**Conflicting Loyalties in "A Far Cry from Africa"**

Walcott discusses the conflict between his loyalties to Africa and to Britain in "A Far Cry from Africa." The title of the poem emphasizes Walcott's cultural instability as it implies a type of alienation from Africa, despite its concentration on African themes. Walcott juxtaposes the Africans and the British, focusing on each group's transgressions. The poet maintains a negative view of his hybridism: "I who am poisoned with the blood of both,/Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" (1246.26-7). This severely pessimistic image illustrates a consequence of displacement--isolation. It seems that Walcott feels foreign in both cultures due to his lack of "pure" blood. An individual's sense of identity arises from cultural influences which define his or her character according to a particular society's standards. The poet's hybrid heritage prevents him from identifying directly with one culture and creates a feeling of isolation. The poem provides a textual version of the poet's mental dissertation on the vices and virtues which differentiate each culture.

Walcott, in "A Far Cry from Africa," depicts Africa and Britain in the standard roles of the vanquished and the conqueror, although he portrays the cruel imperialistic exploits of the British without creating sympathy for the African tribesmen. This objectivity allows Walcott to contemplate the faults of each culture without reverting to the bias created by attention to moral considerations. He characterizes the African Kikuyu in a negative light: "flies/Batten upon the bloodstream of the veldt" (1245.2-3). The Kikuyu resemble primitive savages who abuse the fertile resources of their native plains. In this sense, the entrance of the British appears beneficial not only to the inhabitants, but also to the suffering land. However, Walcott contradicts this savior image of the British through an unfavorable description in the ensuing lines: "The worm, colonial of carrion, cries:/'Waste no compassion on these separate dead!'" (1245.5-6). The poet casts the authoritative British figure as a worm, a creature which exists below the fly on the evolutionary ladder. The cruelty of the invaders toward their captives correlates with the agricultural and technological ignorance of the Africans. Walcott's feelings about his heritage remain ambiguous through his focus on the failings of each culture. He portrays the futility of an empirical comparison of the two cultures: "The gorilla wrestles with the superman" (1246.25). The Africans, associated with a primitive, natural strength, and the British, portrayed as an artificially enhanced power, remain equal in the contest for control over Africa and its people.

Walcott further complicates his search for a legitimate identity in the final stanza. He questions, "How choose/between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (1246.29-30). These lines identify the aspects of each culture that the poet admires. He remains partial to the African terrain and way of life, while he prefers the English language and literary tradition. The poet grapples with his affinity for progress and technology contained within the British culture and his nostalgia for the rich cultural heritage of Africa. The magnetism that each culture holds for Walcott causes a tension which augments as the poem continues. The concluding lines of the poem deny the poet resolution of his quandary: "How can I face such slaughter and be cool?/How can I turn from Africa and live?" (1246.32-3). Walcott's divided loyalties engender a sense of guilt as he wants to adopt the "civilized" culture of the British, but cannot excuse their immoral treatment of the Africans. "A Far Cry from Africa" reveals the extent of Walcott's consternation through the poet's inability to resolve the paradox of his hybrid inheritance.