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Creative Ecologies: Derek Walcott's Postcolonial Ecopoetics

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This essay explores the centrality of Derek Walcott's poetics of nature to his creative imagination. Forensic attention to language illustrates how connections between the mind and its environments engage critical work at the intersection of ecocriticism and postcolonialism. Poetry's contribution to a resolution of these discourses' conflicting concerns is revealed, in a fresh analysis of Walcott's poetic ecology.

Ecocriticism has been charged with homogenising human experience by offering one (usually white, Western) response to nature in the present while erasing history from the landscape: for instance, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley write that deep ecology “dehistoricize[s] nature” (20).¹ In turn, poetic representations of the natural world have often been side-lined in postcolonial discourse in favour of engagement with social narratives. This anthropocentrism has prompted condemnation from ecocritical commentators for its disregard of the connections between political and environmental concerns, and apparent lack of subscription to the idea that “the general neglect of environmental issues in postcolonial studies sorely needs to be addressed” (Huggan and Tiffin 3). A burgeoning area of literary critique is beginning to reverse that “neglect” by drawing attention to the very fruitful terrain that emerges when these two relatively new modes of theory are brought into contact. A number of critics including DeLoughrey, Handley, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, as well as others such as Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic, have demonstrated ways in which both social groups and the natural world were shaped by oppressive or destructive colonial practices. Similarities between postcolonialism and ecocriticism are also clearly identifiable, primarily as they each seek to destabilise capitalism's hierarchical structures. Another area of overlap is in the necessity of the imagination in that attempt: Eleanor D. Helms has written of the ethical turn in creativity in exploring “what ifs” (29). Thus one significant way of assessing how postcolonial and ecocritical discourses may productively interact is through an investigation of the imagination.

This is the context in which I wish to explore how Derek Walcott's poetry negotiates the relationship between creative language, consciousness and physical place. He writes of the “cobbled brook's tireless recitation,” asserting the shared creative aesthetic of language and the natural world (“XXVI,” *Tiepolo's Hound* 57-8).² This poetics is absolutely inscribed in nature, and his writing draws parallels between the environment and poetic practice to demonstrate the unique potential offered by poetic language as a space for change. Just as he invites the reader to “[l]et this page catch the last light on Becune point,” Walcott draws on the creative exchanges between poetic self, language and phenomenal world in establishing a poetics that builds connections reaching beyond the space of the poem (“XXVI,” *Tiepolo's Hound* 105). My study is indebted to the work of Handley and, particularly,

Elaine Savory, both of whose work on Walcott focuses on how the poet's engagement with place might confront cultural memories of colonial history. Handley locates an anxiety about nature in Walcott's poetry, where an "ecological consciousness" reveals that the poet's relationship to his environment can be deeply problematic, while Savory draws on Handley's work to explore in detail the impact of Walcott's engagements with a wide variety of specified plants on his aesthetics (Savory 81). I intend to build on Handley's exploration of the relationship between history and environment, moving from his identification of connections between theories of language and nature towards demonstrating how cultural and ecological narratives can be held in fragments of metaphorical language. In developing Savory's perspective on Walcott's ecopoetics in a fresh selection of poems, I wish to demonstrate in explicit terms how distinctions between poetic imagination and the material world can be deeply problematic, and that new perspectives that emerge following a destabilising of these boundaries may liberate both artistic and ethical creativity.

