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Postcolonialism and the Experience of Place: Derek Walcott's *Another Life*

LE SENSIBLE *and the modern experience of place*

Love of place, or *need* for place rather, is an ongoing theme throughout twentieth-century modernity. The philosophical debate around the concept of place covers a wide spectrum of intellectual beliefs. However, this study will rely mostly on the contribution of phenomenology to a theory of place and especially Merleau-Ponty's concept of "sensible" which will be applied to the reading of contemporary postcolonial literature. Before Merleau-Ponty, Edmund Husserl had already laid the foundation of phenomenology through a return to Descartes.¹ In Husserl's opinion, Descartes' emphasis on the individual, his cogito and will make him the true founder of modern philosophy. Also, Husserl identified Cartesianism with the point at which a split between physicalist objectivism and transcendental subjectivism occurred. This split, Husserl thought, had to be overcome. His philosophy therefore tries to understand not only the world and the subject's life separately, but the two together, i.e., "life-world." Following Descartes, Husserl admits that the self is always self-conscious and intentional: "I think, therefore I am," as Descartes had stated. Yet, in Husserl's opinion, consciousness is *always consciousness of something*, an object-directed consciousness. Unlike Descartes, for whom the self assumed a position outside of the world of which he sought knowledge, for Husserl

¹ See René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Conducting One's Reason Well and of Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, ed. George Heffernan (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1994).

the subject literally *surrenders* to the world in his/her attempt to *grasp* it.²

Upon his death, Merleau-Ponty left behind an unfinished manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which he had meant to turn into a phenomenological ontology, a conclusion to his entire work. Although due to its incompleteness the manuscript does not rise to that level, the text reinforces all the great themes of Merleau-Ponty's work. It is here that Merleau-Ponty speaks, yet again, about *body* and *landscape* as the two pillars of his philosophical thinking, and, in a memorable phrase, he describes the body as "stirring" within landscape, vibrating, as it were, to its intensity.³ Art and style, in particular, render this vibration most accurately being "pregnant" with the depth and intensity of landscape.

Trapped or ecstatic, minimal or intense, the modern writer returns to landscape obsessively. To phenomenology, the body against the background of the landscape is the ultimate and exemplary alliance between object and subject, essence and phenomenon, the universal and the particular. "The problem," says Merleau-Ponty in his earlier book, *Phenomenology of Perception*, "is to understand these strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and me as incarnate subject, and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become *the imago* of a whole segment of life."⁴

To Merleau-Ponty, the world becomes a *complexe sensible*, "a field of presence" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 265), an integrated experience, focused by the lens of my body. The body itself is "an expressive space" (146), the heart of the organism which "keeps the visible spectacle alive" (203). If the unity of the senses makes a sensation and a sensation is the "formal expression of a fundamental contingency" (221), then every sensation is spatial. We do seem "to inhabit the spectacle of the world" (250) and to turn the creation of space into an infinite process rather than something final. The subject is at all times "at grips with the world"

² See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort and trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1997) 119.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1996) 52.

(303), casting his/her "gaze" (326) upon it. The world is there because I experience it and I exist because of my contingency to the world. It is therefore not the polarity of this equation that renders possible the actual constitution of the world (as Descartes thought), but the tension that arises between the two poles, their mutual support and reciprocity.

Merleau-Ponty criticizes both empiricism and intellectualism for their traditional views on place, the former for over-valuing the object and the latter for over-valuing the subject. Critical jargon often describes these extreme locations as *space* (more objective) and *place* (more subjective). The concepts of "world" and "landscape" are more suited, in Merleau-Ponty's opinion, for designating spatial coordinates simply because they involve the subject and the object in synthesis. This new space, a new third dimension, as Merleau-Ponty describes it (248), is a space of perspective and involvement triggering "a complete reform of understanding" (49).

"Perception" and "experience" are united in what Merleau-Ponty calls "sense experience," "that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness" (53). Experience is indeed about the *density* of the world and our *intensity* in responding to it. Its multi-layered nature is, in Merleau-Ponty's comparison, like a cube with six faces that we can never perceive all at the same time, but which are given to us, just like the world, in the sensation of depth they create (205). Experience and perception are neither sequential nor causal, but "a complex re-constitution of the world at every moment" (207), a state of drunkenness and elation. My body and my flesh are the exemplary *sensible*, "communion" and "communication" at the same time (32). Art and writing are at the crossroad, *sensible* corpuses in themselves, alternative and often more valid and relevant ways open to the subject in order to inhabit the world.

