

“Name! Déparlez!” – Ars Poetica in Derek Walcott’s Another Life

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Derek Walcott’s book-length poetic autobiography Another Life as a long meditation of the adult poet looking back to his apprenticeship as a young poet and painter. The poem chronicles a series of conflicts between two opposing entities, which, I argue, can be subsumed to the two large categories (origin & beginning) that define Walcott’s becoming as an artist. As a way of clarifying these terms, I will perform a close reading of the poem and show the clash between the dictating voice of the colonizer, which originates language, and the irredeemable writing of the colonized, which begins language. In doing so, I contend that for the Old World poets, burdened by tradition, the most difficult thing to achieve was finding a “voice”, while for the New World poets the most challenging task was finding a “language.”.

Keywords: *Derek Walcott, postcolonial literature, nation, landscape, poetic art, language.*

Introduction

While for the Old World poets, burdened by tradition, the most difficult thing to achieve was finding a “voice”, for the New World poets the most challenging task was finding a “language”. When, all of a sudden, the *anxiety of influence* was traded for the *anxiety of inception*, the question became not how, but where does one begin? Finding that moment, both in space and time, that is, the poetic space and time, from which life, poetic life, originates is one of the issues that Derek Walcott had to deal with when writing *Another Life*. Since approximating that very moment is beyond the purpose of this paper, beyond the conceivable purpose of any paper, in fact, I’ll concentrate my efforts in what follows tracing down the inured & inward (290) poetics of Walcott’s *Another Life* and the trajectory his writing took as a consequence of reaching a starting point.

(Walcott, 1986)¹ Caught between naming, “*Pour la dernière fois, nommez! Nommez!*” (288), and un-naming, “Name! *Déparlez!*” (170), Walcott is in constant search for *that* first time, *la premier fois*, when his words were ready to create. *Another Life* is the story of the creation that followed. A story about origins, beginnings, and betrayals.

In a much quoted fragment from an autobiographical piece that he wrote as a preface for *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, Derek Walcott presents the need of New World poets of starting from scratch:

In the simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect. Yet the writers of my generation were natural assimilators. We knew the literatures of Empires, Greek, Roman, British, through their essential classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery. If there was nothing, there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began. (Walcott, 1998, p. 4)

Commenting on Walcott’s essays, or plays for that matter, is as difficult as commenting his poetry, so, I’ll limit my observations to a few aspects, relevant for this paper. It is important to note, first, that the author was working on “What the Twilight Says: An Overture” during the time he was laboring on *Another Life*, but this has almost nothing to do with the distilled versions of the final poem. And, yet, it has everything to do with it, if we were to consider the formidable *mise-en-abyme* Walcott is working with at the end of this quote: “If there was nothing, there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began.” What surfaces from this fragment is a typical postcolonial literary question, best framed in one of Naipaul’s novels, *The Mimic Men*. Naipaul, mentioned himself in the poem, like Walcott, is resistant to colonial subjects wholeheartedly embracing the colonizers’ perspective. In this respect, Naipaul’s mimic men and Walcott’s natural assimilators are one and the same, they are not the discoverers “as firm / as conquerors who had discovered home” (195). New World artists are mere re-discoverers, re-lettering the literatures of the Empires: “The candle’s yellow leaf next to his bed / re-letters *Tanglewood Tales* and Kingsley’s *Heroes*.” (158) Their “elation of discovery” is still hidden in the street and in the classroom, the patois signifying nothing, while the language meaning everything!

In *A Simple Flame*, the third section of *Another Life*, Walcott is literally creating a new world for him and Anna. He pictures them as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, “And now we were the first guests of the earth / and everything stood still for us to name.” (231) But this is not just another creation story. Even

¹ All references to Walcott’s poems are made, parenthetically, within text.

