



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

**“CROSSING THE WHITE RIVER”: OTHERNESS  
DECOLONIZED IN DEREK WALCOTT’S *THE  
FORTUNATE TRAVELLER***

Davi Silva Gonçalves

Leandro Zago<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The broad topic of this study is the deconstruction of image into poetry in Derek Walcott’s poem “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007) taking into consideration its imagery as the promoter of a glimpse into post-colonized otherness. The poetic devices applied by the poet makes him a craftsman of the word, shaping the language to sophisticated levels of combination, yelping vowel after vowel to portray the scenario in which each theme cares to be a color in the imagery of his poems. That taken into account, Walcott’s usage of images cannot be taken for granted whatsoever since their ambivalent plus meaningful features are symptomatic of his venture when endeavoring to problematize readers’ preconceived portraits of Caribbean consciousness. As an attempt to show these representations under a postcolonial perspective of otherness, ambivalence, and decentralization as a compact oeuvre one must speaks about postcolonialism. The hegemonic lens offered as to (re)bring the seer closer to what he/she is eager to see only seems to increase the distance between the colonized and the colonizer, at the same time that it succeeds in promoting a diplomatic separateness of being.

**KEYWORDS:** Derek Walcott; Poetry; Otherness.

**RESUMO:** O tópico geral deste estudo é a desconstrução poética da imagem dentro do poema “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007), de Derek Walcott, levando em consideração seus efeitos imagéticos como produtores de um olhar para a outridade pós-colonial. O aparato poético aplicado pelo poeta o torna um artesão do mundo, dando forma a linguagem até níveis sofisticados de combinação, trazendo vogal após vogal como forma de revelar um cenário no qual cada tema se responsabiliza por se tornar uma cor no imaginário de seus poemas. Tendo isso em mente, a forma que Walcott utiliza suas imagens não pode ser desconsiderada já que suas características

---

<sup>1</sup> UFSC – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Centro de Comunicação e Expressão – Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras (DLLE). Florianópolis – SC – Brasil. 88040-900. gonalves.davi@hotmail.com; leandro\_zago@yahoo.com.br



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

ambivalentes e significantes são sintomáticas de sua aventura em um intento por problematizar os retratos preconcebidos de seus leitores com relação a consciência Caribenha. Como numa tentativa de expor essas representações através de uma perspectiva pós-colonial sobre a outridade, a ambivalência e a descentralização como peças compactadas, precisa-se falar sobre pós-colonialismo. A lente hegemônica oferecida para (re)colocar o observador frente ao que ele está disposto a observar parece só aumentar a distância entre colonizado e colonizador, ao mesmo tempo em que se torna capaz de promover uma separação diplomática do ser.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Derek Walcott; Poesia; Outridade

“Back to culture; yes, actually to culture. You can’t consume much if you only sit still, reading your books”.

Aldous Huxley

*Brave New World* (1932, p. 35)

### Introduction

This article aims at discussing issues related to image deconstruction, cultural dominance, and postcolonial displacement in the poetry of Derek Walcott. The analysis is carried out more specifically in the imagery related with the color white present in Walcott’s “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007), our hypothesis being that the color promotes a glimpse into post-colonized otherness. Amid this discussion and theorization on imagery, colonialism, and cultural identities, we propose a closer look at how Walcott uses, describes, and (de)constructs the color white in the poem. More than a color, white symbolizes the colonizer, the white man, and the oppressor.

The poem is divided into three parts. This idea suggests a journey that is not only of the traveller, but is meant to represent the world’s search for identity. There are the Old and the New worlds. The Old is the way of the conquerors, their culture, and their ways. The New is supposed to be new, but actually is a representation of the Old. It is the otherisation of the Western self, a representation of what hegemony wants to see and understand as being “New”, the manifestation of a virgin land where for new



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

conceptualizations to arise they must actually be first able to overcome traditional and pre-established ones. It is a representation not as a descriptive figure, but a *re-presentation* of the Old. And this third part of the poem is the effect of this interaction in the “spaces” of the traveller’s mind.

