

José Luis Martínez-Dueñas Espejo and José María Pérez Fernández, eds. 2001: *Approaches to the Poetics of Derek Walcott*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen. viii + 190 pp.

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Approaches to the Poetics of Derek Walcott brings together a collection of studies on a writer who combines his status as Nobel Prize winner with his condition as a post-colonial, Caribbean-born poet. The ambivalent position enjoyed by Walcott, as a non-canonical author canonised by the prestige of the most highly prized international literary award, turns this volume into a more exciting venture than may appear at first sight. As the editors explain in their Foreword, one of the aims behind the plurality of approaches in the volume is to offer an exploration of the crucial relation between Walcott's poetry and the traditional English canon, given that, as a Caribbean poet, he seems to belong to the margins of this tradition yet, at the same time, his engagement with both Classical and English poets questions his marginality. The aim that binds together the individual essays in this collection is, therefore, to show how Walcott holds a critical position in relation to the canon while, at the same time, his poems offer a poetics of "integration and compromise" (10) through the attention they lavish on landscape and history. This has led contributors to this volume to explore Walcott's relation to Homer, Virgil and Dante, to modern Anglo-American poets, such as Wallace Stevens, and to other Caribbean and Meso-American poets, such as Octavio Paz. This unveiling of a deep mesh of connections makes Walcott's poems equally dependent on both the imperial centre and colonial margins and is one of the book's most engaging features.

The editors also point out that the volume is the result of a joint project carried out by members of the research group "Text and Discourse in Modern English," based at the University of Granada. In fact, all contributors belong to this group, which has been active for almost a decade, with the exception of Donald Freeman, who has provided a preface, and José Antonio Gurpegui Palacios, who has authored the initial essay. Freeman's preface introduces the individual essays and foregrounds some of the thematic links shared by contributions to this collection, stressing their concern with history and heritage. Gurpegui's "I Have no Nation but Imagination: Derek Walcott, a Caribbean in North America" cleverly combines biographical information and critical insight, introducing the reader to Walcott's works in a smooth, effortless way. Even a reader who is not acquainted with the poems discussed is bound to benefit from Gurpegui's discussion, since he makes sure no previous knowledge of Walcott's poetry is required. This first chapter meets its introductory purpose and serves as the welcome drink on arrival at a party—it is refreshing and it whets your appetite for what is to come.

The other chapters in the collection openly display the wide range of interests and concerns that fuel the varied work carried out by the different members of this research team. In "Tropical Sublime: Derek Walcott's Early Poetry," Julián Jiménez Heffernan suggests that Walcott's initial poetic products see the Caribbean landscape through the lenses that the English metaphysical poets—Andrew Marvell in particular—have provided him with. He also discovers traces of Wallace Stevens' "mighty line"—which, in turn, echoes Marlowe's and Shakespeare's—and shows how ruins, history and landscape form a useful triangle to account for the presence of a persistent interest in Walcott's poetry, an interest in the marks history leaves on landscape, in how landscape can be read as history.

In “*Terza Rima*, the Sea and History in *Omeros*,” José María Pérez Fernández reads *Omeros* as an epic poem in which Walcott conflates history and myth taking Dante’s *Divina Comedia* as his model and while doing so, undertakes an exploration of the meanings which have been attributed to the stanzaic form known as *terza rima*, with a view to showing connections between literary criticism and metrical studies.

Symbolism and musical echoes, as present in Walcott’s works, are explored in two independent chapters. In “Return to Sainte Lucie: Poetry, Music, and Civilization,” Marta Falces Sierra shows how Derek Walcott constructs a vision of his native Sainte Lucie out of music, dancing and silences, in particular with the beating rhythms of the percussion, of the drums which mix with song in calypso music. In “The Poetics of Space in Derek Walcott,” Rosa Morillas Sánchez studies the importance of spatial symbolism through the presence of the ocean, the island and the continent as terms which, in Walcott’s poetry, transcend their literal meaning and acquire a particular resonance. In some of his poems, as Morillas observes, the island becomes the centre of a poetic universe, but this island which defines its dwellers is in turn defined by the ocean. The island is, like the house, the domain of the domestic, a “space of intimacy” (82). If the Island is the home, the continent is the “Great House,” now in a state verging on ruin. The relation between empire and colony acquires a new dimension, as Morillas notes, when Walcott presents England as both an island detached from the continent and as a colony of Rome; this vision of England as a province of the Roman Empire is part of the constant foregrounding of history, which plays an ambivalent role in Walcott’s poetics. History is often linked to the ocean and its motions, to the tide and the bottom of the sea, so it is ever present; but the ocean that connects island and continent also destroys, erases history.

