

DEREK WALLCOT'S A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA: SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

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The Caribbean culture is a main theme in the works of West Indian poet and playwright Derek Walcott, whose full name is Derek Alton Walcott. The poem also talks about the bloodshed in Kenya and the speaker's own split identities as a result of colonialism. The speaker of the poem, who is connected to both England and Africa, struggles with how to interpret the violence of the battle. Understanding the poet's multiple literary techniques can help us comprehend the poem more clearly. It matters how the poet portrays both colonists and indigenous people. The poem's conclusion lines, which offer a number of questions, imply that the author is indeed not willing to solve the issues. The poem's significance and congruence with the earlier-mentioned context are due to the symbols and images that were explored.

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Introduction

1. Derek Wallcot’s Biography

The writings of West Indian poet and dramatist Derek Walcott, whose full name is Derek Alton Walcott, focus on the Caribbean culture. In 1992, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Derek Walcott was born on January 23, 1930, in Castries, Saint Lucia. He started composing poetry at a young age, taught in Grenada and Saint Lucia, and published essays and reviews in Trinidadian and Jamaican journals. Walcott went to the University of the West Indies in Jamaica and St. Mary's College in Saint Lucia for his studies. He started composing poems at a young age, taught in Grenada and Saint Lucia schools, and published essays and reviews in Trinidadian and Jamaican journals. His plays were first performed in Saint Lucia in 1950, and from 1958 to 1959, he studied theater in New York City. After that, he resided in Trinidad and the US, working part-time as a professor at Boston University.

Beginning with *In a Green Night: Poems 1948–1960*, Walcott's poetry is best recognized (1962). This book's appreciation of the natural beauty of the Caribbean region is typical of his early poetry. *The Castaway* (1965), *The Gulf* (1969), and *Selected Poems* (1964) all contain verse that is equally lush in form and incantatory in mood as Walcott describes his sense of loneliness due to being torn between his European cultural orientation and the black folk traditions of his native Caribbean. The autobiographical poetry *Another Life* (1973) is a full-length book. Walcott examines the profound racial and linguistic divides in the Caribbean in *Sea Grapes* (1976) and *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979) using a tighter, more economical manner. His own experiences as a black writer in America who has grown progressively far from his Caribbean origins are explored in *The Fortunate Travelers* (1981) and *Midsummer* (1984).

2. Dark august: A Brief Discussion

In response to the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya, a guerilla conflict fought by indigenous Kenyans against British colonists from 1952 to 1960, Derek Walcott wrote the poem "A Far Cry from Africa" in 1962. The speaker seems to be of African and English ancestry and is implied to come from a colony like Walcott. The speaker's intense ambivalence and uncertainty about his allegiances result from his hatred of colonial power and the heinousness of the uprising. The poem also discusses the speaker's own torn identity as a result of colonialism, as well as the violence in Kenya. The speaker conveys the profound anguish this heritage continues to create rather than trying to find a solution to escape it. The poem's speaker, who has ties to both England and Africa, is conflicted over how to understand the violence of the fight. The speaker, who is typically linked with Walcott, struggles with his connections to both the English and the colonized African peoples. In fact, the poem suggests that one of colonialism's painful consequences is a confused identity and the anxiety it entails.

3. Semantic Analysis of the Poem

A Far Cry From Africa by Derek Wallcot

*A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"*

*Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?*

*Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilization’s dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.
The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.*

*Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?*

Metaphor: It is an indirect comparison between two, unlike things.

Tawny Pelt:

Line 1: “A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt “

Line 2: “Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,” The poem's first stanza begins with a metaphor for the African continent: a tawny pelt. When referring to the brownish land of Africa, the term "tawny" describes an orange-brown or yellowish-brown hue. An animal's fur is referred to as a "pelt." Africa is compared to an animal in this phrase. The speaker claims that a wind (war, violence) ruffles Africa's tawny pelt (brownish African land) (an animal, most probably a lion).

Worm:

Line 5: “Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:” The British colonists are represented by the metaphorical worm. This metaphor is being used by the poet to conjure up a horrifying image of worms crawling over bodies.

Paradise:

Line 4: “Corpses are scattered through a Paradise.” The metaphor Paradise is used in the previous line to represent Veldt. Before the bloody conflict, the land of Veldt was like a Paradise, as the poet demonstrates with this metaphor.

Simile: This is a direct comparison between two unlike things using like or as.

Line 2: “Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,” The Kikuyu tribe is compared as blood-hungry flies. This analogy was utilized by the poet to illustrate the Kikuyu tribe's brutality.

Cacophony: It is the use of combination of words with rough or inharmonious sounds.

Line 2: “Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,” These rough and harsh sounds are used to illustrate the brutality and roughness of the Kikuyu people as well as their violence and brutality.

Allusion: It is a reference to a historical figure or an event.

Kikuyu: The poem's first stanza's second line includes a reference to the Kikuyu language. In Kenya, it is the largest tribe or ethnic group, coming from Central Africa.

Jews: The last line of the first stanza refers to Jews. Here it means the cruelty and inhumanity caused by the Nazis during World War II. The speaker makes a reference to that in order to show that the violence caused by the British against the Africans is like the Nazis causing violence against Jews during the Second World War.

Spanish Civil War: The Spanish Civil War is mentioned in the third line of the third stanza. The Spanish Civil War lasted from 1936 to 1939. The Nationalists and the Spanish government engaged in combat (the rebel part of the army).

Rhetorical Question: A rhetorical question is a question asked in order to create a dramatic effect or to make a point rather than to get an answer.

Line 31: “Betray them both, give back what they give?”

Line 32: “How can I face such slaughter and be cool?”

Line 33: “How can I turn from Africa and live?” In order to convey his sorrowful feelings, the poet used rhetorical questions. He poses inquiries that he is aware won't receive a response. Due of his mixed ancestry, he finds the violence committed by British and Africans to be troubling. So, in order to demonstrate that he cannot turn away from anyone on either side, he employs rhetorical questions.

Imagery

At the poem's beginning, when the speaker depicts the battlefield of the war, strong imagery is used. In comparison to an animal, the speaker claims that the African continent's hair is ruffled by a wind. Worms are crawling over the bodies and Kikuyu are flying like flies. With all of this explanation, the reader is able to picture what is happening in the poem.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the poet's various literary techniques aims at understanding the poem more thoroughly. It matters how the poet describes both colonizers and native people. It is important to note the poet's use of language while describing both colonizers and natives. He treats both equally because he cannot justify the horrible massacre of innocent white children by the natives by only believing that colonists are the ones who started violence. According to him, Africans are "tawny pelts," and their rebellion against European colonizers, which is the cause of their wind of "change," leads them to lose their own humanity. The poem's conclusion, which poses a series of questions, suggests that the poet is unwilling to find solutions to the issues. First, he wants his listeners to identify with those who are divided between two cultures or nations and are unable to support the oppressive behavior of the colonizers or feel sympathy for the colonies. Rather than making a statement, the poet chooses to end the poem with a personal loss. He uses emotive expressions like "I who am poisoned" and "I who have cursed" to express his suffering; thus, the figurative approaches are consistent with the explored idea of colonization. The discussed symbols and pictures are responsible for the poem's impact and consistency with the previously discussed background.

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