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**CONTESTING KNOWLEDGE,
CONTESTED SPACE:
LANGUAGE, PLACE,
AND POWER IN DEREK
WALCOTT'S COLONIAL
SCHOOLHOUSE**

Abstract: *Derek Walcott's colonial schoolhouse bears an interesting relationship to space and place: it is both a Caribbean site, and a site that disavows its locality by valorizing the metropolis and acting as a vital institution in the psychic colonization of the Caribbean peoples. The situation of the schoolhouse within the Caribbean landscape, and the presence of the Caribbean body, means that the pedagogical relationship works in two ways, and that the hegemonic/colonial discourses of the schoolhouse are inherently challenged within its walls. While the school was used as a means of colonial subjugation, as a method of privileging the metropolitan centre, and as a way of recreating that centre within the colonies, Walcott's emphasis on place complicates and ultimately rewrites colonial discourses and practices. While the school attempts to legitimize colonial space, it in fact fosters what Walter Mignolo has termed "border thinking."*

Keywords: *Derek Walcott; coloniality; border thinking; pedagogy; creolization.*

**Spor o vědění, rozporovaný
prostor: jazyk, místo a moc
v koloniální škole Dereka
Walcotta**

Abstrakt: *Koloniální škola Dereka Walcotta s sebou nese zajímavý vztah mezi prostorem a místem: je to jak místo v Karibiku, tak i místo, které své locality vzdává tím, že zvyšuje hodnotu metropole a jedná jako nepostradatelná instituce v psychické kolonizaci karibského lidu. Poloha školy v karibské krajině a přítomnost karibského těla znamenají, že pedagogický vztah působí dvěma způsoby a že hegemonické/koloniální diskursy školy jsou uvnitř jejich zdí z vlastní podstaty zpochybňovány. Přestože škola byla používána jako prostředek koloniálního podmanění, jako metoda pro privilegování metropolitního centra a jako způsob znovuvytváření tohoto centra uvnitř kolonií, Walcottův důraz na místo komplikuje a v konečném důsledku přepisuje koloniální diskursy a praktiky. Zatímco škola usiluje o legitimizaci koloniálního prostoru, ve skutečnosti pěstuje to, co Walter Mignolo nazval "hraničním myšlením".*

Klíčová slova: *Derek Walcott; kolonialita; hraniční myšlení; pedagogika; kreolizace*

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Coloniality and Space

Taking his cue from the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, in a number of works the Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo differentiates between colonialism and coloniality. The former term denotes a particular type of rule or historical period; the latter concept is the epistemology generated in order to legitimize that rule, and which is promulgated in both the colonizing nations and colonized territories. Coloniality, as Quijano and Mignolo have shown, exists long after colonialism, and is inherent in three systems: hierarchies; knowledge; and culture. This colonial worldview, Mignolo argues, cannot be separated from modernism: just as modernity was marked by European imperial expansion, its philosophy of modernism is the other side of the coin to coloniality. As James Scheurich and Michelle Young have summarized: “The name for the Euro-American culture’s construction of ‘the world’ or ‘the Real’ [...] is modernism. Modernism is an epistemological, ontological, and axiological network or grid that ‘makes’ the world as the dominant western culture knows and sees it.”¹ For Mignolo, because of its global hegemony, the axioms, epistemologies, and ontologies of modernism/coloniality are pervasive and unavoidable: “From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs, from the dream of an *Orbis Universalis Christianus* to Hegel’s belief in a universal history that could be narrated from a European (and therefore Hegemonic perspective).”² Many peripheralized, subalternized, and colonized nations and peoples have developed strategies to deal with the imposition of Eurocentric philosophies and power structures. While many nations, organizations, and individuals have sought to “re-centre” their philosophies away from the North Atlantic, this has resulted in the creation of different fundamental ideologies. For Mignolo, the more conducive and realistic strategy is border thinking. Border thinking exists, Mignolo argues, as the unintended but inevitable result of colonial acculturation. Its presence can be found both in colonized territories, in immigrant populations living in the North Atlantic, and in other transculturated knowledge systems. Border thinking, to simplify the term, exists at the border between competing epistemologies: it rejects any centre of knowledge or fundamentalism,

¹ James Joseph SCHEURICH – Michelle D. YOUNG, “Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 26, 1997, no.4, p. 7 (4–16).

² Walter MIGNOLO, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000, p. 17.

and allows the thinker to dismantle modernist-coloniality without rejecting everything deemed as modern. As Ann González summarizes, “the epistemological potential of border thinking is [...] to move beyond Eurocentrism, recognizing the achievements and revealing the conditions for the geopolitics of knowledge in the modern/colonial world – recognizing and revealing the coloniality of power imbedded in the geopolitic of knowledge.”³

In the Caribbean context, “border thinking” can best be found in what Paget Henry has termed the poeticist tradition. In his survey of Afro-Caribbean⁴ philosophies, Henry locates two schools of thought in the late- and post- colonial Caribbean, which he names the historicists and the poeticists. (Henry of course notes that these schools are not discrete.) The former school, which contains figures such as C. L. R. James, Marcus Garvey, and Frantz Fanon, tends towards essentialized ideologies, especially Marxism and Afrocentrism; their main focus was the decolonization of societal structures. The latter school has a shared focus on the need to liberate or decolonize the mind through the interrogation of language, myth, and other cultural systems. Henry locates Derek Walcott within the poeticist school, alongside other writers such as Wilson Harris and Édouard Glissant. While the poeticist school develops philosophies rooted within the Caribbean, this notion of rootedness is based upon an awareness of cultural creolization and mixity. In this sense, the poeticist school practice border thinking: they challenge and interrogate modernist-colonial epistemologies from a Caribbean perspective, but accept a de-centred, interlinking network of knowledge systems. Wilson Harris, for example, developed his philosophy while mapping and surveying Guyana’s interior. Surveying is of course a practice associated with modernist science and rationalism; the resulting philosophical works by Harris, which draw upon (amongst other traditions) European phenomenology, Amerindian worldviews, African worldviews, and syncretic systems, are a world apart from modernist scientific thinking. Glissant, whose essays have been championed by scholars and artists of the Caribbean, spearheaded a movement away from *Négritude* (an Afrocentric philosophy and aesthetic) and towards *Créolité* (Creolism) and *Antillanité* (Caribbeanness). Glissant’s notion of *Créolité* draws upon Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome, but transplants their concept of inter-

³ Ann GONZÁLEZ, *Resistance and Survival: Children’s Narrative from Central America and the Caribbean*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2009, p. 1.

⁴ This is a problematic term: many of the thinkers Henry investigates have mixed-ethnic heritage, and their philosophical views reflect the multitude of cultures in the Caribbean.

linked, de-centred knowledge systems into Caribbean soil. In particular, Glissant argued for the promotion of “lived reality”⁵ as a counterforce to the “fundamental hierarchization”⁶ of modernist-colonial epistemologies and ontologies.