The color, in the narrative of the poem, is evoked through certain words that compose the imagery such as smoke, fog, cold, cotton, clouds, snow, etc. This has proven to be relevant, since the (re)construction of the New World through the loss of History constitutes fundamental basis for this analysis. Considering identity as a historically and culturally constructed element predicts prototypes for the visualization of the self and the other, the reverse imagery in the poem will provide a “savage back stare,” a different perspective on “reality” through the eyes of the colonized. This “back stare” is actually the embodiment of Walcott’s attempt at forcing the reader to promote a “dispassionate viewing of a landscape, and of people haunted by years of racial discrimination in a post-colonial setting” (RAZA, 2012, p. 22). Moreover, “this self conscious alienation also fuels his artistic creativity” (p. 22).

Aside from Walcott’s skillful writing, his cultural influences and astounding view of the colonized world, dozens of published poems and plays would have seemed enough for the critics to make mention of him. Derek Walcott, a Caribbean living poet born in St. Lucia in 1930, has been publishing poems and plays since 1944 and has excelled in both genres. Among his awards and honors is the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1992. This poet’s voice has been considered by literary criticism as unique and conscious of his culture and colonial heritage. His major concerns are the nature and identity of Caribbean literature and culture. As found in the Anthology of Collected Poems, Walcott defines himself:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea / I had a sound colonial education / I have Dutch, nigger and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 113).

“[...] The midsummer sea, the hot pitch, this grass, these shacks that made me / jungle and razor grass shimmering by the roadside, the



**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

edge of art; / wood lice are humming in the sacred wood, / nothing can burn them out, they are in the blood.” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 162)

Walcott views a poet “as a carpenter, as one making frames simply and well” (BAER, 1996, p. 101). The poetic devices applied by the poet makes him a craftsman of the word, shaping the language to sophisticated levels of combination, yelping vowel after vowel to portray the scenario in which each theme cares to be a color in the imagery of his poems. That taken into account, Walcott’s usage of images cannot be taken for granted whatsoever since their ambivalent plus meaningful features are symptomatic of his venture when endeavoring to problematize readers’ preconceived portraits of Caribbean consciousness. Notwithstanding their relevance, such images do not seem to be as straightforward as one might usually desire. Nevertheless, and in the words of Amra Raza, “[a]lthough we do not find false eyes painted on insects or fishes in Walcott’s poems, there are numerous ‘false eye’ images which perform a similar function of creating the distinction between the eye and the gaze.” (2012, p. 29)

Walcott does indeed acknowledge the importance of the unique and idiosyncratic features provided by what Amra Raza calls his “native environment”: the atmosphere that surrounds his poetical temporal and spatial atmosphere. His poetry goes indeed through an influx of what she names as “natural gazes”; but the integrations he promotes through such gazes, as the one between images and words, stand for the fact that “instead of leading to an uncomfortable fragmentation under such close scrutiny by one’s native environment, these natural gazes have a soothing and healing effect” (RAZA, 2012, p. 24). This is because “the landscape, in gazing back, provides an identification through recognition. The gazes acknowledge the relationship of the part to the whole, and the whole to the part”. (RAZA, 2012, p. 24)

“The Fortunate Traveller” (which received the Heinemann Award from the Royal Society of Literature in 1983) is encompassed by the ideology and rooted conviction of the ground from whence the poet speaks: his own life and places he has been to can be envisioned in the poem, and the resemblance is mutual. In this journey



**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

for transgressing the lens of meaning there cannot be any division between the moments when Walcott explores the Caribbean self and/or his self. Their identity is dual, but it is also coalesced into a single body of significance since “for Walcott, exploring the formation of the ‘I’ would help him come to terms with the mixed identity of the Caribbean itself. Thus by gazing at and through mirrors and glass (both artificial and natural), he embarks on an identification process” (Raza, p. 18). Besides English, Creole (a French dialect) is spoken in Saint Lucia. Writing poetry in Creole would not fully seem to express what it does when spoken. Such phenomenon almost goes back to the paragon of poetry and prose. Yet Walcott, though determined to use English rather than Creole, seems to conceive his poetic language through the influence of both language metaphors. Speaking his mind then becomes the act of “othering” himself. When self-relation and self-consciousness relate with language, they produce more than an outcome of thought: what comes out is something otherized from inside out.

