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WEST INDIAN LITERATURE AS AN EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL
CULTURES: THE LITERATURE OF ST. LUCIA

'and then each rock broke into its own nation' (Walcott, 'The sea is history')

In the above line, Derek Walcott takes a despairing glance at the present reality of political individualism among the island-nations of the Caribbean, a reality which, ever since the breakdown of the West Indian Federation, has meant the loss of their more hopeful promise as one regional entity.¹ Walcott's line echoes the kind of concerns with which one begins to focus on the literatures of the individual islands - an approach which raises similar questions about separate national literatures or a single regional literature. One needs to start with at least this qualification: West Indian literature, from its earliest beginnings to the present, has always been much more about West Indian nationalism than about separate national identities. The writers have demonstrated one common pursuit, the urgency of which far transcends the individual needs of their various territories. They have all drawn strength from the sense of a shared preoccupation with the basic question facing the peoples of the region: the question of where to find and how to realize themselves in the wake of the experience of slavery and colonialism.

Each writer comes to this collective endeavour, however, out of the lived experience of his own island background. Walcott, again, provides a striking example of the functional relationship between the two. His arch-hero Makak (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*) comes from his childhood memory of a rowdy, awesome woodcutter in St. Lucia.² To make him the carrier of his revolutionary message, Walcott has loaded him with regional history. Makak starts from the common stigmas of racial inferiority and the degrading image of the native as ape-figure, as his French patois name implies. At the same time, Walcott has set him in a cultural milieu which draws as much on the peasant life of his native St. Lucia as on

the urban folk milieu of Trinidad (with its calypso and stick-fighting tradition, its spiritual Baptist cult). But it is one of Walcott's special strengths that he aims at and realizes this kind of fusion.

To stress the importance of the regional context, however, is not to deny the fact that from one writer to another the literature does present a number of distinct socio-cultural environments. We get the multi-racial milieu of Trinidad in Naipaul; the felt presence of the vast interior and Amerindian hinterland in Harris' Guyana; the climate of small-island privation in the early Walcott's St. Lucia. To take these differences into account becomes useful and important for several reasons. First, it puts into focus the extent to which the local circumstances of his island/territory have determined each particular writer's orientation: his perception of, and response to the problem of identity. Seen close-up, each environment presents its own variety of the underlying predicament to explain the different, often controversial 'answers' we get from these writers. From such a close-up view of each particular environment one gets, ultimately, a full sense of the complexity of the history enacted in the region, as colonialism adapted to varying combinations of factors from one territory to another. On the positive side, these individual portraits also serve to highlight the rich variety of resources contained within this diversity, which is one of the region's greatest strengths.

The present paper examines the case of St. Lucia, a small, underdeveloped island from which has come a substantial contribution to the literature of the West Indies. The achievement of its native Derek Walcott, a major poet and dramatist, has made this contribution especially outstanding. The island is also represented by the novelist Garth St. Omer, who first appeared in the late sixties with a slim but very impressive output. Other significant figures include Roderick Walcott (Derek's twin brother) who ranks among the foremost pioneers of West Indian drama; and Stanley French, who has produced a number of fine plays. Quite a few promising figures, moreover, have emerged in the last decade.³ We will deal here, however, only with the works of Derek Walcott and Garth St. Omer, in whom the level of engagement is strongest. There are large areas of difference between Walcott and St. Omer, both in outlook and in sensibility; but they both carry a clear, authentic image of their native island. From their works emerges a graphic portrait of the society and its setting, stamped with its own variety of the colonial condition. The characteristic aspects of that setting, importantly, have closely informed the original leanings and preoccupations of both writers.

