

ISSN: 0976-8165

# *The Criterion*

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

*5th Year of Open Access*

Vol. 5, Issue-6 December 2014

Editor-In-Chief- Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor- Mrs. Madhuri Bite



About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>

## Search for Caribbean Identity: A Study of Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*

**Md. Manirul Islam**

Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of English

Rabindra Bharati University

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Derek Alton Walcott received the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature. He was born in Castries, Saint Lucia, in the West Indies in 1930. His family was of African and European descent – both his grandfathers were white and both his grandmothers were black. This mixed racial background has been reflected in his poem ‘A Far Cry from Africa’. Walcott is universally recognized for his multicultural commitment. Growing up in his mixed St. Lucian world and coming in close contact with both colonial and folk cultures, Walcott becomes aware of the plurality of Caribbean society. Most of Walcott’s plays have employed Caribbean themes and settings. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) Walcott has investigated Caribbean origins – especially the region’s deep-rooted and unbreakable relationship with Africa and Europe.

In the prologue of the play the conteur and the chorus express their concerns for the miserable plight of Makak who has already been in a jail. There are two prison cases on either side of the stage. Tigre and Souris are in one cell and the old Black Makak is in the other. Corporal Lestrade who has put Makak in the jail is a mulatto and an agent of the oppressive system of the white colonial rule; he arrests Makak for being “drunk and disorderly! A old man like that! He was drunk and he mash up Alcindor cafe” (215). Lestrade condemns the Black prisoners as “animals, beasts, savages, cannibals, niggers” (216). Lestrade orders Makak to mention his name, status, occupation, ambition, domicile, age and race. Makak replies that he forgets his name, he belongs to a tired race and his denominational affiliation is Catholicism. In fact Makak has forgot his basic identity.

Lestrade now dons Counsel’s garments, and Souris and Tigre robe themselves like judges. Lestrade is proud of his power: “I can both accuse and defend this man” (220). Corporal Lestrade begins to mention the charges against Makak. Makak at that time remains silent. When Makak lifts up his head, Lestrade jerks it back wildly because Makak is a Black native:

Corporal:

My lords, as you can see, this is a being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of its own. I shall ask the prisoner to turn out his hands..... I will spare you the sound of that voice, which have come from a cave of darkness, dripping with horror. These hands are the hands of Esau, the fingers are like roots, the arteries as hard as twine, and the palms are seamed with coal. But the animal, you observe, is tamed and obedient. (222)

Lestrade calls Makak a tamed and obedient animal. He orders Makak to do some acts which Makak performs timidly. The Corporal, however, is successful to establish the fact that the accused is capable of obeying orders, reflexes and understanding justice. He, therefore, declares the charge against Makak. Hammer comments: “Corporal Lestrade ridicules backward savages and proudly upholds his master’s standards. Gloating over his presumed superiority he proves through interrogation that Makak is an ape, an imitator who must be told how to behave and what to do” (85-86).

Lestrade loudly declares the charge against Makak in detail but Makak admits that he is an innocent old man and he wants to go home:

Makak:

I am an old man. Send me home, Corporal. I suffer from madness. I does see things. Spirits does talk to me. All I have is dreams and they don’t trouble your soul. (225)

In this first long speech Makak discloses his degrading and isolated condition – he is sixty years old; he has lived all his life like a wild beast in hiding without having wife and child; people forget him like the mist on Monkey Mountain. Makak now describes his vision of a white woman who informs him that he is a descendant of the African warrior kings and he should retreat back to Africa. Lestrade thinks this vision as an insane one: “Is this rage for whiteness that does drive niggers mad” (228).

Scene – i is a flashback to Monkey Mountain itself and Moustique who is a little man with a limp has been introduced. Moustique is a realist and extremely materialistic. Makak informs Moustique about his vision of the white woman. Moustique does not believe in the vision and mocks him. Makak persuades Moustique to believe him: “Listen to me, I not mad. Listen!”(236). Makak also adds: “Well, well .....the things she tell me, you would not believe. She did know my name, my age, where I born, and that it was charcoal I burn and selling for a living. She know how I live alone, with no wife and no friend.....” (236). Makak tells Moustique that the white woman has made him aware of his royal origin – that he should act as a redeemer to lead his people back to Africa. Moustique, however, decides to accompany his leader in his journey back to Africa.

