saxophone to drums and the piano. It resembles a solo by Frank Sinatra, a true mix of European, Northern Atlantic and West Indian tones and shades. In short, it is an Antillean musical masterpiece.

2.4 Pantomime

Pantomime is a play with two main characters, which Walcott released in 1980. It was written during a particularly stressful period of the author's life and career. In 1976 Walcott broke up with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, the acting group that embodied his life-long desire to build a national or West-Indian theatrical company. The separation occurred because Walcott betrayed his second wife Margaret, whom most of the company's actors and artists considered one of the pillars of the Workshop. In *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, Bruce King describes the playwright's resignation:

The tensions were made worse by private matters. Walcott had become Norline Metivier's lover. Walcott's openness about his passion was bound to divide a company for whom his wife, Margaret, despite a British university education and her own professional career, had sold tickets at the box office, swept the floor of the theatre, and even cleaned the theatre toilets. Margaret had close friends in the Workshop and was widely respected. Norline Metivier (b. 1951) was young, very pretty, light-skinned, fun, non-intellectual, middle-class, a secretary and dance teacher, the dream of a man in his mid-forties²⁹⁰.

Margaret was in charge of the Workshop finances and she was the only member who took care of, and was able to reassure, the actors and dancers when Walcott lost his temper. Despite various attempts by part of the group to resolve the matter, Walcott decided to leave the Caribbean and settled in the U.S.A. He understood that it was time to move on and try to find a form of the *stability* that he had always rejected²⁹¹. As I have already pointed out in Chapter 1, after a couple of appointments in various Northern American universities, Walcott became Professor of English and Creative Writing at Boston University. Nevertheless, he never forgot his islands and would spend half of the year in the West Indies. This perpetual *division* and incessant cyclical journey between a more segregated North American society and a freer and certainly poorer Caribbean context is at the core of Walcott's later productions, and most certainly of *Pantomime*. As

²⁹⁰ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 244.

²⁹¹ In describing Walcott's precarious situation at this time, King argues: "As I listen to my tapes of interview with Workshop members, compare statements made at various time by the actors, I am struck by how often people contrast the opportunities that were opening to Walcott in the United States and his financial situation in Trinidad at the time. He had created his theatre company and it performed his plays, but he could not live from it. He and Margaret kept investing their own money in productions and in attempts to transfer the productions to Broadway. Everyone agrees that he earned little for what he put into the Workshop. [...] The West Indies could not support writers and it certainly could not afford Walcott. Idealism had kept him in the West Indies [...]. It was time to move on". King, (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 263-264.

was the case in other productions, Walcott was inspired by real events and in particular by a sojourn in Tobago:

Pantomime was written while Walcott was staying at a hotel in Tobago managed by Arthur Bentley, a former British actor who after the breakdown of his marriage moved to Trinidad. Bentley suggested that Walcott write something to provide an evening's entertainment for the hotel's guests. As Walcott listened to the banter between Bentley and one of his employees the idea of the play came to him. Although the situation involved a white English hotel manager and a local black employee, there was an equality in the exchange of repartee that dissolved the racial, class, and economic differences²⁹².

Apart from describing and embodying the ethnical and socio-cultural divisions of his heterogenous archipelago, *Pantomime* addresses Walcott's internal and psychological wounds, as much as his physically projected *shadows* and demons. The comforts and reassurances of his privileged academic post, where he taught the literary models of the European *canon*, were in direct contrast with his creative angst and revolts against Western-dominator structures and the colonial matrix of power. It was during this period that Walcott produced some of his most successful West Indian plays, such as *The Joker of Seville* and *O Babylon!*

Pantomime is set in Tobago, the tiny Caribbean island that, together with the larger neighbouring territory to the south, Trinidad, forms the nation-state of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago²⁹³. Two aspects might have determined Walcott's geographical choice for the setting of his play. First, Tobagonians have always felt less important than their Trinidadian compatriots. Tobago is indeed smaller and poorer than Trinidad, which has always benefited from a larger economy drawn from its richer capital city, Port of Spain. This is also one of reasons why Tobago is generally defined as Trinidad's shadow or little sister. Second, it is commonly acknowledged that Tobago's pristine nature must have inspired Daniel Defoe in the forming of *Robinson Crusoe*, the most emblematic

²⁹² King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 295.

²⁹³ The history of these islands shares the destiny of most of the territories located at the heart of the Caribbean archipelago. For centuries, before the arrival of the Spanish explorers and their subsequent conquest, Trinidad was populated by native Amerindian communities. At the end of the eighteenth century, Spanish colonisers decided to hand over the island to the British Empire. Around the same period, the English took possession of Tobago, a territory that meanwhile had changed *hands* between Spanish, British, French and Dutch colonial powers numerous times. Eventually, at the end of the nineteenth century, England decided to unify the two islands in a single unit state.

castaway in the history of World literature²⁹⁴. Even if these aspects may seem marginal in analysing *Pantomime*, they substantiate Walcott's choices and stratagems in relation to his protagonists and their characterisation. While, on the one side, the author is interested in re-writing a familiar and well-known Western European fictional narrative from a Caribbean point of view, on the other, he does not want to deny or pretend to erase the internal and domestic frictions – and divisions – that characterise his complex and hybrid region.

In this regard, as Bhabha has pointed out in his critical work *Nation and Narration*:

The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of syntactic over the semantic' [...]. What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated²⁹⁵.

In referring to a particular space – the island of Tobago – that most Western European readers would immediately link to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Walcott is able to re-think and re-write physical, ethnical and socio-cultural representations and mythicisations. In so doing, Walcott can move between European cultural models and original, Caribbean artistic interpretations, as the West Indian sense of inferiority (or mimicking attitude) is finally denied in search of new alternatives or an original, new slant.

This sense of split characterisation is immediately discernible from the very first description of *Pantomime*'s protagonists at the beginning of the play. The textual-captions introduce a complex duo: "HARRY TREWE, English, mid-forties, owner of the Castaways Guest House, retired actor" and "JACKSON PHILLIP, Trinidadian, forty, his factotum, retired calypsonian"²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁴ There has been much debate surrounding the identification of Crusoe's island. Even though contrasting views have uncovered different opinions on the topic, literary scholars agree in considering Defoe's visit to the Caribbean islands before the writing of his adventurous novels a steady point of departure for his research.

²⁹⁵ Bhabha (1990), *Nation and Narration*, pp. 4.

²⁹⁶ Walcott (1980), *Remembrance & Pantomime: Two Plays*, pp. 91. All quotations will be from this edition, with the page reference in parentheses after each quotation.

Harry and Phillip are indeed the only characters exchanging lines during the entire performance, and they are indirectly the *reflecting* double of each other. Harry is the English owner of the “Castaways Guest House”, a filthy and sordid hotel which is closed for repair, and Jackson is Harry’s butler or assistant, a retired actor and singer, who came from the nearby island of Trinidad in search of a peaceful life and a quiet job.

The play unfolds around Harry’s intention to put on a *pantomime* (as the title of the play suggests) for the evening entertainment of the hotel guests. Being himself a former music hall player, Harry convinces his employee to put on a farcical *reversal* of the Robison Crusoe adventure. Master Harry will play the servant, Friday, while his assistant Jackson will be Crusoe. Harry explains that the idea came to him by chance when he overheard Phillip singing during an informal contest with other colleagues at the back of the guest house. Harry suggests they swap roles because he knows that Jackson is a talented musician, singer, and also a witty and intelligent *black* person, who can *play* at his own will with the imperial English language which he was brought up speaking. Indeed, Jackson is a bright *Creole* character; he knows how to switch from being ironic to more serious and thoughtful formalism, and does not let his persona be easily ridiculed or mocked.

Despite Jackson’s initial refusal, Harry persuades his butler to improvise, firstly by pretending to admire his talents and later by provoking his West Indian work ethic and strict morals. However, Master Harry soon perceives the dangerous socio-cultural implications of the reversal. At the end of Act I, he orders Jackson to stop and return to their fixed, historically imposed roles. Nevertheless, the transformative process has begun and the pair’s relationship is forever compromised.

My analysis details some of the most emblematic and significant episodes of the play. In tune with the general structure of this Ph.D. thesis, I concentrate on the sections and lines of the play that may be identified as re-writings or intertextual references to Western European canonical texts and narrations. In the second part of the analysis, I investigate the artistic experiments or *inferences* that recall multifaceted Caribbean culture and tradition. To conclude, I propose an original reading of a highly evocative episode occurring in the middle of Act I, which works on the corporeal semantics of the protagonists in order to convey the history of colonial subjugation and its *shadowing* domination. In this regard, I demonstrate how the actors’ movements, postures and

gestures become significant forms of expression in the liberating processes toward *partnership* and bio-cultural and ecosophical encounters.

In *Pantomime*, the actors physically embody the burden and scars of the colonial legacy and the *modernity/coloniality* hierarchies of power. Harry and Jackson's bodies become corporeal symbols that mirror and express physical coercion and/or cultural impositions²⁹⁷.

Walcott's performance would be lacking part of its significance and meaning, had these artistic and embodied structures been avoided. *Pantomime* foregrounds Walcott's endeavour to forge a more equitable and peaceful *wor(l)d* through an attentive and unpredictable reasoning of the *Other*, or self-hidden part of ourselves, also in terms of corporeal constructions, divisions and representations.

2.4.1 Pantomime's *doubles*: an English music hall performer and a Trinidadian calypsonian

The play begins with an ironic and derisive one-by-one introduction of the main characters. At first Walcott introduces the *white* English actor and former music hall player, Harry. Before allowing him to speak, Walcott has him dancing and singing dressed "in white" (93), as he carries a tape recorder²⁹⁸ on stage:

HARRY

(Sings and dances)

It's our Christmas panto,

it's called: Robinson Crusoe.

We're awfully glad that you've shown up,

it's for kiddies as well as for grown-ups.

Our purpose is to please:

so now with our magic wand...

²⁹⁷ It is thanks to the critical work of Marcel Mauss, Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias, to name but a few, that a new conception of the body as the *signifier* for different cultural practices and education transmissions started to be taken in consideration. See: Mauss (1973), *Techniques of the body, Economy and Society*, 2, 1, pp. 70-88; Foucault (1966) *Les mots et les choses: Une archeologie des sciences humaines*; Foucault ([1972] 1980), *Power/Knowledge*. An interesting study on the connections between bodies and literature is also Alessandra Violi's *Il corpo nell'immaginario letterario* (2014).

²⁹⁸ For part of the postcolonial critique, Harry's tape recorder symbolises the power of the dominating colonial order, because through this instrument he can communicate the truth of the Western subjugating *wor(l)d*. Walcott's protagonists represent a reversal of this commonly accepted interpretation because the recording will eventually allow Harry to put down his *own* destabilising story and interpretation of Robinson Crusoe's adventure.

(93)

Walcott's intertextual and performative decolonisation of Western-oriented canonical structures is immediately brought to the stage. Harry begins the play rehearsing a song and dance. He introduces the main topic of the performance, namely the re-writing of the Robinson Crusoe story, through what he claims to be a "magical" role-reversed "Christmas panto", while he is talking directly to the audience²⁹⁹. Shortly after, he leaves the stage and his *black* Trinidadian assistant, Jackson, appears "in an open, white waiter's jacket and black trousers, but barefoot [and] with a breakfast tray" (94). The gap between the two protagonists is immediately brought to the fore by the way they look and dress, and also by the way they talk. While Harry welcomes the audience in a polite and extremely well-mannered British accent, Jackson seems to forget that he is in front of an audience, because he starts using a familiar, barely understandable English Creole accent and form³⁰⁰:

JACKSON

Mr. Trewe?

(English accent)

Mr. Trewe, your scramble eggs is here! are here!

(Creole accent)

You hear, Mr. Trewe? I here wid your eggs!

(English accent)

Are you in there?

(To himself)

And when his eggs get cold, is I to catch.

(He fans the eggs with one hand)

What the hell I doing? That ain't go heat them. It go make them more cold. Well, he must be leap off the ledge. At long last. Well, if he ain't dead, he could call.

(94)

²⁹⁹ Walcott's meta-narrative discourse and strategy is used in most of his plays, such as in the productions of *The Joker of Seville* (1974) and *A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1986). In this way, the author establishes a privileged connection with his audience. Usually, at the beginning of a play, the main character addresses the public and summarises the plot and the main topics that will be addressed during the performance. This approach allows the audience to question the canonical Western impositions and boundaries, thus legitimising Walcott's power to challenge them with new alternatives or different slants.

³⁰⁰ In an interesting article on the power of (*sub*)ordinate speech in Pantomime, Megan K. Ahern argues: "The use of language can be a potent site of postcolonial resistance [...]. The way a person speaks, including characteristics such as accent and diction, is generally held to express identity and to mark a certain social position; yet, language itself is fluid, transmittable, transmutable. Language is often the first of the trappings of imperialism that the colonized are forced to adopt; nevertheless, they are intended never fully to appropriate it, but rather to speak it in a way that is, in terms of Homi Bhabha, 'almost the same but not quite'". Ahern (2007), In(sub)ordinate Speech: Mimicry as Bourdieuan Heterodoxy in Walcott's Pantomime, *ARIEL*, 38, 4, pp. 1.

Walcott's intertextual and Western-oriented references continue in the playful banter that follows between the two. Master Harry re-enters "carrying a hat made of goatskin and a goatskin parasol" (94) while singing "Is this the footprint of a naked man, / or is it the naked footprint of a man" (94). Jackson the servant immediately replies that he is not going to tolerate his employer's tiring "rake" (96), meaning that he will not undergo the same (maybe repetitive) re-enactment of the unfair relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday. The author delves into the individual and distinctive characterisation of his protagonists: Harry is a naïve and clumsy dreamer, while Jackson is a grounded and reasonable man. Trewe is interested in trivial and mischievous happenings, such as setting up an evening performance for his guests, while Phillip is more concerned about the hospital-like conditions of the guest house³⁰¹.

Walcott's choice to start his play with music and dance is not arbitrary, instead it anticipates what is going to happen during the entire play. There is an artistic clash between Harry and Jackson's expressive styles. Indeed, while Harry is the representative of the *white* American music hall, Jackson stands for the *black* Caribbean calypso with its rhythmical and creative improvisations. In this regard, I agree with Edward Baugh's description of the play when he suggests:

Pantomime is very much a play about role-playing, with the emphasis on 'play' for most of the action. [...] Both men are stage performers – Trewe a small-time music hall player, and Jackson a small-time calypsonian. So the play will become a contest, a *picong*³⁰² of performance styles, music hall versus calypso, which will encapsulate the traditional clash and interplay of cultures in the colonial experience³⁰³.

³⁰¹ In presenting the hotel's precarious condition, Jackson uses a series of references that are intrinsically connected to Caribbean traditional folklore: "This hotel like a hospital. The toilet catch asthma, the air-condition got ague, the front-balcony rail missing four teet', and every minute the fridge like it dancing Shango... brrgudup...jukjuk...brrugudup. Is no wonder that the carpenter collapse. Termites jumping like steel band in the foundations" (98). Indeed, the Shango of Trinidad represents a mixture of beliefs and practices that combine Catholic rituals with elements of Hindu tradition. It is characterised by possession rites, which are achieved through the rhythms of the African drum. Steels bands are modern orchestras in which Caribbean cultures use different folkloric instruments. The most famous steel-bands are those of Trinidad, which are used to perform during Carnival season.

³⁰² *Picong* is a Caribbean word deriving from the Spanish *picón*, meaning "mocking". It describes a light, satirical exchange between West Indian people and friends. The term is used to mock and tease acquaintances in a friendly manner, even though in the past it may have escalated into real, physical assault or a singing contest. In *calypso*, the song words are meant to be funny but not offensive, and a good *calypsonian* is identified by the way he "picong" or mocks others.

³⁰³ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 132-133.

When Jackson reaffirms that he has no intention to take part in the pantomime, Harry pretends to commit suicide by climbing up the ledge of the gazebo terrace in order to jump out into the open sea. Jackson is about to leave when Harry further provokes him by saying:

HARRY

Attempted suicide in a Third World country. You can't leave a note because the pencils break, you can't cut your wrist with the local blades...

JACKSON

We trying we best, sir, since all you gone.

HARRY

Doesn't matter if we're a minority group. Suicides are tax-payers, too, you know, Jackson.

JACKSON

Except it ain't going be suicide. They go say I push you. So, now the fun and dance done, sir, breakfast now?

(97)

It is at this point of the performance that Harry decides to introduce the historical implications of the modernity/coloniality power structure in order to convince his employer to finally take part in the role reversal with him. First, he suggests that between the two he is the only one allowed to re-designate roles – “I can bring it down to your level” (98-99), and second, he beguiles his butler into taking on the challenge to prove him wrong by swapping and twisting their identity: “We reverse it” (101)³⁰⁴.

One of the main arguments of my analysis is that a mutual understanding and *partnership* between the two occurs only when the cultural, aesthetic and representational distances are blurred and finally suspended. As a matter of fact, Jackson accepts the role reversal only when his superior and dominant master ridicules him and calls into question his own privileged position as the manager of the hotel.

A partial and incomplete analysis of the play would suggest that it aims at re-writing the text of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, especially in the way it plays with the historical master/slave relationship. In this sense, it is true that the production re-works the Crusoe/Friday duo extremely well, also by re-evoking the shameful Middle Passage that brought to the Caribbean thousands of people like Friday. Nevertheless, my

³⁰⁴ If Act I is characterised by a perpetual echoing battle between the protagonists' first personal pronouns, for the “I” is emphasised in both Harry and Jackson's speeches, a radical and evident shift occurs in Act II, where an equitable and more inclusive “we” is more than present until the end of the performance. Significantly, this is Harry's first attempt to be *inclusive* toward Jackson.

intention to show how Walcott does more than expected because he deepens his message by working and displaying artistic and performative alternatives or *Other* ways of interacting, through unconventional, artistic means. Walcott allows his protagonists to play out a narrative that reflects their different yet similar identities, rather than being firmly separated and independent.

Debunking Western views, besides embodying a tangible (and visible) process of *decolonisation*, has the power to re-establish a natural, unquestionable universal truth: the *equality* of human respect, freedom and parity. This aspect is particularly emphasised at the end of the play when, despite a socially imposed *return* to their designated roles, the two protagonists leave the stage enriched with a fundamental new sense of mutual esteem³⁰⁵. In tune with this perspective, Giselle A. Rampaul argues: “[the] inversion of roles [...] allows Harry and Jackson to move from a relationship that was characterised by hierarchy and separation to one of mutual respect”³⁰⁶.

Act II begins with Harry recognising his own misconduct towards Jackson: “Let’s sit down, man to man, and have a drink” (134). It is through this opening, which breaks down their historically imposed and fictional roles, that the protagonists reach a peaceful *compromise*, and also a deeper understanding of their true selves:

JACKSON

You see, two of we both acting a role here we ain’t really really believe in, you know. I ent think you strong enough to give people orders, and I *know* I ain’t the kind who like taking *them*. So both of we doesn’t have to *improvise* so much as *exaggerate*. We faking, faking all the time. But, man to man, I mean... (*Pause*) that could be something else. Right, Mr. Trewe?

HARRY

Aren’t we man to man now?
(138)

As regards this particular aspect, the play works on recognising and promoting *partnership values*. As I have previously pointed out, most of Walcott’s works share the positive assumptions of Riane Eisler’s encouraging research project: the need for a *cultural transformation* at the basis of human relations, especially in recognising the

³⁰⁵ In commenting on the finale of the play Bruce King argues: “European acting teaches that exuberance is bad, you do not overact; you achieve passion through control. Jackson is a healing angel. He invades Trewe’s privacy and breaks him down which is therapeutic. It does not matter if at the end of the play things are materially the same. The issues are at a different level than the sociological. Jackson and Trewe have confronted each other man to man”. King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 306.

³⁰⁶ Rampaul (2004), *Black Crusoe, White Friday: Carnavalesque Reversal in Samuel Selvon’s Moses Ascending and Derek Walcott’s Pantomime*, *Cultural Studies Journal of Universitat Jaume I*, 1, pp. 79.

empowering challenges coming from the encounter with the Other – the stranger or the unknown – whose identity and values question not only one’s individual beliefs but also one’s self-awareness and certitudes.

In this regard, it comes as no surprise that, towards the end of *Pantomime*, it is the *Other* Jackson who voices the need for this mutual understanding to his Master/Employer Harry, thereby re-formulating the latter’s own initial assumption:

JACKSON

(Shouts) *I tell you: man must live!* Then, after many years, he sees this naked footprint that is the mark of his salvation...

(164)

Part of postcolonial critique investigates the causes and consequences of cultural, social and ethnical *divisions* by disregarding or ignoring the power of unexpected *encounters* or the sharing of different intersubjectivities³⁰⁷. In the history of literature, this is particularly evident when considering, for instance, the canonical critique of William Shakespeare’s plays. When dealing with the Bard’s *doubles*, Western-oriented scholars tend to typify a character’s subjectivity through commonly accepted or attributed adjectives and labels: Prospero is the rational magician while Caliban is the ignorant brute; Othello is the virtuous hero and Iago is the treacherous tactician. Nevertheless, upon closer analysis of these encounters, Shakespeare was perhaps proposing complex, blurred spaces of interaction between his protagonists. In a thought-provoking study, Margaret Paul Joseph questions the relationship between Caliban and Prospero in different Caribbean texts, thus providing a stimulating reflection on the brute decolonising representation(s):

Prospero and Caliban [...] provide us with a powerful metaphor for colonialism. An offshoot of this interpretation is the abstract condition of being Caliban, the victim of history, frustrated by the knowledge of utter powerlessness. In Latin America the name has been adopted in a more positive manner, for Caliban seems to represent the masses who are striving to rise against the oppression of the elite. [...] Caliban [is] a symbol of the West Indian, as both author and character and as both man and woman³⁰⁸.

³⁰⁷ Numerous psychological studies have demonstrated how the encounter with the *Other*, or with someone that we perceive as different in general, activates a series of neuronal and emotional processes that de-base our personal and subjective paradigms. Irrational instincts tend to draw a specific gap between ourselves – the known reality – and the *unknown*. This is mainly due to our fear of picturing the world from different and unusual social, religious, cultural and anthropological perspectives. For an interesting study on this subject, see: Carli & Rodini (eds. 2006), *Le forme dell’intersoggettività*.

³⁰⁸ Joseph (1992), *Caliban in Exile: the Outsider in Caribbean Fiction*, pp. 2.

Joseph suggests that when looking at the master/slave relationship, we may also take into consideration the *Other's* reversing perspective, and not only our Western-dominator paradigm or point of view. Indeed, the *Other* is similarly puzzled and transformed by what he/she perceives as unfamiliar and strange. In *The Tempest*, for instance, the appearance of Master Prospero is a chance for Caliban to question and understand his own personality and intersubjectivity for the first time, thus acquiring a new awareness and definition. Caliban does not only become the servant of the newly established order but also its most powerful counter-symbol. In this regard, it is also true that a constructive, mutual or intercultural understanding between two divergent parties can only occur when their relationship is not directly influenced by historical and social impositions. This is less evident in Shakespeare, even though I have always read Prospero's final departure from his brute's island as a Shakespearian opening towards a form of mutual respect.

In *Pantomime*, the Jackson/Caliban and Harry/Prospero relationship recalls and validates Joseph's suggestion of a positive exchange and interaction between different parties and worldviews. This aspect is particularly emphasised when Jackson tries to give a meaning to their reversal from a decolonial point of view: "Mr. Trewe, you come back with that same rake again? I tell you, I ain't no actor, and I ain't walking in front a set of tourists playing cannibal. Carnival, but not canni-bal" (96).

The assonance of carnival/cannibal allows Walcott to bring to the fore the blurring *carnivalisation* of his play. The Caribbean playwright creates a fictional space where identities are not physically and/or culturally determined and in which chaos and disorder prevail in order to reflect imposed traditions, values and legacies.

In different world cultures, and also in classical tradition, Carnival was the period of the year in which the outcasts or rejected individuals within a community could finally express their repressed feelings, or break free from the injustices derived from their cultural and social subjugation. The Carnival celebration was paramount in black Caribbean plantation slave communities. It represented the time to destabilise colonial order and recover ancestral wisdom, rites and practices. For Western European powers, Carnival was crucial in maintaining and assuring domination and control. Most colonisers

considered the celebration as an irrational and boorish event, a primordial festivity of ignorant and *cannibal* peoples.

In discussing *Pantomime*'s carnivalesque reversal, Rampaul points out:

Pantomime uses role reversal to move beyond inversion to the prescription of new terms of reference from the ones associated with colonialism, resulting in relationships based on mutual respect. Simply applied, the post-colonial reading is therefore not sufficient. [...] There are many deliberate inversions, but their effects are often more complex than reversal: they tend to interrogate the relationships between the dominant and the subordinate and reveal more complicated patterns of power. To read these relationships simply as inversions is to preserve a binary opposition of the powerful and the powerless which only seems to limit the reading and interpretation of the text. [...] The notion of carnivalesque reversals should not therefore support only binary readings, but also open up the possibilities of other analytical discourses³⁰⁹.

In Chapter 1, I argued that dichotomies and binary oppositions are inadequate in depicting and understanding the typically schizophrenic Caribbean experience, in which different layers of meaning intermingle and coexist. In this respect, I underlined how Walcott's narrative and artistic re-thinking of Western European and Northern Atlantic constructions of power need to embrace a series of *alternative* discourses in order to highlight and call into question the inconsistency of colonial epistemology and ways of thinking.

One of the main aspects that exemplifies Walcott's attempt in representing the non-binary heterogeneity and fluidity of the Caribbean context is the association he proposes between his protagonists and their contrasting artistic passions. Despite calypso and musical hall performers come from different cultures and historical heritages, their expressional forms are based on similar features, as they both need music and represent satire or a reversal of some form.

Music hall entertainment was an extremely popular form of British theatre that began in the Victorian era and declined after the First World War. In North America it was known as *vaudeville* and it was based on witty songs and comic acts.

Calypso is an Afro-Caribbean music genre and performance style that originated on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. It is based on the rhythms of West African "Kaiso", which was brought to the Caribbean with French-African slaves during the eighteenth century. Original calypso music (and counter-form) was led by a *griot* and it

³⁰⁹ Rampaul (2004), *Black Crusoe, White Friday: Carnavalesque Reversal in Samuel Selvon's Moses Ascending and Derek Walcott's Pantomime*, *Cultural Studies Journal of Universitat Jaume I*, 1, pp. 79.

was sung in French Creole. When the English took over from the French colonisers, the *griot* oral historian was replaced by a calypsonian, and the French *patois* by English or English Creole. In black slave communities it represented protest poetry and it soon became the symbol of social redemption or justice and freedom of speech³¹⁰.

Harry and Jackson represent a music hall player and a calypsonian respectively. Even though they are now retired artists, during the play they talk about their past experiences with joy and passion. Sometimes they hint at some steps and/or melodies, while expressing their regret at not having invested more time in their dreams or believed more in themselves.

Through his protagonists' voices, Walcott reflects upon his own artistic life and career. In this regard, *Pantomime* questions whether the arts are supporting their talents or whether national governments should be more involved in the issue, helping local artists fulfil their dreams. As I have already pointed out, Walcott wrote *Pantomime* at a time of crisis in his own life. His long-term commitment to making a Caribbean theatre had come to an end, and he was conscious that he was not going to survive with his theatre and his art alone³¹¹.

The issue of the role of art and its significance at the core of a nation's heritage and its cultural development is a problem addressed also through Harry and Jackson's exchanges. In this sense, the protagonists are eager to recount their own embarrassing experiences and some of their compatriots' degrading attitudes towards their artistic lives and passions. Jackson recounts:

³¹⁰ In an article he published in the *Trinidad Guardian* in support of Calypso's performances and their cultural valance for West Indians, Walcott argues: "In the few anthologies of West Indian verse which have appeared, space has occasionally been given to our folk songs but none to the calypso. Worse than that, I am not sure that there is any library which has filled and assembled the hundreds of ballads that appear at every carnival season [...]. As an ephemeral poet, no-one is subjected to a severer test than the carnival balladeer. In the dual role of verbal and melodic composer he must not only satisfy but crystallize varieties of popular taste in a single song, 'a special', which he unleashes as the carnival season mounts to the pitch". Walcott (1960), "Popular Poets' Are Now Severely Tested" (*Trinidad Guardian*, Feb 14, 1960: 7) in Balme & Collier (eds. 2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 2: Performing Arts*, pp. 287-288.

³¹¹ Part of Walcott's critical work during this period looks at the inadequate response of the West Indian government towards its artists. Walcott strongly believed in the power of the arts as a means for cultural and social (r)evolution in the entire region. During his juvenile years, he had witnessed important changes in this direction but, with the breaking up of the West Indian Federation and the rise of the Black Power movement, his expectations were fading. In this regard, see: Walcott (1966), "West Indian Art today" (*Trinidad Guardian*, May 8, 1966: 8) in Balme & Collier (eds. 2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 2: Performing Arts*, pp. 46-49. And also: Walcott (1957), "Society and the Artist" (*Trinidad Guardian*, May 4, 1957: 7) in Balme & Collier (eds. 2013), *Derek Walcott: The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974. Volume 2: Performing Arts*, pp. 106-108.

JACKSON

Mr. Trewe, every day I keep begging you to stop trying to make a entertainer out of me. I finish with show business. I finish with Trinidad. I come to Tobago for peace and quiet. [...] You see that sea out there? You know where I born? I born over there. Trinidad. I was a very serious steel-band man, too. And where I come from is a very serious place. I used to get into some serious trouble. A man keep bugging my arse once. A bad john called Boysie. Indian fellow, want to play nigger [...] and I used to just laugh and tell him stop, but he keep laughing and I keep laughing and he going on and I begging him to stop and two of us laughing, until...

(He turns, goes to the tray, and picks up a fork)

one day, just out of the blue, I pick up a ice pick and walk over to where he and two fellers was playing card, and I nail that ice pick through his hand to the table, and I laugh, and I walk away. (102-106)

In commenting on his violent reaction to the bullying of an Indian compatriot, Jackson highlights the distress of *making art* in the Caribbean. Indeed, Walcott is also condemning his compatriots' behaviour towards the world of the arts, for calypso, music hall or other artistic expressions were mostly perceived as frivolous and worthless means of living. Or worse, they were seen as practices destined only for women or other *caring* individuals and/or professions.

Walcott is thus decolonising commonly accepted ways of thinking and stereotypes, also within his own community. The intent is to discredit male-dominator views in order to embrace a wor(l)d of possibilities for partnership and different social paradigms, in which everyone is allowed to express his/her own creativity and imagination.

In response to his assistant's story, Harry recounts a similar experience:

HARRY

We put on a show in the army once. Ground crew. RAF. In what used to be Palestine. A Christmas panto. Another one. And yours truly here was the dame. The dame in a panto is played by a man. Well, I got the part. Wrote the music, the book, everything, whatever original music there was. *Aladdin and His Wonderful Vamp*. Very obscene, of course. I was the Wonderful Vamp. Terrific reaction all around. Thanks to me music-hall background. Went down great. Well, there was a party afterward. Then a big sergeant in charge of maintenance started this very boring business of confusing my genius with my life. Kept pinching my arse and so on. It got kind of boring after a while. Well, he was the size of a truck, mate. And there wasn't much I could do but keep blushing and pretending to be liking it. But the Wonderful Vamp was waiting outside for him, the Wonderful Vamp and a wrench this big, and after that, laddie, it took all of maintenance to put him back again.

(107)

Apart from behaving in a similar way to his *double*, Harry highlights the protagonists' fear of being judged or associated with non-canonical or traditionally accepted binary identities from their own communities or peer groups. This is a strategy to question whether the arts are also affected by dominant views and modernity/coloniality structures of power. For Walcott, artistic expression is not free, but rather it responds to the dogmas and norms dictated by the colonial and neo-colonial matrix of power. It is in this sense that Walcott decides to portray an artistic battle or contest between two lesser known artistic practices or expressions. Firstly, he can show that the *Other*, the *black* subjugated slave, is capable of creating and developing his own art forms (such as Calypso), and secondly that Western-oriented (or invented) forms of expression or entertainment are equally destined to die out.

In agreement with my reading of this particular episode, some scholars have emphasised how Jackson's concern that he would be associated with a homosexual identity or culture reflects not so much Walcott's presumably homophobic attitudes, but rather the exaltation and acceptance of the *Other* or different ways of being, looking and expressing oneself.

In short, Walcott is responding to Western-dominator male patriarchal perspectives using irony and by abolishing culturally based gender roles. In this sense, I read Harry's amusing disguise as Aladdin's Wonderful Vamp as an attempt to soften radical gender disputes in general and take the chance to reinforce – also from a *white* colonial perspective – the transformative possibility of putting yourself in someone else's shoes. This is also an opportunity to reflect upon Caribbean carnival culture and heritage, for androgynous characters are well represented in traditional parades and folkloric celebrations. As I have already mentioned in Chapter 1, in Walcott's *Omeros* two of the main male protagonists of the epic, Achille and Philoctete, do not hesitate to participate in their village carnival parade dressed in traditional, androgynous costumes.

Walcott destabilises and re-writes the spaces of interaction and exchange between different cultures, stories and artistic practices. He is not interested in imposing a single view but rather in proposing a fluctuating and spiralling context of transformative possibilities. In this regard, Walcott echoes Riane Eisler's ground-breaking research in which she argues:

If we look at our present from the perspective of Cultural Transformation theory, it becomes evident that there are alternatives to a system founded on the force-based ranking of one half of humanity over the other³¹².

In Walcott's texts, Eisler's transformative systems are embodied in the power of the creative, performative and narrating wor(l)d of his protagonists' quests and personal ambitions. In Jackson and Harry's similar accounts of their reaction to the bullying of their artistic passion, the attentive reader may notice shades of ironic exaggeration and overstatement. The truth about their shameful behaviour is disclosed towards the end of the play, when Harry reveals:

HARRY

I never hit any goddamned maintenance sergeant on the head in the service. I've never hit anybody in my life. Violence makes me sick. I don't believe in ownership. [...] I don't think you ever drove an ice-pick through anybody's hand, either. That was just the two of us acting.

JACKSON

[...] Don't be too sure about the ice-pick.

HARRY

I'm sure. You're a fake. You're a kind man and you think you have to hide it. A lot of other people could have used that to their own advantage. That's the difference between master and servant.

JACKSON

That master-and-servant shit finish. Bring a beer for me.

(158)

The blurred definition of the protagonists' true selves has finally dissolved. Harry and Jackson recognise themselves in the non-violent *partnership* wor(l)d of their encounter and dialogue, and in the matching of their double-divided soul, as the play may be read as the performance of a single identity.

Jackson and Harry refuse both "ownership" and "violence" (158). They have been hiding their true caring personas and values because the colonial matrix of power works on repressing and distorting loving human nature. As Eisler points out:

The most fundamental values of our [dominant] systems, [sustain that] traits like tenderness, compassion, and peacefulness are considered feminine, thus totally inappropriate for real or 'masculine' men³¹³.

³¹² Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, pp.159.

³¹³ Eisler (1988), *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, pp.144.

Walcottian protagonists are on a constant quest for their true identity and self, or for their historical community legacy and cultural definition. Most of them do not reach a definitive response to their questions or find closure, but rather engage in a series of transformative *encounters* that eventually teach them how to listen and look carefully for their absent, repressed self, or their unpredictable and unknown *double*.

2.4.2 Questioning the foundations of the colonial matrix of power: re-thinking colonial language, religion and historical legacy

Pantomime is rightly considered the play of the *double*, or the performance that breaks down physical, social and artistic boundaries and categorisations. Its ultimate aim is to discredit and re-think Western European structures of power, especially by deconstructing colonial language, religion and historical legacy.

As far as language is concerned, one of the most emblematic passage involves the appearance of a racist parrot. Harry justifies the animal's discriminatory mumbling directed at Jackson by sustaining that he belonged to the former German owner of the hotel, Herr Heinegger:

JACKSON

[...] Mr. Trewe, I am compelled to report that parrot again.

HARRY

No, not again, Jackson?

JACKSON

Yes.

HARRY

(Imitating Parrot)

Heinegger, Heinegger.

(In his own voice)

Correct?

JACKSON

Wait, Wait! I know your explanation: that a old German called Herr Heinegger used to own this place, and that when that maquereau of a macaw keep cracking: "Heinegger, Heinegger," he remembering the Nazi and not heckling me, but it playing a little havoc with me nerves. This is my fifth report. I am marking them down. Language is ideas, Mr. Trewe. And I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea.

HARRY

It's his accent, Jackson. He's a Creole parrot. What can I do?

(99)

The episode reflects the power of the Western transmission of knowledge and the subsequent imposition of imperial languages in the colonies. It implies that the parrot learnt how to speak and perpetuate colonial structures of domination from its former European master, who must have found it amusing to train a speaking animal to recognise the black *Other*. Jackson is aware of Trewé's usual justification so he decides to contest his employer's argument by replying that "language is ideas" (99). Indeed, the erasure and abolition of aboriginal or African-based languages in the Caribbean (but also in other parts of the world) was at the core of the Western European colonising project. Through language, a community or ethnic group can recognise itself and transmit or preserve its own cultural legacies and traditions. In evoking the parrot episode, Walcott is playing on a twofold intent: he is implying that colonial subjects were trained, or even tamed, like parrots to *repeat* and disseminate the imperial system of beliefs, and he is also implying that, once these values were transmitted and acknowledged, the colonised subjects found it difficult to eradicate or uproot them.

Moreover, the episode allows Walcott to present the strategies at play in the mechanism of *mimicry*, namely the natives or slaves' unconscious desire to imitate or look like their dominant masters, thus legitimising their cultural and racial divisions³¹⁴. The strategy is foregrounded in Harry's reply in defence of the parrot. By using a rhetorical and almost ambivalent discourse, the employer argues that the parrot's racist comment is not to be linked to its former master, but rather to the *Other's* distorted interpretation and poor knowledge of European languages. The parrot is a "Creole parrot" and therefore a mimicking representation of primordial and ignorant societies. Coming from the Caribbean and the Latin American regions, the animal must have misinterpreted and deformed Western European language structures in its own speech. Therefore, the parrot's racist attitude is not to be identified with the well-educated and civilised Harry, but rather with the parrot's uneducated compatriot Jackson, who similarly uses colonial language in inappropriate and incorrect ways.

³¹⁴ In postcolonial studies, one of the most influential works on the power of *mimicry* is Homi K. Bhabha's essay entitled *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*. The scholar stresses the "excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry [which promotes the equation] *almost the same, but not quite*". Homi K. Bhabha (1984), *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, pp. 125-133. For the Caribbean novelist V. S. Naipaul, West Indians are directly influenced by Western colonial mimicry, for they represent *fictional* creations whose cultural outputs are replications of (if not distorted attempts at reproducing) *modernity/coloniality* models of reference.

In this regard, I concur with Huggan Graham when he suggests that:

Caribbean writers have been eager to turn colonial mimicry to their own advantage, capitalizing on the mischief-making alliance between parody and ‘parrotry’ in order to provide a deliberately embarrassing reminder of their own cultural difference. One way of doing this has been to rewrite the classic texts of colonial encounter - *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Heart of Darkness* - but not, of course, as a means of duplicating their authority, rather as a means of exposing the duplicity of that authority³¹⁵.

In light of this assumption, towards the end of the play Jackson kills the parrot. It is only by re-writing and cutting down their colonial *roots* and upbringing that colonised communities are able to finally set themselves free from their Western masters. When Harry sees the animal’s corpse he tries to bring up the cannibal theme again, arguing that Jackson is a “bloody savage” (155). Moreover, Harry tries to re-evoke the implications of *mimicry*, thus suggesting that the theme of killing a bird is not an original one but a well-known leitmotif used in *white* Western European and Northern Atlantic theatre and by cinema directors:

HARRY

[...] You people create nothing. You imitate everything. It’s all been done before, you see, Jackson. The parrot. Think that’s something? It’s from *The Seagull*. It’s from *Miss Julie*. You can’t ever be original, boy. That’s the trouble with shadows, right? They can’t think for themselves.
(156)

Two aspects are interesting here: Walcott is recalling his most notorious disputes with West Indian compatriot and colleague V. S. Naipaul (another Caribbean Nobel Prize winner), whom he contested in his essay *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry* ([1974] 1998), an argument I have already expounded in Chapter 1 (see pp. 70)³¹⁶; and he is making reference to two theatrical masterpieces from the nineteenth century, and their later successful intersemiotic translations or transpositions into Western cinema, which probably influenced his imagination. This aspect is relevant if one considers the author’s

³¹⁵ Huggan (1994), *A Tale of Two Parrots: Walcott, Rhys, and the Uses of Colonial Mimicry*, *Contemporary Literature*, pp. 645.

³¹⁶ Most postcolonial critique agrees in reading Walcott’s *Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* as a manifesto for the freedom and liberation of Caribbean literature and culture, especially in response to those authors, scholars and politicians who did not acknowledge Antillean original and empowering diversity and creativity. In one of his most reported passages, Walcott states: “Nothing will always be created in the West Indies, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before”. Walcott ([1974] 1998), *The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?* pp. 9.

interest in other forms of expression and transmedia artistic practices, which he investigates and describes in numerous articles³¹⁷. *The Seagull* (1895) and *Miss Julie* (1888) are respectively a tragedy by Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov and a naturalistic play by Swedish playwright August Strindberg. In both texts, the killing of birds symbolises the inconsistency and frustration of the middle-class bourgeois societies and characters. In line with other cinematographic references that I later point out, Walcott strengthens here the intertextual cohesion between the two plays and their renowned adaptations for the big screen such as Sidney Lumet's *The Sea Gull* (1968) and John Glenister and Robin Phillips's adaptation of *Miss Julie* with Helen Mirren (1972). In contrast to these plays' main characters, Harry and Jackson do not commit suicide but rather condemn their tragic finale using mockery and derision, thus showing how life should be taken less seriously and with a touch of irony.

Moreover, in commenting on the importance of the killing of the parrot, Rampaul suggests: "it is a symbolic cessation or changing of the terms of reference that would lead to an understanding between Harry and Jackson on a different level, as representatives of the white and black peoples respectively"³¹⁸.

Another episode that focuses on the power of colonial knowledge is Jackson's attempt to form and impose a new type of idiom for communication. The passage occurs right after Jackson's resolute decision to accept playing the role of master Crusoe³¹⁹. Significantly, the first transformative twist that Jackson proposes to his master, and now slave Harry is changing Friday's name to Thursday:

JACKSON

[...] (*He assumes a stern stance and points stiffly*)

Robison obey Thursday now. Speak Thursday language. Obey Thursday gods.

HARRY

Jesus Christ!

³¹⁷ In his *Biographical Sketch* on Walcott's life and works, Paul Breslin foregrounds how the Caribbean writer was also a journalist involved in reviewing "[...] movies, including *Never on a Sunday*, *La Notte* (Antonioni), *The Leopard* (Visconti), *Dr. Strangelove*, *Cheyenne Autumn* (Ford), *Diary of a Chambermaid* (Bunuel); also a James Bond movie, *Thunderball*; the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night*; and film versions of *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Suddenly Last Summer*. This list, already long, is far from complete, but it gives an idea of the range of Walcott's assignments". Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 37.

³¹⁸ Rampaul (2004), Black Crusoe, White Friday: Carnavalesque Reversal in Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*, *Cultural Studies Journal of Universitat Jaume I*, 1, pp. 78.

³¹⁹ For an interesting study on this episode, see: Vásquez (2012), Man Friday Speaks: Calypso Humor and the Reworking of Hierarchy in Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*, in *Humor in the Caribbean Literary Canon*, *New Caribbean Studies*, pp. 117-150.

JACKSON
(Inventing language)
 Amaka nobo sakamaka khaki pants kamaluma Jesus Christ!
 Jesus Christ kamalogo!
(Pause. Then with a violent gesture)
 Kamalongo kaba!
(Meaning: Jesus is dead!)
 HARRY
 Sure. [...]
 Now, could you run it with the subtitles, please?
 (114)

As I point out throughout the analysis, the scene is hard to describe if not seen through the characters' gestures and physical embodiments. Nevertheless, this represents an interesting attempt at decolonising the values and structures of the colonial matrix of knowledge. Creating a new form of communication means delegitimising the importance of English and other Western European dominator idioms. The episode connects to Walcott's strategy of *naming*, the act of baptising his Caribbean wor(l)d in a different light and through a different form³²⁰.

While Harry is initially fascinated by Jackson's challenging twist of speech, he soon realises that his employee is trying to make fun of him, because he does not use the same term for each of the props on stage more than once. Therefore, after having asked Jackson to translate and include colonial "subtitles" (114) for his new language, Harry decides to stop him. Jackson replies: "You best play Crusoe, chief. I surrender. All you win. *(Points wearily)* Table. Chair. Cup. Man. Jesus. I accept. I accept. All you win. Long time" (117). Eventually, the former master-salve relationship is re-established.

The first act of the play is characterised by a continuous shifting between the characters' psychological contrasting forces. Harry seems to be always ready to give up his legitimate colonial control but as soon as he acknowledges Jackson's potential as the master, and the real implications of the exchange, he re-establishes the colonial order.

Apart from the influence of Western European languages and historical truths, there is another socio-cultural topic that Harry and Jackson discuss: the authority of the colonisers' *religion* and the consequent erasure of any type of indigenous belief or faith.

³²⁰ In a series of critical writings and interviews, Walcott has compared colourful West Indian idioms and intricate Creoles to Caliban's speech, thus underlying the positive aspects of changing and corrupting European language forms, inflections and tones. For an overview of these issues, see Walcott's interview with English professor and poet Christian Campbell: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_6mgBRUzo (consulted on 15/04/2020).

Initially, the matter is linked with the stereotypical Western depiction of the cannibal
Other:

JACKSON

[...] Supposing I wasn't a waiter, and instead of breakfast I was serving you communion, this Sunday morning on this tropical island, and I turn to you, Friday, to teach you my faith, and I tell you, kneel down and eat this man. Well, kneel, nuh! What you think you would say, eh? (*Pause*) You, this white savage?

HARRY

No, that's cannibalism.

JACKSON

Is no more cannibalism than to eat a god. Suppose I make you tell me: For three hundred years I have made you my servant. For three hundred years...

HARRY

It's pantomime, Jackson, just keep it light... Make them laugh.

(111-112)

In order to explain the strategies at work in Western-imposed colonial *religion*, Jackson reflects on the significance of the performative *habitus*. Rituals such as kneeling down and eating communion are physical enactments that determine complete subjugation to the Catholic faith. These culturally imposed embodiments, which are sustained by *repetitive* rituals, needed to be performed and accepted without reservation. In this regard, the colonial matrix of power also operates through corporeal and physical ideas, transmissions and impositions. Religion was only an excuse to teach morals and impose behaviours or instil the acceptance of the ethics of the hierarchical colonial and imperial structures.

In the scene following the episode, it is Harry – the true embodiment of colonial power – who calls into question the real implications of Western religious authoritarianism and repression. The protagonist acknowledges his ancestors' unjustified *altering* of history and also their brutal, corruptive narrativisation by arguing: "This cannibal, who is a Christian, would have to start unlearning his Christianity. He would have to be taught [...] that everything was wrong [...] and it would get very, very complicated" (126). The discrediting of Western religion is associated with Harry's disquieting understanding of the shameful processes transmitted to impose the modernity/coloniality faith.

In this regard, Walcott unconsciously echoes the assumptions promoted by decolonial theorists and scholars when they profess the need to *unlearn* and try to re-

create anew, or even restore, what has been distorted, misread or erased. Experiencing and undergoing subjugation of the *Other* means embodying the deprived and unjust *history* of slaves. It also means starting to acknowledge and question culturally transmitted values. The process is twofold because it destabilises *white* privileged or assumed certainties, while addressing the recovery of the subjects' ancient practices, cosmogonies and beliefs.

