Representing Hybridity in Derek Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to read Derek Walcott's play, *A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1983) in light of the concept of hybridity. Initially, the paper introduces the significance of the concept of hybridity in post-colonial writings. Then, it shows how far the universality of Shakespeare is challenged and decentered by the artistic attempts of the colonized through using meta-theatricality. Finally, the paper shows the ways through which Derek Walcott manages to create a Caribbean hybrid space that culturally and artistically includes both the colonizer's legacy represented by Shakespeare and the Caribbean native culture represented by Chris's local/dialect play through the image of a hybrid bird that exists in Egypt and Trinidad.

Key Words: Hybridity, Derek Walcott, Caribbean hybrid identity, Meta-theatricality

الخلاصة

هذا البحث هو محاولة لقراءة مسرحية ديريك والكوت، فرع من النيل الازرق (١٩٨٣)، في ضوء مصطلح الهجنة. في البداية، يقدم هذا البحث اهمية مفهوم الهجنة في كتابات مابعد الاستعمار.ثم يظهر البحث الى اي مدى يتم تحدي عالمية شكسبير وازاحة مركزيتها بواسطة المحاولات الفنية *للمستعمَرين* من خلال استعمال الميتاثيتر. واخيرا ، يظهر البحث الطرق التي تمكن من خلالها ديريك والكوت من انشاء مساحة كاريبية هجينة تتضمن ثقافيا وفنيا ارث *المستعمِر* مثمثلة بشكسبير و الثقافة المحلية الكاريبية مثمثلة بمسرحية كرس المحلية من خلال صورة الطائر الهجين الذي يوجد في مصر وترينيداد

1. Introduction

Derived from the Latin root *hybrida*, the offspring between a wild boar and a sow, the English word hybrid attained a wide array of meanings, when it denoted the offspring of wild and domesticated animals, plants and people. Hybridity, as something emerging from problematic conjunctures of things, culture and ideas, is a highly relevant conceptual framework when approaching postcolonial writings. Postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha accentuate the effects of hybridity in bringing together different sorts of connotations and powers within the same moments of practice. According to Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, the majority of post-colonial writings emphasize the hybridized nature of culture as

a sign of strength. This is because the post-colonial world is not based on one-way process in which the colonizer dominates the colonized, but a kind of hybridity that excludes the colonial categorizations of colonizer and colonized (2003: 183) by creating an in-between space that negotiates the differences between two cultures (Noogvelt, 2001: 170).

This paper explores how Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity functions as an analytic tool to read Derek Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile.* This reading of the play is highly relevant to show how Walcott transforms the performance of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* into a kind of parody in which a cultural encounter is performed. For Bhabha (1994), hybridity is a continuous process that shows inequalities of power, and subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures (Young, 1995). Therefore, it is not simply a mixture of new and old rudiments into a hybrid ideology or practice. For Bhabha, hybridity emerges from 'mixed' cultural products which allows a subversive space through which the denied knowledge of the colonized enters the colonial discourse and destabilizes its authority (Bhabha, 1994: 162). Stated differently, the encounter between the colonizer and colonized people creates a hybrid space between the two

cultures that is mutually interdependent to construct a shared culture. Here, hybridity becomes a strategy of deconstructing the colonial power through the exclusion of races, languages, and cultures. This includes a fusion of cultural elements and practices from the cultures of both the colonizer and the colonized (Yazdiha, 2010: 31).

Bhabha derives his concept of hybridity from Mikhail Bakhtin's hybridization. For Bakhtin, hybrid construction is:

> an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical(syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speeches manners, two manners, two styles, two 'languages' two semantic and axiological belief systems (1981: 304).

Furthermore, Bakhtin distinguishes between two types of hybridity. The first is conscious (i.e. intentional) while the second is unconscious. The conscious or the intentional hybridity indicates the “ability of one voice to ironize and unmask the other within the same utterance” (Young, 2005: 19). In the unconscious hybridity, cultures or languages absorb elements from others by borrowings, mimetic

appropriations, and inventions (Werbner, 2015: 4-5). According to this formula, hybridity can be linguistic, cultural, and racial. The linguistic hybridity manifests itself in languages such as the creole (Ashcroft et al., 2013: 135-136). Indeed, creolization is “specific to, and is best understood in the context of, Caribbean history and societies” (Brathwaite cited in Ashcroft et al., 2013: 69). During the colonial period, the colonizers attempted to impose their own culture on the Caribbean people, i.e. African slaves and indentured labors, who instead of adopting the colonizer’s culture, adapted a new culture that is to say creole culture. The latter is a blend of several cultures such as Spanish, English, French, and African. Thus, creolization is a process that combines aspects of both "acculturation" and "inter-culturation". While the first refers "to the process of absorption of one culture by another", the second denotes “a more reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each” (ibid). Caribbean culture is characterized by its inclusiveness, diversity and hybridity. These are, according to Donnell and Welsh, "the foundation for both Caribbean aesthetics and cultural identities" (1996: 5). In *A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1983), Derek Walcott presents how

Caribbean hybridity is conceived and represented.