For Husserl, the world, is also out there not as mere abstraction, but in the flesh as it is relative to the subject. This engenders an immediate level of cognition (sensual) and a mediate level of cognition (that of articulation). The latter does not describe, but merely evokes through the act of syntactical modalization. According to Husserl, pre-predicative experience, the subject's experience before linguistic articulation, is mainly a receptive experience

in which we demonstrate affection, a "yielding of the ego,"⁵ abandonment and capitulation, a state of "primitive grasping" (37) of the world.

But beyond this potential that phenomenology has, its ability to perceive place as the ground where the subject fulfils himself/herself is of particular importance to this study. Time and time again an author like Walcott acknowledges the power of landscape in shaping cultural identity. "The difference is in the intensity of celebration," says Walcott in "The Muse of History"⁶ as he speaks about the particular relationship that exists between postcolonial writers and the landscape of their homelands. Postcolonial writers capitalize on place, place being the only thing they are left with after the withdrawal of empires, the only anchor they find in the objective world that can help them define an identity. In fact, by obliterating place, modernism has almost invited the postcolonial redeeming of place.

"Topophilia" or the intensity of living in the density of landscape

Most of the contemporary work on landscape comes from the fields of geography, painting, and architecture. Geography, mainly, with the emergence of humanistic geography in the 1960s, has followed subtly down the phenomenological path. "To understand the world at all we must start with the evidence of the senses,"⁷ says Yi-Fu Tuan, author of one of the most influential books on the geographical experience of place, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974).⁸ The term 'landscape,' as some commentators have remarked, has resulted in modern English in 'landscaping,' which associates man and nature under the aegis of 'order.' The suffix '-scape' suggests, at the same time, 'a unit' and 'the whole,' "the unifying principle deriving from the

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 77.

⁶ Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History," *Carifesta Forum: An Anthology of 20 Caribbean Voices*, ed. John Hearne (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1976) 118.

⁷ Quoted in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 100.

⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

active engagement of a human subject with the material object."⁹ And indeed, whether we think of landscape in terms of habitat theory¹⁰ or aesthetically, landscape is undeniably connected to the biological, the cultural, and the personal, or the *Umwelt*, the *Mitwelt*, and the *Eigenwelt*, according to Vygotsky.¹¹ This means that from whatever perspective we intend to approach the issue of landscape, we need to be able to unravel a code, a multi-layered symbolism active at all times under its veil. And to understand the code, the mind needs to engage in a similarly complex symbolic exercise, using other signs and symbols to bring out hidden meanings. As Jay Appleton remarks, from the time of Homer, human culture and its exploits have occurred against the background of a certain landscape, a pattern which seems to have sealed for ever the connection between landscape and storytelling turning landscape into "a kind of back-cloth to the whole stage of human activity" (2).

The entire tradition of landscape theory¹² seems to agree that the way we look at landscape is in fact our way of looking at

⁹ Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 13.

¹⁰ Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1996) 5.

¹¹ Quoted in Steven Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape* (London: Belhaven Press, 1991) 3.

¹² The theory of landscape spans across centuries beginning with Pseudo-Longinus's comments in *On the Sublime* (first century AD), through Hogarth (*The Analysis of Beauty*, 1753), Edmund Burke (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757), the Romantics, and John Ruskin (*Modern Painters*). Also, in England and France, the theory of landscape is closely connected with garden design. In the seventeenth century André le Nôtre designed the gardens of Versailles for Louis XIV in a well-ordered, symmetrical, and logical pattern that has ever since then been identified with the prototype of a French garden. In England, Bridgemen, Kent, and Brown (in the eighteenth century), and Price and Repton (in the nineteenth century) have developed a more natural approach to the design of gardens and open spaces by emphasizing curved lines and asymmetry. Their designs are perceived as representing the typical English garden. In the United States, Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Ormstead (in the nineteenth century) were the pioneers of landscaping. The twentieth-century theory of landscape is marked by the work of the British W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955), and the Americans J.B. Jackson, the initiator of the journal *Landscape* (first published in 1951) and John Dewey (*Experience and Nature* [1929] and *Art as Experience* [1934]).

