

hence transformation of all the three – the Indian text, context and the English language.” (Prasad, 1999: 42) The space that gets created in an effort to translate the Indian experience and native existential realities is exclusively context-specific and attempts to depict “the quality of that particular area, the characteristics of its speech, its typical responses and its distinctive spirit” (Mukherjee, 1971: 174) Thus the turn of speech, movement of thought, tonality and the music of language which reflect a specific worldview and philosophy of existence nurtured by a Punjabi character would be translated rather differently by a Mulk Raj Anand than an R. K. Narayan who attempts to impart voice to a Tamil-speaking villager. Even within a specific speech community, there are variations in style, flavour and diction in accordance with differences in class, caste and demography. What naturally emerges from the above discussion is the fact that an Indian English writer has to have the linguistic competence and mastery of expression to deploy a cline of Englishes fulfilling differential requirements of varied local situations and ever-changing cultural climate. While the how such a diverse linguistic competence can be developed is best left to the speculations of the writers themselves, what is more important is to understand whether they are even remotely equipped with the skills to decipher the nuances and intricacies of variegated linguistic map of the multilingual country. As a matter of fact, majority Indian English writers handling the genre of fiction are monolingual. K. K. Dyson highlights this fact by saying, “Salman Rushdie interlards his English with Urdu words and phrases as a naughty teenager interweaves his speech with swearwords, but he cannot write a book in Urdu...He may be a cosmopolitan, but he is a monolingual writer.” (Dyson, 1993: 178-9) Rushdie probably couldn't chutneyfy his English enough and failed miserably when he tried to do it beyond his language skills in *Midnight's Children* probably because of the constraints imposed by his monolingualism. Chutneyfication thus becomes a space of creative negotiation between languages which can be handled with greater facility and fineness by a bilingual individual, be it a writer or translator, who has proficiency in and experience of creative manipulation of two language systems. It is precisely for this reason that a translator with proven command of source and target languages would be in a better position to do justice to the linguistic hybridity of Indian literature in English translation which is a means not only of reflecting the cultural hybridity of a postcolonial society but also of showcasing the textual, aesthetic and cultural otherness of such a literature. Furthermore, the enterprise of translation has a proven track record of bringing about formal innovation and stylistic experimentation in the target literary system probably because it “...is at times one locus in a literary system where formal experimentation is more easily tolerated, translation can even become an 'alibi' for challenges to the dominant poetics.” (Tymoczko, 1999: 33) It may not be out of place to speculate that Thiongo resorted to the empowering alibi of translation even after possessing tremendous command over and literary felicity in English and Gikuyu. By extended speculation, his challenge through translation

proved too much to handle for the First world literary and academic establishment, so much so that in spite of being a strong contender for Nobel prize for literature in 2014, he didn't get the honour. Never mind, one day Rushdie would certainly get it.

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“Unrecognised generations of mothers and grandmothers”- Women in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

- Panchali Bhattacharya

Abstract: Derek Walcott, the Noble Laureate Saint Lucian poet, playwright, critic and visual artist, in his one of the most ambitious English language poem, *Omeros*, the post-colonial reimagining of Homeric epic, takes a remarkably striking stance as far as the women characters of his epic are concerned. On one hand, he projects most of the female figures as wilfully or unwillingly subjugated to either patriarchy or imperialism. On the other hand, the same women have been depicted as steady anchors and inspirations for the male characters. In fact, unlike the socio-political and cultural reality of the Caribbean that highlights marginalisation of women, Walcott, in his epic-poem, promotes the free-spirit and independent identity of women to a large extent. Even his presentation of the island of Saint Lucia as a feminine entity, is undoubtedly a part of this promotion.

Keywords: Double-colonisation, dual stance, mother-figure, subjugation, seduction, identity.

Derek Walcott, the greatest poet writing in English that the West Indies has ever produced, is endowed with an immense verbal resource and skill which he uses to engage in a complex struggle to render his native Caribbean culture. According to O'Brien, “in an effort to touch every aspect of Caribbean experience”, the richly complex, allusive writer Derek Walcott, in his visually compelling and aurally appealing vivid lyrical verse, *Omeros*, offers unparalleled opportunities for challenging and creatively interpretive insights. Of them, one of the most intense and gripping issue is Walcott's treatment of the women characters. An indispensable factor of Caribbean socio-political and cultural reality is the marginalisation of women- first by the colonial rulers and second, by the repressed desires and needs of the colonised men. Walcott, however, quite surprisingly, took a complex yet remarkable stance regarding this aspect. Walcott's father, Warwick Walcott, makes two appearances in *Omeros* where he reminds his son of the unrecognised generations of mothers and grandmothers who laboured their lives away hauling coal up the gangplanks of transient steamers in the deep water harbour of Castries:

Hell was built on those hills. In that country of coal
without fire, that inferno the same colour
as their skins and shadows, every labouring soul
climbed with her hundred weight basket, every load for
one copper penny, balanced erect on their necks
that were tight as the liner's hawsers from the weight... (O, 74)

That is perhaps why, Walcott has used his pen to “give those feet a voice” in an astonishingly luxuriant English:

The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex.
Instead, they were darker and stronger, and their gait
was made beautiful by balance... (O,74)