In his drama, Walcott attempts to fuse the two conflicting cultures of Europe and Africa together. For instance, he blends European forms with African-derived West Indian vernacular performance forms and styles in plays like *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1958) and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967). In *Pantomime* and *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, Walcott merges English and creole humorously (Baugh, 2006: 24). His dramatic aim is to deconstruct the colonial dichotomies of Europe and Africa for the sake of promoting cross-cultural view of the Caribbean region (Thieme, 1999: 1). Instead of "stripping away of colonial Euro-centrism […] to revive indigenous cultural expressions", Walcott uses "overlapping legacies of the colonizer and the colonized in the Caribbean to claim the rich diversity of the region's cultural resources while still recognizing the trauma of the colonial experience" (Pollard, 2001: 198).

2. The Context of Derek Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile*

A Branch of the Blue Nile (henceforth *The Blue Nile*) was first produced by Stage One and The Nation Publishing Company at Stage One in Barbados on November 25, 1983, directed by Earl Warner (183). This production received

many enthusiastic reviews for its nativism. For King, the production of *The Blue Nile* is purely "international West Indian" because the actors in *The Blue Nile* are from various Caribbean islands such as Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and St-Lucia (2000: 425).

The Blue Nile is a meta-theatrical that is set on a bare stage in present time. The main plot of the play exposes the experiences of a troupe of actors who attempt to rehearse a performance of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (184). The characters are conscious of their role-playing and the difficulties of playing Shakespeare. This theatrical group consists of Harvey, a white Trinidadian director with British theatre experience. Gavin is a black West Indian actor who is struggling to be successful on Western stage. Marylin is a female actress and finally Sheila who is the main character. This rehearsal is intervened by an off-stage love relationship between Sheila and Chris. Within this theatrical framework, Chris, a director and an actor, is also writing a play about the company.

Walcott's dramatic aim of using a meta-play is to question how far "the universalist assumptions about Shakespeare can be effectively challenged by localized creative practices" (Döring, 2005: 17). In the play, the use

of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* creates a tension between the English and the African legacies on a Trinidad stage. The two directors, Harvey and Chris, have their different versions of how to develop a Caribbean theatre. While Harvey introduces Shakespeare's "colonial" play of *Antony and Cleopatra* to the Trinidadian theatre, Chris presents a native play that emphasizes the Caribbean local experience (Matsuda, 2010: 25). Here the master text undergoes a kind of creole transformation thus it problematizes the cultural authority of the text of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

3. Harvey's play and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

As already noted, Harvey is a director, adopting the white British culture. He comes back to his home country to raise the standards of the local actors, as stated in the stage direction of the play (234). *The Blue Nile* opens with a rehearsal of Shakespeare's play of *Anthony and Cleopatra* (185). Harvey directs the Trinidadian actors such as Chris, Sheila, Gavin, and Marylin. Sheila is given the role of Cleopatra who begins the play with words that are directly taken from Shakespeare's play, "Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have Immortal longings in me: now no more, The juice of

Egypt's grape" (ibid). Cleopatra (Sheila) mourns the death of Antony who represents Rome while preparing herself to commit suicide. Walcott's choice for this scene from Shakespeare's play of *Antony and Cleopatra* might be taken to denote the colonizer's perspective toward the colonized represented by Cleopatra who laments with "immortal longing" the end of Western domination represented by Antony/Rome. Cleopatra's "immortal longing" alludes to Trinidad, a West Indian island that gets its independence from the British empire in 1962 (So Young, 2015: 1).