Language and religion constitute two of the most influential means of conserving and disseminating European structures of power. Their strength was bolstered by the colonisers' persuasive enforcement as cultural prerequisites for the establishment of the seemingly beneficial civilising process.

To rethink and discredit the colonial power of knowledge means allowing *Other* languages and/or spiritual systems and beliefs to be expressed and co-exist in the former colonised communities and/or liminal regions of the Caribbean. It is also a challenge to alter the course of *white* colonial history and re-think its archive in order to include everyone's legacies or socio-cultural diversity and historical truths.

This is a hope that Jackson expresses when Harry belittles his personal attempt to re-write Crusoe and Friday's story, or better, the history of the entire Caribbean:

JACKSON

May I say what I think, Mr. Trewe? I think it's a matter of prejudice. I think that you cannot believe: one: that I can act, and two: that any black man should play Robinson Crusoe. [...] Here am I getting into *my* part and you object. This is the story... this is history. This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism; it's nothing less than that. And I don't think that I can-should-concede my getting into a part halfway and abandoning things, just because you, as my superior, give me orders. People become independent. Now, I could go down to that beach by myself with this hat, and I could play Robinson Crusoe, I could play Columbus, I could play Sir Francis Drake, I could play anybody discovering anywhere, but I don't want you to tell me when and where to draw the line!

(125)

2.4.3 Playing with English textual references and intertexts: the re-writing of European literary models

Pantomime is not the first text in which Walcott deals with the Robinson Crusoe story by Daniel Defoe. This should come as no surprise, as, in Western European literature, Crusoe represents the figure of the lonely islander, the shipwrecked outcast

who survives the inhospitable environment of the unknown New World, which is the region of the uncanny *Other*, and the territory of the frightening cannibals and their lost boy, Friday. In this sense, Crusoe is similar to Walcott, as the West Indian writer also struggled to find his own form of recognition in a stretch of *repetitive* and yet similar state islands, whose inhabitants looked upon his work with suspicion and wonder.

Aside from these reverberations, Walcott's work implicitly distances itself from Crusoe's adventures and life choices, and so it would be wrong to think of them as *doubles*. Crusoe escapes from his fixed role (especially the role attributed by his father) in order to embark on a new voyage. After being shipwrecked on a deserted island, he repents having attempted to change his predetermined position and destiny, and decides to turn to religion in order to embrace a puritan life of hard work, thus becoming the symbol of the new bourgeois and middle-class English man. In this respect, he follows the dictates of the colonial matrix of power, for Crusoe becomes the symbol of the exploiter, or better the new *white* coloniser, who relies on his faith and ingenious mind in order to conquer *Others* and their (New) World.

Walcott stands at the opposite end of the scale to Crusoe. Even though the Caribbean writer is constantly questioning his *identity*, he never accepts his determined role(s). He rejects any sort of categorisation and instead embraces the destabilising and colourful chaos of his unpredictable archipelago.

Thus, Walcott's Crusoe determines his own textual representation, because he repeatedly re-writes and re-invents his Western-oriented metaphor³²¹, and allows different characters to intermingle and interplay with him.

This is the reason why, in *Pantomime*, the reader cannot distinguish who is the *real* Crusoe. He is neither Harry nor Jackson, for he is both and neither of them. References to him and his intertextual forms are there, but they are scattered at times in Harry's lines and in others in Jackson's. Crusoe is the *shadow* (one of the most recurrent words used in the play) of both the master and the slave because it is always there with them, but it can also vanish at once. In *The Figure of Crusoe* (1965) Walcott explains:

My Crusoe, then, is Adam, Christopher Columbus, God, a missionary, a beachcomber, and his interpreter, Daniel Defoe. He is Adam because he is the first inhabitant of a second paradise. He

³²¹ See: Patricia Ismond's *Indigenizing the Crusoe Metaphor* in Ismond (2001), *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 43-52.

is Columbus because he has discovered this new world, by accident, by fatality. He is God because he teaches himself to control his creation, he rules the world he has made, and also, because he is to Friday, a white concept of Godhead. He is a missionary because he instructs Friday in the uses of religion; he has a passion for conversion. He is a beachcomber because I have imagined him as one of those figures of adolescent literature, some derelict out of Conrad or Stevenson, or Marryat. [...] And finally, he is also Daniel Defoe, because the journal of Crusoe, which is Defoe's journal, is written in prose, not in poetry, and our literature, the pioneers of our public literature have expressed themselves in prose in this new world³²².

Walcott's re-writing of Crusoe is therefore far from simple³²³, for the Western character appears as a metaphor for, or better as a symbol of, Caribbean writers and peoples. Yet, he also encompasses the dominator figures of the Western wor(l)d, who have tried to erase, alter and control the uncontaminated paradise of the Antilles. In this way, Walcott reaches an *alternative* compromise, because he places his Crusoe in an *in-between* space of encounter, a context in which the atrocities perpetuated by the colonial matrix of power are not neglected but rather transformed into a new creative energy, a floating chaos in which everything and everyone renews, changes and sprouts in a new, different form.

Walcott begins to decolonise Defoe's protagonist long before the writing of *Pantomime*. In a poem entitled *Crusoe's Journal* (which belongs to *The Castaway* collection), he writes:

Once we have driven past Mundo Nuevo trace
[...]
came our first book, our profane Genesis
whose Adam speaks that prose
which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself
with poetry's surprise,
in a green world, one without metaphors;
like Christofer he bears
in speech mnemonic as a missionary's
the Word to savages,
its shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's
whose sprinkling alters us
into good Fridays who recite His praise,

³²² Walcott (1965), "The Figure of Crusoe" in Hamner (1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 35-36. At the beginning of the essay Hamner points out: "This paper was presented orally at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad, 27 October 1965. Derek Walcott has graciously allowed its publication for the first time as edited by Robert Hamner".

³²³ In commenting on Walcott's Crusoe, John Thieme argues: "what begins as a Caribbean borrowing from Europe is turned upside down with a Caribbean Crusoe providing a model for artists in other societies. Walcott's poetics of migration unsettles received notions of literary lineage". Thieme (1999), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 15.

parroting our master's
style and voice, we make his language ours,
converted cannibals
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ³²⁴.

Apart from the evident correspondences linking the themes addressed in these verses with *Pantomime*'s lines, Walcott's intent is to re-imagine Crusoe's island as an uncorrupted paradise, in which a new Adam (and significantly here the name of Crusoe does not appear if not in the poem's title) can start *naming* things afresh, through new metaphors. Walcott dignifies his compatriots' *wor(l)d* and acknowledges their attempt at *parroting*, and later altering, colonial language. He finally hints at the fact that they did not reject the dominator's religion, but rather accepted it together with their faith in a challenging syncretism that denies boundaries.

In *Crusoe's Island*, another poem from the same collection, Walcott re-invents the description of his birthplace. Here the re-writing is more evident, as Walcott deliberately praises and admires his islands' astonishing beauty and the colourful diversity of his peoples, thus decolonising their cannibalistic description:

Now Friday's progeny,
The brood of Crusoe's slave,
Black little girls in pink
Organdy, crinolines,
Walk in their air of glory
Beside a breaking wave;
Below their feet the surf
Hisses like tambourines.

At dusk when they return
For vespers, every dress
Touched by the sun will burn
A seraph's, an angel's,
And nothing I can learn
From art or loneliness
Can bless them as the bell's
Transfiguring tongue can bless³²⁵.

A final and substantial change occurs in Walcott's description of his main character, Crusoe. The self-assured, dominant protagonist of Defoe's story is replaced by a humble man, a lonely figure whose aim is not to survive or accomplish God's will but

³²⁴ Walcott (2014), *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 82-83.

³²⁵ Walcott (2014), *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 88.

rather to acknowledge and understand himself through the voice or the encounter with *an-other* human being. This is for Walcott the real gift and value of our everyday journey: sharing the beauty of life with Others:

As startling as his shadow
Grows to the castaway.

Upon this rock the bearded hermit built
His Eden:
Goats, corn-crop, fort, parasol, garden,
Bible for Sabbath, all the joys
But one
Which sent him howling for a human voice.
[...]
Craftsman and castaway
All heaven in his head,
He watched his shadow pray
Not for God's love but human love instead³²⁶.

This passage is paramount to the understanding of *Pantomime*'s ultimate goal. Jackson and Harry's *individual* stories are not only about the acceptance of their true and equivalent self (or double-self, if we read them as a single version of Crusoe), but rather coming to terms with *an-other* absent self, which is their female counterpart's voice. It is the protagonists' longing for those absent second halves that is the real reason for their frustration and inconsistency in their lives. Towards the end of the play, we learn that Jackson is sadly divorced, while Harry has moved to the Caribbean because his wife has run away with another man after causing the death of their little son.

The wounds of Jackson's personal life seem to have healed, while Harry has not recovered from his personal trauma. This is why the *theatre within theatre* (or re-writing) of Crusoe's story at one point becomes a heart-rending confession of Harry's faults and misfortunes with his wife. It is only thanks to Jackson that Harry can finally break free from his past and start living a *new* life, without regrets and lies. At the end of the play, the protagonists acknowledge that their reversing journeys have helped them both in a new appreciation of their divided lives and experiences, and also in overcoming their tormented past.

³²⁶ Walcott (2014), *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, pp. 86.

Different intertextual layers intermingle in *Pantomime*. Walcott re-thinks the English canonical texts but he also refers to much of his own previous work, making interesting and yet arduous allusions to his complex type of poetry and decolonising narrative attempts. Apart from challenging Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, in *Pantomime* Walcott re-calls another fundamental canonical English text, which is part of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798): the opening poem of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

The poem is presented in fragments or corrupted and scattered lines of theatrical poetry, as both Jackson and Harry keep on forgetting, altering and remoulding the original text. Harry is the first to bring it on stage, while rehearsing possible alternatives for his role reversal as Friday:

HARRY

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide wide sea...

I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,

And cried, A sail! A sail!

(He removes the hat, then his shirt, rolls up his trousers, removes them, puts them back on, removes them again)

Mastah... Mastah... Friday sorry. Friday never do it again. Master.

(JACKSON enters with breakfast tray, groans, turns to leave. Returns)

JACKSON

Mr. Trewe, what is going on on this blessed Sunday morning, if I may ask?

HARRY

I was feeling what it was like to be Friday.

(102)

Harry associates the infamous and terrifying destiny of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner with a possible depiction of his own/Friday's condition. The problem with his re-writing is that he cannot remember the correct order of the Rime or likely even its broader meaning. Indeed, the fragments he chooses are *reversed*, with the first couplet belonging to Part four (lines 232-233) in the original text and the second couplet to Part three (lines 160-161).

Within the structure of the play, Harry's ignorance and alteration of the Rime, which goes unnoticed, aligns with the ironic and destabilising forces of the pantomime. On the contrary, I believe that Walcott's reference to these four verses of the source text is symbolically connected to the main themes of the play. Firstly, in Coleridge's Rime, the Ancient Mariner "sucks his blood" because, after having killed the Albatross, he and

his crew suffer a terrible drought. In this way, Walcott implicitly alludes to the destiny of thousands of African imported slaves, who experienced a similar terrifying situation, transported as cargo by their colonisers. Secondly, the Mariner's solitude is not to be linked with Friday's condition but rather with Harry's own estranging story. Having disrupted the sacred, cyclical order of life – the Mariner by killing the bird and Harry (and, by extension, his *white* dominator companions) by exploiting the New World's resources – they are both condemned to live an unhappy life, in solitude or in a sort of tormented “life-in-death” condition.

Walcott's seemingly easy re-writing of Coleridge's Rime returns towards the end of the play, when Harry and Jackson decide to play around with its powerful meaning again:

HARRY

(*Recites*)

“The self-same moment I could pray;

and... tata tee-tum-tum

The Albatross fell off and sank

Like lead into the sea”

God, my memory...

JACKSON

That ain't Crusoe, that is “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

(*He pronounces it “Marina”*)

HARRY

Mariner.

JACKSON

Marina.

HARRY

Mariner.

JACKSON

“The Rime of the Ancient Marina”. So I learn in Fourth Standard.

HARRY

It's your country, mate.

JACKSON

Is your language, pardner. I stand corrected. Now, you ain't see English crazy? I could sit down right next to you and tell you I *stand* corrected.

(164-165)

Again, the intertextual reference is made at a significant moment in the performance, during Harry's acceptance of and reconciliation with his tormented (and private) past. Thus, Coleridge's Rime is almost entirely reproduced, as it corresponds to the final section of Part four (lines 288-291).

Even though Harry missed out some lines, he is now perfectly in tune with the Ancient Mariner's liberation from the burden of his deeds, and therefore the two are intrinsically connected. This is also confirmed by Harry's onomatopoeic rewriting of the falling of the Albatross through an interesting wording of the sound "tata tee-tum-tum", which is a rewriting of Coleridge's Rime: "And from my neck so free / [The Albatross fell off]" (line 289).

In order to lessen the intensity of the episode, Walcott continues with Jackson's ironic reply. Indeed, even though the butler recognises and praises his employer's intellectual reference, he sustains that the correct pronunciation of the word Mariner is "Marina" and not "Mariner". In this way, Walcott simultaneously corrupts the title of one of the most important texts of the English *canon*, and also makes the reader or viewer reflect on the power of Western-imposed European education. Jackson recalls that he learnt the Rime under colonial rule and that he was forced to do so. From Jackson's perspective, liberation comes through the act of renaming or re-writing the narratives imposed on Caribbean peoples, but also through accepting their original, destabilising version.

As Ahern suggests: "In Jackson we see a versatility and mobility, a power of [...] being unchartable, unfixable on the ethnolinguistic matrix – a powerful resource for evading colonial control and domination, as it resists that very epistemic, nomenclatural hegemony which the latter seeks to impose"³²⁷.

The episode presents a substantial and challenging opening up towards the acceptance of West Indians *corrupted* forms. This is also suggested in Harry's reply: "It's your country, mate" (165), which explicitly allows a decentring *alternative*, the possibility to be finally recognised and acknowledged as correct in the schizophrenic Antillean archipelago.

2.4.4 The embodied wor(l)d and other artistic means in *Pantomime*

I have already pointed out how *Pantomime* relies on the power of the instinctual and highly physical expressiveness of West Indian actors, and their use of improvisation,

³²⁷ Ahern (2007), In(sub)ordinate Speech: Mimicry as Bourdieuan Heterodoxy in Walcott's *Pantomime*, *ARIEL*, 38, 4, pp. 20.

thus determining Walcott's difficulty in staging and presenting it outside the Caribbean. Jackson and Harry bring the embodied battle of their culturally divergent artistic styles to the stage. In this regard, King has pointed out how critics and literary scholars are divided between those who define the play as an "intellectual battle", and others who think of it more as a "war dance"³²⁸.

The performance is based on numerous scenes in which the protagonists do not speak but express themselves through movement, gestures and actions. Moreover, the play contains a lot of specific captions or physical stage directions, which further reinforce Walcott's detailed descriptions³²⁹.

Some episodes of the play Harry and Jackson do seem to follow an almost choreographic or danced structure, with physical representations and precise gestures that convey the radical role reversal and the changes in their characters' attitudes and behaviour. This aspect is also evident in the way they name objects or recall specific artistic practices and means. For instance, when Jackson invents a new, incomprehensible language, he *speaks* through his body. His gestures and hand movements are fundamental in conveying to Harry what he is referring to. He touches and moves the table and the deck chair, he kneels and starts to pray, he screams and looks up at the sky, thus pretending to embody a ritualistic practice for an unknown God. Again, when Jackson pretends to be the *black* Crusoe, he enacts a new, soundless version of the story by sitting on the upturned table and pretending to row towards his unknown island, asking an incredulous Harry to play the sound of a *white* sea bird.

While these aspects may seem marginal, it should be noted how different the experience of reading a script is compared to seeing it performed. Personally, I read the play first and did not understand all of its implications before having had the opportunity to watch it online (thanks to a free version uploaded on YouTube that had been produced and made available by the University of Essex³³⁰).

³²⁸ King (1995), *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, pp. 296.

³²⁹ For an interesting study on the use of theatrical captions and stage directions, see: De Min (2013), *Leggere le didascalie: narrazione, commento, immaginazione nella drammaturgia moderna*.

³³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1bC503njMI&t=1353s> (consulted on 10/04/2020).



Fig. 2: Wendell Manwarren and David Tarkenter in Walcott's *Pantomime* at the Lakeside Theatre, University of Essex (October 2012).

The play, when acted out, is indeed different from its textual form because it conveys fundamental details which may be eluded or ignored while reading the text. In light of this, it is also important to recall how Walcott extensively worked with his Workshop's members in order to convey new and highly expressive meanings, also thanks to Caribbeans' innate sense and control of movement and gestures.

In describing West Indians' original *expressiveness* and highly embodied vocation, Antonio Benítez-Rojo provides an interesting analysis of the use of the body by Martin Luther King. Taking the figure of this Caribbean-born and later Northern-American symbol of black liberation as an example, Benítez-Rojo tries to demonstrate how, when looking at and reading West Indian texts or artistic forms, one should not forget to take into account the body semiotics and corporeal expressiveness of Antillean peoples:

This man was able to be a Caribbean person without ceasing to be a North American, and vice versa. His African ancestry, the texture of his humanism, the ancient wisdom embodied in his pronouncements and strategies, his improvisatory vocation, his ability to seduce and be seduced, and, above all, his vehement condition as a dreamer (*I have a dream...*) and as an authentic performer make up the Caribbean side of a man unquestionably idiosyncratic in North America.

Martin Luther King occupies and fills the space in which the Caribbean connects to the North American, a space of which jazz is also a sign³³¹.

It is not by chance that – when speaking about improvisation and artistic means which concur in giving an original *texture* to openly expressive Caribbean dynamics – Benítez-Rojo introduces the role of music and, in particular, jazz. I have already explained how this artistic form, which was born in the southern regions of the United States of America, owes its origins to the Caribbean peoples, who were the first to re-think and try out new melodies and mix rhythmical alternatives in their musical outputs.

Music also plays an important role in *Pantomime*. Indeed, Jackson and Harry do not only refer to music hall and/or calypso performances, which require of course music, but also to other regional, artistic instruments from the Antillean archipelago. For instance, Harry mentions the “quarto” (110), which is a kind of Spanish guitar, while Jackson compares the hotel’s degrading “foundations” to “[...] termites jumping like steel bands” (98), which are special Carnival bands that one can find in Carnival parades or festivities in Trinidad. When Harry suggests his first personal re-writing of the Robinson Crusoe’s story, Jackson immediately disapproves his *soundless* intent by stating:

JACKSON

You have to have music.

HARRY

Pardon?

JACKSON

A show like that should have music. Just a lot of talk is very boring.

(109-110)

Apart from decolonising Western European narrative forms and plots, this is an original attempt by Walcott to propose a new Caribbean-based style of writing, which encompasses the folkloric and *irrational* forces of music, dance and improvisation that characterise West Indian contexts. In short, Walcott tries his best to give a comprehensive picture and detailed description of his highly creative archipelago. At the same time, he also criticises Caribbean national governments, underlining their lack of support towards the arts in general, which he truly believes to be the most effective means for cultural and

³³¹ Benítez-Rojo (1996), *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, pp. 24.

economic change. In this respect, after acknowledging Jackson's superior artistic talent in the reversing of their roles, Harry poignantly argues:

HARRY

We're trying to do something light, just a little pantomime, a little satire, a little picong. But if you [Jackson] take this thing seriously, we might commit Art, which is a kind of crime in this society... I mean, there'd be a lot of things there that people... well, it would make them think too much, and well, we don't want that... we just want a little... entertainment.
(125)

Clearly, Walcott's opinion towards the creative power of Art(s) is the exact opposite of the words uttered by his *white* protagonist. The Caribbean writer knows that a socio-cultural transformation is possible only through a mutual and collective imaginative shift that brings to the fore and recognises peoples' individual talents, and artistic attitudes or passions. In this sense, Walcott echoes once again Riane Eisler's cultural (r)evolution and her belief and strong faith in the power of the positive and non-violent biocultural, artistic wor(l)d.

Pantomime ends with an amusing and joyful carnivalesque dance. Harry and Jackson sing and move to the rhythms of a tribal song that overcomes their initial separation and exemplifies their newly established recognition. While Harry has finally found the courage to put a definitive end to his tormented past, Jackson surprisingly closes the performance by revealing, out loud: "I going back to the gift that's my God-given calling. I benignly resign, you fire me. With inspiration. Caiso is my true work, caiso is my true life" (170).

The audience is left to ponder Walcott's message as a playwright as the curtain closes. We should all find the courage to question our current lives in order to follow the true dreams of our repressed *double*, and we should all try to rejoice in the carnival of life, by recognising our hidden creativity, which is what truly define us.

2.4.5 Dancing with Caribbean shadows: interdisciplinary connections and encounters in *Pantomime*

Most Western European literary critique of *Pantomime* focuses on the significance of the artistic and cultural *divisions* at the heart of Harry and Jackson's

relationship and their duality as characters. Scholars and intellectuals highlight how the protagonists of the play exemplify respectively the *white* and *black* representatives of the schizophrenic Caribbean reality, and how their performance displays familiar Walcottian themes of language, religion and art.

What may be missing from this type of canonical critique is Walcott's emphasis on his characters' physical *divisions* on stage, or better, their spatial and corporeal separations, which are essential elements at the core of the text. In order to fully explore and convey these aspects, and also to make them more evident in the process of the theatrical embodiment, Walcott persistently addresses the ambiguous and evanescent strength of the image or symbol of the *shadow*.

Not only are Harry and Jackson the shadows of one another, but during the entire performance there are persistent references to all different types of "shadows", which are in turn artistic, historical and even narrative in form. In most of these episodes, the theme connects directly with the colour black and the associated historical and social implications it has.

With this in mind, I think it is interesting to emphasise the meaning of an almost shadow-like name that appears twice in the play, the American actor, comedian and singer Al Jolson, the king of blackface performers in the America of the 1920s and 1930s³³². Walcott recalls him through Harry's timely allusion to two of his most famous songs, namely *Sonny boy* (96) and *Swanee*³³³ (118). Using them as though they were essential intertextual or artistic references, Walcott re-stages fragments of the lyrics of these songs, and even makes Harry dance through them in "Jolson's style" (96).

This aspect may seem marginal if one ignores the original reversal in Al Jolson's art and performative style. The American *white* actor, in fact, used to colour his face *black* in order to portray a highly standardised and repetitive show which drew essentially on

³³² Al Jolson (1886-1950) was a Lithuanian-American singer, actor and performer. "He was the son of a cantor who emigrated to the U.S. in the early 1890s [...] and was followed later by his family. [...] He began working in vaudeville early in the 20th century, often appearing as part of an act with his brother. He was working in blackface as a single by June 1906. [...] In 1912 Jolson introduced the character of Gus, a wily African-American servant who would be his frequent on-stage persona from then on. The show ran 136 performances in New York, then it went on tour from September 1912 to January 1913, and he remained with it. From this time on, he would tour extensively around the country with his shows, becoming a national rather than just a Broadway star". Al Jolson Biography by William Ruhlmann, <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/al-jolson-mn0000609215/biography> (consulted on 30/04/2020).

³³³ It is possible to see Al Jolson's performing *Sonny Boy*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2cYWxLQW9Y> (consulted on 30/04/2020) & *Swanee*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPmBPvHzF2c> (consulted on 30/04/2020).

the rhythms and movements of the Afro-American segregated cultures. Blackface was a common artistic practice and highly successful form of entertainment in America until at least the first half of the twentieth century. Jolson used to play his shows even for soldiers who were fighting in the Second World War, and later for those who went to fight in Vietnam and Korea.

Walcott did not take sides in the controversy surrounding Jolson's *white* legacies and racist endeavours³³⁴, rather he took the opportunity to recall his controversial success in order to reinforce the theme of the *double* and that of the role-reversal of his protagonists. Indeed, I argue that Walcott's cautious and thoughtful evoking of Jolson's artistic style is to be connected to the latter's own divided history, as the actor came from a Jewish-Lithuanian family that must have felt the pressure of being part of a persecuted ethnic-minority community.

This can also be seen in Walcott's reference to a similar *Other* performer, Yul Brynner, who is mentioned by Jackson at the beginning of Act II:

JACKSON

Creole acting. I wonder what kind o' acting dat is.

(Spins the hammer in the air and does or does not catch it)

Yul Brynner. *Magnificent Seven*. Picture, papa! A kind of Western Creole acting. It ain't have no English cowboys, eh, Mr. Harry? Something wrong, boy, something wrong.

(131)

Walcott refers here to the figure of an immigrant, Russian-born actor, who became a naturalised American and controversial symbol of the *white* Western cowboy³³⁵. In this way, the playwright further questions the idea of representational *exactitude* or truth, in order to reinforce its unstable and impossible definition and blurred authenticity, and also to destabilise the strength of the colonial matrix of power.

³³⁴ See, for instance, Ted Goia's article titled: *A Megastar Long Buried Under a Layer of Blackface*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/22/arts/music-a-megastar-long-buried-under-a-layer-of-blackface.html> (consulted on 30/04/2020).

³³⁵ Yul Brynner (1920-1985) was a "Russian-born stage and film actor who was known primarily for his role as the Siamese monarch in more than 4,000 performances in the Broadway musical *The King and I* between 1951 and 1985 and in the 1956 film version. [...] He became known for his resonant voice, charisma, and shaved head [and also for his role as] lead gunslinger in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960)". Encyclopaedia Britannica. Yul Brynner. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yul-Brynner> (consulted on 30/04/2020).

Yul Brynner became a celebrity because he was a *hybrid* individual who knew how to embrace his culturally divided self of Western-Creole actor. He represented an original alternative to *white* Western celebrities and fictional interpreters.

The symbol of the shadow epitomises the *uncertainty* and confusing ambiguity within which Walcottian protagonists recognise each other, clash and connect, or come together and separate. The shadow represents a journey of the Self, a deep plunge into one's own personality and the Others' self-reassuring image. It is a process of detachment and relation, which fortifies and bolsters the incomprehensible *in-betweenness* within the chaos and confusion of life.

The paradoxical fusion and separation that characterises the dichotomic nature of the shadow is embodied in Jackson and Harry's corporeal encounters, in which they keep moving and interacting together, and distancing themselves from one another on stage. In particular, I analyse here the body semantics and corporeal *partitions* of two significant and divergent episodes. First, the separation during the so-called toilet episode, and second the fusional completeness of the shadow dance, which is significantly performed in the middle of the play.

The psychological need to urinate is one the most recurring images of the *theatre of the absurd* and Walcott uses to re-establish Harry and Jackson's division within the frame of the racist modernity/coloniality practice of tracing ethnical and social borders and boundaries between individuals.

When towards the end of the performance Jackson asks his employee to pardon his absence for five minutes because he needs to go to the toilet, Harry replies that the act would take too long. Jackson, like most of his (black) compatriots, usually takes more than five minutes to relieve himself because the toilet was traditionally located far. Here too, it is located at the back of the building³³⁶. Because of his impatient desire to go on with their role reversal, Harry suggests that Jackson may use his own bathroom, so that he can quickly return to acting their pantomime. When Jackson argues that this act would damage their *shadow* distinction, Harry backs off, thus acknowledging that destabilising their defining spaces would be wrong:

HARRY

³³⁶ This divisional ethnic drawing of spaces is made clear from the beginning of the performance, especially when Harry reveals to his employee: "I nearly came around the back, to have a little talk" (97).

Look, I was trying to tell you, instead of going all the way round to the servants' lavatories, pop into my place, have a quick one, and that'll be under five bloody minutes in any circumstances and regardless of the capacity. Go on. I'm all right.

JACKSON

Use your bathroom, Mr. Harry?

HARRY

Go on, will you?

JACKSON

I want to get this. You giving me permission to go through your living room, with all your valuables lying about, with the picture of your wife watching me in case I should leave the bathroom open, and you are granting me the privilege of taking out my thing, doing my thing right there among all those lotions and expensive soaps, and... after I finish, wiping my hands on a clean towel?

HARRY

Since you make it so vividly horrible, why don't you just walk around to the servants' quarters and take as much time as you like? Five minutes won't kill me.

(151-152)

The division of spaces, and the representation of a Western European and Northern Atlantic colonial and neo-colonial drawing of borders are impositions that Walcott calls into question through his characters' behaviour. Walcott highlights this form of centrifugal refusal in most of his texts, as I have already pointed out in *The Joker of Seville*, and as I demonstrate in the analysis of *Tiepolo's Hound*.

Harry's choice to break up and dissolve physical limitations and interdictions for his employee is a timid step towards an understanding of their similar, and in some way identical *shadows*, an attempt that is performed through Harry's unconscious recognition of their double (and true) nature. At the end of the episode, however, the corporeal division is re-established and any attempt at change dissolved. The colonial matrix of power is renewed while the characters are forced to withdraw to their confines. An opposite attitude is displayed during a highly positive encounter towards the middle of the play, when Harry and Jackson put aside their different artistic talents and enforced roles in order to embrace and mimic each other's movements in what I have defined the dancing of the shadows.

The significance of the moment is highlighted by Walcott's precise stage directions and evocative use of stage lighting. During the performance, other episodes are characterised by a conic light spot at the centre of the stage, but this specific episode is further reinforced by an unexpected and almost identical mirroring of the actors' gestures and movements.

The moment reflects on the power of colonial history and shameful subjugation. It tries to read the Caribbean archive through the eyes of an innocent child, who was raised and forced to obey to his/her *white* masters' dictates. The story suggests that, with the passing of time, the same child has become so accustomed to reproducing his/her dominators' pre-set roles that, little by little, the division between the two dissolves, and they eventually become the "shadow" (113) of one another:

JACKSON

For three hundred years I served you. Three hundred years I served you breakfast in... in my white jacket on a white veranda, boss, bwana³³⁷, effendi, bacra, sahib... in that sun that never set on your empire I was your shadow, I did what you did, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib... that was my pantomime. Every movement you made, your shadow copied...

(Stops giggling)

and you smiled at me as a child does smile at his shadow's helpless obedience, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib, Mr. Crusoe. Now...

HARRY

Now?

(JACKSON's speech is enacted in a trance-like drone, a zombie)

JACKSON

But after a while the child does get frighten of the shadow he make. He say to himself, That is too much obedience, I better hads stop. But the shadow don't stop, no matter if the child stop playing that pantomime.
(112-113)

Textually, Jackson's lines are composed as if they were a repetitive litany or prayer. The master's different names are relentlessly re-evoked as uncanny and disquieting "shadows" of one another; their image is introduced by a couple of recurring adjectives that embody and contrast with Jackson, the slave in a *black* body, because he appears in a "white jacket on a white veranda". The physical evocation of Jackson and the child is suggested by their identical and limiting *shadowing* movements. The child's sudden recognition of his mechanical behaviour and the unwanted physical *repetitions* imposed by the modernity/coloniality structure occur only after a process of self-discovery of his own body. He can finally distinguish the difference between himself and his *shadow*. It is only through this reversal and highly epiphanic experience that the child is able to become the master of his own life:

JACKSON

³³⁷ *Bwana* means "sir" in Swahili and it is used by Jackson to recall other types of "British colonialism" around the Empire.

[...] and the shadow does follow the child everywhere; when he praying, the shadow pray too, when he turn round frighten, the shadow turn round too, when he hide under the sheet, the shadow hiding too. He cannot get rid of it, no matter what, and that is the power and black magic of the shadow, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib, until it is the shadow that start dominating the child, it is the servant that start dominating the master...

(Laughs maniacally, like The Shadow)

and that is the victory of the shadow, boss.

(Normally)

And that is why all them Pakistani and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays driving all you so crazy. And they go keep driving you crazy till you go mad. In that sun that never set, they's your shadow, you can't shake them off.

(113)

Jackson and Harry's shadow or mirror dancing starts precisely at this point, in correspondence with Friday/Jackson's sudden lowering of his voice. I will now describe in detail what *physically* happens on stage, taking, by way of example, the video of *Pantomime* recorded at the University of Essex in 2012³³⁸.

Jackson is standing right in front of the audience in the spotlight which foregrounds his body. Harry is sitting right behind him. When Jackson starts moving according to what he is describing through words, Harry mimics exactly what he does, thus embodying and representing them as *doubles* and *shadows*. First, at the word "pray", they clasp their hands together (with their eyes looking down), then at the sound of "turn" they physically turn around, lowering their chest and crouching in fear (at this moment Jackson turns to face Harry, who in turn takes control of their actions). Then, at the word "hide", they turn back again towards the audience, keeping their right arms up while their left arms are lowered, thus alluding to the act of stretching something out, like a sheet or blanket (as if they were hiding their faces behind it – see Fig. 3. Detail 1).

³³⁸ The University of Essex website reports: "In May [2012], Walcott flew over especially from St Lucia to direct the premiere of a new production of his play at the Lakeside Theatre at the Colchester Campus as part of his role as Professor of Poetry. The show was a huge success with the Lakeside Theatre packed out throughout its three-night run and fans travelling from across Europe to see the production". The University of Essex Website (2012) https://www1.essex.ac.uk/news/event.aspx?e_id=4578 (consulted on 25/04/2020). Click on the following link to see the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1bC503njMI> (consulted on 25/04/2020). The physical movements and dancing embodiments I describe in this section of the analysis start at 21:10 minutes.



Fig 3: Harry and Jackson's shadows or mirroring dancing. Detail 1.
 YouTube, University of Essex channel. *Pantomime* directed by Walcott in October 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1bC503njMI&t=1335s>
 (consulted on 15/12/2020)

Finally, when Jackson utters “he [the child] cannot get rid of it, no matter what”, they both cross their arms before opening them out again with their palms facing upwards, as if they were embodying the power of possession, which follows in the next lines: “that is the power and black magic” (113)³³⁹. Towards the end of the dance, while Jackson emphatically *repeats* for the third time the names of all the dominator masters, the actors lower their hands, in order to express their repressing lack of freedom or inability to change their shadowing destiny. A sign of hope occurs when Jackson explains that, as long as the shadow dominates the child, the opposite is also true, so that “it is the servant that starts dominating the master” (113). The theme of role reversal re-appears and this is conveyed through the actors’ raising their hands up one last time with their arms stretched out (again) and their faces morphing into a schizophrenic smile that bursts out into a psychotic laugh (see Fig. 4. Detail 2)³⁴⁰.

³³⁹ Later on, in Act II, Harry asks Jackson if “old black magic” corresponds to “Obeah” practices (137), thus connecting this particular syntagm “black magic” with the commonly accepted Western prejudice of considering West Indian traditional Obeah rites as obscure and mystical events that need to be rejected and forbidden.

³⁴⁰ Walcott makes another interesting intertextual reference or artistic allusion here to *The Shadow*, a collection of serialised pulp novels that were very famous in the 1930s, and that later inspired many cinematographic transpositions.



Fig 4: Harry and Jackson's shadows or mirroring dancing. Detail 2.
 YouTube, University of Essex channel. *Pantomime* directed by Walcott in October 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1bC503njMI&t=1335s>
 (consulted on 15/12/2020)

The dancing of the Caribbean shadows concludes with Jackson clasping his hands forcefully and with Harry's remark: "Got really carried away that time, didn't you? It's pantomime, Jackson, keep it light. Improvise!" (113).

This is Walcott's attempt to re-establish a lighter, more playful atmosphere after this physically engaging and thought-provoking exchange. Through his actors' precise embodiments and choreographic symbolic structures, the Caribbean writer conveys a deep meaning, that is to say, a new empirical understatement that further reinforces his efforts in decolonising thoughts, minds and also *shadowing* bodies.

Like in most of his works, Walcott exploits a highly symbolic moment to reflect on the strength of his peoples, or rather to re-evoked the power of all peoples engaged in a struggle to be acknowledged in unjust colonial or neo-colonial structures of power. In this particular scene, Walcott refers to the rejected immigrants, "Pakistani and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays" (113), who have always been defined and recognised as *shadows* of their privileged masters, the *white* Western European and Northern American dominators who have exploited them for their own interests and comfortable lives.

The truth is that these *black* shadows will always dance in unison with their identical *white* representations, through the light of the wor(l)d, in a universe that

recognises both light and darkness, in what should be a cyclical rhythm of communal partnership and human love rather than dominator exploitation and egotism.

2.5 Tiepolo's Hound

With the publication of *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000) Walcott achieved one of his life's ambitions: bringing together his creative passions and talents in poetry, literature and art. As Baugh argues:

One can hardly imagine anything in poetry that more closely, more sustainably approaches the cohering of the two disciplines. At one and the same time the poet represents in words the life in paintings, or, more precisely, the life of paint, and life as painting³⁴¹.

In this poetic and semi-autobiographical work, Walcott finally breaks free from his *normative* colonial education, imbued with formal literary structures and constrained by rules (especially within the realm of poetry), to embrace a freer, multimodal or transdisciplinary form of expression.

For most critics, the work proved to be unexpected because of the shift not only in Walcott's way of composing verse, but also in his lines of enquiry, which were original and radical compared to his previous work. At the time the poet had just turned seventy and nobody was expecting such a dynamic and puzzling change in direction towards the final stages of his writing career. Bruce King was about to publish an extensive and detailed biography of Walcott's life and even he decided to include a brief consideration of the work at the end of the book:

During August 1999, while my manuscript was being copy-edited, Walcott sent me a near final draft provided that I did not quote from it [...]. I had expected a Popean essay on art and painting; even the newspaper interviews saying it was about the nineteenth-century painter Camille Pissarro had not prepared me for the poem itself. It was long, ninety-seven printed pages in the version I had, over 2,500 couplets, and the first half of the poem was mostly a verse biography of Pissarro. It was much more; it was autobiographical, about the relationship of memory to art, about the life of the artist, exile, the nature of modern art, and about the relationship of Caribbean and other New World arts to Europe and other cultures. It was about Walcott³⁴².

King's suggestion to avoid defining the work as a mere book-length poem containing twenty-six of Walcott's own drawings is a grounded one. *Tiepolo's Hound* pays homage to the world of painting and figurative art in Europe and the Caribbean. It is also an intimate dialogue with Walcott's own identity and *doubles*, and their ever

³⁴¹ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 211.

³⁴² King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 627.

recurring and refracted representations, whether materialised in other protagonists or substantiated under the guise of artists, historical figures, or even trees and animals.

The hound, the dog that gives the work its name, is one of the poem's main themes, even if Walcott repeatedly questions its factual and authentic existence. The poet's alter-ego is indeed obsessed by an unsettling and enigmatic absence and presence. Walcott believes he saw it for the first time on a painting exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Walcott is captivated by the "slash of pink"³⁴³ on its inner thigh, a colourful brushstroke or "epiphanic detail" (8) that torments him for the rest of his poetic journey. In the narrative, the reader slowly and implicitly comprehends Walcott's intent to connect the colour of privilege, embodied by the *white* hound, with that of its destitute *black* counterpart, symbolising poverty and dispossession. Indeed, the dog keeps swapping forms and identities, appearing as a mongrel, lapdog and bastard pup among others.

Aside from its seemingly linear plot, *Tiepolo's Hound* is an intricate and puzzling poem that defies borders, margins and clear representations within the confines of reality and the artistic process itself. The clash between the older Western world and its newer *alternative* on the other side of the Atlantic is further examined within the fictionalised story of Camille Pissarro, a renowned European French painter, whose origins and upbringing are linked to the Caribbean island of St. Thomas.

Pissarro was a member of a Sephardic family from Portugal which moved first to France, to escape the "white hoods of the Inquisition" (3), and later to the Caribbean, to flee the ever-recurrent waves of anti-Semitism in Europe³⁴⁴. Walcott imagines Pissarro's biography as he describes his paintings; he tries to understand and give meaning to his life choices, such as the decision to abandon the Caribbean and settle in Paris.

Realising a number of similarities between his own and Pissarro's stories, Walcott decides to blur and fuse their personas in the poem, in an effort to find a *partnership* response for both while exploring the artist's role in society. Walcott praises the insight

³⁴³ Walcott (2000), *Tiepolo's Hound*, pp. 7. All quotations will be from this edition, with the page references in parentheses after each quotation.

³⁴⁴ In this respect, King argues: "That Pissarro's family were Jews who had fled to France from the Inquisition and then later fled an outburst of French anti-Semitism to settle in St Thomas, illustrated Walcott's claim that the Caribbean was a mosaic of peoples, arts, and cultures, outcast from their origins, and that the region's cultural heritage included the French along with the African". King (2000), *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, pp. 627.

and ability of painters and artists to acknowledge (and sometimes anticipate) socio-cultural transformations and creatively redefine reality.

Walcott presents a decolonial narrative in his poem, which explores the role of the marginal *Other* in undermining and altering the contextual surroundings in which he lives, thinks and creates. In this sense, *Tiepolo's Hound* is a liberating and redeeming canvas of stories, whose protagonists' encounters and developments are fundamental to the formulation of new expressions, art forms and (r)evolutions. Indeed, Walcott and Pissarro's lives, and types of expression and art, soon intertwine and exchange, in a destabilising flow of recurrences or correspondences that give form and coherence to the poem's structure. Walcott transforms into Pissarro's *double* because the poet recognises his own gift for written metaphor in the painter's creative and *ordinary* visions and genius.

Tiepolo's Hound serves as a medium for Walcott to challenge his static and commonly acknowledged definition as one of the most Western-European-oriented poets in the Caribbean. Walcott continues to interact with Western canonical models while proposing a new type of transdisciplinary experiment in which words, art and narrative representations – from the Caribbean and the Old World alike – interact, intermingle and are fused together.

While *race*, memory, identity, exile, migration and the role of imagination are unsurprisingly the recurring themes in the works, the decolonising approach or methodological *praxis* that Walcott employs in his verses are most innovative.

An example that may clarify Walcott's endeavour to propose an original type of poem, open to many possible interpretations, can be found in the title itself, and in the painting on the book's cover. The font used for the title "Tiepolo's Hound" matches precisely with that of the name of the author at the bottom of the page, thus implicitly connecting the two. What may be considered as a marginal or trivial correspondence of *names* takes on a deeper meaning when one considers Walcott's own oil on canvas painting, *Preparing the Net* (1999), which features on the same cover. The painting depicts a Caribbean fisherman working on a net before going out to sea. The connection is thus clearly explained. Walcott is prompting his readers to beware of easy interpretations and analyses, because everything is interrelated, including those episodes or recurrences that may seem disconnected from the whole.

To a certain extent, towards the end of the poem, Walcott does recognise and match up his persona with Tiepolo's hound, or better, as I will demonstrate in my analysis, with the *Other* figures that are depicted and connected to it. In this regard, it is noteworthy to point out how Tiepolo and Walcott share the same philosophy and actualisation of *light*, meaning the description of large groups of people or subjects through a new perspective or shading gradation, as though they were invested by a prophetic *partnership* halo. The poet's purpose is to give voice to the dispossessed and the rejected, and this is indeed one of the most recurrent aims within *Tiepolo's Hound*, and much of the rest of Walcott's work.

Finally, Pissarro's name does not appear on the cover of the book, despite his central role in the poem. Nevertheless, he is indirectly represented through Walcott's own painting technique, as the canvas reminds the reader of Pissarro's own works *en plein air*, especially through the use of colour and the presence of trees³⁴⁵.

My analysis first includes an overview of each of the four books in the poem – with their XXVI chapters - to set out how the story unfolds within the layering of different narrations, historical episodes and fictionalised biographies. In line with the premise of this Ph.D. thesis, I will then clarify Walcott's attempt to re-read and re-write Pissarro's story, and his own life, from the perspective of a reflecting (or double) narrative story. I will also focus on other recurrent themes connected to Walcott and Pissarro's re-definitions, such as their relationship with the Caribbean, the theme of exile and that of their artistic (and experimental) representations. Moreover, I will present what I have termed the "rewriting of Western aesthetics" or better Walcott's "re-reading" of some European figurative masterpieces by renowned artists such as Giambattista Tiepolo and Paolo Veronese.

In the second part of my analysis I will concentrate on Walcott's transdisciplinary and multimodal style of writing. I will present his innovative attempt to merge art and poetry in some emblematic episodes in the poem, such as the description of Cézanne's work (56-57). Moreover, I will study Walcott's inclusion of twenty-six of his own

³⁴⁵ In commenting on the dust jacket of *Tiepolo's Hound*, Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues: "Such a layout effectively explodes chronology and hierarchy and bestows equal status on all the different protagonists of the collection: European masters, the Caribbean landscape and its peoples, the haunting hound[s], the poet's name. The fisherman's net also stands for the network of references that the poet is preparing in order to ensnare his readers, who are therefore warned and enticed at the same time". Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 109-110.

paintings in the poem, focussing on the correspondences I detected between some salient aspects of the poem, their meaning and the intertextual references. In the last section of the analysis, I will explore two of these paintings in particular, firstly because they are less considered within the literary and artistic examinations of the work, and secondly because I believe they constitute an artistic re-writing of the colonial matrix of power, especially if read through the perspective of the lines they are associated with.

The closing section of this third part of my analysis is paramount to the framing of my Ph.D. thesis. Walcott's attempt to challenge and open up his writing towards other forms of expression, other options, standpoints and compositional means elucidates why I was inspired in entering into a direct partnership dialogue with his work through the embodied wor(l)d of dance. *Tiepolo's Hound* provided the relevant connection to begin engaging with Walcott's work through a personal adaptation, or intersemiotic translation, of one of his most renowned poems, *The Schooner Flight*, which will be the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.

2.5.1 Book I

Book I of *Tiepolo's Hound* comprises the first five chapters of the poem. Most critics have focused on the first chapter because Walcott presents, in succession, the Pissarros and their story, a representative sketch of Trinidad's Port of Spain, and Walcott's trip to the "Modern" (7), where he first sees *The Feast of Levi* by Paolo Veronese, the painting in which the hound from the title to the poem is sketched and which he wrongly (or intentionally) associates with Giambattista Tiepolo.

Walcott's aim is to introduce the premise for his unpredictable, ambiguous journey-poem. He warns his readers that his verses may be confusing and blurred, and that the reality he presents may conceal different, obscure meanings below the surface of its clearly defined structure and characters.

I will discuss the subversive and destabilising charge of Veronese's *The Feast of Levi* in the section that deals with what I have termed re-writing (and re-sketching) of the life of Pissarro and other painters and their aesthetic experiences. However, Walcott tries to introduce his innovative and thought-provoking unframing of the poem's structure from the very beginning. In this sense, the first chapter is characterised by words such as

“fade”, “shadow”, “blur”, “mist”, terms which tend to distort the exactitude and preciseness of what is been described and proposed. Even Pissarro, his family and Walcott’s alter-ego, as the main characters in this section, appear and disappear from the narration. The motif that forms the common thread in the story seems to be the recurring presence of a dog, “the mongrel [that] cowers / through a park’s railing” (4) on Pissarro’s Sunday stroll around St. Thomas (their Caribbean island), which later materialises as the “hound” in Veronese’s painting.

Given this premise, the chapter may be read as an authentic poetry-painting, or “picture poem” to quote Döring (see Chapter 1, pp. 112), because it is divided into four subsections that evoke the four angles of a canvas, and a multitude of themes and repetitive occurrences that constantly reappear as the story unfolds as though they were shades of the same subject-sketch. In this regard, I agree with Baugh when he argues: “The opening chapter is a prelude to the whole. Its four sections constitute a collage, signalling variously the main lines of the narrative and theme”³⁴⁶.

