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

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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

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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