

John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*: a Caribbean Revision

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Abstract—This study examines Derek Walcott's revision of John Millington Synge's Irish play *Riders to the Sea* into a Caribbean play entitled *The Sea at Dauphin*. Derek Walcott brought stature and world regard to the Caribbean dramatic theatre. The St. Lucian poet and dramatist, awarded the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature, has written around forty plays in verse and prose, employing both native English and French dialects. In addition to writing plays, he also founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop providing inspiration and advice for many other theatrical groups that have sprung up throughout the Caribbean. The effectiveness of Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin* arises from his turning to the setting of St. Lucia and the patois language he has heard spoken since his childhood. Walcott's Irish teachers at St. Mary's college drew his attention to the similarity between St. Lucia's colonial situation and Ireland's. Thus Walcott has discovered a precedent-setting model in J.M Synge's Irish play *Riders to the Sea*, which is an obvious intertext. Finally, this study shows how far Walcott succeeds in altering and creolizing a European text adding his own Caribbean flavor and cultural imprint.

Index Terms—Assimilation, caribbeanization, folk language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing about the West Indies began with the European discovery of the New World; writing in the West Indies followed immediately upon settlement by Europeans; writing by West Indians – that is, by slaves and colonists whose home was in the islands and not in Europe – emerged in the eighteenth century. The colonizing countries Spain, England, France, and the Netherlands imposed their languages and dominated the writing of their colonies. However in spite of the Caribbean's history of enslavement and colonial domination, individual writers have risen through the West Indian milieu to establish themselves as highly competent, even outstanding, artists. The French have Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon of Martinique; whereas the Spanish have Alejo Carpentier and Nicolas Guillen of Cuba.

It is no wonder that the Caribbean is regarded as a social melting pot owing to the cultural and racial mixture of the West Indies. First, the changing fortunes of international diplomacy and war has put most of the islands under a number of different flags at various times so it is not unusual to find the native populace of an English island speaking a French patois, playing Spanish music and sometimes living

in villages with Dutch names. Moreover, further complexity derives from the importation of foreign labor for it did not take the Spanish long to realize that the native Indians were not adaptable to European working conditions. Hence, the early 1500s marked the emergence of African slavery and the middle passage: the third leg of a triangular trade route linking the continents of Europe, Africa and the Americas. Despite the rigors of the passage, disease, and dehumanizing treatment on the plantations, the Africans managed to endure; so when the British islands were emancipated, they outnumbered their white masters.

Derek Walcott is one of the most prominent contemporary Caribbean writers in the twentieth century. The St. Lucian poet and dramatist awarded the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature has written around forty plays in verse and prose in native English and French dialects. Walcott is one, perhaps the best, of a generation of writers born around 1930 who rapidly created new national literatures, brought their cultures to international attention, and who are viewed as the cultural side of decolonization and the new nationalism which in turn led to post-colonialism. Walcott was born in Castries, St. Lucia which is a small mountainous island situated to the south-east of Martinique and to the north-east of St. Vincent in the Windward Islands. Its mixture of Anglophone and Francophone cultures is a product of its colonial history: it has often changed hands between the British and the French before eventually becoming a British colony in 1802 [1]. In his formative years, young Walcott perceived himself as much more like the whites than those darker and lower on the social scale, until in his teens he discovered the history of slavery, became conscious that his grandmothers were descended from slaves and experienced the discriminations of racial prejudice [2]. In his early poetry, Walcott [3] presents his mixed racial background as a problematic legacy. He speaks of being “poisoned by the blood of both” sides of his ancestry – but quickly coming to see the potential it offers for a creative fusion of traditions.

As a young writer growing up in St. Lucia in the late colonial period, Walcott found himself, like most of his contemporaries, subjected to a process of brainwashing which involved the inculcation of European cultural standards at the expense of local values; in subsequent years, after the various Caribbean territories achieved their independence in the 1960's and 1970's, he saw the pendulum swing the other way, with African retentions in the region now being privileged over European influences and Creole language forms over Standard English. However, Walcott attempted to create his own Caribbean tradition, drawing on an electric assortment of elements from inside and outside the region. Much of his work is metaliterary, a self-conscious

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discussion of the problematic of Caribbean writing and an attempt to evolve suitable forms for the rendition of his own Caribbean experience [1].