In their analyses of the first book some critics and scholars tend to omit Walcott’s accurate depiction of his own personal story, which is in my opinion fundamental to understand the connections he later proposes between his persona and that of Pissarro. At the beginning of chapter II, Walcott explains:

What should be true of the remembered life / is a freshness of detail [...] // And I, walking like him around the wharf’s / barrels and schooners, felt a steady love // growing in me, plaited with the strong weaves / of a fish pot, watching its black hands move, // saw in the shadows in which it believes, / in ruined lanes, and rusted roofs above // the lanes, a language, light, and the dark lives // in sour doorways [...] // a dialect forged from burning asphalt (10).

Through these verses, Walcott presents his own intimate relationship with the West Indies, the place that connects him to Pissarro, and the context in which he achieved most of his artistic visions and poetic goals, as he describes the simple Antillean life, and its peoples’ struggle for survival. The poet explains that his creative insight comes from the language and the diverse vernaculars spoken by his compatriots, and also from their dark, neglected existences as *shadows*. The tender recalling of his father’s ambition to become a painter follows the narration of the chapter. Walcott mentions his father’s pencil reproductions of *The English Topographical Draughtsmen*, a collection of paintings by

³⁴⁶ Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 211.

different English watercolour artists. He discredits Warwick's need to re-propose those "distant landscapes / which his devotion copied, [...] despis[ing] the roots // and roofs of his island as inferior shapes / in the ministry of apprenticeship" (13). His progenitor's alleged betrayal of the Antillean landscape helps Walcott introduce the motif of migration and that of Pissarro's departure from his birthplace in the Caribbean. This is one of the poem's main concerns, because Pissarro eventually becomes the artist of "paintings so far from the life fermenting around us!" (14). Nevertheless, Walcott acknowledges Pissarro's attempts in his youth to give voice and form to their unknown islands, such as in the painting of "the St Thomas drawings [that] have it, the taint / of complicit time, the torpor of ex-slaves // and benign planters" (16).

This insightful poetic preamble allows Walcott to introduce another fundamental painter for the West Indies, Paul Gauguin. The passage is significant as Walcott presents the work of the French globetrotter and painter as though it were a *reversal* of Pissarro's own story and voyage to the Western old world:

The light of redemption came with Gauguin, / our creole painter of *anses, mornes, and savannes*,
// of olive hills, immortelles. He made us seek / what we knew and loved: the burnished skins //
of papaws and women, a hill in Martinique. / Our martyr. Unique. He did for our sins. (16-17)

Walcott praises Gauguin for having decided to paint and describe the extraordinary and fleeting *uniqueness* of the Caribbean archipelago in a new *light* and perspective, and also for being one of the few European artists who had found the courage to talk about the marginal *Other* dwelling on the other side of the Atlantic³⁴⁷.

Again, what may appear to be esteem and appreciation for Gauguin's work in the Antilles takes on another form when one considers the artwork that Walcott includes in this section of the poem, i.e. two of his own paintings titled *Gauguin's Studio* (1986) and *Gauguin in Martinique* (1991).

³⁴⁷ In her insightful study on Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*, Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues: "Gauguin was the first painter of his time to travel as far as he did, to stay abroad for so long, and, most important, to never go back to Europe. He lived in Martinique for only four months but repeatedly expressed the desire to go back there. Gauguin's stay in the Caribbean was a prelude to his retreat to Tahiti and, later, the Marquesas. [...] Walcott is well aware of Gauguin's ambivalent participation in colonialism and of his nostalgic, romanticizing approach to the tropics. Yet he is also appreciative of the fact that, within the limitations of his ideological and historical context, Gauguin's art affected the way in which the North Atlantic constructed its 'others'". Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 126.

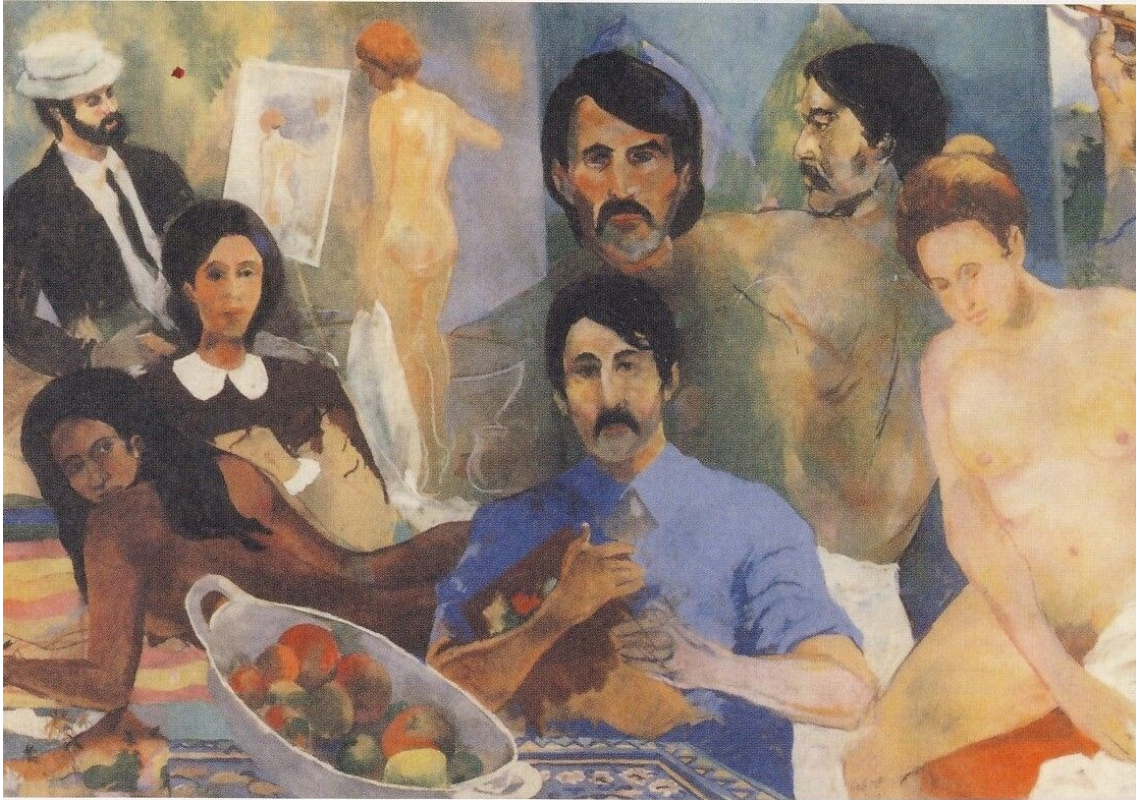


Fig. 5: Walcott (1986), *Gauguin's Studio*. Private collection.

Most literary criticism agrees in recognising, in the first canvas, the poet's attempt to summarise the intent and core meaning of his poem through the medium of paint. *Gauguin's Studio* is an elaborate and complex painting in which different characters intermingle, link up or fuse together, while embodying different attitudes, postures and gazes. Gauguin, for instance, is sketched as three different silhouettes, superimposed as if to represent the artist's *doubles* or different personalities. The painting also features Cézanne, Gauguin's intimate colleague and friend, and some female characters, namely two white women and two black women. Their seemingly marginal role is contradicted if one thinks about how Gauguin sketches Caribbean women. Walcott, in fact, re-writes or re-draws Gauguin's voluptuous and sensual representations of female characters, thus trying to dignify them. One of the black women is dressed, while the other is naked but her nudity, a feature often associated with Gauguin's works³⁴⁸, is concealed. In my

³⁴⁸ In commenting on Walcott's *Gauguin's Studio*, Peter Erickson argues: "In the lower left quadrant [...] is a prone woman reminiscent of *Manao Tupapau*. Although Walcott discreetly blocks our view of her lower body, the association with Gauguin's image is sufficient to recall the brown figure's sexual

opinion, the painting summarises some of the most recurrent themes of the poem, such as the leitmotif of the *double*. In this respect, the canvas is organised into symmetrical pairs: the two black women and the two similar sketches of Gauguin, which dialogue in their colours and postures with a third lower silhouette. This latter figure connects diagonally with Cézanne's figure, and the same oblique trajectory also connects to the two (mimicking) naked white women. The woman close to Cézanne looks at her own double in a canvas or mirror.

Finally, the painting is framed by what I perceive to be the representation of Walcott's hand with a brush or a pen, at the top right of the painting, like a signature, reminding us of the work's dual value as poetry and art.

Walcott's interplay between his verses and canvases is refreshing and groundbreaking. It represents a puzzling way of conceiving, producing and linking art and literature, now combined in a single flow of images, colours, and metaphors. His is a multimodal and transdisciplinary experiment that defies the traditional Western European conception of poetry in order to propose and engage with an alternative literary discourse.

The watercolour on paper *Gauguin in Martinique* is directly linked to *Gauguin's Studio* not only because it appears only four pages later in the work but also because it expounds the themes that Walcott develops in his verses. In this section the poet draws attention to some of the French names attributed to the islands in the West Indies, which have been "pronounced in verdant patois / of bamboo letters, a palm's sibilance" (18). Walcott's intent is to demonstrate how Caribbean people have altered the dominator European naming of places, thus decolonising their Western representation. In this sense, Walcott concludes by recognising: "our landscapes emerging in French though we speak / English as we work. My pen replaced a brush" (19). Walcott's act of rewriting – and repainting – his Caribbean world is also emphasised through this second sketch of Gauguin. The work presents the French artist with an aureole (as though he were a sort of prophet or saint) while he is intent on drawing and immortalising the Caribbean landscape with his brush. A black woman, "his Muse" (17), stands right behind him and rests her hand on his shoulder. The two are gazing outwards, thus directly defying their spectators' eyes or their presumed prejudice. Behind them are a group of canvases

availability and subservience highlighted by the color-enhanced anus". Erickson (2005), Artists' Self-Portraiture and Self-Exploration in Derek Walcott's 'Tiepolo's Hound', *Callaloo*, 28, 1, pp. 228.

depicting the life in the Caribbean, and what seem to be the portraits of Cézanne and Van Gogh. Gauguin has become the symbol of redemption for West Indian peoples and their colourful environment and life. He has opened up the path towards a re-examination of the Antillean space not only through his art, but also through Walcott's re-definition of his inconvenient position as a European contaminated by the archipelago's beauty and wilderness.

As Peter Erickson suggests, the painting links with Walcott's *Self-portrait* (1998) towards the end of the poem, as Walcott's gaze in the painting is a direct reflection of Gauguin's look in book I. Moreover, the correspondence between the two paintings is made even clearer by the way the two artists hold the brush in their left hand. On the cover of the hardback, Walcott has also included a real picture of himself while painting. Here, we see him holding the brush in his right hand. According to Erickson, this detail may provide proof of Walcott's decision to associate his portrait with that of Gauguin's. The claim may be further supported if one compares Gauguin's aureole with Walcott's basketball cap, as though the role of the prophetic voice had now switched between poet and painter.

In *Tiepolo's Hound* Walcott intentionally subverts and alters roles, subjects, themes and geo-temporal coordinates. His aim is to destabilise the modernity/coloniality matrix of power and show how dichotomous perceptions or definitions of reality are illusory, for life is constituted by circular and ever-recurrent encounters, clashes and syntheses. What may be perceived as a revolutionising of the technological West could have its foundations elsewhere, such as in the *peripheral*, creative laboratories of the far West Indies.

In the last few chapters of book I, Walcott presents Pissarro's family and their life in the Caribbean. The painter's ancestors, in the form of voices coming out of family photographs, remind Pissarro of their story and origins, to persuade him to continue their destiny and legacy:

His gaze travels the shelves who now, by rote, / recite their stories from shell-bordered frames, // the wretched passage on the immigrant boat, / their soft eyes warm him. They whisper dates and names. // They quietly catalogue their origins: // [...] colonial haut bourgeois. // 'In 1799 in the coastal city / of Bordeaux, in France, I, Joseph Pissarro, // your grandpère, was born. Anne Felicité Petit, / a Parisian, became my wife. Later, we go // with children and her brother, Isaac Petit, / to settle in St. Thomas. [...] // as we took root in this well-modelled town, / our longing for that

fogbound port grew fainter; // we pray that you (and here the portraits frown) / follow the business, not turn into a painter”’. (21-22)

Pissarro is torn with indecision. He values his family project and desire to see him as the heir of their legacy, yet he is conscious of fulfilling his own ambitions, which are expressed by “a longing for the centre, // for the portals of gilt frames his gift could enter / like a museum door” (24). Pissarro eventually leaves for Paris, unaware that he will never realise his dream. France and Europe would disregard his genius and restrain him, while his art would become the testbed for a future (r)evolution in the world of European painting and expression. His story would go on to be the reverse of what he had hoped for, while his *impressions* would rework the history of human creative and imaginative power.

2.5.2 Book II

The second book follows the story of Pissarro’s life and career in France. From the very first verses of Chapter VI, Walcott describes the painter’s worrying distress for having abandoned his relatives and familiar surroundings in order to live on the *Other* side of the world, the old European continent that rejected his ancestors:

Irascible rain threshed in the cedar leaves, / its roar a conch shell’s voices in his ears; // [...] and the sea noise: Paris. // He lay in bed and listen to the surf / below the greying window and a train’s // moan, like the mail boat’s, every Sabbath. / He rose and drew the lightly surging curtains. // Light. The island vanished. A grey light / reticent, on the roofs, the spires, the domes [...] nothing was black. (33)

While in Paris, Pissarro imagines hearing the voices and noises of his Caribbean islands, the surf of the sea and the islanders chattering in Charlotte Amelie. He confounds settings and themes, just as if he were on both sides of the Atlantic. Peering out from the window, his imaginary sketch soon changes, as he sees Paris in a different *light*: “There was no fury in this light, no glare / of exultation like his island sky” (33). Pissarro is acknowledging a different Parisian landscape, style of living and thinking, and form of expression, and also the burden of its imperial past. He visits the Louvre, the temple of traditional Western art, one of the pillars of the Western European matrix of power. He

thinks he knows what the subjects and protagonists of the paintings he is admiring think of him. Outside, in the real world, his colleagues disregard him because he comes from *an-other* background, faraway, neglected colony. Indeed, they suggest: “Make your own masterpieces, don’t copy ours” (37). Pissarro is very much aware that he belongs to a different world, story and context, or better, that he stands in a blurred, *intermediary* space of possibilities, in which both Caribbean and Western European traditions cohere and echo one another. In this sense, Walcott foregrounds the connections between Pissarro and Paris, firstly by stating “his name, Pissarro, [is] hidden in the word Paris, / and, twigs on the tremulous Seine, [contain] the sound: Camille” (36); and, shortly after, by mentioning the flight of a swallow, whose “wings wrote ‘Paris’ from the name ‘Pissarro’” (41). Paris is indeed calling the Caribbean artist, “her prodigal [who] was back” (33), because Pissarro had studied there in his youth. The European landscape and its environment are accepting of and praise the artist’s internal *divisions* and creative awareness, as Pissarro has a new and refreshing perspective and way of seeing the world. So much so that the painter soon becomes rebellious. He goes against schools, traditions and *Salons* in order to describe his inner feelings and *impressions*, thus opening up the path towards the Impressionist (r)evolution and art movement.

The connection between Pissarro and the French setting is not arbitrary but it may serve to reflect on and respond to Gauguin’s experience in the New World. The stranger or the *Other*, the alien individual who does not belong to a specific culture or group, and suddenly finds him/herself in the middle of an unknown and unfamiliar background, has the power to bring about new and refreshing ideas, and also re-order viewpoints, perspectives and norms, or suggest a different way of feeling and living. After his voyages and stay in the West Indies, Gauguin’s art changed profoundly, both in his use of colour and in the liveness of his canvases’ themes. Pissarro, on the other hand, struggled at first with Europe’s stricter and more realist art. Nevertheless, little by little he started appreciating his colleagues’ precision and formal brushstroke, even though it took him some time and a lot of effort for his own perceptions and views to be accepted and acknowledged.

Walcott describes the estrangement and alienation that Pissarro experienced during his first move to Paris. The recurrent moments of crisis and stasis are overcome by the appearance of snow, an epiphanic manifestation which the painter associates with

a miraculous altering of colours and structures, an event that allows him to glimpse the signs of a call to paint or rewrite the *greyness* of European history:

Doubt made him yield, // his brush a sword reversed; when dusk came, / he set down his bleeding palette like a shield. // Silence woke him. He lay still. [...] // He rose. The sky was shedding flakes like a bolster / feathering the city of his childhood, the wonder / of forgotten snow. [...] // Paris was a blank canvas. Its cloud was still. / He dressed, rushed out, and walked through the miracle. (40)

Putting aside doubts and life torments is Pissarro's own "miracle". He is finally ready to try shedding new light on the Old, *pretentious* world he has chosen as new homeland. Again, the environment proves to be his best ally because it reconnects him with his true self and helps him erase or transform the squalor and filth of the industrial and *civilised* European world. Generally, in Walcott's work, the land, the sea and the sky are the custodians of human scars, hopes and failures. Nature expresses the cyclical renewing of life, in a spiralling and sacred energy that safeguards the powerful connections between all living things.

In this new and revelatory re-birth, Pissarro is able to re-establish a connection with his Caribbean islands. He finally acknowledges the possibility of bridging the division between Europe and the Antilles by mixing the formalism and *standardisation* of the first, with the syncretism and hybridisation of the second, especially by allowing the vegetation and vitality of the West Indies to enter his canvases and paintings. At the same time, the painter makes friends and comes into contact with a new generation of young and rebellious artists who used to meet in a famous Parisian café: "The Refused, the Rejected, they collected there: / Café Guerbois, close to la Place de Clichy, // indulging this anarchist [...] // who would burn the Louvre, Bazille, Monet, Sisley" (45).

Despite their common intentions and goals, such as the "mockery of the centre" (46), the group soon agrees on Pissarro's distinctiveness and repulsive *otherness*, especially in relation to their own, *pure* French origins and roots, "[a] shared [...] intimacy he could not enter" (46). In this sense, Walcott foregrounds how prejudices and representational fictions and narratives may prevail over friendship and bonds, respect and esteem. Ethnicity and a sense of belonging are fictitious strongholds that determine whether an individual is allowed to be recognised or even exist, even if "none // contained the oracular secret of his name / that enclosed their city as his very own" (46).

It is not by chance that Pissarro finds relief within the arms of a Moroccan girl named Rachel, particularly in her “singing [...] Moroccan / lament as grating as the blowing dunes // of her lost desert” (48). The girl represents his *double*, for Pissarro is also an exiled, rejected and dispossessed individual living and working in *an-other*, alien country. Pissarro soon decides to settle in the French countryside, in Pontoise, and Walcott imagines how Rachel, years later, must have “soared from his poplars, [for] she was the inaudible lark // lost in a canvas cloud” (51).

Moving to Pontoise marks a second phase in Pissarro’s life and artistic career in France. The painter perceives the passage of time, because a feeling of distress and fading doubt now pervades and emerges in his works. Walcott recalls that the Realist movement, with its “Barbizon school was entering its eclipse / even with Daubigny” and that “an age, the size of a cloud over a wood, / erased all myth; slow intellectual doubt // diminished awe” (52-53). Pissarro begins to acknowledge that even the European aesthetic *canon* and all the models it imposed as standpoints were no longer valid in an industrialised world, a context in which factories had replaced windmills and train stations were going to alter the French landscape forever.

In this fretful and agitated swapping of epistemic paradigms, with new themes, colours and techniques, Pissarro sees the opportunity to propose his work once again to the Academy: “Again, Again rejection. // A predictable plot” (55). Yet, this is also the period in which an important friendship comes into being, as Pissarro meets and paints together with Cézanne, a younger artist who becomes his pupil. Walcott recalls that they were “a different language for a different light” (56), and that Cézanne will eventually become “the monumental master of Provence” (56).

What follows in the book II summarises Pissarro’s unhappy marriage and his unlucky reputation as an artist making “indifferent art, // the pavement pictures of an islander / struggling with every stroke to realise // a life not his” (60). Pissarro had a large family; his wife was forced to work in the fields to pay their debts, while “his eyes begin to go” (62).

He also developed a friendship with Gauguin, his new apprentice who sees him as a role model and an example to follow, just as Cézanne had praised the same mentor. Other artists tried to help him by buying some of his canvases or by organising auctions. Nevertheless, Pissarro’s art continued to be labelled as old and simple, especially for its

“provincial accent” (67) that did not follow “the anger of Courbet and Cézanne” nor the “Pointillist surface” (66) but rather engaged in a cleaner and plainer dialogue with the French context, life and nature. Pissarro follows and embraces the technique of painting *en plein air* because this represented a way to connect with his islands, and also a way to present something new, to *name* and paint differently or convey new impressions.

The book ends with Walcott’s introspective reflections on his own account of Pissarro’s life and artistic journey. The metanarrative acquires the tones of a sketch within a sketch, as Walcott again foregrounds the features and goals that reverberate both through his life and the adventures of his subject or *double* alter-ego.

2.5.3 Book III

Book III opens with the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and Pissarro’s decision to flee with his family and “along with Monet” (76) to England. In line with other misfortunes and sorrow in the poem, it is the weather that signals the passage of time:

A cloudburst over Paris, the blackening towers / of Notre-Dame, a cannon clap of thunder, // and then a bannered army, marching showers / and lightning’s ordnance searing the sky asunder. // The sodden countryside, its rusts, dun browns / mired in autumn, no longer fired him; // the sense of distant war across distant towns / beyond Louveciennes, while on the field’s rim, // in thin, muck-spattered woods, yellow leaves flared / the colour of malaria, their bodies stricken // and groaning from gales. It was time they fled. (75)

While in London, Pissarro and Monet grew closer; they “toured the museums together” (76) and talked about art and painting techniques. During one of their strolls, they stopped in front of Turner’s *The Fighting Téméraire* (1839), a painting that reminds Walcott of his father, who had copies of it “in his drawing room” (76). The connection is significant as the canvas represents the dismantling of one of the ships that played a central role in the Battle of Trafalgar against the French and the Spanish armies during the Napoleonic Wars. Turner’s use of colour, and the nostalgic atmosphere conveyed through the fading and desolate twilight, epitomises the beginning of the downfall of the British Empire and, indirectly, its influence and power over its colonial territories around the world.



Fig. 6: Turner (1839), *The Fighting Téméraire*. Photograph: National Gallery Collection/Corbis.

One of Pissarro's neighbours in Louveciennes warns him in a letter of the "havoc" (77) caused by the Prussians. Pissarro's paintings have been destroyed and his house turned upside down. Once back in France, Pissarro thinks of those artists and friends who did not survive the war, such as Bazille and Renoir. He starts painting again despite his "scuttering spectres – debt, fear, discontent" (82) and the increasing and recurring regret for having abandoned his compatriots, family and islands.

Chapter XIII of book III deals with death of Jeanne, one of Pissarro's daughters, "his febrile, trembling child, his little rabbit" (83). The painter is devastated by her loss and haunted by her ghostly presence. Painting, in this case, becomes Pissarro's therapy and cure, because "every stroke he made // absorbed her absence; with calm, even / paint he built its blue. This was the way he prayed" (86).

The rest of book III focuses on some of Walcott's poetic standpoints such as his search for links between Europe and the New World; the powerful endurance of colonial narratives and historical erasures; and the *fictional* and *authentic* representation of the

Antillean archipelago with its landscapes and hybrid communities. The issue of naming is also brought to the fore:

The empire of naming colonised even the trees, / referred our leaves to their originals; // this was the blight on our minds, a speckled disease. [...] // Reality was riven / by these reproductions, and that blight spread // through every noun, even the names we were given, / the paintings we studied, the books we loved to read. (92)

The section brings together Pissarro's way of painting with Walcott's style of writing, for both artist and writer aim for a faithful description and definition of the reality of life. Walcott explains that Pissarro tended to cover up and conceal the Caribbean inheritance in his paintings because he wanted to be accepted by the Western European artistic *canon* and audience. Walcott, on the other hand, feels privileged to be able to recount and re-name through poetry and theatre the uncontaminated beauty of the Antillean landscape, a territory that has been deprived of its own voice, divisions and uniqueness.

Another historical episode that Walcott recalls in this book is the Dreyfus case, "the subject of Émile Zola's *J'accuse*, / Zola claiming the army had falsified evidence; // he [Pissarro] shared the blood hatred, the family circumstance, / the Sephardic separation, it cut to the bone" (101). Walcott re-evokes the affair to underline how Pissarro and Dreyfus (and also himself) were linked by being part of a minority ethnic group or culturally diverse community. The author's aim is to reflect on identity exclusion based upon representational categories that divide peoples according to physical features, language, culture and religion, and thus deny the existence and power of the web of life, and the sacred spiralling energy that connects all human beings. By bringing the Dreyfus' case to the fore, Walcott destabilises once again geo-temporal and representational borders, which allegedly confine one's destiny in a linear and unescapable journey of human life. Indeed, *Tiepolo's Hound* undermines linear modernity/coloniality ways of thinking because it shows how the protagonists are incessantly *repeating* and retracing each other's paths in a circular motion: Pissarro's Sephardic family escapes from Europe to the Caribbean to avoid and survive waves of anti-Semitism; Pissarro returns to Europe to fulfil his dream of becoming a painter and challenge his art with that of the French masters; and Dreyfus is sent from France to the Caribbean to expiate a crime he did not commit.

Walcott acknowledges how the passing of time and the *unpredictability* of life may change one's destiny and fate, regardless of one's origins. For Pissarro "France had always been his [...] / the light of the islands was slowly being lost // at dusk on the shallow skin of his different race" (105). In a series of complex and intertwined stories and episodes, Dreyfus will end his days in the West Indies, thus filling the void that Pissarro had left: "Dreyfus was sentenced to his own paradise - / the Caribbean, off the coast of Cayenne, // on Devil's Island, where, if he dies, he dies / in sea and sunshine, luckier than most men" (105).

2.5.4 Book IV

The last book in the poem begins with Walcott's search for the representation of the white hound in Venice. The poet goes on a quest "by trace", to recall Glissant's approach (see Chapter 1, pp. 51), following memories, feelings and emotions related to his past. Thinking rationally and trying to rediscover truths in a linear, sequential and ordered way would have proven to be incongruent because the power connecting the majority of Walcott's protagonists and narratives relies on the instability of encounters, clashes and combinations, which are at the core of the complexity of life, and of the Caribbean sense of *indeterminacy* in particular.

Venice itself is transformed into a canvas, or better in a replica of the painting scenario that Walcott is looking for:

The backfiring engine of the vaporetto / scumbled the reflections of her palaces, // the wake braided its hair; now I would get to / the roaring feast with its fork-bearded faces. // The emerald sleeve of the immense lagoon / shone on a wriggling wall where she would turn // from the pearl drops on her embroidered gown, / while water lapped the landing with its tongue. // A gondola's crescent shell, the quarter-moon [...] // melting the lagoon / with alchemy where sky and water join. (115)

The city becomes one of the places to be examined carefully because Walcott knows that in one of its canals, galleries or museums he may find "the creature of [his] search" (116). The poet recalls having seen the hound in one of the art books that belonged to his father, yet he comes to the conclusion that "Research / could prove the hound Tiepolo's or Veronese's // but I refused" (117). Meaningfully, Walcott decides to stop

trying to attribute the sketching of the animal to one of the Italian painters because he acknowledges that what truly matters is not the authorship of the work but rather its content and message. Moreover, the poet feels “that had I stalked it, the spectral dog / would hide in a forest of hose, peering behind // the folded dog’s ear of a catalogue / then bolting off, catching my scent upwind” (119).

Just like in other episodes of the poem, even in this last book, the hound randomly appears and before vanishing again, as its shadow escapes its own confinement. Indeed, Walcott keeps confounding dogs with mongrels, and mongrels with hounds. Towards the end of Chapter XIX, he imaginatively *steps into* one of the Venetian paintings in which he sees a wolfhound (again, another type of dog that resembles what he is looking for). The passage is significant because: “The wolfhound skinned its teeth in a sneering curse / as I approached the wall. I was there alone, // my shadow joined the feast, then on the fresco’s // wall a door opened and the dog was gone” (120).

This is a revelatory passage in Walcott’s journey of self-discovery because the poet finally acknowledges that the common threads linking Pissarro, himself and the dogs are more than simply sporadic, arbitrary events. Indeed, the animals and humans share similar destinies, as they are all trying to escape their own image or representation and elude their mirroring shadows.

Cowardice, Stubbornness, indifference / made too much of the whiteness of the hound, [...] // until I doubt the very beast’s existence / as much as mine sometimes, like the white sound // made by a snowfall on a winter fence, / the thunder of my shadow on white sand. (121)

The whitening of snow recalls Pissarro’s initial astonishment at seeing snow fall when he first moved to Paris, an event that *erased* the greyness of his adopted city. In this case, the occurrence relates to Walcott’s warning of the dangerous “bleaching” of subjugated minds by the colonial matrix of power.

The relationship connecting the poet’s alter-ego to the privileged hound is now made clear. Walcott associates his blurred, shadowing existence with the fictional copy of a dog that never existed. His mind has unconsciously accepted Western European and Northern Atlantic perceptions and views, thus rejecting reality and validating a dialectic that decides whether one is entitled to speak or not.

Walcott abandons his quest to find out whether the hound existed or not and even which artist painted it; he decides to leave his readers in doubt. At the end of the chapter he suggests:

The visitor to Venice becomes a student of water / and its biography, which is life made easy // by gossip. I heard this later / from waves that whispered: *Paolo Caliari Veronese, // a sculptor's son, was for Feast in the House of Levi / charged by the Inquisition for irreverence* (122).

Again, like in most of Walcott's works, it is water or an aquatic element (see Chapter 1, pp. 94) that holds the truth and that keeps track of peoples' legacies, history and traditions, thus becoming humankind's most reliable archive. Towards the end, Walcott even denies the link he had propounded thus far between Tiepolo and the hound, thereby questioning the mechanics of the mind which led him to choose this title:

Was the name Tiepolo there for euphony? / No skill in the depiction of the beast // ageless, perfection, any one of the / two names might have done it; who painted it best // was not an issue, mastery grew easy, / but where I first beheld the spectral hound. // I would say Veronese for Ver-o-nes-e, / I heard the echo and took it for the sound. // Over the years the arc of the lost hound / faded further; its phantom had appeared // when I, mounting the stairs of these couplets, found / the frame of memory again, but its rust never cleared. // It faded. (123-124)

It is because of this new awareness that, at this point in the poem, Walcott decides to reconsider Tiepolo and Veronese's paintings and works of art. While examining and studying some of their canvases, the poet discovers that both artists had given form and voice to neglected and ignored subjects and themes from their eras such as the presence of multi-ethnic figures and *unrepresented* characters within the privileged context of Renaissance Venice. Veronese and Tiepolo are linked in their use of creativity and narrative approaches that detach from traditional Western European art and/or its classical forms and techniques.

The poetic narrative then returns to Pissarro. Walcott imagines the artist in St. Thomas just before his departure for Europe. Walcott's alter-ego fuses with Pissarro's representation, as if they were one persona. The artist and the poet have become the *double* of one another. The epiphany occurs in Walcott's description of Pissarro, and Pissarro's sketching of Walcott.

Significantly, this is the moment of another revelation, as Walcott meets "the parody of Tiepolo's hound" (138). The encounter with "this trotting, abandoned,

houseless thing” (138) overlaps with Pissarro’s *matching* with the poet. In describing the episodes one after the other, with passages of the narrative intertwining, Walcott substantiates the complex and intricate structure of the poem. *Tiepolo’s Hound* is indeed a journey of the self, or Walcott’s path to come to terms with his own artistic and poetic imagination. At the same time, it discredits modernity/coloniality fictional representations, to decolonise Western European and Northern Atlantic *reality*. The creolisation of the privileged white hound is an attempt to describe and dignify its neglected counterpart, which is a “starved pup” epitomising the brutality and harshness of life.

Walcott finds the courage to deny cultural and social advantage in order to focus on disadvantage, weakness and dispossession. He implicitly links the starving pup with his own identity, the inheritance of his peoples, and the denial of their existence. The compassionate event demystifies what may be considered a mystical and powerful occurrence, because the representation of how things run in the world stands us before a bitter truth, which is the rejection of what we consider different peoples and the negligence of their existence.

Then the poem presents Walcott in St. Thomas, Pissarro’s Caribbean birthplace. The poet suddenly perceives that he is being drawn. This time, Pissarro sketches the silhouette of the poet together with his mentor Fitz Melbye. Walcott’s alter-ego questions the artists’ motives for their departure from the Antilles. The pair cannot reply because the painters are in another dimension, i.e. in the poet’s mind. Walcott blames them for having abandoned their birthplaces, which have remained unpainted and undescribed. Nobody has *given colour* to the true essence and reality of the Caribbean, with its mixture of peoples and its syncretic traditions. Once again, Walcott recalls the figure of Gauguin. He soon confesses to Pissarro that the artist “judged you a second-rater” (142) and that instead he could have been a spokesman for, and prophet-artist of, the Caribbean. Only this time Pissarro replies to Walcott’s alter-ego in an uncanny and almost visionary way: “My history veins backwards / to the black soil of my birthplace, whose trees // are a hallowed forest; its leaf-words / uttering the language of my ancestors” (142). Pissarro’s confession confirms the valence and significance of the trees that he has been sketching for most of his life, particularly those in Pontoise, as I pointed out earlier. Glissant’s rhizomatic influence on Caribbean mindset is once again re-evoked, because the

individuals that are born or raised in the archipelago are unlikely to accept categorisations and binary divisions of the spirit of the world. In this regard, Walcott praises those who stayed, because they decided to struggle and started building a new and different shared history.

In the final chapters of the poem, Walcott traces back the life and artistic journeys of his protagonists. He tries to find connections and associations, as though there was a layer of unknown meaning below the surface of their encounters. Walcott links Tiepolo's final years in Madrid with Pissarro's departure from the Iberic peninsula; he thinks of his father, who copied and admired the beauty of the English landscape from his "small blue book" (149) or catalogue. The poet describes his vivid impressions of the English countryside, while recalling specific terms and names that are used in context. Walcott also thinks of Italy and how the country, with its colours and joyful atmospheres, may have inspired the work of his protagonists. He finally addresses his readers and questions whether he has talked enough about Pissarro's life and artistic (r)evolutions. In emphasising, once more, the idea of the *double*, meaning the intimate interconnections linking his persona to that of Pissarro, Walcott reflects upon the figure of another *unknown* and unrecognised painter:

In Trinidad / there was one painter, the Frenchman Cazabon, // whose embalmed *paysages* were all we had, / our mongrel culture gnawing its one bone. // Cazabon and Pissarro; the first is ours, / the second found the prism that was Paris, // rooted in France, his dark-soiled ancestors. (154-155)

In mentioning the work and presence of this painter, Walcott revives the idea of the abolition of epistemic and cultural borders. He implies that many *unknowns* did accomplish the reverse voyage, from Europe to the Caribbean, and also, that it is time to decolonise the Western European and Northern Atlantic dominator way of thinking and conveying history, for macro-stories such as that of Cazabon are still waiting to be recounted.

Walcott ends *Tiepolo's Hound* with a sketch of Pissarro's as an old man. The painter is now blind and has stopped working, at peace with himself and his torments for abandoning his family and birth islands. Walcott explains "the skeptic turned to a Sephardic sage, / rabbinical in his fragility, // since the snow's rapid strokes whitened a page / of canvas and we lost him to a city" (160).

After the description of Pissarro's death, Walcott asks Tiepolo and Veronese whether they are able to help him sketch the grandeur of his painter *double* for the last time. Walcott also calls upon Pissarro, as he wants his double to guide him through paint and light, since "light is all we have" (161) in the Caribbean:

Help me to crease the pleats of an emerald sleeve / Giambattista Tiepolo, Paolo Veronese, // and idling wrist, the light through a cloud's sieve, / Camille Pissarro, on our beaches the breezy // light over our bays, help me to begin / when I set out again, at sixty-nine, // for the sacred villages. [...] // This is my peace, my salt, exulting acre: / there is no more Exodus, this is my Zion, // whose couplets race the furrowing wind, their maker, / with those homecoming sails on the horizon (161-162).

2.5.5 Encountering the *double*: Pissarro and Walcott, two Caribbean artists

In Book II, Chapter X of *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott provides a short yet fundamental description of Camille Pissarro's appearance when he first moved to Pontoise:

By forty, bald, he looks twice that old, as / from his alpine dome, a beard's avalanche // cascades between the banks of sloping shoulders, / silvered with ash as a brown autumn branch, // but at that age, unchanged, he did not want / to be any different than when he would write // in his uncle's ledgers, still an accountant, / since painting is the chronicle of light, // content to be the weather's actuary, / the season's clerk, the eremite who drew // its Book of Hours, to whom its ordinary / hills and leaf-hachured lanes were always new. (62)

In most Western European and Northern Atlantic art books and anthologies, Pissarro is presented as an old, bearded and wise man, a father and a guide for those young rebel artists who gathered at the Guerbois Café in Paris. Most of them came from Provence, the south of France or the countryside, and their aim was to establish a new form of expression and a new way of dialoguing with the life around them. In this sense, they looked to Pissarro as a mentor, firstly because of his maturity, experience and use of colours, and secondly because he used to paint *en plein air*, outside, with his easel and brushes constantly involved in a dialogue with nature and *light*.

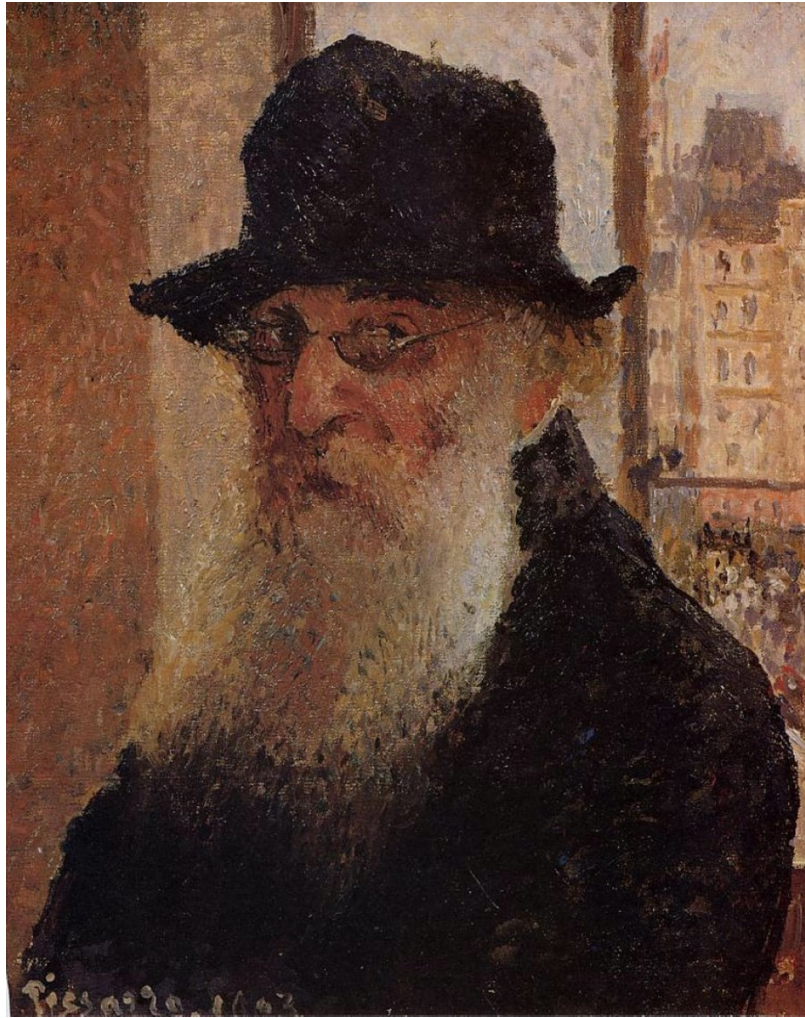


Fig. 7: Pissarro (1903), *Self-portrait with Hat*. Collection Tate Britain.

Walcott decolonises Pissarro's commonly acknowledged Western representation by arguing that his appearance betrayed the spiritual strength and energy that he brought from the Caribbean, which he transformed into something original and as yet unknown in the Western hemisphere. For Walcott, peoples from the *edge* of the Empire are able to provide new, exciting, and creative alternatives in tune with their unique perceptions and experience of reality, history and faith.

Walcott chooses to focus on the life and work of a lesser known and *minor* artist precisely on the grounds of the modernity/coloniality matrix forgetting or distorting the image of Camille Pissarro. In this sense, the poet attempts to unmask evidence of neglected or devalued micronarratives. As a case in point, Pissarro is usually identified as a French artist, even though he came from the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. The painter was not a *marginal* figure in his day, but rather an inspirational role model for

artists such as Cézanne and Gauguin, who praised his deep and insightful vision, respected him and considered him a genius. Pissarro contributed, together with other artists from the same period, to re-writing European artistic paradigms by proposing a simpler and more *ordinary* perspective and way of approaching art.

As far as Walcott is concerned, his choice of Camille Pissarro was not arbitrary. When *Tiepolo's Hound* was published in 2000, Walcott had just turned seventy and so must have felt a deep connection with the views of an older and wiser artist such as Pissarro. Indeed, as Pissarro carried on sketching, Walcott shared a similar strength and vitality, in his desire to keep on writing and composing for both theatre, poetry and the arts in general.

Walcott understood Pissarro and translated him into his *double*, as the poem also features Walcott's fictional alter-ego. The artist also mirrors the author's desires, adventures, and life goals. This should come as no surprise, for Pissarro and Walcott share more similarities than may be first thought.

Jacob Camille Pissarro was born in 1830 into a Sephardic family that moved to the Caribbean from the ghetto of Braganza in Portugal to escape the Inquisition and waves of anti-Semitism of the 16th century. Walcott was born in 1930, exactly one hundred years later. He also came from a minority group, the Methodist community of the island of St. Lucia. In the narration, the poet and the artist's native locations and birth places are associated and put into dialogue with one another:

Doubt was his patron saint, it was his island's, / the saint who probed the holes in his Saviour's hands // (despite the parenthetical rainbow of providence) / and questioned resurrection; its seven bright bands. // Saint Thomas, the skeptic, Saint Lucia, the blind / martyr who on a tray carried her own eyes, // the hymn of black smoke, wreath of the trade wind, / confirming their ascent to paradise (39).

Walcott foregrounds how, during colonisation, St. Lucia and St. Thomas were *named* after the figures of Christian saints, thus asserting their inevitable submission to the Western European modernity/coloniality matrix of power. Nevertheless, despite their ostensible and illusory European background and defined *reality*, the two islands are characterised by highly heterogeneous and mixed populations, which comprise peoples of Caribbean, African, Indian, Jewish and Middle Eastern descendant and heritage, to name but a few. Even the islands' history is a reflection of *unpredictability*, for St. Lucia

switched between English and French rule more than fourteen times, while St. Thomas was a Dutch territory before becoming Danish and finally being sold to the United States in 1913. The indeterminacy that characterises the history of St. Thomas and St. Lucia is reflected also in Pissarro and Walcott's hybrid backgrounds and family legacies. I have already pointed out how the poet considers himself a *mulatto* because of his African, English and Dutch origins. Pissarro shares Walcott's mixed heritage, because his grandfathers were Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, while his mother was a Creole woman from his native island of St. Thomas³⁴⁹. Finally, as Walcott recalls in the poem, the names of the islands are to be connected with the specific quality of their Patron Saints - doubt, for St. Thomas, and sight, for St. Lucia. In this regard, it is not by chance that Pissarro is torn apart by doubt, as he does not know whether he made the right decision when he moved to France, and Walcott is obsessed by the fear of not seeing the truth he is searching for through his poems.

Walcott also shares Pissarro's rejection of imposed destinies and roles. Just as Pissarro moved to Paris to escape his family's predetermined future, Walcott struggled to find his own path or *definition*, for he began with the dream of becoming a painter, soon understood that his gift was poetry but decided to dedicate himself also to the world of theatre and that of the arts in general.

Pissarro brought his West Indian sensibility and feelings to French art, thus mixing colours and techniques, and providing a challenging and highly original type of experiment or revolution. To a certain extent, Walcott does the same within the realm of literature, for he acknowledges and draws inspiration from Western canon and models, and simultaneously fuses them with Caribbean hybrid and schizophrenic dynamism and syncretism.

Pissarro and Walcott's alter-egos enter into a dialogue at a distance in numerous episodes in the poem. Their ways of approaching reality and creating unprecedented outcomes in their art forms within their specific contexts frequently overlap.

³⁴⁹ In an interesting study titled *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, Sarah Phillips Casteel argues that "Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), a verse biography of the Sephardic Caribbean painter Camille Pissarro, illustrates how sephardism can support a noncompetitive and antiassimilatory mode of Black-Jewish comparison. [...] Throughout Walcott's poem, the recurring image of the prism [...] suggests the refraction or dispersion not only of light waves but also of memories, histories, and identities. In *Tiepolo's Hound* these dispersed, splintered histories are dynamically reassembled in a kaleidoscope-like motion that generates new relationalities and patterns of meaning". Casteel (2016), *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, pp. 36-37.

While describing Pissarro in Paris, Walcott resumes the theme of the double by connecting his “first trip to the Modern” (7) to the painter’s first visit to the Louvre. Just as Walcott is stunned by “the Metropolitan’s / marble authority” (7), Pissarro feels disoriented in the city, for “this metropolitan [...] spelt privilege, / each noun in Paris echoed with its fame” (34).

Towards the middle of the narrative, using a metanarrative discourse, Walcott shows how the topography or geography of the world is meant to divide and simultaneously bring together his personal and artistic story with Pissarro’s narrative and artistic path. Walcott contemplates the maps of the world in order to uncover the forgotten threads that link both sides of the Atlantic. He acknowledges that what may connect his alter-ego with the character of Pissarro is the geographical displacement and dis-location of both figures. Soon though, he changes his mind and realises that what really unites them is the power of *reflection*, the uncanny repetition and re-evoking of each other’s memories and life adventures:

*Out of the Antillean crater, every ridge / looks at both seas, both worlds: Pontoise – St Thomas,
// and sees both sides, both tenses, like that bridge / formed by a causeway of olive casuarinas. //
And here is where my narrative must pause, / my couplets rest, at what remains between us, // not
Paris’ privilege or clouds over Pontoise, / nor the white hulls and flags of the marinas, // but the
same reflection that, from a tree’s noise, / arrested him, or as he stared at them, // wavering
memories (87).*

This is also a strategy to revive one of Walcott’s poetic standpoints, that is to say the “amnesia of history” (see Chapter 1, pp. 91), i.e. the desire to erase the wounds of a colonial past in order to embrace a new, circular path of possibilities, because “History is insult, energy is intellect” (90). Decolonising geographical and temporal boundaries allows Walcott to re-establish dignity for his peoples, and also remember those who suffered and perished from the atrocities and shameful divisions of the Middle Passage:

*On one side is the healing / of Time measured in ruins, the empires of Europe, // its smoke, its
spires, and a gold Tiepolo ceiling [...] // but on the other side of the wind / is what exile altered
and banishment made dim: / the still pond and the egrets beating home / through the swamp trees,
the mangrove’s anchors, // and no more bitterness at the Atlantic foam / hurtling the breakwater;
the salt that cures (88-89).*

Walcott explains that he has “learnt to regulate devotion” (89) to the seemingly dull Caribbean landscape, just as Pissarro has managed to re-write the French landscape through painting, thus giving a new and redemptive *light* to colonial Europe.

Despite these congruous yet vague correspondences, Walcott provides a more explicit link with his *double* Pissarro towards the end of Book III. In this section of the poem, the artists do not only match in their forms of expression but also, more importantly, in the confusing reality and inaccuracy of their existences and biographies:

My inexact and blurred biography / is like his painting; that is fiction’s treason, // to deny fact, alter topography / to its own map; he too had his reason // for being false to France. Conspirators, spies / are what all artists are, changing the truth (101-102).