The promotion of “lived reality”, then, becomes a powerful agent in counter-discourses to modernism. In terms of theoretical considerations of space and place, “lived reality” has become one of the most fundamental concepts. My reading of Walcott’s poetry, and my general understanding of the terms and functions of space and place, are beholden to a number of key theorists who have critiqued modernist thinking. My reading of Walcott is particularly indebted to the French Marxist Henri Lefebvre’s distinction between *connaissance* and *savoir*. I take *connaissance* (embodied, experiential knowledge, which is inherently counterhegemonic) to relate to place, and *savoir* to relate to colonial space. This colonial space is of course abstract, and exists only through representation and narrativization. Notably, the Cuban poet José Martí also makes this distinction between types of knowledge when he attests that “to know [*conocer*] the country and govern it in accordance with that knowledge is the only way of freeing it from tyranny.” In his readings of these lines, and in agreement with Patricio del Real, Peter Hulme notes that Martí’s distinction between *conocer* (connaitre) and *saber* (savoir), in terms of epistemological function, relates to distinctions between place and space. The distinction made by Martí, Hulme suggests, is the very same made by the North American philosopher Edward Casey in his call to reinstate place into critical vocabulary. Casey convincingly argues that the academic domination of the abstract term space, and indeed the very notion that place is somehow created from this space, is related to the domination of Enlightenment thinking in the academy. Casey’s phenomenological (embodied) reading of space and place points to the body as the mediator of knowledge, and as Hulme proposes, “what Casey calls [the] ‘vernacularity of place’ can be seen as a postcolonial move foreshadowed in Martí’s call for proper attention to what is ‘born from the country.’ ‘To live is to live locally,’ Casey writes – but it could as easily have been Martí.”⁷

⁵ Aisha KHAN, “Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol.16, 2001, no.3, p. 271 (271–302).

⁶ Wilbert J. ROGET, “Land and Myth in the Writings of Édouard Glissant.” *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, 1989, no. 4, p. 628 (626–631).

⁷ Peter HULME, *Cuba’s Wild East: a Literary Geography of Oriente*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2011, p. 98.

Similarly, in her call for an eco-feminist epistemic location, Lorraine Code notes that “post-Enlightenment, post-Kantian western philosophers often work with a curious, if standardized, conception of the (largely invisible) human subject who is their main protagonist. Although details of his identity rarely figure explicitly in colonial and pre-second-wave feminist theories, this subject is presumptively adult (but not old), white, affluent, and male.”⁸ It is this philosophical figure who achieves what Donna Haraway has influentially called “the god-trick,”⁹ a stance that is “central to the epistemology of modernity” which avoids “the messiness, confusion, and concerns of the everyday to achieve a ‘view from nowhere.’”¹⁰ As both Code and Haraway argue, “situated knowledges” are anathema to the “god trick” perspective of modernist epistemologies. In his celebrated essays on place, Michel de Certeau argues that “the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy” in a “Cartesian attitude” are utilized when an agency “appropriate[s]” a place. This attitude, based in “modern science” masters place “through sight” and “makes possible a panoptic practice” of observation.¹¹ Bringing these diverse thinkers together, we can see that Casey’s notion of space as place that has been mathematized is also inherently political: the “god-trick” or “panoptic practices” inherent in modernist philosophies, are also strategies of dominion. Space, therefore, speaks to Quijano and Mignolo’s concept of coloniality: it is, at one and the same time, part of a Eurocentric, Enlightenment-based philosophy, *and* a tool used in colonial subjugation, subalternization, and peripheralization. In these terms, a call for “local knowledge” is also a call for the reinstatement of place as a means of individual and collective agency. Mignolo himself argues that “knowledge is not just something that accounts for (describes, narrates, explains, interprets) and allows the *knower to sit outside the observed domain* and, *from above*, be able to observe imperial domination and colonial societies” it is “itself is an integral part of imperial processes of appropriation.”¹²

⁸ Lorraine CODE, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, p. 135.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid.* p. 118.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Michel DE CERTEAU, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1984, p. 36.

¹² Walter MIGNOLO, “The Darker Side of the Enlightenment.” In: ELDEN, S. – MENDIETA, E. (eds.), *Reading Kant’s Geography*. Albany: State University of New York Press 2011, p. 338 (319–344), my italics.

The coloniality of space takes many forms. As Claudio Canaparo argues, discussing Latin America but in an observation applicable to the Caribbean, colonialism itself was a space-making project: the concept of Latin America, for Canaparo, is “a perspective on organizing objects, naming an environment, establishing subjectivities, constructing knowledge, [and] producing narratives.”¹³ This *episteme* of space, and its praxis of space-making, is also disrupted by “the mediation of the body,”¹⁴ and also explains why so many of the European thinkers I have mentioned were attractive to peripheralized philosophers in order to privilege their “geo-epistemologies”.¹⁵ Having made space, European colonialism constructed a worldview of centre and periphery; coloniality valorized the epistemologies of the “centre,” while denigrating and sometimes attempting to destroy peripheralized worldviews. Many of these worldviews themselves related to place, and knowledge of place. For example, as Erik Malewski has argued in his writings on indigenous American epistemologies of place, epistemologies “of reason that posit humans at the center of the universe” disavow localized, bodily knowledge of place by abstracting knowledge from its source.¹⁶ In these terms, coloniality is both a spatial practice *and* a knowledge-system that denigrates place-bound worldviews.¹⁷ The coloniality of spatial models, as Mary Finley-Brook attests, still has tremendous power to dispossess and destroy peripheralized peoples when these models are imposed upon their locale.¹⁸ Border thinking, in fact, is a strategic method for avoiding such destruction by altering those models within the locale.

¹³ Claudio CANAPARO, *Geo-epistemology: Latin America and the Location of Knowledge*. Bern: Peter Lang 2009, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–7.

¹⁶ Erik MALEWSKI, “Reading Have We Known Rivers?: Indigeneity, Language, and the Significance of Epistemologies of Ignorance for Curriculum Studies.” In: MALEWSKI, E. – JARAMILLO, N. E. (eds.), *Epistemologies of Ignorance in Education*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2011, p. 247 (243–266).

¹⁷ For example, Linda Tuhiwai SMITH discusses the Maori epistemology of “the earth as a living entity”, “Mother Earth” from which all “indigenous values and practices, social structures and relations are derived.” *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed 1999, p. 99.

¹⁸ See Mary FINLEY-BROOK, “Green Neoliberal Space: The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.” *Journal of Latin American Geography*, vol. 6, 2007, no. 1, pp. 101–124.

Coloniality and Pedagogy

Although Walcott's entire oeuvre can be related to place and to the ways in which place-based thinking can interrogate coloniality, I focus on the classroom because it offers a vision of Code's "human subject": the teacher here, who is "adult," "white," "male" and to add to Code's list, European, exemplifies hegemonic thinking and the indoctrination of the subaltern. As Ann González argues, the concept that "children are subalterns [...] voiceless and powerless, in need of colonization, civilization, enlightenment, and (re) formation [...] is not a particularly new concept."¹⁹ In fact, in the colonial European consciousness, both children (from any region) and colonized peoples were considered to have limited ability to reason, and to think in abstract or nomothetic terms.²⁰ Drawing on the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter, Kristen Buras has located the school as a site where "race-based oppression" promulgates through a normative lens of whiteness, which "defines what it means to be human or civilized."²¹

In Caribbean literature, the schoolhouse is a powerful topos or trope, which can be used to denote colonial subjugation of the mind. For example, the Surinamese writer Bea Vianen has condemned the schoolhouse as "a microcosm centred on the power of Christian colonialism."²² The Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau also offers a critique of colonial education in his memoir *School Days* (1994), in which he describes how the local Creole language was denigrated, and French culture was exalted inside the classroom.²³ Perhaps the best exemplar of the school's function in Caribbean literature is in the Trinidadian Earl Lovelace's novel *The Schoolmaster*. Here, a group of poor, rural Trinidadians set up a village school. In a series of actions that mirror popular anticolonial metaphors for colonialism, the newly arrived schoolmaster sexually assaults and impregnates a young woman, who later

¹⁹ Ann GONZÁLEZ, *Resistance and Survival*, p. 4.