though the new couple is joined together in their mission of naming and making the world and *everything was to be made*, they do not exactly resemble the Adamic couple. Chapter 14, *Anna awaking*, explains why. In a nutshell, the three parts of this poem represent Walcott’s poetic art. The first section is a creation story in which the creator/created is Anna in the seventh, resting, day: “I could be happy, / just because today is Sunday. No, for more.” (235) Moreover, like God, on a Sunday, Anna is admiring her work and realizes there’s nothing else to do, everything is in place, so she “lie[s] to [her] body with useless chores.” (233) The second section, in Sundays to come, it’s time to inspect the garden of creation. In a “walking mood,” Anna takes her Adam “near the lagoon”, where the water’s lens frames the pair. The image of the water that reflects the creation speaks volumes about the hold Walcott’s poetry has in transforming the world. If, at the beginning of the poem, “the oil green water glows but doesn’t catch,” now the water has the power of reflection, it doesn’t only glow, it also catches: “Stunned by their images they strolled on, content / that the black film of water kept the print / of their locked images when they passed on.” (236) The intimation of betrayal is already present here, but it is accentuated in the final section. The morning of the creation, “I shall always be morning to him, / and I must walk and be gentle as morning” (234) is replaced by the evening treachery of poetry and art. Which of the two would be betrayed and would betray is the question the poetry does not ask, but it seems that the power of reflection interferes with the power of creation and of the created. In the end, the poet’s hand that writes this story of creation is the one that betrays, that *catches* Anna’s description. But this is a mere representation that lets the poet unsatisfied. Therefore, with a masterful twist, he turns creation on its head and replaces the “poetics of twilight” with the “poetics of morning,” and this, rather than have the poet resistant to it, places him within tradition. Thus, Old World poets find their equal in the New World poet.

Of Origins & Beginnings – Making & Naming.

When in *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha speaks about the social and textual affiliation of nationness, he makes a relevant distinction between the Western nation and the colonial government,

If the spirit of the Western nation has been symbolized in epic and anthem, voiced by a “unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its speech,” then the sign of colonial government is cast in a lower key, caught in the irredeemable act of writing. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 93)

Working through Derrida’s deconstruction of speech and writing, Bhabha’s statement locates with precision Walcott’s position as a colonial subject and as an

emerging artist. The young poet is doubly removed by being both *written* and *spoken for*. Even though his father, whom he does not recall because of his early death, was a small official of the colonial government, Walcott does not belong to the colonial government, nor is he a part of a Western nation. Nationless and fatherless, then, he cannot voice any epic history, nor can he document, in writing, his existence.

Surprisingly, though, this initial lack of agency proved salutary. Raised in an orphaned household, Walcott became accustomed, and I should add, resistant to one of the most crucial aspects of colonialism: the colonial hand wrote what the metropolitan voice dictated! But the speech and writing dialectic was broken once Walcott's father, part of the colonial administration, began using his hand at more than writing (King, 2000, p. 5).² Thus, painting, arguably a different form of writing, became the first instance of agency. For Walcott's poetics, this originating move is full of meaning. His father's water color paintings foreshadow his national and artistic project. Commenting on "The Schooner *Flight*", another one of Walcott's epic poems, Rowan Ricardo Phillips refers in technical and etymologic detail to the relationship between nation and poetry:

Both poetry and nation speak to the act of creation. "Poetry," coming from the Greek poiesis, or "making," also implies a relationship to home as well as to the body in its uses of the Italian word for "room," stanza; its invocation of "foot" as the term for the basic metric unit of verse; and dactyl (Latin for "finger") for a particular foot that, like any finger on your left hand, has one long unit and two shorter ones. "Nation," meanwhile, echoes the Latin nasci, "to be born," and its obvious equivalents in modern languages are the Spanish verb nacer, as well as the French naître. Thus, in any examination of the relationship between poetry and the idea of nation, one also is witness to a parthenogenetic event: a simultaneous situation of making and of being born. (Phillips, 2002)

This semantic archeology is telling with regards to the kind of work Walcott sets out to do. The almost Derridean (parthenogenetic) event that Phillips invokes refers to the nationless and fatherless poet's efforts of finding / founding a beginning. With no tradition to fall back on, Walcott invents one out of nothing (Walcott, 1974).³ For him poetry becomes a way of performing the nation (in its

² In King's biography, Walcott's father, Warwick, is described as a "thoughtful, helpful and socially impeccable person" who started as a "Copyist" at the Education Office and was later appointed to the Registry Department to work for the Attorney-General and Acting Chief Justice. He was also listening to "recordings of opera, loved gardening, and was a gifted amateur in many arts," including painting.