the world (Cosgrove 1), that landscape is perceived differently by different interpreting communities¹³ and that, therefore, landscape is, first and foremost, a cultural product.¹⁴ Moreover, as Cosgrove explains, landscape is an ideological concept (15) involving human agency, hence the importance of the notion of "authorship of landscape" (36). Too often, it seems, landscape has been perceived in a simplistic binary way, when, in fact, "the idea of landscape runs counter to the recognition of any simple binary relationship between man and nature. Rather, it begins with a naïve acceptance of the intricate, intimate intermingling of physical, biological, and cultural features which any glance around us displays."¹⁵ The landscape of art is a mixture of impression and expression (72), *topophilia*, in Tuan's famous phrase, "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (*Topophilia* 4), "the human love of place" (92). The landscape of art allows us to contemplate the world from "the safety of a humanly constructed world" (xiii) which resolves the contradictions of the real world through artistic narration (17). The multitude of personal worlds that art creates is proof, ironically, of the validity of each and every one of them. This right to vision that we all seem to have may well be a consequence of what Tuan calls "the axial transformation of the European world view" (133) which occurred, according to him, "some time between 1500 and 1700 AD [when] the medieval conception of the vertical cosmos yielded slowly to a new and increasingly secular way of representing the world. The vertical dimension was being displaced by the horizontal; cosmos was giving way to a flat non-rotary segment of nature called landscape" (129).

Despite the recurrence of the theme in literature, literary theory and criticism have dealt with the topic only sporadically. This may appear strange especially since literature is, in an obvious way, the territory where ambiguities can be best dealt with since language, its medium, renders *the density* of the world with *the intensity* of expression.

¹³ Chris Fitter, *Poetry, Space, Landscape: Toward a New Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 8.

¹⁴ Simon Schauma, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995) 9.

¹⁵ Meining, ed., *Ordinary Landscapes* 2.

"The furtive locus of Caribbeanness"

Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1996) takes Caribbeanness as exemplary of contemporary ideological mutations. Its "furtive locus"¹⁶ is not only a regional reality, but a global one, hence the impact of its discourse on the contemporary critical debate. Just as, metaphorically speaking, "the island" multiplies itself indefinitely in the Caribbean landscape, his own excursion (and mine) are of the same nature, "repetitive rather than definitive" (xi), a personal intellectual voyage which portrays "my way of understanding Caribbean complexity, a way which doesn't exclude other possible voyages, other possible routes" (xii).

Phenomenology has often described place as a multitude of folds (*plis*) and the Caribbean, through mere geography, seems to be the very actualization of such a place: the dream of phenomenology turned real. The Caribbean is a "discontinuous conjunction," "an island bridge," "unstable condensation, turbulence, whirlpools, dumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification," a whole "dynamics of chaos" (*The Repeating Island 2*).

The Caribbean archipelago is therefore "a meta-archipelago" (24), its richness and flux being at the basis of the exuberance of Caribbean literature. And how could it be otherwise since, at least at one of its ends, the search for the Caribbean landscape is the search for El Dorado,¹⁷ the dream of a terrestrial paradise? In 1492

¹⁶ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 22.

¹⁷ *El Dorado* (in Spanish "the gilded man") was, according to a South American legend, the lord of a rich kingdom, so rich that he could cover himself with a dusting of gold every day and wash it off at night. His kingdom was thought to be somewhere in the northern part of South America. The capital of this kingdom was the city of Manoa. A local Indian custom may be at the origin of the legend. On the shores of a lake in the Columbian Andes, a great number of gold objects were retrieved from the lake bottom. It seems that, a long time ago, local Indians were tossing precious gold offerings to a protecting god. The quest for El Dorado engaged the minds of many explorers. The first to attempt the discovery of the lost city of Manoa were the Spaniards. They were soon followed by other explorers. On the English side, Sir Walter Raleigh is known for trying to find the city somewhere in the wilderness of the Orinoco valley. This myth has had major implications in the discovery of the South American inland since the obsession

when Columbus first set foot in the West Indies and sent a letter to the Spanish monarch describing the results of his first voyage, he spoke of Espanola as of a land "to be desired and, when seen, never to be left."¹⁸ For anybody who has experienced the intensity of Caribbean landscape (its glory and its misery), the Caribbean appears overwhelming and one can almost understand (without justifying though) the dream of possession of its first explorers.

