

Absolutely Postcolonial? —Singular Relationality, Comparability, and Walcott’s *Tiepolo’s Hound**

Chun-yen Chen

Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University
162, Sec. 1, He-ping East Road, Taipei 10610, Taiwan
E-mail: jochen@ntnu.edu.tw

Abstract

Derek Walcott’s *Tiepolo’s Hound*, at a cursory glance, appears to proceed along the lines of racial identity politics. This essay argues that this narrative poem, in effect, articulates some kind of “singular relationality,” that is, some kind of self-definition that is not predetermined by essentialist categories, of racial or cultural differences, for example. Even if the formations of singularity may be shot through by racial groundings, these groundings, I suggest, should be read as “relationality” rather than any precedence in time or importance. “Relationality” refers to relations as the “content” of an encounter, but also points to the process of forming relations as a problem. In this essay, I first tease out the various “relations” in the poem, with a view to demonstrating how Walcott revamps old postcolonial themes beyond identitarian confines. As some of the

Received December 10, 2008; accepted July 3, 2009; last revised August 20, 2009

Proofreaders: Jeffrey Cuvilier, Chia-chi Tseng, Kuei-feng Hu, Ying-tzu Chang
* The writing of this essay benefited from the funding support of the Taiwan National Science Council (grant 95-2411-H-003-008). I also thank the two anonymous readers for their constructive suggestions.

scenarios of relationality presented in the poem strike one as “non-relational” at first sight, the question of relationality is thus translated into the issue of comparability. From a close reading of this poem, I proceed to touch upon the ethos of comparability with regard to postcoloniality. I hope to show that, more than a thematic idiom, “singular relationality” also stands as a promising epistemic mode that can help us construe the transcultural encounters in the postcolonial context without falling back into the dubious category of the rational subject or essentializing identity politics.

Key Words: Derek Walcott, *Tiepolo's Hound*, singularity, relationality, comparability

[I]t is only the human imaginary that cannot be contaminated by its objects. Because it alone diversifies them infinitely yet brings them back, nonetheless, to a full burst of unity. The highest point of knowledge is always a poetics. (Glissant, 1997: 140)

I. Between the Singular and the Relational

In Peter Hallward's 2001 book *Absolutely Postcolonial*, a forceful critique is advanced on the epistemological foundations of postcolonial theory as a discipline. He takes issue with the tendency of what he calls "singularization" in postcolonial theory, which he defines as a mode of thinking operating in accordance with its self-created logic and acting in the absence of any external criteria for its configuration: "Singular configurations replace the interpretation or representation *of* reality with an immanent participation in its production or creation: in the end, at the limit of 'absolute postcoloniality,' there will be nothing left, nothing outside itself, to which it could be specific" (2001: xii; emphasis original). Writers and thinkers of the singular mode write in the Deleuzian "world without others," so to speak,¹ in a mode inapplicable to other historical contexts. Prime examples of this singular thinking in the postcolonial context, according to Hallward, include Homi K. Bhabha's notions of incommensurability and untranslatability, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's configuration of the silenced non-agent (the subaltern), and her concept of ethics as the experience of the impossible.

Postcolonial theory is flawed for Hallward not only in its promotion of an impossible singularity as manifested in Bhabha and Spivak. Hallward is troubled by yet another strand in postcolonial theory, which he calls "the specified" mode and by

¹ See Gilles Deleuze (1990), especially the chapter entitled "Michel Tournier and the World without Others."

which he means the celebration of the particular, the heterogeneous, or the hybrid along the lines of cultural essentialism. The danger of the specified, Hallward contends, lies in its tendency to objectify or pin down the subject with essentialist terms such as class, race, and gender. While the specified trajectory in postcolonial theory makes routine attack on Bhabha and Spivak for their context-free formulations, Hallward argues that the two seemingly opposing positions in effect reinforce each other by a symmetrical tension: Bhabha's and Spivak's "homogeneously postcolonial" propositions stand for "the virtual Unity of *the* postcolonial," to which corresponds the "multiplicity of its actual expression" or the "heterogeneously postcolonial" position represented by the specified (2001: 36; emphasis original).

Distrustful of both the auto-affecting "singular" and the trivializing "specified" modes, Hallward posits "the specific" to be *the* critical model for our time. The specific pivots upon two keywords: relational and universal. On the one hand, it "yields elements whose individuality can only be discerned through the relations they maintain with themselves, with their environment, and with other individuals" (2001: 4). On the other hand, it attends to certain universal "external criteria," the criteria that Hallward says are missing from the singular mode such as "freedom from immediate determination, the ability to think and innovate, the ability to make a genuine decision and explore its consequences" (2001: 49). The specific will always involve the taking of sides and making of decisions on the part of the individual; it is, therefore, a category of the subject: "We become specific, we become *subjects* as opposed to objects, we learn to *think* rather than merely recognise or represent, to the degree that we actively transcend the specified or objectified" (2001: 48; emphasis original). Hallward explicitly ascribes emancipatory politics to this kind of subject formation and insists that a political claim becomes genuinely emancipatory only when the claim has established some sort of universality applicable. It is in this spirit that he finds inadequate postcolonial theory's auto-generation on

the one hand and fetishization of particularity on the other. What is epistemologically productive and politically effective, instead, is a “specific relationality,” a kind of “relational indetermination” that can steer clear of the essentialist determinism of the specified and the “absolute indetermination” of the singular:²

This relationality implies the constitutive distinction and permanent co-implication of its terms: a subject *becomes* as distinct from, *as* co-implicated with or against, the other. . . . Specific relationality forces a *choice* of inflections. Inflection of a relation is contingent because the status of relationality is itself transcendental of all particular inflections. . . . The specific subject . . . maintains a relation with others that is neither oriented toward fundamental consensus (Habermas), nor destined for dialectical absorption in a third and higher term (Hegel), nor reduced to the status of a contingent construct awaiting imminent deconstruction (Derrida, Bhabha, Spivak). The specific sustains itself *as ongoing relation*, i.e. as an ongoing *taking* of sides. (2001: 50-51; emphasis original)

This proposition is captivating. In particular, it offers alternatives for those who have misgivings about collective identity politics (“the specified” in Hallward’s definition), for “specific relationality” entertains contingent interconnections without being

² Exemplary thinkers of the specific mode include Toni Morrison, whose fiction “assumes the burden of a past and a place;” V. S. Naipaul, whose work presumes some sort of critical detachment and provides “scenarios that allow for the ‘imposition’ of judgement;” and Michel Foucault, who writes “to preserve the space of a forever undetermined, fully specific experience, at the ‘limit’ of all specification, pursued through the *evacuation* (rather than elimination) of relations” (Hallward, 2001: 19; emphasis original). Other examples include Edward Said (only sporadically, however), Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Judith Butler, and Ernesto Laclau, thinkers who, according to Hallward, have all come to interrogate configurations of human behavior informed by such intrinsic essences as class, race, and gender, and to privilege the relations “that make different groups specific to each other and to the situation in which they come to exist” (2001: 48).