This passage is paramount to understanding the whole meaning of the poem, for Walcott confesses, once and for all, that what the reader is going to regard and understand as *reality* and truth in the poem may be false, or that it may be part of the artists’ undefined and imaginative process of representation. Put simply, the poet advises not to pay too much attention on what is presented as his protagonists’ stories, but rather to focus and appreciate their sudden alteration, as positions and views intertwine sometimes in ambiguous and conflicting ways - for this is what life is, always turning, swapping, altering and changing.

These features are even more evident towards the end of the poem, when Walcott finally *blends* with Pissarro’s figure:

One sunrise I felt an ordinary / width of enlightenment in my motel, // at the Ramada Inn in Albany. / I was bent, writing, he was bent as well, // but in nineteenth-century St. Thomas / my body filled his pencilled silhouette // [...] I’ll be born // a hundred years later, but we’re both bent / over this paper; I am being drawn, // anonymous as my own ancestor, / my Africa erased, if not his France, // the cobbled sunlit street with a dirt floor / and a quick sketch my one inheritance (137-138).

After retracing Pissarro’s *true* story and almost neglected past, Walcott understands that most of his own life and works mirror and relate to the French-Caribbean artist’s endeavour to debunk modernity/coloniality subjugation. Even if, throughout the entire poem, Walcott suggests he and Pissarro may disappear “anonymous” in the backwash of colonial oblivion, he acknowledges that their writings and paintings alike will exist forever, and will testify and give value to their existence. This is the

responsibility that Walcott, as a Caribbean and West Indian poet and artist, feels as his ultimate goal: to pass on decolonial and alternative narratives and ways of acting, or to provide counter-narratives which are destined to transform mainstream thoughts and views.

The episode in which Walcott and Pissarro *blend* into one another is also a cutting response to those Western European and Northern Atlantic representations that have shown and encouraged a reality that diverged from the authenticity of life. It is in this sense that Walcott juxtaposes the reconciling and mixing of his doubles to another destabilising and astonishing revelation, that is the unveiling of the hound's true identity. Indeed, Walcott connects his own *true* multiple identity with that of the dog, which he recognises as a "starved pup" (138), a lonely abandoned creature that he encounters in one his island's sand beaches:

Then one noon where acacias shade the beach / I saw the parody of Tiepolo's hound // in the short salt grass, requiring no research, / but something still unpainted, on its own ground. // [...] now I had found [...] / this tottering, abandoned, houseless thing. // A starved pup trembling by the hard sea, / far from the back yards of a village street. // [...] This was not the / cosseted lapdog in its satin seat, // not even Goya's mutt peering from a fissure / of that infernal chasm in the Prado, // but one that shook with local terror, unsure / of everything, even its shadow. [...] // this was the mongrel's heir, not in a great / fresco, but bastardy, abandonment, and hope // [...] The hound was here (138-139).

It may be tempting to associate the pup with Tiepolo's *white* hound, thus assuming that it is *black*, especially when considering Walcott's association with his "ancestry" (139) towards the end of section. Yet, this type of reading is wrong because Walcott does not mention any colour here, thus implicitly suggesting that the real condition of the *dispossessed* can either affect white, yellow or black peoples (or animals) alike. In this regard, I agree with Maria Cristina Fumagalli when she argues: "The emphasis is not on the dog's color – we know it is the heir of the black mongrel, but we are never told whether it is black or white. What Walcott highlights instead is its 'bastardy' and capacity to endure"³⁵⁰.

For Walcott, the art of seeing reality *for what it is* requires a long period of training and exercise, especially in unveiling the foundations that have been constructed under the influence of the modernity/coloniality matrix of power. Together with the recognition of

³⁵⁰ Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 112.

the inconsistency of the duality of the world, the reader is finally able to embrace the power of what Glissant has termed *Tout-Monde* (see Chapter 1, pp. 52), meaning the concealed relations and interactions that are at the heart of our being and living in this world. Towards the end of the poem, Walcott reminds us that, as human beings, we are all connected through reflections and *repetitions* of one another, in a spiralling continuum of change, new encounters and fusions. Walcott concludes his narration of Pissarro's life wondering whether he has dignified his persona and whether his alter-ego has finally come to be at peace with his own identity and representational doubts. It is the spiritual strength of the *encounter* that breaks down all borders and fuses together the protagonists' visions and the final destination of Walcott's poetic and artistic journey.

I suppose I should have told you about Louveciennes / and the other villages where he [Pissarro] took a house // with his brood of seven [...] / those walks of a Pontoise // I have never seen except as his accompanying / shadow [...] // but I kept seeing / things through his eyes (154).

2.5.6 Forgetting the islands, exile and migration in *Tiepolo's Hound*

Even though *Tiepolo's Hound* is usually described as a poem of passage and movement – with its protagonists travelling and crossing colonial, historical and representational boundaries – the work also focuses on the significance of *roots* and a communal past, as much as on returning home to one's familiar origins and legacies. In this sense, the poem presents, on one side, Pissarro's frustration and resentment for having abandoned his native environment, and, on the other, the puzzling perspectives on the burden of colonial exile and forced migrations of Walcott's alter-ego.

At the beginning of the poem, Pissarro's ancestors argue "this place [the Caribbean] is good, away from the world's noise, / but the old world must never be forgotten" (22). Pissarro takes his family's advice seriously and starts travelling away from his islands, eventually choosing to settle in the *centre* of the *old* Western European dominator world as he moves to Paris. Pissarro follows his intuitions and ambitions, thus defying his own Caribbean origins and roots. For the artist, moving to the *centre* of power signifies a definitive rupture with its *edge* territories, which are indeed rejected or, worse, not represented:

He and Melbye [...] fled to Venezuela, / and remained there for years, till the day came // [...] to tell the / story, familiar obscurity to unfamiliar frame. // What would have been his future had he stayed? / He was Art's subject as much as any empire's (29).

Once in Paris, Pissarro is “determined to erase his island” (41) for he believes he is part of Europe's “heritage by right” (41). His naïve perception and ambition to become part of the advantaged and privileged Western European colonial world obscures his own recognition of his legacy and story. Despite his education in France, and his talents in the world of figurative art, the painter will be always pointed at as an *outsider*.

It comes as no surprise that some of his colleagues refuse to befriend him, and the French Academy avoids his work. Pissarro remains, for both the French people and their institutions, an artist from *edge*, the colonies of the Empire:

Success at home meant nothing, this was the centre / of opinion; for a Danish colonial Jew // from a dirty, backward island to enter / the museum's bronzed doors, that would never do (61).

Walcott indirectly suggests that Pissarro was not able to read and interpret the markers of his Caribbean background. Indeed, the artist misinterprets the profound meaning of his ancestors' warning against abandoning them. “We know you going. / We is your roots. Without us you weak” (25). These are unsurprisingly the only English Creole verses in the entire poem. Walcott bestows Pissarro's forebears with spiritual wisdom, so as to bring to the fore the painter's own debt towards his origins and peoples.

Yet, during the first phases of his stay in France, Pissarro tries to hide his Antillean origins thus devaluing his colonial upbringing, without understanding that it represents the main source of inspiration for his revolutionary forms of expression:

Suddenly all his work revealed itself / as a betrayal, all that he had painted // he saw now with another eye whose health / and clarity remained untainted. // [...] Banish the island from your mind completely, / its zebra patterns of palm light and shade, // the rain-glazed drizzles of Charlotte Amalie, / and the slave voices down Dronningens Gade. // The slaves still practised obeah. Was he cursed / for abandoning the island, with the terror // of work unfinished and his death rehearsed / in every casual accident, not error? (80)

Pissarro retraces his ancestors' curse, because after finishing any painting or canvas he feels as if he were a bird in a cage, or an outsider looking at someone else's work. This happens because he tried to obliterate his true *identity* and the reality in which

he grew up. The painter does not want to admit that the life he abandoned comes through in his forms, colours and artistic visions. Pissarro struggles to recognise the roots of his creative insight, which are the result of the unrepresented shades and hues of the flourishing Antillean land and seascape. During moments of introspection, his ancestors' curse re-appears to re-evolve the consequences of his decisions:

Aha! his mirror smiled: this is what it means / to leave the fading Eden where you were, // its violet flowers, primordial blues and greens, / for the smell of absence on varnished furniture. // The repetition of work preserves his reason. / Hostages to debt, his seven children, his wife's voice, / tired of painting, calls Pontoise their just prison (82).

With the passing of time, Pissarro gets used to the life he has chosen for himself and his family in France. The choice to move to the countryside may reflect an attempt to reconnect with his forgotten world and its untainted beauty, purity and virtue, and also with its simpler life.

Pissarro is exiled from the corrupted society and institutions of the capital city. He believes that conducting his life as a hermit may allow him to start again and redeem himself for his ungrateful deeds. Slowly, Pissarro acknowledges the impossibility of severing his ancestral roots, and therefore repents for having tried to deny what he understands to be his true legacy or ancestral *shadow*:

A shadow / over a road, that is the painful precision // of exile, detail's mound of exact increase, / not as one thought or read, of dimming vision // by distance, but its opposite. The trees / I never thought I needed to remember, brush / or charred trunk against the changing sea's / hues and channels, eluding pen and brush (99-100).

In the poem, also Walcott's alter-ego seems to be haunted by places, spaces and presences from his past. Indeed, it is on one of his islands' beaches that he encounters the *real* and authentic dog he has been searching for. Aside from this epiphany, Walcott repeatedly recalls images from his youth and joyful past on the islands, such as those related to his father, and he continues an intimate dialogue with the powerful Caribbean environment.

Despite some critics and scholars, and sometimes even colleagues, criticising Walcott's choice to leave his birthplaces in the middle of his career to work in the wealthier United States, he has always maintained that his departure was dictated by

necessity. I have already pointed out how Walcott struggled to build a new and authentic Caribbean theatre in the region, also by investing a lot of his own resources and energies, and how his dream did not come to fruition due to a lack of financial support from the Antillean state-island governments. Moreover, although Walcott spent most of the second part of his life abroad, it is important to foreground how he kept writing for and of the Caribbean, thus becoming one of the most praised and authentic voices for its peoples. *Omeros*, for instance, the epic poem that won him international acclaim, is entirely dedicated to his islands and compatriots.

In this sense, *Tiepolo's Hound* is no exception. This is evident in the episode in which Walcott's alter-ego finds himself in St. Thomas and meets Pissarro and Melbye by chance while they are focused on painting the island's landscape. At this moment, Walcott questions Pissarro as to the reasons why he left places familiar to him unpainted. The poet receives no answer, because the two artists cannot hear him. They epitomise the visions and hallucinations of Walcott's alter-ego, even though they soon connect with him by sketching his silhouette.

Pissarro and Melbye's portrait encourages Walcott to re-think and re-evolve the themes of exile, identity and migration. The sketch, in fact, re-establishes a link to Walcott's West Indian origins. Walcott is depicted as an authentic Caribbean person, thus suggesting his inevitable connection not only with his past, but also with the artists themselves.

I passed, climbing the hot hill to the college, / him [Pissarro] and Fitz Melbye sketching in the shade. // I stopped. I heard their charcoals scratch the page / and their light laughter, but not what they said. // I felt a line enclosed my lineaments / and those of other shapes around me too // [...] my clothes were lighter and my stance as frozen // as the pencil branches of an immortelle. / I shrank into the posture they had chosen, // and felt, in barefoot weightlessness, that choice / transparently defined, straw hat, white cotton // fabric, drawn with a withdrawn voice, / knowing that I, not it, would be forgotten, // keeping my position as a model does, / a young slave, mixed and newly manumitted (140-141).

Through this passage Walcott reflects on the idea of how moulding and modelling shapes, bodies and objects is dangerous especially when depicting a codified representation or truth that may be wrong or unreal. In this regard, Walcott refers in particular to the commonly accepted views that the colonial matrix of power imposed on its subjects and society under colonialism, for very few authentic representations of the

Antillean world were allowed to be made and still today few are available for appreciation or study.

Despite Walcott's alter-ego being crystallised in Pissarro's figurative representation as symbol of the Caribbean, Walcott allows his double to speak up for his whole community, thus expressing the need for a new depiction of the archipelago.

My figure now emerging, and it said: // "I and my kind move and not move [...] // Mission-accomplished, exile-humming niggers // [...] but do not leave us here, // for cities where our voices have no words". / Our figures muttered, but he could not hear, // and to this day they still receive no answer, / [...] "We lost our roots as yours were far Braganza, / but this is our new world, of reeds and sand" (141-142).

Walcott concludes by suggesting that it is part of the duty and mission of intellectuals and artists to talk and let people know about the *unknown* or misrepresented contexts of the world, to provide a truthful description of the hidden and even unrivalled beauty of the *edges* we tend to forget or leave to their fate. It is only by transcribing silenced voices and unknown contexts that peoples from a former modernity/coloniality background can finally redeem and free themselves of past cultural stereotypes. As Maria Cristina Fumagalli has suggested³⁵¹, Walcott re-connects with Pissarro when he states that "your [Pissarro] drawing / is edged with a kindness my own lines contain" (141). Nevertheless, it is also true that Walcott cannot avoid wondering what his art may have made of those astonishing Antillean scenarios.

Are all the paintings then falsifications / of his real origins, was his island betrayed? // Instead of linden walks and railway stations, / our palms and windmills? Think what he would have made // (but how could he, what colour was his Muse, / and what was there to paint except black skins?) // of flame trees in the fields of Santa Cruz; / others took root and stood the difference, // and some even achieved a gratitude / beyond their dislocation [...] // made good / from an infernal, disease-riddled heaven, // and let the ship go, trailing its red banner / out of their harbour, like *The Téméraire*. // St Thomas stays unpainted, every savannah / trails its flame tree that fades. This is not fair (143).

2.5.7 In a different light, with a different name: Walcott's recurring poetic standpoints and Pissarro's decolonial approach to art

³⁵¹ Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 121-122.

The animal, human and natural presences that readers face in *Tiepolo's Hound* are not what they first seem. For example, at the beginning of the poem, the “mongrel” (4) that follows the Pissarros on their stroll in St. Thomas looks like an accidental encounter, and only later on does it reveal itself as one of the most powerful symbols of the entire narration. Indeed, the dog soon materialises in different forms and shapes, and also spaces and epochs, thus embodying the precariousness and ambivalent representation of “Caribbeing” (see Chapter 1, pp. 97), or the destabilising and unpredictable dynamism of the Antillean reality. The hound is also the thread linking the protagonists’ stories and their personal quests for their true origins and identities, legacies and ancestral past.

As in most of his works, Walcott combines his poetic and aesthetic standpoints in the flow of the narratives and stories he is dealing with. In addition to a focus on the power of art, the issue of exile and the artists’ role in building a communal future, *Tiepolo's Hound* brings the modernity/coloniality power of *naming* to the fore, along with the consequent dominator shaping of reality. In describing the (unconscious) acceptance of this type of Western dominator wor(l)d view and order, Walcott argues:

The brushwork arranged itself in a local frame; / every landscape seemed to delight in its echo of // its French or Spanish original, down to the name, / the sound preceding its subject; we learnt to love // places to whom their sound were already given, / as our own names were given, until we became, // in the maps of our faces and places, however riven / our hearts by baptism, the same, yet not the same (92-93).

To delve into the poem’s profound meaning, it is important to disengage from Western European and Northern Atlantic views, since what seems to be familiar or repetitive turns out to be something different or not yet considered. Events and narrations are not merely a repetitive replica of one another but rather single hues and shades of a far more complex and intertwined sketch of reality.

It is from this perspective that readers need to consider, for instance, the issue of the dogs’ colours. Walcott does not present a sharp distinction between black and white hounds, mongrels or wolfhounds, but rather a blurry attribution that does not assign specific contours and shades to their existences, thus freeing them from fixed roles or representations. In this regard, Maria Cristina Fumagalli has suggested:

The fact that the hound in the painting is white while the Caribbean mongrels are black seems to suggest, prima facie, the possibility of a raciological reading. Yet the text ultimately resists any such interpretation by rejecting chromatism as a privileged category of investigation³⁵².

When he first settled in France, Pissarro felt bewildered by the new meanings given to the names he used to employ in the Caribbean. In the Western European reality, the places he knew thus acquire different contours and shades. The artist is involved in a process of reversal, denying the way names had been employed in his past in order to embrace and connect to an alleged authenticity of significance:

So too the young painter must have felt in France / that the names he knew were not a contradiction // for an islander but his given inheritance, / as one grew more real and the other hazed into fiction (93).

In his later redemptive journey, during which he reconnects with his islands and birthplace, Pissarro approaches and interacts with the places he knew and imaginatively recalled in two different ways. Firstly, as I have already pointed out, he draws on the power of *light*, Caribbean light in particular. Secondly, he elaborates what I believe to be a new type of partnership and communal way of painting and producing art.

In *The Crowning of a Poet's Quest: Derek Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, Paola Loreto tries to explain Walcott's conception of *light*, which she assumed he drew from Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

Walcott's light has substance and casts no shadow. It has a gentle power of definition that shapes a square in Venice and knits a woman's hair. It defines Pissarro's and Walcott's delight in the wharves of Charlotte Amelie, the capital of St Thomas. It activates sight [...]. It is pure energy, unceasingly creative, and an eternal life principle³⁵³.

It is through the dazzling and blinding power of Caribbean *light* that Walcott responds to colonial history and naming conventions, thus brushing aside the marks of its unjust past in order to propose a new Adamic and paradisiacal vision of the Caribbean. The spiritual and communal *light* that Walcott embraces obliterates the darkness of

³⁵² Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 112.

³⁵³ Loreto (2009), *The Crowning of a Poet's Quest: Derek Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, pp. 103.

ethnic divisions and separations; under the brightening halo of the sun, we are forced to recognise in partnership our common human condition and existence³⁵⁴.

Walcott acknowledges another approach in order to re-think and demystify the modernity/coloniality matrix of power: the adaption of a serene and unpretentious way of describing and writing about his simple and marginalised protagonists. In tune with Walcott's perspectives and compositional style, Pissarro likewise establishes a painting technique that expunges formal and pretentious depictions of reality. Pissarro's way of painting is direct and honest:

There is something uxorious in Pissarro's landscapes, / as if his brush had made a decorous marriage // with earth's fecundity [...] // every framed landscape that he loves in Pontoise / is framed by an open window in its Books of Hours, // compared to the anger in his friend Cézanne, whose / canvas rants at the subject it has chosen [...] // His paintings have the meditative progress / of a secular pilgrim, praising its larks and elms, // ricks for their shade, aspens for their light grace, / voluble poplars. Their modesty overwhelms, // their gratitude (64-66).

Compared to some of his colleagues' art, Pissarro's sketching technique is placid and peaceful: "War was a subject for Meissonier and Delacroix, / his skill was not in such fury, he painted peace // in long-shadowed roads [...] / battles would pass" (75-76). Pissarro's art is the outcome of *another* vision made up of powerful and yet seemingly insignificant encounters and sketches of everyday scenes such as women and men at work in the fields, a rural avenue, a forest or the sooty chimneys of the homes of poverty-stricken families going through life unnoticed.

Pissarro's move to Pontoise coincides with his attempt to re-connect with his lost, neglected and *uncontaminated* Caribbean world. In this sense, the French countryside becomes a shelter away from the "smoke and raw noise / of industry" (53). Pissarro finally recovers his state as an islander; he feels free to paint the "ordinary" (53) life of France and connect his West Indian creativity with a European landscape in a creative contamination of places which is at the foundation of the mongrel's essence of all humanity, where race is a created word and concept meant to divide and control. Yet, the

³⁵⁴ In this regard, Loreto argues: "Walcott is [...] incapable of conceiving a language that is deprived of its physical reference. His treatment of the theme of voluntary exile is figured through Pissarro's and his own pursuit of the right light in which to paint and write. The whole issue of the artist's belonging to a place is thought of in terms of the relationship between his craft and light, which is gradually revealed to be a relationship between Light and his psyche—or soul, in a more traditional interpretation of the text". Loreto (2009), *The Crowning of a Poet's Quest: Derek Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, pp. 106.

Antillean archipelago continues to haunt him. Walcott believes that the trees drawn by Pissarro in Pontoise are to be connected to the artist's ancestors, thus appearing as roots transposed in a foreign, faraway land. Again, Walcott reinforces here the idea of Glissant's rhizomic perspective, thus suggesting that nature and the environment have the power to unify what we erroneously believe to be splintered or separated. Pissarro's poplars become anthropomorphised *replicas* of his compatriots, for nature does not distinguish between roots, but rather embraces Glissant's idea of *Tout-monde* (see Chapter 1, pp. 52), a unifying vision of reality and humanity.

He paints in dialect, like an islander, / in a fresh France; when his swayed poplars tilt // you catch an accent in their leaves, or under / his formal clouds a hill's melodic lilt. // A prism of broken glass flashed at the roots / of an oracular oak seized by the light, // it lit the shadows and the radial shoots / of his iris. It charted his new palette (53-54).

Walcott reinforces the idea that Pissarro's canvases evoke a connection between Europe and the West Indies. He then expands on this assumption by describing Pissarro's palette and suggesting that his tools are further proof of the link, an "explosion of primal colours, the African sounds" (54), which are contrasting and yet recall "the wet grey smells of cavernous sheds / in Paris" (54). The clash between Paris on the one hand, and Charlotte Amelie and the Caribbean on the other, is another way of destabilising the geo-temporal and cultural frontiers established by the Western European and Northern Atlantic sense of linearity. It represents a new and unpredictable mapping that bridges different shores of the Atlantic in a unique and complex space, which is artistic and highly creative. It is also another attempt to overcome binary positions or dualistic ways of seeing and perceiving reality.

For Walcott, "art is secular" (46) and it should not be pretentious or codified, for it embodies the power of imagination and the cycles of life. Art is the key to understanding our true inner self in an undetermined and rebellious way, expressing what we truly are.

Pissarro and Walcott both accept the power of their redemptive art on an uncharted path, which is divergent from traditional Western European or Northern Atlantic ways of interpreting and using aesthetic means. Their art is closer to a rite, a shamanic experience or journey for reconciling with their true self and their powerful, shared Caribbean heritage, environment and historical archive.

In short, Walcott and Pissarro's themes, subjects and perspectives reverberate in their decolonial approach to reshaping reality, which is indeed a passage or rite towards *another* dimension or vision.

A change of Muses, a change of light and customs, / of crooked tracks for avenues of bricks for straw, // change fiddling orchestras for firelit drums, / they were never his people, we were there to draw // [...] an island race / damned to the provincialities of passion. // My muses pass, in their earth-rooted stride, / basket-balancing illiterate women, their load // an earthen vessel, its springs of joy inside, / pliant shadows striding down a mountain road (135-136).

With *Tiepolo's Hound* Walcott embarks on a journey of the self to redeem and recount the story and adventures of his Antillean neglected double, the French-Caribbean Pissarro – or better, the Caribbean-French Camille Pissarro – a painter and artist of the *ordinary*, like Walcott himself, a writer of the dispossessed and alienated West Indians. Through Pissarro, Walcott responds to the Western European *canon* using a revolutionary and destabilising approach. His lines are the counter-narrative to a commonly believed second-rate story, which has now acquired a new meaning and is part of a wider discourse on a geo-temporal shifting of influence.

In his [Pissarro] life's dusk, though hand and eye grow weary, / his concentration strengthens in its skill, // some critics think his work is ordinary, / but the ordinary is the miracle. // Ordinary love and ordinary death, / ordinary suffering, ordinary birth, // the ordinary couplets of our breath, / ordinary heaven, ordinary earth (155).

2.5.8 Re-writing (and re-sketching) an artist's life and aesthetic experience

Tiepolo's Hound focuses on what Western European and Northern Atlantic critics have termed *writing back*, especially in the sketch of Pissarro's narrative and its mostly forgotten truth, and the painter's *alternative* way of producing art.

Apart from Pissarro, Walcott focuses on the work of other renowned artists such as Tiepolo, Veronese, Goya, Rembrandt, Courbet, Vermeer, Cézanne, Monet, Turner, Manet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Renoir, Chardin and Guardi, to name but a few. In this sense, Walcott's goal is to reflect on how art forms other than literature are capable of

challenging dominator paradigms, thus demystifying what the dominator colonial matrix of power considered the *norm*.

Together with the re-writing of Pissarro's life and artistic path, Walcott redefines a commonly acknowledged portrayal of the Caribbean as a land of uncontaminated beauty and of schizophrenic and puzzling contradictions. At the same time, he reflects on Western European *canonical* art. He investigates painters' ambitions and rebellious experimentations, thus connecting the extraordinary journeys of his protagonists with the hidden and mostly silenced attempts to create new visions, arrange subjects differently and make new use colour, perspective or *light*.

In a spiralling circle of possibilities and encounters, Walcott creates an intricate work in which art, poetry, vision and revelations intermingle and intertwine. His work represents radical attempt to re-think literature within the domain of different expressions and artistic means.

Given this perspective, Pissarro's re-drawing of the French landscape mirrors and connects with Walcott's attempt to convey the dynamic and fluctuating energy of his – and eventually their – Caribbean archipelago. While European and Antillean landscapes seem to be divided, the two wor(l)ds do mix with one another, both in refined and mostly *ordinary* ways. For Walcott, the *amnesia* of traditional dominator history is necessary to re-establish a fair and balanced dialogue between the colonisers and the colonised. His intent is to present a history-less reality that *forgets* and is not pre-determined, because it denies cultural, social and artistic boundaries, between memory and oblivion, absence and presence.

These little strokes whose syllables confirm / an altering reality for vision // on the blank page, or the imagined frame / of a crisp canvas, are not just his own. // I shift his biography as he shifted houses / in his landscapes; not walled facts, their essence; [...] // nor ceilings huge with paradisaal glow, / incredibly saffron, bearing those breezy // wing-headed cherubs limned by Tiepolo, / or in that Jewish feast by Veronese. // [...] Ours was another landscape, a new people, / not Oise, where a wind sweeps famous savannahs, // with farms and poplars and piercing steeple, / but cobalt bays and roads through high bananas. // [...] There is no history now, only the weather, / day's wheeling light, the rising and setting // seasons: young Spring, with her wet hair / gone grey, the colour of forgetting (70-71).

As noted, most of books II and III of *Tiepolo's Hound* are devoted to the reworking of Pissarro's story from a decolonial point of view. The French impressionist painter, as he is commonly known, re-acquires his *true* Antillean identity. The poem

reflects on Pissarro being indebted to his islands and West Indian peoples, especially for the way they *see* and experience reality in an unpretentious, humble and modest way. Walcott reveals how Pissarro drew, from his past and his ancestors' life and endurance, an ability to survive in a mostly hostile European dominator space that rejected his experimentations and visions because they did not seem conventional and did not adapt to the Western *canons* of art. In analogy with his critical contextualising of Pissarro's paintings, Walcott applies a similar approach to his own unexpected *re-writing* of Western European paintings from *an-other* point of view. Walcott attempts a revolutionary reading of forms and subjects in traditional Western art. The poet does not reject European canvases and their forms of expression, but rather takes inspiration from their models and structures in order to re-think their content and meaning from his own West Indian perspective.

This reworking or *praxis* of re-evaluating established literature and stories links with decolonial theory and principles (see Chapter 1, pp. 27). The aim of scholars and thinkers from the *edge*, who come from territories and spaces of former colonial subjugation, is that of deconstructing borders of imagination in order to provide a new and unexplored journey of possibilities.

This is particularly evident at the beginning of the poem, when Walcott's alter-ego visits the Metropolitan Museum in New York for the first time and remains "stunned as [he studies] the exact expanse / of a Renaissance feast, the art of seeing (7). The reader expects a description or ekphrasis of the painting Walcott is looking at, but the poet decides to mention its renowned title – *The Feast of Levi* – and simultaneously focus on some precise and almost trivial details:

Then I caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh / of a white hound entering the cave of a table, // so exact in its lucency at *The Feast of Levi*, / I felt my heart halt. Nothing, not the babble // of the unheard roar that rose from the rich / pearl-lights embroidered on ballooning sleeves, // sharp beards, and gaping goblets, matched the bitch / nosing a forest of hose. So a miracle leaves // its frame, and one epiphanic detail / illuminates an entire epoch (7-8).

What gives the poem momentum is the "epiphanic detail": the colour of the thigh of a painted "white hound". This becomes Walcott's obsession in his quest to uncover the animal's true identity. This aspect is paramount to understanding *Tiepolo's Hound* because, in describing Western European artists' work, Walcott re-writes (through

poetry) the stories and themes presented, thus uncovering part of their true and neglected (or forgotten) meaning. In this way, Walcott offers alternative readings, thus unveiling the value of details, and inclusions or exclusions of peoples and different perspectives.

I have already mentioned how the poet at first confuses not only the author of the painting but also its geographical location. *The Feast in the House of Levi* (Cena a casa di Levi in Italian) is a 1573 oil on canvas by Italian painter Paolo Caliari Veronese which is housed at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice³⁵⁵.



Fig. 8: Veronese (1573), *The Feast in the House of Levi*.
Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia.

The painting portrays Christ's last supper and it would have had this title, had the Catholic Inquisition not decided to summon the artist for irreverence and heresy. The inclusion in the canvas of buffoons, dwarfs, Moors, Germans, black servants and even animals, such as hounds, irked the high-ranking clergy. Veronese's concealed intent was in fact to dignify the true multi-ethnic reality of Renaissance Venice. As Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues:

The painting testifies to early modern Venice's cosmopolitanism, which was at the core of her prosperity and one of her distinctive traits. In 1484 the Italian Marin Sanudo described Venice as a 'domicile common to every-one'. In 1599 Gasparo Contarini presents it as 'a common and general market of the whole world' with a 'wonderful concourse of strange and forraigne people, yea of the farthest and remotest nations'. On the left of the painting, a few turbaned Turks are squeezed to the margins or bizarrely hang from the ceiling at the edge of the feast. Turkish traders, it is well known, were indispensable immigrants for Venice. They had been present in the city for

³⁵⁵ See: <http://www.gallerieaccademia.it/en/feast-house-levi> (consulted on 19/06/2020).

centuries and accommodated by the state in different areas [...]. Veronese also features a yellow turban, which was instead the distinctive color of the Jews. Jews came to Venice from everywhere, but at the end of the fifteenth century many Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal moved to the Serenissima, where the first ghetto of Europe came into existence in 1516³⁵⁶.

The painting was innovative, unusual and dangerous for those zealously religious years. It depicted, for instance, a man using a fork to clean his teeth and a servant with a nosebleed, which was read as an insult to the suffering of Christ. For art critics, the scene depicted the decline of Christian values and spirituality. In this regard, it should be remembered that Veronese painted the work right after the clash between the Catholic Church and the Protestants or Lutheran supporters of Northern Europe. When he appeared in front of the Inquisition, the artist justified himself by arguing: “we painters take the licences of poets and crazy people”³⁵⁷, thus bravely claiming that art and creative imagination are not to be codified or called into question by established standard views and norms.

It comes as no surprise that Walcott decided to open his poem with this highly evocative artistic and intertextual reference. He was endeavouring to suggest a complex web of interrelations between words, images and expressive (r)evolutions. Indeed, just as some of the protagonists in the canvas are humble or rejected figures, Walcott’s protagonists are, for the majority, peoples from the *edge*, or dispossessed individuals in search of recognition and their true identity. It is not by chance that Walcott highlights the richness and prosperity at the banquet, by reflecting on its superlative opulence. Conversely, he decides to speak about the alleged insignificant and irrelevant presence of the hound. The animal stands for the voices of the *unknown*, the undesired and unrecognised subjects of the painting, such as the black servants and the Jews or the Moors, thus becoming the symbol of a reversal in viewpoint, in a transversal and transdisciplinary approach that finally recognises the *margins* of reality. There are many indirect (textual and artistic) references that connect Veronese’s painting to Walcott’s

³⁵⁶ Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa’s gaze*, pp. 114.

³⁵⁷ Veronese’s trial in front of the Catholic Inquisition for having painted *The Feast of Levi* was recorded and transcribed, thus becoming an act or manifesto of revolt against the power of the Church. One of the most renowned justifications Veronese used in response to the clergy was: “noialtri pittori si pigliamo le licenze che si pigliano i poeti e i matti” (“we painters take the licences of poets and crazy people” [my translation]). Rizzoli (2005), *Pittori, poeti e matti: il processo a Paolo Veronese, L’Undici*, 98, November 2015. <http://www.lundici.it/2015/11/pittori-poeti-e-matti-il-processo-a-paolo-veronese/> (consulted on 10/08/2018).

poem. First, the depiction and inclusion of Jews in the scene³⁵⁸, which implicitly recalls the figure of Pissarro and that of his ancestors; and, second, the use that impressionist painters – according to art critics and scholars – made of the *The Feast of Levi*. The canvas became an example for waves of artistic revolutions that were to come over the following years, especially in the use of bold, bright colours. Finally, Veronese and Walcott overlap in their depiction of great crowded frescoes of peoples and subjects. In this sense, they both try to convey the world's highly heterogeneous and hybrid spaces, as part of a constant dialogue that underlines the complexity of human interrelations and exchanges.

Giambattista Tiepolo's art is also extensively covered in the poem. At first, Walcott pretends to confuse the two Venetians, thus emphasising again the theme of blurred definitions and the composition of his poem, as well as the uncertainty of the truth in general and in artists' work in particular. At the beginning of Chapter XXII, book IV, he confesses: "Tiepolo, Veronese, // the image I had cherished made no sense, / my memory's transference of their frescoes // meant that I never learnt the difference / between Veronese's gift and Tiepolo's" (134).

However, when it comes addressing Tiepolo's paintings, Walcott seems to have had an epiphany and is finally able to decipher what he is *really* looking at, especially as a marginal and non-European viewer of the artist's work. In short, Walcott de-codes and unveils the meaning and value of Western European art forms through his own, unconventional Caribbean sensibility.

Towards the end of the poem (while still looking for the hound in Venice), Walcott indirectly re-writes (again) three of Tiepolo's paintings as part of a destabilising ekphrastic experiment.

The first of these paintings is *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, a classicist representation in which the poet (unsurprisingly) focuses little on the pomposity of the dress or the pretentious poses of the protagonists in the painting, and more on its marginal and unknown figures, in particular the black moor clutching a hound he soon comes to identify with:

³⁵⁸ For a complete overview on the theme of Jewishness in Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*, see: Casteel (2016), *Calypto Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, in particular the chapter titled "Sephardism in Caribbean Literature: Derek Walcott's Pissarro", pp. 35-67.

I ravaged a volume on Tiepolo later. / I was searching for myself now, and I found // *The Meeting of Anthony and Cleopatra*, / I was that grey Moor clutching a wolfhound, // tan and excitable the dog frets at her, / the Queen gliding in jewels and her train (124).

By examining the spatial organisation of the work, it may be possible to explain Walcott's attentive interest in the canvas. While Anthony and Cleopatra occupy the upper section of the scene, the Moor and the hound are represented just below them, as though trained to be their lower-class, domesticated subjects or servants. The Queen and the General are avoiding looking directly at their feet. Conversely, the black servant is absorbed by Cleopatra's astonishing beauty.

A similar kind of poetic and ekphrastic description occurs when Walcott refers to Tiepolo's *The Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra*. The scene is similar to the previous painting, even though the Queen is now seated and "poises a pearl over a goblet" (124), in a clear reference to the power she holds over her subjects. Once more, Walcott recognises himself in the figure of a "Moor in a doublet" while another "brown hound frame[s] the scene" (124). The recurring presence of the dogs catches Walcott's attention. He is astonished by the way Tiepolo and Veronese, before him, decided to depict the marginal presence of servants and animals that may have spoiled the clarity and precision of the composition. He questions Western European artists' intent in deciding to include or foreground rejected and unimportant subjects or themes in their works. Finally, he acknowledges the sensibility and responsiveness of these artists in accurately conveying a true picture of reality. In this sense, Walcott compares his poetical journey with the efforts of European artists, likening their common intent to portray the contractions and injustices of dominator *hierarchical* life. This is also the painting in which Walcott confirms Tiepolo's indebtedness to his predecessor and mentor Veronese.

This was something I had not seen before, / since every figure lent the light perfection, // that every hound had its attendant Moor / restraining it with dutiful affection. // I riffled through the derisive catalogue / determined that the fact was not a vision. // (The dog, the dog, where was the fucking dog?) / Their postures wrong. Nothing confirmed my version. // The prints confirmed his debt to Veronese, / his distant master; tiringly inspired, // he learnt from him to keep his gestures busy / and the light clear; by now he has acquired // the weight and flourish of a public syntax / Veron-easy with colloquial scholarship (124-125).

The last painting Walcott evokes in this section is *Apelles Painting Campaspe*³⁵⁹. The canvas is important to the whole structure of the poem because it may form a meta-narrative or self-reflective artistic output. The work depicts Tiepolo's self-portrait under the guise of the painter Apelles. The painter is sketching, in turn, the portrait of Campaspe, Alexander the Great's favourite concubine. The originality of this work lies in the fact that the representation of Campaspe has been replaced by Tiepolo sketching his wife, Maria Cecilia Guardi (the daughter of Domenico Guardi, a renowned Italian artist). In doing so, Walcott *blurs* the identity of Tiepolo's protagonists, thus suggesting that his poem may function in a similar way:

Another print! *Apelles Painting Campaspe* / is this allegory Tiepolo has painted himself, // painting his costumed models, on the floor, what must be / his mascot: a white lapdog revels in the wealth / of Venetian light. Alexander sprawls in a chair. / An admiring African peers from the canvas's edge // where a bare-shouldered model, Campaspe with golden hair, / sees her myth evolve. The Moor silent with privilege. // [...] we presume from the African's posture that I too am learning / both skill and conversion watching from the painting's side (129).

In addition to recognising the correspondences between Tiepolo's revolutionary artistic approach and his own experimental poem, Walcott also more specifically identifies himself with the black African standing at the edge of the painting. Another *privileged dog* appears on the canvas.

³⁵⁹ Scholars and art critics agree in recognising Udine as the city where Tiepolo composed this artwork. The painting is currently housed in Montreal.



Fig. 9: Tiepolo (1726), *Apelles Painting Campaspe*.
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

As many art critics and scholars have pointed out, the scene may be divided into two different spaces: on the left, Tiepolo depicts ancient Greek myth, with its seemingly perfect, statuesque protagonists and their classical proxemics; on the right, the light is dimmer and the subjects are less rigorous. Tiepolo's aim was to reflect on how classical and contemporary worlds may intertwine in a new dialogue, even within the restricted space of figurative canonical representation and creative production.

To a certain extent, Walcott's undertaking matches Tiepolo's structures, use of position, and appreciation of the classical world. However, he takes a step forward while commenting on the scene because he does not focus on the division of the canvas, but rather on the perspective of one of its lesser considered subjects, the African servant. Walcott highlights the slave's posture and the embodied significance of his peering as though wanting to learn how to paint and describe the reality surrounding him. The reference is clear. Walcott is acknowledging the importance of new and uncharted perspectives, even (or especially) in the world of the arts. In this way, he prompts his

black African compatriots to pay attention to their *real* condition and way of living at the *margins* of society. Walcott urges them to learn both “skill and conversion” (129), that is to say formalism and non-formalism, or normative, canonical expression and its counter-narrative.

For Walcott, blending *canons* and mixing visions is the only way to reach something new, alternative and original, so as to embrace the ever-shifting and uncontrollable swapping of times, geographies, spheres of influence and domination.

In this regard, I agree with Fumagalli when she praises Walcott for having opened up the path for transdisciplinary and unexpected encounters, in literature, the arts, theatre and folklore, thus “brushing away” the power of the colonial matrix of power in all its forms and manifestations:

Walcott is convinced that the future depends on one’s capacity to brush history and received formulations of modernity against the grain, to reinterpret the past by taking into consideration the perspective of the underdog, not only that of the victors. *Tiepolo’s Hound* is thoroughly committed to such an endeavor, as the perspective he invites us to adopt when looking at early modern and modern art testifies. Most important, art is not just upheld as evidence of past wrongdoings: its utilization is at service of the future, and it becomes inspirational³⁶⁰.

2.5.9 Transdisciplinarity in *Tiepolo’s Hound*: mixing poetry, figurative art and music

For most literary and art critics, *Tiepolo’s Hound* is one of the most subversive, revolutionary poems of the early twenty-first century. Visions, adaptations, new experiences, unexpected ways of experimenting with verses come together in a single, multifaceted work, in which Walcott substantiates the decolonisation of his Caribbean wor(l)d. The poet’s alter-ego repeatedly draws on disrupting aesthetic techniques and styles. In doing so, Walcott introduces one of the main themes of the poem: the rejection of old, canonical types of expression, subject and scenario in order to acknowledge the passing of time, and also provide a new type of creative and imaginative endeavour.

It is not by chance that Pissarro became one of the leading figures of the impressionist movement, which was a new and innovative way of sketching existence and grasping the shades and *impressions* of daily life. Pissarro came from *an-other* world

³⁶⁰ Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa’s gaze*, pp. 113.

and must have felt that the industrialisation of Europe, and the stricter formalism of its cultural and artistic institutions, needed a refreshing, *ecosophical* perspective³⁶¹.

The painters and artists who identified, or were labelled, as “impressionists” started their (r)evolution in Paris, the capital at the time of the avant-garde. Progress was transforming the city, and not always in a positive way, for disparities amongst people were growing and the ancestral interrelations with the natural environment were being lost. People were moving from the countryside to live and work in the city, while museums, academies and Western European centres of power started organising public exhibitions and cultural events, so as to show a more inclusive and comprehensive attitude towards their subjects and citizens.

In this unexpected opening up of possibilities and artistic slants, impressionists decided to take their brushes and easels out onto the streets in order to depict the explosive energy of this refreshing and unexpected new reality. At the same time, some opted for the reverse voyage, thus moving towards the outskirts of *civilisation*, in order to reconnect and re-establish a dialogue with nature, depicting peasants and simple, more authentic rural life. In both cases, impressionists began working *en plein air*, that is to say *outside*, beyond the centres of domination and power. This aspect represented an important cultural and artistic shift, because artists were finally allowed to depict simple subjects, and not draw only from mythological or classical themes. Moreover, by swapping their work spaces, moving between ateliers, public contexts and natural environments, artists could finally study and convey the *true* colours and shades of life.

This was also the case for Pissarro. After having experienced a moment of crisis in the *greyness* of Paris, the painter understood that he could have obtained something *different*, closer to his sensibility, simply by distancing himself from the corruption of the city.

These were the hazards of painting *en plein air*: / the dust of the wind and the capricious light // fading and brightening, nowhere was plainer / than his repeated views, none of them right [...] // The Salon's choice // omitted him repeatedly. Who would want / 300 versions of visions of Pontoise // [...] Rejection intensified defiance, // stubborn as Cézanne's stones in the stone light / of L'Estaque, its blue morne in the distance. // So his own canvases stayed as they were, / without

³⁶¹ With the term *ecosophical*, I make reference first to Raimon Panikkar's *ecosophical view*, and also to Riane Eisler's biocultural partnership model, in which the Jewish-American anthropologist and social thinker sustains the need for recovering authentic human relationships, between genders and communities, and also with the natural environment and ecosystems that sustain life.

narrative pathos, they would insist // on the raw vehemence of real weather, / snow-spattered mud, grey gardens in grey mist (68-69).

During his time in Pontoise, Pissarro gave colour and form to country lanes, humble houses and rural scenes. His aim was to concentrate on representing authentic realities, whether this meant describing the poor condition of people in the country or exploring their monotonous routines: “He sat out for the fields when the sun broke / like any labourer so his work might grow // *en plein air* only, not a single stroke / made from the comfort of a studio (80).

This aspect links to Walcott’s project reflecting on and giving voice to the *dispossessed*, the rejected or the un-described individual(s) of society. As Fumagalli points out: “Pissarro is particularly endearing to Walcott because of his dedication to ordinary people and ordinary places [...]”³⁶². Indeed, the two were both sympathetic to the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion that govern human relationships. In tune with Eisler’s biocultural partnership approach, their art and imaginative outputs provided an alternative, comprehensive approach to the modernity/coloniality dominator matrix of power.

Another technique or artform Walcott takes as an example of a decolonial switch in the world of painting is the Pointillist movement, an aesthetic alternative that, in a sense, was a consequence of the Impressionist revolution. It is interesting to point out here is Walcott’s association of Pointillism with science, a comparison that once again abolishes the alleged gap between different disciplines in the author’s wor(l)d:

The Pointillist muse was Science; all space / was a concentration of dots, picnickers boating // on the summer Seine, dogs, parasols. Their refusers / rejected this change of vision, of deities; theories // instead of faith, geometry, not God. Their accusers / saw them as shallow heretics, unorthodox painters // [...] They followed impulse, with no concern for their craft, // [...] The Salon laughed / as it locked them out. Sketches. Impressions (44-45).

Walcott’s aim is to investigate an inability to grasp the importance of change, cultural empowerment and innovation. He urges his colleagues, both painters or writers, to think about the inevitability of the passing of time, and change in modes and forms of

³⁶² Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa’s gaze*, pp. 111.

expression, i.e. to delink from the austerity and rigid normative ethic of the immutable and inflexible Western *canon*.

As Hannan points out in *Crossing Couplets: Making Form the Matter of Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, the same kind of experimental energy that readers and scholars appreciate in Walcott's work in general can be found particularly in the use and organisation of the poem's lines and rhythms:

In Tiepolo's Hound form does not act to preserve literary or cultural tradition. Instead Walcott returns to the couplet, and transforms it, as a way to invest traditional form with a sensibility of crossing and fluidity that characterizes the Caribbean. Walcott's particular construction of the couplet in this poem, and his related exploitation of rhyme, presents new possibilities in postcolonial aesthetics and expand the boundaries of postcolonial writing³⁶³.

This feature is recognisable from the very beginning of the poem. Indeed, Walcott foregrounds the disruptive and unsettling dynamism of his verses by allowing their forms and original structures to enter the realm of his metaphorical and highly creative imagination. In describing his first trip to the Modern, Walcott's alter-ego states: "I remember stairs in couplets" (7), thus allowing his artistic vision to become poetry and vice versa. The analogy between different semiotic systems is reinforced soon after, in particular when Walcott describes how he "paused on a step of this couplet" (8), thus suggesting a simultaneous arrest both in his writing and pictorial depiction of the events. In this regard, Hannan suggests:

For Walcott the couplet materializes as a kind of intermediary element with which he builds, couplet by couplet, a space of exchange between word, sound, sight, and physical object, crossing, as he does, any divisions that might inhere between word and image, poetry and painting. [T]he art of seeing becomes an art of transformation, of perceiving in the poetic line the visual, material, tactile elements of painting and the world³⁶⁴.

I think that Walcott employs a particular kind of intersemiotic complementarity³⁶⁵, in which different expressive and artistic forms intermingle and fuse with one another so

³⁶³ Hannan (2002), *Crossing Couplets: Making Form the Matter of Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, *New Literary History*, 33, 3: 559.

³⁶⁴ Hannan (2002), *Crossing Couplets: Making Form the Matter of Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound*, *New Literary History*, 33, 3: 562-563.

³⁶⁵ *Intersemiotic complementarity* can be defined as the interrelation between different semiotic systems sharing an equal space in the process of conveying complex meanings. The concept was propounded by Terry D. Royce in an interesting article titled *Intersemiotic Complementarity: A Framework for Multimodal*

as to propose a puzzling and yet coherent representation of his Antillean hybrid background. In this regard, there are multiple examples of transdisciplinary encounters, clashes and mixes amongst diverse configurations, arts and expressive forms in the poem.

The most recurrent association is the link between poetry, art and vision, as in the following example:

Since light was simply particles in air, / and shadow shared the spectrum, strokes of paint // are phrases that haphazardly cohere / around a point to build an argument, // vision was not the concentrated gaze / that took in every detail at a glance (43).