Walcott's self-conscious engagement with other literary texts is an important part of his negotiation of personal and cultural history. The figure of Robinson Crusoe recurs in his poetry in a variety of connected formations, in a "continuing use of the European literary tradition to provide analogous symbols for his own condition and the Caribbean" (King 220). This offers Walcott an opportunity both for political commentary, in presenting a re-imagined version of the Edenic tropical paradise of colonial discourse, and an interrogation of his own craft in attributing creative agency to the solitary figure. The integrity of both his postcolonial vision and his poetic values are strengthened by the interconnected nature of these projects, which is also significant for my line of argument that emphasises the possibilities of imaginative discourse in the development of progressive ideology. Bruce King recalls Walcott's 1965 lecture "The Figure of Crusoe: On the Theme of Isolation in West Indian Writing," in which the poet highlights the artist's isolation, and suggests how interaction with the phenomenal world affords him a creative vision with Adamic consequences:

In [the lecture] he compares himself to a lonely man on a beach making a bonfire from dead bushes and twigs. The poet does something similar with memories, thoughts, used parts of his life ... The poet's world becomes remote, yet all persons and objects are equally holy. Walcott's Crusoe is, like Proteus, a shape-changer: Adam, Columbus, God, a missionary, Defoe, Protestant, craftsman, existentialist, beachcomber, derelict from an old novel, Prospero, someone who can name, shape, and baptize a still virgin part of the new world (220).³

In "The Castaway" (1965) it is precisely this kind of relationship with the natural world, involving literal and imaginative reappropriation of poetic raw material, that both confirms the isolation of the poet in asserting his creative impulse, and sees him establish connections beyond the limits of his imagination.

The stillness evoked by the sense of slow time in "The Castaway" as the "[b]lowing sand, thin as smoke,/ Bored, shifts its dunes" is undercut by a gradual awakening of the protagonist's senses (7-8). His relationship with the world he is building is mutually interactive: his responses are in turn

induced by the phenomena that he first imaginatively rendered in poetic language. The “needle’s eye” begins to stitch his surroundings as he internalises the landscape and the “horizon” becomes part of his perception (“Homecoming” 27). The self is reliant on the material world for the external objects necessary for the sensory experience that leads to self-knowledge, yet perception is creative, and so self and world build each other “infinitely” (“The Castaway” 3). The eye may be “starved,” but the agency in “Sailing,” “Blowing,” “Action breeds frenzy,” forms the basis of sensory stimulation (1-7). The castaway figure can smell the “smoke,” he can taste the “salt” of the “vine,” he can “listen” to a creative restructuring of a natural and a personal history in the “polyp,” and the tactile veracity of his encounter with the phenomenal world is revealed in the “dr[y]ness” of the “leaf,” and his consciously Biblical act of destruction: “Cracking a sea-louse, I make thunder split” (7-21). This is an ecosystem in which the poetic consciousness is as much a correlative part as the tangible physicality of the “sand,” “[t]he surf,” “the dog’s feces” (sic), the “sea” (7-20). It is in the creative act that, having isolated himself, the poet is able to re-establish a network of correlative links with his social sphere and the physical world.

“The starved eye devours the seascape,” simultaneously searching and consuming the very horizon on which his rescuer would appear in a manner that internalises the landscape and renders it part of his imagination (1). It is a realm in which he is the sole governor, and “Godlike, annihilating godhead, art,/ And self,” he negates the possibility of his own rescue (23-4). Under this conception, “I lie” suggests a deliberate distortion of the truth and the rhyme with “multiply” intimates the possibility that the “green wine bottle’s choked with sand” because of a deliberate destruction of his own (message-in-a-bottle) appeal for liberation (4-6; 29). The dual processes of creation and destruction work concurrently in the castaway’s mind to secure a parallel between his creative consciousness and the back and forth phases of the “waves of the sea” and “shift[ing] dunes”, asserting the interdependent relationship between mind and nature (8-21).

The boredom of the castaway morphs into imaginative escape and paranoia as he lies in the shade both fantasising about his escape and fearing that possibility:

Action breeds frenzy. I lie,

Sailing the ribbed shadow of a palm,

Afraid lest my own footprints multiply. (4-6)

On the one hand, Walcott takes the elongated curvature of the palm fronds as a physical metaphor for a tree rendered in a different way as the arched bow of a ship. Perhaps he also draws on the similarities between the natural processes of sea waves and sand dunes, and alludes to typical colonial conceptions of islands as sequestered, singular instances that sail the sea without historical or political ties (and by insinuation, cultural relevance) to any community or land mass beyond their own borders.⁴ But on the other hand, a much more intimate image presents itself, of the castaway lying on his back, waving the “palm” of his hand in front of his eyes so that the “ribbed shadow” of his fingers

falls on his face, moving like the rippling waves of the sea (5). In drawing a parallel between his fingers and the palm fronds, Walcott connects the Crusoe figure to his environment, drawing on the physical relation between man and plant as elements in the same ecosystem, to build by means of poetic language an ecology in which his mind is no longer isolated.