²⁰ See Mariah ADIN, "I Shall Beat You so that the Devil shall Laugh at It: Children, Violence, and the Courts in New Amsterdam." In: MARTEN, J. A. (ed.), *Children in Colonial America*. New York: NYU Press 2007, p. 91 (90–103).

²¹ Kristen L. BURAS, "Putting All Students at the Center: Charting an Agenda for Urban Educational Transformation." In: BURAS, K. et al. (eds.), *Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of Dispossession and Defiance from New Orleans*. New York: Teachers College Press 2010, p. 128 (114–144).

²² Bea VIANEN, "Of Nuns and Punishments." In: ESTEVES, C. C. – PARAVISINI-GEBERT, L. (eds.), *Green Cane and Juicy Flotsam: Short Stories by Caribbean Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1992, p. 225 (224–242).

²³ Patrick CHAMOISEAU, *School Days*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1997.

commits suicide. In an exchange between a white priest and a black Trinidadian, Lovelace describes the prevailing idea levied against colonial teachers. When the priest points out that the teacher is black, he is confronted with the reply that:

He is black, yes. But not my own people. Priest, he is closer to your people. I think he is your people. He learned in your schools, and he wears the clothes the way you wear them, and he talks the way you talk, and his thinking is that of your people. He is yours, priest. He is not mine.²⁴

In this sense, Lovelace's character charges the school with creating what the Barbadian writer Edward Kamau Brathwaite has termed "Afro-Saxons": "the educated middleclass, most finished product of unfinished creolization; influential, possessed of shadow power; rootless (eschewing the folk) or Euro-orientated with a local gloss."²⁵ Through their education, "Afro-Saxons" have been conditioned with false consciousness and with a belief in European superiority. To Brathwaite, to behave in a "European" manner is to think in a European manner, is to wish to be European, and is ultimately to believe in the superiority of European knowledge and culture.

Because educational systems promulgate the ideology of the colonizer, they are crucial institutions for coloniality. As Myriam Chancy notes "educational systems" allow people to "remain colonized" after the historical period of colonization.²⁶ As Sabina Lovibond has noted, "schools", "universities", and other "institutions of knowledge production" demand critical attention, not just because they promulgate epistemology, but because they "naturalize" hegemonic epistemology by accepting it as axiomatic.²⁷ Additionally, the very notion of a singular enclosed *place* of education is alien to a number of peripheralized worldviews in which every adult member of a local community has a responsibility to educate every child.²⁸ Foucault has noted that such segregation relates to power dynamics: the "spatialization"

²⁴ Earl LOVELACE, *The Schoolmaster*. Oxford: Heinemann 1968, p.7 8.

²⁵ Edward Kamau BRATHWAITE, quoted in Aisha KHAN, "Journey to the Center of the Earth," p. 280.

²⁶ Myriam J. A. CHANCY, "The Challenge to the Center: Caribbean Literature." *American Literary History*, vol. 13, 2001, no. 2, p. 330 (329–342).

²⁷ Sabina LOVIBOND, "Feminism and Postmodernism," quoted in CODE, p. 70.

²⁸ See Roberta BRAMWELL – Kathleen FOREMAN "Questioning Power Structures and Competitiveness in Pedagogy: Insights from North American Indian and Philippine Pedagogies." *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l'Education*, vol. 39, 1993, no. 6, pp. 561–575.

of schools (as well as other sites like hospitals, prisons, etcetera), through “architectures of enclosure”, “segregation”, “surveillance” and “classification” is a method to exert power.²⁹ In the colonies, this power is exerted through the school’s spatialization as metropolitan space. Brathwaite’s condemnation of “Afro-Saxons” is based on their “rootlessness” and lack of creolization; Walcott’s attention to place offers a different interpretation of the schoolhouse, which is more in line with the Jamaican educator and poet John Figueroa’s summary of the British colonial pedagogical system. Figueroa states that “it would have been remarkable if the educational arrangements in the West Indies had escaped the British influence; and they are, in fact, in many ways British,” but also asserts that this Britishness is “not quite as much so as many outside commentators, especially those unacquainted with Britain, believe.”³⁰ In Walcott’s works, the situation of the schoolhouse in place, the presence of Caribbean accents and intonations, and the emplaced bodies of the school’s children comprise resistance to colonial epistemic authority. Walcott’s notion that emplacement complicates hegemonic ideologies is not without precedence. For example, Ann Stoler’s research has illuminated that, while colonial systems implemented a number of taxonomies, and practiced ontologies “of naming,” their administrators “reeled uncomfortably” between “abstract principles” and “what people did in their everyday lives.”³¹ This phenomenon of naming and its relation to the “everyday” is something that Walcott also explores in his relationship between white colonizers and colonized children; in Walcott’s poetry, the utterance of a name by the colonized people fundamentally changes this process.

Framed by *Epitaph for the Young* (1949) and “A Latin Primer” (1987), the body of Walcott’s texts that I read in this article were composed and published in the late 1960s and 1970s. This was the period of mass decolonization in the West Indies, and also marks a worldwide concern with pedagogy and subalternization. As exemplified by James Baldwin’s “The Negro Child – His Self-Image” (1963) which finds the paradox that education systems must stifle independent thought in order to produce citizens, Jonathan Kozol’s seminal *Death at an Early Age* (1967), a number of works by Maxine Greene, and innumerable other texts, the black rights movement in the United States

²⁹ See Thomas F. GIERYN “A Space for Place in Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, p. 465 (463–496).

³⁰ John J. FIGUEROA, *Society, Schools and Progress in The West Indies*. Oxford: Pergamon Press 1971, p. 7.

³¹ Ann Laura STOLER, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010, pp.1–3.

increasingly probed the role of education and the double-consciousness, the disavowal of black history and identity, and the formation of black students as exploitable labour. Alongside other works published across the world, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogia do Oprimido/ Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) became hugely influential and was championed by critics of hegemonic educational practices. In his text, Freire reads the classroom through a framework of colonization, and called for an end to a top-down educational approach: students' minds should not be approached as *tabulae rasae*, but should be considered willing and able participants in classroom-based knowledge production. Walcott's works on the classroom are certainly sympathetic to calls for reform, and criticism of pedagogical systems, but through his emphasis on place and the body, they also show the influence of critical consciousness already in place in the colonial classroom.

Walcott's approach to pedagogy mirrors more recent movements in educational criticism. In his call for "A New Latin Americanist Pedagogy" (2004), Donald Bray criticizes scientific stances that degrade or marginalize "unprovable cosmologies, myths, and legends" and seeks to move toward a pedagogical system that promotes "the edifying structural change and enlightened knowledge without extinguishing the inner light resident in individuals."³² Writing in the 1990s, George Dei makes a similar case from an African perspective. Despite terming his pedagogical "cornerstone" Afrocentric because it incorporates such issues as "traditional African solidarity", "traditions of mutuality", and "collective responsibility", Dei stresses that his ideal pedagogical system would not be a "totalizing" approach that "replaced" one system with another.³³ Vitally, the influential theorist of critical pedagogy, Henry Giroux, has consistently called for moves towards "border pedagogy" as a progression from both the reforms to education made by postcolonial theorists and other non-hegemonic thinkers, *and* the conservative backlash these reforms have created. Giroux's "border pedagogy" is, in his own words, "a theoretical discourse that creates a cartography for creating new boundaries in order to explore, negotiate, and translate between new and old questions, problems, and objects of knowledge."³⁴ That, with

³² Donald W. BRAY, "A New Latin Americanist Pedagogy." *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 31, 2004, no. 1, p.10 (10–22).