The most significant female figure in Walcott's magnum-opus is Helen, an exceptional woman, who is pivotal to the action of the epic in multiple levels and is the one to determine the progression of the narrative and its crucial outcome as well. Helen is beautiful, proud and dangerous:

Her beauty is what no man can claim any
more than this bay. Her beauty stands apart
in a golden dress, its beaches wreathed with
her name. (O, 288)

She is not the 'face that launched a thousand ships', rather she is the 'ship' herself. Just like her Homeric namesake who was the cause of contradiction between Paris and Menelaus and the reason of the Trojan war, the Antillean Helen is also the typical object of strong conflict between two men, Achille and Hector. Her radiance and exuberance push them to extremes and the former friends and companions become enraged competitors. On the other hand, she is projected as the seductress who ensnares all the men of the entire 'horned island' (O, 40), the axis around which the elemental men rotate. Achille feels "like a dog that is left/ to nose the scraps of her footsteps"(O,38). Hector, in his attempt to win Helen, loses his life unfairly and ingloriously. Major Dennis Plunkett is "fixed by her glance" (O, 96), lost in her "seduction of quicksand" (O, 264). Even Philoctete has suddenly become her "footman" (O, 107). And last but not the least is the Vagrant poet, Omeros, who once exclaimed, "What a fine local woman!" (O, 322) and finally, after undertaking a series of journeys to a communal past, surrenders unconditionally to Helen, the mother-figure of Africa:

You were never in Troy, and, between two Helens,
Yours is here and alive, ...
... These Helens are different creatures,
one marble, one ebony...
but each draws an elbow slowly over her face
and offers the gift of her sculptured nakedness,
parting her mouth. (O, 313)

Again, on one hand, she is considered as the inspiration for Walcott, the participating narrator, and Major Dennis Plunkett who attempt to immortalise her through their respective writings- "Not his, but her story./ Not theirs, but Helen's war" (O,30). Towards the end, both of them, however, realise that regarding a woman as an idealised object will be a repetition of the shameful pattern of hundreds of years of imperial as well as patriarchal domination. On the other hand, she is depicted as a territory that awaits the subjugation of men since she is unsure about the identity of her unborn child's father. Further, another aspect of Helen's character is brought to the fore when she works as a maid to the Plunketts who fire her because of her proud assurance which made them feel like intruders in their own home. But it is the same Helen who, in spite of all her pride and haughtiness, happily settles down in the island of Saint Lucia which she very tenderly but possessively claims to be 'her' village. In

short, Walcott represents Helen in *Omeros* as the well-balanced conflation of aspiration and inspiration, insisting on her existence as a 'real' person:

Why not see Helen
as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,
swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone,
as fresh as the sea-wind? Why make the smoke a door? (O, 271)

Such a claim undoubtedly justifies Walcott's dual standpoint which, however, complicates his perception of women characters in general. The next noteworthy female figure in the densely textured pages of *Omeros* is that of Ma Kilman, a native tribal medicine woman, who is also the proprietress of the No Pain Cafe which is the village gathering place. An African sibyl as well as the priestess of Apollo who guides Aeneas through the underworld in Virgil's epic-poem *The Aeneid*, Ma Kilman had the unique ability to restore tribal rituals. She is presented as a practitioner of sorcery and black magic with roots in African tradition and is guided by a shamanistic quest in the manner of generations of Obeah woman. But on the other hand, Walcott also realistically and endearingly portrays her as a large woman in black dress, black hat, tightly clutched purse and stockings with elastic bands, and also an ill-fitting wig. Such a realistic description is juxtaposed with the magical dimension attributed to her character earlier. Ma Kilman, under the uncomfortable garment of civilization, has, however, lost her memory of herbs, potions and spells. But within her mind, she is driven by her desire to cure the incurable wound of Philoctete, a character peripheral to the ostensible main action. That is why, by following the line of black ants which guide her from the church to the medicinal plant, "signalling a language she could not recognize" (O, 238), she is finally able to re-establish connection with her memory of tribal roots. Thus, whereas through his description Walcott makes Ma Kilman resemble the witch Circe from the Homeric epic in so far as she uses transforming magic, the same woman is represented as an earth-mother figure, healing men and linking them with the natural environment. Even the poet-narrator identifies himself as being her beneficiary and spiritual son: "See her there, my mother, my grandmother, my great-great-/ grandmother" (O, 245).

The character of Maud Plunkett is another reflection of Walcott's obsession with the struggles of women in general. In fact, the inspiration for the character of an Irish woman in the Caribbean is his own mother- "There was Plunkett in my father, much as there was/ my mother in Maud" (O, 263). Initially, Maud appears to be a stereotypical British colonial wife, a steady anchor to her husband's whimsical energy. In the few episodes that are devoted entirely to Maud, she appears to be subservient to her husband. Although Major Plunkett feels guilty for abandoning his wife emotionally and often refers to her as his 'crown', his conquering 'queen', he constantly refuses to spare money for her passage back to Dublin, in spite of Maud's immense longing to visit her native Ireland once. But Maud never openly questions his decision. She steadily waits, accepts and, to some extent, celebrates her position. The most crucial aspect of Maud's character is revealed in her treatment of Helen who used to be a housemaid for her. Maud, from the very beginning,