Walcott sees no distinction between his life's passions – figurative art and poetry – for one is a reflection of the other; a sign or phrase on paper is equal to a blank page filled with colourful brushstrokes. Both represent an act of the creative imagination and a manifested liberation.

Walcott speaks of poetry as though it were paint, and of the act of painting as though it corresponded to writing a poem. The distinction between disciplines proposed by the modernity/coloniality matrix of power, and also by Western European tradition does not fit with his mindset. In erasing the time of colonial subjugation, the Caribbean author blurs the defined and constraining confines of imagination, thus allowing different kinds of art and expression to intertwine in the *praxis* of decolonising the Caribbean.

If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess, / it was not from ambition but to touch the sublime, // to heighten the commonplace into the sacredness / of objects made radiant by the slow glaze of time [...] // I approach every canvas with a pompous piety, / faithful to the lines of the drawing, a devotion transferred // from a different servitude, to lines of poetry / proceeding by systematic scansion, brushstroke and word. // [...] if this pen were a brush, and a brush as true as your pen (98-99).

In Walcott's subversive act of multimodal writing, the two disciplines cohere and ignite in a resourceful space of possibilities, in which different issues, themes and subjects are treated and expressed in unexpected ways. It is in this creative laboratory of balancing and complementary attempts that Walcott beseeches the aid of *other* muses, *other* sensibilities and practices. It is in this new Adamic wor(l)d, made up of images, sounds, embodied gestures and movements, that the author accomplishes his own (r)evolution.

Discourse Analysis in Royce and Bowcher (eds. 2007), *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*, pp. 63-110.

In tune with this perspective, Walcott is not afraid to go beyond the reference models imposed by the colonial matrix of power. On the contrary, he takes advantage of the sacred spirituality of Western European idols and symbols in order to re-write their significance from a more inclusive point of view.

They continue at sixty-seven / to echo in the corridors of the head, perspectives // of a corridor in the Vatican that led, not to Heaven, / but to more paintings of Heaven, ideas in sieves // drained by satiety, because great art can exhaust us, / and even the steadiest faith can be clogged by excess, // the self-assured Christs, the Madonnas' inflexible postures. / The hound raced with my thought to brightening Venice. // Here a black mongrel, nosing around a bright boat, / is chased, then chased again, but has returned // without any shame; turn your gaze about / to the starved pot hound that your foot once spurned (110-111).

One final and particularly interesting intersemiotic episode occurs when Walcott deals with the art of Paul Cézanne³⁶⁶, Pissarro's pupil³⁶⁷. Walcott mentions their friendship and how the Provençal artist would be "signing his work, *Pupil of Pissarro*" (135). This intertextual, artistic reference becomes significant when Walcott describes Cézanne's style of drawing, which he associates with the act of composing music, or imagining a musical score:

The practice of modulation by a succession / of square, progressive strokes transformed a canvas // by Cézanne to a musical score. This was not Impression / but visible syntax. (56-57)

In this evocative and symbolic passage, Walcott combines the creative practices of music, poetry and figurative art through an (apparently) easy *transcodification*, i.e. a passage from one semiotic system to another. This is a deliberate attempt to put forward a new and challenging *praxis* of writing. Walcott has finally evaded the modernity/coloniality structures of power. Decolonising the Caribbean also means suggesting a new way of interacting with literature and offering alternative modes, readings and disciplinary encounters and fusions.

³⁶⁶ On the figure of Paul Cézanne, Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues: "Cézanne was more regionalistic in his approach: it is well known that in his landscapes he tried to capture not only the colors but also the scents of his beloved Provence; he hoped that by looking at his painting, one would feel the Mistral blowing". Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 124.

³⁶⁷ In Chapter XII, Walcott explains: "As Melbye was once his [Pissarro's] master he was now Cézanne's, / who copied and copied his large view of Louveciennes (79).

2.5.10 Walcott's painting, the crowning of the poet-artist's quest for a multimodal work

At the beginning of this analysis, I emphasised how Walcott includes twenty-six of his own watercolours in *Tiepolo's Hound*. Walcott the artist merges with Walcott the poet, in a constant comparison between separated, dual facets of the same personality. In this way, Walcott realises one of his childhood dreams of bringing together his artistic and aesthetic passions. This was the beginning of a journey that he would pursue for the rest of his life, as can be seen in his last productions both in poetry and theatre³⁶⁸.

What may be interesting to point out here is Walcott's final approval and experimentation within the world of poetry, a realm he used to consider as highly codified and difficult to decolonise in its structures and themes.

Tiepolo's Hound represents an exception and may be a warning to or wakeup call for other artists and writers, to try out and believe in their artistic and transdisciplinary connections and (r)evolutions.

The title page and all the books that *Tiepolo's Hound* comprises are introduced by a brushstroke, and the hardbound copy contains twenty-six of his paintings. His pen, therefore, did not really replace his brush: reassessing North Atlantic conceptualizations of the space-time of modernity and their cultural expressions is a complex task for which Walcott deploys all the weapons in his arsenal³⁶⁹.

Despite the focus of most literary and art critique on the paintings that refer directly to or epitomise the essence of the Caribbean archipelago, in this last paragraph I will analyse two marginal, lesser debated canvases that Walcott includes in his work.

The sketches are meaningfully placed one after the other, at the beginning and end of chapter VI, book II, as though in a dialogue or in some way related in an intricate and intimate way. As Erickson suggests: "For a book that spends so much time in Europe, it is noteworthy that, out of twenty-six paintings, only two are located in the 'Old World'"³⁷⁰. From a literary point of view, the section focuses on Pissarro's first

³⁶⁸ In 2012 Walcott produced one of his last plays titled *O Starry Night* on the friendship between Van Gogh and Gauguin at Arles. In 2014 he published a poetry-art book titled *Paramin*, in cooperation with his Trinidadian friend and artist Peter Doig.

³⁶⁹ Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*, pp. 109.

³⁷⁰ Erickson (2005), *Artists' Self-Portraiture and Self-Exploration in Derek Walcott's 'Tiepolo's Hound'*, *Callaloo*, 28, 1, pp. 226.

impressions of Paris and his psychological need to create a division between the Caribbean landscape and the French capital. The painter acknowledges, for the first time, the weight of colonial history and memory, as much as the power of the modernity/coloniality influence in Europe. Pissarro immediately sees that he is an *outsider*, or better, an artist to be segregated from his French European colleagues and friends. Pissarro feels lost in his new adopted city and therefore begins building a *shadowing* shield around him in order to contrast and safeguard himself from the authority and influence of the powerful French centres of domination.

Museums demean him. Island boy. The eye / of a crazed duke pursues him up the stairs // of the Louvre to halt at this couplet as I / did for the grazing hound. At night, he hears // a litany of great names, Goya, Velázquez, / but marbles turn their heads away from him, // from ancient texts in his Sephardic eyes [...] // and, as he drifts and mutters, aimlessly, / jealousy pierces him, until he freezes // before the gold heat of a Tiepolo sky, / down tiring colonnades of masterpieces. // None, none are his! (34-35).

Walcott juxtaposes these verses with his watercolour titled *English Garden, Stratford-On-Avon* (1991). The canvas depicts what seems to be an English patio, with a garden table and a marble statue of a naked woman. The uncultivated, wild, green vegetation in this place contrasts with the white silhouettes or *impressions* of the sculpture on the left, and the chairs and table on the right. No people are represented in the painting, which engages in a direct dialogue with the texts, since Walcott talks about “marbles” at the Louvre. The canvas conveys a sense of *stasis* against a motionless backdrop. In this regard, Walcott has skilfully created a link between the burden of history and the unmovable and heavy standing of statues, which recall the preciseness of the classicist period. In this sense, the sculpture may be associated with the Western European literary or artistic *canon*, for it epitomises modernity/coloniality aesthetics, especially in its seemingly perfect forms and appearances, and in its inflexible and unchangeable stance.

In the poem Walcott refers to an “eye / of a crazed duke [that] purses him [Pissarro]” (34). The poet also emphasises the presence of a “grazing hound” (34) and how “turn[ing] heads” looked away from “[Pissarro’s] Sephardic eyes” (35). Significantly, the theme of embodied and physical looks contrasts with the motionless painting. This comes as no surprise, given Walcott’s aim is to empower Pissarro’s consequent “freeze” in the presence of “tiring colonnades of masterpieces” (35). Walcott substantiates Medusa’s gaze, to cite a metaphor used by Fumagalli in her study on

Caribbean literature³⁷¹. In this way, he explains that artists, writers and peoples from the *edge*, or the peripheries of the world, who happen to encounter the extraordinary (alleged) perfection of Western European and Northern Atlantic outputs for the first time tend to feel *inferior* or bow down in awe. Medusa's gaze has the power to immobilise creative and alternative viewpoints, so as to provide a unique line of thought and perception of reality.

In addition to this reading, it may be noted that the painting represents an English garden or, even more so, a *locus amoenus* located in Stratford-upon-Avon, making a direct intertextual (and artistic) reference to Shakespeare's figure and work, for this was his birthplace. According to Erickson:

The Stratford location [...] evokes Shakespeare as an icon of the great tradition; the statue that dominates the garden is reminiscent of another icon, Venus de Milo. The whiteness of the statue resonates not only with the image of the white hound, but also with the statues in Parisian museums that proclaim Pissarro's exclusion³⁷².

In this complex intertwining of artistic and literary references, Walcott again foregrounds Pissarro's disquieting "anxiety" and "fears" (36), for the artist cannot yet imagine the possibility of escaping and eluding European reality, or its labyrinth of existence. It would be easy to interpret the second painting that Walcott posits in this section as a further reinforcement of this way of seeing and experiencing modernity/coloniality contexts. However, if associated with Walcott's verses at the end of this chapter, the canvas titled *St. Malo* (1993) assumes another and more valuable meaning.

The painting depicts what may look like as a Sunday stroll in the northern French coastal city of St. Malo. People are walking along the beach, while a recognisable figure at the fore is holding a black dog on a leash. The skyline is grey, as are the hues and shades of the city. The lifeless tones of this representation are meant to announce an imminent change in the weather. The city and the port feature prominently, providing a stable background, as though representing the stronghold of powerful European cities.

³⁷¹ See: Fumagalli (2009), *Caribbean perspectives on modernity: returning Medusa's gaze*. University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville & London.

³⁷² Erickson (2005), Artists' Self-Portraiture and Self-Exploration in Derek Walcott's 'Tiepolo's Hound', *Callaloo*, 28, 1, pp. 226.

The greyness of the scene connects textually to Pissarro's nostalgia for his islands. The artist acknowledges Europe's authentic and shameful reality. He perceives how the modernity/coloniality matrix of power has created a hierarchical, unjust and unequal society. He understands the truth of progress, with its "sugar-factor[ies] machines", where "ochre pot hounds forage, not at the Feast / of Levi, but for scraps of garbage" (37). He starts doubting his unconsidered decision to move to the privileged centre of Western domination.

Nevertheless, Pissarro soon acknowledges the possibility he has to give a new life and a new *light* to that old, grey and unfair world. The moment of revelation occurs during the falling of the first snowflakes in the French capital, a scene I have already described in a previous section of my analysis.

It is in light of this epiphany, a highly significant *visual* moment, that Walcott's painting *St. Malo* should be considered. Walcott's intention and intersemiotic complementarity is clear here, in this unprecedented mix of figurative art and poetry.

The complex intertwined relationship between the painting and the final verses of this chapter is an attempt to substantiate a decolonial *praxis* of transdisciplinary encounter. The fusion between the artistic and poetic wor(l)ds is a way out towards a prism of radiant *alternatives*, which are possible only after having *bleached* or *whitened* the spaces of the modernity/coloniality matrix of domination. The art of partnership, with its easy yet complex interpretations, is ready to try out and give voice to new and exciting exchanges between modes, expressions and creative means.

I would like to conclude this analysis of three of Walcott's texts with an invitation. When it comes to studying postcolonial/decolonial literature, I would invite European and Western oriented scholars and critics to include in their research elements and features that their systems of thoughts may consider trivial and unimportant. This discourse applies in particular to traditions, arts and expressive means that artists, playwrights and writers from the *edge* have been able to include and valorise in their works. It is only through an inclusive, comprehensive and partnership approach that postcolonial literatures and texts can be studied within a liberated decolonial framework that detaches from commonly acknowledged views, perspectives and visions. In this regard, through my analysis I have tried to focus on three different artistic means, first

within the wor(1)d of music, then of dance, and finally that of figurative art, in a constant dialogue that takes into consideration the *Other* and a different *praxis* of experimentation.

Chapter 3: *The dancing wor(l)d of The Schooner Flight*, an intersemiotic and multimodal translation/adaptation

This last chapter of my thesis presents my personal attempt to decolonise Derek Walcott's textual and artistic wor(l)d through the art of contemporary dance-theatre, through lyrical embodied movements and gestures. I will explore transdisciplinary encounters and possibilities between my passions and interests: literature and ballet. I propose a multimodal, intersemiotic translation of a selection of passages from Walcott's poetic manifesto *The Schooner Flight*, composed in the late 1970s³⁷³, in which he reflects upon his hybrid identity, colonial legacy and blend of cultural practices, traditions and arts.

My dance-theatre production challenges rigid antinomies between the arts and originally fuses together poetic words and rhymes, images and sounds, movements and gestures in an embodied and metaphorical transdisciplinary decolonial narrative, which shape in dance Walcott's powerful and enthralling text.

Generally, the world of dance, with its physical configurations, articulates meaning without the use of the (written/spoken) *word*, while the realm of poetry works within an un-corporeal and imaginative framework. I focused on merging these two creative processes in a performative transposition or *praxis*, where embodied words fuse together with their semiotic meanings and corporeal textures. My experiment, an alternative way of reading and interacting with literature, allowed me to appreciate unknown or unexplored features of Walcott's poetry. In this sense, through the choreography, I wanted to evoke a connection with the poet's creative insight, while taking into account my individual interpretation of his wor(l)ds.

The idea for this transdisciplinary encounter began when I approached postcolonial literature(s) for the first time. I was fascinated by the way poets, writers and playwrights from the *edge* were approaching art. Their ability to express themselves through different practices and means such as music, dance and mime made me realise

³⁷³ As Breslin recalls: "The publication dates of the three preliminary versions span the period from winter 1977 through 1979. Given the lead time between submission and publication, Walcott must have begun the poem in 1976, when his affair with Norline Metivier, later to become his third wife, was breaking up both his second marriage and the social cohesion of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop". Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 189.

that there were other, new and original ways to read the interplay between literary forms and content.

When I came across Derek Walcott's poetry, I was stunned by the way he worked with verses and lines. Walcott does not limit himself to the confines of the blank page but rather escapes from its margins in order to propose an almost *corporeal* and extremely visual experience, which has the power to connect both West Indian ancestral wisdoms, or African tribal rhythms and sounds, with Western European *canonical* structures and themes.

From my point of view, Walcott's wor(l)d epitomised an opportunity to access an unknown and yet fascinating scenario: the Antillean archipelago, a faraway agglomeration of islands exploited by the European and Northern Atlantic matrix of power over the course of colonial history. This territory still nowadays is misinterpreted in Western Europe, because it is perceived as an archipelago of tribal dances and different types of music, with well-defined Caribbean peoples, who are principally descendants of African colonial slaves.

The Caribbean, in reality, is much more. A more appropriate and accurate definition would be of a highly creative stretch of similar territories in which Western traditions were incorporated into and merged with various ethnical, cultural and folkloric realities. Despite commonly acknowledged perspectives and views, *Caribbeing* (see Chapter 1, pp. 97) still hones in on Western European background, which it aims to *re-write* within its highly experimentative and creative *psyche* made up of different cultural, social and aesthetic clashes and encounters.

It took some time for critics and scholars to recognise Walcott's outstanding achievements in the world of literature. In this regard, I agree with Walcott's close friend, the poet and Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky, when he suggests:

Critics on both [...] sides have dubbed him 'a West Indian poet' or 'a black poet from the Caribbean'. These definitions are as myopic and misleading as it would be to call the Saviour a Galilean. [...] The mental as well as spiritual cowardice, obvious in these attempts to render this man a regional writer, can be further explained by the unwillingness of the critical profession to admit that the great poet of the English language is a black man³⁷⁴.

³⁷⁴ Brodsky (1986), "The Sound of the Tide" in Bloom (ed. 2003), *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Derek Walcott*, pp. 36-37.

Indeed, Walcott has accomplished an unexpected and alternative type of writing, in which he has rethought and debased *canonical* or classical Western structures, thus decolonising the rules of English syntax and lexicon with Creole and vernacular forms, images and sounds. Walcott has unveiled and given form to the colours and shades of his Caribbean compatriots' lives. At the same time, he has worked extensively to build a West Indian theatrical experience, collaborating with producers, stage directors, actors, dancers, singers and performers from all over his islands. Still today though, very few translations of his plays are available, for instance, in Italian. This explains how Walcott is commonly read in a Western oriented mindset and from a Western approach, meaning from the perspective of critics and scholars that tend to avoid or omit a fundamental part of his work and personality: the highly corporeal, physical and performative side of being Caribbean (see Chapter 2, pp. 105).

It was an encounter with *Omeros*, Walcott's poetic masterpiece, that prompted me to think about a dance-theatre interpretation of his works. The epic offers a re-writing or counter-reading of Homer's well-known narrative models, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, while simultaneously presenting the folkloric and Creole traditions of the West Indies. In this regard, most postcolonial and Western European literary critics have neglected the highly evocative idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of the region the poet foregrounds through his work. *Omeros* is indeed not only a response to Western European literature, but also a ground-breaking space in which to present the Caribbean Carnival, their ancient cosmogonies and ancestral beliefs and spirituality. *Omeros* manages to bridge the divide between the classical world, or better the Western European and Northern Atlantic *canon*, and the distinctive and original setting of the Caribbean. It also demonstrates how today's world cannot be made up of walls or frontiers, for languages and ethnicities, and to the same extent cultural and artistic syntheses, mix and combine in what is the schizophrenic and fluctuating reality of globalised life.

Based on this premises, in 2017 I managed to choreograph with a group of ballet students from a school in Udine. The intent of my work was to give voice to lesser studied episodes of the epic in which female figures become the bearers of hidden ancestral wisdom, and also the *carriers* and *healers* of West Indian suffering, endurance and survival under colonialism. The project became extremely significant for the young women involved. They discussed, read and debated about the influence of the colonial

(and neo-colonial) matrix of power, and the Western European dominator attitude of imposing and perpetuating a single dominator truth. The students talked about their involvement in the choreography at school; some of them presented the project as part of their final high school diploma examination. From my perspective, allowing myself and my students to appreciate Walcott's poetry through other expressive means meant venturing into a *praxis* that experimented with something new, in the world of academia, education and, finally, dance. In short, I began researching and applying the premises and foundations of what scholars and critics identified as intersemiotic or multimodal translation³⁷⁵. The project was not, however, an *accurate* translation only, as it was also based on participatory interventions and suggestions from the students. The production became a dance-theatre multimodal experiment that came closer to the processes of *applied theatre*³⁷⁶, a practice that involved a community (in this specific case, a small group of young girls and students) in the act of thinking and expressing through their art, passions and talents, the ideas and inspiration they had gathered from reading and studying a text, which also said much about them and the male-oriented dominator world systems.

Following this preliminary experiment³⁷⁷, I decided to further investigate the possibility of choreographic Walcottian poetical texts in my Ph.D. thesis. In this case though, I decided to create a full length dance-theatre multimodal work that would include the perspectives of students, and also of other professionals, such as choreographers, a group of video and transmedia artists, and a troupe of post-editing technicians and specialists.

The project started in October 2018 and came to an end in June 2019, with a final world stage première of the dance at the Teatro Verdi theatre in Pordenone (Italy). In the autumn of 2018, I worked on writing the script for the production, conducting research on Walcott's text *The Schooner Flight* and choosing the most emblematic passages of the

³⁷⁵ See: Bruhn (2016), *The Intermediality of Narrative Literature: Medialities Matter*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke; Dixon (2007), *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA; Murphet (2009), *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American avant-garde*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

³⁷⁶ For an overview on the experimenting praxis of applied theatre, please see: Reason & Rowe (eds. 2017), *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in theatre, music and art*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama: London.

³⁷⁷ For a complete overview of my first experimental experience with Walcott's poetry through the lens of the wor(l)d of dance, see: Mantellato (2017), A Choreographic Dialogue with Caribbean Poetry: The Sacredness of the Feminine in Walcott's Omeros, *Lingue e Linguaggi*, 21, pp. 145-157.

poem. During the first months of 2019, I held a series of workshops to identify a group of dance students who would be interested in working on the project at a local dance school in Pordenone, where I teach classical technique³⁷⁸. In March-April 2019, I collaborated with a fellow choreographer from Turin, Raffaele Simoni, on the possibility of creating a duet for the first part of the work and a series of group dances as frames for the production. In May 2019, together with my ballet students, I recorded some of the scenes and episodes of the dance adaptation in a symbolic and highly evocative *desert* space in my local region, in Friuli Venezia Giulia, which is indirectly linked to the themes in the poem, as I will later explain in my analysis of the work. The recordings were produced with the intention of representing a double-layered narrative structure on stage, which would further open up individual interpretations and receptions of Walcott's work and our dance performance rendering. The videos were thus designed and edited as a set of dialoguing images, spoken lines and short episodes of dance, to be projected on stage at the theatre during the première. Spectators would try to find connections between the *real* embodied movements on stage and the *fictional* videos projected as the backdrop to the performance. In this context, I also reflected on the influence and emergence of multimedia artistic productions and performances³⁷⁹, which today form an interesting trend that challenges contemporary artists and performers alike³⁸⁰. Indeed, in a world where artistic and literary boundaries are becoming increasingly *porous* and undefined, performance praxis can provide a privileged space in which to carry out transdisciplinary experiments and investigations.

The aim of my project was to interconnect and have an artistic, creative and dialogic dialogue with Walcott's poetic attempt to *destabilise* and break free from constraining Western European or Northern Atlantic views. The goal was to implement

³⁷⁸ The dance school that hosted the project and included it as closing performance for its annual dance recital is PassioneArteDanza (PAD), directed by Nicoletta Moras. See: <http://www.passioneartedanza.it>

³⁷⁹ According to Klich and Scheer, "through experimentation and innovation, contemporary performance is not only utilising new media technologies to create innovative aesthetic forms, but it is also functioning as a training regime for the exploration of contemporary perspectives developing as a result of, or at least in a conjunction with, audio-visual and information technologies. Multimedia performance, as a medium that incorporates both real and virtual, live and mediated elements, is in a unique position to explore and investigate the effect of extensive mediatisation on human sensory perception and subjectivity". Klich & Scheer (2012), *Multimedia Performance*, pp. 1-2.

³⁸⁰ For an overview on contemporary multimedia performances, please see: Briginshaw (2009), *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke; Dewey ([1934] 1958) *Art as Experience*. Capricorn Books: New York; Kaye (2000). *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. Routledge: London.

a spiralling and unpredictable mixture of practices, with moving bodies and fragmented images, sounds and texts, that would express the schizophrenic instability of Walcott's wor(l)d and poetry through different transdisciplinary encounters.

The final chapter of my thesis is an exploration of my personal journey and an attempt to explain what I have achieved through conceiving and creating my dance-theatre translation of Walcott's *The Schooner Flight*.

The analysis first presents the theoretical premises and conceptual values of an intersemiotic or multimodal artistic translation. While conceiving my thesis, I drew on several approaches before deciding on a multimodal and applied social dance-theatre experiment. As a result, I will present several options, which were largely already integrated with one another. I will introduce the field of *performance studies*, thus emphasising the connections at play between seemingly distant academic disciplines. I will also present contemporary academic research in the domain of embodied, corporeal and body *semiotics* in relation to dance studies, thus showing how this challenging way of approaching literary texts may bring to the fore yet unexpected views or interrelations.

In the second part of my analysis, I will present the different stages of the production. Firstly, I will concentrate on Walcott's text itself; then, I will move on to the work I have done with students and other professionals in the production, before providing a brief account of the embodied strategies that I applied throughout the translation and adaptation, showing, in particular, how I shifted between precise *intertextual references* and blurred *corporeal allusions* in my choreography. I will conclude with some personal considerations, thus suggesting how the world of academia, and literary studies in particular, may become a privileged field within which to carry out experiments and investigations in different languages, arts and forms of expression to uncover different creative insights or means.

3.1. A matter of definition: an intersemiotic translation, a transdisciplinary adaptation or a multimodal dance-theatre encounter?

Before presenting Walcott's poetic manifesto *The Schooner Flight* from a literary and textual point of view, and my personal dance-theatre adaptation of its themes, content and verses, it is fundamental to reflect upon the concept of multimodal or intersemiotic translation, for Western European *canonical* taxonomies are far from being univocal in their definition of original ways of interacting with literature and other textual or written forms.

In this innovative artistic challenge or *praxis*, as decolonial thinkers and scholars may be inclined to define my dance adaptation of Walcott's wor(l)d, I began by considering the standpoints of *performance studies*, an academic field that gained recognition around the 1970s, under the influence and work of Professor Richard Schechner³⁸¹.

Working at the time at New York University (NYU), Schechner proposed a switch of focus from the centrality of language/speech to that of performance/performativity by arguing that before *speaking* we *do* and, therefore, we *perform* rather than simply think and construct discourse or speech. For Schechner, the body, or a physical or corporeal means, is the first visible – and tangible – sign of communication, because even *text* is the outcome of an act, that of writing and structuring its content. In Schechner's terms, *speech* is a special kind of *embodied behaviour*, while *performativity* is the direct consequence of an experienced or highly standardised *habitus*, which substantiates everyday unconscious routines. In short, for Schechner, performances are all around us, and they take place in all different kinds of human circumstances, interactions and contexts, from business, sport and the arts, to any movement or action we accomplish in life, from crossing the street to having a meeting, going to church, eating, studying and so on.

³⁸¹ Richard Schechner is one of the founders and first theorists of *performance studies*. Besides his academic position as Professor of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, he is an editor, director and playwright. For a complete introduction to his groundbreaking work, see: Schechner ([2002] 2013) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Routledge: London & New York.

In conceiving his idea of *performativity*, Schechner drew on Austin and Searle's theory of *speech acts*³⁸², which broadened the idea of structuring language to include the value and significance of gestures, movements and expressions or physical acts in communication.

Other important key figures in the field of performance studies include Dwight Conquergood, Professor at Northwestern University, who focused primarily on the use of *performance* within the domain of rhetoric, speech and communication³⁸³. Conquergood worked on the concept of performance as a meaningful instrument to understand human interaction(s) and connections, especially within the hierarchical structures of power.

Finally, the works of the anthropologists and social thinkers Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner also need to be included in the revolutionary path taken by *performance studies*. Indeed, thanks to their studies and research, language was, for the first time, considered and studied *within* (and in relation to) societies and communities, thus becoming an essential part of cohesive or disruptive organisational dynamics, and a tool to convey *other* possibilities or means of building partnerships. In this regard, it is also important to recall the contribution of post-structuralists and, in particular, Jacques Derrida, who maintained that we are always performing a *text*, and that there is nothing outside of a text. It is clear that, in Derrida's terms, a text is not just a written output but mainly a *performative* outcome³⁸⁴.

³⁸² Before Austin and Searle, *performances* were considered acts or events to be framed within the realm of theatre, drama and plays. Thanks to Austin's works in particular, *performativity* started to be considered as an action, an actual doing to accomplish intents and events by acting, speaking and gesturing or expressing through movements. In *How to do things with words* (1962), Austin suggests that there are three types of sentences that actually allow us to *do* or *accomplish* something. These are defined as *constatives*, *declaratives* and *performatives* sentences. He focuses on the latter ones, thus theorising that language and communication studies also take into account the way we structure and use words in order to convey and express routines, accustomed movements and performance acts.

³⁸³ For an overview of Dwight Conquergood's research, see: Conquergood (2013), *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*. The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor. In the volume, Conquergood lays down the foundations for the use of performance studies within the domain of ethnography, and also for social and artistic activism in order to propose a methodology of action and praxis in academic and cultural contexts.

³⁸⁴ In clarifying the idea that a *text* is performance, or better that the term relates to an act of performance, Schechner highlights how the word "text" derives and is connected to "textile", which is the act of weaving together. Indeed, a text should be connected to writing because it involves recalling and ordering multiple threads that we have learnt to bring and fuse together by studying and reading other texts. Schechner also mentions Derrida's line of thought, arguing that this is one of the clearest examples of *embodied behaviour*.

For Schechner, *performance* is a problematic word, because it is generally linked to the world of the arts, where dances, concerts and plays are referred to as *performances*. In reality, Schechner foregrounds how ordinary life is an act of performance, thus implying that we live according to embodied structures and models of conduct that have become part of our (unconscious) way of living in – and interacting with – the wor(l)d. In this regard, *performance studies* look at and interpret all different types of performance, which can be aesthetic, political, social, cultural, artistic, and so on.

Schechner's discourse on *performativity* matches the decolonial thinkers' attempt to suggest alternative ways of responding to the Western European and Northern Atlantic matrix of power, thus allowing different paradigms and deconstructing practices to reshape modernity/coloniality epistemologies³⁸⁵. In this case, the focus is on body language and corporeal semiotics, a field of enquiry which has been little considered in postcolonial and decolonial studies of literature and literary texts.

Schechner's theory may be particularly relevant for those scholars and researchers who are interested in highlighting the interconnections at the crossing of language and contextual or referential settings, especially from a socio-pragmatic point of view, in which meaning is interpreted as an instrument for performing something or achieving a goal. In my opinion, *performance studies* are paramount in underlining non-linguistic elements and features, and in being one of the few theories to first reflect upon the power of the corporeal and physical *being*, as a strategy to convey and express meaning, also through gestures, ritualised movements and/or embodied configurations and dimensions. It is also true, though, that in my personal attempt to translate Walcott's poem into dance, I veered away from the *performance studies* approach to account also for the literary and mixed texture of the poem, which is indeed a true fusion of canonical standard English and Creole embodied and almost physical imaginative expressions, as I will demonstrate in my textual analysis of the poem. Therefore, dealing with Walcott's text in *performance studies* terms alone may have meant applying a pragmatic and almost utilitarian angle to

³⁸⁵ In this regard I agree with Stephani Nohelani Teves when she argues that "Performance studies requires an engagement with Native studies scholarship and settler colonial critiques to be fully accountable to the global stakes of indigeneity and Indigenous performance. An exploration of the legacies of colonialism, scholarly misinterpretation, and the pressures of cultural authenticity reveals the division between performance studies and Native studies and the need for performance studies to engage Native studies scholarship and settler colonial critiques to enrich analyses of Native/Indigenous performance and the field in general". Teves (2018), *The Theorist and the Theorised: Indigenous Critiques of Performance Studies*, *The Drama Review*, 62, 4, pp. 131-140.

the production, which was not the aim of my adaptation from the very beginning of the project.

Another theoretical approach I took into account while considering the methodologies of my interpretative choreography was the dimension of the intersemiotic or multimodal translation.

In this regard, I drew on the extensive research carried out by British academic and scholar Jess McCormack within the field of verbatim theatre between gestures, movements and words, thus defining this particular type of English theatre as a sort of dance through words³⁸⁶.

McCormack suggests that, in Western dominator *logocentric* tradition, the practice of “transferring ideas/language/image into a physical language”³⁸⁷, as accomplished by choreographers and dancers, is not perceived as a true *translation* but rather as an *adaptation*, because it occurs between two different semiotic systems, and is not limited to the realm of the written wor(l)d. McCormack and other dance theorists and scholars agree in considering performers’ interpretations of texts as freer forms of semiotic transfer from one expressive means or system to another. For them, choreographies that embody the content of a written text are adaptative corporeal versions rather than accurate translations of words. In this regard, McCormack also recalls Bakhtin’s concept of *heteroglossia*³⁸⁸, which legitimises the coexistence of different types of communicative organisations such as speech, movement, gesture, mime or language(s) within the same work. For Bakhtin, *heteroglossia* is “a strategy that can provide multiple perspectives, confront and disable the dominant authorial voice and corrode the concept of the existence of any ‘particular’ or ‘concrete’ single perspective”³⁸⁹.

McCormack also proposes a distinction between *source text* and *performative text*, thus implying that the outcome of the two expressive practices is different and can provide

³⁸⁶ As Michael Billington brilliantly summarises in an online article in *The Guardian*: “Verbatim theatre [...] is not a form but a technique: a way of incorporating the words of real people, as spoken in private interview or public record, into drama. Michael Billington (2012), *V is for Verbatim Theatre* (consulted on 12/01/2020): <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/may/08/michael-billington-verbatim-theatre>.

³⁸⁷ McCormack (2018), *Choreography and Verbatim Theatre. Dancing Words*, pp. 3.

³⁸⁸ In *Discourse on the Novel* (1981), Bakhtin focuses on the idea that, within a text such as a novel, the reader is confronted with the characters’ voices and thoughts and (indirectly) with those of their creator or author, thus moving between what he terms a *dialogism* between different points of view or perspectives. For McCormack, a similar type of *dialogism* occurs in the relationship between dancers, choreographers, the audience and possibly the author or writer of the text they are referring to or drawing from.

³⁸⁹ McCormack (2018), *Choreography and Verbatim Theatre. Dancing Words*, pp. 17.

similar but not identical shades and nuances of a single, unifying meaning. Towards the end of her introductory analysis of dance through words, McCormack proposes that we should balance the mechanisms occurring in choreographic adaptations of texts with their final or intertwining results. She proposes the twofold term *dance-theatre translation*, which she defines as follows:

Influenced by theatre director Bertolt Brecht and choreographer Pina Bausch, dance-theatre as a genre is committed to the understanding that in order to connect with or comment on 'real'-life/feeling something must be constructed, something artificial set up. Central to the practice of dance-theatre is the belief that use of choreography, text, scenography that includes constructed images, juxtaposition, collage, discontinuity and distortion creates a dialectic space which reveals something about reality. Dance-theatre as a genre challenges the concept of a stable meaning³⁹⁰.

Finally, McCormack embraces a transdisciplinary encounter or inter-textual and embodied fusion between different semiotic systems, which blend together, intermingle and dialogue with one another in what she defines as a challenging *dialectic space*:

I am arguing for the importance of the inclusion of dialogism in non-text-based theatre, i.e. dance-theatre. The development of the term, heteroglossia and its application to dance-theatre has particular relevance when we focus on translation in dance-theatre³⁹¹.

McCormack's approach matches decolonial attempts to offer new and alternative spaces of transdisciplinary possibilities, a sort of undefined and unfixed *middle passage* of creative challenge, in which heterogenous perspectives have the opportunity to be expressed freely, without being forced to succumb to traditional Western ways of adapting forms and perceptions or feelings.

In my multimodal experiment with dance and literature, I tried to synthesise different theoretical options by focusing on two divergent and yet complementary dynamics that I believe are simultaneously at work when performers adapt (or translate) written content or a source text into dance. My suggestion relies on the idea of a *continuum* of interferences and correspondences between written texts and physical movements. I propose a combination of intertextual references and embodied allusions. This involves blending direct quotations or extracts from the text with specific gestures, and recalling semiotic content using strategies that relate to dance technique in order to

³⁹⁰ McCormack (2018), *Choreography and Verbatim Theatre. Dancing Words*, pp. 13.

³⁹¹ McCormack (2018), *Choreography and Verbatim Theatre. Dancing Words*, pp. 19.

convey a particular meaning. I provide examples of this original cooperation or dialogic dialogue between choreographic and literary structures in the analysis that documents my experimental work with *The Schooner Flight*. In short, I relied on the concept of intertextuality to *translate* words and concepts that are easily identifiable through *ordinary* gestures and movements, such as the act of walking, which was matched up with the line “I taking a sea-bath, I go down the road”³⁹². For more complex, multi-layered passages such as the description of the protagonist’s voyages across the Caribbean islands, I drew on the power of the embodied allusion or *adaptation*, in this particular case by choreographing the idea of travelling through running in circles on stage.

My dance-theatre multimodal approach engages with what decolonial theorists and scholars define as creative and artistic *praxis* (see Chapter 1, pp. 39), as I believe it would be misleading to introduce sharp divisions between different semiotic systems or forms of expressions. This would, once again, legitimise the centuries-long dominator Western European shaping of art and creative endeavours. In this regard, I agree with the decolonial need to break down the walls of canonical and traditional *order*, to convey a more blurred, unpredictable and unstable form of communication and artistic challenge.

In tune with this perspective, my work follows the path outlined by Pina Bausch, one of the most important pioneers of contemporary dance and the founder of *Tanztheater*, a form of theatrical dance that blends movement and choreography with the spoken word, everyday gestures, and iconic or highly expressive embodiments. McCormack makes frequent reference throughout her analysis to Bausch’s revolutionary turn in the world of dance, which the scholar praises by arguing:

The *Tanztheater* movement began to break down boundaries between different art forms, with a focus on multiplicity and ambiguity, by combining and layering fragments of spoken text, movement objects and images. This breaking down of boundaries and transitions between different media introduced the concept of ideas being moved/translated from one medium to another³⁹³.

³⁹² Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 112. *The Schooner Flight* appeared for the first time in Caribbean literary reviews, before undergoing a series of changes that led to its final version, first, in *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979) and, later, in *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (1986). In what follows, I refer to Adelphi’s Italian selection of Walcott’s poem titled *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo* (1992). All subsequent references are to this edition and the page numbers are provided in brackets.

³⁹³ McCormack (2018), *Choreography and Verbatim Theatre. Dancing Words*, pp. 2.

Particularly important in the world of dance since the 1970s, Pina Bausch belonged to a restricted group of visionary choreographers that began distancing themselves from *canonical* classical technique, offering a different way of composing and structuring contemporary dance and theatre. In her astonishing career, and in her foundation of the innovative *Tanztheater*, Bausch was profoundly inspired by the work of other pioneering female choreographers and innovators who had destabilised the strict norms and rules of ballet before her, from the beginning of the twentieth century until after World War II. Amongst the most famous are Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and, later, Martha Graham³⁹⁴: all female artists and performers who focused on the power of liberated, free movement, responsible for founding modern dance in a symbolic *return* to Mother Earth, abolishing the tendency towards ephemeral and intangible expression (typical of classical ballet), so as to recover a profound and intimate connection with the floor. Despite their belonging to different times and contexts, these women were connected in their urgent desire to decolonise the rigorous, academic Western stage in order to provide a new and original type of expression and movement, which was simpler and more *real*, and would relate to the problems and issues of contemporary society.

In her unsettling and yet fascinating productions, Bausch focuses on the *irrational*, ancestral physicality and strength of the human body, by offering dance-theatre performances in which performers are allowed to speak, scream and talk about life, madness and spirituality. For Bausch, the power of imagination was paramount to exploring a creative energy that erupts into the spoken word, repetitive movements or rituals, symbolic embodiments and iconic gestures. Bausch's dancers and performers included professionals but also *ordinary* people. Her performers do not respect the physicality of classical ballet dancers because they represent the *true* image of life, the sacred power of the corporeal and physical human being as it is, with no constraints or limitations. Clearly, there are productions in which Bausch used the strength of professional dancers, such as in her *Rite of Spring*; nevertheless, even in this ballet, there

³⁹⁴ Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) was an American dancer whose performances transformed radically classical ballet. Duncan was one of the founders of a modern type of movement and dance, which she believed to be freer and simpler than classical technique. For her choreographies she drew inspiration from ancient classical statuary. Mary Wigman (1886-1973) was a German dancer who developed a new form of modern dance in Europe. She was a pupil of Rudolf Laban and often enjoyed choreographing without music or with percussions. Martha Graham (1894-1991) was an American dancer, choreographer and dance-innovator. She gave new meaning to the world of modern ballet, thus shaping profound and highly articulated choreographies with the intent to explore dancers' inner feelings and emotions.

are performers who stand out because of their personality rather than their precise academic technique.

This opening up towards the *ordinary* is one of the main reasons that led me to draw extensively from Bausch's works in order to conceive my dance-theatre multimodal adaptation. I too worked with ordinary people and performers, for most of the choreography is interpreted by a group of young women dance students, a colleague, and myself.

The idea was that of creating an original and participatory dance-theatre event. The choreography is the result of a communal project and partnership, which brought to the fore different perspectives, views and ideas. Raffaele Simoni, a fellow choreographer, and I worked extensively with the students involved in the project. We read the texts together, discussed themes, reflected on the concerns expressed in the poem, and debated about Italy and the political and cultural situation in our region, so as to sketch out the correspondences between our context and the West Indies, but also the world order in general. *The Schooner Flight* is a poem that reflects on political issues, social problems and cultural and artistic possibilities. It is a narrative that dialogues with contemporary human dilemmas, from our relationship with nature and the environment to the acknowledgement and acceptance of ethnical minorities and marginal groups. The poem is indeed one of Walcott's most passionate accounts of the Caribbean reality, from its unstable political situation to its social and cultural clashes, its positive hybridism, and its artistic and cultural resources.

It is from this perspective and inclusive partnership approach that my dance-theatre multimodal production applies the premise of *applied social theatre*³⁹⁵. Indeed, it would be reductive to view the project as merely an individual process of translation/adaptation. The production created a connective space, bringing together different artists, ballet students, and video and multimedia professionals. Aside from Raffaele Simoni and the group of dance students, the team also included a costume designer, two actors and a video and postediting professional.

³⁹⁵ For an overview on social applied theatre, please see: Taylor (2003), *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community*, Heinemann Drama: Portsmouth or Reason, M. & Rowe, N. (eds. 2017), *Applied Practice: Evidence and Impact in theatre, music and art*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama: London.

In line with the purposes of applied theatre, the production analyses definitions and representations of cultural and social *identity* and the concept of *borders*; it proposes a collective challenge to the current political situation and stands against contemporary xenophobic discourses. Moreover, it offers the theatrical space as a platform for experimentation, critical thinking and transformation³⁹⁶. From a pedagogical point of view, I investigated how the dialogic encounter between ballet and literature would affect the dancers, whether it would enhance their appreciation for literature and whether it would be useful as an approach to improve literacy, question and discuss domestic issues, and apply a passion for theatre as a medium for understanding oppression and injustice³⁹⁷.

In this respect, the choreography works on a double track, as it *translates* Walcott's text and message, while simultaneously exploring and interplaying with the reality in which we, the interpreters of his works, are living.

This short presentation serves to introduce how I adopted an interdisciplinary, or better, transdisciplinary, multifaceted approach to translate one of Walcott's most celebrated poems into dance-theatre. By drawing on decolonial *praxis* to provide an original and unpredictable, even puzzling, version of *The Schooner Flight*, my multimodal production brings together different theoretical frameworks in order to destabilise, question and decolonise single perspectives, meanings and views. It represents a communal effort to express the heterogeneous, diffracted reality of today's wor(l)d and a proactive attempt to *re-write* traditional forms of expression, thus positioning diverse aesthetics and creative practices on the same level, from dance to literature, and from technology to transmedia experimentation³⁹⁸. The resulting *praxis*

³⁹⁶ In line with these aspects of the project, I drew extensively from the following works: Boal (1979), *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Pluto Press: London; Boal (1995), *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*. Routledge: London & New York; Broadhurst (1999), *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*. Cassell: London; Kaye (2000), *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*. Routledge: London.

³⁹⁷ See: Taylor (1989), *The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean literature, popular culture, and politics*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca.

³⁹⁸ In the field of contemporary art and performance, scholars and artists alike have attempted to identify precise taxonomies and terminologies for the encounter between media (or media technologies) and art. Amongst the numerous studies on the subject, I agree with Klich and Scheer when they argue: "When addressing the current cultural moment in performance we observe a haemorrhaging of nomenclatures: 'Cybertheatre', 'postorganic theatre', 'mixed media theatre', 'intermedial theatre' or 'transmedial theatre', 'video performance', 'networked performance', 'multimedia installation', 'new media performance', and 'computer theatre', 'virtual theatre', 'multimedia theatre' [...] perhaps there is no need to settle for any particular one of these. [...] One of the defining features of multimedia is its inherent mutability [...], and just as multimedia is constantly evolving and assuming new forms, so the field of multimedia performance

sets out a new direction, or a future path for unexpected and original decolonial stage encounters.

3.2. The text: Walcott's *The Schooner Flight*

Over the course of this Ph.D. thesis, I have argued that *The Schooner Flight* (1979) can be considered as Walcott's poetic manifesto. This assumption is justified in part by the fact that, during the narration, the author deals with most of his poetic and aesthetic concerns, such as the issue of Caribbean representation and identity; confrontation with colonial history, legacy and subjugation; and the establishment of neo-colonial forms of domination. Through the adventures and life choices of the poem's protagonist, Shabine – another of Walcott's alter egos – the author presents a shared path of redemption for the Antillean peoples and communities. In this liberating journey of possibilities, Walcott brings to the fore the *uniqueness* of West Indians' unpredictable and schizophrenic background and way of living, expressing themselves and surviving. In this respect, the poem emphasises how the *creolisation* of cultures, and therefore the mixing of traditions, values and customs from different heritages, may be considered in positive, not negative terms, because the interrelations and encounters between different viewpoints and legacies can enhance peoples' appreciation and understanding of one another, in a circular exchange of opportunities and connections.

The poem is also one of Walcott's most felicitous attempts to bring together the accents and rhythms of Creole English with standard British structures and forms. As I have already pointed out, *The Schooner Flight* represents an exception in Walcott's works, for the author was rather reluctant to alter or revise canonical Western formalism within the realm of poetry³⁹⁹. This was probably due to his strict colonial education, great respect for English poetry, and awareness that he was freer to experiment within the wor(l)d of theatre. In this regard, Breslin suggests:

is continuously pushing the parameters of existing practice and inventing new modes of performance and prompting new ways of talking about it. Klich & Scheer (2012), *Multimedia Performance*, pp. 11.

³⁹⁹ As Edward Baugh points out: "the poem is a spirited performance [and] it represents Walcott's most sustained use to date, in his poetry, of a West Indian creole speech, a virtuoso performance of the West Indian 'man of words', and partly on the skill of its achievement in the interplay of genres – narrative, dramatic and lyric. In its interweaving of personal and communal themes and story, the poem re-enacts, freshly and trenchantly, Walcott's quarrel with history". Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 109.

In *What the Twilight Says: An Overture*, Walcott conceded that in mastering the English tradition, he ‘insisted on a formality which had nothing to do’ with the lives of the West Indian actors who performed his scripts. With *The Schooner Flight* he begins to integrate this dualism. In this respect, he both influenced and participated in a widespread change. [...] In assimilating canonical English poetic styles [...] Walcott was not turning his back on creole culture but following a pattern within creole culture itself, which itself adopts practices of European origin and evolves an ‘Afro-American style’ in which to perform them⁴⁰⁰.

Thus, the poem becomes an experimental and highly creative endeavour to intertwine the different spirits of the hybrid West Indian background. From this perspective, Shabine’s voyages across the Caribbean islands assume the tones of a magical, Pindaric, perhaps even unrealistic, journey. The protagonist’s disquieting and troubling undertakings may be interpreted as occurrences within his own imagination. Indeed, for Walcott/Shabine, *imagination* is the only process to be embraced and enhanced in order to overcome centuries-long European subjugation and domination. The poem is a creative and dynamic flow of unpredictable options and turns that belong to *Other* heritages and perspectives, and accentuate the gap between *centrally* structured, homologising societies and diffracted ones, such as those of the Caribbean, which do not recognise hierarchies and linear thought.

In this sense, *The Schooner Flight* should be read as a circular and redemptive middle passage not only for Shabine, but for the whole Antillean archipelago, since Walcott offers a highly inclusive, shared vision of his New Adamic World.