“I abandon/ Dead metaphors,,” the castaway proclaims, before laying down several deliberately dense metaphorical abstractions, demonstrating that it is the poetic persona’s desire to break free from literary and social history and assert his individualism that displays how personal and social histories cannot easily be untangled (24-5). Savory writes that “[p]layfully, but also seriously, in “The Castaway,” Crusoe is a writer who iconoclastically destroys what has become too familiar and safe, imaged via plants,” alluding to the simultaneously creative and destructive possibilities offered by the imagination’s ability to redefine physical and psychic landscapes (93). By outlining the castaway figure’s frustrated dismissal of spiritual and artistic frameworks, Savory locates a preoccupation with cultural memory in this poem. But this understanding develops from thinking about “the way language can become overgrown, shapeless, feeding on its own energies, producing a dysfunctional effect,” and as such is considerably limited (93). In the next section of this essay, I want to turn not away from a complex, organic language, but towards it in order to demonstrate how rigorous exploration of the possibilities of poetic language uncovers ideas, connections and openings into new modes of thought. The “almond’s leaf-like heart,” a particularly dense metaphor, explores the interactions between a set of words, each of which holds its own weight in terms of political, environmental and personal narratives (“The Castaway” 25). Three similarly shaped natural objects are brought together in a fruitful encounter, and identifying the connections between them demonstrates how language can be compressed as a material that maintains cultural, spatial and temporal knowledge.

The almond, leaf and heart each have curvature and tapered boundaries, and each is a correlative part of a larger organism. For Walcott, leaves are pages of books as well as foliage (Savory 92). The shared creative aesthetic in poetic language and the natural world, as held in the duality of these objects, foregrounds the manner in which this metaphorical abstraction speaks beyond the immediate spatial and temporal modes. “[L]eaf-like,” when placed alongside the figurative value of the “heart,” reminds us that the almond is a seed and, if it situates itself in the earth and interacts with elements in the soil (as the words here interact within the fertile space of the poem) it will establish roots and grow into a tree. Walcott establishes an ecological system of language that does not speak of the tree, but speaks it: this short phrase is an organism in itself, with reciprocal links, branches and roots. In this way the poet generates in real terms, within the space of the poem, the properties of the tree that he seeks to describe.

Paul Breslin remarks that:

Walcott’s penchant for metaphors that circle back on themselves, turning figurative meanings into literal meanings, literal meanings into figurative ones, is of a piece with

the poem's erosion of boundaries, meridians of distinction, and hierarchies of periphery and center. (21)

The poet employs imaginative structures of thought as a defence against established modes of hierarchical discourse. It was a standard undertaking of colonising powers to give names not just to the islands themselves, but also to the various flora and fauna, a legacy that Walcott struggles with in "Sainte Lucie" (1976).⁵ By establishing a fresh bionetwork with his own set of values, Walcott resists the possessive power of naming, and frees the island environment from reductive colonial representation that both homogenises the landscape into what Kincaid calls "the blankness of paradise," and refuses historical narrative (115).⁶ Walcott has successfully created a nature that is free, not from the brutal fact of the colonial past, but from enduring neo-colonial projects that mark Caribbean islands as dehistoricised Edenic spaces that are fair game for the European coloniser. Walcott is pushing at the limits of metaphor's powers to "redescribe reality" (Ricoeur 7). His achievement here lies in the fact that by exploring his own rich creativity, he restores a narrative of cultural and environmental history to this locus, as further interrogation of the image of "the almond's leaf-like heart" will show.