³³ George J. Sefa DEI "Afrocentricity: A Cornerstone of Pedagogy" *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, vol. 25, 1994, no. 1, pp. 6–11 (3–28).

³⁴ Henry A. GIROUX, "Democracy and the Discourse of Cultural Difference: Towards a Politics of Border Pedagogy." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 12, 1991, no. 4, p. 507 (501–519).

the language of maps and boundaries, Giroux discusses what we may call a post-postcolonial pedagogy through the language of space and place is not coincidental. As Walcott shows, pedagogical systems are not only tied to place in the sense that locality disrupts abstract educational models, but also the types of knowledge these systems produce – or at least privilege – are part of larger epistemologies of place and space.

Derek Walcott and the Colonial Schoolhouse

Walcott has, provocatively, spoken fondly of his schooling and his schoolmasters. In the words of Walcott's alter-ego Shabine, from "The Schooner, *Flight*", the poet received, from his Irish and British teachers, a "sound colonial education."³⁵ Walcott has also paid tribute to the figure of the colonial schoolteacher with his play *Remembrance* (1977), which focuses on a retired teacher. In his own words, Walcott's play is both a "sincere" and "painful" tribute.³⁶ In a 1979 programme note for *Remembrance* Walcott discusses the last generation of colonial West Indian educators: "They have become as anachronistic as their clothes. But they were not imitators, they believed in the Caribbean."³⁷ The need to defend these educators through their "belief[f] in the Caribbean", however, suggests the problematic of a colonial education: just as in Professor Croston's comment, Europe could easily stand as the touchstone for knowledge and the benchmark of civilization. Jordan, the teacher of *Remembrance*, himself realizes such problems in the play. In the prologue, Jordan frames the narrative through the realization that he "taught the wrong things."³⁸ And as the play closes, Jordan tries to reconcile his methodology, source material, and love of place. Fundamentally, Jordan's methods appear as old-fashioned and ineffective (rote learning; terrified silence in the classroom), but on the other hand, his intentions were admirable:

I am trying to tell all you blasted young whippersnappers that
Thomas Gray is saying: It doesn't matter where you're born,
how obscure you are, that fame and fortune are contained

³⁵ In the 1993 episode of the BBC documentary series *Arena* "Derek Walcott: Poet of the Island", the interviewer Stuart Hall is visibly shocked when Walcott, perhaps mischievously, clarifies that he wrote this line with complete sincerity.

³⁶ John THIEME, *Derek Walcott*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 1999, p.121.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Derek WALCOTT, *Remembrance and Pantomime: 2 Plays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1980, p. 7.

within you. Your body is the earth in which it springs and
dies. And it's the humble people of this world, you Junes, *you*
Walcott, and you Brown, and you Fonesca, and you Mango
Head, that he's concerned about.³⁹

However admirable his tensions, the fact that the teacher has to explain the purpose of Gray's "Elegy" demonstrates the ineffectiveness of his methods. His emphasis on instruction or transmission of knowledge ("I am trying to tell you"), rather than on knowledge exchange or mediation means that, although the purpose of the lesson is benign, the mode of instruction is ineffectual. However, the inclusion of a young Walcott as one of Jordan's pupils reveals that the source material may indeed have inspired the next generation of Caribbean poets: it is no coincidence that Gray's message, as understood by Jordan, is the same found in much of Walcott's poetry.

In *Epitaph for the Young* (1949), a remarkably complex and assured poem self-published when Walcott was 19 years old, the newly graduated poet discusses the colonial school system and knowledge-production. Defining "History" as "a dull pupil" whose "silence speaks epitaphs / on all our wooden actions", the poet challenges the failures of the modernist "age of reason"⁴⁰ to provide for its peripheralized graduates. Those pupils who share the classroom with "History" graduate to become 'inan[e] or drunk on 'rotgut', or else banal 'inspector[s] of Civil Service lavatories.'⁴¹ Walcott then describes his action of writing as "taking up arms"⁴² in order to escape such a fate. This process of writing involves travels around the islands, and ultimately, the literary production of the islands in the poem itself. The moment of leaving school, which Walcott discusses, is that of great revelation about the potential of the individual outside of institutions. "Leaving School", in fact, became the title of an essay (1965), which in turn was the impetus for Walcott's book-length autobiographical masterpiece *Another Life* (1973).

In "Leaving School" Walcott considers, in chronological order, his childhood in the classroom, his education outside of the classroom, and his return to the school as a teacher. Walcott's first headmaster, of whom he speaks affectionately in the piece, was English; many of the school's at-

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87, my italics.

⁴⁰ Derek WALCOTT, "Epitaph for the Young: A Poem in Twelve Cantos." *Agenda*, vol. 39, 2003, no.1–3, p. 24 (15–50).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² WALCOTT, *Epitaph*, p. 25.

tributes, such as the blue blazer uniform and system of house points, seem quintessentially British. However British the school may seem through its faculty and organizational system, before Walcott begins to describe his school days, he is careful to situate the school firmly within Saint Lucia: “Now, when I stood on the long wooden verandah of St Mary’s College, I could see clear across the charred pasture of Castries to the Vigie promontory.”⁴³ These verandahs become the celebrated opening lines of *Another Life*: “Verandahs, where the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master”.⁴⁴ Usually read as a reflection on plantation society, “the absent master” may in fact also signify a school master, as well as a slave master. In “Leaving School” the verandahs are utilized to show the school (architecturally at least) as a creolized building; in *Another Life*, the verandahs open up to a world where Walcott can not only learn from the landscape, but can also appropriate the tools of the master. Verandahs themselves – both etymologically and architecturally – also suggest fluid knowledge exchange between Portugal, India, Britain, and the Caribbean,⁴⁵ because verandahs now link India and the Caribbean (through British cultural appropriation and acculturation), they cannot be discussed simply as a colonial imposition. In “Leaving School”, the verandahs serve to complicate the ideological “threshold” between the school’s interior (British) world and the outside world of the Caribbean landscape; from his stance on the threshold, Walcott is able to “bring” the local landscape into the school. Quite literally, these verandahs stand at the border of thinking.

Although structurally there is nothing to segregate the school from its locality, in his essay, Walcott shows that the school’s relationship to the Caribbean was far from unproblematic. After explaining that “despite his short-fuse temper” Walcott and his classmates had “worshipped” their headmaster, the poet describes him as:

a lonely man, devoted to parades, fond of sailing and Conrad’s prose, proud of the benignity of his Empire. He left the names of battles drumming in us, Blenheim, Waterloo, Malplacquet, of heroes who had actually quartered here, sir John Moore, victim of Corunna, Admirals Adercomby and Rodney and the graves of an Inskilling Regiment on the Morne, where there were barracks built

⁴³ Derek WALCOTT, “Leaving School.” In: HAMNER, R. D. (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Boulder – Colorado – London: Lynne Rienner 1997, p. 24 (24–32).