confined *a priori* to any essentialist particulars. However, one problem with Hallward's thesis of specific relationality is that it presumes (perhaps too categorically) the prospect of "ongoing *taking* of sides" on the subject's part. As mentioned above, Hallward configures the subject as an autonomous, free, rational agent constantly making decisions, taking action, and forming relations with others: "We might say that an individual becomes a subject to the degree that he or she is able to *take* (rather than inherit or adopt) *sides*, in the most active and deliberate sense" (2001: 50; emphasis original). As empowering as it is, this proposal sidesteps the possibility of any circumstances fraught with the incommensurability or unrepresentability of experience. Hallward avers that "even the most dispossessed subjects are not determined or coordinated (or silenced, or justified . . .) by History or its equivalents" (2001: 50). While this prescriptive formulation for emancipatory politics is commendable, Hallward fails to recognize that some historical circumstances—the postcolonial condition, for instance—are indeed registered by what we may call the overdetermination of history. "Critical detachment" may be desirable, but it does not mean that endeavors to tackle the overdetermination of history are fatally mistaken to begin with.³

Against a reading of Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*, this

³ Hallward's valorization of the specific mode ties in closely with his emphasis on the "critical distance" (see note 2 for the reasons why he singles out certain writers as examples of the specific). Many propositions he feels uneasy with are those that he thinks cannot maintain a critical distance. For example, he questions affirmative uses of the concept "glocalization" on the grounds that it denotes the disappearance of critical detachment: "Once the local is *immediately* articulated with the global, there is little space from which to prescribe the distanced imposition of political principle. Immediate articulation of the local with the global excludes the specific in advance . . ." (2001: 65; emphasis original). What Hallward has ignored is the distinction between the descriptive and the prescriptive (while this distinction does not preclude the co-presence of both). "Glocalization" often stands in globalization studies at both levels, yet Hallward seems to suggest that "glocalization" remains nothing but discursive and has nothing corresponding in reality.

essay seeks to address what I would like to call “singular relationality,” as opposed to Hallward’s “specific relationality.” The former is in agreement with the latter on the assumption that what is at issue here is the “irreducibly relational” (Hallward, 2001: 50). Yet “singular relationality” does not rest on the concept of the subject underlying Hallward’s “specific relationality” (“we become *subjects* as opposed to objects, we learn to *think* rather than merely recognise or represent, to the degree that we actively transcend the specified or objectified” [2001: 48; emphasis original]). Instead, “singular relationality” recognizes—or, more precisely, appreciates the valence of recognizing—the possibility of the unthinkable and the moments when the “taking of sides” may have been violently disrupted by outside circumstances. Moreover, the “singular” here, in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s words, refers to “that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category” (2000: 82). It henceforth departs from the identitarian formulation of the specified. It also refuses to correspond spontaneously to the universal “external criteria” prescribed by Hallward’s formulation of the specific.

Walcott’s *Tiepolo’s Hound* may seem an unlikely choice for the proposition of singular relationality since the poem, at a cursory glance, appears to entertain nothing other than old postcolonial themes such as the margin-center relationship, the history of the dispossessed. In other words, it looks like a prominent instance of identity politics along the lines of racial difference and imperialist power play. While Walcott indeed deals voluminously with racially-bound identity issues, *Tiepolo’s Hound* also points to a kind of self-definition that is not grounded in predestined, entrenched racial rootedness. Even if, admittedly, the formations of singularity may be shot through by racial groundings, these groundings, I suggest, should be read as “relationality” rather than any precedence (“precedence” in terms of both the temporal order and the degree of importance). On the one hand, “relationality” refers to relations as that which constitutes an encounter; on the other hand, it also shows that the process of

forming relations *is* a problem. I propose to read relationality not only as a governing theme of *Tiepolo's Hound*, but also as a defining problematic for the postcolonial context.

In *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott's reflection on relationality begins with the ostensible inequality inflicted upon the colonized, manifested in their overall experience as one of studying and translating the Western civilization. Yet, by laying bare the relations of indebtedness in European art history itself, Walcott posits that such experiences of study and translation in effect apply to anyone and everyone, master or slave, thus overwriting the pre-comprehended relationship of imbalance between the privileged and the dispossessed. Moreover, Walcott crystallizes the "communion of paints" in the figure of Time. Instead of a generalized marker, Time figures in the poem for the singular experience of wresting meaning out of the present, as opposed to the experience of relying on a predetermined sense of inheritance. The figure of Time, in this light, signifies a radical departure from the overloaded History. If History connotes a positivist mode of knowledge premised upon the knowability of the object and ability to know in the subject, Time stands as an ethos of articulation and relationality.

In what follows, I will first tease out the various "relations" in *Tiepolo's Hound*, with a view to demonstrating how Walcott revamps old postcolonial themes beyond identitarian scopes. As some of the scenarios of relationality he presents in the poem strike one as "non-relational" at first sight, the question of relationality thus translates into the issue of comparability. On what grounds do we compare? By what criteria do we juxtapose two seemingly unrelated things or individuals side by side claiming that there is a relation there? More importantly, when the postcolonial singularity pronounces a prospect of relation where none is apparent, what is the character of the ethos manifested here? From a close reading of Walcott's poem, I will then proceed to touch upon the question of comparability in postcolonial studies as a whole. My point is to show that "singular relationality" is an

illuminating proposition rising out of postcoloniality-related conversations. More than a thematic idiom, it also stands as a promising epistemic mode that can help us construe transcultural encounters in the postcolonial condition without falling back into the dubious category of the rational subject or essentializing identity politics.

II. Another Enlightenment

Thematically, relationality is pivotal for *Tiepolo's Hound*. In this long narrative poem, published in 2000, we discover different kinds and levels of relations being formed: relations between the Walcott persona (the narrator) and the nineteenth-century Caribbean-born Impressionist painter Jacob Camille Pissarro, between Pissarro and a Jewish officer charged with treason in France in the nineteenth century, between the artistic and the experiential, between the human and the dog, and many more. Some of these connections do not make much sense at first sight, but it is precisely in these relations that the issue of singularity/comparability will be illuminated.

To begin with, the narrator, someone with a biographical background similar to that of Walcott, is seeking constantly connections with Pissarro. The narrator meanders between Pissarro's St. Thomas and Paris on the one hand, and his own St. Lucia and Trinidad on the other; between the burgeoning period of French Impressionism and the postcolonial era, making inquiries about his own life by way of imaginatively visiting Pissarro's.⁴ A

⁴ Born in 1930 on the island of St. Lucia, Walcott has long-standing ties with Trinidad. He founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959 and has lived and worked there on and off ever since. Jacob Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) was born on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas, ruled then by the Danish Crown. His father was a Sephardic Jew who was born and grew up in France, and his mother a Dominican of Spanish descent. In 1841, Pissarro was sent to a boarding school in Paris. He returned to St. Thomas in 1847 to help his family run their dry goods business. But gradually he realized that being a clerk was not for him. He ran off to Venezuela with a painter friend Fritz Melbye in 1852 to pursue a life as an

would-be artist, the narrator figure in the poem avidly studies Pissarro's *oeuvre* in conjunction with the long Western artistic tradition. But instead of making this apprenticeship symbolic of the postcolonial subject's predetermined insignificance, Walcott takes pains to present a postcolonial existence that is no longer plagued by the anxiety of influence, for art will serve as a medium of forming community.