³ At various points in this essay, Walcott is extremely straightforward, when talking about "a mass art form which came out of nothing" or "culture can only be created out of this knowledge of nothing."

various units, ranging from the individual person and the family to community and humanity as a whole). Poetry as a household and as a redeemable act of writing – this is Walcott’s original work.

After the father’s paintings, the son’s poems constitute a superior form of agency that the poet uses in order to advance original creation. As Edward Baugh notes, “Walcott stand[s] in relation to the development of [his] national literature much as Dante stood in relation to his.” (Baugh, 2003) Paul Breslin reinforces this national project by pointing out “Walcott’s attempt to imagine a society in which his poems could take place,” effort that “would later receive help from an emergent West Indian cultural nationalism that looked forward to federation and independence.” (Breslin, 2001, p. 53) It is obvious from the start, even if unconsciously from Walcott’s part, that his poetry is to a certain extent a test of citizenship. Walcott not only *makes* and *gives birth* to his poetry, but he also does that and much more with regards to his nation. For instance, as I will try to show in the final part of this paper, the son’s hand will not only try to paint the St Lucian landscape, his hand will also try to describe it. But the transition from painting to poetry does not only signify augmented agency; it also contains an inescapable sense of betrayal that fails to reconcile the representation of the art object with the object itself.

Here lies, then, the distinction I am trying to make between origin and beginning. Almost biologically, I read *origin* as an attribute of the *missing father*. The father’s absent presence manifests itself through a special kind of painting. The father’s paintings, mostly watercolor landscapes that later Walcott tried more or less to replicate, are an incipient way of crafting the nation. Commenting on Bakhtin’s analysis of Goethe’s *Italian Journey*, Bhabha notes that

The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression. [...T]he origin of the nation’s visual presence is the effect of a narrative struggle. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 143)

After the *dictating voice* and the *writing hand* (introduced in the first quote from *The Location of Culture*), the *naturalizing eye* comes as a crucial element in the configuration of Walcott’s poetics. The (narrative) struggle that engulfs the young poet, between the epics and the anthems of Homer, Dante, or Eliot (the cultural fathers!) and the “irredeemable act” of painting of his father, is tentatively settled through a special kind of poetry that incorporates equally the voice, the hand, and the eye. Failed both as a painter and as a heraldic poet, Walcott redeems himself by crafting a poetic language capable of creating a nation. And this is

Walcott's *beginning*. As implied before, if the father originates, the son begins; if the father paints, the son writes. Similar in craftsmanship, the two creative processes differ with regards to their final product. I am not referring here to the inherent distinctions between a painting and a poem; rather, under these circumstances, I am referencing a difference in the means of representation.

When Hannah Arendt speaks in *The Human Condition* about art works as being both "thought things" and "things," she favors mostly their *thingness* (Arendt, 1958, p. 169). Even though a work of art, more than anything man-made, is the immediate reflection of a thought process, Arendt argues, the thought that supposedly originated the end product comes second in a creation process in which the human hand comes first,

The reification which occurs in writing something down, painting an image, modeling a figure, or composing a melody is of course related to the thought which preceded it, but what actually makes the thought a reality and fabricates things is the same workmanship which, through the primordial instrument of human hands, builds the other durable things of the human artifice. (Arendt, 1958, p. 169)

Without going in further detail into Arendt's argument, suffice it to say that what the father's hand originated, the son's hand began. As long as the workmanship involved in both painting and writing remains the same, the thought process itself remains the same as well: both father and son have, supposedly, the nation in mind. Both their hands painted and, respectively, described the same landscape.

But, if thought and workmanship are alike, the end products differ significantly. Even though conventional aesthetics clearly distinguishes between a painting and a poem, in Walcott's situation there might be a more subtle explanation. Apart from *ekphrasis*, which I will briefly use in the final part of this paper and which can be seen as a reconciliation of sorts between painting and poetry, there is really no similarity between the father's paintings and the son's poems. If, arguably, they both reify (in Arendt's understanding of the term) the same reality, the same landscape, or the same nation, they do it in a different way. If one uses mimesis, the other uses mimicry!