⁴⁴ Derek WALCOTT, “Another Life.” In: *Collected Poems: 1948–1984*. London: Faber and Faber 1982, p. 145 (143–294).

⁴⁵ See David PUNTER, *Metaphor*. London: Routledge 2007, pp. 69–70.

by the Royal Engineers, with the same rational, Romanesque brick-works as those at Vigie. Apart from the Cathedral, they were our only "architecture".⁴⁶

Walcott's schoolmaster introduced the pupil to views of his native land as space. In the above quotation, Saint Lucia is rendered as the overseas space of a "benign" Empire; this space is created and held together by a narrative that represents it as an extension of Britain. Walcott's headteacher served as the poet's first sustained encounter with hegemonic narratives of British history. Not only did the headmaster show pride in the Empire and valorize British battles and military heroes, the statement implies that he implicitly, perhaps unwittingly, devalued Saint Lucia by suggesting the island's only worthy history lay in the presence of such British military figures on the island. Both this view of British superiority and this mode of history (history as a list of dates, and names of singular "heroes") were subsumed into the Saint Lucian pupils' bodies ("drumming in us"), and affected the way in which Walcott looked upon his local landscape. The notion that the only real "architecture" in the Caribbean belonged to the British military or the cathedral also deserves scrutiny. The Barbadian novelist George Lamming has argued that, in his native island, the British administration erected "three shrines of enlightenment",⁴⁷ namely the church, the school, and the plantation house. Reading Lamming's novel, Kathleen J. Renk has suggested that these "shrines" were part of an English colonial project of "settlem[ent]" and "replic[ation]", which resulted in "a shadow copy of itself".⁴⁸ For Walcott, the "shrines" of British coloniality also include the military barracks. If the barracks represent bodily control, and the church poses as the keeper of the soul, then the school is a necessary colonial institution to control the mind. In Walcott's statement, the "only" Saint Lucian architecture is that which supports British dominion over the island.

In Walcott's description, the school stands as a place not of education, but of instruction. To view pupils of this mode of education as helpless victims is to accept that the teacher is all-powerful. If Walcott's school operated solely on these principles, in his case at least, the indoctrination process failed. That is, whilst Walcott may have been taught a colonially-sanctioned history and encouraged to 'read' his landscapes in a way that privileged

⁴⁶ WALCOTT, "Leaving School," p. 25.

⁴⁷ George LAMMING, *In The Castle of My Skin*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1999, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Kathleen J. RENK, *Caribbean Shadows & Victorian Ghosts: Women's Writing and Decolonization*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 1999, p. 2.

colonial constructions, the very fact that he writes the essay from a different perspective reveals that such ideas are not unbreakable. In this sense, by writing about his childhood indoctrination, but by doing so as someone who has rejected these ideas, the poet shows that his experience outside of the classroom victoriously contested the knowledge transmitted within the classroom. This process continues throughout leaving school. For example, Walcott rejects the ontology of “natural science” taught by Catholic missionaries, for the exterior, place-based *connaissance* of “the thick green hills boiling all day with their broadleaved, volcanic vegetation.”⁴⁹ This relationship between ontology, education, and the landscape reappears in the poem ‘Names’ from *Sea Grapes* (1976).

“Names” is, perhaps provocatively, dedicated to Brathwaite, who espouses a more Afrocentric epistemology and politics. The year “Names” was published Brathwaite legally added the Kikuyu name “Kamau” to his given name. “Names” begins with the arrival of both Europeans and Africans in the Caribbean, moves through the process of colonization via naming, and ends with a pedagogical exchange. The trajectory draws a clear line between enslavement, colonization, epistemologies, ontologies, and colonial pedagogy. Beginning “[m]y race began as the sea began, / with no nouns, and no horizon,” the speaker also adds that the enslaved Africans had “a different fix on the stars”, suggesting a nondominant geo-epistemic worldview or cosmology.⁵⁰ However, Walcott also asserts that the “horizon” “never halved” the minds of Afro-Caribbeans, and adds “Benares” (India) and “Canton” (China) to West African points of departure. The notion of beginnings and naming as a creation myth signifies “the dawning of consciousness”,⁵¹ and specifically draws on Walcott’s notion of the New World poet as an Adamic figure.⁵² The Afro-centric worldview is flawed because, for Walcott, the Caribbean offered a chance to renew knowledge based on sense knowledge of the landscape. Because Afro-centric thinking rejects other epistemolo-

⁴⁹ WALCOTT, “Leaving School,” pp. 25–26.

⁵⁰ Derek WALCOTT, “Names.” In: *Collected Poems*, p. 305 (305–308).

⁵¹ Anthony J. PALMER, “Consciousness Studies and a Philosophy of Music Education.” *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, vol. 8, 2000, no. 2, p. 99 (99–110).

⁵² This theme has been discussed in detail by a number of Walcott scholars. Of note the following texts offer nuanced and detailed analyses of the Adamic theme in Walcott’s works: Paula BURNETT, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press 2000; John THIEME, *Derek Walcott*; Paul BRESLIN, *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2001; and George HANDLEY, *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 2007.

gies (European, Asian, Amerindian) it is inappropriate to the Caribbean experience.

Walcott's viewpoint is, of course, not this simple; the poet introduces European colonizing presences to his Caribbean beginnings by asking "when they named these bays / bays. / was it nostalgia or irony?", and "In the uncombed forest, / in uncultivated grass / where was there elegance / except in their mockery?"⁵³ Here, the Caribbean landscape is experienced and named through a Eurocentric knowledge system. Such naming processes are based on a worldview that places culture over nature, and Walcott's emphasis on the "uncultivated" and "uncombed" state of the landscape relates to the notion of naming and categorizing as a means of taking dominion. The privileging of culture over nature has created what Peter McLaren calls a set of "Western, Euro/US.-centric ways of knowing the world that are based on capitalist wastefulness and a lack of regard for the planet"; McLaren sees the cure for such thinking in contemporary pedagogy based on "nondominant conceptualizations of the world".⁵⁴ As the poem progresses, and the landscape transforms from such "uncultivated" and "uncombed" areas to orange and cocoa plantations,⁵⁵ Walcott relates epistemologies of space to exploitative moneymaking practices. Here, however, Walcott alters the power dynamic:

Being men, they could not live
except they first presumed
the right of every thing to be a noun.
The African acquiesced,
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children, say:
moubain: the hogplum,
cerise: the wild cherry,
baie-la: the bay
with the fresh green voices
[...]
our natural inflections.⁵⁶

⁵³ WALCOTT, "Names," p. 306.

⁵⁴ Peter MCLAREN, "Towards a Decolonizing Epistemology." In: *Epistemologies of Ignorance in Education*, p.xiii.