On its face, the poem appears to center on the familiar motif of the marginalization of the Caribbean vis-à-vis the European center. In those episodes where the narrator imagines Pissarro's desire to leave St. Thomas for France, he appeals to the theme of "longing for the centre" (Walcott, 2000: 24):⁵ "Those islands . . . / . . . are all ports / of sunshot vacancy: a brochure's remarks. / Perhaps he [Pissarro] saw their emptiness in terror / of what provided nothing for his skill / until his very birthplace was an error / that only flight might change, and exile kill" (29-30). When the New World has had its use and has gotten old, the aspiring artist must take that "deep reversing road / of the diaspora" to find a different landscape, a different voice, and a different skill (30).

A sense of inferiority is palpable, to be sure, especially when Walcott trenchantly pits two images against each other throughout the poem: a black mongrel that figures frequently in the episodes dealing with the Caribbean, and the white hound that the narrator often finds in Western works of art such as the Renaissance painting *The Feast in the House of Levi*. The mongrel as a trope for the hybridity of blood is more than obvious⁶ whereas the hound in

artist but had to return to St. Thomas two years later under pressure from his family. In 1855, Pissarro left for France again to further his career in art and since then remained in Europe for the rest of his life. He later became a principal figure in the development of Impressionism and was generally attributed as having influenced major artists like Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin.

⁵ Subsequent references to this poem will be cited in the text.

⁶ In addition, the mongrel also appears in the Pissarro episodes of the poem. In the opening section, for instance, the narrator uses the mongrel to indicate the complicated ancestry of Pissarro: "A mongrel follows them [Pissarro and his family], black as its shadow, / nosing their shadows, scuttling when the bells /

the *House of Levi* painting unequivocally pictures Europe as the center of civilization, the fountainhead of inspiration. At one point, the narrator describes his trip to the museums of New York as an encounter with the sublime:

On my first trip to the Modern I turned a corner,
rooted before the ridged linen of a Cézanne.

A still life. I thought how clean his brushes were!
Across that distance light was my first lesson.

I remember stairs in couples. The Metropolitan's
marble authority, I remember being

stunned as I studied the exact expanse
of a Renaissance feast, the art of seeing. (7)

The trip to the Museum of Modern Art would also become an encounter with "the Modern" (modern art, modern civilization) whereas the visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art is likened to a visit to "the Metropolis," the center. It will take the narrator a while to realize that Cézanne's clean brushes may very well have been influenced by the narrator's Caribbean predecessor Pissarro. At this point, however, European masters are here to awe him.

An accompanying experience is that of humbled joy whenever the narrator locates a trace of his ancestors or the Caribbean landscape in any European masterpiece:

Flattered by any masterful representation
of things we knew, from Rubens's black faces

devoutly drawn, to the fountaining elation

exult with pardon" (4). When the young Pissarro first arrives in Paris, it is the sight of "a black dog" that assuages his homesickness (38). Or, when Pissarro finds himself isolated among his French fellow artists, he feels as if he were "that homeless dog" that used to follow the Pissarros on Sundays in St. Thomas, "keeping his distance" from the cohort of the French-born Impressionists (46).

of feathery palms in an engraving's stasis,
 we caught in old prints their sadness, an acceptance
 of vacancy in bent cotton figures
 through monochrome markets, a distant tense
 for a distant life, still, in some ways, ours. (16)⁷

This experience of awe and humbleness is but a part of the daily routine for the narrator, as life in the Caribbean turns out to be one of "study," in particular, study of the orthodoxy inherited from the European masters. Hence, the narrator finds himself "rooted" in front of a Cézanne still life as a pupil receiving a "lesson" from the master, and he cannot help but "stud[y]" the phenomenal *House of Levi* piece. Or, in a more everyday setting, even an ordinary tropical tree like ravenala (a.k.a. traveler's tree) standing beside an ordinary street in Port of Spain, Trinidad can remind him of *The Traveller's Tree* (5), a famed travel book written by some Briton called Patrick Leigh Fermor about his experience of "island-hopping" across the Caribbean in the 1940s: "The empire of naming colonised even the trees, / referred our leaves to their originals / . . . Reality was riven / by these reproductions, and that blight spread / through every noun, even the names we were given, / the paintings we studied, the books we loved to read" (92). The narrator's experience with his native place is always already fraught with others' representations of it.

This "studied experience" (or "experience as study") figures most predominantly in the motif of art throughout the poem. If apprenticeship indeed evokes anxiety, the narrator ascribes it to the sense of unfamiliarity rising out of the contact with the erstwhile unknown:

A hill town in Mantegna, afternoon light
 across Les Cayes, and dusks of golden wheat,

⁷ "Rubens" here refers to the famous Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640).

as pupils we needed both worlds for the sight:
of Troumassee's shallows at the Baptist's feet.

Paintings so far from life fermenting around us! (14)⁸

Yet apprenticeship need not entail a secondary status, for it is through studious study of all the masterpieces that one sees in art “the communion of paints” (15). Art is one rare realm in which hierarchy can be undermined whereas study prepares one for epiphany. The narrator thus defends his deceased father, also a spirited pupil of European art, saying that “[l]earning / did not betray his race if he copied a warship's / final berth, a cinder in a Turner sunset burning . . . (13)” even though those faraway landscapes that his father was so devoted to might “despise the roots / and roofs of his island as inferior shapes / in the ministry of apprenticeship” (13).⁹ In addition, even if the course of Pissarro's life seems to drive home the “Europe as center” motif (since he opts for the metropolis eventually), Walcott strenuously makes art a site where hierarchy matters little and tradition does not reign supreme. Anyone can be “Art's subject as much as any empire's” (29): “the paint is all that counts, no guilt, no pardon, / no history, but the sense of narrative time / annihilated in the devotion of the acolyte / as undeniable as instinct, the brushstroke's rhyme / and page and canvas know one empire only: light” (58). Thus, art figures as a community that promises relations of equality, and Pissarro's ties with Impressionism in history serve as a beautiful coincidence here as Impressionism is characterized first and foremost by the artist's working with light.

On the narrator's trip to the sanctuaries of art in New York,

⁸ Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506), Italian, produced several paintings around the figure of St. John the Baptist. Les Cayes is a town in Haiti and Troumassee a river in St. Lucia.

⁹ “Turner” here refers to the English landscape painter J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), whose best known works include *The Fighting Téméraire*.

he too finds “light” to be an invaluable enlightenment (“light was my first lesson” [7]). Moreover, he discovers epiphany to be taking the form of the most unnoticeable detail. On that day at the Metropolitan, he comes across something next to the grandiosity of the Renaissance:

Then I caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh
of a white hound entering the cave of a table,

so exact in its lucency at *The Feast of Levi*,
I felt my heart halt. Nothing, not the babble

of the unheard roar that rose from the rich
pearl-lights embroidered on ballooning sleeves,

sharp beards, and gaping goblets, matched the bitch
nosing a forest of hose. (7-8)

This hound, the narrator continues, stands as a miraculous detail that “illuminates an entire epoch” in the same way “a medal by Holbein, a Vermeer earring” does (8).¹⁰ More significantly, this hound enlightens the narrator not with any flamboyant skill or revolutionary aesthetic idea, but because of its banality: “Between me and Venice the thigh of a hound; / my awe of the ordinary” (8). If the ordinary “leaves its frame” to shed light on a new era (8), the hierarchy between high and low, center and margin is thus rendered irrelevant. What counts is epiphany rather than inheritance.