Walcott's ambivalence or at least his acute consciousness of the complexities of his situation makes his work all the more valuable. If he has been criticized for sounding too much like some of the masters of Western Literature, he is willing to admit that he has greatly profited from his predecessors. Furthermore, he has no fear of the charge of imitation; in fact, the echoes of past and contemporary artists in his work increase the resonance of his own authentic voice. He is not afraid to build where others have surveyed and laid foundations maintaining at the same time his individual integrity. Furthermore, Walcott is not only the preeminent poet of the West Indies, but he is also the area's leading dramatist [4]. Walcott's life and work inhabit a teeming intersection of cultural forces, a space that his friend and fellow-poet James Dickey [5] described with a remarkable litany, "Here he is, a twentieth-century man, living in the West Indies and in Boston, poised between the blue sea and its real fish ... and the rockets and warheads, between a lapsed colonial culture and the industrial North, between Africa and the West, between slavery and intellectualism, between the native Caribbean tongue and the English learned from books."

As far as Walcott [6] is concerned, the greatest bequest of the British Empire was education, which, "must have ranked with the finest in the world. The grounding was rigid – Latin, Greek, and the essential masterpieces, but there was this elation of discovery. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Horace, Vergil – these writers weren't jaded but immediate experiences." Walcott [7] indicates that this background is very important to West Indian artists, "the writers of my generation were natural assimilators. We knew the literature of Empires, Greek, Roman, British, through their essential classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery. If there was nothing, there was everything to be made ... with this prodigious ambition one began." Hence, according to Hamner [4], Walcott passed through a youthful apprenticeship phase wherein he consciously traced the models of established masters. He was honest enough to disclose his intention to appropriate whatever stores he found useful in the canon of world literature. There are traces in his poetry and his drama of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Sophocles, Andrew Marvell, Tirso de Molina, Bertolt Brecht, Baudelaire, J.M. Synge, the Japanese Kabuki and Noh theatres, and West Indian folktale and dance. However, assimilation not only means ingesting into the mind and thoroughly comprehending, but it also means merging as well as becoming one with a cultural tradition. Thus, since Walcott's culture as a West Indian is fed by multiple tributaries, he is inspired by it.

II. DISCUSSION

Walcott's play, *The Sea at Dauphin*, employs local registers throughout, blending Francophone patois elements with Anglophone Creole, and this immersion in everyday St. Lucian speech is complemented by a similar commitment to the local world in the use of a beach setting, which allows the

sea to function as a major protagonist in the action. The effectiveness of the play derives from Walcott's turning to the setting of St. Lucia and to the language he has heard spoken since his childhood. These are important factors; but far more crucial to him during this apprenticeship phase was his discovery of a precedent-setting model in the Irish writer John Millington Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* that is an obvious intertext [4]. Breslin [8] argues that Walcott's Irish teachers at St. Mary's impressed upon him the similarity between St. Lucia's colonial situation and Ireland's. Both countries are predominantly Catholic and still rooted to an extent in a village, peasant culture that no longer exists in many parts of the world. In an Interview with Derek Walcott conducted by Hirsch [9], Walcott's own account of the borrowing stresses the role of language:

When I read Synge's *Riders to the Sea* I realized what he had attempted to do with the language of the Irish. He had taken a fishing port kind of language gotten beauty out of it, a beat, something lyrical. Now that was inspiring, and the obvious model for *The Sea at Dauphin* [...]. If you know very clearly that you are imitating such and such a work, it isn't that you're adopting another man's genius; it is that he has done an experiment that has worked and will be useful to all writers afterwards. When I tried to translate the speech of the St. Lucian fishermen into an English Creole, all I was doing was taking that kind of speech and translating it, or retranslating it, into an English-inflected Creole, and that was a totally new experience for me, even if it did come out of Synge.

Hence, in the West Indies, as in Synge's Ireland, the folk idiom and imagination continue to thrive. In prefacing his play *The Playboy of the Western World*, Synge [10] acknowledges the influence of the language and folk imagination of the fishermen, peasants, and ballad singers along the Irish coast on his work, "in a good play every speech should be as fully flavored as a nut or an apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry." Breslin [8] states that Synge's main inspiration to Walcott therefore was his success to translate vernacular speech into a heightened dramatic language that brought out its beauty and rhythms. Moreover, moving the setting from the Aran Islands to St. Lucia meant not only a change of language but also a change of cultural milieu. Because the most commonly used form of St. Lucian creole has French rather than an English lexicon, Walcott's first task of translation was a literal one. Thus he often makes his characters paraphrase their French creole phrases with English creole equivalents.