⁵⁵ WALCOTT, "Names," p. 307.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

As Carole Boyce Davies and Monica Jardine have summarized, “The issue of geography and empire can be best preliminarily understood as a series of remapping exercises in which various land spaces are acquired and located within an orbit of control”,⁵⁷ and that “the conquest and transformation of historical space is a fundamental narrative of the capitalist West” which has been “conceptualized and written as a Western narrative of exploration and science, bringing with it modernity.”⁵⁸ As Londa Schiebinger has shown, such a narrative has “emphasized the rise of modern botany as the rise of taxonomy, nomenclature, and ‘pure’ systems of classification”, which were in reality “a matter of state, important strategically for emerging nation states vying for land and resources.”⁵⁹ In other words, the Caribbean landscape – its flora and fauna – were classified through both an epistemology of scientific advancement, but also with the purpose of ownership and commercial exploitation. In “Names” Walcott reimagines this process through the pedagogical exchange in which “the African acquiesce[s]” and “changes” names. The “natural inflection” of the body, through the process of speech, alters and redefines this process of classification. In “Leaving School” Walcott discusses the drab classroom-based “natural science” lessons; here, he offers such a lesson based on the Saint Lucian Creole language. What Walcott offers is his own take on the “object lesson”, a pedagogical technique that was favoured in colonial England as a metonym for “‘modern education’ itself”, and had, “from the very beginning of its introduction into Britain, embedded in this popular pedagogic technique were powerful cultural and epistemological assumptions that were fundamentally informed by Britain’s imperial identity.”⁶⁰ The fact that Walcott looks to images from nature (fruits, plants, geographical formations) as the subject of naming is also related to spatial epistemologies. The naming of the local Caribbean environment is part of the general move, as suggested by Glissant, to break away from Afro-centric thinking, and to embrace complex creolized Caribbean worldview(s).⁶¹

⁵⁷Carole Boyce DAVIES – Monica JARDINE, “Imperial Geographies and Caribbean Nationalism: At the Border between ‘A Dying Colonialism’ and U.S. Hegemony.” *The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, 2003, no. 3, p.1 62 (151–174).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵⁹ Londa SCHIEBINGER “Feminist History of Colonial Science.” *Hypatia*, vol. 19, 2004, no. 1, p. 235 (233–254).

⁶⁰ Parna SENGUPTA, “An Object Lesson in Colonial Pedagogy.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 45, 2003, no. 1, p. 98 (96–121).

⁶¹ See Shireen K. LEWIS, *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité*. Lanham: Lexington 2006, pp. 72–3.

In this exchange, Walcott asserts that the enslaved had a degree of agency; while the landscape was named and possessed by European agents, this process was disrupted and remolded by the slaves' experiences of the landscape. This is not to say that Walcott suggests that the slaves were not subalternized; rather, Walcott shows that in the "contact zone"⁶² of the colonial Caribbean, the competing epistemologies of slaver and enslaved were entangled from its beginnings. The poet shows us such an exchange, and offers its reader a glimpse of subaltern strategies of acquiescence (literally meaning to be silent), in order to prepare the poem's concluding pedagogical dialogue:

and children, look at these stars
over Valencia's forest!

Not Orion,
not Betelgeuse,
tell me, what do they look like?
Answer, you damned little Arabs!
Sir, fireflies caught in molasses.⁶³

Here, Walcott alludes to Genesis 15:5, in which the creation story culminates with God's instruction to Abraham to "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."⁶⁴ Discussing the poem's final line, and calling it at one and the same time "tiny" and "epic", Paula Burnett argues that "this line [...] exemplifies the rhetorical shift which the postcolonial project of mapping involves". For Burnett, this includes both the action of "nam[ing] an immediate locale" and naming "the universe" from the perspective of this locale. Continuing from this, Burnett read the "cruel juxtaposition of the fragile, elusive beauty of fireflies with the sugar industry's smothering molasses" as a powerful symbol, encapsulating the region's predatory colonial history.⁶⁵ While the Abrahamic allusion situates the instructor in the same position as the "word of God", the exchange between teacher and pupils also serves to disrupt the power relationship: although the students' voice still offers the honorific "Sir", it does so in order

⁶² I borrow this term from Mary Louise Pratt's extremely influential monograph: Mary Louise PRATT, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Abingdon – New York: Routledge 1992.

⁶³ WALCOTT, "Names," p. 308.

⁶⁴ *Genesis* 15:5, King James Version.

⁶⁵ BURNETT, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 42.

to unmake the authority of the instructor by offering an alternative cosmic classification. The poetry itself serves to destabilize: using the term “Arabs” as a metonym for all colonized “savages”, the instructor ironically also includes the Arabic-derived word “Betelgeuse” in his cosmological naming system. Here, Walcott suggests, the hegemonic English worldview, as suggested by the English language, is composed of meeting points with other cultures. Given the allusion to the “Book of Genesis”, and especially to God’s covenant with Abraham, the reference to Arabs also serves to destabilize essentializing ideologies: the seemingly Eurocentric discourse of salvation, which enabled the colonization of large parts of the world (including much of Arabia), is itself based on mythological thinking from outside of Europe. In other words, when we acknowledge that the centre of much European thought is in Western Asian antiquity, the very notion of stable centres becomes more complex and fluid, and we arrive at a more rhizomatic conception of knowledge. At the very least, Walcott addresses the colonial pedagogic paradigm in which “black students learn that their people have contributed nothing to world developments, while white contributions are exalted.”⁶⁶

Using Michel Foucault’s term, Gayatri Spivak has spoken of breaks in thinking as “epistemic violence”. Giving the example of a worker’s consciousness as an “agent of production” rather than a “victim of capitalism”, Spivak notes that “in a sense, education is epistemic violence”⁶⁷ because it allows for the students to take advantage of existing power structures. Walcott’s emphasis on the colonial classroom as a matter of dialogue, rather than dissemination, seems very much in agreement with such ideas. In *Another Life*, Walcott also produces the colonial classroom through dialogic exchange:

“Boy! Name the great harbours of the world!”
“Sydney! Sir.”
“San Franceesco!”
“Naples, sah!”
“And what about Castries?”
“Sah, Castries ees a coaling station and
der twenty-seventh best harba in der worl’!
In eet the entire Breetesh Navy can be heedent!”
“What is the motto of St. Lucia, boy?”

⁶⁶ BURAS, “Putting All Students at the Center,” p. 128.

⁶⁷ Nermeen SHAIKH, “Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.” In: *The Present as History: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Global Power*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 187.

“Statio haud malefida carinis.”
“Sir!”
“Sir!”
“And what does this mean?”
“Sir, a safe anchorage for sheeps!”⁶⁸

As Henry Giroux argues, the “transmission model” of teaching is associated with “discourses” that “define civilization as synonymous with selected aspects of Western tradition”.⁶⁹ In the “transmission” of Walcott’s poem, the pedagogical voice once again seeks to rank and classify information related to the children’s locality. This classification is linked to geographical territorialization, and more specifically, to British imperialism. The children learn of their native town that its value rests in its relation to Britain, and British rule, and this is reinforced by its Latin motto which reduces Castries to “an anchorage” for British ships. However, the “transmission” of knowledge becomes an exchange of viewpoints through the incorporation of accent, and voice, which are of course extensions of the body. Walcott very rarely writes Caribbean accents phonetically, and has expressed distaste for the practice on numerous occasions. The phoneticized “sheeps|” here are more than simply the Saint Lucian child’s rendering of “ships”: in the exchange, the child mockingly reduces British imperialism to a state of sheepishness, and in doing so disrupts the seemingly one-sided flow of power. In his reading of *Another Life*, Stan Smith suggests that the following stanza, which locates the graves of the Irish Inniskilling regiment on one of Saint Lucia’s mornes (who fought for British forces in the final battle for Saint Lucia against the French rule; and for whom Saint Lucia was certainly an unsafe anchorage), “spells out the full implications for all those subject peoples who have been perennial cannon fodder for the self-regarding discourses of empire.”⁷⁰ In the exchange, the child tactfully and subtly unmakes the teacher’s authority; the landscape itself, which contains the graves of the soldiers “safe in their anchorage”⁷¹ also serves to disrupt the hegemonic instruction.