III. Another Community

This “studied experience” will come to alter the narrator’s sensory and cognitive experience altogether. One time, for instance, he describes how in Port of Spain the “silent city” (5), where

¹⁰ “Holbein” refers to the German artist Hans Holbein the Younger (c. 1497-1543), and “Vermeer” the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675).

inertia prevails, engagement with the landscape seems the only meaningful preoccupation:

. . . afternoon repeats
the long light with its croton-coloured crowds

in the Savannah, not the Tuileries, but
still the Rock Gardens' brush-point cypresses

like a Pissarro canvas, past the shut
gate of the President's Palace, flecked dresses

with gull cries, white flowers and cricketers,
coconut carts, a frilled child with the hoop

of the last century, and, just as it was
in Charlotte Amalie, a slowly creaking sloop. (6)¹¹

The narrator's visual experience is not just what the eye catches in the here and now; it is an immediately gained impression incorporated with recollections—the recollections, in this case, of Pissarro's works, which the narrator is adoringly conversant with. Experience is thus always a reproduction or the result of some study.

Walcott's attempt to ratify experience as mediation is further realized in the actual "expression" of the narrative form of *Tiepolo's Hound*. There are various levels of "inter-mediation" or interpenetration of different media of expression throughout the poem, a feature that should be taken to signify the valorization of experience as constant interrelations and the ensuing transformation.

The verse in *Tiepolo's Hound* is replete with interpenetration of the experiential (cognitive, affective, etc.) and the artistic (verbal, visual). The narrator is prone to experience the outside world via

¹¹ Savannah is in Trinidad. Tuileries Palace was a palace in Paris, razed in 1871. Near where the old palace once stood is the Tuileries Gardens, the subject of several of Pissarro's paintings. Charlotte Amalie is the capital of St. Thomas.

the representation of either metaphoric language or visual art. It is not just a one-way channeling (turning the experienced to the artistic, for instance); rather, it seems that in the experiential realm the artistic lens has always been there. In the opening section, for example, the narrator depicts the young Pissarro and his family strolling down the main street of Charlotte Amalie, and it is a street “quiet as drawings” (3). At the end of the street is the harbor where “gulls tick the lined waves” “like commas” (3). Or, Port of Spain, dead-silent as it is, is “blest with emptiness / like an engraving” (5). And on a Sunday morning, the narrator would look out his window through a picture-like frame: “My wooden window frames the Sunday street” (4). Or, when the narrator describes how the landscape of his homeland has helped him transform the insult of history, the history of dispossession, into forgiveness, this experience is again presented through an intermingling of the linguistic and the visual: “History is that tilted freighter stuck in its sense / of the past, the intellect, an egret’s ewer of light, / stabbing a phrase, lifting itself over the sound / of repeated parentheses, the circular prayers / perhaps with an outcry of sorrow over the drowned, / beating its wings, till anger soars into grace” (90-91).

Unlike what Hallward may have in mind, the postcolonial condition revealed in *Tiepolo’s Hound* is anything but “freedom from immediate determination” (Hallward, 2001: 49). Shifting between different media of expression becomes an everyday necessity primarily because, for the narrator, living in the aftermath of colonization means constant translating between languages, between life-worlds. When the narrator comes upon Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, for example, he cannot help but need to seek out similarities in his hometown landscape: “I matched the first paragraph of *The Red and the Black* / in translation to a promontory on the sky of the page / resting on the harbour line with the recumbent arc / of the Vigie peninsula, across the sea from the college” (Walcott, 2000: 19). The opening paragraph of the Stendhal classic depicts the town of Verrières in

eastern France. The narrator's resort to "translation" bespeaks not only the transference between languages but also that between two reference points for the imagination. Yet more often than not, what the narrator finds is the "middens' excremental stench" rather than the "impasto indigo bay, the ochre walls of Provence" inherited from Stendhal (19-20). Nevertheless, the Caribbean villages still "clung to a false pride, their French / namesakes, in faith, in carpentry, in language, / so that the harbour with its flour-bag sails, / the rusted vermilion of the market's roofs / made every wharf a miniature Marseilles" (20). For someone whose birthplace is named after European towns, translation is but a habitual activity: ". . . Anse La Raye, Canaries, / Soufrière, Choiseul, Laborie, Vieux Fort, that were / given echoes drawn from the map of France, / its dukedoms pronounced in the verdant patois / of bamboo letters, a palm's sibilance" (18). It is amid the constant need to translate that the narrator develops a tendency to conflate the experiential and the artistic: "There is a D'Ennery in the private maps / Pissarro did of his province, its apostrophe / poised like a gull over these furrowing whitecaps" (18).

Another kind of inter-mediation is the translation of Pissarro's painterly life into the poetic language. The narrator has followed Pissarro's life story with "a pompous piety," transplanting his devotion to the artist from his visual admiration to "lines of poetry / proceeding by systematic scansion, brushstroke and word" (98-99). For the narrator, his pen is like a brush "as true as" Pissarro's "pen," while his couplets often evoke the furrows of the fields in Pontoise, a French town where Pissarro lived for some seventeen years and which became one of Pissarro's favorite subjects (99).

The mixture of different areas of experience points to the commonplaceness of translating experience whereas the commingling of different levels of expression suggests the collapse of any predetermined hierarchy.

There is yet another commonality the narrator is seeking to build between himself and Pissarro—nonetheless a rather unusual kind. But it is precisely here that *Tiepolo's Hound* begins to take

bold turns in terms of the comparisons and relations it seeks to entertain: “My inexact and blurred biography / is like his painting; that is fiction’s treason, / to deny fact, alter topography / to its own map; he too had his reason / for being false to France. Conspirators, spies / are what all artists are, changing the truth” (101-102). In the verse that follows, the narrator makes references to a high-profiled scandal in France in the 1890s known as the “Dreyfus Affair.” Alfred Dreyfus was a French artillery officer of Jewish descent, wrongfully accused of high treason. When the evidence of his innocence and of the military’s fabrication of false documents against him was exposed, French society was split in its opinions on the matter. According to his biographers, Pissarro, a Sephardic Jew, was quite distressed by the societal mayhem occasioned by the incident, especially the anti-Semitic sentiments in France. The scandal eventually got personal when a fellow artist Edgar Degas, taking an anti-Dreyfus position, broke off his long-time friendship with Pissarro.

By referring to the Dreyfus Affair, the narrator in *Tiepolo’s Hound* takes the opportunity to touch upon Pissarro’s Sephardic Jewish ancestry and the issue of such institutional oppression as the diaspora of the Jews and the black slaves.¹² But I want to argue