St. Lucia emerges from the early Walcott and St. Omer as a small-island setting dominated by poverty and religion, here represented by

Roman Catholicism. These two particular factors, to a large extent, determined and defined the reality of the island in colonial times. A brief survey of St. Lucia's history will give the background to these factors as well as other related aspects of the island's cultural legacy.⁴

St. Lucia was discovered, probably by the Spanish, sometime between the late 15th and the early 16th centuries. Several European nations made abortive attempts to settle the island in the early decades of the 17th century. They met with, among other adverse factors, the resistance of the indigenous Caribs, who were themselves eventually wiped out. It was the French who, in 1650, made the first successful attempt at settlement. From that time (circa 1657) and through the period of slavery, St. Lucia was the object of a long-drawn out struggle between the French and British, who each sought to secure it as a military base. The island shifted from the one to the other in the naval battles waged by these powers throughout the 18th century in Caribbean waters. By the time it was finally settled on the British (1814), it had passed hands between them fourteen times. The French however, in addition to their early start, had held the island during its longest spell of peacetime development. They were therefore responsible for the most formative influences. St. Lucia thus emerged as a special type of anomaly: officially British, but essentially French in cultural influence.⁵

Two main features survived as a monument to this French colonial legacy: the French patois dialect which remains the native tongue of the majority of the island's people, and Roman Catholicism, which claims 95 per cent of the population to this day. The Catholic Church rose to its monopoly in a neglected British colonial outpost. Its influence extended into the public sphere. Education, for example, remained under its exclusive control until the early seventies. Its strict code of orthodox morality presided over norms and mores in the society. It is interesting to note that St. Lucia is one of the few islands where Baptist-Revivalist sects never took root. What all this amounts to, in effect, is that, to all intents and purposes, the Catholic Church was the main local agency of the colonial dispensation in that island.

What helped especially to maintain this religious stronghold was the fundamental problem of the island's extreme poverty. Like the other tiny, underdeveloped territories of the region, St. Lucia lacked the material resources to support its population – a mere 80,000 in the forties and fifties. It was still virtually dependent on a meagre sugar industry, which was itself undergoing a general decline in the area. Sugar production was confined to two plantations in the north-east of the island, and provided employment for a limited number of laborers from the neighboring rural

districts. A coaling industry, also in its dying phases, provided even more minimal employment for the urban poor in the capital town of Castries. The familiar problem of low wage conditions, moreover, was the order of the day, and had already given rise to some degree of unrest in both industries.⁶ The majority of the island's people, however, scattered in its isolated coastal districts, eked out a living as small subsistence peasants and fisherfolk, often at the destitute level presented in Walcott's *The sea at Dauphin* (1970). A large deprived class of peasants and fisherfolk in the rural districts; an urban contingent of small vendors, artisans and domestics; a would-be middle class of civil servants and teachers - these comprised the essential reality of St. Lucia's society and its means.

Traditional Catholicism, sublimating earthly suffering in the hope of supernatural reward, thrived well in this climate of privation. Walcott and St. Omer both show, from the outset, an acute reaction to this overwhelming Catholic presence, and a sense of the island's plight within the combined stranglehold of poverty and religion. In both, the first instincts of protest are directed against the religious establishment. St. Omer provides a good point of entry into these fundamentals of the island's social reality. Confining his gaze to the small urban capital of Castries, he deals with a social realism which closely documents the conditions and character of its life. His novels are a searching analysis of precisely this twin problem of poverty and religion, and probe some of the lasting injuries to the St. Lucian sensibility.

St. Omer has produced four novels so far: *A Room on the hill* (1968), *Shades of grey* (1968), *Nor any country* (1969), and *J-, Black Bam and the masqueraders* (1972).⁷ These works explore one single subject: the dilemma of the educated native son, returning home to take his place and make a contribution to his society. He finds this purpose thwarted by a society still trapped in the dearth of persisting poverty and alien religious values. He comes to face, instead, his own personal paralysis and psychic disability. In a sensitive response to St. Omer's theme, Walcott (1969: 50-51) has described this dilemma as 'homecomings without home'. The St. Omer persona, who appears in all the various protagonists, sums up the problem thus: 'From his memory he had exhumed corpses of his old self, probing them with the scalpel of his new awareness. ...But the timidity and fear his discovery of himself had instilled and the paralysis they induced made any reconstruction in the future too daring for him to contemplate.' (*Room*, pp. 36-38). Inclined towards self-withdrawal, he remains intimately enmeshed in the reality of that society, experiencing his past and continuing ties with it. He therefore reflects the predicament of the society in analyzing his own.