Although this moment of knowledge-production reduces the Caribbean to its relation with Britain and British interests, *Another Life* contains a previous pedagogical exchange, quite possibly with the same teacher. As

⁶⁸ WALCOTT, “Another Life,” pp. 171–172.

⁶⁹ Henry A. GIROUX, “Post-Colonial Ruptures and Democratic Possibilities: Multiculturalism as Anti-Racist Pedagogy,” *Cultural Critique*, 1992, no. 21, p. 6 (5–39).

⁷⁰ Stan Smith, *Poetry and Displacement*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2007, p. 139.

⁷¹ WALCOTT, “Another Life,” p. 172.

Walcott reminisces upon reading two books of Greek myths for children (Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853) and Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1856))⁷² a voice questions: "Boy! Who was Ajax?"⁷³ Walcott's reply that Ajax was a local thoroughbred stallion, leads him to describe other members of the town by enumerating Classical and historical figures. Helen, for example, is a local prostitute; a chicken thief is "like Jason";⁷⁴ and Midas is a corrupt local businessman. Here, the knowledge brought through the classroom, or through interaction with two North Atlantic writers – both heavily associated with colonialism and modernity, is mediated through local knowledge, *and*, is an enabling force. Although, as Emily Greenwood has shown, "the colonial curriculum in the West Indies [...] advocated Classics for its own sake, or, worse, for the sake of empire failed in its inability or unwillingness to relate the subject to the society in which it was being taught" and "became a fossilized pursuit",⁷⁵ Walcott was himself able to make such relations to place, and to let such knowledge adapt. Through the confluence of hegemonic knowledge (*savoir*) and local experience (*connaissance*), Walcott is able to look beyond historicist approaches to the Caribbean, and to read his locality through a framework of myth.

The Adamic process and the creation myths which Walcott alludes to in "Names" are a fundamental aspect of Caribbean poeticist thinking. Although primarily known as an essayist and novelist, Wilson Harris' first published works were a series of poems that fused Amerindian/Caribbean experiences of Guyana's interior with Greek myth. Glissant has written extensively on myth, and the ways in which Western creation myths place nature over culture. "History and literature", Glissant argues, "agree to separate man from the world, to subject nature to culture."⁷⁶ As Wilbert Roget shows, Glissant argues that this hierarchization of knowledge eventually "leads to the destruction of the power of myth, the emergence of a sense of superiority of Western culture over other cultures, and the affirmation of the superiority of written cultures over oral cultures", but that "the tale

⁷² Kingsley was, in his later life, a staunch nationalist and supporter of British imperialism. For example, his novel *Westwood Ho!* (1855) celebrates Early Modern British naval victories in the Caribbean. See C. J. WAN-LING WEE, *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern*. Lanham: Lexington 2003, pp. 37–76 for a detailed analysis of Kingsley's coloniality.

⁷³ WALCOTT, "Another Life," p. 158.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷⁵ Emily GREENWOOD, *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, p. 110.

⁷⁶ Édouard GLISSANT, *Caribbean Discourse*. Quoted in ROGET "Land and Myth in the Writings of Édouard Glissant," p. 628.

(*conte*) [...] by its exploration of lived reality, negates history and negates writing.”⁷⁷ Elsewhere, Glissant has called for a national Caribbean literature to “mythologize” or “demystify” the European system, while simultaneously “hallowing” the community around its own “myths, beliefs, imagination, or ideology”, and to assert “rootedness”.⁷⁸ In *Another Life*, Walcott fuses the mythic texts of his colonial education with this “lived reality”, through the process of re-rooting European myth and knowledge in the Caribbean. While Glissant points solely to the “tale” as the antithesis of colonial hierarchization and knowledge systems, Walcott suggests a new method that can fuse and appropriate colonial knowledge. Here, Walcott indeed reads “pages [...] left open by an absent master”, and transforms that knowledge at its borderline.

To reinforce the importance and need for myth in relation to epistemologies of place, later in the poem, an “explorer stumbles out of the bush crying out for myth”.⁷⁹ This action forms the first part of a prolonged meditation on privileged scientific methodology, and its relation to peripheralized epistemologies: Walcott’s mentor, before he commits suicide, loses “his own control and centre” through the classification systems of “botany, history, lepidoptery, [and] stamps”,⁸⁰ “academics crouch like rats / listening to” the tambourines of peasants;⁸¹ those who, like Brathwaite “pronounce their measure / of toms, of traitors, of traditionals and Afro-Saxons” are the inheritors of the logic and science of slavery: Afro-centric thinking, Walcott suggests, is no better to the colonial science that “measured the skulls [of black people] with calipers”, seeking to “measure and divide”,⁸² an “astigmatic geologist”, like the academic, “stoops, with the crouch of the heron, / deciphering – not a sign”;⁸³ while finally, the “historian decipher[s] in invisible ink”.⁸⁴ To understand Walcott’s worldview, we can compare these kinds of figures to characters such as Ma Kilman, an Obeah woman from *Omeros* (1992), whose local knowledge of the bush, which is mediated through local myth, enables her to safely travel through Saint Lucia’s forested and mountainous interior with no difficulty.

⁷⁷ ROGET, “Land and Myth in the Writings of Édouard Glissant,” p. 628.

⁷⁸ GLISSANT, quoted in Shirley TOLAND-DIX, “*The Hills of Hebron*: Sylvia Wynter’s Disruption of the Narrative of the Nation.” *Small Axe*, vol. 12, 2008, no. 1, p. 59 (57–76).

⁷⁹ WALCOTT, “Another Life,” p. 283.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269. To Walcott crouching and stooping, as in Blake’s “Newton”, are visions of closed-off knowledge systems that are unable to adequately explain the world.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

In his work on Caribbean colonial schoolrooms, Walcott certainly indicates a number of problems related to hegemonic assumptions and racist attitudes. However, he also shows that such a process was not as “all powerful” as many anti-colonial commentators have assumed. While not a fully creolized institution, the schoolhouse stood at the threshold between a performed version of the metropole and its actual locality. As such, the schoolhouse was the perfect forum to generate border thinking. While the students could put on the educators’ knowledge, they could also subtly and covertly interrogate that knowledge. In “A Latin Primer” (1987), Walcott’s last piece to deal explicitly with education, the poet acknowledges his own uncertainties about such a position, and in doing so revisits the many issues relating to the schoolhouse, place, and power exchange. Crucially, this moment of doubt – before he is able to resolve such problems – relates to his own role as an educator within the Caribbean. The poem, which is dedicated to H.D. Boxill, who was both Walcott’s godfather and the Saint Lucian education officer in the 1950s and 1960s, traces Walcott’s development from pupil to tutor, and like “Names” begins with the expansiveness of the horizon:

I had nothing against which
to notch the growth of my work
but the horizon, no language
but the shallows in my long walk

home,⁸⁵

The poet goes on to explain that this “nothing[ness]” forced him to look towards “distant literatures” in order to measure “the growth of [his] work” and to find a “language”. Despite this perceived “need” to look to “distant literatures”, the reader familiar with Walcott’s work will recognize the “nothing” of the “horizon” and “shallows” as an important motif. While the young Walcott may have seen the horizon or sea in terms of nothingness, their presence throughout his later poetry suggests that he came to see them in other terms. The vastness of the sky and sea has, in Walcott’s literature, come to represent possibility and invention without limitation.⁸⁶ Nothingness for Walcott is in fact a complex theme and suggests, rather than absence, that

⁸⁵ Derek WALCOTT, “A Latin Primer.” In: *The Arkansas Testament*. New York: Faber and Faber 1987, p. 21.