¹² Pissarro’s ancestors were from the Portuguese city of Braganza near the Spanish border. His grandfather Joseph Gabriel Pissarro moved to Bordeaux, France at the end of the eighteenth century. To survive the hostility towards the Jews across Europe, the family had lived for generations as converted Catholics while secretly practicing their religion. Joseph Gabriel married Ann Félicité Petit in 1798. At that time Ann Félicité’s brother Isaac Petit had immigrated to St. Thomas, allegedly for the business opportunities the island had promised. When Isaac Petit died, the Pissarros sent off one of their sons, Abraham (Frédéric) Gabriel, to St. Thomas to help Isaac’s widow Rachel (maiden name Manzano-Pomié) with the family business. Frédéric and aunt Rachel fell in love and decided to tie the knot in 1826. But their marriage met with vehement disapproval from the leaders of the local Jewish community. It was not until 1833, seven years after their marriage, that the authorities of the local synagogue finally legitimized the union. Jacob Camille Pissarro, their third child, was already three at the time. Camille Pissarro’s great-grandson Joachim Pissarro once remarked that his great-grandfather’s atheism and long-time indifference to

that what Walcott does here is less an affirmation of racial identity politics than an interrogation of it: “The minute the traitor Dreyfus was condemned / he ceased being a Frenchman, a Jew” (102). The narrator goes on to challenge those who stick to racial politics by asking whether the drive behind Pissarro’s art is his “Sephardic eyes” or his identity as an artist (102-103). Under the politics of representation ordained by racial politics, the fact that Pissarro “wasn’t much of a Jew” (101) matters little, as he is already predestined by his racial lineage and will always be held accountable for his people as a collectivity (what Chakrabarty calls the “attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category” [2000: 82]). When the narrator goes on to discuss the history of the Jewish diaspora (how the ancestors of Pissarro were driven out of Portugal, for instance), his point is not so much to valorize a minority politics grounded in racial difference, as to question the injustice of seeing in an individual nothing but such essentialist particulars as racial rootedness.

IV. Another Life

Walcott published the semi-autobiographical *Tiepolo’s Hound* at age seventy, interposing so many personal details about his own quest as an artist that the reader is constantly drawn to disregard the fine line between narrator and author (in fact, most critics indeed choose to read this poem entirely autobiographically, referring to the narrator as Walcott). But why Pissarro? Why this late-blooming Impressionist? Is it because painting was once an endearing dream of Walcott’s, only to be put aside when he discovered that his talent lay elsewhere?¹³ Or, by singling out

his Jewish heritage could have derived from the experience of having witnessed the religious heavy-handedness surrounding his family. For a detailed history of the Sephardim and Pissarro’s Jewish lineage, see Rachum (2000).

¹³ The Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition of *Tiepolo’s Hound* consists of twenty-six color plates of paintings by Walcott interspersed in the text, most of which his

Pissarro's Caribbean link, is Walcott seeking reassurance about a homeland staggering on the edge of history? Is the poet eyeing the affinities between the marginalized position of his people and Pissarro's outcast status as a Jew? In other words, is Walcott, after all, still speaking of collective subjectivity and identitarianism?

The poem teems with postcolonial motifs, posing inquiries as to why Walcott's people are nothing but "History's afterthought" (96), why theirs has been a tale of "the taint / of complicit time, the torpor of ex-slaves / and benign planters" (16), of "the painful precision / of exile" (99-100). What is more, most of these postcolonial motifs are rendered through a dualism pitting two worlds against each other:

That middle passage, that bridge the [sand] bank provides,
is one the submerged memory must negotiate

between the worlds it finds on both its sides,
the Caribbean, the Atlantic with its reeking freight,

the archipelago's bridge. On one side is the healing
of Time measured in ruins, the empires of Europe,

.

. but on the other side of the wind
is what exile altered and banishment made dim:

the still pond and the egrets beating home
through the swamp trees, the mangrove's anchors,

and no more bitterness at the Atlantic foam
hurtling the breakwater; the salt that cures. (88-89)

Here, on "the other side of the wind," one can detect a message of reconciliation on the part of the narrator ("no more bitterness at the Atlantic foam"), but, undeniably, for quite some

depictions of the Caribbean landscape and people. As the critic Peter Erickson astutely points out, "While the verse traces its long European trajectory, the paintings never leave home" (2005: 225).

time the landscape of the Caribbean in the eyes of the narrator has been nothing but an “open museum of bondage” (89).

As the governing premise of this essay is to read *Tiepolo's Hound* in the context of postcolonial writing, we have to ask if, by invoking the worlds on both sides of the “middle passage,” Walcott is not reproducing the dichotomous thinking that has constituted colonial imperialism? Or, even if we must acknowledge the reality of the opposition between the Old and the New Worlds occasioned by imperialism, is this poem shedding new light on postcolonial discourse at all? My argument is that Walcott here reworks the old motif of postcolonial experience in a twofold manner. First of all, he problematizes “relationality” in the postcolonial context by furthering it into an issue of “comparability.” Secondly, he puts forward “Time” as a figure for an ethical approach to “relations,” displacing the overloaded concept of “History.” He deals with both issues by way of extending his reflections on the European artistic tradition further back, to the Renaissance and the eighteenth century. There, seemingly unrelated connections will bring the problem of postcolonial relationality to light.

The first three books of *Tiepolo's Hound* center on the life work of Pissarro. In the last book, however, the narrator launches a journey in search of the white hound in *The Feast in the House of Levi* painting that once arrested his attention at “the Metropolitan.” Though at some point he unequivocally attributes the painting to Paolo Veronese (8), the narrator later confuses this Renaissance painter with the eighteenth-century artist Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.¹⁴ He therefore decides to pay a visit to Venice to verify the identity of the artist of the *House of Levi* piece. But he has been enchanted not so much by the authorship of the painting as by the image of the hound figuring in the long history of Western art; Veronese and Tiepolo happen to have produced this

¹⁴ Paolo Veronese (Paolo Caliari) (1528-1588) and Giovanni Batista Tiepolo (1696-1770) were both Italian.

image consistently in their works.

What is the significance of this hound, then? For one thing, the image of “a hound in astounding light” (8) that the narrator claims to have seen at the Metropolitan surely stands as an awe-inspiring experience for the novice of art. More significant, however, is perhaps the image of the hound in relation to the oeuvres of Veronese and Tiepolo.

After he completed a *Last Supper* piece commissioned for the Dominican monastery of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, Veronese was called before the Inquisition to explain why he had included in the painting such irrelevant figures as “drunken buffoons, armed Germans, dwarfs and similar scurrilities” (Bayer, 2006), not to mention a white hound placed in the center of the canvas. Veronese’s defense was that painters should be allowed “the license employed by poets and ‘matti’ [i.e., madmen]” (Cocke, 2001: 179), an answer that the Inquisition apparently did not appreciate because they insisted that Veronese replace the dog with the image of Mary Magdalen. Refusing to comply, Veronese cleverly made a gesture of compromise by renaming the painting *The Feast in the House of Levi* with nothing in the canvas altered.

Instead of being a depiction of the Last Supper, the painting becomes a reference to the story of Levi recorded in the New Testament (Mark 2.13-17; Luke 5.27-32 [King James version]). Levi is a tax collector called upon by Jesus to give up everything and follow him. The publican complies and gives a banquet for Jesus in his house, inviting also a crowd of tax collectors as guests. When the Pharisees and their scribes complain and ask why Jesus is dining with sinners, Jesus responds, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5.31-32). In brief, the story of Levi is one of hospitality, and the all-inclusiveness shown in the feast scene must have sent a palpable message to the narrator of *Tiepolo’s Hound*: “Why at the House of Levi, though, unless / in all the autumnal riot of the house, / Sephardic guests in silvery coined Venice / were welcome then, and a few turbanned Moors?”

(121-122). Moreover, the story of Veronese's refusal to conform also resonates forcefully with the *Tiepolo's Hound* narrator's treatment of the Dreyfus Affair, in his subscription to the artist's "license" and profession of "treachery."