Miguel Ángel Martínez-Cabeza dissects two related poems, “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen” and “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen, Part II,” in “Poetry as Discourse: Readers and Critics.” He discusses the different implications of three types of meaning: author-induced, text-based and reader-oriented and suggests that despite the absence of a fixed, unique meaning of a text, readers often agree in their readings of a given poem. José Luis Martínez-Dueñas explores readers’ generic expectations in one of the most stimulating contributions in the collection, “The Rhetoric of Dirt and the Hermeneutics of Mystery: ‘God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen, Part II’” and shows how the expectation of a given genre, the traditional English Christmas carol, is triggered by the title of the poem. The expectation set up by a title that echoes a well-known Christmas carol, and in doing so conveys the presupposition of festivity, celebration and joy, is consistently deflated by the “rhetoric of dirt” on whose foundations the poem rests. This opposition between the associative meanings of the Christmas carol and the dirty, corrupted cityscape described in the poem does not imply, according to Martínez-Dueñas, a semantic chasm; rather, the semantic integration of poem and title takes place at a hermeneutic level through a reconciliation of opposites. Belén Soria Clivillés, in “Metaphor in Walcott,” explores the Caribbean poet’s metaphorical use of language in his essay “The Muse of History” and shows how metaphor plays a substantial role in Walcott’s re-categorisation of the postcolonial conflict between European heritage and West Indian cultural identity. Metaphor enables Walcott to challenge dominant world-views of the post-colonial experience and to construct his own personal world-view of the postcolonial experience which departs from established positions held by other writers in its refusal to reject the colonial past.

The volume is brought to a close with “An Interview with Derek Walcott” which took place in 1997 during a summer course held at El Escorial. In this interview, José María Pérez Fernández poses his questions to the Nobel Prize winner shrewdly and engagingly, is prompt to reply and probe into Walcott’s thoughts and comes across as an experienced conversationalist, creating for the reader the pleasant feeling of sharing a private, comfortable conversation—which is what the best interviews achieve. In his answers to questions, Walcott expands on his relation to Latin American writers, such as Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, and examines what Caribbean poets share with them—the same experience, the same landscape—but also establishes a dividing line, since the surrealism and magic realism which infuses Spanish and Latin American literature is something which, according to him, the English language has little room for. The after-effects of colonisation and the adoption of the language of the colonisers have been counteracted by—or melted with, as Walcott says—African rhythms and melodies and this gives Caribbean literature its special flavour. Walcott sees this as the equivalent of the process Latin literature underwent when provincial writers began to write on the outskirts of the Roman empire and provinces grew into countries. Wordsworth, Milton, Browning, Faulkner and Hemingway pop up recurrently in the conversation, as do nature, landscape, history, religion and rhyme. If this interview provides a very fitting closing statement for a scholarly collection of essays on the work of a Caribbean Nobel Prize winner, it is no doubt because Pérez Fernández manages to steer smoothly and lets the stream of Walcott’s words and thoughts run at its own vibrant pace.

Placed at the end of the collection, the interview works as a compendium of the strands of themes and topics which appear entwined over the book: Walcott’s concern with history and landscape; his assimilation of the colonial language’s poetic traditions from a post-colonial perspective that has been grafted onto the native African heritage; his debt to some of the English poets who are steadfastly fixed in the core of the English canon; his interest in rhyme and rhythm; his deployment of metaphor; his attitude to civilisation and religion. Given the disparity of interests displayed by the contributors, the book has no other claim to unity beyond these shared thematic links and Walcott’s work itself. At times, a certain amount of methodological or theoretical common ground is felt to be missing—and this would have added a sharper edge to what often gives the impression of constituting a chain of individual, unrelated essays. The editors claim in their foreword that the engine that propels the work of their research group is “a critical approach to literary texts that includes the combined perspective of applied linguistics and discourse analysis” (9) but the degree of engagement shown in this collection with contemporary developments in the linguistic study of discourse is not very striking. In this respect, the collection as a whole is rather uneven. The reader who expects to find here studies involving schema theory, presupposition and implicature, cohesion and coherence, information structure, topic and theme, politeness, speech and thought presentation, exchange structure, critical discourse analysis or conversational analysis will be disappointed. With the exception of those by Martínez-Dueñas and Soria Clivillés, most contributions could be said to be only tangentially concerned with discourse analysis and linguistic approaches to literature—but others not at all. The editors’ foreword is silent on this point, making no attempt to present the different theoretical, critical or methodological stances from which individual contributions stem, so the reader is bound to feel that

a more substantial piece from the editors' pen would have been welcome. An overview of previous critical responses to Walcott's poetry is particularly felt to be absent and this would have been appropriate subject matter for an introduction that could have taken the place of a foreword that seems too succinct. In spite of this, as a mosaic composing a multifaceted profile of a contemporary poet, the collection stands firm. Undeniably, it provides appealing studies of Walcott's poetry for those working on post-colonial and Caribbean literatures as well as for anyone concerned with twentieth-century poetry in English.