In this poem, Walcott returns to the same overarching themes found throughout his works: in response to the atrocities of colonialism, he propels once again for *amnesia*; to counteract his irascible compatriots who would opt for war instead of peace, he responds by sustaining the power of art; and to overcome the problems of a coexistence between different heterogeneous ethnic groups, he replies by suppressing individualism and singular perspectives with one of his most celebrated quotes: “either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation” (112).

The Schooner Flight is Walcott’s manifesto also in political terms. He denounces the corruption and misconduct of the neo-colonial ruling class, condemning extremist movements such as the Black Power revolution in particular, and his communities’ abuse

⁴⁰⁰ Breslin (2001), *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 192-194.

of minority groups and *mulattos*, such as himself. The poem includes some highly lyrical and metaphorical passages, in which historical personifications appear in order to destabilise and jeopardise Shabine's spiritual journey. The journeys of Walcott's alter-ego become a form of rite of passage, to understand and grasp his destiny and role. As the narration progresses, Shabine becomes a spiritual guide for his community and for the entire archipelago. He becomes a warrior and a creole custodian of the Caribbean lands and seas. At the same time, he sharpens and improves his prophetic poetic wor(l)d. Towards the middle of the story, he acknowledges: "I who have no weapon but poetry and / the lances of palms and the sea's shining shield!" (138).

While some literary critics have emphasised how the text presents coarse language and at times misogynist conceptions and views, it is also true that the poem generally propounds *partnership* values and perspectives, especially in an effort to acknowledge the region's challenging *diversity*. For Shabine, the Caribbean has the power to respond to the modernity/coloniality matrix of power in alternative and more equitable ways. In this respect, I believe that the female character Maria Conception, despite being the protagonist's lover and the reason for his departure from his family and affections, also represents the bearer of the archipelago's spiritual *truth*. Shabine eventually understands the meaning of life only thanks to his invisible and yet constantly present second half, for Maria appears in different forms and in several dreams throughout the poem. In this sense, despite his apparent disdain for his female counterpart, Walcott/Shabine knows that he must rely on sacred female wisdom in order to find peace, attenuate his initial confusion, and find answers as to his destiny and that of his community.

As is the case in other poems, Walcott is also concerned with presenting the astonishing beauty of his islands. He refers to highly emblematic and evocative contexts such as *Blanchisseuse*, a fishing village on the northern coast of Trinidad. This precise reference occurs rightly after Shabine has left the island's corrupted capital, Port of Spain. *Blanchisseuse*, which, Breslin recalls, means "laundress"⁴⁰¹ in French, stands as an uncontaminated and paradisaical space where:

Lighthouse and star start making friends,
down every beach the long day ends,
and there, on the last stretch of sand,

⁴⁰¹ Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 203.

on a beach bare of all but light,
dark hands start pulling in the seine
of the dark sea, deep, deep inland. (124)

This passage highlights the contrast between the *white* light of the beach, which is a direct reminder of the name of the village, and the colours of the hands of *black* sailors, who pull in from work, thus suggesting that, despite the disorders and immorality of Port of Spain, the Caribbean is mostly made up of simple and respectable people, who struggle and work hard every day to survive. Unsurprisingly, as in the episode in *Tiepolo's Hound* in which Pissarro interprets the appearance of white snow in Paris as a manifestation of the divine (in order to repaint the greyness of the French capital), here too Walcott endows *light* with the power of bleaching reality. In this sense, the poet redeems and rewrites his birthplace, thus showing how the miracle and authenticity of life happens in *ordinary* places, where “lighthouse and star” are bound together in order to shine a light on the bounty and innocence of the real human condition.

In another section of the poem, Walcott focuses on the Antillean vegetation, and in particular on the naming of a specific kind of tree, which he does not know whether to call a cypress, Canadian cedar or casuarina. The matter may seem trivial and unimportant but Walcott/Shabine recalls that “when I was green like them, I used to think / those cypresses, leaning against the sea, [...] are not real cypresses but casuarinas. / Now Captain just call them Canadian cedars” (128). The issue is a pretext for returning to the power of modernity/coloniality *naming*. In this sense, Walcott/Shabine explains:

We live like our names and you would have
to be colonial to know the difference,
to know the pain of history words contain,
to love those trees with an inferior love,
and to believe: “Those casuarinas bend
like cypresses, their hair hangs down in rain
like sailors' wives. They're classic trees, and we
if we live like the names our masters please,
by careful mimicry might become men”. (128-130)

As I have already explained, for Walcott the *naming* of places, peoples, and flora and fauna, becomes fundamental in the process of decolonising the Caribbean wor(l)d. In this sense, the poem reflects on the significance of altering and changing forms, terms,

visions and thoughts in order to re-paint colonial history and practices, or structures of domination.

Apart from presenting the recurrent themes in Walcott's poetry, *The Schooner Flight* is also one of his most visionary and highly mystical poems. In this sense, Shabine recounts a series of uncanny and disquieting *doubles*, such as that of himself while he is leaving his homeplace. As I demonstrated in Chapter II, this is not an uncommon feature in Walcott's works. Nevertheless, in *The Schooner Flight*, the protagonists' doubles are sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly, because they either appear as ghosts or in the form of dreamlike visions or blurred revelations. I see a connection in this particular way of depicting his characters' *doppelgängers* with Walcott's efforts to display and simultaneously draw on the folkloric ancestral wisdom of his peoples. In this sense, the poem balances references to Western mythology such as the dream in which Shabine encounters three women stitching the threads of his fate – a direct link to the three Parcae – with occurrences more in tune with Caribbean folkloric beliefs in irrational ancestral forces and/or cosmogonies such as when the sailor addresses the stars or a book of dreams.

The Schooner Flight connects with the analysis of the three texts I have expounded so far in more than one way. In this atypical poem, Walcott endeavours to present something alternative, original and new, and it comes as no surprise that this happened right in the middle of his career. I would argue that the poem is a re-writing of Walcott's own (partial) life-journey, not only in terms of his personal ambitions and life events, but also in terms of his own writing style. Indeed, the poem is a sort of transitory passage or creative middle crossing in which he experiments with forms and structures, while at the same time keeping in mind the complexity of his puzzling form of expression and way of composing and handling different themes, matters and subjects.

In what follows, I will briefly present the eleven sections of the poem, focusing in particular on the episodes and passages that I translated and adapted in my multimodal dance-theatre production, and explain the salient features of Walcott's poetic manifesto from a textual and literary point of view.

3.2.1. Walcott's poetic manifesto, an introduction and textual analysis

Section I of *The Schooner Flight* is titled *Adios, Carenage* and, right from the beginning of the poem, it bestows a sense of fluidity and instability on the whole framing of the text. The section presents Shabine, the protagonist of the story, who speaks in the first person and whose name stands for “red nigger” in Caribbean patois (112)⁴⁰². It is easy to draw parallels between the character and Walcott himself, not only by considering the line “a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes” (112), which describes the poet's appearance, but also by the fact that, despite being a seafarer and sailor, Shabine is also a poet, just like Walcott⁴⁰³.

The protagonist is depicted in the act of leaving his lover, Maria Conception, for whom he has already abandoned his family and home: “I swear to you all, [...] that I loved them, my children, my wife, my home; / I loved them as poets love poetry / that kills them, as drowned sailors the sea” (114). However, even the love for Maria Conception is not enough for Shabine who decides to embark on a journey on a symbolic schooner, the *Flight*. It is only through this redemptive journey across the Caribbean Sea that the protagonist comes to terms with his *divided* identity, West Indian heritage and colonial legacy. The first lines of the poem are paramount to understanding Walcott's attempt to *re-write* Caribbean literature and simultaneously venture into Shabine's destiny and wor(l)d.

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 Conception
to ship as a seaman on the schooner *Flight* (110)

⁴⁰² Breslin explains that “The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage, ed. Richard and Jeannette Allsopp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), defines shabine or ‘chaben’ as a derogatory term for ‘a person of mixed African and European descent who has a dull sort of pale brown skin, coarse reddish hair and sometimes freckles and greyish eyes’. (The word derives from French *chabin*, a thick-wooled variety of sheep ‘once thought to be a cross between a sheep and a goat’.)”. Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 315.

⁴⁰³ In this regard, Baugh points out: “The narrator-protagonist is a mulatto sailor-poet who is identified only by his nickname, Shabine, a generic pejorative, often jocular, used in Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and St Lucia (with variant spellings) [...], that is, anyone visibly of mixed European and African blood, like Walcott himself. This identification immediately establishes Shabine as representative, not just of his alter ego Walcott, and not even just of that particular group of West Indians as well, but also of the West Indian people as a whole, their racial and ethnic admixture and variety”. Baugh (2006), *Derek Walcott*, pp. 109.

Indeed, the first two verses are an interesting intertextual re-writing of Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1377), one of the oldest texts in English literature dating back to the Middle Ages: "In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne, / I shope me in shroudes, as I a schepe were"⁴⁰⁴. Walcott recalls such a canonical English text for two key reasons, firstly because *Piers Plowman* is not written in standard English (for national languages were yet to be codified), and secondly because the protagonist of Langland's poem also travels across the countryside on a salvific voyage through a dreamlike fictional dimension. In this regard, John Thieme emphasises:

Clearly Walcott's apparent use of this medieval English intertext does not develop a straightforward relationship with a European 'norm', but in this instance it suggests more commonalities than differences. Walcott's opening line replaces the sun of *Piers Plowman* with the sea and Langland's protagonist's dream of a 'faire felde ful of folke', in the rural English setting of the Malvern Hills, is supplanted by Shabine's vision of a journey through the marine world of the Caribbean. The geography may have changed, but both openings are preludes to a spiritual reverie rooted in a very specific natural world and the apparent allusion to Langland's dream-poem links 'The Schooner Flight' with the alliterative poetry of the pre-Renaissance era, a period when the orthography of modern English had still to be determined and when there was little or no consensus as to what constituted 'literary English' – only a range of emergent suggestions as to what might conceivably become a 'norm'⁴⁰⁵.

Indeed, a dreamlike dimension is immediately foregrounded throughout the first section of the poem. While slipping furtively out of the house where his lover is still asleep, Shabine encounters an old neighbour, a "witch", who is "sweeping the yard" (110). The female figure, as most critics have pointed out, may be Maria Conception's double, but what is more interesting is the fact that she does not see Shabine, as if he were a ghost. A similar uncanny event occurs when the protagonist hops in the taxi that leads him to freedom. Indeed, from the back seat, Walcott/Shabine sees a double image of himself in the rear-view mirror of the vehicle, and he is weeping over his own shameful decision to abandon his home and old life.

⁴⁰⁴ Langland ([1377] 1965), *Piers the plowman*, pp. 1. This first two lines of Langland's allegorical poem can be translated as follows: "In a summer season, when soft was the sun, / I clothed myself in a cloak as I shepherd were" [my translation].

⁴⁰⁵ The following quotation comes from an undated essay uploaded by British scholar and Professor John Thieme to his Academia profile with the title *Derek Walcott – Schooner Flight*. See: https://www.academia.edu/4188068/Derek_Walcott_Schooner_Flight (consulted on 10/02/2020).

These highly evocative moments of *stasis* and blurred reality and fiction are overcome when Shabine finally presents himself and explains the stressful divide that torments his representational identity and soul, and the idea of belonging to a single, specific community or unifying nation that recognises itself in diversity. The passage is introduced by a symbolic “sea-bath” (112), which represents a sort of baptismal re-birth that allows the protagonist, and the reader, to re-consider modernity/coloniality boundaries or Western dominator views and perspectives.

I taking a sea-bath, I gone down the road.
I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.
I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation (112)

As I will explain in reference to my multimodal dance-theatre adaptation of the poem, I chose these two extracts as the opening texts for the performance. There were two reasons for this. First, they set the scene for the whole meaning of the poem. Walcott introduces Shabine’s ever-lasting dilemmas surrounding himself and having to deal with his community, as much as with its past and heritage, a burden that connects him to most of his compatriots. Second, because the line “either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation” has been rightly praised as one of Walcott’s most successful portrayals of the hybrid and unpredictable background of the Antillean region⁴⁰⁶.

In my choreography, I also included one final extract from this first section of the poem in my choreography: the close, in which Walcott metaphorically describes his attempt to replace the rhythms and structures of canonical or standard English language with the bristly and salty speech of his compatriots’ Creole.

You ever look up from some lonely beach
and see a far schooner? Well, when I write
this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;

⁴⁰⁶ In this regard, Paul Breslin recalls that the poem “has impressed custodians of the canon enough to be excerpted in the fourth edition of the Norton Anthology of Poetry”. Breslin (2001), *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 189.

I go draw and knot every line as tight
as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech
my common language go be the wind,
my pages the sails of the schooner Flight (114)

The act of soaking poetical lines and phrases “in salt” connects with Shabine’s attempt to wash away and distance himself from the norms and structures of the colonial systems of domination. Indeed, the stanza suggests that Shabine re-catches his words from the sea and dries them out in order to intertwine them with new and unexpected “rigging”, which he relates to simple Caribbean speech. As Breslin points out, it is also interesting to reflect upon Walcott’s emphasis on the invisible sound of speech, which the poet perceives as wind:

Shabine says that his common language is not to be any form of English but ‘the wind’, which is indeed audible but is not linguistic. He invokes a Romantic poetics in which the authority of language is grounded not in convention but in nature itself, and in which the play of wind on an aeolian harp supplied an analogy for poetic inspiration. [...]. Shabine’s ‘common language’, with which his voyage brings him into primal contact, is above all nature itself, the renewing source that the corrupt language of Trinidadian politics no longer honors⁴⁰⁷.

For this and other reasons that I will explain in the following paragraph, this particular section of the poem is included in the second dance in my choreography, which portrays the appearance of colonial ships and ends with an event to counter-balance them, emphasising the need to re-write history and narrations, beginning precisely with a re-formation or re-structuring of language.

This stanza also serves to introduce the second section of the poem titled *Raptures of the Deep*, in which the poet presents Shabine’s misfortunes and troubles in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad.

Section II is a flashback in the narration as Shabine recounts his rapid descent into crime and corruption, especially after carrying out fraudulent activities for his powerful employer, who belongs to the government of the island. Shabine is soon accused of committing these deeds, and therefore decides to change his life. He begins “salvage diving” (118) in the Caribbean Sea. Here he has to confront the horrifying image of dead bodies who have now become “corals” (118) and he subsequently also abandons this job. Eventually, he has a mystical experience in which he sees a vision of God who prompts

⁴⁰⁷ Breslin (2001), *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 198.

him to leave Maria Conception: “if you leave her, I shall give you the morning star” (120). This spiritual opportunity for redemption, enhanced by the familiar Walcottian symbol of light, explains Shabine’s decision to leave Port of Spain and introduces the next section, *Shabine Leaves the Republic*. It is only through a salvific and redemptive voyage that the protagonist is able to find the answers he seeks.

The third section of the poem recounts the reasons why Shabine feels disillusioned with the idea of change and revolution for his archipelago. Despite the opportunity to build a shared future for the Caribbean and its heterogenous communities, those responsible for the modernity/coloniality dominator matrix of power have now switched from being Western European colonisers to neo-colonial hierarchical and privileged West Indians. In this regard, Shabine explains:

I had no nation now but the imagination.
After the white man, the niggers didn’t want me
when the power swing to their side.
The first chain my hands and apologize, “History”;
the next said I wasn’t black enough for their pride [...].
I met History once, but he ain’t recognize me,
a parchment Creole, with warts
like an old sea-bottle, crawling like a crab [...].
I confront him and shout, “Sir, is Shabine!
They say I’s your grandson. You remember Grandma,
your black cook, at all?” The bitch hawk and spat.
A spit like that worth any number of words.
But that’s all them bastards have left us: words.
I no longer believed in the revolution (122)

The protagonist seeks refuge in the irrational power of creative imagination. Walcott/Shabine allows himself to re-define the contours of his present reality, because the situation has not changed much from the past. In this way, Walcott denounces the radical views of the Black Power Revolution, a political movement from the 1970s that encouraged black people to protest and perpetuate violence against white people and minority groups on the Caribbean archipelago.

Once again, Walcott is coherent in his poetic standpoints because, in response to violence, he opts for amnesia, without neglecting to highlight the historical connections and family lineage that bring together all West Indian people. Shabine encounters and talks to a personified History because he feels an undeniable bond with it, or better, with

the whole global community, or *Tout-Monde*, in the words of Glissant (see Chapter 1, pp. 52).

As I will later explain, this whole section of the poem has been adapted in the choreography as a direct performative action, which was interpreted by the young women dancers (in the guise of History) and me (as Shabine) on stage, but also through a video projected as the stage backdrop, which reiterates the same gestures and movements happening on stage to emphasise the cyclical path of history.

Shabine's denial of History and acceptance a more communal worldview in partnership with one another is also underlined in section four, which brings the reader back on board the Flight in order to resume the narration from the point of Shabine's departure from Trinidad. The section is titled *The Flight, Passing Blanchisseuse* and, as I have already pointed out, it may be interpreted as a counter-narrative to the previous parts of the poem, because it shows the life of righteous and hardworking people in a remote fishing village on the same island. Blanchisseuse is also the first geographical location that Shabine places outside of Trinidad. This may be read as the first sign of spiritual redemption because he can finally distinguish the authenticity of pure, uncorrupted and *ordinary* life, as it is or should be.

Section V of *The Schooner Flight* is titled *Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage* and it epitomises one of the most significant episodes in the poem. From the depths of the sea, the colonial archive surfaces to reveal its pains and sorrows in order to provide the history-less figure, poet-sailor Shabine, with a tangible reminder of his ancestors' past and shameful Middle Passage from Africa to the Antilles. The protagonist encounters, first, the ghostly manifestations of colonial ships, steered by renowned European captains and their crews, and, second, the silenced cargoes of slave ships, with his own ancestors down below decks. Shabine cannot see his grandfathers, nor hear their voices, despite him calling them. He also cannot distinguish their faces or physical appearance because they are not visible. This is one of the strategies Walcott uses to debunk the lines and confines drawn to define identity in the Caribbean, precisely because it is impossible to distinguish individuals from within the masses of slaves. The episode also foregrounds Walcott's psychological need to re-write, talk about or give form to those unheard voices, an approach that I decided to substantiate throughout my choreographic work, in which

the dancers are lyrical embodiments of those invisible, rejected and un-sketched presences.

As I will later explain, my multimodal translation makes a distinction between the first part of this text, i.e. when Shabine sees the colonial ships, and the second, when the protagonist imagines the agonies and inhuman conditions in which his grandfathers were brought to the New World. In this sense, I divided the text into two sub-sections in order to provide a different interpretation of these contrasting scenes, thus allowing the same young dancers to interpret the two opposite positions, first in the guise of the colonial dominators, and second as the enslaved captives. From this perspective, I worked with the students on the idea of swapping roles, in order to enhance their understanding and awareness of the injustices and disparities that dominator hierarchical structures of power may still perpetuate in today's societies. The first part of this section recites as follows:

I couldn't believe what I see:
where the horizon was one silver haze,
the fog swirl and swell into sails, so close
that I saw it was sails, my hair grip my skull,
it was horror but it was beautiful.
We float through a rustling forest of ships
with sails dry as paper, behind the glass
I saw men with rusty eyeholes like cannons, [...]
and high on their decks I saw great admirals,
Rodney, Nelson, de Grasse, I heard the hoarse orders
they gave those Shabines, and the forest
of masts sail through the Flight,
and all you could hear was the ghostly sound
of waves rustling like grass in a low wind (126)

Walcott/Shabine is mesmerised and yet terrified by the vision of these colonial ghost ships. The valiant strength of the admirals is emphasised by their physical and embodied stance, which is conveyed through verses such as “high on their decks” and “great admirals”. Walcott names famous colonial adventurers and exploiters in order to recall and remember the pains provoked by their deeds. The only recognisable sound in the entire section is that of their “hoarse orders / they gave those Shabines”, just as if they were ready to dominate and colonise the unknown lands of the New World.

The contrasting representation of slave ships is foregrounded by the poetic length of their description. The section is less detailed than the previous one because Walcott's intent is to show how the modernity/coloniality matrix of power can erase stories and

work on the memory of its subjects and dominated peoples, expunging them in order to bring their white masters to the fore. Indeed, the slaves cannot be heard or seen. They are not allowed to express or embody their fear and anguish, for they have been objectified, becoming goods for the colonial market and systems of power. Walcott draws attention to this shameful occurrence by proposing short yet powerful lines:

Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations,
our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose,
to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting. Who knows
who his grandfather is, much less his name? (128)

Walcott counterbalances this sorrowful section with a break in the poem. Section six is titled *The Sailor Sings Back to the Casuarinas* and, as I have already explained, Walcott allows Shabine to ponder the significance of colonial naming within the realm of Caribbean vegetation and its natural context. This is also a first step in re-thinking Antillean history and legacy, since Shabine understands that, aside from the powerful heterogeneity of perspectives and views he can draw from his hybrid peoples, he can also rely on the sacredness of Antillean nature. Indeed, thanks to its virginal beauty and astonishing wisdom, the Caribbean environment safeguards the secret ingredients for healing colonial and historical wounds. Walcott highlights these aspects in later poems, in particular his epic *Omeros*, as I have pointed out in an article published on this subject⁴⁰⁸.

It comes as no surprise that section seven, titled *The Flight Anchors in Castries Harbor*, is set on Walcott's native island, St. Lucia. In his internal dialogue with his double Shabine, Walcott seeks to retrace the path of his juvenile years, and the scents and colours of those familiar spaces. It is here that Walcott/Shabine again recalls the image of his lover Maria Conception, or maybe that of his wife. The woman to whom he addresses his verses is not mentioned, but she becomes, for a moment, the sacred shelter, feminine carrier and muse for his poetry and creative imagination as a whole:

When the stars self were young over Castries,
I loved you alone and I loved the whole world. [...]

⁴⁰⁸ I published an analysis of the sacred power of the Antillean environment and natural wor(l)d in an article on Walcott's *Omeros*. See: Mantellato (2018), Rooting Identities: Derek Walcott's Connection(s) with the Caribbean Environment, *Le Simplegadi*, 16, 18: 191-204.

I have kept my own
promise, to leave you the only thing I own,
you whom I loved first: my poetry.
We here for one night. Tomorrow, the Flight will be gone (130)

Apart from the beginning, when Maria Conception is described as one of the origins of his troubles, in the rest of the poem, Walcott and Shabine's female double is the textual *parenthesis* for dreaming, refuge and peace. In the troubled torments of his soul, Shabine understands that he needs her, in order to accomplish his unpredictable and undefined destiny. Maria, whose name carries the sacred power of femininity, that is to say the womb of life (note, in this respect, the reference to the Spanish term Conception, meaning pregnancy, origin, and so on), is the only invisible character that will help Shabine to rediscover himself, and therefore his ancestors and contemporary compatriots.

In direct contrast to this scene, the following section of the poem is titled *Fight with the Crew* and it presents Shabine's brawl with one of his fellow sailors, a "cook" (130) from Saint Vincent, who makes fun of him for being a poet of the wor(l)d. Some critics have identified the figure of the cook as another of Shabine's doubles. Walcott has always fought against peoples' low esteem for poets and artists in general. Nevertheless, I believe that the episode foregrounds a far more implicit message, that is to say, the need to avoid people's opinions and judgements about our life choices and passions. Walcott knows that art, poetry and literature will not bring fame and success for most; nevertheless, he strongly believes in the power they have as a means for change and for enduring the agonies of life.

The ninth section of the poem is titled *Maria Conception and the Book of Dreams* and it recalls, in an evocative and yet dreadful way, colonial history and domination. Shabine and Vince, the cook that has now become the protagonist's best friend, are approaching "Dominica" (132), one of the first islands to be *discovered* by European explorers. The pair discuss modernity/coloniality "Progress" (134), a miserable and unattainable Western ideal which they both despise, and which also provided the pretext for slavery and exploitation in the Caribbean. The characters recall the appalling genocide of the first inhabitants of the islands. Only few Caribs survived to later be forced to work as slaves in mines or colonial plantations. Shabine rejects the atrocities and slaughters endured by his forefathers. Nevertheless, he dreams of them, and later encounters Maria Conception, in what seems to be a suspended and blurred dreamlike dimension.

One night, in a fever, radiantly ill,
she say, "Bring me the book [of Dreams], the end has come".
She said: "I dreamt of whales and a storm",
but for that dream, the book had no answer.
A next night I dreamed of three old women
featureless as silkworms, stitching my fate,
and I scream at them to come out of my house,
and I try beating them away with a broom,
but as they go out, so they crawl back again,
until I start screaming and crying, my flesh
raining with sweat, and she ravage the book
for the dream meaning, and there was nothing (136)

Maria is obsessed by a seemingly prophetic Book of Dreams, and she believes that her visions are a sign of the upcoming dreadful future. Soon after, Shabine also starts dreaming. He sees "three old women" weaving his destiny. As I have already pointed out, Walcott is re-writing the mythical Western figures of the three Parcae; nevertheless, I believe that they may also relate to the three male colonial admirals that Walcott mentioned in section five. After consulting her book, Maria Conception herself is unable to give meaning to their annoying appearance. At this point, Shabine decides to rely on the power of his creative and artistic imagination. He counterbalances the modernity/coloniality matrix of power with a strong belief from his poetic arsenal. Only the strength of his partnership wor(l)d will liberate him and his community from the claws of colonial or neo-colonial domination.

All you fate in my hand,
ministers, businessmen, Shabine have you, friend,
I shall scatter your lives like a handful of sand,
I who have no weapon but poetry and
the lances of palms and the sea's shining shield! (138)

A "light damn strange" (140) introduces section ten, which is emblematically titled *Out of Depths*. A storm transforms the sea into a living creature, and, out of the depths, the terrifying Leviathan appears. In this section, Walcott intermixes Shabine's prayers to save himself with his alter-ego's recalling of his own childhood faith, in the "Methodist chapel [of] Castries" (142), the capital of his birth-island. Walcott delves into a psychological journey made of sea imagery, animals and symbols that connect to Shabine's enduring in the storm. At the end, it is thanks to the captain of the Flight, "that

nigger [who] hold fast to that wheel [...] like the cross held Jesus” (142), that everyone survives and Shabine can re-emerge from his redemptive voyage.

The closing section of *The Schooner Flight* is titled *After the storm* and it represents Shabine’s conclusive circular path in the labyrinths of the self. The protagonist sees “Maria Conception marrying the ocean, then drifting away in the widening lace of her bridal train [...] till she was gone” (144). Shabine acknowledges the departure of his female counterpart⁴⁰⁹. He finally understands that his destiny corresponds to the vast, widening and infinite sea. The final section of the poem is a tribute to Walcott/Shabine’s islands, a symbolic and highly evocative invocation to the mystifying Caribbean archipelago.

There are so many islands!
As many islands as the stars at night
on that branched tree from which meteors are shaken
like falling fruit around the schooner Flight.
But things must fall, and so it always was,
on one hand Venus, on the other Mars;
fall, and are one, just as this earth is one
island in archipelagos of stars.
My first friend was the sea. Now, is my last.
I stop talking now. I work, then I read,
cotching under a lantern hooked to the mast.
I try to forget what happiness was,
and when that don’t work, I study the stars (146-148)

Shabine acknowledges that the Antillean archipelago with its numerous island territories and diverse people is no more than a direct replica of the infinite cosmos with its stars. The sea is once again the spiritual element that re-connects the scattered lives of the West Indian communities and past lineages. The mirroring of the immeasurable universe with earthly life is a metaphor to reflect on our transitory and ephemeral passage in the backwash of the spiralling cycles of life. In this sense, Walcott recalls the

⁴⁰⁹ The image of Maria Conception marrying the ocean connects with the history of Yemaya, who represents the Ocean Mother Goddess in several African or Afro-Caribbean cultures around the world. In an interesting article on the significance of this powerful mythical figure, Amber C. Snider suggests: “Often depicted as a queenly mermaid, Yemaya is considered the Ocean Mother Goddess in Santería, an Afro-Caribbean religion practiced around the world. With anchored roots in Yoruba religion, Yemaya was brought over to the New World by enslaved Africans as early as the 16th century”. Please see: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-history-of-yemaya-goddess-mermaid> (consulted on 18/12/2020).

contrasting and yet fusional powers of war and love, destruction and construction, life and death, “Mars” and “Venus”, to quote from the text.

Again, it is with a maritime and aquatic image that Walcott allows his protagonist to take their leave of his readers: “Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea” (148).

3.3. A multimodal performance or artistic production *read* through the lenses of Eisler’s partnership model

The dancing wor(l)d of The Schooner Flight is the title I attributed to my intersemiotic and multimodal adaption of Walcott’s homonymous poem. As I have already explained, my artistic experiment was carried out in different locations and periods of time, thus offering unique and unexplored possibilities within the context of transmedia and theatrical *praxis*.

Firstly, I directed the recording of four different videos, two long and two short, against the backdrop of the *Magredi*, in the province of my hometown Pordenone. I later added a selection of music tracks that I had chosen together with my assistant choreographer and fellow dancer Raffaele Simoni. The videos were produced and postedited by José Fogliarini, a video and transmedia professional, who I had previously worked with on other performative projects.

Secondly, together with a couple of university colleagues, I recorded a reading of a selection of poems from Walcott’s *The Schooner Flight*, in a professional recording studio in Udine. The choice to use the accents, voices and tones of non-native English speakers was a reflection of my idea to decolonise Walcott’s world, releasing it from the constraints of received pronunciation (RP) or standard British English. In this way, the recorded voices convey a sort of informal and *ordinary* type of speech, which took into account Walcott’s goal of allowing different tones to interplay within his verses. In particular, I worked with colleague and amateur actor Giovanni Verdoliva, who gave voice to the English version of the poem, while the Italian translation of Walcott’s lines was recited by fellow Ph.D. candidate Riccardo Vanin. In this way, I created a double-track reading of Walcott’s *The Schooner Flight* so as to emphasise the theme of the *double*, and also to provide an alternative perspective on and better understanding of the work, especially for an Italian audience, unacquainted with the English text.

Thirdly, I worked with Raffaele Simoni on the choreography for the stage production and theatrical performance, which took place at the Verdi theatre in Pordenone on 14 June 2019. The choreography dialogued both with the videos produced in the *Magredi* area and with the audio recordings, which were in turn blended with music and the actors' recitals of Walcott's texts.

In this piece of choreography, Raffaele Simoni and I played the character of Walcott/Shabine, and my dance students took on the guise of the white colonisers/black slaves, with the exception of one student, who played the role of Maria Conception. The workshops held with the students at my local dance school provided the experimentation ground to find connections between the videos, music and texts chosen, and the movements, gestures and embodiments we wanted to convey and express in the performance. This was a long process of writing, thinking, debating and experimenting, between choreographers, video and transmedia professionals, and the dance students.

It is important to point out here that there is a distinction between the performance and the multimodal output, which was derived from the postediting work. The performance constituted only one side of the experience, as its staging was mainly to produce an artistic video that worked as a synthesis of the entire production. The final recording does not provide a single view of, or approach to, the dance-theatre event, but rather a complex mixture of adaptational choices that foreground and bring together salient moments of the production. Therefore, the video that is attached to this Ph.D. thesis – which readers can view online⁴¹⁰ – represents the final outcome of an intricate and complex layering of different perspectives, videos and performances which all occurred at different times, and in different places and contexts.

This *diffracted* conception of my artistic work was a way to re-evoked the breaking down of boundaries as occurs in *decolonialism*. In tune with Mignolo and other decolonialists, I embraced a debunking aesthetic and artistic *praxis* in order to experiment and interact with postcolonial literature in an original way. I also proposed a new approach to the Western European literary and artistic *canon*. My objective was to rethink and, to a certain extent, rewrite commonly acknowledged (or Western European) creative and imaginative interdisciplinary practices. I believe that the encounter between, and

⁴¹⁰ The video-abstract of my production can be accessed via the following link: <https://vimeo.com/364759314>. Please contact me at mattia.mantellato@gmail.com for the full production.

fusion of, literature and art (or artistic and literary expression, as is the case here) can substantiate what scholar, social thinker and activist Riane Eisler terms “biocultural transformation” towards *partnership* (see Chapter 1, pp. 55).

As I have already pointed out, for Eisler, *partnership* means finding alternative and challenging ways to bring people together and make them co-operate for the common good of all in different relationship(s), which can transform their/our lives. In tune with Eisler’s work, my personal and artistic intersemiotic translation/adaptation followed this path of rethinking and reshaping encounters, in light of approaches that recognise the *Other* and bring to the fore more sustainable, peaceful, equalitarian and respectful worldviews.

When read through the perspective of Eisler’s *Seven Relationships that will Change Your Life*⁴¹¹, my artistic and multimodal work follows, both directly and indirectly, the entire circle of possibilities and challenges that the American scholar puts forward. This is because, following Eisler’s advice, I worked firstly on a personal level, thus highlighting and giving voice to my *dual* personality as a dancer and literature expert. On this level, I also worked on a piece of choreography that would give new emphasis and meaning to the power of the *body* as a true instrument of the soul and a means for recognising the mysterious forces or unknown dynamics of corporeal symbolism. The dance students appreciated this specific characteristic of the project, because they could interpret different gender roles, firstly in the guise of the colonisers and then of the colonised, thus experiencing the physical embodiments of both perspectives. In this way, they were also able to think about their lives, thus pondering and confronting what happens in the context of their own family and peer groups. In this respect, the dancers enhanced their awareness of the power of dialogue and respect, and the strength of giving/receiving, which is the second step on Eisler’s journey towards *partnership*, i.e.

⁴¹¹ Eisler (2002), *The Power of Partnership. Seven Relationships that Will Change your Life*. [2018. *Il potere della partnership. Sette modalità di relazione per una nuova vita*]. This is one of Eisler’s most practical books: “a book to help us help ourselves”, as the American anthropologist and scholar has suggested in several interviews. The volume presents seven key relationships that make up our lives: 1) our relationship with ourselves; 2) our intimate relationships; 3) our workplace and community relations; 4) our relationship with our national community; 5) international and multicultural relationships; 6) our relationship with nature and the living environment; 7) our spiritual relations. During her inspiring 2019 TEDxUDINE talk titled *Narrating Partnerships with Humans* (Narrare la partnership con l’umano), Professor Antonella Riem expounded the premises of Eisler’s work, in particular by referencing and drawing examples from this practical volume. To watch Professor Riem’s presentation, please click on this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TxaDTqFJJY> (consulted on 17/12/2020).

encountering and understanding others, which also represents an understanding of the self.

Community and work relationships – Eisler’s third level of investigation towards partnership – are probably the most practised type of exchange in the entire project. The team involved in putting together this creative works was propelled through moments of reading, confrontation and debate during the process of adapting the poem into a performance, so as to delve into Walcott’s text and bring it to life, in light of everyone’s experiences and backgrounds. Indeed, the choreography and multimodal experiment may not have taken form had the components of the group not collaborated and cooperated so closely and wholeheartedly with one another.

In this respect, I want to highlight how the project is not to be considered as my own, personal and individual creation or output, but rather as a communal partnership effort and an attempt to build something original and highly creative for all of us. The intent was to work together while discovering our own personal worldviews and ways of expressing ourselves, and responding to *others* so as to build unforgettable, shared experiences and moments of creative freedom.

This leads to a consideration of national and worldview relationships, as Eisler terms them, which are respectively the fourth and fifth types of encounter she prompts us to focus on in order to reach *partnership* values. In this respect, my video and multimodal artistic work were produced with the aim of being accessible and visible to anyone, online on different social media platforms or websites, such as that of the Partnership Studies Group (PSG) based at the University of Udine and founded in 1998 by Professor Antonella Riem. This is a research community which brings together scholars, students, professionals, artists, and associations and institutions, to apply Eisler’s approach to literature(s), the arts, and educational and social contexts alike (see Chapter 1, pp. 59).

The goal of my performance is to reach anyone interested in sharing partnership values and ideals, as well as those who wish to get to know alternative ways of interacting with literature and the arts. It is for this reason that the video has been produced both in English and Italian – with subtitles – so as to defy linguistic borders and reach out to everyone, or *Tout-Monde*, to recall Glissant’s preferred term (see Chapter 1, pp. 52).

The sixth relationship that Eisler believes to be essential for humanity is that with nature. Eisler suggests we should recover the sacred links between the natural world and

human societies. In her studies, she explains how the dominator modernity/coloniality matrix of power has altered and even erased the spiritual connection we had with Mother Earth, as the multifaceted ecological planetary crisis is showing us. She invites us to recover ancestral knowledge and wisdom in order to restore a fair balance between all the creatures living on earth and the cyclical systems of renewal that sustain life. Eisler's standpoint recalls the spiritual ecology that Raimon Panikkar terms *ecosophy*:

A certain habitual ecological attitude must be overcome in order to go much deeper, seeking a new equilibrium between matter and spirit [...]. Beyond a simple ecology, ecosophy is a wisdom-spirituality of the earth. 'The new equilibrium' is not so much between man and the earth, as between matter and spirit, between spatio-temporality and consciousness. Ecosophy is neither a mere 'science of the earth' (ecology) nor even 'wisdom about the earth', but rather a 'wisdom of the earth herself' that is made manifest to man when he knows how to listen to her with love⁴¹².

Indeed, my choreography takes into serious consideration the relationship with the natural environment and its ecosystems. I chose to set part of my production in an intimate and mostly disregarded area of my region, which I identify with the term *Magredi*.

The name of this stretch of land comes from the Friulan language and the culture of popular country dwellers. The word "magredi" stands metaphorically for *scarce* or *poor*. The area looks like a tiny desert, made up of stones and sporadic bush vegetation. It is believed to be a very ancient natural formation deriving from the erosion of the Alps in the Northern part of the region where I was born. Under the surface of this apparently barren land, there is a complex system of concealed streams and watercourses. During the rainy seasons, the *Magredi* area floods easily and, astonishingly, separates villages and communities nearby. When I was a child, I was fascinated yet frightened by the power of water that was able to separate and isolate people, families and entire territories⁴¹³.

As I explained in my textual analysis, Walcott's *The Schooner Flight* bestows great value on the sacred and renewing power of water. It is the natural environment, with its hidden and lively forces and dynamics, that guides Shabine in his reconciliation with his past and forebears' collective legacies. Moreover, the protagonist entertains a

⁴¹² See: <http://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-ecosofi.html> (consulted on 23/09/2020).

⁴¹³ For more information on the *Magredi* area, please visit the following websites: <https://gelindo.it/it/il-territorio/i-magredi>; <http://www.cmfriulioccidentale.it/index.php?id=19621>; <http://www.pordenonewithlove.it/it/cosa-fare/solo-da-noi/i-magredi-la-steppa-pordenone>.

privileged dialogue with the archipelagic context surrounding him. In a way, the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia mirrors multicultural Trinidad, the island where Shabine is from. It has three names and is on the *border*, an *edging* territory which has always benefited from the coexistence of different cultures, languages and peoples. It is located in the north-east of Italy, a territory characterised by a rich natural diversity, with the Alps to the North, the Adriatic Sea to the South and a large, plain valley in the middle. The *Magredi* stands between these areas, in the province of Pordenone.

Politically, the territory constitutes the boundary between Italy and the Western Balkan route, traversed by thousands of migrants. Previously, a left-wing regional government encouraged the hosting of migrants from North Africa, but the recent xenophobic campaigns of the right-wing and extreme-right-wing parties have favoured a change of political direction.

These assumptions, issues and concerns form the background to my choreography and multimodal project. On the one hand, I wanted to express Shabine's tormenting divisions within the context of a highly heterogenous space; on the other, I wanted to embrace and provide an intimate and personal dialogue with my native land and regional territory. In this way, I have both rediscovered my ancestral roots and connected with a specific context that somehow links to the texts I wanted to translate and adapt through dance-theatre.

Walcott's *The Schooner Flight* is a poem that delves into issues of ethnical divisions and unjust segregations and, worse, the human refusal of *Other* humans. In this sense, as I will explain in my analysis of the dance, my artistic work has suspended roles, genders and corporal boundaries, taking on a fluid and unpredictable dimension, in which borders and historical frontiers no longer apply. I have also referenced the current political and global issue of ethnic discrimination, as expressed in the recent U.S.A. demonstrations against racism and xenophobia under the motto: "Black lives matter"⁴¹⁴. In this respect, in one of the most powerful sections of the choreography, my colleague Raffaele *colours* my white shirt in different shades, symbolising a denial and rejection of *white*, or better, Western European and Northern Atlantic uniformity and homologation of society, and instead embraces the power of the colourful diversity and heterogeneity of life.

⁴¹⁴ For more information on the black lives matter movement, please see: <https://blacklivesmatter.com>.

This aspect also links to the last type of relationship that Eisler identifies as essential on our path towards *partnership*: our encounters with the *Other* and the spiritual need to connect and be connected with one another. Indeed, humanity is genetically and socially in search of love, care and respect. If someone acts in a violent manner or adopts a despotic stance, it is because he/she has lost the sacred and spiritual meaning of life, which is that of gathering all of us together in a great circle of encounters and exchanges.

This particular type of relationship is emphasised throughout the choreography, not only by the switching and altering of roles between the coloniser and the colonised, but also through the most important feminine figure in the entire poem, Maria Conception.

As I have already pointed out, I believe that the female protagonist embodies and substantiates the full feminine wor(l)d, in a powerful and yet concealed strength that struggles to manifest itself during the narration. It comes as no surprise that Maria Conception appears in those revelatory moments in which Shabine is in need. The male protagonist cannot decipher the signs of nature without the help of his double/female counterpart. Alone, Shabine wanders and loses himself in the labyrinths of the self until he perceives Maria's *light* and overpowering guidance.

From this perspective, in my choreography, Maria Conception was *adapted* as a solitary figure and ghostly presence that materialises unexpectedly, mostly in two marginal scenes that I have identified as *parentheses* or moments of stasis through the framing in the video production. Shabine and Maria meet and soon leave each other, in a perpetual and cyclical journey of encounters, clashes and rediscoveries.

In tune with Eisler's work, Walcott/Shabine physically embraces his powerful and undetermined *Other-self*, Maria Conception⁴¹⁵. However, at the same time, he immediately leaves her, for he knows that she holds a truth that he may never grasp, if not through the cyclical repetition and recovery of his own life's journey, through past, present and future, while keeping in mind where he comes from and where he is heading to.

⁴¹⁵ While most literary critique on *The Schooner Flight* tends to highlight Shabine and Maria Conception's separation and distance from one another, in my multimodal production I wanted to demonstrate how the pair are in reality connected from the beginning to the end of the text. Indeed, it is thanks to Maria's dream and recollection – and also return – that Shabine is able to understand the ultimate goal of his life and cyclical poetic journey.

In what follows I will present the final output of my project: the multimodal video, which is attached to this Ph.D. thesis. I will explore its five different and yet interrelated sections. I will present not only the embodied adaptation from a choreographic and technical point of view, but also focus on issues that I took into account while working on the production and creating the video.

3.4. The performance: the dancing wor(l)d of *The Schooner Flight*

In the following analysis, I will delve into the five sections of my multimodal dance-theatre production of Walcott's text *The Schooner Flight*. Each section is a direct translation or transdisciplinary adaptation of the textual extracts of the poem that I analysed in the previous chapter. The compositional order of the text has sometimes been altered for reasons explained throughout the analysis. My aim was to focus on the episodes in which Shabine dialogues with his *doubles* and interacts with or responds to the colonial matrix of power, particularly in search of answers both for himself and his ancestors. The performance highlights the history of the Caribbean, its legacies and its traditions. It emphasises the need for identity representation, and new interpretations of imperial history and subjugation. It is also a powerful *praxis* merging Walcott's wor(l)d with the place where I was born and grew up. With the help of my colleagues and dance students, I have produced a multimodal video that brings to the fore issues that we tend to believe to be outdated and calls them into question, such as encountering and acknowledging the *Other*, as well as sustaining and promoting our natural territory and local surroundings.

Due to the complexity of the issues involved, I decided to divide the performance into three long sections and two shorter ones. The shorter sections, which I have called *parenthesis*, constitute a sort of break from the whole framing of the choreography, but they remain as important as the main sections as they provide a *feminine* alternative or complementary force in the narration. In these scenes, I/Shabine encounters the regenerative and renewing force of Maria Conception, one of the few female characters in the poem. In this sense, the performance suspends its linearity and instead proposes a spiralling journey of chance, in which the protagonist is finally able to acknowledge his true identity and story.

3.4.1 Section one

My dance-theatre adaptation of *The Schooner Flight* begins with the sound of heavy rain. The video starts with a close-up of the two performers' hands (00:11⁴¹⁶). The camera angle then switches to show their backs. The performers are dressed identically, wearing a long-sleeved white shirt and loose cream trousers. They are both standing still, looking forwards towards the horizon as the first lines of Walcott's *The Schooner Flight* are narrated in English. The dancers are alone, standing close to each other near a stream of water in the vast desert-like area of the *Magredi*. The scenery alludes to the first lines of the poem: "In idle August, while the sea is soft" (110). The Caribbean has been substituted with the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, a territory splintered into different areas, each with its own individual and yet intertwined traditions, languages and identities. As previously stated, the *Magredi* valley is a natural land formation dividing various villages in the province of Pordenone. In a sense, it matches Shabine's Trinidad, which is, in turn, a highly heterogenous island located at the heart of the Caribbean Sea.

After presenting the Antillean setting, Walcott's poem gives voice to a narrative self, and the reader is left to interpret whether this is the voice of a protagonist or Walcott's own voice. In doing so, Walcott is already introducing the theme of the *double*, to create ambiguity as to who is speaking. The same idea is embodied in the *immobility* of the dancers, as viewers do not know whether to focus on one figure or the other. There are two performers to represent Walcott/Shabine's *double*, and Shabine's double voice, since, in the poem, the protagonist is torn between a narrative and speaking voice⁴¹⁷.

The performers' outward gaze represents Shabine "as a seaman on the schooner *Flight*" (110), fleeing Maria Conception. Another two intertextual references have also been incorporated into the video: Shabine's "blow[ing] out [of] light", and Maria's

⁴¹⁶ For the purpose of this choreographic analysis, I have provided timing references in brackets. These refer to the final video production (total duration: 20:00 minutes). The video has been submitted together with this Ph.D. thesis as a separate file. It can also be consulted on request by e-mailing mattia.mantellato@gmail.com. A video abstract of the works is available on my personal VIMEO profile: <https://vimeo.com/364759314>.

⁴¹⁷ Paul Breslin suggests a continuous "code-switching [...] between Shabine as narrator of his autobiography and Shabine as character within the story – a distinction that works against the aspiration, explicitly avowed in later revisions, to fuse the roles of poet and representative common man". Breslin (2001), *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 191.

“dreamless face” (110). This first video was in fact recorded on a dim and cloudy day, and the expressionless look on the performers’ faces aim to communicate a neutral and plain outlook, as though they were absorbed in their own thoughts or imaginative dimension. Once the first text has been recited, the camera angle switches again to a close-up of the performers’ faces. At this moment, viewers are able to recognise me and Raffaele Simoni in the guise of performers. Our appearance as a pair or *double* preannounces Shabine’s internal divisions, and also Walcott’s connection to his protagonist.

As most literary critics have pointed out⁴¹⁸, the theme of the *double* is one of the most explored elements in the poem and it is clear from the analysis of his works (see Chapter 2) that Walcott wishes to address his protagonists’ *double* voices, identities and representations. He does not display their distress or anguish owing to their condition, but rather their apparent yet puzzled self-awareness. For Walcott, accepting one’s unknown heritage and cultural *hybridism* represents a chance to think about (and substantiate) something new, alternative and original. It is precisely around this idea of alleged equanimity that my adaptation of Walcott’s first text unfolds.

