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SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN DEREK WALCOTT'S DREAM ON MONKEY MOUNTAIN

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ABSTRACT

Derek Alton Walcott, a prominent playwright, poet and painter was born at St.Lucia which is an island in the Caribbean region that formerly belonged to the British Empire, but gained independence in 1979. He was of mixed black, Dutch and English origin. St.Lucia had a hybrid British and French influence and it was an island that belonged to the British and French alternately. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1992.

In the Derek's play Dream on Monkey Mountain we find an evinced interest in the situation of his island of St.Lucia and he wished to chronicle his island. He was filled with an intense desire to depict the core and essence of his Caribbean environment. Later, he approached the theme with greater maturity and he was able to overlook the faults of his ancestors who were both victims and in a sense beneficiary of the slave trade. In the play, Walcott strives hard to interpret the nature of Caribbean identity. The most relevant aspect in the play is the quest for identity which the protagonist, Makak is out to look for. He prefers to live away from the flare of society which comprised a racial mix of people. In the play, colonialism played a vital role in disgracing the denizens of the land. It also shows the damaging effect on the human soul which is portrayed exquisitely.

Keywords: Beneficiary, Carribbean identity, Denizen

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Derek Alton Walcott, a prominent playwright, poet and painter was born at St.Lucia which is an island in the Caribbean region that formerly belonged to the British Empire, but gained independence in 1979. He is the founder of Trinidad Theatre Workshop and has written a great number of plays for this workshop. He was of mixed black, Dutch and English origin. St.Lucia had a hybrid British and French influence and it was an island that belonged to the British and French alternately. He is universally recognized for his multicultural commitment. His enthrallment of painting reflects in his work references to the great European artists like

Cezanna, and Gaugin. Later, he shifted himself in the field of writing and trepidation himself with the problems of his country. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1992.

In the Derek's play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* we find an evinced interest in the situation of his island of St. Lucia and he wished to chronicle his island. He was filled with an intense desire to depict the crux and quintessence of his Caribbean environment. Later, he approached the theme with greater maturity and he was able to overlook the faults of his antecedents who were both victims of the slave trade. In the play, we perceive that Derek employ of colloquial language when the characters speak to one another which blemishes out that they are not familiar with formal or correct speech patterns.

Walcott strives hard to interpret the nature of Caribbean identity. The slave trade had an adverse impact and the blacks felt a sense of alienation as they were moved from their native land. Walcott reflects this with the character of Makak which he frequently refers to Africa as the land of his dream, identity and roots. This kind of language exists in a major part of the play. But the contrast is clear when Makak speaks himself in a soliloquy or speaks as if he is caught up in a state of trance indicating his nature i.e., the colour of black.

"I was a king among shadows. Either the shadows were real, and I was no king, or it is my own kingliness that created the shadows. Either way, I am lonely, lost, and old man again....

.... We are wrapped in black air, we are black, ourselves shadows in the firelight of the white man's mind. Soon, soon it will be morning, praise God, and the dream will rise like vapor." (*Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* 304)

During such times, his language is not merely formal or precise. It has a poetic quality in it. Here, we should come to know that Walcott was also a gifted poet. He makes his protagonist to speak in poetry. Hence, we find this contrast very clearly in the play. Derek also reflected the other feature that is the enactment of tribal rituals. This element contributes to make the play distinctly a Caribbean one which includes song; musical instruments, masks and the use of smoke and loud cries are employed. These rituals often involve the use of colours and are enacted in forests, market – places and the busy streets.

The most relevant aspect in the play is the quest for identity which the protagonist is out to look for. It explores the Caribbean cultural experience with its heterogeneous fusion of British imperialism and black identity as a springboard for Walcott's coherent deformation. In the play, Walcott experienced the tension between the cultural heritage of the old world and the newly emerging traditions of the new one. The play is a complex allegory which is concerned with racial identity which deals with the Makak's dream in which he finally discovers his self-worth as a black man. The dramatist who lives in St. Lucia was dominated with Afro-Caribbean folk customs and traditions, especially in the countryside. So, the dramatist reflected this with the character of Makak where Makak was caught up in a conflict between two different influences i.e., Caribbean and Europeanized culture and was keen to find out for himself the true nature of his own racial identity.

The protagonist Felix Gobain who calls himself as Makak is caught up in an imaginary situation as in a dream. Actually, in French Makak means Ape. The setting is a West Indian island and when Makak lands in jail for his unruly behaviour, he pleads with the judges to leave him alone with his dream. He pleads his own case and bears testimony to the fact of his dream and tells them –

"Sirs, I does catch fits. I fall in a frenzy every full moon light. I does be possessed. And after that, I am not responsible. I responsible only to God who spoke to me in the form of awoman on Monkey Mountain. I am God's warrior." (226)

When we see Makak we realize that his state of mind is something which is terribly wrong with him. He feels disillusioned because he feels by him own identity i.e., he is black and he wants to strive to find a remedy for it. This can be achieved by seeing or looking up to the whites. Hence, he dreams of a beautiful white woman who he believes that she has been sent to speak to him by God himself. This dream is only a sub-conscious mind of Makak where he serves to strengthen his own view that his problem can be solved only by considering the Whites to be his superiors. White culture and White superiority has so powerfully impacted these colonies that it created in them a feeling of inferiority and non-acceptance. Also, the feeling that to be

accepted one had to be white or behave like a white man was deeply ingrained in black consciousness. Derek uses the symbolism like darkness for the lost feeling of the native population. The prison is a symbol of colonial rule in which liberty was sacrificed. This approach explains Makak's quest for identity which he hopes would find for him and his nation an attitude of acceptance. Walcott drama expresses the main focus of his attitude to the political, racial and psychological problems of the post-colonial world.