Walcott draws the audience's attention to the binary opposition between the Western world or the masculinized Antony/Rome and the Orient world represented by the feminized Cleopatra/Egypt. Such an opposition is captured by Harvey's stage direction. In a scene when Harvey claps for Sheila's performance, he draws her away and whispers, "What is all this sexual hesitation, Sheila? You know how sensual his [Antony] corpse is to her [Cleopatra]?" (185). Here, Harvey's gender discourse emphasizes the imbalance between the two sexes. This, according to Matsuda, reveals a Eurocentric, colonial and patriarchal view that labels the Orient represented by Cleopatra 'with inferiority'

(2010: 23). Further, Sheila's dark skin exacerbates her sense of inferiority that leads her finally to declare 'I'm not her [Cleopatra], Harvey. I can't play all that' (185). By her refusal to identify herself with Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Sheila decenters Shakespeare's Cleopatra who is according to Jaynie Anderson "a universal icon" (2003: 37).

Harvey's direction of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* questions the role of the language as a medium of power and domination. According to Ashcroft et al, "post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the center and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (2004: 37). This is done by "capturing and re-moulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege" (ibid: 37-38). In *The Blue Nile*, the characters attempt to appropriate the language of Shakespeare's play to their native context:

> HARVEY: Christopher, Gavin. As we agreed. Correct?
> GAVIN "Saw you my lord?"
> CHRIS: Your lord? No. He gone out. [*Laughter.* GAVIN *controls his laughter, resumes*] (185-186)

In this extract, Gavin and Chris deconstruct Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* by

replacing Shakespeare's original lines with a comic West Indian dialect because they have some difficulty in coping up with Shakespeare's proper tragic tone. However, for Harvey, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is pertinent to the West Indian society as "there's disorder here [Trinidad] no trust, no center, no authority" (194). Tobias Döring points out that Walcott's *The Blue Nile* questions the viability of cultural translation through Harvey's failure to stage Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In this sense, Walcott's *The Blue Nile* addresses "the controversy associated with intercultural appropriations of Shakespeare in a post-colonial context" (2005:18). This scene ends with Chris's words, "We have found some truth," and that the truth "go split us up" (193). The truth Chris referring to is that the Trinidadian theatre troupe would split up into two camps. These two camps are represented by Harvey's colonial play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Chris's dialect/local play. Harvey's colonial play emphasizes the colonizer culture by rehearsing a colonial play. On the other hand, Chris's dialect/local play emphasizes the local dialect and experience of the native people.

4. Staging Chris's dialect/local play

In addition to Harvey, Chris, an actor and a playwright, writes a dialect play that is a purely Trinidadian comedy taken from the native traditions using domestic places. Chris presents his dialect play in Trinidadian Creole that is the native language of the people and not in English. In this way, Chris's dialect/comedy play may stand as a counterpart to Harvey's colonial play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

As in Harvey's play, Chris's dialect play begins with a rehearsal in which Marylin plays Serafina while Gavin plays Dolphus. Both wear a "burlesque peasant clothes, soft felt hats, big boots" (210). On the stage, there is a "cutout of banana trees onstage" (ibid). The characters' peasantry costumes and the stage-props of the banana trees reveal 'real Caribbean.' As that of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Chris's play is nothing more than a play as it is artificial and far away from the lives of these characters, thus the characters feel themselves "out of place" (Reed Dasen, 2005:106). This is clearly shown when Gavin mocks Chris's dialect play by distorting the pronunciation of Shakespeare's "Richard the third" into his Trinidadian accent of "Richard de Turd" (213). This underpins a severe criticism to Chris's dialect play that is a "[t]urd World shit" (ibid). In a different instance,

Gavin interrupts Chris's dialect play, "why we doing this shit [Chris's dialect play]?" (ibid). Chris defends his dialect play by saying that despite his white English wife, he still speaks Trinidadian language that he considers his language, "I'se a Trinidadian, and that's my language" (ibid). For Chris, the European classics have nothing to do with him or the local audience when he declares: "I ain't care who the arse it is, Shakespeare, Racine, Chekhov, nutten in there had to do with my life, or the life of all them black people" (214-215). In his constant protest, Chris "sounds too much like someone playing a part for an audience of believers" (Baugh, 2006: 145). This is manifested in his criticism of Harvey's colonial ideas of introducing Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to Trinidad theatre, "I say, Harvey, this ain't England. This ain't New York. You go put shit in people head. You go make them feel they white" (215). For Chris, staging Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* make people feel white and it is better to stage a comedy play such as his dialect play that will let "[audience] laugh…till their belly hurt" (ibid).