But this is not all. If the narrator sympathizes with Veronese's works, the crux of this connection, we may say, lies in the curious position of the dog in Veronese's art. Though rarely the main subject, the dog is nonetheless a popular detail in Veronese's oil paintings and frescos.¹⁵ According to experts on the Bible, the dog in both the Old and the New Testaments is generally referred to as a figure of unimportance. On rare occasions the greyhound may have been mentioned to symbolize something "stately," but this rendering rests entirely on inference and therefore is never explicit. In other words, references to the dog in the biblical contexts are chiefly of a derogatory nature (Day, 2007). Intriguingly, those Veronese works that feature the dog or the hound are primarily religious in subject. So, it is not too far-fetched to argue that the Caribbean native in *Tiepolo's Hound* is identifying with the image of insignificance represented by the dog.

What is more telling is the fact that most of these Veronese works with a dog or hound in the picture happen to also include at least one black person, often a servant figure. This "dog with black attendant" image later would emerge as a prominent detail in Tiepolo's works, including those mentioned by the narrator of *Tiepolo's Hound*: two pieces rendering the story of Antony and

¹⁵ The dog can be found in these major works by Veronese: *Queen of Sheba before Solomon* (Galleria Sabauda, Turin); *Crucifixion* (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice); *St. Sebastian Exhorts Sts. Mark and Marcellian to Their Martyrdom* (Church of San Sebastiano, Venice); *Martyrdom of St. Justina* (S. Giustina Cathedral, Padua); *Modello for the Martyrdom of St. Justina* (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles); *Marriage Feast at Cana* (both the Paris and the Dresden versions); *Adoration of the Magi* (at least the Vicenza and the Dresden versions); *Feast in the House of Simon* (all three versions: Milan, Turin, and Versailles); *Feast of St. Gregory the Great* (Sanctuary of Monte Berico, Vicenza); and the *Feast in the House of Levi* (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice). For a catalogue of Veronese's art and plates of works referred to herein, see Cocke (2001).

Cleopatra, and one piece about Alexander the Great's mistress Campaspe posing for the artist Apelles. In the *Banquet of Cleopatra*, the narrator finds that "in the quiet, / a Moor in a doublet and brown hound frame the scene" (124). The narrator then moves to identify himself with the black retainer in another Cleopatra painting: "I was searching for myself now, and I found / *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, / I was that grey Moor clutching a wolfhound" (124). *Apelles Painting Campaspe*, on the other hand, depicts a black retainer peeping around the canvas's edge in Apelles's studio. The narrator once again identifies with the black servant: "we presume from the African's posture that I too am learning / both skill and conversion watching from the painting's side" (129).

Peter Erickson reads these Tiepolo references as a fruition of Walcott's self-identification as both a black person and an artist: "The result of the black page's imagined 'learning' by 'watching from the painting's side' is translated into Walcott's action of taking on the role of artist and portraying himself as a black man, thus uniting the two hitherto separate roles" (2005: 230). With this harmonious unity, Erickson goes on to argue, Walcott's journey of self exploration has come full circle with new illuminations now that the poet has come to accept the "legacy of his origins" (2005: 230).

Erickson rightly focuses attention on the "black connection" that links the two principal artists; the confusion of Veronese and Tiepolo on the part of the *Tiepolo's Hound* narrator is thus read "not as an annoying failure of academic exactitude, but rather as a useful compression that makes it possible to address a racial phenomenon that spans two centuries"¹⁶ (2005: 229).

¹⁶ Erickson is here relying on the research of the art historian Paul H. D. Kaplan: "The black retainers who are so common, for instance, in the paintings of Tiepolo, are derived from the sixteenth-century images of Paolo Veronese, and also from the more or less continual black presence in Venice itself" (Kaplan, 1988: 179; quoted in Erickson, 2005: 229).

Erickson's reading echoes what Hallward terms the "specific relationality," that is, a problematic of relationality rendered possible by choice-making subjects "as opposed to objects" ("Walcott's action of taking on the role of artist and portraying himself as a black man" [2005: 230]). Yet, apart from readings along the lines of the "racial phenomenon," I would like to suggest that another "relation" that holds true here should be the one between the narrator and Tiepolo both being novices of art at one point. Tiepolo's indebtedness to Veronese has been an accepted commonplace in art history. While he knows that "[r]esearch / could prove the hound Tiepolo's or Veronese's" (Walcott, 2000: 117), the narrator decides to launch the search anyway all because he has been confounded by the similarity between the two masters' styles, manifested in particular in their representations of the hound. After consistent search and research, the narrator is convinced of "[Tiepolo's] debt to Veronese, / his distant master" (125), and of the fact that the images under Tiepolo's brush turn out to "evolve via Veronese" (126).

If Walcott's quest effects his acceptance of the "legacy of his origins," it also materializes the understanding of a kind of relationality or community across racial divides. If the lives of the narrator, his father, and his people are all defined by "study" and "apprenticeship" through and through, so is the career of European masters like Tiepolo. The meaning of the titular hound thus becomes clear by now. If "follow[ing] in the footprints of the hound" (127) has led the narrator to his black ancestry, it has also elucidated a genuine "communion of paints" wherein all is equal:

The hound's thigh blurred the smoky dyes around it,
it mixed the schools of distinct centuries,

fixed in its stance it stays where I had found it,
painted by both, Tiepolo, Veronese;

since what is crucial was not true ascription
to either hand—rather the consequence

of my astonishment, which has blent this fiction
to what is true without a change of tense. (133)

V. Another Framing

As pointed out above, *Tiepolo's Hound* abounds in interpenetrations between diverse realms of expression: the visual can be rendered into the verbal whereas the verse more often than not mimics the movement of the eye scrutinizing the canvas of one masterpiece after another. Interpenetration at the formal level virtually translates as interrelation at the thematic level—that is, the mixture of different media of expression in the course of the narrative only highlights the intertwining of experiences of different people represented in the poem.¹⁷ Art is singled out in this poem not only as the proper subject matter (in keeping with Pissarro's identity as an artist); Walcott also turns to the very nature of art for his thematic engagement. Conflation of various media is one telling example. Consistent recourse to the artistic notion of "framing" is another.

Besides identifying with the "admiring African peer[ing] from the canvas's edge" in *Apelles Painting Campaspe* (129), the narrator also tends to see things through frames. This applies to his daily reality: "My wooden window frames the Sunday street" (4); "I, mounting the stairs of these couplets, found / the frame of memory again" (124). It also threads through his entire self-exploration quest as he tries to come to grips with his life by

¹⁷ Other critics have noted that the couplet form Walcott uses in *Tiepolo's Hound* helps translate the subject of conflict into a possibility of transformation or reconciliation. The form, in other words, brings to light the thematic thrust of the poem. Jim Hannan, for example, maintains that "the couplet materializes [for Walcott] as a kind of intermediary element with which he builds, couplet by couplet, a space of exchange between word, sound, sight, and physical object, crossing, as he does, any divisions that might inhere between word and image, poetry and painting" (2002: 562-563); also see Harris (n.d.).

seeing through the lives and works of Pissarro and many other European artists. Even the image of the hound, to a great extent, is treated as some kind of framing via which the narrator formulates his selfhood: “I painted this fiction / from the hound’s arch, because over the strokes and words / of a page, or a primed canvas, there is always the shadow / that stretches its neck like a spectral hound, bending / its curious examining arc over what we do, / both at our work’s beginning and at its ending” (50). The “arc” of the “shadow” that figures in “the hound’s arch” resonates compellingly with “the canvas’s edge” from which the black slave in Apelles’s studio attentively watches the master at work. An obscured space as it is, this arc or edge turns out to be a vantage point where Walcott gets to form dialogue with the eclipsed parts of history.