The manner in which this metaphor creatively reaches beyond itself in both time and space to establish the prospective tree is mirrored in another kind of organic network on a different scale. DeLoughrey and Handley engage with the work of Richard Grove and others who investigate the widespread movement and exchange of plants and animals across the globe that occurred as standard practice from the earliest days of colonial expansion: "Our entire planet has been biotically reconfigured due to this long history of what Richard Grove calls 'green imperialism,' a process that foregrounds the etymological definition of diaspora as the spreading of seeds, and destabilizes our association of flora and fauna with a natural (read: autochthonous) landscape" (DeLoughrey and Handley 11).⁷ This occurred both as an unintentional side-effect of trade interchanges and the transfer of peoples, and as a direct result of the colonial project in the deliberate alteration of natural environments. Ecosystems were cleared in order to impose European farming practices, crops and animals on foreign spaces, or to take tropical plants back to colonial centres to display as examples of the paradisiacal exoticism of conquered lands: "tropical island colonies were crucial laboratories of empire, as garden incubators for the transplantation of peoples and plants and for generating the European revival of Edenic discourses" (DeLoughrey and Handley 12). Walcott acknowledges the reductive creativity in this design in "The Star-Apple Kingdom" (1980) as he writes of the time "when the landscape copied such objects as/ 'Herefords at Sunset in the valley of the Wye'" (4-5).⁸ Savory's fascinating study of Walcott's creative interaction with flora directs the reader to *Omeros* for an example of a whole host of plants of different origins co-residing in his poetic landscape (89-92). The narrative of exploration and displacement implicit in this re-telling of Homer's *Odyssey* draws a direct link between human beings and seeding plants as correlative parts of an organic system. That relationship is established in conjunction with the textual materials of a cultural history that Walcott simultaneously engages and rewrites. DeLoughrey writes that in these kinds of ecologically conscious postcolonial texts, "flora and fauna are inscribed as diasporan settlers, highlighting the ways in which

the landscape mitigates the complex process of human transplantation and sedimentation” (“Island Ecologies” 299). This plant diaspora, and its correlation to narratives of human colonisation, is a key example of the interconnectedness of social and natural histories, a political and environmental redefinition of both nature and culture that clearly demonstrates a shared objective for postcolonial critics and ecocritical commentators alike.

There are two ways in which this green history is built into the metaphor of ‘the almond’s leaf-like heart.’ The first takes “almond” to mean not the drupe or seed often eaten as a nut, but the “sea-almond” tree with which the poetic persona, in creative contemplation, associates himself elsewhere: “I am lying/ like this felled almond/ when I write...” (“To Return to the Trees” 10-12). This particular species is one that is now commonly found in the Caribbean islands, though it was not native to the region and, crucially, it is not clear where it did originate. This is a tree with “no visible history” (“The Almond Trees” 5). The second holds ecological diaspora and etymological narrative together, in taking the “almond” as the seed of the plant that is native to the Mediterranean, particularly Greece. “Almond” derives from the Greek *amygdala*, and so the evolutionary narrative of a transplanted seed developing into a new form is established in both biological and linguistic expression (see “almond”). Further exploration of this root reveals a shared history with “*amygdalae*,” a term used in English to describe almond-shaped nuclei in the brain that are involved with emotional intelligence and formation of memories (Aggleton). Thus as the physical connection between the almond and the poetic consciousness is confirmed in the following line, “The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut,” it is clear that Walcott has engaged with the imaginative association-making that, over an extended period of time, built etymological branches between these similarly-shaped organic constituents (“The Castaway” 26). Narratives of displacement and regeneration establish an ecology in which language, nature, and the poetic consciousness interconnect.