A recent study [11] asserts that *Riders to the Sea* is frequently cited as the best one-act play ever written. Certainly, it is a remarkable achievement in capturing the tragic mood in so brief a time. Though it is unusual in being Synge's only play not to use extensive comedy, it is entirely typical in combining reality with joy, with a language style that is poetically evocative without being verse, thus elevating the play into a higher order of art than is attainable through photographic realism alone. The play is set in one of the Aran Islands off the western coast of Ireland where centuries of isolation have produced a unique and rugged culture dependent on wrestling a livelihood from the sea. The

sea pervades the lives of the islanders and the prevailing atmosphere is that of despair. The details of the play are utterly naturalistic, and Synge insisted on the occasion of the first production that every prop and every costume item must be carefully selected to support this realism. The furnishings of the cottage are meticulously described, and serve an important imagistic function that can only be fully appreciated when they are physically present before an audience. The verbal references to the white boards, and the bit of rope and the flannel shirt are effective linguistic elements rendered far more vivid by their actual presence on stage. This realism extends to the play's language as well, for Synge insisted that he has used no more than one or two words he had not heard among the country people of Ireland and his sensitive ear for the uniquely Irish combination of Celtic and English is evident to any reader of the play. On the other hand, the play is not simply a slice of life, for the poetry of its language and the poetic use of all its theatrical elements combine to form a highly evocative work of art that extends far beyond photographic realism. Perhaps the most powerful effect the play creates in a theater is an evocation of mood, a mood of despair and acquiescence to a harsh fate, but tempered by a kind of nobility rising from mankind's perseverance despite death.

Donoghue [12] declares that the Sea is the agent of the drama and the play as seen through the eyes of Maurya, is full of the vision of life as a small area (the family) entirely surrounded by evil (the Sea). To Maurya the Sea is the Enemy, the destructive principle, and destroyer of human and family continuity. The thematic situation of the play derives from the inhuman power of the Sea, and Synge has placed before the eyes of his audience a representation of sea-death in the white boards standing by the wall of the cottage. The new boards are there from the beginning of the play and they are to be made into a coffin for Michael, Maurya's son whom she has lost at sea, then for Maurya herself. They stand there throughout the drama and are finally used at the end of the play to give Bartley, her other son who will also be lost at sea, his grave. The boards are therefore a continuously operative symbol of the presence of death.

According to Hill [11], in *Riders to the Sea*, there is a distinct plot centering upon a clash of wills – narrowly, Maurya's attempt to dissuade Bartley from going on the sea, and, in a broader sense, Maurya's struggle against the sea for the lives of her sons. Yet her struggle is doomed to failure. Maurya has lost her husband, her father-in-law and four sons to the sea. For nine days now she's anxiously watched the surf for the body of her son Michael, lost at sea. When her last remaining son, Bartley, prepares to travel by sea to the Galway horse fair, Maurya asks the local priest to stop him, but the priest assures her that the Almighty God won't leave her destitute without a son. Maurya tries to stop Bartley from sailing to Connemara to sell the two horses at the Galway horse fair, yet he ignores her pleas: the family desperately needs money and the sale of horses is one of the few ways for them to get it. Bartley leaves without his mother's blessing and as her sole-surviving son leaves, Maurya knows that he is going to drown too because she is aware of the sea to be an implacable enemy. Furthermore, Maurya perceives the sea as a mass grave for young men, a grave that denies mothers the

consolation of mourning over their sons' bodies. Thus she is aware of the unpredictability and the destructive power of the sea, which eventually takes her last son.

On the other hand, there is an important sense too in which *Riders to the Sea* is a religious play, exploring the relationship between the Aran people and their God in an environment in which, contrary to the young priest's prediction, God does in fact leave Maurya destitute with no son living. Nevertheless Maurya's fundamental faith seems not to be shaken by the loss of her last two sons and she believes that the young priest; the community's spiritual leader; knows little about the sea. Hence, Maurya's faith may not be shaken, but it is a harsh, unbending faith that, like the sea, has little about it of forgiveness or mercy. By the end of the play, she finds grace in that, with no more sons living, the sea can no longer hurt her, and that the most one can ask of God are a quick death and a clean burial. Not only is this a religious comfort at best, but it is also a philosophical position that should be examined with care, since it fits the physical facts of life not only of the Aran Islanders but of a great many of the less fortunate people on earth. The play ends with Maurya's fatalistic submission for as far as she is concerned; there isn't anything more the sea can do to her now that all her sons are gone. At this point of her grief, Maurya touches a wellspring of common humanity, and her experience of death is so universally the human experience that an audience identifies with [11].