Land-scape and self-scape: Derek Walcott's Another Life

In 1986, in an interview with Edward Hirsh, Derek Walcott said the following regarding his experience of writing the autobiographical poem *Another Life*: "What I tried to say in *Another Life* is that the act of painting is not an intellectual act dictated by reason. It is an act that is swept very physically by the sensuality of the brushstroke."¹⁹ The poem describes the intellectual and emotional coming of age of an artist, the moment when the impulse carried by the sensuality of the brushstroke gives weight to a vision previously articulated along much more simplistic lines, in black and white, as in a photographic image. The intuition of a certain degree of complexity at work behind appearances is nevertheless present in the duality of the photographic image since the positive (white) is revealed only through the development of the negative (black). The intensity of this fundamental contrast evokes, first and foremost, the radical nature of racial distinctions to which Walcott is particularly sensitive. Yet, black, in Walcott's view, is complementary to white (Walcott's mulatto origin may account for this particular nuance). Alternatively, landscape unfolds beneath our eyes, in black (a hearse passes by followed by a group of mourners) and white (a communion celebration).²⁰ In fact, Walcott's overall "black and white ambivalence" towards the island is openly admitted when he acknowledges being consumed with love for

with El Dorado made Europeans explore "the interior" and not only "the exterior" (the northern fringes) of South America.

¹⁸ Christopher Columbus, *The Journal of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1960) 198.

¹⁹ Quoted in Robert D. Hamner, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1993) 70.

²⁰ Derek Walcott, "Another Life," *Collected Poems: 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992) 152.

the very landscape he abhors: "The soul, like fire, abhors what it consumes" (152). Walcott himself mentions "negatives" on several occasions throughout the poem. One of the most important references (Book One, Chapter 1) is when he contemplates the black children of the island:

Well, everything whitens,
 All that town's characters, its cast of thousands
 Arrested in one still!
 As if a sudden flashbulb showed their deaths.
 The trees, the road he walks home, a white film,
 Tonight in the park the children leap into statues,
 Their outcries round as moonlight, their flesh like flaking stone,
 Poor negatives! (151)

This relativity, spanning from landscape to the self, life, and the world in general, is the most difficult burden on the shoulders of the West Indian writer. Unlike other literary traditions where modes can be juggled in the disjunctive structure of "to be *or* not to be," postcolonial writing, and Walcott's in particular, displays the fearsome power of accumulation. The resulting confusion translates into a de-stabilization (mainly of the self) followed by a constant need to re-construct. Therefore, everything has to be brought *close* and appropriated. Landscape is the first element in that personal universe that is re-appropriated, first from within reach, with the parental home and memories of motherhood (156–57).

The narratives of the land (land-scape) and self (self-scape) are probably more interconnected in the Caribbean than in any other culture. The reason is undoubtedly the heavy legacy of colonialism and slavery and their impact on the life of the individual and collectivities. Place (its geography and history) seems to be the actual reason why destinies unfold as they do, its *intensity* and *ambivalence*, Freud's "conflict of love,"²¹ being perhaps its two

²¹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) 239–93. Freud speaks of "the conflict of love" especially when he describes infantile sexuality (see, for example, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality"). Love for the mother, according to Freud, is an incipient metaphor for any kind of love in the child's subsequent life. The contemplation of incest and arousal of infantile anxiety are the child's response to the immanence of loss: the mother leaves and she also loves the father and the other children.

main defining characteristics. Walcott's poetry is no exception. *Another Life* is the story of Walcott's growing up against the meaningful landscape of Saint Lucia. From enchantment and dependence, through rebellion, disappointment, his decision to leave, and the poet's nostalgic return, the storyline of the poem follows the line of Walcott's exceptional life destiny.

