

Abstract

Through an examination of twelve plays, this study traces Derek Walcott's evolution as a West Indian playwright between 1949 and 1975.

He began in apprenticeship to the great Jacobean and Elizabethan playwrights. He has experimented with approaches from a variety of sources, including the Irish Theatre of Yeats and Synge, the Japanese Kabuki Theatre and the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. These borrowings were part of a conscious effort to create a dramatic medium capable of presenting the multi-racial, multi-cultural experience of the region: a fusion of local and foreign sources, language patterns and dramatic techniques.

Walcott concurrently strives to penetrate to the very bedrock of human experience, to transcend the socio-economic and racial barriers that divide societies and individuals, to be at once both uniquely local and accessibly universal.

The plays reveal the gradual development of a West Indian archetypal hero, a direct descendant of the African Warrior/Chief who had been destroyed by the slave experience. This archetype epitomizes the sufferings and potentialities of West Indian man, combines grandeur and degradation, resists the categorization of race and exists as Man, in complete harmony with self and environment.