St. Omer stays within a domestic, private sphere of experience to explore this dilemma. He deals in mainly personal relationships: between parents and children, husbands and wives, sexual partners, as well as close friends. From the protagonist's immediate background - the lower and 'backyard' classes comprising market-vendors, shopkeepers, domestic servants - comes one of the most endemic ills. John, in *Room on the hill*, sees it in the general picture of lives impoverished of all save the practices and pieties of religion. His own mother is the painful prototype of this condition. Her life has been strictly divided between scraping to see her son through school and attending to such ritual acts of devotion: 'The sputtering of the small lamp, and the holy images it never ceased to burn before, were her only heralds.' (*Room*, p. 34). At the core of this kind of virtuous poverty lies the Catholic doctrine of the after-life, fostering the attitude of resignation and sacrifice in deprivation. In the environment she represents, the doctrine of sin and punishment is just as strongly internalized, with equally repressive results.

What stands out especially in the community St. Omer presents is the rigid system of orthodox morality, which closely regulated its life. It dictated the prevailing codes, sanctions and mores of the society. Among these, the most formidable was the sanction against illegitimacy. It imposed all kinds of double-standards and constraints in a largely underprivileged class where the traditional pattern of unmarried mothers and fatherless homes obtained. Most expressive of the kind of authoritarianism the Church stood for was its policy for enforcing this sanction. Young men and women involved in pregnancies outside marriage had the choice of either getting married or losing their jobs in the teaching service and similar educational opportunities. This is the subject of St. Omer's most powerful novel so far, *J-, Black Bam and the masqueraders*, to which we will return later.

There is nothing particularly unusual about this type of obscurantism in the older forms of orthodox Catholicism; nor was St. Lucia the only place to suffer from it. The point is, though, that the Catholic institution assumed an inordinate influence in shaping this small society because of the virtual absence of any other active, directing forces in what was a forgotten colonial backwater. The only prospects for possible change lay in the few openings through higher education, which were becoming available in St. Omer's time. Meanwhile, the influence of the Church extended into all spheres of sociocultural organization in the island-community. It stood solidly in the background of race, color, and class alignments in the society. The island had its own quaint variant of the race-class syndrome. Most St. Lucian writers record the image of the two short streets adjoining the Cathedral in the capital town of Castries. There

a small group of French creole mulattoes lived secluded and remote from the black community around it – except for its occasional sexual raids on their lower ranks. This mulatto enclave represented, to all intents and purposes, the ‘white’ elite of the community. A white priesthood, the French and Irish religious orders who ran the schools, and this invisible elite naturally rallied to uphold the white models and values which overshadowed the black community. St. Omer conveys the character of that white morality system in a reference to one notorious practice. He refers to a system of double uniforms operated by the nuns who ran the single secondary school for girls – one colour for legitimates and another for illegitimates. There is a curious twist in the situation he presents. A member of the white elite was able to buy his illegitimate daughter by a black servant the legitimate status.

One thing becomes quite clear about the society St. Omer recaptures: there were glaring gaps between its prescribed norms and its actual practices. The system harbored the kind of hypocrisy just cited. More critically, its pressures and strains backfired to cause total disarray within the most private areas of human relationship. Family, married, and sexual life were all strangely disordered. Most of St. Omer’s characters are casualties of one type or another of these abnormal relationships; and his final, most penetrating focus is on the toll in damaged psyches and ruined lives.

In his culminating novel, *J-, Black Bam and the masqueraders*, St. Omer describes a situation that highlights the extreme reaches of just these violations. The novel juxtaposes the stories of two St. Lucian brothers, Paul and Peter Breville. Paul, the older brother who remained on the island, has ended up mad; Peter, who left the island on a scholarship, has just returned to a university post in one of ‘the larger islands to the north’. The technique of the novel is both functional and thematic. Paul’s letters to his brother, a desperate outpouring of his memories, alternate with snapshots of Peter’s present life in the other island. The two brothers, in fact, emerge as alternate sides of the same coin: Paul, a victim of madness; Peter trapped in a violent, destructive marriage to a St. Lucian girl from his past. It is as if, in other words, neither had ‘escaped’.