Otherness, to put it bluntly, is the discursive point of view of a person about another. Humanity is thus divided mainly into two groups: one whose identity makes it more valuable for following a certain pattern, and another that is discriminated and devalued because of its faults. The self and the other are usually opposed by territory, spatial marginality and stereotypes of exoticism. These differences are related with fact and discourse. Biological sexual difference is a fact while gender is otherness. The aspect of otherness briefly explored here can be viewed more as a denouncement of instruments of power and coercion rather than mere differences of culture and identity: nations that rape each other and care not for their illegitimate children. It seems that the other is always the inferior, no matter the order of the polarization: Woman x Man; White x Black; Jews x Gentiles, etc (Beauvoir, 1952; Fanon, 1963). Otherness affects poetry reading as does postcolonialism, and these, combined with the reader’s visuality, create a new realm of perception that sustains otherness beyond the immateriality of the image.



### **The face of imagery**

In the poem “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007) ambiguity begins in the title. The traveller is fortunate because he can travel to colonized-third-world countries with a return ticket. He can go and see for himself, in a diasporic ablegation, what has been made of the old places and people whose trip to America was “unfortunate”, being taken as slaves. The traveller is pierced by the desolation he sees, and all the pre-established contrasts begin to unshape. The desolation the traveller faces in the colonized space is a reflection of the results of colonization spread mostly by religion and other cultural institutions of power. European colonization in Africa was the most notorious one. Soon England would fight France for colonies overseas. An example of this suggested imagery of cultural dominance would be the opening lines of the poem: “It was in winter. Steeples, spires / congealed like holy candles. Rotting snow / flaked from Europe’s ceiling” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 146). The imagery created is that Europe was a glass shade covering up the sky of lower countries like a ceiling. The spires are as stalagmites fallen from a rotten cave, and these pointy signs of domination still remain in the form of churches. The sign of religious colonization stands still as an iconic figure reminding the decentralization of St. Lucia in comparison with Europe. Well, this could be just our “imagination” and such vision could be considered presumptuous in that “this is not what the poem is about.” Nevertheless, this is exactly why it is important to “make good use” of imagination and search for imagery in its source: the mind, the anthropizing force of human intelligence. Yet, in order to theorize upon what we understand about imagery and its implications upon visibility and meaning in this poem, we propose a brief theoretical recovery from experts in the field.

Going back to imagery’s old definition, we find in Trapp:

Thoughts are the images of things, as words are of thoughts; and we all know that images and pictures are only so far true as they are true representations of men and things [...], for poets as well as painters



**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

think it their business to take the likeness of things from their appearance. (1711, p. 103)

Imagery is the very attempt at framing what we think with, as if what constitutes our thoughts could be seen and touched as a solid mass, separated into different categories and available as if it were a book on the shelf. If thoughts are the images of things and words are the images of thoughts, imagery is the tentative of grasping the understanding of what goes on inside our brains. Whether we think with words, with images or with music (or everything at once), this is all imagery, pure brain language. It is not just what we “see” when we read a poem or observe a picture: it is also what these things represent. The concept of imagery defended by William James Thomas Mitchell (1986) is that the differences between images and words are not analogous oppositions, like nature and culture, space and time, poetry and painting. Pictorial and verbal representations help us access nature and, in turn, “nature informs both sides of the conversation” (1986, p. 46).