“[T]he almond’s leaf-like heart” thus demonstrates the parallel between the natural world and the poetic project in several ways. Walcott’s succession of metaphorical abstractions in the final lines of “The Castaway” build to a final image of “Clenched sea-wood nailed and white as a man’s hand” (32). The allusion here to Christ on the cross also extends the implied creativity of the poet to an explicit vision of the poet’s Adamic project in clutching “sea-wood” in his “hand” like a pen, inscribing his vision on the “white” sand (31). Elsewhere the poet addresses a similar creative impulse in the directive, “[t]hen, on dark ground, using a twig for a pen,/ write Genesis and watch the Word begin” (“Midsummer LI” 12-13). This is a creativity that does not just build a world, but depends on the raw materials of the natural world as tools in the artistic process.

The creativity of this interactive encounter between poet and phenomenal world is seen once more in the productive relationship between concerns of the postcolonialist (the “white” of racial discourse, “Clenched sea-wood nailed” a literal evocation of a ship), the environmentalist (the “sea-wood,” and the relationship between that plant and the “man’s hand”), and the individual creative consciousness (the “hand” representing the skill of the writer). These projects are inextricably connected, and the concentration of material in a tight linguistic space, as is seen in the “almond”

metaphor, registers a reading of productive relinquishment. “I abandon dead metaphors,” the poet claims, but this death is in an organic sense of recycling and reimagining material, in a manner not unlike Walcott’s comparison of the poet to “a lonely man on a beach making a bonfire from dead bushes and twigs” in the 1965 lecture I invoked earlier. Walcott is not turning from language, but to it, employing metaphor in a way that engenders interactions between the words that are reworked into something new; as he casts down his words, they take on new life in the process of deliverance to the reader. In this way, the poet renders language itself as poetic raw material that can be recycled into something fresh and new, just as the “sea-wood” is at once discarded driftwood and a network of mangroves or plants growing out of the water, verdant and regenerative.

Walcott introduces the poetic persona in “The Castaway” directly into the physical re-cyclical process in two temporal modes. The first sees the Crusoe figure moving from suggested eating imagery in the first line to:

Pleasures of an old man:

Morning: contemplative evacuation, considering

The dried leaf, nature’s plan. (13-15)

A reference to the “dog’s feces” (sic) in the following line demands that the reader reconsider the “evacuation” and “dried leaf” in relation to the poetic persona’s own faeces, but the focus is very much on the regenerative nature of passing material in this way. One organism’s waste becomes food for another life-form: “In our own entrails, genesis” (19). It is in this sense that the isolated poet figure emerges again. Walcott has remarked that: “For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night.” Thus “nature’s plan” for regenerative use of this material is paralleled with the poet’s plan of reimagining cognitive and linguistic fragments in making a new reality (“The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory” 265). The second, much longer, temporal mode, “[w]e end in earth, in earth began,” acknowledges the decay of the body after death (“The Castaway” 18). This is an important trope in Walcott’s ecological vision, and applying it to particular loved ones allows personal consciousness to connect itself in creative interrelation with the linguistic and biological system. “Your death was a log’s entry,” he writes of “Robert Head, mariner,” paralleling nature and poetry by simultaneously suggesting the writing of a log book and the slow “entry” of a dead tree into the soil as decomposed matter (“Landfall, Grenada” 15). In this way he liberates his friend from a “rigid” and final death, offering permanent redemption instead in a passing that is “such ease, such landfall going” (21). Nature’s recycling of material and rendering it anew is a routine that the creative consciousness also employs. The final lines are held together by the rhyme of “friend” and “end,” identifying a permanence in the bond established between the two men, the mariner’s fresh existence rooted in the poet’s imaginative space (20-25).