In his discussion of Shakespeare's legacies, Michael Neill concludes that "[t]o cut oneself off from Shakespeare in the name of a decolonizing politics is not to liberate oneself from the

tyranny of the past, but to pretend that the past does not exist" (2004: 184). Thus, by neglecting Shakespeare, Chris's dialect play does not decolonize and liberate the Caribbean from the colonial past. Nevertheless, it pretends that such past does not exist. In this regard, Renu Juneja poses the question of whether staging Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in Trinidad theatre is going to indict the Caribbean culture as "still colonised, unable to break free from the hegemonic canon of the West" (1992: 243). In his essay, *What the Twilight Says*, Walcott answers Juneja's question by pointing out that, "The pride of the colonial in the culture of his mother country [England] was fiercer than her true children's because the colonial feared to lose her" (1998: 17). Thus, for Walcott that "the West Indian too is a legitimate inheritor of Western tradition; and this inheritance can be transformed, creolised, assimilated to render an experience that is uniquely West Indian" (Juneja, 1992: 243). Obviously, Walcott does not approve Chris's dialect play because it cuts off the West Indian from his legitimate Western tradition represented by Shakespeare.

When Harvey asks Chris "Who's this [Chris's dialect play] for? The audience or the actors?" (215), Chris immediately casts his answer in Shakespearean terms

(Erickson, 2010: 228), "I write for that madman screaming in the street. His language […] Phil is my Lear, my Mad Tom out in the rain" (p. 215). Peter Erickson points out that by "Chris's own self-deprecating admission, his local play amounts to" (2010: 228) "a damned stupid West Indian back-yard comedy" (205) and it is for this reason unable to offer a convincing alternative (Erickson, 2010: 228). Marylin confirms this truth when she says, "I find it [Chris's dialect play] funny. I enjoy doing this nonsense" (216). The rehearsal of Chris's folk/dialect play represents a "complete artistic breakdown" (Erickson, 2010: 228). Tobias Döring also points out that Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile* does not stage reservations against Harvey's play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, but also against Chris's Trinidadian comedy which also fails because despite "its good intention, it seems to exhaust itself in folk clichés" (2005: 20). Obviously, Walcott's *The Blue Nile* fails to approve any stable opposition. Harvey's colonial play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Chris's local play must come to nothing as they confine themselves to one place only rather than trying to mediate the spatial and the cultural differences. Walcott acknowledges this spatial and cultural differences by mediating the cultural

differences through Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (ibid).

5. Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

According to the stage directions, there is a "papier-mâché sphinx's head is upstage" (228) to help Harvey establishes the Egyptian context on the Trinidadian stage. In his new hybrid play, Harvey decides to interweave Chris's local play with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In Harvey's new hybrid play, Marylin plays the role of Cleopatra who speaks Shakespeare's original lines. However, Gavin who plays the role of Shakespeare's clown, "gives a hilarious Trinidadian, dialectical takeoff on the great play by the imperial bard" (Breslow, 1989: 38). In the following dialogue, Marylin/Cleopatra prepares for her final departure, encounters the Clown/Gavin who speaks Trinidadian creole. The clown brings Cleopatra the asp with which she commits suicide (Dasenbrock, 2005: 107):

> MARYLIN / CLEOPATRA: "Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there, That kills and pains not?"
> GAVIN / CLOWN**:** "Madam, I have him, but 'tain't go be me who go ask you handle him, because one nip from this small fellow and Basil is your husband; this little person will make the marriage, in poison and in person,

> but the brides who go to that bed don't ever get up." (p. 228).

Here Harvey hybridizes the original play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* by making the clown replaces Shakespeare's original lines with his Trinidadian Creole. Here, *The Blue Nile* articulates Walcott's vision of an indigenous theatre by "hybridizing Shakespearian forms with local ones" (Gilbert and Tompkins, 2002: 22-23). It is important not to consider this hybridized scene between Cleopatra and the clown as an evidence of local adaptation or to misread its transcultural essence because Walcott's protagonists do not adopt hybridity without questions since they have serious doubts about imported texts such as that of Shakespeare that offers them a raw material to work with. For Döring, this double failure of Harvey and Chris's plays under rehearsal opens up new opportunities represented by Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (2005: 21).