This struggle for the “ownership of truth” between images and words has been aggravated since Lessing’s preface to the Laocoon in 1766: “[. . .] under the name of painting, I include the plastic arts generally; as under that of poetry, I may have allowed myself sometimes to embrace those other arts, whose imitation is progressive” (p.50). As pointed out by Lessing—who wrote his essay based on the writings of Edmund Burke (1757)—these terms are synecdoches for all spatial as well as temporal significations. This notion means antitheses claim their realm: text and image, sign and symbol, symbol and icon, metonymy and metaphor, signifier and signified. Authors such as Gombrich (1956) and Goodman (1976) also agree that this semiotic rivalry only makes it worse for a clearer distinction of imagery. For instance, semiotics is considered a less natural art than aesthetics because the signs used to create poetry deal with the representations of feelings and ideas of fluid schemata rather than nature itself.

Arrested action in a painting is to image what movement is to poetry. It is argued heretofore that imagery in poetry arises from textual surface, enters the reader’s filters



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

of background, culture and ideologies to be finally “depicted” in our brains. Allusiveness, though, can sometimes alienate readers because of its symbolic mediation under which unnatural elements, such as time, consciousness and history, belong. Here again, pictorial surfaces provide hidden verbal messages, as it were, conveying signification and communication. Therefore, imagery instigates “guilt”, for there must be intimacy to create and to convey significance. That is why mental images are critically essential for the very act of understanding. As in Wittgenstein: “It is no more necessary to the understanding of a proposition that one should imagine anything in connexion with it, than that one should make a sketch from it.” (1953, p. 120)

Learning to sketch from understanding is actually using imagery. This allows the assumption that knowledge is constructed by grasped meaning and that this meaning is negotiably inherent to accuracy in perception. Even when discourses get in the way and suppressors state that “this is not what it means”; closeness to the so-called natural order of things may buy us a ticket into the sublime and beautiful. This is the reason why Walcott’s careful ability of transcendental sight—a sight that reconfigures temporal and spatial relations—is so pivotal for him to poetize about his condition as an artist, which is directly interwoven to his perception regarding his symbolic and material milieu: “Walcott self consciously uses shiny, transparent and opaque surfaces to generate a series of images of the self in various contexts of the past and present. The ‘eye’ thus becomes an instrument for the formation of the ‘I’”. (RAZA, 2012, p. 17)

### **The Fortunate Traveller**

Now that we have already pointed out some of the many variations there are with which to understand and view imagery, let us move into the poem “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007) for more details. The first stanza of the poem brings out certain elements that combine visuality, knowledge of history, and imagination:

I sat on a cold bench / under some skeletal lindens. / Two other  
gentlemen, black skins gone grey / as their identical, belt overcoats, /





Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

crossed the white river. / They spoke the stilted French / of their dark river, / whose hooked worm, multiplying its pale sickle, / could thin the harvest of the winter streets (WALCOTT, 2007, 146).

The white is perceived in many instances. The “cold” gives a feeling of white, as it reminds us of snow and that it is in winter—another symbol for gloom, darkness and sadness. The “skeletal” lindens are white as a skeleton’s bones are white. The gentleman had “black skins” that now have “gone grey”. Even though Chemistry affirms it is not possible to turn black into white, before black could turn to white it would have to turn to grey. These men are not simple men: they are “gentlemen” who have *become* “white” through western practices, wearing their “identical” uniforms and their “belt overcoats” to pay tribute to an ideology and exteriorization that gives them the sense of being part of something bigger. Here again, these men crossed the “white” river which is some sort of frontier, a geographical space whose colonized landmarks separate it from their “dark river” where these men used to speak their language. Their “French” is stilted because by borrowing some other people’s language it seems they do not walk with their own legs, and walking is affected, becoming a heavy pace as that of someone crossing a river.

Their “French” has become a Patois, a dialect, a stilt. Their river once was “dark” and was abundant in fish because its “hooked worm, multiplying its pale sickle, could thin the harvest of the winter streets.” This statement is really strong, and the first image that arises is that of a hook—that is used to fish—with a worm on it. The interesting thing is that the worm can be “divided” into many pieces to “multiply” the chances of catching more fish. The imagery goes on, and it is possible to see similarities in the format of a hook and of a “sickle”, which is an instrument for harvesting wheat. The “sickle” and the “hook” are much alike, and both are used to pull something out of their natural environment for personal benefits. The “sickle” is “multiplied”, that is, it becomes more than only one, and it “could thin the harvest of the winter streets” because there would be more hands at work and more chances to harvest a greater amount of wheat.