A similar process is at work in “Early Pompeian” (1982), a poem that also opens with a personal dedication, here to the poet’s stillborn child. Once again, the poet is supported in his attempt to face loss by engagement with poetic language and the natural world:

As for you, little star,
 my lost daughter, you are
 bent in the shape forever
 of a curled seed sailing the earth,
 in the shape of one question, a comma
 that knows before us whether death
 is another birth. (IV 1-7)

Savory and Handley both link Walcott’s representations of plants in *The Bounty* (1997) to grief for the loss of his mother, and here too the natural metaphor plays an important role in the poet’s confrontation of his bereavement. In the first instance, the tenderness of this evocation suggests that there is a real comfort for the poet in being able to re-establish the child’s reality in the space of the poem, as the ability of metaphor to “re-describe reality” is once again asserted. Walcott turns the doubt of the bowed “question” mark into the curve of the “comma,” which signifies continuity in its linguistic project; a pause and a turn in a new direction in the sentence, “another birth.” The “curled seed” too, of course, suggests a tangible future and a generative possibility that refuses a static conception of death in the evocation of a plant that will spread its seeds abroad in germination. Engagement with social and environmental histories reaches beyond the immediate locus and temporal sphere to recall in “sailing the earth” the slave trade and associative plant diasporas. The “seed” takes on properties of animal matter as well as vegetation, as the seed with which the father gave life to his daughter. In a biological sense this confirms the relationships between flora and fauna in the ecosystem, and on an imaginative level the seed is conjured here to crystallise that familial bond: “Child, wherever you are,/ I am still your father” (II 5-6).

A third personally dedicated poem, simply titled “For Adrian” (1987), also creates strong bonds that are at once physical and imaginative. Walcott gives voice to the deceased eight-year-old child of the title, who proclaims:

I am not young now, nor old, not a child, nor a bud
 snipped before it flowered, I am part of the muscle
 of a galloping lion, or a bird keeping low over

dark canes. (26-9)

In these lines, as in the rendering of the stillborn child as a “curled seed,” it is under the pressure of imaginative thought that new possibilities emerge. The particularities of movements of both lion and bird forge a new imaginative sphere shared between poet and reader. The dialogue in “Early Pompeian” between the poet and his dead child, for whom death has not brought a closure but a new kind of knowledge, resumes in “For Adrian,” where a fresh truth is articulated:

[...] and what, in your sorrow, in our faces

howling like statues, you call a goodbye

is – I wish you would listen to me – a different welcome,

which you will share with me, and see that it is true. (29-32)

The shared faces, and the focus on sensory knowledge, speak of the ecology that reaches between the living and the dead, but this is a relationship that relies on the poetry that has articulated its being. In the final lines, the poet holds in structured interrelation his own creative mind, the consciousness of “the child,” the natural world and the act of writing poetry:

All this the child spoke inside me, so I wrote it down.

As if his closing grave were the smile of the earth. (33-34)

Each line begins with an internalisation, and finishes with a liberation: the poet formalises the words of the child that have emerged from their imaginative interaction in a promise of future invention that mirrors the physical regeneration that awaits the body in the “closing grave,” as promised by the “smile of the earth.”

Poetic and natural futurity is pledged, but the appropriation of one creature’s expression by another, with “As if” balanced between the lines to destabilise what comes both before and after, and the equally menacing and benevolent “smile,” means that the truth “which you will share with me” is held at a distance. Indeed, while in “The Castaway” it seems isolation is the price the poet pays for Adamic creativity, here the reverse process occurs as imaginative inspiration stems from pain and loss:

I will see you in a boneless

sunbeam that strokes the texture

of things – my arm, the pulseless arm

of an armchair, an iron railing, the leaves
of a dusty plant by a closed door,
in the beams of my own eyes in a mirror. ("Early Pompeian" IV 23-8)

The movements the poet makes here from the sibilance in the first three lines to the shorter "t" of "texture," stoppered by the dash before opening a list of related images, demonstrates in sophisticated idiom not just how the poet has been artistically stimulated by tragedy, but how both phenomenal world and self are defined in terms of the lost child. But the "sunbeam" is reflected in the "beams of my own eyes," which are in turn reflected in the "mirror": this is an interactive process that forms self and world without allowing primacy to either. "The lives that we must go on with are also yours," he continues, as the shared experience of the "faces" is here recreated with a promise of a lasting emotional bond.