The problem that Walcott faces is not only a problem of reification. It has also something to do with representation. As an official scribe (working for the colonial government) and amateur painter, Walcott's father made use of mimesis at his best interest. If copying reality is what mimesis entails, then Warwick Walcott was a good copyist. He both copied documents, he might have even been writing them, but he also copied the St Lucian landscape. This move, the move of his hand, in fact, from copying the master's documents to painting the local

landscape, is, as I mentioned before, the first instance of agency. It ushers in the break with the colonial past. It originates a beginning. But it also places the son, the poet, in a difficult situation by placing the father even stronger under the colonial hold. Warwick Walcott does not only copy the master’s documents; it turns out he is also copying the master’s art. With a cliché in postcolonial criticism, by adopting the master’s culture, Walcott’s father is also accepting his rule. He could never be a mimetic painter without first being a mimic man. And this is the son’s crux!

How can he represent his father’s landscape without using his father’s master’s art? Where should he begin? Walcott finds a possible answer and a possible beginning in the epigraph of “The Divided Child,” the first part of “Another Life,”

An old story goes that Cimabue was struck with admiration when he saw the shepherd boy, Giotto, sketching sheep. But, according to the true biographies, it is never the sheep that inspire a Giotto with the love of painting: but rather, his first sight of the paintings of such a man as Cimabue. What makes the artist is the circumstance that in his youth he was more deeply moved by the sight of works of art than by that of the things which they portray. (143)

The tension between the “old story goes” and “according to true biographies” and between a work of art and the reality it represents resembles exactly Walcott’s tension. His father’s water color landscapes are without a doubt a starting point in his poetic project. Also, the works of Dante, Homer, Eliot or Joyce represent clear landmarks of inspiration in Walcott’s poetics. By placing himself as a disciple of the great poets, he begins a practice that will eventually make him more than a mimetic follower. In fact, in this apprenticeship lies the whole constellation of meaning that *Another Life* entails. The work of imagination, the work of art, Walcott suggests, is never original. One necessarily begins in *media res*. A few lines into the poem, the young poet / painter, with the fever of the “draughtsman’s clerk”, is trying to make his hand at capturing the landscape. An easy route to follow would be in the father’s trace, yet the son wants to do more. The ambition of creation pushes him even further. Realizing he can never describe the landscape through his painting, he lets the twilight take over. The light fades and the vision dies, but the temptation of poetry is near. What the brush started, the writing hand brings to completion.

Thus, mimicry is part of the process of beginning anew. Caught between the old (story) and the true (biography), Walcott tries to fixate his poetics within language. Language, poetic language becomes the true mediation between *the dictating voice* of European tradition and the *irredeemable writing* of St Lucia. If,

for Derrida quoted by Bhabha, the voice is the attribute of “people assembled in the self-presence of [their] speech,” for Walcott language becomes a self-presence that breaks away any relation between the signifier and the signified. Moreover, while Derrida questions the existence of a universal, original, primordial signifier, without which the signified, any signified cannot exist, Walcott questions the relevance of a signified attached to an original signifier. In other words, if speech, in its self-presence, is capable of bringing and keeping people together as long as they suspend the original signifier, language cannot but start from that original signifier.⁴

This is what Édouard Glissant describes as a poetics of language-in-itself. In this way, Walcott is the poet who “sought / the paradoxical flash of an instant / in which every facet was caught / in a crystal of ambiguities” (200), by sanctioning

*the moment when language, as if satisfied with its perfection, ceases to take for its object the recounting of its connection with particular surroundings, to concentrate solely upon its fervor to exceed its limits and reveal thoroughly the elements composing it—solely upon its engineering skill with these. (Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: UM Press, 1997, p. 25, quoted in Phillips, 2002, pp. 112-132)*

It seems, then, that in Walcott’s case the signifier is both within and outside language, since he concentrates more on the signified, that is both his father’s landscapes and his own poetic landscape, and its powers of signifying the nation. As he points out in his Nobel lecture, poetry is a process of excavating and self-discovering of the “buried language” of the past and of the “individual vocabulary” of the present (Walcott, 1998, pp. 69-70).

