WALCOTT'S WORLD

Derek Walcott, who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature this year, was born in 1930, in St.Lucia, a Caribbean island that passed from British to French hands no less than 13 times. The island's rich heritage encompassing Carib, African, French and British traditions, its schizophrenia as a British colony which was mainly Catholic, its history of slavery and colonialism, find expression in Walcott's poetry, as he explores his identity as a 'divided child', an exile, a mulatto of style. The figure of Crusoe, who was castaway on a Caribbean island figures prominently in Walcott's work, as he identifies with Crusoe the castaway, survivor, artist and coloniser, while also acknowledging Friday, the colonised ancestor.

CRUSOE'S JOURNAL

I looked now upon the world as a thing remote, which I had nothing to do with, no expectation from, and, indeed, no desire about. In a word, I had nothing to do with it, nor was ever like to have; so I thought it looked as we may perhaps look upon it hereafter, viz., as a place I had lived in but was come out of it; and well might I say, as Father Abraham to Dives, 'Between me and thee is a great gulf fixed'.

-ROBINSON CRUSOE

Once we have driven past Mundo Nuevo trace safely to this beach house perched between ocean and green, churning forest the intellect appraises objects surely, even the bare necessities of style are turned to use, like those plain iron tools he salvages from shipwreck, hewing a prose as odorous as raw wood to the adze; out of such timbers came our first book, our profane Genesis whose Adam speaks that prose which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself with poetry's surprise, in a green world, one without metaphors; like Christofer he bears in speech mnemonic as a missionary's the Word to savages, it's shape an earthen, water-bearing vessel's whose sprinkling alters us into good Fridays who recite His praise parroting our master's

style and voice, we make his language ours, converted cannibals we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ.

All shapes, all objects multiplied from his,
our ocean's Proteus;
in childhood, his derelict's old age
was like a god's. (Now pass
in memory, in serene parenthesis,
the cliff-deep leeward coast
of my own island filing past the noise
of stuttering canvas,
some noon-struck village, Choiseul, Canaries,
crouched crocodile canoes,
a savage settlement from Henty's novels,
Marryat or R.L.S.,
with one boy signalling at the sea's edge,
though what he cried is lost.)
So time, that makes us objects, multiplies

our natural loneliness.

CRUSOE'S JOURNAL...

For the hermetic skill, that from earth's clays shapes something without use, and, separate from itself, lives somewhere else, sharing with every beach a longing for those gulls that cloud the cays with raw, mimetic cries, never surrenders wholly, for it knows it needs another's praise like hoar, half-cracked Ben Gunn, until it cries at last, "O happy desert!" and learns again the self-creating peace of islands. So from this house that faces nothing but the sea, his journals assume a household use; we learn to shape from them, where nothing was the language of a race and since the intellect demands its mask that sun-cracked, bearded face provides us with the wish to dramatize ourselves at nature's cost, to attempt a beard, to squint through the sea-haze, posing as naturalists, , drunks, castaways, beachcombers, all of us yearn for those fantasies of innocence, for our faith's arrested phase when the clear voice startled itself saying "water, heaven, Christ," hoarding such heresies as God's loneliness moves in His smallest creatures.

DEREK WALCOTT

Pravada thanks Vivimarie Van Der Poorten and Lakmali Gunawardena for their help in bringing out this issue.