Walcott's *The Blue Nile* shows a creative interaction between the two styles, cultures, and languages in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Chris's local play. For instance, in act one, scene one, Harvey's attempt to rehearse a scene from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is repeatedly subverted by the Trinidadian

actors who speak creole language humorously instead of Shakespeare's proper English and tragic tone. The creole functions "only as comic put-down of Shakespeare's elevated speech" (2006: 145). However, the creole interventions "betray the actors' insecurity with the Shakespeare" (ibid). Walcott's *The Blue Nile* represents a Caribbean appropriation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, even with the feeling that the original is maintained (ibid). Marylin/Cleopatra speaks the following lines on the production's opening night of Harvey's new hybrid play in which a farce overtakes Cleopatra's immortal longings (Bradshaw, 2011: 242):

> MARYLIN / CLEOPATRA: Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have Immortal longings in me: now no more The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear Antony call. (230).

The intentional linguistic hybridization of Shakespeare's original lines with the clown's Trinidadian Creole is echoed here by Harvey's new hybrid play in an unintentional comedy that hybridizes Shakespeare's tragic tone with a comic tone. When by mistake, the stagehand, Wilfred rolls out a prop from Chris's local play on the stage, "a cutout of banana or fig

trees," just as Cleopatra begins her suicide speech (Dasenbrock, 2005: 107). Wilfred places the banana behind Marylin/Cleopatra and the cutout blocks the cutout sphinx (ibid). In this regard, Stephen Breslow points out that Harvey's new play "is marred by a ludicrous mistake of scenery when one of Chris's sets is pushed onto the stage: it is painted with banana trees instead of the proper Egyptian set" (1989: 38). Wilfred's unintentional mistake makes Marylin goes angry. Wilfred's mistake also irritates Harvey who screams from offstage (Bradshaw, 2011: 242), "Wilfred! Wilfred! Move the figs! [WILFRED *goes to the sphinx*] *Not the F.E.G., not the effigy, the figs! Move the fucking bananas!"* (230)

Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* ends with Wilfred who "backs off rapidly, bowing, as if he were part of the action. Then he returns for the banana cutout, changes his mind, grins, exits. Laughter, applause" (ibid). Obviously, Walcott reflects on the situation of the West Indian artist who faces two conflicting projects represented Harvey and Chris's plays under rehearsal. Walcott wants us to embrace this contradiction rather than eliminating it. In this sense, the "authentic Caribbeanness" is not restricted to one of those projects under rehearsal, but

the "authentic Caribbean" is the "confused, hybrid, syncretic, conflicted space. In this sense, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot be handled as a dead text or an object to be reverenced but "it must be brought into connection with the lived realities of the Caribbean, intentionally or unintentionally (Dasenbrock, 2005: 108). Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* may echo an "authentic Caribbean" because it embraces the conflict by creating a Third Space for hybridizing Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with native Trinidadian Creole. However, Yana Meerzon points out that Harvey's new hybrid version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* fails at the opening night because the reviews mock Harvey's educational and artistic attempts in Trinidad (2012: 114). Although the reviewer understands that the indigenizing lines of the clown is intentional while Wilfred's mistake is unintentional. However, the reviewer considers the two "as travesties of the original [Shakespeares *Antony and Cleopatra*]" (Dasenbrock, 2005: 107). The reviewer criticizes Harvey by saying that the only indigenous thing in Harvey's "abbreviated, aborted, and abominable mounting of *Antony and Cleopatra*" (234) is a bunch of

bananas that is trundled by Wilfred inadvertently onstage during Cleopatra's farewell speech (ibid). The reviewer considers Harvey's new hybrid play as an attack on Shakespeare who represents a "Western icon that upholds civilization" (Calbi, 2009: 8), "Certain things remain sacred, or else our civilization is threatened" (234).

6. Chris's play of "A Branch of the Blue Nile"

In addition to Harvey's new hybrid play, there is Chris whose new play (second play) entitled as "A Branch of the Blue Nile". Chris includes everything happens from the beginning to this point in his new play (251-253), "Everything we tried to do is in here" (267). Chris tells Sheila that he chooses such title "[b]ecause it ain't mainstream" (253) and "Blue" because "white it too obvious" (ibid). Chris's new play attempts to create a hybrid space for cultural negotiation between the colonizer's legacy (i.e. Shakespeare) and the Caribbean native culture represented by Chris's local play. Renu Juneja emphasizes this aspect by writing that the river is neither white nor black but it is in-between (i.e. blue). By flowing in the New World, this river represents an art that "has transmuted suffering into music; it is like the blues, fusing African forms into Western, and transforming them into something new,

creative, something distinctively these peoples own" (1992: 245). In Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile,* art especially drama represents the space of self-exploration and self-definition (ibid: 42-243). In this regard, Walcott claims that "the future of West Indian militancy lies in art" (1998: 16). Here, militancy implies a rebellion against "the colonial conceptions and judgements of art [and] also against that spurious backward journey sustained by a nostalgia for a pastoral and folk past" (Juneja, 1992: 242-243). Walcott's *The Blue Nile* is a deliberate attempt to bridge the oppositions between the white and the black, between Harvey's play of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Chris's local play. By bridging this colonial opposition, Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile* articulates "a West Indian identity that is neither the one nor the other but a distinctive fusion of the two" (ibid., 242).