Properly speaking, “history” is not the right word here. If postcolonial literature is generally characterized by the imperative to negotiate with history, Walcott in *Tiepolo’s Hound* posits a different framing—Time—to overwrite the improper moments of history. “Time” with the capital letter recurs in the narrative, less as a generalized marker than as an animate figure. Sometimes Time is that nimble element called the fleeing moment, the hallmark of Impressionism that Pissarro discovers and integrates into his paintings: “he [Pissarro] has learnt to look / at the instant with no pretext of stasis” (55). At other times “the pallor of Time” testifies to such errors of history as slavery and human-imposed diaspora (103-104). In other words, Time is time experienced by the humans yet is not always tantamount to the narrative that constitutes history. Yes, it is true that “the frame is Time,” through which the narrator finds his own posture of “learning” like the African servant in the *Apelles* painting (129). Yet equally true is the fact that Time stands as a community of relationality, to which everyone is subject and wherein everyone is some sort of vessel or apprentice: “Time continues its process even for the masters / whose triumph astonishes us, but they are still learning / with arthritic fingers and shovel-wide beards, their disasters / our masterpieces: Van Gogh and Cézanne” (94).

The most important “framing” of all turns out to be Time: “Vessel, apprentice and interpreter, / my own delight, before the frames of Time, / was innocent, ignorant and corruptible, / monodic as our climate in its sublime / indifference to seasonal modulations, / to schools, to epochs” (132). By portraying the postcolonial experience through the frames of Time instead of History, Walcott neutralizes the inevitability of the scars inflicted by the history of colonization. Time is not merely a naturalized version of History. Rather, Time stands as a trope for articulation, echoing the theme of relationality we see in the art episodes of the poem.

The History to be displaced by Time here may be construed in Foucault’s words, especially where Foucault lays out the lineaments of the modern episteme: “History . . . is the fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge for the use of such disciplines or sciences as may arise” (Foucault, 1989: 219).¹⁸ History, as Foucault views it, is the backbone of the positivist mode of knowledge, which in turn “imputes a transparent knowability to the empirical object and a corresponding capacity to know in the subject” (Melas, 2007: 24).

The Time in *Tiepolo’s Hound*, on the other hand, recalls the evocation of the “weather” in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, an episode singled out by Spivak to be a figure for “planetarity.” I quote Spivak at length here:

¹⁸ This reference to Foucault is entirely inspired by Natalie Melas’s 2007 book *All the Difference in the World*. In her attempt to tackle the direction of comparative literature in the postcolonial global context, Melas insightfully identifies the issue here to be not only comparison as a method but also comparison as an epistemic mode. Her recourse to the Foucault in *The Order of Things*, the source of the quotation here, is partly intended to instantiate her call for the transition of comparative literature from a temporal to a spatial episteme. Her argument about the necessary spatial turn in comparative literature is acute, and I take it to mean that her target is primarily the chronocentrism of European modernity, not the notion of time and temporality altogether.

The lesson of the impossibility of translation in the general sense, as Toni Morrison shows it, readily points at absolute contingency. Not the sequentiality of time, not even the cycle of seasons, but only weather, as in these words, summing up the conclusion of the terrible story of maternal sacrifice, an opening into a specifically African-American history. . . . Morrison undoes the difference between Africa and African-America by the experience of a planetarity equally inaccessible to human time: “By and by, all traces gone. And what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted-for; but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather.”

That too is time. Geological time, however slow, is also time. One must not *make* history in a deliberate way. One must respect the earth’s tone. One might be obliged to claim history from the violent perpetrator of it, in order to turn violation into the enablement of the individual, but that is another story. After the effacement of the trace, no project for restoring the origin. That is “just weather,” here today as yesterday. (2003: 88-89)¹⁹

Spivak in her reading of *Beloved* thus turns to the time of the earth as something beyond or other than the human-made history. This geological time points to an “absolute contingency,” resembling what Hallward ascribes to the singular mode of thinking: “absolute indetermination or pure Creativity” (Hallward, 2001: 50). Similarly, *Tiepolo’s Hound* registers a sense of time that subsumes the human trivia *qua* history. Paul Breslin rightly notes that throughout his career as a poet Walcott consistently opposes “visionary imagination” to “History” (2001: 200). George Handley, on the other hand, makes an astute argument about the element of Time in *Tiepolo’s Hound*. Handley expands the study of ekphrasis, which normally addresses the dialectic between word

¹⁹ The parenthetical pagination refers to *Death of a Discipline*. This passage has appeared, in slightly different wording, in Spivak (1992: 793-794).

and image, by adding Time as the third element. He maintains that it is this triangulation that helps Walcott break free from the demands of History as the latter is predicated chiefly upon dualist thinking (superior vs. inferior, original vs. imitator, first-comer and latecomer, etc.). Time, in comparison, “synchronizes and frees the artistic imagination from the chronological constraints and demands of ‘History’” (2005: 237).

VI. “Relation: What the World Makes and Expresses of Itself”²⁰

The reference to Spivak here is not random. In her 2003 *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak seeks to problematize and find solutions for the discipline of comparative literature in our time. I want to conclude my discussion by engaging Spivak’s proposition, addressing the question of comparison and comparability with regard to postcoloniality.

Spivak acknowledges that the postcolonial global condition has been a driving force behind the self-definition of comparative literature as a discipline. As is well known, the arrival in the U.S. of European scholars fleeing Nazism such as Erich Auerbach and René Wellek helped advance the institutionalization of comparative literature in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The comparative scope of these preeminent figures is nevertheless more European than global; a more comprehensive vision at that time would be the task of the politically motivated and nationally funded area studies. Yet the impact of the postcolonial global condition has been too vast to be ignored. Spivak suggests that to acknowledge the inevitability of interconnectedness occasioned by postcolonial globality is to call for and justify a much broader framework for whatever comparative literature can do than its earlier Eurocentrism. The ethos of the new comparative literature is thus, in some way, some

²⁰ See Glissant (1997: 160).

kind of all-inclusiveness.²¹

Spivak names this all-inclusiveness “planetarity” and postulates that it will displace the formulation of globalization on the one hand and the project of identity politics on the other (in particular, the kind of identity politics that is posited to counterbalance globalization). Globalization, as it is now generally understood, amounts to the sweep of market value, which often finds its counterforce coming from localized identity politics. While the concept of globalization is limiting given its focus on the economic/cultural, identity politics is no less problematic in that it tends to conduct its conversation within the confines of a “differentiated political space” with a view to writing for the self. Spivak’s “planet-talk” or “unexamined environmentalism,” in contrast, attends to the alterity symbolized by the planet that we “inhabit . . . on loan” (2003: 72). As shown in her rendition of *Beloved* (“Morrison undoes the difference between Africa and African-America by the experience of a planetarity equally inaccessible to human time” [2003: 88]), at issue here is no longer “our dialectical negation” alone, but rather the stake in the fact that the planet “contains us as much as it flings us away” (2003: 73). To the extent that the alterity of the planet determines our experience, it stands as/for an experience of the impossible. It is the *unheimlich*, the unhomely located right in the homely (2003: 74).

