

PhD Abstract

CULTURAL POLITICS IN SELECTED WORKS OF DEREK WALCOTT: A STUDY IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

This thesis discusses cultural politics in the discourse of Derek Walcott (1930-), the West Indian poet, dramatist, essayist and Nobel Laureate. Focusing primarily on Walcott's essays and poetry and endorsing the tenets of postcolonial theory, the thesis undertakes two tasks: First, to probe the possibility of introducing Derek Walcott as one of the virtuosic postcolonial critics whose views prefigure, support and correspond in many ways to other canonized theoreticians in the field; second, to survey and analyze how far Walcott's postcolonial critical views are clear in his poetry.

The thesis falls into four chapters, an introduction, a conclusion and a bibliography. Whereas the first two chapters are devoted to his theory, the remaining two deal with his poetry. In the first chapter, "The Theoretical Contours," the study explores, classifies, compares and analyzes Walcott's theoretical views in order to introduce him as an unacclaimed postcolonial critic. After establishing the fact that cultural politics in Walcott's discourse involves the struggle over cultural power using what Gilles Deleuze calls "war machines" and that these machines include art, land and people, the study traces and analyzes the different theoretical mechanisms through which Walcott has attempted to find in-between resolutions to the different dualities that may hinder his aesthetical commitment to use art in the articulation of the nuances of Caribbean experience. Through a set of seminal views, Walcott has addressed the conflicts pertaining to language, text and the artist himself. In addition to emphasizing the importance of hybridizing languages and dissociating them from the shackles of race and history, Walcott has pointed to the validity of creative mimicry through which texts, genres and cultural forms at large can be reworked and creolized. He has also stressed the importance of the positive capitalization on the state of schizophrenia bivocalizing the Caribbean artist due to racial and linguistic dualities. In the last section of the chapter, the study discusses in depth Walcott's concept of the poetics of naming which lies at the center of cultural politics in his theory and practice. The analysis shows that this concept crystallizes the interdependent relationship between art, land and people, the three war machines of power in Walcott's discourse. Despite the fact that in its broad sense, "the poetics of naming" involves the use of discursive forms in discursive representation, in its deeper sense, the concept also involves voicing out the problems threatening the integrity of his peculiar region particularly the threats of the neo-colonial tourist assaults on Caribbean land and people. The analysis also reveals that the poetics of naming, at its technical level, stresses the importance of the creative use of language in this act of representation.

To delve deeper into the mechanics of theorizing in Walcott's discourse and to show how Walcott gives his most seminal critical views by manipulating poetic devices and exploiting metaphoric language, the second chapter, "The Poetics of Walcott's Politics: A Study of Two Representative Essays," undertakes a rhetorical study of two selected essays. To underline the steadiness of Walcott's theoretical discourse and

technical repertoire, the study analyzes his 1970 essay, "What the Twilight Says", and his 1992 Nobel Prize talk, "Fragments of an Epic Memory." The analysis of the two pieces shows how Walcott uses a governing metaphorical image as a comprehensive framework for his critical views. Hence, while in the first essay, he subtly manipulates the image of twilight in order to comment on the multiple divisions tearing the Caribbean consciousness, in the second piece, he plays on the metaphor of fragmented mosaic to shed more light on the fruitfulness of hybridity at the linguistic, racial and cultural level. The analysis of the two essays also gives credence to Walcott's belief in the importance of metaphor not only in the act of naming but also in the formulation of cultural reality. Walcott's view that forceful metaphors should be based on contradiction rather than substitution is also verified. Hence, twilight can be a source of illumination and fragmentation is a symbol of wholeness.

In the remaining two chapters, the study establishes a link between Walcott's theory and practice by analyzing an eclectic assortment of his poems. Taking the concept of the poetics of naming as a corner stone for this examination, the study, in the third and fourth chapter, attempts to disclose how far Walcott has been true to critical vision. In his critical writings, Walcott has tied discursive representation to the celebration of the provincial specificity of his region with particular emphasis on people and land. The analysis of representative poems in the third chapter, "The Poetics of Naming and The Politics of Caribbean Subjectivity in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott", reveals that, in practice, he has devoted his career to the articulation of the nuances of Caribbean subjectivity in a way that not only deconstructs Western stereotypes and drag his people from their invisibility but also reflects the power lying in their interracial mixture. In addition to the representation of individual images that shed light on the multi-layered aspects of Caribbean subjectivity, Walcott, has given communal portraits of simple islanders in their simple daily life. He has also crowned his commitment by the writing of his epic *Omeros*, in which he represents a mosaic multi-vocal multi-lingual interracial island community.

Through his concept of the poetics of naming, Walcott has also underlined the role of literature in deconstructing certain stereotypes concerning the island as a spatial contour and re-inscribing it as a powerful spatial sign. He also stressed the importance of facing up the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism which fragmentizes the island and violates its landscape. The analysis of selected poems in the fourth chapter, "The Poetics of Naming and the Politics of Place in Selected Poems of Derek Walcott" has substantiated the fact that he has forcefully translated this critical stance in his poetry. In addition to the inscription of the small island as an embracing homeland rather than a mere recreational place and the deconstruction of the stereotype of the wildness and inferiority associated with Caribbean vegetation, Walcott has unwaveringly attempted to dismantle the neo-colonialist discourse of tourism with its mechanisms and symbols.

Having established a link between Derek Walcott's critical views and his poetry, this thesis concludes that he ought to be regarded as one of the postcolonial literary theoreticians. The analysis of Walcott's verse and prose clearly shows that Walcott imposes himself upon the field of postcolonial theory. Not only does he march in the line of those writers who try to resist and disrupt imperial hierarchies and to recover a sense of their local cultural identity by using their literary output, but he is also squarely situated in the company of those intellectuals who map out, analyze and propose answers

to the different dilemmas besetting their once-colonized native regions.