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

This is the portrait of how life was before the white men came. The land was theirs; the rivers were theirs—when their skins were only black. There was enough for everyone and there was no harsh “winter”—the season of darkness and desolation brought by the colonizers. The problem now is that the sickle is “pale”. A “pale sickle” is a weak sickle that has lost its sharpness and has gotten rusty, old, grey. This is where on the surface of this painted moment stands a golden field of wheat that no longer exists because it is on the other side of the “white river”, and that cannot be harvested for winter because the “multiple” sickles (the people, the colonized, the slaves, the other) are powerless and have had their hands “hooked” to the lindens, treated like “worms,” made bate for the fishing.

When this horrible scene comes to mind the sentence gets an even deeper sense: the people are being literally harvested in the streets. People are imprisoned and taken as slaves by those with “identical” clothes (and skin) to a “white river” where the sun always shines and the moon is full: the Helen of the West Indies—Sainte-Lucie. Here it becomes clear that “The Fortunate Traveller” (*Selected Poems*, 2007), the speaker, is (mis)taken by Walcott himself. Taking into account his life and passion for his land, the reader can be (mis)led to biographical cultural assumptions that straightforward relate with the narrative.

Another intriguing look at this passage will reveal that many forms of “fishing” were used to “harvest” the colonies. In this case, the reader experiences Walcott’s usage of an image as “a source of gazing into the past, much like a wizard’s crystal ball or a time machine” (RAZA, 2012, p. 27). Furthermore, when such images are applied “a relationship is established between gazing and [...] perspective, and the divided consciousness of the Colonised and the Coloniser become synthesized in the same vision” (RAZA, 2012, p. 27). There is this synthetic blending between the Colonized and Colonizer imaginary, for in the Caribbean, the cultural domination was easily spread through the ambiguous (mis)use of the Self-belief of a God-given right to



**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

rule and to “subdue”, therefore victimizing the figure of the villain. Indeed, conquerors thought themselves to be the anointed ones:

Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks; And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men (Jeremiah 16:16; Matthew 4:19 - 1769 Oxford King James Bible).

The opium of religion seemed to be the cure for all the evils the downtrodden faced, and it was a crucial part for cultural dominance. When not by force, natives were conquered with fodder, and this is the image brought forward by Walcott, now reshaping images through the advent of what he calls “the eyes of children.” In Amra Raza’s view, the symbolic appearance of children in Walcott’s poetry stands for his poetry recognition of itself as often joyous in that the child imagines its mirror image to be more complete than its own body. It implies, therefore, that “recognition is replaced by misrecognition since the image reflected in the mirror is conceived to be the reflected body of the self, and thus superior” (RAZA, 2012, p. 20). It is in this infantile gaze, when “the moon goggles with the eyes of children”, that the returned mirror gaze of identification expresses Caribbean natives’ obliteration by the whites:

[...] and they remain compassionate fodder for the travel book, its paragraphs like windows from a train, / for everywhere that earth shows its rib cage / and the moon goggles with the eyes of children, / we turn away to read. Rimbaud learned that (WALCOTT, p. 151).

Finally, it seems that “everywhere that earth shows its rib cage” declares the universality of death. From dust to dust shall all mankind go. The “earth” is the final destination as it was first in the beginning and the “rib” which was once formed from the dust will now become a “cage”, a place where the ribs are to the soul like bars are to a jail that decomposes into dust once more to “set us free”. Yet this pain does not go



away. When “the moon goggles with the eyes of children” they “turn away to read.” This is a profound image of sorrow and despair: children’s eyes popping out of orbits because of starvation, sickness, and death. And all they can do is “turn away to read.” Then hatred towards the “white religion” comes when they “read” and do not find applicable what is written in “its paragraphs.” Even Rimbaud is mentioned for taking part of this universal “journey”—generic accounts of (*silenced*) history report that he lived in Africa for 10 years, moved back to France and when attempting to move to Ethiopia once again, died of cancer on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1891 in Marseille (NICHOLL, 1999).