And this is what he means by mimicry. Thus, the difference between mimesis and mimicry is rendered by the words that take over and describe both visions of the landscape, the real and the painted one, discovering the buried language of representation and finding a new vocabulary for other representations. Mimicry, more than being a copy, is a repetition. Quoting Rei Terada, Charles Pollard notes that,

Mimicry is necessary in the New World because human beings create cultures though imitation. [...] Walcott characterizes this imitation as mimicry rather than mimesis to underscore the absence of origins in the New World. Mimicry connotes a representation of representation in a series of representations, whereas mimesis implies a representation of reality, a representation that assumes an authentic

⁴ For instance, Warwick Walcott’s landscape signifies the nation, while Derek Walcott’s landscape first signifies his father’s landscape and only then the nation. That’s why the poet needs to find more sophisticated means of expression that would account both for nation and his father’s watercolor paintings.

cultural origin. [...] In Walcott’s view, there are no core cultural identities only the representation of other representations. (Pollard, 2004, p. 34)

If, as Walcott puts it in *What The Twilight Says*, “imitation is true belief” and, in *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic History*, “What is called mimicry is the painful, new, laborious uttering that comes out of belief, not out of doubt”, let me point out, for one last time before analyzing *Anna Awaking*, what I understand to be Walcott’s mimicry. In his attempts of naming his nation, Walcott succeeds in crafting a poetics that allows him to both recover the best parts of Western tradition and initiate a West Indian tradition. He is not completely rejecting the past, nor is he wholeheartedly embracing it. He continues his father’s work, but at a superior level. Instead of using mimesis, that is, instead of copying reality and Western art, he gives imitation new meanings. It is my belief that he did in fact imitate the workmanship that original creation entails, but he did not imitate the end product. Whereas, in Arendt’s understanding of art, poetry is about remembrance and memory, in Walcott’s poetics, art is about remembrance and amnesia. In other words, he remembered the craft, but he refused to remember (to recover) the original act of creation. In contrast, he preferred to imitate (discover) the act of creation as if creation always happens for the first time, hence instead of witnessing time and time again the Nietzschean eternal return to origins, he becomes the witnesses of an eternal beginning of origins. Even though in his poetics the move seems to be towards a cyclic paradigm, with New World poetry continuing the Old World poetry, and with the twilight symbolizing the fall of the first and the rise of the latter, in *Anna awaking* Walcott seems to be able to break that endless original cycle, and lay emphasis on morning, rather than on twilight.

The reason for which remembrance cannot bring about memory, but amnesia, is because the cord has been cut by the mirror that the colonizers brought over to the colonized, a mirror that can only reflect the Western values and virtues, but somehow passes over the language that, eventually, can and should contain them all.⁵ As Arendt points out, the durability of a poem, resides in its capacity to

⁵ A rather long quote from “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” explains the function of the mirror as a self-discovery tool, “Once the meridian of European civilization has been crossed, according to the theory, we have entered a mirror where there can only be simulations of self-discovery. The civilized virtues on the other side of this mirror are the virtues of social order, a lineally clear hierarchy, direction, purpose, balance. With these things, so we were taught, some social justice and the exercise of racial memory which is tradition. Somehow, the cord is cut by that meridian. Yet a return is also impossible, for we cannot return to what we have never been. The truth in all this is, of course, the amnesia of the American, particularly of the African. Most of our definitions of American culture are fragmentary, based on the gleam of racial memory which pierces this amnesia. The Old World, whether it is represented by the light of Europe or of Asia or of Africa, is the rhythm by which we remember. What we have carried over, apart from a few

condensate and explain living and the world, therefore life, outside the written page through is living recollection,

The durability of a poem is produced through condensation, so it is as though language spoken in utmost density and concentration were poetic in itself. Here, remembrance, Mnēmosynē, the mother of muses, is directly transformed into memory, and the poet's means to achieve the transformation is rhythm, through which the poem becomes fixed in the recollection almost by itself. It is this closeness to living recollection that enables the poem to remain, to retain its durability, outside of the printed or written page. (Arendt, 1958, p. 169)

For Walcott, though, this living recollection carries over from the workmanship that creates the poem towards the confines of *another life*, the beginning of imagination and representation that eventually will create not only the poem, but also the poet and his nation.

Of Betrayal – The Representation of Representation.