After this introductory scene, the soundtrack *Endless Fall* by Loscil⁴¹⁹ begins (00:39). The music is subtle, delicate and simple, made up of just a few notes that repeat in an almost obsessive refrain. The music is used as a complementary intersemiotic tool to represent Shabine’s *repetitive* or double identity and personality. As the faint beginning of the soundtrack plays, the camera follows one of the performers as he walks through the *Magredi*, across a plain valley of grey pebbles. The walk reinforces Shabine’s departure and switch from one personal condition and story-path to another. At the same

⁴¹⁸ See, for instance, Breslin’s analysis on *The Schooner Flight*: Breslin (2001), *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, pp. 189-214.

⁴¹⁹ Loscil is Scott Morgan’s nickname. He is a Canadian composer, songwriter and producer known for his creative and innovative music, which blends “the intuitive and the intellectual with deceptively easy grace”. He is interested in the connections between music and the natural environment, especially in consideration of the astonishing surroundings in which he lives and works. Raffaele Simoni and I also chose his mystical and yet rhythmical music because his biography and art match Walcott’s in more than one way: “born and raised in Vancouver, Morgan moved from the city’s eastern suburbs to Courtenay on Vancouver Island as a boy. In his teens and twenties, he grew bored of the island’s stillness, and channelled his restlessness into the bands he played with [...]. However, studying communications and music at Simon Fraser University opened Morgan the possibilities of experimental and electronic music. As he trained to be a sound designer and director, he learned about the fundamentals of computer music [...]. Taking the term ‘loscil’ (a combination of ‘loop’ and ‘oscillate’) from the audio programming language Csound, he began performing his minimalist dub/techno/ambient-inspired tracks”. For a complete overview of Loscil’s work, please see: <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/loscil-mn0000215557/biography> (consulted on 23/09/2020).

time, the shot foregrounds a never-ending flow of water (in the opposite direction), as though conveying the idea that life and nature carry on in their cyclical and spiralling transformations.

At the one-minute mark, there is another salient close-up of the performers' gaze. This time, I am standing slightly in front of Raffaele, who can be seen behind. This staging signals the meaning and structure of our attributed roles. I represent Shabine/Walcott, while Raffaele is his *double* or mimicking *shadow*, to use one of the terms preferred by Walcott in his production.

Immediately after this passage, there is a sudden and unexpected change of atmosphere, weather and *light* in the *Magredi*. The rainy, grey scenario has now switched to a sunny, clear day (01:10). I am walking, with my back to the camera, towards Maria Conception. The female character is interpreted by Chiara Bettini, a dance student, dressed in a long, white wedding dress, making a direct reference to the end of the poem, when Maria Conception "marr[ies] the ocean, [...] drifting away / in the widening lace of her bridal train" (144). Maria is walking in the opposite direction, towards me, looking ahead and avoiding my gaze. This switching of positions tries to bestow a sense of *indeterminacy* and create a blurred scenario of what will happen throughout the entire video. I wanted to give the idea of entering into Shabine's mind and inner world. Shabine is dreaming of his female counterpart, the better half he is about to leave. Again, the reference to departure is conveyed by the dancers' crossing each other's paths, only looking back at each other at the end of the encounter, as though they had left someone behind. This image of the performers walking in opposite directions is very present in the works of German choreographer Pina Bausch. Bausch plunges into the themes of departure, passage and encounter in many of her productions and pieces of choreography⁴²⁰. Another artistic reference that has inspired my adaptation of this specific scene is Marina Abramović's powerful performance titled *The Great Wall: Lovers at the Brink*⁴²¹, which the globally acclaimed Serbian performer carried out with

⁴²⁰ In one of Bausch's most represented and controversial performances titled *Kontakthof* (1978), she focuses on the impossibility of true love between "young elders", as she called them. The performance is set in a dance hall and shows two distinctive groups of female and male interpreters embodying and expressing the same desires and hopes to be loved in turn, despite their seemingly old age. The production is simple and yet evocative, for the groups alternate in a continuous and repetitive exchange of poses and directions, made up of sudden departures and unexpected twists and turns.

⁴²¹ To watch the performance, please visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtX7yZo_5vg (accessed on the 23/09/2020).

her life partner and performing *double* Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen), along the Great Wall of China. The artists decided to end their artistic and personal relationship through a spiritual *crossing* journey, with Marina starting from one side of the Great Wall and Ulay from the other. They meet halfway and depart immediately, taking separate paths, both in life and at work.

Maria Conception turns her head towards Shabine, which corresponds to an abrupt return to the previous scene, in which Walcott/Shabine's *double* is embodied by me and Simoni (01:27). Shabine, in recalling Maria, determines a separation of the self, represented by Simoni standing apart from me. This time, we begin to move in an attempt to connect with the invisible forces of the natural surroundings. This aspect is embodied by upper-arm movements and gestures that mimic or reproduce a sort of embrace. I perform a *port de bras*⁴²² to the right, which allows my arms to extend diagonally and subsequently close up into a chest contraction, as though holding onto something.

On the opposite side of the river, my *double* Raffaele starts dancing. His movements are dictated by a dynamic drive flowing from his upper arms. A wide shot then cuts in to show our *dialoguing* bodies. We are separated by a stream of water and, through delicate and suspended arm movements, try to express the need to depart, yet remain close to each other. This idea of rejection and searching for the other is also conveyed by us standing on the same spot, so that we are moving physically without moving spatially⁴²³. Our dance is a tribute to the powerful context hosting us and bringing us together. Through a series of *pliés*⁴²⁴, we try to connect to the mountain skyline behind us. By reconnecting with the environment, we are *rooted* in the surrounding space, while our disjointed bodies seek out the other. This idea is reinforced by a blurred image of me

⁴²² A *port de bras* is "a classical ballet term meaning movement of the arms. It describes how dancers move their arms from one position to another". In explaining the meaning of dance movements and steps, I refer to BalletHub blog and website. Please, visit: <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/port-de-bras/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

⁴²³ This sort of static yet dynamic movement (which is possible only through the use of the upper arms) is a direct reference to Walcott's performances and plays. In his theatrical works, he tried to express the innate dynamism of West Indian people, while conveying a sense of stasis or slow motion, which he has asserted as coming from his interest in Japanese theatre. This is particularly evident in *Pantomime* in which Harry and Jackson constantly move around the stage while acting but also alternate with slow actions and gestures, to express specific messages and/or occurrences. In this respect, see my analysis on the dancing of the shadows (see Chapter 2, pp. 207)

⁴²⁴ In ballet terminology, a *plié* occurs "when a dancer is basically bending at the knees". <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/plie/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

and Raffaele fading in (01:53), standing side by side, only this time looking directly at the camera.

The section changes radically when the outdoor scenery disappears to show us in the guise of dancers inside a theatre, on stage (2:14). The outdoor reproduction of the *Magredi* section continues to play as a backdrop to our separated dance. A *pas de deux* or duet then begins on stage. I am the first one to move, revealing Raffaele right behind me. I step out twice in a diagonal motion with my right leg to return to my initial position. Raffaele replicates my stride in a canon but, with his second step, starts walking to the front of the stage to position himself in front of me, with his back to the audience. I lunge with my right knee bent and turn away from him to swap positions; Raffaele also moves (again reproducing my steps) and we finally stop back-to-back, with Raffaele in front, facing the audience, and me behind, facing the back of the stage. At this point, we both lean outwards to the left, extending our right side until our eyes meet, before finally engaging in an embrace in a *plié*, holding onto each other's hips. This allows us to change direction repeatedly, transferring our weight in a fluid motion, from one side to the other. Raffaele finally stretches out his arms in a fan, re-evoking the liberating *port de bras* embodied in the *Magredi*. I wrap both arms around his waist before turning to face the floor and extending both arms and legs in a plank position. Raffaele then turns to lean his full weight on my upper back, looking upwards. Next, I lower my body down to the floor, accompanying Raffaele who then stretches both legs upwards towards the ceiling. He then lowers both feet to the floor and rolls away from me before returning to face me with a *rond de jambes en plié*⁴²⁵. Meanwhile, I have rolled over on to my left side and extended my right leg upwards so that Raffaele can take hold of it and turn me to face the opposite direction. Raffaele tries to launch me into a *pirouette*⁴²⁶ with the other leg, but I stop and instead roll on my back, extend both legs out straight and transfer my weight onto the left side of my neck, suspending my lower body in another plank position. At the same time, Raffaele stops and extends his right leg up in a *pirouette en dedans*⁴²⁷ that echoes my turn

⁴²⁵ A *rond de jambe* stands for “round of the leg or circular movements of the leg”. <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/rond-de-jambe/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

⁴²⁶ A *pirouette* is a dance tour or spin.

⁴²⁷ A *pirouette en dedans* is “a pirouette turning inward toward the standing leg” <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/pirouette-en-dedans/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

on the floor. He then changes direction with a *passé en contraction* (with his right leg)⁴²⁸ that allows him to *demi-tour*⁴²⁹ towards the back of the stage (with his arms extending up and over), ending in a standing position facing stage right. After having turned from right to left on the floor, I lunge into a *plié* that allows me to reproduce Raffaele's motion on the opposite side. A *demi-tour* then takes me to face the same direction as my *double* in the same position⁴³⁰.

We both plunge into a deep *lunge* with our left legs extended backwards. I then run towards my *double* and, with a *demi-rond en plié* with my left leg, try to kick his left leg up, but Raffaele snatches his left foot away before I can touch him. He stands in a suspended position, then kicks his back leg to the front with a *développé*⁴³¹ that becomes a *lunge* on his left leg; he then uses the energy of the *lunge* to turn to the right and face me, in order to replicate and respond to my kick. As soon as he gets close to me, he performs a *rond de jambe en l'air*⁴³² while turning, but I move backwards with a chest contraction so that our bodies do not touch. I then turn to the right and stand in a *relevé*⁴³³ position, extending my right arm backwards (towards my double) and my left arm diagonally towards the audience. After the attempted kick, Raffaele turns and sees my right arm extended towards him. He grabs hold of it and guides me as I jump extending my left leg diagonally upwards into a turn before spinning me to the left with the help of his outstretched right arm. We then reverse roles, so that I lift him up over my shoulder. Raffaele jumps into a lift, with his legs up off the ground, holding my back with both arms. I then run diagonally backwards. After the lift in motion, we drop down into a *grand*

⁴²⁸ *Passé* or *Retiré* are interchangeable ballet terms “describing the same position where a dancer’s leg is bent upwards, with their toes typically connected to the other leg. Having the ‘passe leg’ turned out is mostly common in classical ballet, but of course, *passé* (or *retiré*) can also exist as a turned in position in jazz, contemporary and other dance techniques”. <https://ballethub.com/ballet-lesson/positions-passe-retire-basics/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

⁴²⁹ A *demi-tour* is literary a half-spin or pirouette.

⁴³⁰ Even non-experts in ballet or dance terminology are able to distinguish the continuous repetition of movements and steps. Linguistically, it is interesting to see how ballet and writing – two different types of expressions – interact with one another; through diverse means, they both convey the same content and idea, that is to say the dialogue between two interrelated bodies and performers.

⁴³¹ *Développé* means “to develop, or developing movement. A *développé* is a movement where the dancer’s working leg is drawn up to the knee of the supporting leg and extended to an open position. <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/developpe/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

⁴³² A *rond de jambe* can be either performed on the floor or in the air (*en l'air*).

⁴³³ A *relevé* occurs when “a dancer rises up and seemingly is standing on their toes in a *demi-pointe* or a *fully en pointe*”. <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/releve/> (consulted on 09/11/2020).

plié in second position, meaning that both our legs are apart. Our arms are wrapped around each other in an embrace that signals the end of our struggle.

The idea of this section was to embody Shabine's powerful confrontation with the cook, Vince, on board the *Flight*. As I have already pointed out, the cook mocks Shabine's love of poetry, while Shabine is tired of the crew discrediting his intellectual passion. In this episode, Walcott is addressing his Caribbean compatriots in general, to increase their awareness of the creative effects that poetry and other arts or forms of expression may have on people's mind and sensibilities. The duet also recalls identity, and the cultural and stylistic *struggles* that Walcott had to endure in his life. In this regard, the duet mirrors steps that are associated with two types of dance: classical ballet, on the one hand, and modern and contemporary dance, on the other⁴³⁴. Finally, I also reflected on the significance of Walcott's accuracy and precision in the staging of his plays. For the Antillean playwright, in fact, art and performance were to be driven by the power of the creative imagination but also by coherent and visible staging structures. In this sense, Walcott praised the performances of Japanese Kabuki⁴³⁵, with its highly stylized performances and almost imperceptible movements. Again, this represents a striking contrast to the dancing and acting of Caribbean actors and performers, which he simultaneously drew from:

Our sin in West Indian art is the sin of exuberance, of self-indulgence, and I wanted to impose a theatre that observed certain rules. The use of choruses required precise measures; the use of narration required precise mime. There was one dance step that, when it was arrested, seemed to be exactly what I wanted – powerful, difficult, precise. It came out of the bongo-dance. It is a male challenge dance played at wakes, obviously derived from warrior games, and I saw in that

⁴³⁴ My choreography and dance production does not separate the world of ballet from contemporary and modern dance. Instead, I have tried to fuse the different types of movements and gestures. While classical ballet tends to be a more aerial and incorporeal (take, as an example, the use of *pointe shoes*, which are meant to give an idea of detachment from the floor), contemporary dance re-establishes a connection with the floor, proposing a freer and less ordained gestural. In this regard, my choreography tries to blend both forms of expression together, as Raffaele and I simultaneously perform very structured sequences, with lots of standard steps and movements from classical ballet, but also liberated and almost improvisational choreographic sections, in which we are transported by the dynamics of weight transfer and interfusional positions.

⁴³⁵ From the online Encyclopaedia Britannica: "Kabuki, traditional Japanese popular drama with singing and dancing performed in a highly stylized manner. A rich blend of music, dance, mime, and spectacular staging and costuming, it has been a major theatrical form in Japan for four centuries. The term kabuki originally suggested the unorthodox and shocking character of this art form. In modern Japanese, the word is written with three characters: ka, signifying 'song'; bu, 'dance'; and ki, 'skill'". Britannica Online, *Kabuki, Japanese Art*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Kabuki> (consulted on: 25/08/2020).

moment the discipline of arrest, of revelation from which a mimetic Narrative power could spring like some of the *mies* in Japanese theatre⁴³⁶.

As I tried to convey through my adaptation, Walcott was fascinated by the power of arrest and performance *stasis*. Indeed, in an exceedingly colourful and diversified Caribbean theatrical experience, it could not have been any other way. For Walcott, pauses and arrests became epiphanies or moments of revelation in the chaos of the schizophrenic Caribbean life and artistic experience. Raffaele and I sometimes perform sudden stops or freezes in the choreography to emulate this.

What follows in my choreography (03:20) is more gestural than dynamic, meaning that Raffaele and I try to re-connect with Walcott's idea of stasis by proposing a performative sequence in which our bodies fuse together. As I step towards the audience, Raffaele positions himself behind me. At this precise moment (03:23) the video switches back to the *Magredi* setting, where the duet sequences that follow were also recorded. The aim of this switch in perspective is to recall the *breaking* of stage and representational boundaries, not only in my artistic production but also in Walcott's work. In this sense, I reflected again on the power of and need for a liberating and free production, that does not take into account Western-oriented definitions and constraints, especially within the process of artistic imagination and/or creation.

This duet within a duet represents a symbolic break in the flow of the dance (03:24). Raffaele leans to the side and slides his head down my left arm, following the silhouette of my body⁴³⁷. This contact with his head prompts me to lift my left shoulder and arm to rest on his shoulder, in a supported embrace. Raffaele rolls up from his back, thus forcing me to return to my initial position. The energy and flow of this movement allow me to relax forwards towards the ground in a chest contraction, as Raffaele opens out into a *port the bras* towards the right behind me (with both arms extended). We then swap roles and I open out into a *port de bras* towards the right (with both arms extended) and Raffaele contracts his chest, acting as a support for me to lean against as I extend my arms upwards towards the sky (as he did before me). As soon as we return to the initial parallel position (03:38), Raffaele projects his arms forwards from behind me, over my shoulders, forcing

⁴³⁶ Walcott (1970), 'Meanings' in Hamner (1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 47.

⁴³⁷ Here I was inspired by Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*, in particular by Pissarro and Melbye's sketching of Walcott in St. Thomas. In this episode of the poem, Walcott physically perceives his body being drawn by the two artists (see Chapter 2, pp. 249).

me into another chest contraction towards the ground. I immediately counteract this force, extending from my shoulders into an upright position. Raffaele also raises his arms up and then rests his elbows on my shoulders. Slowly, I lower my shoulders, allowing him to bend his left arm and place his left hand in front of my eyes. I then follow his left hand with my gaze, while rising to *demi-pointe*⁴³⁸. As Raffaele positions himself to my left and our eyes meet, the recording cuts back to the stage (03:49). As I recognise my double in an epiphany, I jump on his back, as he lowers into a *grand pli * in second position. He is then able to lift me onto his back, transferring me from one diagonal to the other (I lift up my right leg in order to convey the idea of a circle). After the lift, I grab Raffaele’s hand and lean away diagonally, throwing my left arm backwards, as though wanting to escape. Raffaele guides me as I slide down to the floor and through his open legs. I lift my left leg to turn and lay flat in a prone position. Meanwhile, Raffaele performs a *demi-tour* to the right with his left leg bent, to allow me to turn on the floor. He then steps backwards away from me to observe me in a resting position, before crawling back towards my head in order to challenge me with another interlocked gaze. I do not respond to his challenge, and instead stand up by pushing backwards using my arms in a chest contraction that echoes his crawl. I struggle to stand back up straight, while Raffaele follows my movements and uncertainty. The idea behind this last, rigid return to standing in a parallel position is to connect with what follows. The *pas de deux* is now finished and the recital of Walcott’s most powerful stanza can begin (in English). The crawling movement is thus a representation of a return to the origins of one’s legacy and history. Indeed, after struggling with the idea of abandoning his family and familiar places, Shabine is once again torn by the frustrating acknowledgement of his *divided* identity. By returning to my initial position in the choreography, I am alluding to the cyclical journey of self-discovery. Shabine “tak[es] a sea-bath” (112) in order to feel reinvigorated in a new identity and future, for himself and for those around him.

In correspondence with Walcott’s most famous stanza (112), Raffaele and I start walking slowly around stage. The idea was to pay tribute to Walcott’s powerful wor(l)d but also allow the spectators to enjoy the rhythms and deep allusions of his verses. Firstly, I walk diagonally backwards, following Raffaele’s gaze. Raffaele in turn walks towards

⁴³⁸ *Demi-pointe* is the raising up the heels to achieve a *relev *. <https://ballethub.com/ballet-term/releve/> (consulted on 18/11/2020).

me but facing the audience. Secondly, as the line in which Walcott explains Shabine's nickname, "the patois for any red nigger" (112) is read, I turn towards the right in order to reach the back of the stage, while Raffaele walks in the opposite direction. In this way, our paths mark out a half circle, alluding to the geography of the Antillean archipelago. The walk is slow and controlled; it connects to Shabine's journey across the Caribbean islands, as I pointed out in my analysis. At the end of the walk, I finish facing the audience upstage, while Raffaele is downstage and turns towards me.

As we hear "I'm just a red nigger who love the sea" (112), we walk towards each other. I am now walking boldly towards the audience since, in the guise of Shabine, I am proud of my ethnical and cultural *hybrid*. The video reproduction of the *Magredi* film playing as the backdrop shows Raffaele and I crossing the stream that separated us, as though our divided identities were now able to reunite. Through Walcott's verses, Shabine finally acknowledges the potential of his mixed creole legacies. It is at the end of this section that the protagonist powerfully states that either he is *nobody* or a *nation*, meaning that either he recognises himself in this puzzling and schizophrenic mixture of identities, cultures and traditions or he is nobody⁴³⁹. To emphasise once more the centrality of these verses, Raffaele and I decided to add another powerful choreographic scene to the duet.

From behind me, Raffaele turns (04:52) to take hold of my right arm and throws it towards the left side of the stage. The fluidity of the movement allows me to open out into a wide *grand pli  * in second position and return to the right. He then clasps my upper body to turn me to the left in a *pirouette en diagonal* that ends with me standing on my left leg, while my right leg is relaxed in an open parallel position. Raffaele grabs me from behind again, and this time I push him away by projecting my chest and shoulders outwards. He then catches hold of my arms and counteracts my weight. I bend down into a *demi-pli  * and jump towards him a *demi-tour en l'air*⁴⁴⁰ to the right. I then throw both

⁴³⁹ In a profound and insightful article titled *Derek Walcott: Either Nobody - or a Nation*, Edward Hirsch comments on the most powerful lines of Walcott's *The Schooner Flight*: "The Odyssean figure of Shabine undoubtedly speaks for his creator when he uses the demotic and turns the language of colonial scorn into a source of pride [...]. One way to view Walcott's work is as an energizing struggle to reconcile a divided heritage. His pact with his islands, his first commitment to describing the world around him, was balanced by a sense of self-division and estrangement. He grew up as a 'divided child' – a Methodist in an overwhelmingly Catholic place, a developing artist with a middle-class background and a mixed African, English, and Dutch ancestry coming of age in a mostly black world, a backwater of poverty". Hirsch (1995), *Derek Walcott: Either Nobody - or a Nation*, *The Georgia Review*, 49, 1: 309.

⁴⁴⁰ In this case the half *pirouette* or *tour* is carried out in the air (*en l'air*).

my arms around his shoulders with my legs outstretched and my toes pointed, and allow him to take the full weight of my body. Raffaele starts running diagonally to carry me away. The run ends as I release into a *grand-plié* in second position, which forces him to stop. I then draw my feet in, in order to turn towards the audience, while Raffaele stays behind me. I turn my head towards his right arm and lean into it, looking up towards the ceiling with my legs bent, allowing Raffaele to turn me to the right. I perform a series of small, quick steps that drive the turn, while Raffaele uses this energy to counterbalance. He then stops me, and guides me back up using his right arm and into an upper body contraction. I counteract the contraction and take hold of his right arm in order to turn him towards me in an embrace. We then stand for few seconds in this position, as though we were one person (05:11). Raffaele suddenly pushes me away and walks diagonally backwards in order to distance himself from me. We stare at each other as the duet finishes, representing, in this final section, our failed attempt to fuse into one.

In this section of the *pas de deux*, Raffaele and I tried to embody the hardship and difficulties that Caribbean peoples endure in accepting their *hybrid* identities and heritages. What follows in the choreography is a direct denouncement of ethnical segregation and xenophobic attitudes towards the *Other* in general.

The dance continues with a highly symbolic run (05:18). Raffaele runs in circles around me, thus covering the entire stage, as I run on the spot to convey the idea of a continuous struggle against prejudices and dominator views, which still occur and are very much present in today's world. Shabine also runs against himself, his life and his dictated views; he runs away from the Leviathan creature from section X of the poem (142): the monster that tries to stop his dream to become a sailor and accomplish a voyage of self-discovery. At the same time, Raffaele, Shabine's *double* or *shadow*, feels liberated beyond the margins of the self. He runs in a symbolic circle that recalls Eisler's *chalice* and the idea of the circular web of life and human interrelations. In this highly evocative scene, the Italian audience hears the reading of Walcott's poem (05:30) for the first time in Italian, their native language, without any subtitles, which have, until now, been playing on the video backdrop. This was not an arbitrary decision but instead responds to the idea of making the audience pay particularly close attention to what is being said. The voice recounts Walcott's most significant verses and, in this sense, the translation serves as a powerful warning and a reminder of what is happening now in Italy with migrants

and other minority groups that are discriminated against for their skin colour, nationality, culture or religious beliefs.

I also used another strategy in editing the video to foreground this particularly powerful moment. During the performance at Teatro Verdi in Pordenone, there was another figure on stage with us, working and following us during the entire choreography. This was an external cameraman who provided *another* video or perspective on the live performance. In this sense, I wanted, once again, to foreground the importance of the *porosity* of perspectives. Indeed, through my multimodal work, I personally experienced *alternative* ways of reading Walcott's wor(l)d, in the guise of an artist and performer, choreographer, producer and, later, a spectator. This allowed me to approach the adaptation of the text in different ways throughout the choreography and, in particular, at the post-editing stage, in order to challenge opinions and destabilise homogenising interpretations of the work.

This symbolic switch in my multimodal work is clearly visible because the snippets of the recording live on stage differ from the rest of video. They are more uncertain and shakier because the camera was handheld and in motion.

This change of perspective is also a way to reflect upon, and delve further into, our own culture and provide a bridge between the West Indian reality and our own context, through a highly creative and destabilising outlook that breaks up normative standards and rules, even within the world of transmediality or multimodality.



Fig. 10: Raffaele Simoni and I performing the *pas de deux* of Section I.

There is another section of choreography in which the video switches to the live camera recording. This occurs in the middle of the first duet, when I am laid on the floor and begin to crawl backwards away from my new *identity* as a transformed man. In this way, I was able to signal that there was a second recording taking place at the live performance, even though here it is not as noticeable as in the final part of the video.

Returning to the choreography, as Raffaele is running in circles around me, the cameraman on stage first follows him on his self-liberatory path, and later me (05:40), in my desperate attempt to overcome my own story and representation as a performer or choreographer of my own work. In this particular section of the video, Raffaele and I have returned to our true identities as performers and producers. In the final section of the choreography, we stand on stage not so much as representatives of Shabine's character but rather as ourselves, as performers and interpreters of the contemporary world.

After our symbolic running, Raffaele and I stand downstage left where a waterproof cloth and three bowls have been prepared (05:53). Raffaele bends down towards the bowls containing different coloured tempera. I turn towards the left side of the stage in order to position myself diagonally, turning my back to the audience. Raffaele returns with a handful of *yellow* tempera. He then spreads the colour on my *white* shirt, to symbolise that I have been tainted by the power of *light* (06:15), a recurring concept in Walcott's works, as I demonstrated in Chapter 2. I do not move but rather acknowledge the fact that my allegedly white *superiority* or *privilege* no longer suffices.

Raffaele returns to the bowls on the floor as the audio recording of Walcott's verses begins again (06:20). This time though, the Italian and the English versions of Walcott's most emblematic lines are reproduced and fused together, so as to provide a sort of *double* or *echoing* voice. The fusion is symbolic because it represents an attempt to overcome linguistic differences in order to reflect on shared problems in the wor(l)d order, showing how we all experience similar issues and concerns in our daily lives. The narrative layering is now suspended. Raffaele and I have become Shabine's *double*. We have merged our identities with his destiny and we have blurred our representational divisions so as to epitomise *humanity* in its broadest sense.

Raffaele takes another colour from the bowl. This time he paints my shirt *red*. In the meantime, I have turned towards the back of the stage so that he can spread the tempera on the back of my shirt. In my interpretation, this colour symbolises the spiritual

flow or energy that sustains life and that allows different identities, opinions and perspectives to merge. In this sense, and in contrast to the yellow tempera, Raffaele spreads the colour across my entire body, as though purifying or transforming the soul. This is further emphasised by Raffaele bending his knees, as though performing a purifying ritual.

The last colour that Raffaele takes from the remaining bowl is *black*. This tempera represents the *stain* of humanity for perceiving reality according to divisive structures and dominator hierarchical orders. The colour also evokes black skin, for that is allegedly the *true* legacy of the Caribbean. From my perspective, it stands as a tribute to all those who have suffered discrimination and ethnical seclusion, such as the millions of Africans who were brought as captives to the Caribbean. To emphasise the significance of this last colour, Raffaele does not spread the tempera but rather places his hand on my chest, as though recalling the shameful practice of marking bodies, carried out by colonialists to the New World. I turn towards the audience, in order to show my reaction as he spreads this last colour, and close my eyes, symbolising a powerful and inescapable acceptance of my condition.

At the end of this meaningful, ritualistic scene, I turn towards Raffaele and we stare at each other for a few seconds, as though wanting to acknowledge our common, double destiny. At the end of the section, we lean in towards each other in a symbolic embrace (07:22), eventually reconciling our identities. The cameraman following us on stage uses a dolly-out shot, moving upstage. In the video, the stage performance fades out and the recorded video fades in, showing the exact same embrace only in the *Magredi* setting (07:30), in the middle of the stream of water that separated us at the beginning of the choreography. The power of partnership and communal understanding has prevailed. We, as the representatives of Shabine's *doubles*, have finally recognised each other, and we are ready to go on, not as "nobody" but as a "nation".



Fig. 11: A communal and symbolic partnership embrace concludes Raffaele Simoni and I's *duet* in Section I.

3.4.2 First parenthesis

The next section of my multimodal production presents, what I have termed, the *first parenthesis*. This represents a break in the flow of the text and artistic narration, and an indication of what will come next in the poem — and consequently in my production. The aim was that of altering the ordained sequence of episodes in the text, to propose an alternative reading of Walcott’s *The Schooner Flight*. In this regard, through this short section of the video, and together with a second parenthesis, I wanted to emphasise the power of the feminine, which is quite concealed in the text. The video re-evokes an episode that occurs later, in section IX of the poem, when Maria Conception and Shabine dream of their future and interpret Shabine’s nightmares with the help of Maria’s Book of Dreams.

The section opens in the pitch-black, without any visible images in the video (07:53) and the English recording of Walcott’s text begins: “She said: ‘I dreamt of whales and a storm,’ / but for that dream, the book had no answer” (136). The video then switches to the *Magredi* setting. Maria Conception is walking towards the camera and, in the background, a group of three female dancers, dressed in long red gowns, are gathered together, wafting their arms and hands upwards as though they were waving at something. They represent the three mythological Parcae, in the act of “stitching [Shabine’s] fate” (136).

The narration continues, evoking how Shabine dreams of these “three old women / featureless as silkworms” (136). A dolly shot then shows me in the guise of Shabine laying on the stony desert ground as if I were dreaming. My eyes are closed while my legs and arms are suspended in the air. The artistic allusion is that of recalling a floating body, as if I/Shabine were resting in an *undefined* space. Maria Conception does not look at me, but rather changes direction, walking around the three female dancers.



Fig. 12: I/Shabine is dreaming his fate in the first *parenthesis* of my multimodal work.

In an abrupt change of shot (08:16), I am standing in the middle of the circle, looking directly at Maria, who is now standing away from us in a static position that evokes classical sculpture. Her arms are stretched out in front of her and she is not looking at anyone, but rather stands transfixed. As the recorded voice explains that Shabine is trying to escape from the dream, “I start screaming and crying, my flesh / raining with sweat” (136), I change expression and try to escape from the embrace. Soon after, the

voice explains that Maria “ravag[e]d the book / for the dream meaning, and there was nothing” (136). At this precise moment, the shot switches back to the previous scene, in which I am lying on the ground, and Maria is not looking at me. The lover has no answer for Shabine’s anguish and torment.

However, Maria acknowledges Shabine’s power and control within the realm of poetry. In fact, the scene switches back again to the moment in which Maria was depicted as a statue (08:34). She does not look at me, but this time I am free from the hold of the three women, who, in turn, perform a short choreography in which they bestow meaning on my looking upwards, towards the sky, in a liberating moment of freedom.

The off-stage voice recalls that Shabine “[has] no weapon but poetry and / the lances of palms and the sea’s shining shield!” (138). As these lines are heard, the three dancers perform a delicate piece of choreography in which they bestow sacredness on the wor(l)d of poetry, and indirectly on that of art in general. They drop to the floor in a dream-like dimension because now it is my/Shabine’s turn to hold them within the confines of imagination, in a reunion that recognises the balance needed between gender roles, particularly in constructing a non-hierarchical and equalitarian society.

3.4.3 Section two

Section II of my dance-theatre adaptation (09:00) is dedicated to Shabine’s (imaginative) encounter with colonial ships, which corresponds to section V of Walcott’s poem, *Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage* (126). The video begins with a highly evocative scene set in the desert-like *Magredi*. A group of dance students are positioned in an organised and structured group, walking proudly towards the camera. They are wearing long, brown trousers and a simple leotard, with a long red shawl over their shoulders. As they walk, they perform a series of intricate movements with their arms, hands and wrists, in unison, with their gaze fixed ahead. They do not look at each other nor do they smile, so as to portray the *indifference* and cruelty of colonial subjugation and domination. In this first part of the video, they are not wearing masks, which are, conversely, the symbol of the colonial matrix of power for the rest of the choreography. This is because I wanted to show their *real* faces, before hiding their expressions behind

an indistinguishable ornamental mask⁴⁴¹. The idea for the masks, which appear right after this introductory image or stance (09:24), came from the need to provide a shift in perspective for the students involved in the project. The group was able to think and embody different situations, roles and views, firstly by performing the inflexible and sharp movements of the colonisers, and secondly by dropping the masks in order to freely express the anguish and fears of slaves and subjugated individuals, who were brought against their will to the Caribbean. This continuous shift in perspective allowed the performers to experience what Viktor Shklovsky defines as *estrangement*⁴⁴², or the politics of estrangement⁴⁴³, that is to say, the feeling of seeing things as though for the first time, or in a way that is different from everyday life, as though standing before a new or *unknown* reality. This awareness allowed the performers to feel *physical* sensations they could not account for. In this way, the students were able to discover the shameful policies and constraints of the colonial matrix of power.

Another concept that I wanted to convey through the use of masks was the recovery of the sacredness of these traditional objects for enslaved African cultures in the Caribbean. In line with this perspective, I agree with Harris when he argues that, in today's Western societies, these particular masks have been devalued of their powerful meaning:

African masks are little more than ideological weaponry, now that they have been endorsed as phenomena of genius in the museums of the West. They perform with photographic glosses in American and other Western magazine to declare 'black is beautiful'⁴⁴⁴.

⁴⁴¹ The masks were made by Marco Caudera, our team costume designer. Marco decided to work with second-hand and recycled materials so as to add an additional ecological dimension to the production. He used real sailors' ropes to design a cylindrical hat to which he applied fringes made from second-hand cloth. Caudera decided to work with simple materials and fabrics, as can be seen from the dancers' outfits. Only Maria Conception's wedding dress was borrowed from a colleague, who used the outfit for a different production based on the power of the feminine.

⁴⁴² In an interesting art project titled *Altre Stories - Other Stories*, Professor Sergia Adamo brought together different art forms, from painting to video art and performances, dealing with the themes of origins, departure and migration. In a later publication that reflected upon the project and the idea of narrative alternatives, Adamo explains that artists in general rely on Viktor Shklovsky's *estrangement* approach, which is "a fundamental artistic process that allows things to be seen for the first time". Adamo & Zanfabro (2019), *Altre Storie – Other Stories: Parole e Immagini per Raccontare le Migrazioni del Presente*, pp. 34 [my translation].

⁴⁴³ To see how Shklovsky's *estrangement* influenced the world of politics and art during his lifetime, see: Vatulescu (2006), *The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky's Device through Literary and Policing Practices*, *Poetics Today*, 27, 1: 35-66.

⁴⁴⁴ Harris (1983), *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*, pp. 124.

The use of masks in my choreography is a *decolonial* attempt to re-envision and re-establish traditional and folkloric means as artistic instruments of liberation from the colonial matrix of power. I also tried to retrieve the original, sacred meaning of African masks, to emphasise their ancestral or spiritual strength.

Based on this idea of swapping and changing roles, in my multimodal adaptation the dancers do not wear masks when performing the role of the slaves or colonial subjects but, on the contrary, when performing as the colonisers and Western European dominators and explorers in general. My intent was to disorient the spectators' perception and understanding, so as to provide my own representation of the Caribbean with all of its puzzling, almost schizophrenic, facets.

During the performance on stage (09:26), the masked performers move, one after the other, in a precise, repetitive and almost mechanical pattern. They lift one leg and drop to the floor in a diagonal that alludes to a univocal direction, which is the way towards the West and, therefore, the New World. This repetitive sequence bestows a sense of rigid fluidity because, despite the steps being precise and accurately executed, the dancers create a sort of undulation which recalls the ebb and flow of the sea. At the same time, the video projected as the backdrop to the performance shows the same arm movements from the beginning of the section, only with the performers now wearing masks. In short, this piece of choreography tries to reproduce an inflexible repetition of defined movements to evoke the inescapable power of the modernity/coloniality dynamics of domination.

Once on the floor, they dance together as a group again, performing a series of frenetic and convoluted gestures moving them from one direction to another, before finishing in a supine position on the floor. They then perform the same sequence in a canon, which ends with them all standing in a *parallel* position, signalling a break that is emblematic of the stance of the great admirals, with their hands clasped one inside the other. The idea was to allude to the inevitable conquest of land and territories far away from home, as though the performers were now directly embodying the successful European enterprises in the West Indies (09:52).

This scene is followed by a change of location in the video, to show the dancers at their dance school, as they replicate the same gestures with their arms, elbows and hands as in the previous section. The recorded voice now recounts section V of the poem,

Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage. It is only at this moment that we are able to identify the disguised performers as colonisers. Their arm and hand movements match “the fog swirl and swell into sails, so close / that I saw it was sails” (126). The intertextual reference is here clear: the performers’ gestures are the direct embodiment of the wind that allows the ships to materialise in front of Shabine and his fellow sailors. In addition, the masks prevent us from seeing their facial expressions. This uncanny and rather disquieting erasure allowed me to translate Walcott’s oxymoron: “it was horrors, but it was beautiful” (126).

As we hear the “great admirals” (126) of Europe being described in the poem, the video returns to the stage to show the dancers as colonisers once again. At this moment, the choreography returns to the frantic, agitated tone seen previously, as the dancers try to convey the prevailing charge of “hoarse orders / they gave those Shabines” (126). At the end of the dance, the performers walk towards the back of the stage to pick up the red shawl seen at the beginning of the video. This section of the choreography concludes with the dancers returning to the position first seen at the beginning of the section, standing authoritatively in a rigid formation (10:58).



Fig. 13: Dancers embodying the modernity/coloniality matrix of power.

The video continues showing me standing in the distance, in the guise of Shabine in the *Magredi* (11:04). In front of me, five dancers improvise to counterbalance the frigidity and apparent coldness of the previous section of choreography they performed. This represents how the modernity/coloniality matrix of power may seem to function calmly and methodically but, in reality, hides the torments and agonies of human souls, because it is unnatural for human beings to dominate and control one another.

The following scene shows the same five dancers and me reunited (11:25). I am now standing in the foreground, holding hands with the other performers as they try to pull me back towards them. I try escaping from their grip, arching my back and moving my arms, in vain. They continue pulling my arms backwards, as wanting to take full control of me. In the background, the three Parcae from the first *parenthesis* have reappeared. They remind the spectators of my/Shabine's destiny. Indeed, this whole section provides clarification as to Maria Conception and Shabine's dream. The protagonist of the poem, who stands as a representative of the Caribbean people, is trapped in the coloniser's way of thinking. There is no way to escape.

A glimmer of hope follows in the video as the unjust and painful manifestation of modernity/coloniality subjugation and oppression is replaced by an image of the female dancers without masks (11:37). They are positioned in a freer, unaligned formation, with one performer sat on the stony riverbed and, just behind her, another kneeling, with two more detached from the rest of the group at the very front. The remaining four are positioned in a semi-circle, to represent the stern of a ship. They are all facing the same direction, as though wanting to escape all together. They each move independently, following their arm movements with their gaze, each according to her own rhythm and pace. Indeed, they seem to be surprised at their own gestures and corporeal strength, as though seeing their own bodies for the first time. Their movements are now uncoordinated and the performers detached from one another, and the frenetic arm and hand gestures have been replaced by softer, more harmonious bending and flowing movements using their elbows. This represents their reappropriation of their powerful, sacred bodies. The dancers are now acknowledging that they have been tricked by the colonial matrix of power, because one of the strategies of the Western European dominator approach relies precisely on limiting corporeal and physical freedom. I will later point out how African

slaves and other captives tried to overcome these constraints through the power of sacred dances, such as limbo, especially during their crossing of the Atlantic Sea. Nevertheless, this is a first attempt towards unchaining Western European structures of power, and the first visible sign of what will happen later in the performance.

The video then returns to the stage production (11:50). The dancers have now switched back to their role as Western dominator masters. They are wearing masks and are positioned upstage in the right corner. The tone of the music by Loscil – which, until now, has produced rather simple and mystical melodies⁴⁴⁵ – changes to include single, rhythmical beats.

On the first beat, one of the dancers on stage runs through the group along the diagonal, with intent. On the following beats, the others do the same, one after the other, and sometimes in unison, in an incessant flow of steps towards downstage right. The dancers hold their hands clasped together in a sort of *praying* position that is a direct reminder of modernity/coloniality approaches to power, i.e. through physical limitation and domination, but also through the doctrine of the church. As the dancers walk on stage, which emblematically becomes the territory of conquest for the (disguised) colonisers, the lights start dimming in order to blur the performers' bodies. Simultaneously, the recorded English voice can be heard again, reciting the closing part of section I of Walcott's poem. As I stated at the beginning of the textual analysis, I have transposed this section of *The Schooner Flight* to a performative action scene, so as to end part II of the choreography on a positive note.

The voiceover asks the spectators if they “ever look up from some lonely beach / and see a far schooner” (114). My aim here was to recall the image of the ship recreated previously by the free, unmasked dancers in the *Magredi*, only after acknowledging the secret, unknown powers of their highly symbolic, corporeal representations.

Once the dancers reach downstage right, they start positioning themselves in an intricate and complex body-structure that reminds us of a schooner or boat, with one of the performers stepping on the shoulders of two other companions to represent the ship's mast. The dancers' embodiments match Shabine's praise for his “common language”

⁴⁴⁵ While the first *parenthesis* or pause in the choreography is soundless, this second section presents another soundtrack from Loscil's *Endless Fall*. The melody of this track is plain, simple and obsessively repetitive. Walcott's text in section V flows into the labyrinths of Shabine's imagination, to portray the encounter with his ancestors and their white colonial masters. The intent was to reproduce a rather mystical and blurred ambience in the music, too.

(114), which he formed after “soak[ing phrases] in salt” and “draw[ing] and knot[ting] every line as tight / as ropes in this rigging” (114).

The importance of this closing part of section II in the choreography is further emphasised as the Italian version of the poem is played (12:33). The dancers dismantle the schooner structure and position themselves in such a way as to evoke the moment they first acknowledged their individual bodies, reperforming the same gestures as if they were part of a cyclical journey of reoccurrences. As the Italian voiceover continues reciting the passage, the lights on stage fade out and the video returns to the bright plains of the *Magredi* (12:45). Here, the same dancers that built the colonial ships are standing in a *repetitive* schooner structure, without their masks. In the open air of the plain, their faces look serene and at peace with themselves and the world that surrounds them. A faint, gentle breeze ruffles their red shawls as the voice recites Shabine’s Creole “language [...] that go be the wind” (114).

The message here is clear: despite the horrors of colonialism and historical subjugation, the Antillean peoples can rely on their hidden talents and abilities, such as constructing another language. Their speech does not follow the rules and constraints of Western European syntax or grammar, but rather follows the *unpredictable*, dynamic flows of the Caribbean. The same kind of freedom is expressed in the choreography, with the dancers first performing rigid, confined and highly standardised movements and later, after having abandoned themselves to the power of imagination and improvisation, embracing the wor(l)d of dance, which is one of the approaches to challenging traditional ballet technique.

The second section of my multimodal adaptation closes with a symbolic return to the live performance (13:07). The aim of this final return to the stage is to show how the performers are moving on stage, despite wearing masks, in the same liberating way as in the previous scene. The lights then dim and the stage fades out in a serene and quiet atmosphere. Shabine’s spiralling journey into the labyrinths of the self has now come to an end. The protagonist can finally prepare to encounter his own ancestor but, before that, he needs to take leave from his female counterpart, the imaginative and yet sacred figure of Maria Conception.

3.4.4 Second parenthesis

The second parenthesis or performance break in my multimodal work is the shortest section of the entire production (13:33). Chiara Bettini, in the guise of Maria Conception, and I/Shabine are standing together on the *Magredi* plains. We are holding each other in a symbolic embrace, epitomising the power of the sacred union between humanity and lovers. The English voiceover recites parts of section VII of Walcott's text, which corresponds to Shabine/Walcott's anchoring and imminent departure from Castries, St. Lucia's capital.

The choreography is simple and consists of one single movement. I have my arm around Maria Conception supporting her back as she leans away, as if wanting to slip away from me. Maria, or rather Chiara, bends her knees and slowly lowers herself to the ground, disappearing into the folds of her wedding dress.

The idea was to convey Shabine/Walcott's departure from his lover and his birth island, and also reference – and embody – the poem's last verse: "We here for one night. Tomorrow, the Flight will be gone" (130). This line articulates our almost invisible (note the reference to the night), fragile and ephemeral existence as humans, which immediately relates to the image of departure.

Through this brief passage I also wanted to convey the unattainable framing of the Caribbean reality and people. This is a setting that escapes and obliterates all epistemological confines and definitions. It is an archipelagic region open to different possibilities, and it is made up of scattered entities and highly heterogeneous communities that clash, intermingle and mix in a relentless flux of encounters.

Finally, Maria Conception's wedding dress is a clear artistic reference to Pina Bausch's dress code during most of her productions. Bausch is known and remembered for introducing long cloth and gowns that were used to amplify movements and gestures. In this respect, I believe that Bausch worked on the power of the feminine *openness* towards the world, the Other and the non-formed matter⁴⁴⁶. Subconsciously, Bausch evokes the archetypal representations of the Goddess, the female spiritual force that generates life and represents the womb of humanity. It is not by chance that Bausch

⁴⁴⁶ On Pina Bausch's work, please see: Climenhaga (ed. 2013), *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*.

worked extensively with the elements of nature and the environment such as earth, water and wind⁴⁴⁷. She believed in the spiritual vitality of Mother Earth. In her choreography, her dancers were invited to interact with outdoor spaces such as rivers, forests and deserts, as well as urban metropolises. Bausch, to the same extent as other pioneering European choreographers of the past centuries, took the performance (of life) beyond the enclosed space of the traditional stage. Her intent was to reconnect humanity and corporeal beings with the surrounding environment, for she understood that all of us are interconnected and part of a single, unified cosmos.

3.4.5 Section three

Section III of my multimodal dance-theatre adaptation of *The Schooner Flight* is the most complex and elaborate part of the production. The section is characterised by direct intertextual references to Walcott's texts but also *allusions* to or indirect embodiments of unexpressed or silenced voices in the poem, in particular those of the slaves and captives who were brought to the Caribbean below the deck of colonial ships⁴⁴⁸.

The section is divided into two parts. In the first (14:07), the audience is taken back to the stage setting, precisely to the moment where I am embracing my *double*, Raffaele, in the guise of Shabine. This return to the beginning of the poem (and the dance) is not arbitrary, but instead aims to emphasise the concept of a cyclical journey. In the text, after departing from his birth island, St. Lucia, Shabine circumnavigates the Antillean archipelago. He faces perils and adventures, together with his fellow companions, amongst whom there is Vince, who has now become Shabine's best friend. They face death, not only because of a devastating storm, but also because of the

⁴⁴⁷ For a comprehensive overview of Pina Bausch's work and her Tanztheater, please see Wim Wenders' documentary *Pina* (2009), which comprises scenes from her most famous productions, and also interviews with Bausch's interpreters and dancers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RnXGMGPPj8> (consulted on 27/09/2020).