The poem starts off with a moment of revelation, from twilight, "begin with twilight" (145), to full light, "the sky grew drunk with light" (145), as a young student tries to paint a landscape:

All afternoon the student
with the dry fever of some draughtsman's clerk
had magnified the harbour, now twilight
eager to complete itself,
drew the girl's figure to the open door
of a stone boathouse with a single stroke, then fell
to a reflecting silence. This silence waited
for the verification of detail:
the gables of the St. Antoine Hotel
aspiring from jungle, the flag
at Government House melting its pole,
and for the tidal amber glare to glaze
the last shacks of the Morne till they became
transfigured sheerly by the student's will,
a cinquecento in gilt frame.

Next follows a flow of free-association evoking names of places and the most vivid memories they bring back: Vigie, Ajax, Berthilia, Castries, Morne, Anse La Raye, Canaries, Souffrière, Choiseul. Their specificity comes from the people who fill them with life: Darnley, Emanuel, Gaga, Helen, Ityn, Joumard, Ligier, Midas, Nessus, Submarine, Uncle Eric, Vaughan. These characters are brought in often with their nicknames and personal life stories in an attempt to recreate a high level of intimacy. The greediness of Manoir (the black priest and ruthless bourgeois) and the infidelities of captain Fouquarde's wife, for example, are described in detail.

The accumulating paradoxes lead to the ever-increasing awareness of division, similar to that of Walcott's heritage—"What else was he but a divided child" (183)—as well as to the under-

standing that within Saint Lucian geography and history abomination and fascination co-exist.²² The “true light” of things always seems to be somewhere between the two extremities of light and darkness, black and white, splendour and obscurity:

But which was the true light?
Blare noon or twilight,
“the lonely light that Samuel Palmer engraved,”
or the cold
iron entering the soul, as the soul sank
out of belief. (185)

The second part of the poem deals with the young artist’s intellectual maturation as he empowers himself by conquering the devastating ambivalence of landscape in the act of creation. The visible and the invisible side of things (evocative of Merleau-Ponty) is Walcott’s indirect way of depicting, yet again, the duplicity of landscape by resorting to the photographic metaphor. Actual images are “locked” within hidden outlines and their gradually emerging contours are shaped by a bitterness similar to the acid used in photographic development. Everything echoes something else far more dense than what is visible to the naked eye:

There are already, invisible on canvas,
Lines locking into outlines. The visible dissolves
In a benign acid. The leaf
Insists on its oval echo, that wall
Breaks into sweat, oil settles
In the twin pans of the eyes. (197)

However, catching the right shade of that complex landscape turns out to be difficult, if not impossible, especially since this landscape hasn’t been painted or named before. This lack of

²² The interdependence between fascination and abomination is undoubtedly one of the favourite themes of colonial and postcolonial writing. The best known example that comes to mind is that of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in which the exploring colonizer, Kurt, discovers both the horror and the fascination of Africa. On his deathbed he confesses how the fascination of the abominable has seduced him in his explorations along the Congo river.

inherited tradition adds an ethical dimension to the effort of creation (in the painter's *obligation* to articulate his experience as truthfully as he can). The young artist and his friend Gregorias (who in real life appears to be the West Indian painter and Walcott's long-time friend, Dunstan St. Omer) make a pledge not to leave the island before putting it on canvas or on the page:

But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
disciples of that astigmatic saint,
that we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of the hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect, the ropes of mangroves
from which old soldier crabs slipped
surrendering to slush,
each ochre track seeking some hilltop and
losing itself in an unfinished phrase,
under sand shipyards where the burnt-out palms
inverted the design of unrigged schooners,
entering forests, boiling with life,
goyave, corrosol, bois-canot, sapotille. (194)

The state of elation induced by landscape is their (Walcott's and Gregorias's) source of creation. Its frenzy borders on madness. Rhetorical abundance matches the abundance of light in this setting, hence the invocation of Van Gogh (199). Progressively, the landscape on canvas seems to fall into place. The discovery of the senses and of their ability to capture the complexity of landscape marks the revelatory stage in the coming of age of the artist. The basic understanding that landscape has to carry within it the passion of the brush stroke is the key that ultimately validates the artist's work. All of a sudden, paintings multiply like the gracious vines of landscape. Miraculously, the sustained effort, desperate previously, becomes controlled and purposeful like a well-planned battle. Landscape is subdued. Dürer, Boucher, Fragonard, the Pre-Raphaelites, Giotto, Masaccio, father's water-colours still present in the house long after his death, book images of Eves, muses, Annas, Circes, Ruths, Judiths, all come to mind as the painter begins, for the first time, to actually *see* his world.

