

Abstract

This study argues that throughout Walcott's work there is a line of inconsistency and paradox consistent with his confessed "split"¹ and reflective of the contradictory stance to be expected from a person born in a polyglot society such as the Caribbean.² Furthermore, this tendency towards contradiction is compounded by the conflict between the "little tradition" and the "great tradition". Walcott's work, to my mind, is representative of these contradictions.

His work is also influenced by what he is reading at any particular point in time. Walcott not only tends to reflect the rhythms of the writer's language that he is reading while doing his creative work, but he tends to echo their opinions and attitudes. As he goes from writer to writer, his views contradict each other. It is the burden of this study to show not only how Walcott's development is linked with his reading, but how his early writings all contain themes that he will later develop as he reads more and responds to the stresses of his society's growth.

Moreover, this study shows that the area that best reflects Walcott's inconsistency is his treatment of the theme of history. Closely linked to this is Walcott's ability to explore certain themes in his plays while negating their importance in his poems or critical essays. Nowhere in his poetry, for example, is there a rigorous exploration and use of the folk and folk material, though this happens in some of his plays. Yet, he remains critical of other writers who use the folk in their work. This study shows that Walcott's work becomes more compli-

1 Derek Walcott, "Meanings", Savacou II, Sept. 1970, p.48

2 Dr. Michael Gilkes in his lecture "New Directions in Caribbean Literature" given at Carifesta '76 has suggested that there is a strong link between the polyglot society in which we live and the schizoids of West Indian literature to be found especially in the work of Mittelhelzer, Hearne, V.S. Naipaul and Lamming. See also his "Introduction" in Wilson

-cated and effective when, as exemplified by Dream On Monkey Mountain, he tries to resolve such contradictions, and attempts to make creative use of his "schizophrenia".