In Scene – ii, Makak descends from Monkey Mountain and acts as a Jesus-like healer. Makak eventually saves a snake-bitten man named Josephus. Moustique seizes the opportunity and collects food and money from the relatives of the healed man. Whereas Moustique is concerned with collecting money, Makak clearly states his own viewpoint: “You don’t understand, Moustique. This power I have, is not for profit” (254).

In Scene – iii, Lestrade’s recollection begins and it merges with Makak’s. In the recollection, the market-scene appears; Corporal Lestrade and Caiphas J. Pamphilon are on duty at Quartre Chemin crossroads. People gather in the market for the arrival of Makak and they discuss about various rumours regarding Makak’s spiritual power. Lestrade Harshly comments: “The crippled, crippled. It’s the crippled who believe in miracles. It’s the slaves who believe in freedom” (262). Lestrade says that the Black natives are paralysed with darkness of ignorance.

In fact Lestrade denies the Black aspect of his mulatto identity. In Lestrade's recollection, Moustique appears in the market as a healer in the disguise of Makak. Moustique presents himself as Makak before the crowd of the market:

Moustique:

Qui. It is Makak

.....

Let the enemies of Africa make way.  
Let the Abyssinian lion leap again,  
For Makak walk in frenzy down Monkey Mountain,  
And God send this message in lightning handwriting  
That the sword of sunlight be in his right hand  
And the moon his shield. (265)

Moustique ultimately fails. As he drops the bowl in fear of a spider, the Corporal loudly mocks him: "A spider? A man who will bring you deliverance is afraid of spider?" (268) Basil, the carpenter and the maker of coffins ultimately exposes Moustique's disguise: "You cannot run fast enough, eh? Moustique! That is not Makak! His name is Moustique!" (269) Moustique confesses the truth: "You know who I am ? You want to know who I am? Makak! Makak! Or Moustique, is not the same nigger? ..... All I have is this [shows the mask] black faces, white masks!" (270-271) This truth is also applicable to the condition of Lestrade because he is a mulatto and acts as an agent of the white colonizing power. Moustique identifies himself with Makak as both of them are black natives. Makak, however, arrives and gazes into Moustique's dying eyes; what he sees is only emptiness and black nothingness.

In the interlude of the second part of the play, the playwright uses Jean Paul Sartre's Introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* to highlight the schizophrenic psyche of a colonized native:

Two worlds: that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night and at dawn they crowd into the churches to hear mass; each day the split widens. Our enemy betrays his brothers and becomes our accomplice; his brothers do the same thing. The status of 'Native' is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people with their consent. (277)

The two worlds of Black and White, Africa and Europe not only fight in the psyche of Makak but this war is running in the minds of all the West Indians or the Caribbeans. The West Indians find themselves in the endless confusion of their African origin and European legacy – whether they should go back to Africa or to permanently stick to the white colonizing influences. Scene – i of Part – 2 shows the jail again where Corporal Lestrade is engaged in defending white justice: "I am an instrument of the law, Souris. I got the white man work to do" (279). Lestrade's attitude echoes the attitude of the White European colonizers towards the West Indians. Tigre and Souris pretend to be on the side of Makak to take possession of his hidden money. They overpower Lestrade; they wound him and return to the mountain thinking that Lestrade is dead. But Lestrade is only injured and begins to chase the prisoners. Corporal Lestrade eventually

changes and is ready to play ‘another part’. The Corporal becomes aware of his Blackness and joins Makak’s back-to-Africa movement. The critic Bruce King in his book *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean life* rightly comments: “Walcott said that *Dream on Monkey Mountain* was about the West Indian search for identity and what colonialism does to the spirit. The first half of the play is white, but when Lestrade becomes an ape, the play becomes black, and the same sins are repeated, the cycle of violence begins again” (275). The Corporal now accepts Black identity and admits his African origin. The Corporal becomes an Advocate of the Black race’s law and confesses his fragmented consciousness:

Corporal:

Too late have I loved thee, Africa of my mind.....I received thee because I hated half of myself, my eclipse. But now in that heart of the forest at the foot of Monkey Mountain .....I kiss your foot. Monkey Mountain ..... I return to this, my mother. Naked, trying very hard not to weep in the dust. I was what I am, but now I am myself.....I sing the glories of Makak! The glories of my race! ..... O God, I have become what I mocked. I always was. Makak! Makak! Forgive me, old father. (299-300)

Tigre wants money from Makak’s hidden source; Souris changes his mind and supports Makak; the Corporal kills Tigre for the latter’s intention of exploiting Makak.