Behind their two contrasting circumstances lay two opposite choices. Both brothers had found themselves faced with the same problem, common enough: to conform to the Church’s policy on extra-marital pregnancies or lose their chances of a future through education. Paul, always confident of his own brilliance, had preferred to defy the system rather than enter into a marriage he did not want. Peter had married Phyllis, whom he later suspects of having deliberately trapped him, to preserve his chance of pursuing a career. To survive in the island, where he is doomed to

remain, Paul dons a pose of madness. He is seduced into the role by egomaniac delusions of his own apartness, and contempt for his mean surroundings. The pose of madness becomes all too real. Peter, on the other side, pays an equally high price for his convenient conformism. His life with Phyllis is a mutually destructive affair, now down to a level of raw brutality and violence. He has nothing in common with the wife who had actually waited eight years in his mother's house during his absence. (Peter had left to take up the scholarship soon after marrying her.) Phyllis embodies some of the worst hangovers of the past. She is devoid of ambition and is inarticulate, driven solely by her ambition to find her own salvation in someone, like Peter, who had achieved success. In her fights with him she keeps returning to this statement as her sole defense: 'I don't have nowhere to go. So you taking advantage' (*J-, Black Bam...*, p. 23). It sadly sums up her plight as a trapped animal.

Phyllis herself is one of the casualties of the past. She comes, warped, from one of those clandestine liaisons between white upper class and black which made social history in the island. She is the mulatto daughter of a white father from the French creole elite, who had kept a separate house for his 'outside' children (as the saying goes in the region), and their black mother. The latter, almost like the housekeeper of this illegitimate household, emerged from the back quarters of the house only during his visits. Phyllis had suddenly found all prospects of mulatto privilege shattered at his death, and had placed her stakes for retaining her higher entitlements as a mulatto in marriage to a promising black. Peter himself had been drawn to the compensations of her long hair and fair complexion. Phyllis's fixation becomes pathological in the face of a failing marriage. It assumes truly manic proportions, and erupts into raw violence, physical response seeming to be her only recourse. She drives Peter into beating her on the Campus fields; she finds her way into the house of the French colleague with whom Peter is having an affair, lies in wait, and gives her a sound beating with a stick. She smacks of an insanity even more disturbing than Paul's. In fact, in Paul's world, as in that of Peter, who is yielding to his own paralysis under the pressure, the crises all end in psychological collapse.

St. Omer singles out a portrait of St. Lucia which obviously has some personal urgency for him. Though there are other faces besides the one he shows, he does sound some of the key notes of the St. Lucian sensibility, and evokes strains and postures which also appear in Walcott. His images point to an authentic pull between two opposite strains of that sensibility – the one repressed, the other charged with a spirit and energy that will not stay harnessed. It is interesting, in this respect, to note the use St.

Omer makes of folk forms like the local masquerades. They appear in all his novels, and include the masquerade of the costumed child-eating devils we meet in *Ti-Jean and his brothers* (1970), and bands of revellers on the trail of the town's eccentrics, or following popular dumb shows. In St. Omer, these folk customs usually convey notes of hysteria and dread. In *Room on the hill*, Old Alphonse is one of the town's self-dramatizing layabouts, leading a band of shouting children. The bacchanal starts as a humoring of Old Alphonse, but soon becomes more of a harrying of this would-be hero. It is almost as if the wilder spirits of the crowd were finding release from their Sunday habits.

It is an easy step from this public madness to the private schizophrenia of a Paul. Similar tensions lie behind the strange form of rebellion he is driven to perform. Paul is the likeness, on his higher level, of a number of possessed derelicts and layabouts of whom Walcott, in "What the twilight says", writes: 'The derelicts who mimed their tragedies, the lunatics who every day improvised absurd monodramas. ...all towns are full of them, but their determined, self-destructive desolation was performed' (1970b: 23). Walcott has preserved the image of these derelicts, all living legends in their time, in a portrait gallery which is one of the outstanding things in *Another life*. Their strange obsessions attest to a vexed, distressed, but irrepressible spirit, as in this picture of a crippled mother being carried by her son. She cuts a strangely imposing figure, while he feels heroic in his wretched burden:

Berthilia
 the frog-like, crippled crone,
 a hump on her son's back, is carried
 to her straw mat, her day-long perch,
 Cassandra, with her drone unheeded.
 Her son, Pierre, carries night-soil in buckets,
 She spurs him like a rider,
 horsey back, horsey back;
 when he describes his cross he sounds content,
 he is everywhere admired. A model son.

