

The Elements of Hybridity in Walcott's *Crusoe's Journal*

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ABSTRACT

Derek Alton Walcott is a West Indian poet and playwright. He is considered as one of the major figures of contemporary literature. Though he was popular as a playwright his keen interest was in poetry. His 1962 volume, *In a Green Night*, garnered positive reviews in the English-speaking world and brought his name to the forefront. He became the first native Caribbean to be rewarded with the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 1992.

Walcott's poetry focuses on cross-cultural identity issues and the differences between the Caribbean and Western civilization in a postcolonial perspective. Walcott's writing incorporates themes of identity, exile, isolation, birth, death, creation, hybridity, the growth of national consciousness and the portrait of the artist. The poem *Crusoe's Journal* is replete with tropical bestiary and flora which illuminate the poetic consciousness of the West Indian and explores his psycho-social development. The poem brings out the outcome of the post colonisation and displays the discomfort, uncertainty and pain of isolation and cultural dislocation, suffered by the islanders. This paper traces the themes of hybridity in the poem '*Crusoe's Journal*' by a Caribbean writer who struggles to build foundation for a better future of his country.

KEYWORDS: Hybridity, Identity Crisis, National Consciousness, Colonialism

This paper focuses on the elements of Hybridity in the poem ***Crusoe's Journal*** by the Caribbean writer Derek Walcott. Before analysing this poem there is a need to realize the history of the Caribbean islands for better understanding. The group of islands which was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 were initially inhabited by certain groups of tribal people. Later on the European countries like Spain, France and Britain started to set up their colonies there. Coloniser brought many African slaves to the island for labour. Likewise people from Asia including Indians and Chinese were also imported by the colonisers to the islands to work in sugarcane plantation. The colonisers taught the subordinates and slaves their tongue, culture and religion for their selfish motives. This led to formation of multicultural society in the Caribbean island.

There were many hardships faced by the slaves and their constant protest against colonisation led to independence of the Island. During the nineteenth century slaves were liberated, the colonisers returned home leaving the island in the hands of its inhabitants. This period of survival by the inhabitants without their masters leads to strenuous difficulties. The Post-colonial era led to the formation of a New World, New Language, New Society, New Culture, New Lifestyle and so on. The pioneers who strived to build a society for themselves had many challenges to face the newness of the society. At the same time people underwent varied dilemmas especially the issues with double identity and predicaments of existential issues. Moreover, the relative issues with structure of the language becomes predominant in regard to the

use of Creole, that is, the language formed by the mixture of the colonisers tongue with the languages of the African slaves ultimately became the 'Nation's Language'. Though not considered as the standard form, Creole is widely used by the Caribbean writers to order to bring out the ethnic touch in their works.

One of the main after effects of colonialism is Hybridisation. According to the popular postcolonial theorist Homi K Bhabha, the word Hybridity means "creation of new cultural forms and realities resulting from colonial encounter." (Farahzad,3) Hybridisation can be traced in cultural, political and linguistic forms in a postcolonial state. Writings of a Caribbean Islands also exhibit traces of hybridization. In order to explore the elements of hybridity in the Caribbean writings, the poem *Crusoe's Journal* by Derek Walcott is taken for the study.

Derek Alton Walcott is a West Indian poet and playwright. He is considered as one of the major figures of contemporary literature. He is an offspring of both the Anglo-European and the Afro-Caribbean heritage as his father is a British and mother a West Indian. Scion of both, he has done his best to put together his dual inheritance in his works and has projected himself as the citizen of the New World. Though popular as a playwright his keen interest was in poetry. His 1962 volume, *In a Green Night*, garnered positive reviews in the English-speaking world and brought his name to the forefront. He became the first native Caribbean to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 1992.

Walcott's poetry focuses primarily on cross-cultural identity issues and depicts the differences between the Caribbean and Western civilization in a postcolonial perspective. In his works he incorporates both classical and Afro-Caribbean themes and experiences. Walcott's works also throws light upon themes of identity, exile, isolation, birth, death, creation, the growth of national consciousness, the portrait of the artist, the West Indian psyche and landscapes. Some of his poems include *In a Green Night*, *The Gulf and other Poems*, *Midsummer*, *Another Life*, *Sea Grapes*, *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, *The Fortunate Traveller*, *The Arkansas Testament*, and *The Castaway* and other poems,

His poem *Crusoe's Journal* was published in the collection called *The Castaway and Other Poem* (1965). The central theme of the poem is the emotional outcome of West Indian artist who expresses his feelings towards post colonialism and the need for building up a solid society for the better future of the citizens of the island. The poem begins with an epigram of Robinson Crusoe which explains Crusoe's alienation from the world and his helpless plight in a new land. In many of his writings Walcott has used the Crusoe figure to depict the struggles of a West Indians in the New World. The poet symbolises Crusoe figure as a West Indian in the Newland who needs to work on for his survival. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is like this West Indian, who struggle alone in an isolated island. Crusoe, in this poem has been depicted in different forms like Adam, Proteus, creative artist, coloniser, beach comber, God, mentor and a missionary; thus exhibiting a multidimensional view of the sufferings of the West Indians.

In his poem *Crusoe's journal* Walcott talks about the setting of the poem - a beach house at Trinidad. There he conceives the Crusoe figure as someone like a West Indian who survives the shipwreck like how the Caribbean people survived the

post colonial effects. He compares the West Indian creative artist to that of Crusoe who makes use of the tools in the wreckage to build a favourable environment for him to live. Likewise, the West Indian creative artist also makes use of the prose to shape his work. Walcott compares Crusoe to that of Adam who was the first to name the things around him without the use of metaphors like how Crusoe named them in the Newland. Crusoe again is like Christopher Columbus who taught his tongue to the natives and converted them to Christianity. On the whole Crusoe is a shape-shifter like the mythic figure of Proteus, who learns to adjust to changing circumstances.

Walcott also brings out his elevated feeling which he had towards Crusoe during his childhood. Crusoe was considered as a hero who survived the shipwreck and constructed a New World out of great difficulty. To Walcott, Crusoe is like the Greek God Proteus who can assume any shape. His childhood fancies are depicted by the mentioning of characters and books which children used to admire in the nineteenth century, like that of the works of Stevenson, Henty, Marryat etc. Walcott describing the coast seen off a cliff-side road as a kind of "stuttering canvas" (Walcott,33) because it represents a unclear, broken kind of image. The passing villages can be compared to the castaway setting of children's stories. The young boy, is considered as a lonely image, where Walcott compares the loneliness of Crusoe's to the loneliness of the West Indian artist who has to create from the left behinds.

Poetry is like the clay vessel which Crusoe makes after many unsuccessful efforts. The language is acquired from the colonisers but it is made use of by the Caribbean writers in their own way which is without use apart from its creator. It is like the gulls which never surrender but expects praise from others. Like the character of Ben Gunn, it must learn to be at peace with its island isolation. Like Crusoe, creative artist has created a new culture out of the debris of their historical experience. The state of natives/ writer is that they long to return to Eden which means the need to set up a society/ culture/ language of their own. So the work of the creative artist will reflect the sufferings he underwent.

On the whole the poem sketches the discomfort, uncertainty, pain of isolation and cultural dislocation, suffered by the islanders. 'Crusoe's Journal' exhibits the need of the poet's response to his role as Adam who must create a future for his country. Crusoe again becomes a representative in creating a new culture to express the glories of the bygone past in culminating the contemporary perception of cultural practices which is very essential in the hybrid society after the colonialism and slavery. Definitely, it becomes significant in assimilating freedom in thought to begin and practice varied facets of new society facing the challenges to salvage the best of other cultures and make something new.

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