⁸⁶ Paola LORETO, *The Crowning of a Poet’s Quest: Derek Walcott’s Tiepolo’s Hound*. Amsterdam: Rodopi 2009, p. 17.

which cannot be known through a hegemonic North Atlantic conception of science.⁸⁷ In an absence of “culture”, Walcott is able to look to landscape and locality in order to develop his artistic sensibilities.

As the poem progresses, Walcott creates a link between his early poetry, his education, and his locality. For the young poet, “signs of scansion” “drizzled on the horizon” and were “like Mathematics / that made delight Design / arranging the thrown sticks / of stars to sine and cosine.”⁸⁸ In this sense, the privileged knowledge of scientific, nomothetic, or abstract thinking which, in Edward Casey’s terms “mathematizes” nature, is also inherent in the very kind of poetic form Walcott uses in the poem. Claudio Canaparo’s assertion that “standardization” of writing techniques in schools and universities is “an instrument of epistemological control” which makes “European culture impossible to separate” from “knowledge, science, and the written dimension that makes it transmissible and public”⁸⁹ is relevant here. However, in “A Latin Primer” the poet then realizes that these poetic forms can be found in the nature’s own rhythms, “across the sea’s page”, which speaks in “trochee, anapest, dactyl.”⁹⁰ The European form, therefore, can be naturalized through bodily experience of place, and as such, adherence to European structures does not compromise a Caribbean position.

Describing his graduation and move to teacher, the poet describes another moment of similar anxiety:

The discipline I preached
made me a hypocrite;
their lithe black bodies, beached,
would die in dialect;

I spun the globe’s meridian,
showed its sealed hemispheres,
but where were those brows heading
when neither world was theirs?⁹¹

In his essay “Isla Incognita” (1973), Walcott describes a similar moment from his own education:

⁸⁷ See Paul BRESLIN, *Nobody’s Nation* for a book-length study of the notion of nothingness and negation in Walcott’s oeuvre.

⁸⁸ WALCOTT, “A Latin Primer,” p. 22.

⁸⁹ CANAPARO, *Geo-epistemology*, p.21.

⁹⁰ WALCOTT, “A Latin Primer,” p. 22.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The weird, raggedly inaccurate, infantile maps of the old explorers, in school, were more fearful than comic. The wrongly real outlines were perhaps more terrifying than their blank confession “Terra Incognita.” If what they knew was so inaccurate, how accurate was what they did not? Not Atlantis and all that, or leviathans and sea serpents, but a world without edges, a flat world without edges, giving us two unappeasable concepts- Terra Incognita and Space. Savages have no such edges, no urgency about topography. Short on such ego, they do not try to contain a detailed world whole in their heads, except as a metaphor, except as the word “world.”⁹²

As the essay progresses, Walcott delights in the way that beaches and island structures can mutate their forms away from their “representation” and into the shapes he “know[s] and that sensation subconsciously records,”⁹³ and also warns of “theories” such as the Hegelian notion of America as an “impotent” space,⁹⁴ that “lead to the prejudices of anthropology”, from which “the decline into history is easy.”⁹⁵ As a tutor, Walcott finds himself reaching towards the same spatial models (the map or globe) that he rejected from his own education. The irony is his own realization that the map has no meaning for his pupils. The act of standing outside of a globe, and even “spinning” it, is perhaps the representation *par excellence* of “the god-trick”; ultimately, Walcott acknowledges that his pupils’ “bodies” reject the knowledge he imparts, and likens this act of rejection to indigenous peoples’ epistemologies. Just as in *Epitaph for the Young*, the adolescent poet rejects the knowledge of his classroom and looks to the sea in order to “take up arms”, the adult Walcott again travels outside of the classroom and to the sea in order “to find [his] voice”.⁹⁶ Seeing a frigate bird sail over the water, the poet again reflects on practices of naming the natural world. Thinking of the different names of the frigate bird, but also how the same creature has been “named with the common sense / of fishermen”,⁹⁷ the poet acknowledges that the hegemonic Latin taxonomical term *fregata magnificens* and the Creole *ciseau la mer* are both appropriate terms describing

⁹² Derek WALCOTT, “Terra Incognita.” In: DELOUGHREY, E. M. – GOSSON, R. K. – HANDLEY, G. B. (eds.), *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2005, p. 51 (51–57).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁹⁴ See Fernando CORONI, “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, 1996, no. 1, p. 58 (51–87).

⁹⁵ WALCOTT, “Terra Incognita,” p. 54.

⁹⁶ WALCOTT, “A Latin Primer,” p. 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

the same creature. At this realization, the frigate bird “ma[kes] one with [...] the horizon”,⁹⁸ resolving the borderline between hegemonic savoir and local knowledge. Mignolo himself has argued that the very purpose of border thinking is to erase distinctions: “between the knower and the known”, “between subject and object”, “between epistemology and hermeneutics”.⁹⁹ Walcott’s “horizon” between here and elsewhere, and his frigate bird which can be known through seemingly discrete epistemologies (its Latin name suggests scientific European taxonomy; its English name suggests colonial hegemony; its Creole name suggests peripheralized epistemologies) in the same instance and by the same person speaks to such erasures. Later in the same collection, when the poet asserts that “our [Caribbean] myths are ignorance, theirs [European myths] are literature”,¹⁰⁰ he successfully privileges Caribbean thinking without denigrating that of Europe.

Conclusion

Throughout his oeuvre, Derek Walcott formulates an epistemological framework which arises from a place-bound perspective. Such a perspective, as many commentators from diverse – yet peripheralized – perspectives show, is in opposition to the modernist epistemology which privileges the “god-trick” perspective. Such a perspective is related to space, and to spatial thinking, which in a colonial context enables territorialization, dominion, and exploitation. In Walcott’s poems and essays of the colonial schoolhouse, the poet explicitly interrogates the “rational”, modernist worldview. However, unlike other Caribbean thinkers, he does not seek to re-centre this worldview, but rather, to de-centre thinking. In the classroom local knowledge is available through the presence of students’ bodies and especially their voices, which engage in conversation with the hegemonic knowledge of the teachers. Such conversations in fact challenge the very conception of hegemonic European knowledge as a singular, monolithic viewpoint, and reveal that this knowledge was also constructed from a series of networks. Colonial pedagogy while on the surface disavowed local knowledge and served to justify the spatial dominion of the colonies, was in fact available to alteration when it was relocated to these colonies. While Walcott makes no claims to produce or espouse a monolithic Caribbean epistemology, he does

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁹ MIGNOLO, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Derek WALCOTT, “White Magic.” In: *The Arkansas Testament*, p. 39.

suggest that a Caribbean worldview is not compromised when it re-routes and re-roots European knowledge. Bodily experience/place are then able to test, rewrite, and regulate hegemonic knowledge; in this sense, Walcott privileges rhizomatic knowledge exchange, rather than frozen or purified worldviews.