(III.ii.28-37)

Walcott describes them as 'the stars of his mythology', recalling those early fantasies in which he tried to find for each derelict a parallel among the Greek epic heroes. The entire effort suggests that it was these reduced figures who first defined for him in their reversed 'heroic' way the awesome reaches of human suffering and defeat. Tutored as he was on classical literature, it was in them that he found his first real-life glimpse of the tragic.

St. Lucia has been present in Walcott's work from the beginning. Walcott gives a much fuller and richer portrait of the island than St. Omer, embracing as he does the 'several postures' of its physical and human landscape. His major work so far, *Another life*, comes out of the simultaneous pain and love with which he continues to possess the entire landscape. He uncovers, accordingly, both its disfigurements and its areas of possibility. One major difference between Walcott's St. Lucia and that of St. Omer is that Walcott includes the life of the island's country districts and coastal villages, drawing upon its more active, rural folk culture.⁸ It is in these areas that he seeks out the unfettered spirit and essence of the place: 'In the deep country it found the natural man,/generous, rooted' (*Another life*, VII.i.31-32). We will return to this highly significant feature in his work.

Walcott, too, as already observed, starts with an early attack on the unholy alliance between poverty and religion in the island. (He himself belonged to a tiny Methodist contingent, a situation which probably made him all the more sensitive to the pervasive influence of the dominant religion.) He deals with the subject in his first important play, *The sea at Dauphin* (1970),⁹ in which the fisherman-hero, Afa, is his spokesman. Afa is the lone angry voice in the village, railing against religious servitude and complacency amid destitution. Thus, in the accents of the local patois, he says: 'Dirt and prayers is Dauphin life, in Dauphin, Canaries, Micoud. Where they have priest is poverty' (11.517-518). In the same play, Walcott shows an early penetration of the final danger to the black spirit colonized by a white imperial religion – that of seeing the very universe refracted through the white race, of internalizing that image. Afa points to this danger obliquely, as he draws upon the stark, physical images of his rough 'piece of coast' to rage against its ills:

God is a white man. The sky is his blue eye,
His spit on Dauphin people is the sea.
(11.67-68)

The theme, which Walcott calls one race's quarrel with another's God, recurs throughout his works. He returns to the idea again and again, and expresses the view that the black race can come to terms with the problem only by taking possession of this God and remaking it in the image of its own soul. The spirit of militancy, the deeply-inspired will to survive which distinguishes the Afro-American traditions of Christianity, represents for him this kind of achievement (1974: 7-12).

There was, however, one especially curious feature about the religious

environment of the St. Lucia in which Walcott grew up. A strong, though 'submerged' core of primitive religion existed alongside the formal. Walcott was deeply responsive to this phenomenon. His work registers the ambivalences and clashes this juxtaposition involved, and the powerful climate of superstition it created. 'The Pact' in *Another life* (I.iv) is an inset of a strange tale of sorcery, locally known as obeah, of a kind which still survives in the superstitious lore of the island. According to the general belief, individuals who practice obeah engage in various evil and mysterious activities by virtue of certain powers they receive from the Devil (see Breen 1970: 249). They use these powers mainly to work harm against their enemies, or for purposes of worldly gain. To secure these powers, they have made a pact with the Devil – which means, effectively, that their souls are contracted to him. In a play entitled *Malfinis* (1966), Roderick Walcott deals with the authentic case of three malefactors who set out to fulfill such a pact by tearing out the heart of a child live.¹⁰ The deed was intended to bring them a good cane harvest. This is the practice, incidentally, alluded to in the chant of the child-eating Devils used in *Ti-Jean and his brothers*.