In "Sea Canes" (1976) the poet addresses bereavement from a different but closely related perspective. "No, give me them back, as they were ... I cried," as he bypasses dialogue with his lost friends and instead engages directly with the earth (3-4). According to Deena, the "mother figure in Caribbean literature represents the symbol of origin, roots, and the land," and reciprocally the earth often possesses maternal qualities (67). Walcott once commented, "I think the earth that you come from is your mother and if you turn around and curse it, you've cursed your mother," while in "Early Pompeian" he evokes "the vineyard of a woman's labour" (qtd. in Hirsch 33; "Early Pompeian" 38). This generative quality reveals itself in "Sea Canes" via Walcott's construction of another personified earth. The opening lines initially seem to show the poet opening a dialogue with the earth:

Half my friends are dead.

I will make you new ones, said earth. (1-2)

But this is an illusion uncovered by the self-conscious "said" and "cried" in the second two phrases, which let us see that the opening line is not speech but a private lament, closed within the self by the full stop. It is thus the earth who speaks first, offering not a reversion to the past, but a fresh promise of futurity in a renewal of biotic and imaginative material. Interaction in "Sea Canes" between the poet and the natural world takes place once more in the reflection of the self and "the rational radiance of stone,/ enduring moonlight" (17-18). "Out of what is lost grows something stronger"; it is in grief that this sense of self is expressed, and as the closeness to nature deepens, it is the imaginative inspiration engendered by that intimacy that in turn "brings those we love before us" and goes some way to articulating an acceptance of loss (16-20).

The imagination thus interacts with the material world to allow the poet to explore his anxieties about the future beyond death, both personally and in terms of his friends. The manner in which Walcott identifies his own poetic project with the speech of the earth demonstrates the imagination's capacity to contribute to a new futurity not by erasing the past, but by confronting it and

rendering it new in one's own language. Metaphor articulates the tight bonds between various material and ideological processes that are significant to the poet's commitment to social and environmental justice. At the deepest level of Walcott's imaginative engagement with the phenomenal world is a rooting of language in nature. It is this that liberates his poetic creativity.

Notes

1. The term "deep ecology" was first coined by philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970s to describe a particularly radical form of environmentalism, which is characterised by a conviction that recognition of practices destructive to the non-human world, alongside a belief in the inherent value of all living things, implies an obligation to political activism. The ideological shift deep ecology calls for would demand a dramatic re-visioning of social and technological structures; hence the movement is deeply divisive.
2. All references to Walcott's poetry are taken from *Selected Poems* unless otherwise stated.
3. The respectful equality here in consideration of "persons and objects" demonstrates the ethical turn of the creative mind: the ability to regard the social and phenomenal world in a manner that refuses hierarchical thought in indiscriminate homogenisation marks poetic creativity as the space in which postcolonial and ecocritical discourses can productively co-reside.
4. While this was of course a fiction, ignoring shared linguistic developments, trade connections and other forms of social bonding and experience, it nevertheless proved useful for the coloniser's new Edenic vision of the Caribbean. See DeLoughrey, "Island Ecologies"; and Bongie.
5. "Pomme-arac,/ otaheite apple,/ pomme cythère/ ... / Come back to me,/ my language" ("Saint Lucie" 1-21).
6. See Walcott's 1992 Nobel Prize acceptance lecture for an articulation of the oppressive quality of the touristic eye in reducing "the Caribbean [to] a blue pool into which the republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft" ("Antilles" 266).
7. This qualification of the word "natural" stems from an unease that the ecocritic often shares, in that the terms "nature" and "natural" base themselves on a presupposed conception of biotic truth in a limited set of norms: the similarities with the postcolonialist's concern about a different organic community are clear. See, for example, Soper; and Breslin for an account of nature's "slipperiness" (11). For more on the plant diaspora, see also DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*; Grove; Crosby.
8. The title poem from Walcott's 1980 collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom*.

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