Finally, Synge's *Riders to the Sea* sums up the essence of the constant struggle of the islanders against their relentless enemy, the sea. The play is not a political parable, but it had a significant political impact. It counteracted the colonial view of the Irish as a rather savage, primitive uncultured people. It shows a family struggling against overwhelming odds to survive, and maintaining dignity in defeat. *Riders to the Sea* has been called, "the tragedy of a community," in which the characters "are not so much individuals as typical representatives of that community" [13]. The richness and spirit of the Irish language is recreated in English modelled on Gaelic speech patterns. The play reduces the colonial period to an episode in the history of the Irish, as it provides a picture of how the people lived down the centuries. It could have given the audience a sense of hope: if people survived thousands of years battling against the elements, then surely a struggle against mere human unreason could ultimately be successful.

On the other hand, despite the geographical and cultural particularity that makes Synge's *Riders to the Sea* inseparable from its setting on the Aran Islands, Derek Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954) moves the play across the Atlantic to a "Windward island in the West Indies," most likely based on his native island of St. Lucia [14]. The title of the play suggests the central focus of the play: the sea at Dauphin. As in Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, going to sea signifies a primal encounter with death. There is suspense concerning the fate of the characters. The play explores the nature of the sea and the mysterious compulsion it has for fishermen, whom young Walcott saw as a breed apart in St. Lucia [1]. The play is concerned with Caribbean fishermen, the precariousness as well as uncertainty of the profession, and the bitterness they feel about the hostility of the physical

and social environment. Hence, whereas *Riders to the Sea* moves nowhere other than within the borders of the cottage, *The Sea at Dauphin* is set on the beach presenting Caribbean fishermen who risk their lives on the sea to earn a living. The play's dialogue begins between Afa and Gacia who, while waiting for the other fishermen in the early morning, comment on the severity of the wind and the sea:

Gacia: *Bon matin, boug.*

Afa: *Matin, Gacia, bon matin.* Wind hard, eh...Wind still savage.

Gacia: Ay, *oui*, the cold will drop, but this just half the wind. The next half in the sea back- pocket, by Sablisse. Where Augustin?

Afa: You know Augustin. Augustin is his woman blanket. Where Debel?

Gacia: Debel? Debel sick. [*Imitates a man vomiting*] *Rhum.*

Afa: You see, cousin? Rum is a bad wife.

Gacia: But you must sleep with it. Debel finish. Between him and his woman not much leave. He should die, since to beg is worse. [*Shivering*] I don't even take my little coffee yet. [*Looks at sky*] Two weeks now, this sea whiter than spit, two weeks is rain.

Afa: It white like the time when Bolo drown. [*Points off-shore*] There so!

Gacia: *Garçon*, to see a next day so like when Bolo drown ... [*Shakes his head*] I remember...

Afa: But the sea forget [14].

Yet despite the bad weather, both fishermen agree that they must go out on the sea or else they will starve. So they decide to defy the sea on such a dreadful, windy day:

Gacia: The sea do what it have to do, like wind, like birds. Like me. Cigarette? [*Offers Afa a cigarette*] American.

Afa: *Merci ...* [*Looks at it*] Ay, ay, *bough*. 'ous riche, a whole one? [*They laugh*] Is only natural for wind to blow so hard, but to turn, and turn. You going out, you one? The others, they making one with their woman, only both of us two so stupid.

Gacia: It staying so for a next month, *comp ére*, and in all my life I never see it more vex and it have many reason, fishing *nasse*, I see it bad; but never in a life, like this. But is work or starve. They have many garden wash down in Fond River. We curse, *comp ére*. God forget us ... *Bonne chance ...* [14].

Walcott's Afa is a fisherman who works hard yet receives very little in return. He recounts the litany of his failures and the fishermen who have died, but even in the face of inevitable defeat unlike the characters of *Riders to the Sea* who deeply mourn their losses and accept them as inalterable fate, Afa defies the sea as well as God who ignores his prayers:

Afa: God is a white man. The sky is his blue eyes,
His spit on Dauphin people is the sea.