### **The funereal fragrance of white lilies**

As an attempt to show these representations under a postcolonial perspective of otherness, ambivalence, and decentralization as a compact oeuvre one must speak about postcolonialism. Postcolonialism is a theoretical movement that entirely revises modern history, cultural studies, literary criticism, and political economy. This movement makes distinction between two important periods in the life of a colonized nation: before colonization, and after decolonization (ABRAHAM, 2008). Modern history has to be retold, when it comes to defining race and class, language and culture, dominance and resistance—all through the eyes of the downtrodden, the subaltern, the other. This new conception brings up the question of cultural identities, whether for the peripheral societies without resources whether for their political and economic development. Literary criticism embraces these subjects under the broad hood of “postcolonial studies” and seeks to explore Foucault (1970)'s assertion that no knowledge is for knowledge sake.

A knowledge discourse serves as a discourse of power and, puts at stake human endeavors through dominance and control. In the coming and going of peoples, histories and situations, there remains in the end what is left of it: who you are and where you belong. Postcolonial studies were firstly fomented by Edward Said’s *Orientalism*,



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

published in 1978. Building upon Foucault's assertions, Said argues that the Orient indeed does not exist. In a bold denouncement he states: "(. . .) as a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge" (1978, p. 204). Here is where imagery changes because of the look. Words as invocators of imagery more than images themselves compose the impactating difference. In this New World where History is not relevant, imagination is necessary for the recovering of the nearly lost and almost forgotten loss of History.

The recognition of this "recalled amnesia" unblocks inferences with the (shaded, covered up, almost fictional) past and opens up a negotiation of (re)constructed meanings. Political reasoning creates monsters of dictatorship. Though reason underlies this movement, and it endeavors to obtain an even closer watch at human actions, its perception, and poetry making rely on human beings. Basic questions arise: Is poetry looking for the poet or is the poet looking for poetry? How do you know when you are a poet? How does Walcott research, look into nature, into culture, into language, into race, and into suffering? The ideology of semiotics to designate the other and the identity of the traveller constitute "oppositional reading practices, exposing the power relations constructing meaning in a given text" (ABRAHAM, 2008, p. 380). "The Fortunate Traveller" (*Selected Poems*, 2007) notices his own otherness and realizes his decolonized privilege. He is a sort of archetype of the business man from the capitalist world who travels to poor countries and has the role of maintaining a distorted account of facts:

"Then we can depend on you to get those tractors?" / 'I gave my word'  
/ 'May my country ask you why you are doing this, sir?' Silence. /  
'You know if you betray us, you cannot hide?' / A tug. Smoke trailing  
its dark cry." (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 147)

Despite the traveller's political role, the image pulls us back to the last line of the stanza: the words "tug" and "trailing" illustrate how "quickly" he understands the consequences of his acts and how "slowly" mankind's cry for freedom drags along. This cry is the cry every man wishes to shout to denounce injustice, misery and



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

exploitation. Yet the “dark cry”, that is, the cry of the African descendents, moves slowly through “smoke”. Though there might be different colors and condensations of smoke, the emergence of the color white is hereupon acknowledged as a representation of cultural and political dominance of the West over the East. Several reasons prevent third world countries from development such as lack of education, economy, historical implications, as well as prejudice. It is nothing but the antonimization of the self as a lyric product of ambiguity. “Lyric” because of the way dominance is architected and magistrated: forged under the allurements of gleams of gold in the stained white minds of those with *sangre azul*.