'The Pact' tells the tale of Monsieur Auguste Manoir, 'pillar of business and the Church', whose pact with the Devil is uncovered by a strange sequence of events. One fateful night, Manoir's watchman deals a sinister-looking dog a blow. The truth about Manoir's identity as a sorcerer comes to light when a mysterious bloodstain is discovered on the streets next day, while Manoir lies dying in his bed. It was Manoir himself, the community believes, who, in the form of a dog, had received that blow which divested him of his powers and spelt his death:

The blood of garbage mongrels had a thin,
watery excretion; this, a rich red
bubbled before their eyes.

Monsieur Manoir
urged his ringed, hairy hand to climb his stomach
to nuzzle at his heart.

.....
hearing his blood race
like wine from a barrel when its bung has burst.
(I.iv.88-98)

The tale attests to the power of a subterranean 'negromancy' that proved 'stronger than their mass'. That 'negromancy' found points of contact, in fact, with the core of Catholic supernaturalism. Thus, in the Manoir incident, a priest is on the scene to perform the necessary rites as official

exorcist. The combination served to compound the peculiar atmosphere of superstition in the island. Walcott sums up the phenomenon thus:

One step behind the city was the bush.
One step behind the Church door stood the devil.
(IV.11.62-63)

He captures a timeless portrait of the island in that image.

Walcott's work reflects the several, complex facets of religion in St. Lucia. He was above all concerned with the lack of spiritual direction underlying the strong hold of religion on the people, and despaired of the backwardness and ignorance fostered by this climate of superstition. Yet the root problems and urgencies of religion in St. Lucia left a lasting influence on Walcott. That influence survives in his central preoccupation with the possibility of a liberating faith, and the need for spiritual wholeness. The case of Dunstan St. Omer, the St. Lucian painter, is relevant here. He is the Gregorias to whom Walcott pays a major tribute in *Another life*. Dunstan St. Omer has made his own impressive contribution in the sphere of religion with a number of paintings which draw upon local forms and features to recast the Christian faith in the native image and sensibility.¹¹ This achievement fulfils his early revolutionary ambition to indigenize and liberate religious faith in the island. A revolutionary in spirit, St. Omer is yet a product of the pervasive religious culture we have been considering. Against this background, it seems to me, we can begin to appreciate why Walcott's militancy remains essentially a-political, and his affirmations deeply 'religious' in intention.

It is the island's country districts, however, its small peasant communities and fishing villages – the scenes of its largely rustic culture¹² – that comprise the largest and most seminal area of the St. Lucian presence in Walcott's work. Included is the surrounding physical setting, which accounts for more than three quarters of its undeveloped area: the mountain-forest of Makak; the coastal settings of its fisher-folk; and the island-sea, which is everywhere in Walcott. The physical setting is in itself an organic element of culture in Walcott's imaginative world.

This rustic configuration is of far-reaching significance in Walcott's work. He seems, from the very beginning, to be virtually turning away from St. Omer's 'unreal' town to seek out a more authentic life in these country districts. He goes to this setting for his first and arch-heroes – the fisherman Afa, the charcoal burner Makak. It is 'out of these foresters and fishermen' that he makes 'heraldic men'.¹³ Walcott's 'heraldic men' are, to begin with, natural rebel-figures, law-breakers or felons, like the Chantal of *Malcochon*

(1970) from whom Makak evolves. They all stand outside and come into conflict with the inherited social order. Secondly, all carve out a livelihood from bare elemental resources, and are potentially their own masters – that is, potentially independent spirits. In Walcott's view, these virtues and strengths inhere in their very denuded, reduced condition. Walcott thus perceives this characteristic condition as the ground of primal possibilities. The idea is reiterated throughout his work.

But Walcott is not being so unrealistic as to stop at this 'primal' level, and deny the even more palpable socio-cultural context. This is clear from his presentation of Makak. Makak in his mountain-forest setting is a man living on his own ground, off its elemental resources. As such, he has a pure unadulterated capacity to lay claim to his own roots there. Yet, any impulse towards this very real potential is thwarted and mocked by the deformed self-image that lives with Makak, even in isolation. The latter is, of course, the legacy of racial oppression and subjugation, which spell socio-historical necessity. In the tug-of-war that is waged within Makak, it is the independent spirit that prevails, overcoming the negative self-image (held up to him by the mulatto Lestrade). At such points, Walcott's roots in St. Lucian culture, and his wider concern with West Indian race and history, join forces and become one.