The first commission is a confirmation of success sealing the artist's battle in a "fresco of the New World" (204). His gradual victory over landscape is generously watched over by Gregorias (St. Omer), and his beloved master (Harold Simmons). At one point in the poem Gregorias simply opens the window to awaken the young artist to the fascination inherent in the landscape that unfolds beneath their eyes. Although a painter himself, Gregorias perceives the land/seascape framed in the window as music, an indication that painting needs to go beyond a mere visual reconstruction to aim at a harmonization of all senses, Merleau-Ponty's *sensible*:

Look!

He frames a seascape in a chair,
then, striding back, beyond the table littered
with broken loaves, fishbones, a gut-rusting wine,
he smites his forehead.

.....

He hoists his youngest seascape like a child,
kisses, cradles it, opens the window
of the village night, head tilted seaward,
grey gaze serenely clamped,
lean fingers waving, "Listen!"
As if the thunderous Atlantic
Were a record he had just put on.

"Listen! Vasco da Gama kneels to the New World." (206-7)

Landscape activates a complex of senses, similar to the one evoked by Proust's *madeleine* (218), covering the entire sensual spectrum. In *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (1990), J. Douglas Porteous very ingeniously speaks of landscape as of a variety of "-scapes"—smellscapes, soundscapes, inscapes—and deplors the fact that critical tradition has discussed landscapes mostly as a visual mode.²³ Walcott's constant evocation of sounds, smells, tastes, is therefore a perfect illustration of Porteous's theory. Mostly, Walcott seems to dwell on the sounds of

²³ J. Douglas Porteous, *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990).

his language, the use of the *patois*, its expressiveness and exoticism, as he does on numerous occasions throughout "Another Life" and more explicitly in another poem, "Sainte Lucie":

Pomme arac,
 Otaheite apple,
 Pomme cynthere,
 Pomme grannate,
 Moubain,
 Z'ananas

 Come back to me,
 My language. (*Collected Poems* 310)

Understanding engenders love, and therefore the third and last part of "Another Life" speaks of the artist's first love for a woman (Anna). The paradisiac beauty of landscape is transferred onto her (256). Yet, the story of our first love is also the story of our first mourning. Walcott's first love, so much intertwined with his love for the Saint Lucian landscape, is at the same time a story of sensual blooming and irretrievable loss. Mourning and melancholia are "the negative side" of his love and enjoyment of his native landscape. Like the mourner, who is compelled by the irreversibility of loss to cling to the object of love through a display of sorrow, the poet tries to incorporate the object of his love in an act of "thematic cannibalization," obvious in the recurrent nature of landscape evocations (*The Freud Reader* 584–89).²⁴ The poet is literally "feasting on landscape" as he states in the poem "Love after Love" (*Collected Poems* 328), or again in "Another Life," "you have eaten nothing but this landscape" (200). His writing is a constant flight to

²⁴In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud describes the act of mourning as an attempt to recreate the presence of a lost object of love. This impulse is similar to the infant's "oral phase" where the child feeding at mother's breast looks for a reassurance of her presence and their on-going symbiosis. Thus melancholia and mourning are, in a way, forms of infantile regression based on a need for identification with a lost object of love. Mourning, in this case, is the normal affect, while melancholia is its pathological side. These psychic affects have a strong somatic side. In literature, and art in general, this psycho-somatic aspect is expressed through sensuality.

and *from* the object of love, as in another Walcott poem, "The Schooner Flight," in which the protagonist, Shabine, as he leaves the island, re-visits (imaginatively) its entire geography and history.