It is after the traveller sees children “pounce on green meat with a rat’s ferocity” (WALCOTT, 2012, p. 149) and feels the coldness of the real “heart of darkness” that he is able to wonder about his fortunate condition. The image of the children is evoked again, but why do they pounce on the green meat with such “rat’s ferocity”? Even though this image might look fairly repulsive, even repulsiveness is a notion problematized by Walcott’s approach on its real and ideal supposed epitomes: “The infant feels attracted to the image as an ideal and yet simultaneously feels repulsed because the real is not the ideal. In this moment of recognition the child sees all the parts [...] at the same time”. (RAZA, 2012, p. 19)

Walcott works in the spaces between dusk and dawn, light and darkness and in the core of something in between. As already mentioned, the poet makes mention of specific images of smoke, fog, cold and snow. It looks like the whole place, both in Haiti or in Africa, is shrouded by some kind of unpleasant-intoxicating-white substance. Still in the first part of the poem there is a passage where he negotiates some tractors with the natives. After this negotiation, the reader is told there was “smoke trailing its dark cry” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 147). Even the palms of the gecko’s hands against the hotel glass were white, and it excused itself from the monsieur. Again, the steeples are now like “tribal lances through congealing fog and the church bells are wrapped in cotton” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 147). The color white is all around but there’s a “grey



Revista Igarapé  
Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade

mist enfolding the conspirator” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 147). “The jet fades like a weevil through a cloud of flour” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 147). This “grey mist” is actually the “winter” season brought by the white to control and enslave. Even the telly “displays a blue storm of soundless snow” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 148).

Perhaps it means that snow represents the white and their culture, but it is soundless not because it does not have sound but because it is the other: the strange voice, the ones they do not want to listen to anymore. The same can be said of fire. Fire may represent light, warmth, and protection against wild beasts, but it also represents destruction by burning and smoke. Life in the past was prejudicial for the natives. Renaissance teachings, though “white” in their concepts of *en-light-ment*, became devilish while the trees burned. The “White Devil” was taught in old “Sussex dons” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 148) and the Duchess’s soul had “a white flame blowing out between the smoking cypresses” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 149). Finding himself in the midst of that environment, the traveller understood that “the forked white gull was pulled back by gravity” as “mercy has its own magnetic field” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 149). And so was he pulled back by mercy.

He had a choice that everyone has, but chose not to have charity. The same happened in the Americas when Ponce de Leon encountered Florida: “as Ponce’s armoured knees crush Florida to the funereal fragrance of white lilies” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 149). He named the place La Florida, because of its many flowers. The white lilies exhale a pleasant fragrance, but here the fragrance is funereal because it inaugurates an era of death among the Americans. White becomes black, and is in the heart of darkness. “The heart of darkness is not Africa. The heart of darkness is the core of fire in the white centre of the holocaust” (WALCOTT, 2007, p. 150). The color black is demystified as a symbol of evil, darkness and inferiority. Good and evil are repainted, as it were, by their “true colors,” and that is not a Caribbean blue.

### Final Remarks



**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

For Sartre (1957), the other looks at the self and turns it into an object. The outsiderness we have to others is the condition for those others ethical strivings to be aestheticized; we are, thus, the aesthetic for the other. Self and other are both representatives of the extra temporal that looks back and project into the future in a surplus of seeing, whereas they are, at the same time, representations of the private and public sides of subjectivity. Self and other, subject and object, and, therefore, seemingly separated but actually, and controversially, “two sides of the same coin” (RAZA, 2012, p. 24). Amra Raza (2012) illustrates such paradoxical coexistence between self and other by bringing the idea of the photograph. Through photography one’s snapshot would be an embodiment of the other, even though it also becomes an objective view of his/her self, an indirect but material gaze of the camera.

Furthermore, even though photography might generally be conceived as an image of one as observed by others, as a source of identification for an outer analysis of the inner self, it is, likewise, a surprisingly misrepresentation of such self. Pictures are supposed to stand for the “real”, for the “now”, but they are actually lying for the materiality of experience. When one stares at his/her picture, at his/her symbolic representation, he/her might find that perhaps it lacks a particular aspect of his/her character, realising that an incontestable or unequivocal “me” is not really in the photograph at all: “In which case the camera would be the equivalent of the gaze, since I as the subject, would be missing in the snapshot”. (RAZA, 2012, p. 24)