The Apotheosis scene (Scene – iii, Part – 2) follows; it is a dream within a dream. Transported to Africa, Makak accepts his position as an African monarch. The Corporal rejects his colonial uniform and wears African robes. Makak sets up a court to pass judgement on the ‘enemies of Africa’ who have dominated over the Blacks. Basil reads out the names of the offenders whose common crime is their ‘whiteness’, the enemies are condemned to death because they have contributed to the repression of the Blacks. Basil again mentions a catalogue of tributes offered to Makak from the white world. But Makak shakes his head and all the tribes reject those tributes. Even the dead Moustique is not exempted; he is executed for betraying Makak’s dream. Finally, the figure of the apparition of the white goddess who made Makak aware of his African origin is brought before him. Makak beheads the apparition of the white goddess at the instigation of Lestrade:

Corporal:

She is the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape look into and find himself unbearable. She is all that is pure, all that he cannot reach. You see her statues in white stone, and you turn your face away, mixed with abhorrence and lust, with destruction and desire. She is lime, snow, marble, moonlight, lilies, cloud, foam and bleaching cream, the mother of civilisation, and the confounder of blackness. I too have longed for her. She is the colour of the law, religion, paper, art and if you want peace, if you want to discover the beautiful depth of your blackness, nigger, chop off her head! When you do this, you will kill Venus, the Virgin, the Sleeping Beauty. She is the white light that paralysed your mind, that led you into this confusion. It is you who created her, so kill her! Kill her! The law has spoken. (319)

By beheading the apparition Makak kills the European side of his heritage. Before performing the act of beheading he removes his African robe. Thus the twin 'bewitchings' of Europe and Africa are rejected at the same time. In fact neither the European nor the African side of Makak's self is given the chance to dominate over him.

In the epilogue of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* Makak awakens from his dream and is still in the jail. He now discovers his essential self. He remembers that his legal name is Felix Hobain. In fact Makak regains his true identity:

Makak:

Lord, I have been washed from shore to shore, as a tree in the ocean. The branches of my fingers, the roots of my feet, could grip nothing, but now, God, they have found ground. Let me be swallowed up in mist again, and let me be forgotten, so that when the mist open, men can look up, at some small clearing with a hut, with a small signal of smoke, and say, 'Makak lives there. Makak lives where he has always lived, in the dream of his people.' ..... Come, Moustique, we going home. (326)

Home for Makak is, therefore, Monkey Mountain of the Caribbean landscape. In the play Walcott rejects the idea of racial or cultural superiority through Makak's repudiation of African origin and European legacy. The Caribbean culture is the creolization of different cultures. Daizal R. Samad comments: "The excellence of Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* resides in this poet's awareness of conflicting variables within the West Indies and the West Indian; its excellence rests upon his complex vision and hope for reintegration / resolution / rebirth" (Parker 243).

*Dream on Monkey Mountain* is a very complex play and some ambiguities within the play lead the critics to interpret the play in diverse ways. In spite of its essential dream-sequences and ambiguities the play offers us an unforgettable character named Makak who regains his Caribbean identity through taking revenge upon the enemies of Black people and beheading the apparition of the white goddess. Makak rejects his obsessions with his African origin and his European legacy in the beheading scene. In fact Makak asserts in reverse the hybrid origin or multicultural aspect of Caribbean identity. He does not admit the superiority of any one particular influence, culture or race; rather he embraces the hybrid or mixed culture of his society.

#### Works Cited:

- Baugh, Edward. *Derek Walcott*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.  
 Hamner, Robert D. *Derek Walcott*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.  
 King, Bruce. *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.  
 Parker, Michael and Starkey, Roger. (Ed.). *New Casebooks: Post Colonial Literatures*. London: Macmillan, 2007.  
 Thieme, John. *Derek Walcott*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.  
 Walcott, Derek. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970.