Don't ask me why a man must work so hard

To eat for worm to get more fat. Maybe I bewitch.

You never curse God, I curse him, and cannot die,

Until His time. This basin men call sea

Never get red for men blood it have. My turn is next [14].

The St. Lucian fisherman, Afa, defies the elements by going to the sea with Augustin on a particularly windy day.

At the same time Afa refuses to take Augustin's godfather, the East Indian Hounakin, who has just been widowed with them since he suspects that he is courting death. Afa's younger fishing partner, Augustin, arrives and reveals that last night at the bar Afa has been drunk and has promised Hounakin that he could come with them on the sea in the morning. Afa maintains that the sea is too bad to take the old man, who is a farmer, not a fisherman, and accuses Augustin of trying to drown his godfather:

Augustin: Last night in Samuel café when white rum scald you tongue, is not you tell this old man he can come? Not you what have water in you eyes from Samuel onions, and cry on the old man shoulder?

Afa: Well, today I feel to say *Non, non!* Last night did drunk. This morning I have sense, and so is *non, non!*

Augustin: The old man is my godfather!

Afa: What a man, to drown he godfather! [14]

Hence, as Augustine, the younger fisherman joins them; we begin to learn more about the character of Afa and his apparent callousness in his refusal to let the old East Indian Hounakin go out to sea with them:

Afa: Old man, your wife is dead and sorry make you mad. Go on the morne and count the birds like Ragamin, and play bamboo under the wood trees for you' goat. Is land you know, old man, you don't know sea, you know the fifteen kind of grass this land have, land hard under a old man foot and hard on old woman body, but this sea is no cemetery for old men; go on the morne behind the presbytery, watch goat, talk with priest and drink your white rum after the night come. When we come back we will talk of this sea [14].

As a matter of fact, Afa and Augustin begin to suspect that Hounakin actually wants to die, so they pull him out of the canoe, promise to bring him fish, bread, and a "white shell for Rama," and set sail without him:

Afa: [*Starting to push the canoe*] *à nous, à nous, comp ére*, sea going down, and the sun hot ... [*They start to haul the canoe*] *Plus fort. Poussez! Poussez!* ... Mind the sail, Agos, mind the sail! [*The old man remains watching them dazedly, and waves a worn, tired hand, then goes off as the lights fade into evening and the almost blinding twilight*] [14].

Furthermore, aside from Afa, Hounakin is a memorable character in *The Sea at Dauphin*. The East Indian, "more old than Dauphin self" remembers a time "when didn't have no Dauphin, only cane, and a green river by the canes" [14]. It is from those canes, rather than fishing, that he once made a living. Hounakin, an old man desolate with poverty and age, but mostly with the loss of his wife, wants to take up fishing with Afa and Augustin because he does not want to beg:

Hounakin: When Rama dying she did want more medicine,

You know we could not beg, but then I beg

For one whole year, then she catch sick again.

And Rama say no medicine we must not beg.

I did not want to beg and Rama die.

The first time I did beg you was last night.

To work. I cannot beg or bend down to make garden.

I know have friend, but friend and pride is different...

Is just a work to feed a old man and the dog... [14]

Afa, Gacia and Augustin go out to sea leaving the old man on shore while the wives of Dauphin sing sad songs of

fishermen who are drowned at sea. Afa and the others return before sunset with gifts of fish for the old man only to learn from the villagers and the priest on the shore that Hounakin was found dead. He has fallen from a high cliff and died, “he fall down from the high rocks by Point Side. His face mash up” [14].

Nevertheless, Afa meets the young French priest’s attempt at consolation with an angry tirade, calls God “a big fish eating small ones,” and tears off his scapular, shouting that it is “not Dauphin own” [14]. He criticizes the priest for talking of God and taking the people’s money to build the church while around him there is poverty, dirty woman, and children.