In his dream, he believes or finds that the White woman would help him to scatter his enemies and slaughter those around him. On seeing this vision he experiences a sense of confidence and strength. In that frenzied state of mind, he lets out a cry and begins to dance with the splendor of a lion. In a reverie, he dreams about a beautiful woman who approaches him and was surprised to know that she knew everything about him and calls him by his name. She beckons him to be by her side and begins to talk to him. Her words clearly reinforce the fact of the protagonist/playwright sense of poor self-esteem.

Makak was a charcoal burner who believes that he looks ugly. He prefers to live away from the flare of society which comprised a racial mix of people – chiefly the blacks and the whites. We learn that Makak is desperately seeking to find a place of respect for him. Makak also feels enthused of the white woman and he feels determined to succeed with her help. We also notice that ironic effects appear in the events.

When his romantic dream is presented, it is a fantasy of a white lady who protects him and also takes care of him thus assuming a naturally superior position. Makak is only a recipient of her kindness and encouragement. This we find in Makak's narration –

“She says something I will never forget. She says I should not live so any more, here in the forest, frighten of people because I think I ugly. She says that I come from the family of lions and kings.”

For the purpose of goal, he dreams himself in the role of a champion and a leader of the masses. He also dreams that he holds a piece of burning charcoal in his hand and tells the people who are surrounded i.e., his wives, his warriors and the masks of pagan gods to see whether he possess miraculous powers.

In his dream, he is able to notice the dreadful intricacies of his countrymen. He sees them without roots, without identity and also enveloped in darkness with their own sense of clarity is missing. Realizing this state of existence and to overcome this, he holds up the promise of better time ahead by reminding them of their hidden strength and potential as –

“Sing as you sing in the belly of the boat
You are trees under pressure
You are brilliant diamonds
In the hand of your God”. (249)

Often he remembers the land of his roots – Africa and believes that Monkey Mountain represents his African roots. He takes a role of a spiritual healer and invokes God's help for the purpose. His need for Divine Help, guidance and intervention is expressed along with the need to restore to the black people a sense of self-worth, dignity and respect. For instance when he heals a dying man, he kneels down and invokes Divine Help:

“Like the cedars of Lebanon
Like the plantations of Zion,
The hands of God plant me on
Monkey Mountain. (248)
He calleth to the humble.
And from that height
I see you all as trees
Like a twisted forest
Like trees without names a forest with no roots”. (248)

“Pray for the world to change. Not your friend. Pray for the day people will not need money, when faith alone will move mountain. Pray for the day when poverty done, and for when niggers everywhere could walk upright like men. You think I doubt you, you think I don't respect you and love you and grateful to you? But I look at that moon, and it like a plate that a dog lick clean, bright as a florin, but dogs does chase me out of

people yard when I go round begging, Food for my master, food." And I look there, and that thing shining there, that is the ocean. Behind that, is Africa! How we going there? You think this... [Holds up mask] this damned stupidity go take us there? Either you let me save money for us, or here, at this crossroads, the partnership divide". (*Conversation with Derek Walcott 254 – 255*)

A mock trial is held so as to fight the superiority of the whites. Such as famous characters of West like Plato, Ptolemy, Florence Nightingale are accused of neglecting other races and therefore condemned to death by the African tribes. Another trail we find that Lestrade Corporal has abandoned his loyalty to the Western world. He returns to his black inheritance and swears loyalty to Makak. He tries to convince him that he should not depend on the white man for counsel and so he tells him to do away with her. He also warns him of the disastrous consequences of his dependent approach. The white culture has dominated his mind to such an extent that his own identity has been lost. In order to recover it, he should erase it from his dream and imagination. He says about the white woman of Makak's dreams as –

"She is the wife of the devil, the white witch. She is the mirror of the moon that this ape looks into and find himself unbearable. She is all that is pure, all that he cannot touch. You see her status in white stone and you turn your face away, mixed with abhorrence and lust, with destruction and desire". (319)

Finally he tells to Makak – "She is the white light that paralyzed your mind, that led you into this confusion. It is you who created her, so Kill her! Kill her!". (319)

This impact makes Makak executes his plan to destroy the illusion that had been tormenting him. He holds the curved sword in his hands and brings down and woman is beheaded. This shows that eventually he gives up his dream and brutally kills the woman a sacrifice that symbolizes a reaction against a life of fantasy which is far removed from reality.

It is a period of dawn on Makak that he will look an inner meaning and strength and not rely on external factors especially on the Whites for recognition, acceptance and identity.

The significant aspect in the play is that colonialism played a vital role in disgracing the denizens of the land. It also shows the damaging effect on the human soul which is portrayed exquisitely. Especially it reflects, when the white man with his superior style came into contact with the blacks, he made the latter feel acutely conscious of his inferiority stemming from the colour of his skin. In the crux of the play we see how Makak eventually comes to turns with himself and his race and culture. In the play, Makak initially fantasizes about his African roots. But eventually we read in the epilogue how his native visionary is acquitted of his misdeeds. The Western civilization with its important characters is eventually sentenced to death. Finally, we should bear in mind that hatred and vendetta meant little to Walcott. What he strove to gain was the identity of Makak which represented the identity of his race/nation.

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