Chris's new play also articulates a West Indian identity by creating a hybrid link through a bird called the "ibis" that lives in Egypt and Trinidad. Chris begins to quote from his new play in which there is a local boatman speaks to some tourists about the Caroni bird sanctuary and the natural beauty in Trinidad (Calib,2009: 12):

> It have a bird here, mister, call the ibis. The colour is pure flame. Like fire, self.

> And from what I hear, it have the same bird in Egypt, a sacred bird, with long legs, by the Nile. Now, how that bird reach here, I self don't know…. But the bird live here [Trinidad], like the same bird in Egypt. Neither bird is more beauteous than the next (254).

Edward Baugh points out that Chris comes back to Trinidad with his new script that represents his "act of contrition". Chris's new play is "a truly West Indian play" (2006: 145) because its title "will acknowledge and celebrate a link with Shakespeare and 'elsewhere' [i.e. Trinidad]; and in which the vivacity of creole will touch the note of high seriousness" (ibid). This hybrid link is evident in Chris's quote about the "ibis bird" that establishes a link between Trinidad and Shakespeare's Egypt (ibid, 146). Chris's new play goes beyond the process of writing without Shakespeare into a hybrid space of cultural negotiation of writing with Shakespeare (Calbi, 2009: 13). Chris and by extension Walcott's *The Blue Nile* turns the Caribbean stage into a contact zone between the "foreign" and the "familiar" (ibid., 3).

Chris's new script is the same play that Walcott's audience has been watching. In this sense, Walcott's metadrama takes "self-referential turn towards its uncertain position between the global/local,

Shakespeare/Chris's dialect play (Döring, 2005: 21). This self-referential turn in Chris's new play urges the audience to pose questions such as to what extent Harvey's colonial and Chris's dialect plays succeed or fail? It also presents the audience with an opportunity to reconsider Shakespeare and one's roots and origins (Calbi, 2009: 13). Gilbert and Tompkins point out that "by developing multiple self-reflexive discourse through role playing, role doubling/splitting, plays within plays, interventionary frameworks" (2002: 23), post-colonial works as Walcott's *The Blue Nile* explains, self-consciously, that they "are acting out their own histories/identities" (ibid). Unlike the dramatic figures in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Walcott's play remains onstage because its actors do not interact with the audience directly (Breslow, 1989: 37).

Tobias Döring points out that "A Branch of the Blue Nile", which Chris uses as a title for the double performance, suggests a programmatic point. This goes back to the truth of the Nile river that has represented the wonder of the unknown world. The ambiguity of its sources always fuel fantasies related to the quest for true origins. The "Blue Nile" represents a paradigmatic for several Western travelers whose intention is to break

through "Dark Continent". In Walcott's *The Blue Nile*, the quest for authentic origins results in recognizing "pluralized and branching networks of belonging, and that the claim of sources yields to claims of destination" (2005: 21). Therefore, it is significant that it is Chris is the one who writes his new play because it is he who insists on the quest for authenticity. In this case, Chris's dialect play is challenged and transformed by his new hybrid play. Obviously, Walcott's *The Blue Nile* ends with Chris who lives up to his name, "Christopher, or 'Christo-ferus', which already implies a history of transference and cultural transformation" (ibid).

Conclusion

The Blue Nile is meta-theatrical play that questions the universality of staging Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* through the Trinidadian theatre troupe who attempt to deconstruct it by turning its tragic tone into a comic one. Walcott wants to mediate the cultural difference by creating a hybrid space for cultural negotiation through Harvey who hybridizes the original text of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* with the native culture and language of the Caribbean. Walcott also mediates the cultural difference through Chris's second play that attempts to create a hybrid link between Shakespeare's Egypt and Trinidad through the

image of a bird called the "ibis". In other words, Chris's second play attempts to go beyond the anti-colonial vision of writing without Shakespeare into a hybrid space of writing with Shakespeare.

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