Nevertheless, even though the “I as the subject” is “missing in the snapshot”, the act of observing, of experiencing, is, in itself, an endeavor to transcend visuality; that is, the perceptible is what allows perception to overstep its own conceptualization, since “to see” might also result in “to have”, or even “to be”: “As Walcott’s gaze acquires its independence from the eye it goes beyond the limits of the visual to the tactile [...], and occasionally, the gaze displays a tender possession”. (RAZA, 2012, p. 30) The gaze might, therefore, be lying to both the observed and observed, but it may also be helping them to reach the sublime; the postcolonial self and other cannot be institutionalized





**Revista Igarapé**  
**Literatura, Educação e Cultura: Caminhos da Alteridade**

without taking into account how the institution of meaning constructs itself, and this is why Walcott's dexterous rearrangement of imagistic features disrupts normative and established notions regarding what it is to colonize and what it is to be colonized.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the self pre-exists; that the observation is what follows the observer. Both the sight and the one who sights are composed and recomposed together, vis-à-vis the experience of watching, the experience of gazing. The one who sees (be it colonizer, colonized, or both) is also seen by external spectators. And, in Walcott's poems, the eyes of others (such as tourists to the Caribbean islands or even the Caribbean natives) are, in a way, "an integral part of this type of identification. The Caribbean man is characterized by the gaze of others which reflects preconceived images tainted by racial superiority 'in the blue reflection of eyes'" (RAZA, 2012, p. 23). In the case of the tourist ("the fortunate traveller"), the romanticized appreciation that wraps the process of visiting the exotic and mysterious New World represented by the Caribbean as narrated by normativity ends up with the occurrence of an unexpected counter-result concerning such course.

In the end, what seems to take place is that the hegemonic lens offered as to (re)bring the seer closer to what he/she is eager to see only seems to increase the distance between the colonized and the colonizer, at the same time that it succeeds in promoting a diplomatic separateness of being. In Walcott's poetry, nonetheless, "there are not only numerous human eyes, but even the landscape has eyes." (RAZA, 2012, p. 23) The process of self-conscious gazing is, therefore, extended beyond the inner Caribbean self as a product of past multiracial immigrations, to the outer world and pre-existing European conceptions of cultural identity. That is why the traveller, carrying with him/her such pre-existent Eurocentric conceptions, is so fortunate; this is the basis of our contemporary innocuous compassion: a compassion that allows us to visit the many places that are supposedly just like the Caribbean – anywhere where there is serious human pain and discrimination – with the sole intention of appreciating its romantic and mistakenly taken as meaningless atmosphere.



## REFERENCES

- BAER, William. "Conversations with Derek Walcott". US: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
- BAKHTIN, M. "Author and hero in aesthetic activity" (ca. 1920–1923). Holquist M., Liapunov V. (eds) **Art and answerability**: Early philosophical essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 4-256, 1993
- BEAUVOIR, S. de. **The Second Sex**. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952.
- FANON, F. **Black Skin**. White Masks. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963
- HUXLEY, Aldous. **Brave New World**. UK, London: Chatto & Windus, 1932
- MITCHELL, W. J. T. **Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology**. US: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- NICHOLL, C. **Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa**. US: The University of Chicago, 1999
- RAZA, A. "The formation of the 'I' through the 'Eye' in Derek Walcott's Poetry". Science and Technology Free Docs; Authentic Body. US: New York Free Docs Association, 2012. Available in: <http://www.slashdocs.com/npvmrk/ms-amra-raza.html>
- SAID, E. **Orientalism**. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- SATRE, J. **The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness**. Translated and edited by Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. US, New York; Noonday, 1957.
- ABRAHAM, S. "What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology". US: Theological Studies, p. 376-93. 2008
- TRAPP, J. **Lectures on poetry read in the schools of natural philosophy at Oxford**. London: Oxford University Press, 1711.
- WALCOTT, D. "The Fortunate Traveller" (p. 114). In **Selected Poems**. Edited by Edward Baugh. Great Britain: Faber & Faber Poetry, 2007.