The belief in primal possibility, further, does not mean that Walcott subscribes to the notion of a *tabula rasa* in his vision of Caribbean man: he is too much aware of the mixed bag of traditions that is part of the region's complex historical legacy. Walcott believes, however, that the task of building a world from scratch, which is the challenge of a new environment, means that Caribbean man has the potentiality of injecting a new lease on life into whatever he creates. Whatever he retains from older traditions, whatever new syntheses emerge, are charged afresh with human purpose. Thus Walcott sees the promise of the region as one of *renewal*. The renewal consists of, and is synonymous with the very process of indigenization.

Walcott's view of creolization is based on this concept of renewal. He sees a creole folklore, for example, in the masquerades and legends of the island, which are survivals of both the African and the French cultures. These sources are important, but even more important for Walcott is this: their power of survival came from the fact that they took on new and particular urgencies in the extraordinary circumstances of the slave ancestors. Thus if the Ti-Jean legends are a combination of African and Western survivals, they are above all an expression of the sensibility of the indigenous folk.

It is for these reasons that Walcott celebrates the greatest legacy of

his native land thus, in the closing lines of his crowning poetic achievement so far:

Gregorias listen, lit
we were the light of the world!
We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world
with Adam's task of giving things their names,
(*Another life*, XXIII.iv.11-14)

Here he recovers the wonder and elation, the creative ardor he and St. Omer shared as young artists discovering the features of a setting that had so far lain unseen. Finally, his most moving tribute in *Another life* is to the man who directed them to look, and see the island for the first time. He was Harold Simmons (1914-1966), the St. Lucian painter who served as their tutor and mentor. This man can well be regarded as the father of St. Lucian culture. He was the first to embark upon a full-scale mission to search out and define the features of the island: its folk forms and customs, its flora, geography, and native faces. To this task he brought the talents of the painter, folklorist, anthropologist, and naturalist, all mostly self-taught and amateur. The closing movements of Walcott's tribute call the island to solemn last respects to this St. Lucian who 'is a man no more/but the fervour and intelligence/of a whole country'. Joining in to consecrate his virtues are the laborers and fishermen at work, a doyen of the folk-dance, the natural setting itself – all the scenes which Simmons raised up to view:

Leonce, Placide, Alcindor,
Dominic, from whose plane vowels were shorn
odorous as forest
ask the charcoal burner to look up

with his singed eyes,
ask the lip-cracked fisherman three miles at sea
with nothing between him and Dahomey's coast
to dip rain water over his parched boards
for Monsieur Simmon, *pour* Msieu Harry Simmons,
.....
Blow out the eyes in the unfinished portraits.

And the old woman who danced
with a spine like the 'glory cedar',
.....
let her sit in her corner and become evening
for a man the colour of her earth,
.....

His island forest, open and enclose him
 like a rare butterfly between its leaves.
 (XX.iv.43-67)

This homage to Simmons captures the essential value of St. Lucia for Walcott. It also captures the true genius of the place.

NOTES

1. For a similar comment see Walcott 1979: 53.
2. See Walcott 1970a: 50.
3. The two leading figures of this younger generation are Robert Lee (poetry), and Kendel Hippolyte (poetry and drama). Their main publications so far are Lee's *Vocation* (St. Lucia, 1975) and Hippolyte's *Island in the sun, side two* (St. Lucia, 1981).
4. On the history of St. Lucia; see Jesse 1970 and Breen 1970.
5. The neighboring island of Dominica presents a similar case.
6. See Lewis 1977: 21-22.
7. These are all published by Faber and Faber. The Faber editions are used throughout the present essay.
8. Both writers are natives of the capital town of Castries.
9. The play was written circa 1954. It appears in the *Dream* collection.
10. The murder was discovered and the three men brought to trial. The trial, on which the play is based, took place in the 1930s.
11. See Walcott's poem on St. Omer's painting, 'For the altar- piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia' in Walcott 1976.
12. The rustic life-style of these country districts have given way to urban influences in more modern times.
13. See *Another life*, XII: 39-40.

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