Even in its more serene lines, Walcott's involvement with place is mournful,²⁵ as, for example, in the weeping episode of "Another Life." This episode is the account of a walk in the hills of the island when the poet was suddenly seized by a melancholic state of deep pain, unspeakable and without tears, an "extinction of all sense":

About the August of my fourteenth year
 I lost myself somewhere above a valley
 owned by a spinster-farmer, my dead father's friend.
 At the hill's edge there was a scarp
 with bushes and boulders stuck to its side.
 Afternoon light ripened the valley,
 rifling smoke climbed from small labourers' houses,
 and I dissolved into a trance.
 I was seized by a pity more profound
 than my young body could bear, I climbed
 with the labouring smoke,
 I drowned in labouring breakers of bright cloud,
 then uncontrollably I began to weep,
 inwardly, without tears, with a serene extinction
 of all sense; I felt compelled to kneel,
 I wept for nothing and for everything. (184–85)

This episode seems to have left a significant mark on the young man and artist, since Walcott has referred to it on several occasions as, for example, in the previously mentioned interview with Edward Hirsh, "The Art of Poetry" (1986):

What I described in "Another Life," says Walcott, about being on the hill and feeling the sort of dissolution that happened—is a frequent experience in a young writer. I

²⁵ In my opinion, 'mournful' does not mean 'bare' or 'empty,' but rather, 'evocative.' Hence the fact that Walcott's overall mournful mood goes hand-in-hand with the exuberance of his expression.

felt this sweetness of melancholy, of a sense of mortality, or rather of immortality, a sense of gratitude both for what you feel is a gift and for the beauty of the earth, the beauty of life around us. When that's forceful in a young writer, it can make you cry. It's just clear tears; it's not grimacing or being contorted, it's just a flow that happens. The body feels it is melting into what it has seen. This continues in the poet. It may be repressed in some way, but I think we continue all our lives to have that sense of melting, of the "I" not being important. That is the ecstasy. (*Critical Perspectives* 68)

To return to the idea of joy and melancholy, it seems that art alone can bring these apparently opposite (black and white) sides of perception together in the alternative vision it offers. In the poem the whole idea of "another life" revolves around this (see *Collected Poems* 200, 219, 261). Moreover, the landscape locked in a painting or in a poem is like amber (another beautiful Walcott metaphor), a slow and steady accumulation of impressions, or as Edward Baugh says in his analysis of *Another Life*, amber has the ability to *transfix* and *transfigure*, it is like the film/glaze of resin on the old masters' paintings which was meant to preserve and heighten the quality of the painting.²⁶

There
was your heaven! The clear
glaze of another life,
a landscape locked in amber, the rare
gleam. (*Collected Poems* 145)

From the ecstasy of the first successful landscape, to his departure on a plane, "all that I love folded in cloud" (257), and the poet's nostalgic return, landscape has revealed the complexity of *a manuscript* which the poet has gradually learned to read (253). It is interesting to note how the moment of understanding through revelation seems necessarily to trigger the abandonment of that

²⁶ Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision: "Another Life"* (London: Longman, 1978) 20–21.

landscape. Understanding, it seems, requires action, and the poet's flight from the island becomes a gesture of self-protection against an ambiguous love that can become destructive. In life, as in art, we need distance, de-familiarization, for emotions and images to crystallize. The poet's self-induced exile is an expression of this belief.

The ambiguous attachment to his island is repeatedly stated whenever the name of the island, Santa Lucia, comes up in the poem. References to it always seem to carry a mixture of unconditional attachment and bitter irony (irony, which by the distance it implies, suggests *de* attachment) as, for example, when children learn in school the meaning of Santa Lucia's motto:

"Boy! Name the great harbours of the world!"

"Sydney! Sir."

"San Franceesco!"

"Naples, sah!"

"And what about Castries?"

"Sah, Castries ees a coaling station and
der tewnty-seventh best harba in der worl!

In eet the entire Breetesh Navy can be heeden!"

"What is the motto of St. Lucia, boy?"

"*Statio baud malefida carinis.*"

"Sir!"

"Sir!"

"And what does that mean?"

"Sir, a safe anchorage for sheeps!" (172)

Later the origin of the name, Santa Lucia, is traced back to the blind patroness of Naples, "Santa Lucia / patroness of Naples, they had put out her eyes / saint of the blind / whose vision was miraculously restored" (218).