Chapter 14 of *Another Life*, whose epigraph is *Anna awaking*, is typical for the move that Walcott makes with regards to his poetics. As I tried to show before, the poet is using a certain kind of language in his efforts to begin to tell the story of his nation. His work, as a consequence of the workmanship that underlines the creations of the past, reaches in this poem a twist that, I argue, becomes specific to Walcott's poetry. He is not interested in the creation process itself, but rather, he manifests interest in the object of creation. Creator and inventor at the same time, Walcott is not drawn into origins, even though he takes his power from there. Instead, he is totally dedicated to beginnings, to what happens to creation after it has been created. There is where his poetic strain becomes relevant. As discussed before, Walcott's poetic art is at work only when he begins to transform his father's work, that is, when his poetic hand intervenes over the water color landscapes of his father. As Judith Harris points out, it is Walcott's "intent to reverse the perceptual order, to reinterpret the history of the island by painting over (whiting out) received narratives with fresh discursive colors and glaze." (Harris, 1997, pp. 293-309)

desultorily performed customs, is language. When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes." It is obvious and, I guess, extremely simple to understand the function that the mirror has in Walcott's essay. Even though it distorts reality by equating the right side with the left side, a mirror is still a pretty accurate instrument of reflection – it cannot mirror back something that it does not contain. Therefore, even though it mimics reality, a mirror cannot actually describe it, whereas language can.

As Harris suggests, Walcott is painting over and whitening out received narratives, but he is not reinterpreting the island’s colonial history. The reversal in the perceptual order the critic is invoking, then, refers to Walcott’s reinterpretation of his own artistic history. *Another Life*, in fact, carries the poet’s hidden ambition, that of describing for the first time, his island, and, thus, creating his nation. He is indeed painting over history, but he is painting over his own and his father’s understanding of history. If the father mimicks the art of the colonizers, the end product, the son succeeds in mimicking creation itself, and not merely the object of creation. *Anna awaking* chronicles this move in which, for the first time, the poet gives up his obsession with the twilight and focuses on the morning. Thus, when Anna wakes, poetry wakes too, and the atmosphere that the poet creates in this poem is a clear manifestation of perceptual reordering. The poet no longer begins anew at twilight; this time he really begins at dawn.

The third section of the poem gives credit to this possible interpretation of the break in Walcott’s poetry that accounts for a “poetics of morning” that replaces the “poetics of the twilight.” Considered by Walcott himself to be a direct answer to Western poetics, the “poetics of the twilight” comes to represent, with all its possible implications, the betrayal the poet constantly invokes:

*And which of them in time would be betrayed
was never questioned by that poetry
which breathed within the evening naturally,
but by the noble treachery of art
that looks for fear when it is least afraid,
that coldly takes the pulse-beat of the heart
in happiness; that praised its need to die
to the bright candour of the evening sky,
that preferred love to immortality;
so every step increased that subtlety
which hoped that their two bodies could be made
one body of immortal metaphor.
The hand she held already had betrayed
them by longing for describing her. (236)*

This long stanza in the form of a fourteen-line sonnet defines the battle between what I call the “poetics of the twilight” and the “poetics of morning.”⁶ In a nutshell, this is the conflict between origins and beginnings. As mentioned before, *Another Life* is a long meditation of the adult poet looking back to his

⁶ From all possible meanings, obvious within the text and implied by the large body of Walcott criticism, and to stay true to my understanding of the origin / beginning dialectic, I’d like though to suggest that the “poetics of twilight” represent the origin, while the “poetics of morning” embody the beginning.

apprenticeship as a young poet and painter. Moreover, the poem chronicles a series of conflicts between two opposing entities, which, I think, can be subsumed to the two large categories (origin & beginning) that define Walcott's becoming as an artist. As a way of clarifying my terms, before the close reading of the poem that, I hope, will prove my analysis, let me briefly reiterate what I mean by origin and beginning. First of all, even though there's no such thing as *a* first in good deconstructivist practice, there is the voice (the *dictating voice* of the colonizer) that originates language, and the writing (the *irredeemable writing* of the colonized) that begins language. Then, there's the absent father's hand that originates art (by painting the landscape) and the son's hand that begins it (by writing the landscape). Mimesis and mimicry, reality and representation, painting and poetry, past and present, memory and amnesia are also presented and represented.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise, there's the "poetics of the twilight" and the "poetics of morning." In the fourteen lines of the third part of *Anna awaking*, the two poetics are rendered by the *poetry which breathed within the evening* and by, what the poet calls, *the noble treachery of art*, respectively. What is more interesting, though, is the time sequence that the poet uses in rendering them. Whereas for the treachery of art he employs the present tense, for the evening poetry he uses the past. There's also at play a distinction between love and immortality. Let's take them separately and see what the poet means.