In both plays *Riders to the Sea* and *The Sea at Dauphin* the sea represents the unpredictable forces of nature with which men have to contend for their lives. The name of Afa’s boat, *Our Daily Bread*, is both metaphorical and literal. Afa’s recitation of the names of fishermen who have lost their lives at sea is, “a chronicle of the village’s past. Growing out of this blending of metaphor and reality is an image of the cyclical nature of existence” [4]. However, what saves the plot of the play from tragedy and sends it off into another cycle is the appearance of young Jules. Jules, son of Habal, the man who first took Afa to the sea, comes to him seeking work. At this point, “Afa, childless, an intractable curmudgeon, begins the initiation of the next generation” [4]. Delivering his acceptance to Jules’s demand he says:

Afa: Tell him if he know what it have in this trade, in this season any day is to die. And tell the boy it make you sour and old and good for nothing standing on two feet when forty years you have [...] Ask him if he remember Habal, and then Bolo. If he say yes, tell him he must brave like Hounakin, from young he is. Brave like Habal to fight sea at Dauphin. This piece of coast is make for men like that. Tell him Afa do it for his father sake [14].

Afa, looking at the sea, ruminates, “Last year Annelles, and Bolo, and this year Hounakin ... And one day, tomorrow, you Gacia, and me ... And Augustin.” Yet, in spite of this, Afa has to set out, “[t]omorrow again. *Un autre demain...*” [14]. Nonetheless, unlike the past, this time Afa will go fishing accompanied by the young boy Jules, who will become a kind of disciple and will have to learn not only fishing but also the art of living and surviving. Hence, man has, “to face the truth, to acknowledge his fundamental aloneness and solitude in a universe indifferent to his fate ... Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only by using his own powers can he give meaning to his life” [15].

The Sea at Dauphin maintains many of the central concerns of Synge’s play, exploring the poverty and hardship of life on an isolated island, the tension between outside influence and the local culture. Perhaps most significantly, it extends and reframes Synge’s concern with mourning and memory. In both plays, mourning and memory are integral parts of the daily experience of the characters, who constantly recite the names and stories of the dead. In *The Sea at Dauphin*, however, memory and the rituals that attend it are treated far more ambivalently—remembering the dead can be a source of valuable lessons but also of crippling as well as destructive grief.

On the other hand, the most prominent difference between *Riders to the Sea* and *The Sea at Dauphin* is that Walcott changes the play’s focus from the domestic space of the cottage to the open air at the beach, from the world of the grieving mother to the world of the fishermen who contend daily with the sea. The speech of the Dauphin fishermen is full of references to the dead. At the beginning of the play, Afa and Gacia have exchanged only a few words before their dialogue shifts to mentioning the dead fisherman Bolo; Afa notes that the sea is white like the time when Bolo has drowned. This reference is characteristic of the way the fishermen discuss their fallen fellow-fishermen through most of the play—using them to describe the weather or to warn of the danger and unpredictability of the sea. Thus memory of the dead is an integral part of how the fishermen understand themselves and their relationship to the sea.

Despite the fact that Afa and Augustin are fully aware of the lessons provided by the deaths of their fellow-fishermen, they choose to defy them by risking their lives at sea. Moreover, Jules, whose own father Habal is among the dead fishermen is excited to be initiated into the company of such men, even when Afa warns him that the lifestyle of a fisherman will make him sour, old and good for nothing. Thus the memories of the dead, their hard work and their bravery are powerful enough to inspire a new generation to follow their footsteps since the memory of the dead fishermen and Hounakin inspires a young boy to maintain that traditional way of life, a way of life that Walcott believes is worth preserving.

Afa who feels bitter and lonesome admits that his life is, in many ways, a miserable one, “I have no woman. I cannot love woman. [...] My head is full of madness. I make my heart hard long.” [14]. Thus his pursuit for bravery in the course of the play by challenging the death-defying sea makes him stand in opposition to Maurya’s character in *Riders to the Sea* who is always dwelling in her grief and past memories. However, Augustin questions Afa’s motives, suggesting that constantly valorizing the dead fishermen indicates not Afa’s respect but a defiantly competitive death wish, “I know you, Afa. All your life is to be better than Bolo. You can’t dead better than what is dead. You want Dauphin and the whole coast to say Afa was brave! Is when you drown you brave?” [14]

Nevertheless, though Augustin often accuses Afa of concealing a death wish; it is Hounakin who becomes the center of sympathy. Ever since his wife and life companion Rama died, he has been overwhelmed with sorrow. The first reference to him in the play is when Augustin describes what he sees when he passes by his house, “the house eyes close, and he cannot sleep, he crying in the making dark, making ehhhh like dog, and the dog self watching him, waiting to die” [14]. Hounakin’s love for his wife is deep and sincere for he still expresses his love for her even after her death:

Hounakin: To dead; what is to dead? not dead I afraid ...
For old man that is nothing, wind.
But when one woman you loving fifty years,
That time they dead, it don’t like they should have bird,
And bread to eat, a house, and dog to feed.
It is to take a net in you hand to catch the wind,
To beat head on a stone, to take sand in you’ hand,

And that is it, *comp ére*, that is it true,
When Rama dead I cry [...] [14].

