ABSTRACT

The Prose and Poetry of Wilfred Cartey: A First Reading

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This study presents the first comprehensive analysis of Wilfred Cartey's thought and aesthetic with a view to identifying their significance for Caribbean letters. Cartey, former Martin Luther King Distinguished Professor of Black Studies at City College, New York, is a Trinidadian scholar who was born sighted in 1931, but became blind in 1962, and published the work that is the focus of this study between 1959 and 1991.

Reading Cartey's published legacy of prose and poetry as an *oeuvre*, and linking the biographical with the historical and the literary, the study illuminates Cartey's poetics of potential as a distinguishing feature of his legacy in Caribbean letters, potentiality and innerness being the core parameters of the poetics as mediated through Cartey's self-designated transformative vision.

The ontological thrust of Cartey's transformative vision is explored by this study which reads the vision's movement from personality to presence as depicting the spiritual reality of human individuation and self-transcendence, albeit with language, imagery and themes that bespeak a Caribbean heritage.

Seeing that the vision projects a perspective of humankind's intrinsic authenticity and is aimed at reconstructing man's humanity, the discourses of Caribbean theology and Caribbean philosophy are found to be appropriate for locating Cartey's thought and aesthetic in Caribbean letters.

Keywords: Sylvia Rose-Ann Walker; Wilfred Cartey; poetics of potential; transformative vision; Caribbean theology; Caribbean philosophy.