As expected, *what the twilight says* is given in more detail. The "poetics of twilight" refers to "the longing of describing" Anna, a need that would eventually betray the reality of the love the poet describes. Even though it seems clear that love is favored to immortality, the poet cannot escape the trap of the immortal metaphor. This means that in the process of transforming reality, poetry would have to give up life and, more importantly, give up the world it describes, therefore the nation. The two lovers' bodies would only become one by way of representation, by dying "to the bright candour of the evening sky." The poet seems to be so taken by the power of poetry that he loses sight of the downfalls of creation: the love he would thus describe would be a mere creation, irrevocably severed from reality. As Gregorias cautions a few lines before Chapter 14, the poet should prefer real intoxication to poetic intoxication,

*Gregorias would laugh, "Drink, take a next sip.
You are creating this, and it will end.
The world is not like this,
nor is she, my friend." (232)*

In contrast, the poetics offered as alternative disregards from the start the dangers of infatuation and intoxication. The “poetics of morning” “looks for fear when it is least afraid” and “coldly takes the pulse-beat of the heart / in happiness.” But what is more important, such a poetics questions the validity of the creation. The poetic process and its end product that are being questioned are presented in the last stanza of the second part,

*“Let’s go for a little walk,” she said, one afternoon,
“I’m in a walking mood.” Near the lagoon,
dark water’s lens had made the trees one wood
arranged to frame this pair whose pace
unknowingly measured loss,
each face was set towards its character.
Where they now stood, others before had stood,
the same lens held them, the repeated wood,
then they grew on each one
the self-delighting, self-transfiguring stone
stare of the semi-god.
Stunned by their images they strolled on, content
that the black film of water kept the print
of their locked images when they passed on. (236)*

This fourteen-line stanza is a clear example of “twilight poetics” under interrogation. In opposition to an element of the “poetics of morning,” “the oil green water” with which the poem begins, the dark water here signifies the poet’s creed in representation. The dark water’s lens creates both the frame and the image of the two lovers. Even more, it also locks their image in a typical exercise of transfiguration. Thus, locked in “the repeated wood”, the characters “measured loss”, meaning the impossibility of this type of poetry of portraying life. Repetition, which is one of the attributes of creation, does nothing more than to stifle the life of the creation. The black film of water keeps their print, which is a mere representation of a representation, thus making the “poetics of the twilight” an almost useless enterprise that needs to be questioned.

In fact, this questioning is the greatest move that Walcott dares to make. He is not only questioning his father’s mimetic rendering of the master’s art, he also questions his own use of the same art. The demi-god of poetry visits his own poems, but this is something from which Walcott wants to break away. Instead of being an original copyist, his characters standing where others’ characters had stood, he strives for another beginning. And this is literally found at the beginning of the poem,

*When the oil green water glows but doesn’t catch,
only its burnish, something wakes me early,*

*draws me out breezily to the pebbly shelf
of shallows where the water chuckles
and the ribbed boats sleep like children,
buoyed on their creases. I have nothing to do,
the burnished kettle is already polished,
to see my own blush burn,
and the last thing the breeze needs is my exhilaration. (233)*

These nine lines represent what I would call the “poetics of morning.” The poetic self, represented here by Anna, wakes in *media res*. Everything is in place, the poet has nothing to do, poetry is already created. The “burnished kettle of [poetry] is already polished.” This means that the poet already places himself within a tradition that seems not to need his poetic attempt. He does not want to see his own “blush burn” and the breeze no longer needs his exhilaration. It seems that everything that he had strived for, with his poetics of the twilight, is all of a sudden useless. The poetic self is already inscribed. He will never be original, therefore he needs to begin and Anna’s waking offers itself as a beginning.

Another look at this fragment reveals its ekphrastic quality. This is a narration of a landscape, similar to the landscapes that his father painted. The oil green water, in contrast to the dark water that will later lock the images of the two lovers, “glows but doesn’t catch”. It is early morning and the son is about to rise, make the water glow and reflect the shore. But that does not happen yet. If and when it does, the poet, like the painter would find himself in the presence of the light, which signifies tradition. That is why, for a long time, until now, Walcott seems to have favored the twilight, the fading light of the sun, and the glowing light of the moon. He knew he could not or should not put up with the light of the West, with the master’s tradition, like his father did.