Afa ignores Augustin's plea to allow the old man, Hounakin to join them on the boat because he knows that he wants to go out with the fishermen in the hope that he may die in the sea, a death he sees as a kind of rebirth. Thus Afa is skeptical of his desire to risk his life at sea: "Is land you know, old man, you don't know sea, you know the fifteen kinds of grass this island have, land hard under a old man foot and hard on old woman body, but this sea is no cemetery for old men" [14]. Moreover, when Augustin urges Afa to have some compassion for Hounakin, Afa angrily answers him back:

Afa: Where is compassion? Is I does make poor people poor, or this sea vex? Is I that pit rocks where should dirty Dauphin side, man cannot make garden grow? Is I that swell little children belly with bad worm, and woman to wear clothes white people use to wipe their foot? In my head is stone, and my heart is another, and without stone, my eyes would burst for that, would look for compassion to grow food for children, no fish enough to buy new snail, no twine [...] If is compassion you want talk to the sea, ask it where Bolo bones, and Rafael, and friends I did have before you even born ... [14]

In spite of promising Afa and Augustin that he will not kill himself, Hounakin, however, jumps from the high rocks into the sea. Hence, in one sense or another, he has achieved his aim; that is dying and ending his grief and agony. Another point worth mentioning is Walcott's portrayal of the priest's figure in the play. The young French priest is presented as an alien with regards to the harsh life on the island and the needs of its inhabitants. His consolation words have almost nothing to do with the severe reality. Afa criticizes him when he tells him, "All you can do is what, sing way! way! Hounakin dead and Bolo dead, is all mouth!" [14]. Thus he condemns the young priest for talking about God when God has done nothing to help Hounakin. Moreover, Afa defiantly curses God for the life he has given the peasants as well as the priests for telling them to accept and be thankful for such a life:

Afa: That is God! A big fish eating small ones. And the sea, that thing there, not a priest white, pale like a shark belly we must feed until we dead, not no young Frenchman lock up in a church don't know coolie man dying because he will not beg! ... [He turns and tears a scapular from his neck and hurls it to the ground] Mi! Mi! Pick it up, *p ére*, is not ours. This scapular not Dauphin own! Dauphin people build the church and pray and feed you, not their own people, and look at Dauphin! *Gadez lui!* Look at it! You see? Poverty, dirty woman, dirty children, where all the prayers? Where all the money a man should have and friends when his skin old? Dirt and prayers is Dauphin life, in Dauphin, in Canaries, Micoud. Where they have priest is poverty [14].

In this fashion, Afa makes poetic similes in which God and the awful environment are associated with the color white. There are for example, the dangerous white waves that threaten the fishermen who must defy the rainy, windy sea or

starve. Accordingly, instead of a God of love, Walcott offers a God of life as a predatory food chain of conquerors and victims [2].

III. CONCLUSION

Finally, while *Riders to the Sea* has provided Walcott with the confidence to revise a play which engaged with the folk culture and language and took the sea as a central metaphor for the existential situation, ultimately *The Sea at Dauphin's* powerful imaginative evocation of the distinctive apartness of fishermen's lives leaves Synge to one side [1]. On the other hand, Walcott has explored the history of Dauphin to set up a confrontation between colonizer and colonized in order to launch an attack on the discourse of colonialism. Walcott writes, "[t]he migratory West Indian feels rootless on his own earth, chafing at its beaches" [7]. That is to say, Afa and his fellow-fishermen provide an early illustration of those who elude social entrapment, existing as they do outside the constraints of colonial society in a daily encounter with death. Conclusively, Walcott's writing deals with the lasting scars – personal, cultural and political – of British colonialism in his native land and the opposing African and European influences that characterize his West Indian heritage. Integrating the formal structure of English verse with the colorful dialect of St. Lucia, Walcott denounces colonial exploitation and suppression of Caribbean culture, while attempting to reconcile the disparate cultural legacies that inform his literature and Caribbean history in general.

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