⁴⁴⁸ In *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*, Emery argues that "the slave importation to the New World in the seventeenth century was not the first incidence of enslavement in Africa. Africans had been enslaved by Europeans before the sailing of Columbus. The Portuguese, in fact, had begun the African slave trade in 1441 as an element of national commercial expansion. Over the next century the slave trade grew from a mere trickle until a gigantic flood of black bodies poured out of Africa. As early as 1518, slaves were being imported to the West Indies, particularly to the island of Hispaniola (Haiti). By 1540 ten thousand Negroes a year were being imported, and, according to one estimate, by the end of the sixteenth century there were already nine hundred thousand black slaves in the West Indies". Emery (1972), *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*, pp. 1-2.

appearance of the “Leviathan” (142), a sea monster which epitomises Shabine’s torments and insurmountable obstacles through life. The Flight’s crew is saved by a Christ-like black captain. Towards the end of the poem Shabine reflects on his past, destiny and future. The reader does not know whether in the end he returns home or opts for the open sea. What is certain is that Shabine comes back to his writings because he needs to put down in words what he has experienced. Through this cathartic and highly spiritual experience, he acknowledges how humanity is insignificant compared to the powers and mysteries of the cosmos. He then understands that he wants to live his life without constraints and rules. Shabine is well aware of what happened in the Caribbean during colonial domination, especially to his forefathers and ancestors. Nevertheless, he feels it is time to swap things around and start living a new life, for himself and – indirectly – for his people.

Shabine takes leave from his readers through an emblematic line: “Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea” (148). The ending of the poem remains open. By recalling the sea, Walcott prompts his readers to carry on with their lives as though they were an inexorable and eternal flux of happenings, victories and defeats. Walcott knows that we cannot forget what happened in the past and, in this sense, I read “the depths of the sea” as a clear statement for future generations. Humanity cannot erase or forget what has occurred in history. At the same time, it cannot remain stuck or completely subjugated by its force, because the true meaning of life resides in redemption and regeneration, continuously searching for new paths, possibilities, challenges and experiences. Walcott believes in the *unpredictability* of life and in the imaginative and creative power of human beings, which one day – perhaps – will be able to finally put aside their divisions and thirst for power to embrace the holy and spiritual energy of *Tout-Monde*, the Wor(1)d.

In light of this textual analysis, my choreography could not end without referring to Walcott’s demons and preoccupations. The first part of this third section then focuses on one of Walcott’s most debated poetic standpoints: the power of colonial history and the Western European dominator paradigm.

As I explained in Chapter 1 (see Chapter 1, pp. 91), Walcott advocates *amnesia*, specifically forgetting the past as ordained by the modernity/coloniality matrix of power. He believes that only by remapping the world order and abandoning what has happened in history can people finally rejoice in the bliss of their encounters and, more importantly,

move on with their futures. Nevertheless, it is true that throughout his poems and plays, Walcott does sometimes refer to history. This is the case with *The Schooner Flight*. Indeed, as I pointed out when I analysed the text, in section III, Shabine meets a personified History who does not recognise him, or better, avoids him completely and uses one of the strongest strategies of the colonial-dominator enterprise i.e. erasure, or worse, *indifference*.

In this sense, I personally felt the urge to highlight the theme of indifference before ending my production. I think that modern society is dangerously driven by a collective, unsympathetic lack of concern for what is happening around us. We are too busy with our hectic routines and we believe that what surrounds us – the issue of migrants, climate change and so on – have nothing to do with us and are not caused by our own behaviour and spoilt way of living.

In this sense, my choreography tries to convey a frustrating and alienating sense of indifference. After releasing myself from Raffaele's – my double's – embrace, I walk towards the centre of the stage. Behind me, the group of the dancers appear, also walking slowly towards the centre of the stage. They are not fully visible because they represent *humanity* at large. In the video projected in the background, the dancers who portrayed the colonial ships by wearing masks reappear. They walk towards the camera and provide a contrast with what is happening on stage.

When the English voiceover starts explaining that even black people do not recognise Shabine for the colour of his skin (for he is a *mulatto* or Creole), I start walking towards the dancers. Then, on the word "History", everyone on stage freezes and the group all turn their heads towards me and the audience can see them clearly. They are dressed in a simple grey polo shirt and long black leggings. They are barefoot and their faces are visible. They are not wearing masks, making them immediately different to those who are represented in the background (14:25).



Fig. 14: History does not recognise Shabine and his divided *identity*.

The production continues off stage with the video recorded at the local dance school (14:30). This shift in perspective corresponds to Shabine’s meeting with History. As the audience hears how Shabine has never been recognised or accepted as a “grandson” (122) by his colonial forefathers, there is a close-up on the performers’ faces. First, it foregrounds my/Shabine’s face, which looks disoriented and scared in the midst of a series of harsh black masks, intentionally avoiding my/his gaze. Second, the camera moves to show the unwavering faces of those who are behind the masks. To achieve this, costume designer Marco Caudera created a disguise which would cover up the performers’ eyes but not their facial expressions.

Towards the end of the section, the voiceover explains how the colonial matrix of power left only unfair and unjust “words” (122), which must have sounded more like orders and commands to African captives and slaves. In the guise of Shabine, I am now no longer mesmerised by the rhetoric of the colonial matrix of power and so I decide to depart, moving outside the circle, leaving the other performers alone in their embodied, repetitive movements, representative of their unfair, dominator discourses. My departure is also foregrounded by the utterance of the last emblematic line: “I no longer believed in

the revolution” (122). Shabine is now free to think by himself, and act accordingly, in a world he wants to rewrite and rediscover through a new self-awareness.

This last section of my choreography represents this idea of rewriting. I am responding to the Western European and Northern Atlantic dominator perspective and also, in a way, to Walcott’s text itself.

After I have walked out of the *colonial* circle, the production returns to the stage (15:10). The distance between these two closing sections of choreography is foregrounded not only by this change of perspective, but also by the appearance of a new musical track⁴⁴⁹.

The last section of my choreography is a tribute to all those who suffered from the logic of the colonial enterprise. In particular, I give *voice* through dance, movement and gestures to those *unheard* voices that were brought as captives to the Caribbean, especially from Africa. In this sense, the music also suggests a sort of lamentation, or voiceless recalling of those who suffered, and perished, in the Middle Passage towards the New World⁴⁵⁰.

The choreography is my own *rewriting* of Caribbean history, or its *historyless* past. It is a way of shedding light on the backwash of oblivion. It is a sacred dance which the spectators may interpret as a renewing flux of spiralling *bodies* that reconnect to the power of life. It is a dignifying chorus movement that evokes the waves of the sea, because it is only by retracing untold histories and legacies that humanity can avoid the injustices of what it has produced and encouraged.

The English voiceover recalls how Shabine tried to call for his ancestors, hoping to see them. Nobody answered because the dehumanisation had already happened, and the slaves had become objects for the shameful dominator system. Therefore, Shabine

⁴⁴⁹ For this last part of my multimodal production, I decided to opt for a switch of music, so as to choreograph to a more melodic and listenable track. I chose Eternal Eclipse’s *Dawn of Faith*, which, already in its title, epitomises the need for change and hope. For more information on the band, please see: <http://www.eternal-eclipse.com> (consulted on 28/09/2020).

⁴⁵⁰ In *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*, Emery recalls that “most students of slaving know [...] that heads were shaved and all clothing removed, for the sake of health, before sailing. They are also aware of the tremendous death rate from disease, filth, and suicide; the shackling of the men while the women roamed free at the mercy of the sailors; the small device used to pry open the mouths of slaves who refused to eat; the screaming and howling in the airless holds; the savage beatings administered to those who attempted suicide by jumping over the railings; and the sharks which followed each slave ship, waiting for its human cargo”. Emery (1972), *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*, pp. 5.

stops to contemplate how he will ever know “who is grandfather is, much less his name” (128).

While the voiceover recites these moving and highly evocative lines, the dancers start walking towards the audience, dividing themselves into two groups so as to convey the brutality of the colonial traders that separated family members and communities or tribes as soon as the slaves reached the ships, to make them feel disoriented and abandoned, so that they would rely only on their new masters.

The choreography differs from the duet in the first section, because when a *corps de ballet* performs together in unison, the audience changes perspective, focusing on the linearity or geometry of the movements. In this sense, the spectators are made to feel as though they are on board a colonial ship.

The movements and corporeal imagery in this section evoke the sketches I found in *Black Dance in the United States* by Emery (1972), which show the positions that the colonial masters obliged their captives to assume while traversing the Middle Passage⁴⁵¹. The dance contains incessant references to moments of contraction and release, as the dancers use their upper bodies to recreate these poses. At the beginning, the choreography is quite free, including lots of jumps and turns, to end in a static, parallel position of *constraint*. The choreography is performed first by the group on the right and then by the group on the left. The groups are divided along an imaginary line that separates the stage into two equal parts. The second group adds some short passages in pairs to the jumps and turns, mainly on the ground, to convey the frustrations of the slaves at being lined up one after the other in a restricted space (15:53).

After this initial division, the dancers on the left remain standing, while those on the right use the floor. Both groups end their routine in a *grand-plié à la seconde*, gazing up towards the ceiling. This is an important moment, as the voiceover returns to recite Shabine thinking about the meaning of life. In the narrative, after the symbolic storm, Shabine is left alone, in his ship cabin, writing poems. He thinks about the infinite number of “islands” (146) the Caribbean is composed of. In this sense, he compares his islands to stars, or precisely “meteors” (146) that are shaking. The intertextual reference is

⁴⁵¹ In particular, see the first chapter: “The slave trade”, pp. 1-12. Emery (1972), *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*.

embodied through the dancers' bending into a *plié*, with their upper bodies swaying as though wanting to escape from the constraints of the colonial ship decks (16:04).

The voiceover continues, recounting how the stars are like “falling fruit around the Schooner Flight” (146) and some of the dancers start dropping down to the floor in a dynamic flux of intertwined movements, recreating the image of the fruit falling. Meanwhile, a small group remains bound in pairs, as a reminder that they represent the captives on the colonial ships, with one lying on the floor, in a foetal-like position, holding onto the other's ankles. The other then cannot move or can only convey, through her upper body, a state of restriction or lack of freedom.

After these highly iconic passages, the voiceover explains that, in any case, “things must fall, and so it always was” (146), meaning that the eternal lifecycle cannot be stopped. In this passage, Shabine re-evokes the balancing power of two complementary planets in the universe, namely “on one hand Venus, on the other and Mars” (146), which are usually identified as the symbols of love and anger or war and peace. This passage is adapted in the choreography by the dancers splitting into two groups (16:15). This time, though, some stand at the edge of the stage, while the others are in the middle. In this section of the production, the geometry of the choreography re-evokes an *all-embracing* structure, just as if both groups represented a unique spiritual force: the fusion of love/anger or war/peace. This intricate layering of meaning is emphasised by the continuous repetition of similar movements, first by the inner group and then by its outer alter-ego or double.

In the narration, Shabine reveals how “earth is one / island in archipelagoes of stars” (146). In this way, the protagonist is reminding us how humans and their actions are insignificant and ephemeral when compared to the vastness and infinitude of the universe, and how we should all stop arguing or making war in order to pay attention to the mysteries and beauty of life.

The singularity and power of Mother Earth is emphasised in the choreography with a short solo. One dancer detaches from the group at the left of the stage and raises her left arm, depicting her unstable fragility and unstoppable falling into the labyrinth of the cosmos (16:26). The other dancers to her left keep on dancing and embodying gestures connected to the precariousness of human life.

Shabine then recounts that his “first friend was the sea. Now is [his] last” (148). This passage is conveyed through a triple structure in the choreography. On the left side of the stage, the solo performer keeps moving and releasing energy downwards, representing earth as a whole, with its rises and falls. Suddenly, two dancers detach from the main group to perform the duet from the beginning of the piece. They re-embody the constraints slaves had to endure in the claustrophobic spaces on board the colonial ships, thus signalling how the sea keeps track of the colonial atrocities but also of their inevitable passing as they are forgotten. The dancers in the middle of the stage are static, to represent the rise and fall of the tide. They bend their knees into a *grand-plié* in parallel, with their arms bent towards the audience as though calling to them. Here I wanted to convey how we all consider the *sea* as our true custodian, because it is the renewing and restless energy of our transitory and yet communal existences.

After this passage, all the dancers vacate the stage, and only one solo performer remains centre stage. She represents Shabine, who, through the voiceover, recounts that he will stop talking to concentrate on his work and poetry. The choreography becomes briefly quite chaotic just as if it represented the different spaces and stage of life, from work to death, from daily life to repetitive failures and accomplishments.

Slowly, all of the dancers join Shabine on stage (17:00), positioning themselves in an emblematic and spiritual circle. The voiceover recounts that Shabine tries to forget “what happiness was, / and when that don’t work, [he] stud[ies] the stars” (148). Again, Shabine emphasises how he needs to reconnect with his ancestors not only by remembering them – which is a process of physical and mental suffering – but also, and more importantly, by recognising and talking about them. He imagines that, in the form of ghostly figures, they are now wandering in the peaceful and unattainable immensity of the universe, in a dimension in which we are all equal despite our differences and legacies. This highly spiritual message is conveyed through sharp movements that reconnect with the floor. The dancers throw their arms up towards the ceiling and, at the same time, bend their knees, fall and move dynamically around the stage floor. They also jump high with both arms stretched upwards, as though wanting to escape from something or someone. Finally, through a series of other gestures and more intimate and individual movements (such as embracing their own bodies) they portray their ultimate self-awareness of their inescapable condition.

Slowly, all the dancers rise up and walk towards the centre of the stage (17:18). They know that the last line of the poem is coming: “Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea” (148). They are ready to express – through highly structured choreography and mirrored sequences – the embodied voices (or silences) of those who were not allowed to speak or even exist, of the African slaves or captives, or indeed of anyone who suffered from the unjust policies of the colonial matrix of power.

The closing section of the choreography is performed in unison. The dancers re- evoke all the steps they have performed so far but in a coherent, coalescing and unifying way. There is no splitting into smaller groups because they all represent the ultimate embodiment of a similar fate: unfortunately, they will all become subjects of the colonial enterprise. Through the choreography, I try to suggest a progressive annihilation of the freer movements towards more structured, heavy, corporeal submissions. While the first part of the choreography is characterised by *rond de jambes, développés en l’air*⁴⁵², turning heads in search of an escape, and jumps towards the ceiling, the section ends on the floor (17:28). The dancers kneel before the power of colonial submission. In the following part, however, they rise up, regaining their dignity, and lift their left knees, facing the left side of the stage. In this attempted escape towards freedom, the dancers turn their heads towards the audience (17:35), suggesting how we are all involved in what happened, and also how we can never turn a blind eye and avoid the truth of history.

This symbolic gaze towards the audience is followed by a change of perspective in the production. The viewer is transported again, for the last time, back to the *Magredi*, where Raffaele and I stand apart from each other as Shabine’s doubles (17:40). The scene re-evokes the beginning of the choreography, when Raffaele and I were performing separated by flowing water. This short flashback is followed by a section in which we recall the choreographic fusion which saw Raffaele and I merge into one, unifying body, through intertwined movements and gestures. It is also a short and significant reminder of the end of the first *parenthesis* in which I, in the guise of Shabine, stand looking up towards the sky while, at my feet, the colonial ships (embodied by the masked dancers) seem to be defeated (17:55).

⁴⁵² *Développé* means “to develop, or ‘developing movement’. A Développé is a movement where the dancer’s working leg is drawn up to the knee of the supporting leg and extended to an open position”. It can be performed also *en l’air*, meaning in the air. <https://balletHub.com/ballet-term/developpe/> (consulted on 25/10/2020).

This sequence of scenes retraces Shabine's cyclical journey, first reminding us how he struggled to understand himself in the beginning of the poem (which is why Raffaele and I are separated); second, how he accepted his *divided* and highly creative identity, and thus acknowledged his hybridity; and, third, how he slowly understood the need to come to terms with his ancestors and their silenced past.

Towards the end of the track, the filming returns to the stage (17:58). In the video displayed in the background, Raffaele and I can be seen finally fusing into each other. On stage, the dancers are running in a symbolic and liberating circle, which resembles Raffaele and I running at the end of our duet⁴⁵³. Suddenly, I, in the guise of Shabine, appear in the middle of the performers and slowly we reach the back of the stage in an almost militaristic formation, again recalling the scene in which the masked dancers embodied the colonial ships.

Towards the very end of the music, I step out of the formation, and start walking towards the audience. The dancers part, to let me out of their fixed pose. I then turn towards them, as though wanting to contemplate their faces, now finally visible and recognisable. I stare at them, with my back to the audience, as they look back at me and the audience. They stand still and in silence, as if to remind us all how we cannot forget about them and their stories.

⁴⁵³ Another reference that prompted me to choreograph the finale of my dance-theatre production in this way – is again Emery's study of black dance, specifically when she re-evokes what happened on slave ships: "The Africans danced in a ring; they danced in their shackles; they jumped up and rattled their chains; they writhed and twisted in 'disgusting and indecent attitudes'. This they did to the accompaniment of a drum – sometimes a broken drum or kettle and sometimes even a relief pot. The beat of the drum followed the captives across the Atlantic to their home in the New World". Emery (1972), *Black Dance in the United States: From 1619 to 1970*, pp. 12.



Fig. 15: Shabine and his ancestors are finally reunited, and their stories will be forever remembered.

The stage lights start fading out, while the dancers and I hold this symbolic pose, which may be interpreted as a dialogue in partnership with one another or a powerful encounter between I/Shabine and his forbears and their now known identities.

Concluding remarks

Reading, examining and interacting with Derek Walcott's work means undertaking a bewildering and puzzling voyage at the heart of Antillean sensibility and way of living and imagining. Walcott is not only a poet, playwright and artist of the Caribbean wor(l)d, he is a seer and prophet of today's globalised reality, with all of its paradoxes and ambiguities. Through his literary works, Walcott has given voice and dignity to his Caribbean compatriots, including the lesser-known and misinterpreted island-territories scattered in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. These places have lived through a tough history, including the genocide of indigenous and aboriginal peoples, and the establishment of shameful *modernity/coloniality* systems of power. Walcott, like many of the poets, writers, playwrights, academics, scientists, and artists of the New World, portrays the *humility* of the Antillean peoples, in imagining and hoping for a better future, in partnership, and a communal wor(l)d of opportunities. This is the great lesson in Derek Walcott's endeavour: we are not here in this world to wage war on one another and on life, driven by the forces of violence or revenge. We need to rediscover the power of *partnership* and dialogue, and gather together in the celebration of the bounty of life, which is made up primarily of beauty and art, loving encounters with and understanding of the *Other*, accepting our similarities as we embrace our ethnical, socio-cultural and psychological *differences*.

By following a non-Western-European and non-Northern-Atlantic theoretical framework, I was able to read Walcott's texts through a different lens, from a less codified and rigidly canonical perspective, which oriented my analysis beyond the constraints of Western taxonomies, stereotypes and categorisations.

Walcott's work is the outcome of a *hybrid* and mostly imaginative spiral of heterogenous traditions, cultural backgrounds and mixed communities. Walcott's production resembles an artisan's laboratory. He is a craftsman of the words, rhythms, music, customs and dances belonging to a specific region: the highly diverse Creole archipelago of the Antilles.

In this sense, the *decolonial approach* allowed me to experience unexplored shades, colours and textures of this Caribbean author and artist, as Walcott is not only a poet – as most Western European anthologies or critics define him – but also the true

painter-writer of the Caribbean, and indeed one of its most prominent interpreters and spokesmen. Walcott is a writer *of the edge* and *at the edge*, because he escapes any kind of limiting definitions or designations. The decolonial option allowed me to plunge into his work from different angles, from his witty re-writing of Western European canonical textual models, to the reshaping of its constructed forms and structures, from studying his paintings and songs, to his rhythmical and polished theatrical verses and precise rhymes.

However, in applying the premises of the decolonial approach, I found some flaws and inconsistencies which have not been addressed. In considering the regions where the scholars and critics of the decolonial option come from, and even the examples of application taken by theorists as samples of investigation (see, for instance, the opening of *alternative* museums in the Middle East, as argued in Chapter 1, pp. 44), despite the decolonial option exhorting new approaches and views, the truth shows that inequalities are still present in these contexts. It is true that the decolonial option tries to rebalance and find solutions to these issues by looking, in particular, at one side of the story i.e. the advancements that these societies have made in recent years but, even on this side of the world, there are problems that remain unresolved. Women and men alike continue to be discriminated against for their gender, social class, access to education, civil rights or human liberties. Therefore, while the decolonial option represents *another* way of looking at the world in unexpected terms, it is still a work in progress, developing options that edge towards a change of perspective but that cannot change the world order or its dominant neo-colonial system of power overnight.

One of the most positive and proactive innovations of the decolonial framework is the opening up towards other types of expression, beyond the written word. In this sense, the approach is revolutionary because it embraces the power of *un-written* systems of expression and communication, and it brings to the fore the uncontested relevance of other means which are easily erasable such as the dynamic and creative strength of dance, song, chants, the folkloric experience and traditions from the Caribbean.

It is also true that, thanks to the premise of the decolonial option, I was able to focus on *praxis* and therefore enter into a new and challenging dialogue with Walcott's word, through the art of ballet and contemporary dance-theatre in particular. This represents *an-Other* way of interacting with Walcott's works and literature in general. In

this sense, my choreography and multimedia production should be *read* as a means to suggest new interactions and transdisciplinary fusions within academic research.

I strongly believe that the Humanities need to be more open towards experimentations and investigations with new digital media, and also with the world of the arts and new communication technologies in general. It is important to build up and think about new possibilities and encounters so as to be able to fully decipher the intricate, *hybrid* relations of today's complex networks and world systems. In this sense, new technologies and multimedia or multimodal approaches can enhance understanding and give new meaning to the *porosity* and permeability of reality, breaking down frontiers between disciplines, approaches and art forms.

This approach is also a way to respond to the opposing tendency towards building new walls and frontiers between nations, peoples, communities and cultures. We need to embrace and not fear the *uncertainty* of a more mobile and blurred reality. We need to acknowledge and respect differences between cultures, religions and traditions. It is only by opening up towards *Other* views that we are able to get to know ourselves better and relate to Others, or even collaborate and work together to build a shared future.

In the video production attached to this Ph.D. thesis, some of the scenes filmed on stage also show other young ballet students watching the première of the project in the wings. During postediting, some of the technical crew suggested that I substitute the scenes in which the children were visible with other parts of the choreography. I disagreed, explaining that the project was addressed, in particular, to them. As Riane Eisler points out in most of her work, children's education and training is key, as they are our future and hope⁴⁵⁴. My dance-theatre production should be read and interpreted in these terms. It is a work for upcoming generations, as we all need to find a way to tell and retell stories, and debate or prompt critical thinking about what has gone before us, and how and why it happened.

Extraordinary and sometimes difficult literature, such as the work of Derek Walcott, should be read from different, challenging and new passionate perspectives, as my personal experience as researcher and ballet dancer shows. I was able to demonstrate

⁴⁵⁴ Please, see: Eisler (2000), *Tomorrow's Children. A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century* [2016. *L'infanzia di domani: un contributo per l'educazione alla partnership nel XXI secolo*]; Eisler (2007), *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating A Caring Economics* [2015. *La vera ricchezza delle nazioni: creare un'economia di cura*] & Eisler & Fry (2019), *Nurturing Our Humanity. How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future*.

how the merging of literary texts and artistic praxis can enhance our understanding of literature and the world.

My dance-theatre production allowed me to fuse together my passions, and literary and artistic inclinations. Even if some would argue that the connection is hard to sustain, for it breaks away from certain constraints and critical paradigms of Western academia, my work proved to be useful not only for myself but also, and more importantly, for the people that were involved in project, particularly the group of young dance students who worked with me.

The outcomes and feelings I carry with me from my work are similar to those of Walcott's *Pissarro after his first encounter with snow in Paris*: this is my painting "miracle", a chance to express my true Self, with the intent to progress and research in other projects, this time in a transformed, new Walcottian "light".

Sinossi in italiano

Studiare l'opera dello scrittore, drammaturgo e artista caraibico Derek Walcott (1930-2017) significa adottare strategie d'analisi e di critica letteraria inedite e pluridisciplinari. Se da un lato i testi walcottiani tendono ancora a essere letti e interpretati da una prospettiva *eurocentrica* che rintraccia e confronta tematiche e strutture riferibili al *canone* delle letterature europee e occidentali (e in particolare nel caso di Walcott a quelle d'area inglese e anglofona), dall'altro è vero che lo scrittore santaluciano, premio Nobel per la letteratura nel 1992, è stato sin da subito riconosciuto per la sua originalità nell'oltrepassare e fornire dinamiche e configurazioni nuove a quella stessa "sound colonial education", ovvero a quella "rigorosa educazione coloniale", nella quale si è formato e cresciuto.

Già all'inizio del nuovo millennio nello studio dal titolo *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry* (2001), Patricia Ismond segnalava come i quattro principali studi sull'opera dell'autore caraibico, ovvero "Edward Baugh's monograph on *Another Life*, entitled *Memory as Vision* (1978), Robert Hamner's *Derek Walcott* ([1981] 1993), Rei Terada's *American Mimicry* (1992), and John Thieme's *Derek Walcott* (1999)"⁴⁵⁵, si fossero limitati ad esaminare in primo luogo le connessioni intertestuali che Walcott intratteneva con i modelli della letteratura europea, e successivamente a far cenno al suo particolare "writing back" o *scrittura di ritorno*, sempre alla luce però di modelli e teorie consolidati che afferivano per lo più agli studi post-coloniali di stampo occidentale e nord Atlantico. Ismond è una delle prime ad affermare che l'opera walcottiana va letta da una prospettiva nuova e a sé stante:

Walcott's anticolonial revolutionary route turns primarily on a counter-discourse with the dominant mode of thought of the colonizer's tradition, against which he pursues an alternative, liberating order of values and meanings, generated from the different time and place of his Caribbean, New World ground⁴⁵⁶.

È a partire da queste considerazioni che negli ultimi decenni studiosi e studiose hanno proposto e dato l'avvio a una nuova critica dell'autore caraibico, riflettendo maggiormente sul contesto e la cultura in cui lui stesso ha operato. "Abbandonare le

⁴⁵⁵ Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Ismond (2001) *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry*, pp. 2.

vecchie metafore” significa proporre un radicale cambio di prospettiva partendo dal presupposto che le letterature del *margin*e non sono da considerarsi come lo specchio o il risultato di interazioni e connessioni con il mondo occidentale, quanto piuttosto delle nuove e originali rappresentazioni e interpretazioni, che creano e danno origine a metafore inedite e autentiche anche per aiutarci a decifrare la complessa realtà globalizzata nella quale viviamo.

Nel corso dell’annuale conferenza organizzata da TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association) tenutasi all’inizio di settembre 2019 all’Università dell’Exeter in Inghilterra, Margherita Laera, traduttrice e studiosa di teatro e di performance dell’Europa, nella sua relazione d’apertura ha puntualizzato che il concetto di multiculturalismo anglosassone “ha permesso sì la rappresentazione e produzione di nuovi e articolati costrutti sociali e culturali all’interno e all’esterno del paese, ma non ha saputo colmare quel divario che ancora sussiste e che traccia un confine netto tra società ricche dell’Occidente e società povere del ‘Global South’, ovvero del Sud del Mondo”. Laera ha anche affermato che il populismo di questi ultimi anni ha promosso una politica del disconoscimento dell’altro e dell’altra, del migrante e del rifugiato, nonché delle stesse minoranze etniche presenti all’interno della società inglese, determinandone un’ingiustificata demonizzazione e scarsa rappresentazione. In realtà, spiega Laera, è proprio grazie al fenomeno della *creolizzazione*, avvenuto in primo luogo nelle ex-colonie europee che si è assistito all’emergere di nuove identità e sistemi di relazione *ibridi*, nonché di connessioni e scambi che a ben pensarci riflettono e ripropongono le dinamiche alle quali le società globalizzate del presente sono esposte. Laera e altri e altre studiosi/e di teatro, letteratura, antropologia e scienze umane invocano un cambio di paradigma negli studi culturali e letterari, in riferimento a posizioni e strategie che definiscono de-coloniali.

A partire da questi assunti, nel corso della mia ricerca nell’ambito dell’opera di Derek Walcott, ho deciso di adottare una metodologia di studio de-coloniale nel tentativo di tratteggiare ed esplicitare quel particolare sforzo creativo e transdisciplinare che contraddistingue il modo di fare letteratura dell’autore caraibico.

Il fulcro della mia ricerca muove dalla percezione che l’opera walcottiana sia di difficile interpretazione proprio per l’intrinseca *porosità* e indeterminatezza dei suoi confini - e costrutti - letterari e artistici. Prima di diventare segno e poi pagina, i testi

dell'autore caraibico sono anzitutto impressione, visione e immagine. Walcott non dimentica da dove proviene, per chi sta scrivendo e chi sta descrivendo.

Il primo capitolo della tesi si focalizza sui presupposti della *decolonial option*, ovvero su quell'insieme di teorie che a partire dagli anni '90 del secolo scorso hanno portato alla nascita di gruppi di studiosi e studiose dediti a smascherare le strutture di un potere definibile come neo-coloniale. Il capitolo presenta il pensiero di Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Maria Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa e Walter D. Mignolo, studiosi e studiose provenienti dal contesto latino americano (e quindi da uno dei tanti "margini" proposti dall'occidente), promotori e promotrici di un dibattito epistemologico che riconosce una correlazione tra il nesso *modernity/coloniality*, modernità e colonialità, in particolare nella promozione di quello che identificano con l'espressione "colonial matrix of power", ovvero costrutti neo-coloniali che perpetrano l'influenza e il dominio dell'Occidente europeo e Nord Americano sulle altre realtà del mondo. Nella delineazione della *decolonial option*, che rifiuta dicotomie precostituite e modelli di pensiero preesistenti, Mignolo puntualizza:

Decoloniality [...] does not [only] imply the absence of coloniality but rather the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural⁴⁵⁷.

Nella teorizzazione di un pensiero condiviso e intersoggettivo, aperto al dialogo e al confronto con altre culture e sistemi di relazione, Quijano è il primo a mettere in discussione le fondamenta del sistema logocentrico e dominante dell'Occidente, proponendo la sostituzione dell'equazione cartesiana "Penso dunque sono" con un radicale e propositivo "I am where I do and think", "Sono dove agisco e penso"⁴⁵⁸. I promotori e le promotrici del pensiero de-coloniale credono nella necessità di imparare a disimparare, "learning to unlearn"⁴⁵⁹ per mettere in discussione assunti e prospettive che riteniamo valide e innegoziable nella ricezione e interpretazione del reale. I "decoloniali", inoltre, tengono a precisare come la loro non sia tanto una disciplina accademica, o un nuovo paradigma o pensiero critico, quanto piuttosto uno spazio aperto al dialogo, alla

⁴⁵⁷ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 81.

⁴⁵⁸ Quijano (2007), Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality, *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2/3, pp. 168.

⁴⁵⁹ Mignolo & Tlostanova (2012), *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*, pp. 1.

condivisione e alla sperimentazione, alla decostruzione e al sovvertimento. “[Decoloniality] is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice and praxis”⁴⁶⁰.

Tra le molteplici strategie di “de-colonizzazione” che i teorici e le teoriche di questo nuovo approccio critico propongono, la mia ricerca punta in particolare su due vie o metodologie d’analisi: da un lato si focalizza sul ripensamento o meglio la riscrittura delle narrazioni e storie che vengono considerate come *modelli* per l’Occidente e dall’altro abbraccia il ri-utilizzo e la rivalutazione dell’estetica e della prassi artistica come spazio eterogeneo e dinamico per la rappresentazione e sperimentazione di un nuovo immaginario collettivo, plurale e di partnership.

L’opzione de-coloniale, infatti, da un lato avverte la necessità di un ripensamento delle storie e narrazioni che tramandiamo come premesse per un pensiero libero e articolato (nonché lontano dal “pericolo della storia univoca e uniformata” - the danger of the single story⁴⁶¹), mentre dall’altro rimette in discussione il principio dell’arte come forma estetica per sé e come atto e principio da confinare per e nell’atto creativo. La decolonial option riconosce nell’arte e nell’immaginazione strumenti cardine per il sovvertimento dei costrutti e delle rappresentazioni attuali, in quanto dispositivi di alternative che si rifanno sì al passato ma che operano attraverso la lente della sperimentazione e dell’inconsueto, dell’originale.

In quest’ottica l’opzione de-coloniale lavora molto sul concetto di prassi e/o pratica, ovvero sulla necessità dell’agire pratico e di circostanza, anche nel ripensamento e costruzione di un mondo alternativo e transdisciplinare - e non interdisciplinare, in quanto questo prevedrebbe la restituzione di relazioni e strategie già consolidate.

Il capitolo prosegue con una breve disamina sulla vita e l’opera di Derek Walcott. Vengono presentate dal punto di vista tematico le sue principali strategie di “risposta” al canone e alla tradizione inglese (come ad esempio l’atto della nominazione, the act of naming, il disconoscimento della Storia e l’utilizzo di più lingue e sistemi di comunicazione) per poi riflettere come l’autore ricalchi e riverberi il progetto di *creolizzazione* introdotto e promosso da Édouard Glissant nonché il principio di

⁴⁶⁰ Mignolo & Walsh (2018), *On Decoloniality: concepts, analytics, praxis*, pp. 5.

⁴⁶¹ Il concetto di *single story* (i pericoli di una storia unica) viene ripreso in particolare dal TED TALK 2009 di Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, scrittrice e attivista nigeriana. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), *The Danger of a Single Story* (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (consultato il 26/11/2020)).

trasformazione culturale verso la *partnership* dell'antropologa e attivista ebreo-americana Riane Eisler.

Il secondo capitolo della tesi presenta l'analisi di tre opere walcottiane che a mio avviso rappresentano esempi significativi di de-colonizzazione nell'opera dell'autore caraibico. Nella fattispecie vengono esaminati: *The Joker of Seville*, opera teatrale o musical del 1974, nonché uno dei maggiori successi del Trinidad Theatre Workshop, la prima compagnia di teatro delle Indie Occidentali che Walcott aveva fondato all'inizio degli anni '60. Si tratta di una riscrittura de *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra*, opera in spagnolo del 1616 attribuita a Tirso de Molina. Nel complesso della tesi il Joker è centrale innanzitutto perché "gioca" sulla mobilitazione straniante dei personaggi principali tra diversi contesti (e persino sponde dell'Atlantico), annullando così le coordinate geo-corporeo-temporali dei confini identitari "occidentali" per proporre un sincretismo culturale dai contorni indefiniti tra tradizione europea e folklore caraibico. In secondo luogo perché propone il Carnevale come modello interpretativo per la caratterizzazione e lo scavo psicologico dei protagonisti, in relazione dunque con l'ambiguità e la schizofrenia caraibica. In realtà il carnevale è un contesto, o topos, che si ritrova in gran parte del teatro walcottiano, come ad esempio in *Drums and Colours*, opera commissionata all'autore per l'apertura della breve esperienza della Federazione delle Indie Occidentali nel 1958. Infine, imprescindibile risulta essere l'analisi della struttura e dell'originalità artistica della produzione, che ne prevede la messa in scena in un'arena circolare che richiama i *bull-rings* o terreni di scontro per gli *stickfighters*, ovvero i combattimenti con i bastoni tipici della cultura caraibica, nonché la presenza preponderante di canti e di melodie popolari, prodotte dall'americano Galt MacDermot, e che richiamano la tradizione dei *calypso* o canti degli schiavi delle ex colonie europee.

Pantomime, opera teatrale del 1978 e riscrittura del mito del Robinson Crusoe di Daniel Defoe, è un testo complesso che richiama il teatro dell'assurdo e l'opera di Bertolt Brecht. Mette in scena il dialogo a due tra il proprietario "bianco" di un hotel in decadenza nell'isola di Tobago, Harry Trewe, e il suo inserviente "nero", Jackson Philip. Trewe vorrebbe inscenare per la clientela del suo albergo uno spettacolo rivisitato del Robinson Crusoe, vestendo lui stesso i panni dello schiavo Friday e facendo recitare al suo assistente la parte del padrone Crusoe. Dapprima riluttante all'idea, Philip accetta la provocazione del datore di lavoro proponendo però un'ulteriore rivisitazione della storia

che non convince lo stesso Trewe. Questi ben presto si rende conto delle implicazioni razziali e di potere che lo scambio determinerebbe non solo nella relazione professionale con il suo dipendente ma anche con il suo ipotetico pubblico. Nel corso della performance lo scontro (ironico) tra colono e colonizzato lascia i confini dei retaggi storici per sfociare in un duello artistico e creativo: Jackson, infatti, è un ex cantante di calypso (forma di poesia di liberazione cantata dagli schiavi neri come reazione all'assoggettamento dei coloni bianchi), mentre Harry, meno dotato dal punto di vista canoro e interpretativo, incarna lo spirito del music hall americano dei primi anni '20. Walcott lavora minuziosamente sul posizionamento del corpo e sulla mimica degli attori. Se in un primo momento Philip si pone come "ombra" al cospetto della figura di Harry, nella seconda parte dello spettacolo il ragazzo nero sovrasta il padrone bianco non solo nella mimica gestuale e carica interpretativa ma anche nell'arguzia e nell'intelligenza con la quale risponde alle provocazioni del suo interlocutore. L'opera riflette sulle relazioni di potere e di prestigio che ancora sussistono in una realtà eurocentrica che contrappone un mondo bianco civilizzato a un altro nero, primitivo e ignorante. Lo spettacolo mette a nudo la coscienza e l'intelletto dei due interpreti, proponendo un'analisi sul concetto dell'uomo solo che si confronta con i propri condizionamenti e pregiudizi sociali, economici e culturali.

Tiepolo's Hound, ovvero il *Levriero di Tiepolo*, è un lungo poema in versi che Walcott pubblica nel 2000, e quindi dopo il successo e il riconoscimento internazionale come poeta e voce della letteratura caraibica e mondiale. È un'opera matura nella quale l'autore riflette sul potere dell'arte nel creare un ponte tra culture e lenire le ferite di un passato coloniale travagliato e ancora irrisolto. Walcott presenta la storia e le vicissitudini di Camille Pissarro, artista impressionista dell'800 europeo che viene erroneamente riconosciuto come francese ma che in realtà nasce nell'isola di St. Thomas nel Mar dei Caraibi da una famiglia sefardita portoghese che era scampata nella colonia a seguito delle persecuzioni ebraiche del 1500. Per Walcott il poema è un pretesto per riflettere sulla sua stessa condizione di poeta e drammaturgo espatriato in cerca di fortuna nell'America degli anni '80. L'autore riflette su come la decisione di Pissarro di far fortuna in Francia cancelli il suo riconoscimento come "artista delle Antille", espressione che verrà invece attribuita al pittore che compirà il viaggio al contrario, dall'Europa ai Caraibi, ovvero Paul Gauguin. Infine, il poeta propone una profonda riflessione sui confini identitari e di

rappresentazione artistica: lungo l'arco del poema, infatti, Walcott-protagonista è alla ricerca incessante della “vampa di colore” di un levriero che aveva intravisto in un quadro di un museo o di una galleria della quale non ricorda il nome o la localizzazione. Si chiede se l'animale che tanto lo ossessiona non appartenga a un quadro del Veronese, esposto all'Accademia di Venezia, e nel quale l'artista raffigura persone e situazioni poco raccomandabili nel contesto dell'Ultima Cena del Cristo. Il dipinto rappresenta mori, nani e animali, nonché azioni, come quella del lavarsi i denti, che avevano gridato allo scandalo tra le cerchie ecclesiastiche e dell'Inquisizione, costringendo il pittore a cambiarne il titolo (da “Ultima Cena” a “Cena a casa di Levi”). Alla fine, Walcott ricorda e riconosce l'errore nell'attribuire a quella rappresentazione un significato alto e privilegiato, probabilmente desunto dalla classe e dalla società nella quale egli stesso opera. Aprendo l'archivio irrisolto della sua stessa condizione ibrida si rende conto che il levriero tanto ricercato altro non è che un “mongrel”, un cane bastardo nero che aveva intravisto in una spiaggia delle sue isole natie. La contrapposizione tra il cane nero bastardo delle colonie e quello bianco ed elegante dei banchetti della società europea riflette la condizione degli emarginati, di quei “dispossessati” che ancora faticano a trovare un'affermazione e una voce nel raziocinio di una logica che li ha voluti – e che li vuole ancora - esclusi dalla Storia. Walcott propone l'arte, e il processo artistico, come pratica per un futuro più equo e solidale, dedito ad una società che si riconosca nella bellezza e nell'inclusione tra popoli e modi di vedere, pensare e agire.

Esiste una distanza cronologica e di pensiero che separa il Walcott dei primi due testi teatrali scelti da quelli del testo poetico del 2000. Ciononostante, esistono anche alcuni richiami e connessioni che in una prospettiva de-coloniale riassumono e invocano una convergenza di fondo tra queste opere. Innanzitutto, la volontà di analizzare come tutte e tre rispondano in modo divergente ai retaggi di tre culture differenti dell'Europa colonizzatrice: per il *Joker* quella spagnola, per *Pantomime* quella inglese e per il *Leviero di Tiepolo* quella francese. In secondo luogo, la questione di rappresentazione e di identificazione identitaria e di narrazione, che se da un lato rifiuta una semplicistica definizione dei confini e contorni di attribuzione, dall'altra riplasma e mobilita un discorso che ormai non riconosce più linearità ma una circolarità di possibilità e alternative eterogenee e fluide. Infine, il processo e l'apertura della scrittura nei confronti di altre arti ed espressioni, alla pittura innanzitutto ma anche alla musica, alla danza e alla

performance. Non è un caso se nella descrizione della sua stessa scrittura, Walcott abbia affermato:

I am a kind of a split writer: I have one tradition inside me going one way, and another tradition going another. The mimetic, the Narrative, and dance element is strong on one side, and the literary, the classical tradition is strong on the other⁴⁶².

Il terzo e ultimo capitolo della tesi sperimenta una connessione tra la scrittura e il mondo artistico dell'autore caraibico e la "praxis", la pratica d'azione incoraggiata e sostenuta dalla decolonial option. In linea con la mia carriera da ballerino professionista e insegnante di danza contemporanea, ho deciso di "dare voce" attraverso il corpo e il movimento ad alcune strofe di un poema emblema del percorso letterario di Derek Walcott, ovvero *The Schooner Flight*, La Goletta Flight. Nella cornice di un'interpretazione che tiene conto delle metodologie e premesse dei Performing Studies, inaugurati da Schechner, e degli studi dell'Applied Theatre, e quindi del Teatro Applicato, ho tentato di mettere in dialogo i versi walcottiani con la realtà nella quale io stesso e gli interpreti e le interpreti di questo particolare scambio intersemiotico viviamo. Il progetto è stato realizzato in collaborazione con un collega e arista coreografo, Raffaele Simoni, e grazie all'interpretazione di alcune studentesse e danzatrici dell'A.S.D. (Associazione Sportiva Dilettantistica) PassioneArteDanza di Pordenone. Inoltre, mi sono avvalso dell'aiuto di un costumista e di alcuni tecnici audio e video per la realizzazione delle registrazioni e di un video-abstract che sono fruibili e disponibili nel mio canale Vimeo⁴⁶³. Una selezione di 5 parti emblematiche dello Schooner Flight è stata accuratamente operata nel tentativo di attualizzare una connessione transdisciplinare tra poesia, danza, arte, musica e parola che esplicitasse le tematiche e le suggestioni evocate nel poema. Il racconto è stato scritto da Walcott verso la metà della sua carriera e riflette sulla difficile condizione identitaria del marinaio Shabine, che in patois significa "negro rosso". Il protagonista rappresenta un alter-ego dell'autore e infatti, lungo l'arco delle peregrinazioni per mare, Shabine riflette sul proprio passato e su quello delle persone a lui care, incontra le navi negriere dei suoi antenati che sono stati costretti ad attraversare

⁴⁶² Hamner (ed. [1993] 1997), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, pp. 48.

⁴⁶³ <https://vimeo.com/364759314>

l'Atlantico nelle stive dei velieri coloniali e riflette sulla propria condizione di diseredato e disadattato:

I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,
a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.
I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation⁴⁶⁴.

Questi versi emblematici del poema, nonché di tutta l'opera e del percorso letterario di Derek Walcott, sono stati resi nella performance attraverso un duetto: il collega Simoni e io “incarniamo” la figura “divisa” del marinaio Shabine che a tratti si sente parte del contesto nel quale vive, e a tratti rifiuta e ripudia la propria identità. In corrispondenza della strofa più celebrata dell'autore caraibico, ovvero “I'm just a red nigger...”, Simoni colora i miei vestiti bianchi con delle tempere colorate, per richiamare l'ibridazione caraibica. I versi walcottiani incitano a una riflessione sul presente e sul nostro contesto regionale. Il Friuli Venezia Giulia, infatti, una regione con tre nomi, ha da sempre beneficiato dell'incontro tra diverse lingue, etnie e culture e in un certo senso richiama il multiculturalismo dell'isola di Trinidad. Il video, inoltre, è stato girato non solo a teatro, nel contesto della rappresentazione di fine anno della stessa scuola di danza che ha ospitato il progetto, ma anche all'esterno, e in particolare nell'area desertica dei Magredi di Pordenone. La divisione e porosità degli spazi performativi è un chiaro riferimento alla necessità di ripensamento del concetto di confine. Nelle società attuali, contraddistinte da diseguaglianze economiche, culturali e sociali sempre più marcate ma anche da un'eterogeneità di pensiero più fluida e multiforme, è necessario adottare una prospettiva di tipo intersezionale che chiarisca e vanifichi il tentativo di frontiere tra noi e loro, il migrante/la migrante e il cittadino/la cittadina, il legittimato/la legittimata e il disadattato/la disadattata, il privilegiato/la privilegiata e il subalterno/la subalterna.

All'interno della stessa coreografia, inoltre, si è cercato di attuare uno scardinamento dei confini semantici del testo. In questo senso, i “soundless decks”, e

⁴⁶⁴ Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 112.

quindi le stive nelle quali gli schiavi neri erano stipati per essere trasportati nelle nuove colonie, hanno “preso voce” attraverso i movimenti silenti, i balzi e le interpretazioni delle giovani allieve. Nel testo, al contrario, Walcott nomina e riconosce per nome solo le navi dei colonizzatori che avanzano:

I couldn't believe what I see:
[...] We float through a rustling forest of ships
[...] I saw men with rusty eyeholes like cannons [...] and high on their decks I saw great admirals, Rodney, Nelson, de Grasse, I heard the hoarse orders they gave those Shabines, [...]
Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations, our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose, to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting.
Who knows
who his grandfather is, much less his name?⁴⁶⁵

Nell'interpretazione accade il contrario: le navi colonizzatrici vengono silenziate attraverso l'utilizzo di una maschera. In questo modo le stesse interpreti hanno sperimentato un ri-adattamento interno alla traduzione. Il ribaltamento di prospettive ha l'intento di far riflettere le giovani danzatrici e il pubblico sull'importanza dell'accoglienza, della condivisione e del rispetto. In una condivisione d'insieme tra coreografi, studentesse e collaboratori, abbiamo portato l'attenzione sulla necessità dell'azione e della presa di posizione nei confronti delle politiche e delle pratiche che tendono a dividere, separare e creare nuovi confini, muri e frontiere. A conclusione dei laboratori abbiamo convenuto sull'importanza del dialogo e del confronto sulle nostre influenze di pensiero e di dominio, nonché sulle narrazioni alle quali siamo abitualmente esposti ed espone nella speranza di un cambiamento verso la *partnership* e la condivisione/relazione. In questo senso, il sapere e la cultura accademici possono fare molto, nell'istruire e guidare verso un pensiero critico che sappia essere aperto e pluridisciplinare, anche nell'utilizzo consapevole e intelligente delle nuove tecnologie e dei mezzi di comunicazione.

⁴⁶⁵ Walcott (1992), *Mappa del Nuovo Mondo*, pp. 126-128.

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