The ambivalence of these descriptions echoes, through the ennobling and degrading messages that they convey, the paradoxical nature of the island. The island is the fixed place on the flux of the ocean, "the island has not moved from anchor" (219), a place of extremes, Paradise (207) and hell, "Qui côté c'est l'enfer? / Why, Father, on the coast" (179), black and white, just like the ugly reality of slavery it has sheltered (see also the poem "Crusoe's Island"). It is the place that needs resurrection in the poet's act of

naming with all its baptismal implications. The island (as home and village) generates a down-to-earth, even frivolous identification. The island, for example, and never the ocean, is at the interplay of the heroic and mock-heroic; "provincialism loves the pseudo-epic" (181).

On the other hand, it is interesting how only the imagery of the sea (and never that of the island) allows for metaphysical suggestions. The middle passage is, for example, compared to the wanderings of the Jews in the desert (the Jew as non-Aryan is close to Walcott's racial trauma). This is not to say that Walcott's tone in describing the island is less respectful, but only that Walcott's island is more vulnerable and more human. It is that other side of the poet's psyche, in broad daylight, while the ocean is its darker, hidden side. Once again, the recurring double-sidedness of the photographic image seems to be invoked.

The ocean is also the paradoxical Lacanian mirror, *béance*,²⁷ identification and alienation, ebb and flow. Its depth joins the poet's mind in that state of Freudian latency (see also "The Fortunate Traveller") becoming the archaic memory of an entire race.²⁸ The sea is also the harbour with its promise of shelter, and the gulf, constantly widening, engulfing. Interestingly enough, Freud also speaks of "oceanic feeling" in his essay "Civilization and Its Discontents" (*The Freud Reader* 723) as of our most intimate con-

²⁷ See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 1-8. In the essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," Lacan insists on the importance that the child's self-recognition in the mirror plays in his/her intellectual development. The mirror reveals the sameness and the alterity of the image as compared to the real child. This is the incipient stage of individualization. This revelation is, in Lacan's opinion, the foundation of an incipient apprehension of the world which includes the child while expanding beyond him/her.

²⁸ Freud speaks of "latency" on numerous occasions, as when he describes the mechanism of infantile neurosis as "latent" in the adult's psyche and when he describes the process of "working-through of dreams." In the first case, the child inhibits his/her parental attachment in early childhood. This silenced affect surfaces under various external circumstances in the child's later life. In the second case, dreams process a "latent" affect into neurotic or psychotic symptoms. Later, Carl Jung picked up on Freud's ideas (especially the ones relating to the interpretation of dreams), expanding them into his well-known theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious.

nection with the world, a promise of pre-existential harmony in which "our present ego feeling is only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, of an all-embracing feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" (725).

Quoting Saint John Perse, Walcott confesses that "the beauty of this world hath made me sad" (*Collected Poems* 246). His friends have decayed (Gregorias), died (Harry, by committing suicide), or left (Anna, his first love). According to Edward Baugh, Walcott wrote the last part of the poem after he found out about the suicide of his master and friend, Harold Simmons. This tragic event seemed, all of a sudden, to put the entire poem in a "mortal" perspective, "light compounded in the mortal glow" (294).

Like any other major cultural trend, postcolonialism (with writers such as Derek Walcott) continues and disrupts tradition. Also, in the twentieth century, phenomenology seems to be the moment when, philosophically speaking, the disruption of traditional views on identity occurred. Postcolonialism is in many ways the echo of that disruption and reform. Landscape and the body stirring in it are, in their metaphorical association, the best articulation of the postcolonial search for identity. Landscape is to the postcolonial writer what cities were to the European modernists, the backdrop against which human life unfolds in a meaningful way. In Derek Walcott's poem "Another Life," the artist's coming of age is a way of coming to terms with the complexity of his native landscape. The island as human and terrestrial and the sea as metaphysical are the two sides of the postcolonial psyche. The "gaze" that the postcolonial writer casts on landscape turns, in fact, into a much larger vision of existence and of the role the life of the individual plays within that same vision.