Yet by exercising his poetics at dawn, Walcott implies that the light no longer bothers him. His task is no longer to resist tradition and fight back, at twilight. As if and as it does happen, yesterday’s light is about to rise today, as it will do it, again, tomorrow, so, instead of following it into the night in order to set forth his poetry, Walcott decides to compete with it, and start his “poetics of morning.” Still waiting for the sun, Walcott makes Anna, his poetic self, awake just before sunrise. The fact that his poetics glows but doesn’t catch is, then, a great realization from his part because he comes to understand that there’s nothing to catch!

Moreover, as he puts it in the next stanza, “The wind is older than the world. / It is always one thing at a time.” He is talking here about the poetic creation that can never be originated again. Then, his only task is to begin it again, to particularize it according to his needs. This does not mean, though, that he

surrenders to tradition; rather, through his poetry, he is contributing to tradition. In fact, this is his way of making and giving birth to poetry, as he suggest at the end of this second stanza,

*When the sleep-smelling house stirs
to that hoarse first cough, that the child’s first cry,
that rumbled, cavernous questioning of my mother,
I come out of the cave
like the wind emerging,
like a bride, to her first morning. (234)*

The invocation of the mother, here for the first time after presenting her as a servant in Chapter 2 suggests, both an unusual birth and a monstrous rape in which the spirit of tradition impregnated Walcott’s poetry and produced the “poetics of morning.”⁷ After consummating the marriage, the bride wakes “like the wind emerging.” In these lines, there is implied a crucial element of Walcott’s poetics in which the poet equates poetry with morning. In “The Antilles, Fragments of Epic History,” his Nobel lecture, Walcott writes,

For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.

There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise. (Walcott, 1998, p. 79)

In *Anna awaking* this early ritual of the sunrise breaks the ritual of love between the two lovers and, thus, also breaks the ritual of the “poetics of the twilight.” If once the poet/lover tried hard to describe his loved one, now it is time for the poet to fall in love with the world and admit the “noble treachery of art,”

*But even if I love not him but the world,
and the wonder of the world in him, of him in the world,
and the wonder that he makes the world waken to me,
I shall never grow old in him, I shall always be morning to him,
and I must walk and be gentle as morning. (234-5)*

Arguably, this is the ultimate betrayal that the poet can stand, when the loved one that he desperately wants to describe and have her image locked in poetry becomes the one with the world that will inspire his work. The object of desire and its representation become eventually a representation of the world. Waking herself, Anna does nothing more than waking the poet to his world.

⁷ In Chapter 2, Alix Walcott is portrayed as following the motto of the Prince of Wales, *ICH DIEN, I SERVE*.

In his Nobel lecture Walcott writes that “There’s no beginning but no end” when it comes to the role the poetry and art play in the Caribbean. Since there is no beginning, then there must be an origin. As I mentioned before, Walcott’s poetry, his process of making poetry, went through three phases. At first, Walcott mimicked the poetry he read. Like his father’s watercolor paintings, Walcott’s first poems are mere exercises after the great works of the literature of empires he studied in school. As he confesses in *Another Life*, the poet “had entered the house of literature as a houseboy.” (219) He then developed what I called to be the “poetics of the twilight,” a new sense of poetry that would resist and confront the literature of empires, at large. Finally, he settled for the “poetics of morning,” when he realized that the tradition he tried to confront was actually flowing through his veins. There is no contradiction in this. Instead of excessively engaging in an endless constellation of representations, that would sacrifice life, love and world, the poet, cunningly, resorted to a poetic self that would awaken the world to life. His island, as it becomes obvious from *Anna awaking* comes to life and the personal, almost private task, of the poet becomes that of a chronicler that follows the moves of the poetic self’s body. A chronicler that is capable of capturing in those moves the sound that wakes Anna and makes her body move “like a walking, waking island.” The memory of those moves, or the amnesia for that matter, is what Walcott calls not the making, but the remaking of poetry. In the end, the “walking, waking island” breaks away, both from the confines of his father’s landscape and from his own twilight poetics. This could be, then, the beginning of Walcott’s attempts at performing the nation!

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