The planet, in other words, figures as the scene wherein Spivak’s notion of ethics (experience of the impossible) can take place. This ethical agenda, furthermore, ties in with the other governing proposal of the book, that is, her remedy for the current practice of comparative literature. Spivak’s solution is appealing (dauntingly so, as a matter of fact): to incorporate comparative literature with area studies, to facilitate the demand of comparative work with the rigorous language training of area studies and at the same time to crack open in area studies more space for the

²¹ For a similar argument, also see Melas (2007: 1-43).

imaginary inspired by comparative literature. For that which defines comparative literature, Spivak says, is its work of “othering:”

[T]he proper study of literature may give us entry to the performativity of cultures as instantiated in narrative. Here we stand outside, but not as anthropologist; we stand rather as reader with imagination ready for the effort of othering, however imperfectly, as an end in itself. . . . In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination—the great inbuilt instrument of othering—we may . . . come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a “life.” (2003: 13)

Strictly speaking, what Spivak is referring to here is not “comparative literature” yet, but “literature” per se (“to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination—the great inbuilt instrument of othering”). It is the work of comparison, which borders on “the irreducible work of translation,” that illuminates the inbuilt instrument of othering in literature. It is comparison that is making the study of literature a figure for the experience of the impossible. Literature thus also stands as the site for attending to (but not subsuming) alterity.

Spivak’s thesis is highly relevant here because her envisioning of comparative literature today hinges principally on her configuration of postcolonial globality as overwhelming interconnectedness, which in turn renders relationality an exigent issue of “translation” or “comparison.” Although *Tiepolo’s Hound* does not explicitly address the disciplinary characteristic of comparative literature, it showcases the exigency of relationality by way of making various unlikely comparisons. Most of the different sets of relations featured in the poem may appear to reinforce what Peter Erickson calls the “racial phenomenon,” that is, racial identity politics. However, Walcott also moves to further his inquiries beyond the identitarian scope by entertaining relations

where none seems possible. Between Tiepolo and Veronese, for instance, is not only a relation of predecessor and follower in terms of skill, but also a kindred spirit in their interest in the hitherto marginalized. Between Tiepolo and the narrator, on the other hand, is the commonality experienced by all as an apprentice in one way or another. Moreover, between the narrator and the hound is more than just a shared destiny of insignificance; *there* is in effect a “curious examining arc over what we do, [50]” a site where fictional relations can be conjured up so as to overwrite the wrongs of history (“I painted this fiction / from the hound’s arch, because over the strokes and words / of a page, or a primed canvas, there is always the shadow / that stretches its neck like a spectral hound, bending / its curious examining arc over what we do, / both at our work’s beginning and at its ending” [50]).

Tiepolo’s Hound is anything but a naïve celebration of the Caribbean roots of a prominent European artist. From time to time the narrator in fact sounds a note of bitterness towards Pissarro. One day, for instance, the narrator imagines himself being the subject of the young Pissarro and Pissarro’s artist friend Fitz Melbye practicing their skills, and he questions the motivation behind Pissarro’s interest in the Caribbean locality: “I and my kind move and not move; your drawing / is edged with a kindness my own lines contain, / but yours may just be love of your own calling / and not for us / . . . / but do not leave us here, / for cities where our voices have no words” (141). The narrator dares not pronounce Pissarro one of them since Pissarro eventually “found the prism that was Paris, / rooted in France” (154). Nevertheless, after a long voyage of discovery, the narrator ultimately comes at a “conviction” based on what he has identified in Pissarro’s paintings, even though Pissarro’s subject is Paris instead of Charlotte Amalie. The narrator thus avers: “Camille Pissarro must have heard the noise / of loss-lamenting slaves, and if he did, / they tremble in the poplars of Pontoise, / the trembling, elegiac tongues he painted” (157-158). What *Tiepolo’s Hound* realizes is akin to what Bhabha terms “catachrestic . . . translation” (Bhabha, 1994: 244). Different

from what Hallward may have prescribed for the postcolonials (“freedom from immediate determination”), translation is a basic demand in the postcolonial condition as the postcolonials have to negotiate constantly between different time frames or different life-worlds. And if catachresis arises, it does so because of the radical differences or untranslatability of experiences being negotiated here. To attempt translations where catachresis is inevitable is to form an ethos of comparability. To entertain an ethos of comparability, in turn, is to acknowledge the singular relationality inscribed in the postcolonial experience.

References

- Bayer, A. (2006, October). *Sixteenth-century painting in Venice and the Veneto*. Retrieved September 12, 2008, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/veve/hd_veve.htm
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Breslin, P. (2001). *Nobody's nation: Reading Derek Walcott*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cocke, R. (2001). *Paolo Veronese: Piety and display in an age of religious reform*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Day, A. E. (2007). *Dog*. Retrieved August 25, 2008, from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/D/DOG/>
- Deleuze, G. (1990). *The logic of sense* (M. Lester & C. Stivale, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Erickson, P. (2005). Artists' self-portraiture and self-exploration in Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's hound*. *Callaloo*, 28, 1: 224-235.
- Foucault, M. (1989). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Routledge.
- Glissant, É. (1997). *Poetics of relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Hallward, P. (2001). *Absolutely postcolonial: Writing between the singular and the specific*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Handley, G. (2005). Triangulation and the aesthetics of temporality in *Tiepolo's hound*. *Callaloo*, 28, 1: 236-256.
- Hannan, J. (2002). Crossing couplets: Making form the matter of Walcott's *Tiepolo's hound*. *New Literary History*, 33, 3: 559-579.

- Harris, A. J. (n.d.). *Review of Tiepolo's hound, by Derek Walcott*. Retrieved July 1, 2008, from *The Richmond Review* <http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/books/tiepoloshound.html>
- Kaplan, P. H. D. (1988). The earliest images of Othello. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39: 171-186.
- Melas, N. (2007). *All the difference in the world: Postcoloniality and the ends of comparison*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rachum, S. (2000). Camille Pissarro's Jewish identity. *Assaph: Studies in Art History*, 5: 3-28.
- Spivak, G. C. (1992). Acting Bits/Identity Talk. *Critical Inquiry*, 18, 4: 770-803.
- Spivak, G. C. (2003). *Death of a discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Walcott, D. (2000). *Tiepolo's hound*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

絕對後殖民？：
從沃克特《提也波洛之犬》談
獨一關係性與比較性之問題

陳春燕

國立台灣師範大學英語學系
10610 台北市和平東路一段162號
E-mail: jochen@ntnu.edu.tw

摘 要

沃克特的敘事長詩《提也波洛之犬》表面上處理的仍是諸如種族身分認同等議題，但本文將嘗試以「獨一關係性」的角度切入，指出該詩如何跳脫一般熟悉的認同政治介面、探究一種不以特定本質或先驗集體身分為依歸的關係——「關係性」除了直指關係的內容，亦將各種關係的形成本身視為一種問題意識的發生。由於沃克特在詩中大量試探各種乍看之下沒有關係的關係可能性，本文將進一步將其引申為後殖民情境的基調，亦即比較之必要、經驗翻譯之必要。而以「關係性」、「比較性」作為思考基礎，將可避開理性主體概念與本質主義式認同政治的盲點。

關鍵詞：沃克特、《提也波洛之犬》、獨一性、關係性、比較性