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Derek Walcott; edited by Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh
Another Life. Fully Annotated with a critical essay and comprehensive notes.
Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, xiv + 354 pp.

Reviewed by Carmen Ruiz-Castañeda

When one thinks of Derek Walcott's later poetry, three things come to mind: an innovative and elegant style, a deft use of metonymy and allusion and an encyclopedic knowledge of art, literature and history. These traits have elicited praise and admiration from fellow poets and high critical acclaim from academics. Yet, the same elements which merit a Nobel Prize often prove to be a stumbling block for readers new to Walcott's work and to the literature of the Caribbean. In a new fully annotated edition of Walcott's *Another Life*, Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh recognize the poetic autobiography to be an Aristotelian masterpiece, "an exquisitely plotted work" in which structural and thematic unity depend on the exact placement of each word. However, to truly recognize Walcott's mastery of the English language, his poetic craft and Caribbean history, readers of *Another Life* must have at least a rudimentary knowledge of these subjects. Assuming a pedagogical but not pedantic posture, Baugh and Nepaulsingh demystify Walcott's autobiography without over determining its meaning or privileging one particular reading over another through their clear annotations and an illuminating critical essay. In a sense, to read *Another Life* in this edition is to return to the classroom of a favorite professor who indulges his or her students with vignettes about the author's personal life and the fruits of a lifetime of scholarship. The collaboration between Baugh and Nepaulsingh broadens the scope of the annotations, as Baugh is considered the foremost authority on Walcott, and Nepaulsingh's background as a Spanish medievalist allows for a multi-lingual approach to the autobiography. Beyond creating a page-bound classroom, Baugh and Nepaulsingh also contribute to contemporary scholarship about Walcott through the "Critical Essay," which helps to standardize the poet's numerous drafts and manuscripts housed in archives across the Caribbean region.

Following a brief preface which underscores the importance of the work in relation to the tradition of Western writing and the development of Caribbean letters, the poem is presented in its entirety without footnotes or parenthetical references that would otherwise detract from the experience of reading the poem in the original form (vii). As skilled teachers of literature, the authors aim to preserve the challenges and joys of the first encounter for the readers. They do not provide the reader with an easy crib sheet at the bottom of the page or along the margins, but leave the reader to encounter Walcott's lyrics on their own. As Walcott's work resonates differently for each individual, Baugh and Nepaulsingh reserve their critical commentary until the end of the text. Choosing to subordinate the "Critical Essay" to the text of the poetry allows

the authors to preserve a multiplicity of meanings rather than imposing a single critical framework on the poem.

In the preface, Baugh and Nepaulsingh rightly state that “[t]he richness of the text and the encyclopedic nature of its references invite commentary,” and they follow Walcott’s thoughts through the many avenues and disciplines that have influenced him (viii). No reference is considered too small or too well known for comment, as nearly every line has a corresponding annotation. This speaks to the density of allusion in Walcott’s work, and also to the tenacity and perseverance of the scholars. For example, the annotation for lines 132-133 glosses the phrase “the white face of the dead child” which appears in Book One “The Divided Child” shortly after Walcott describes a childhood encounter with George Campbell’s poetry (230). In this annotation, Baugh and Nepaulsingh model the poetic process stating, “A stream of new creative associations floods the poet’s mind: cemetery › moon › reading glass › bulb › book › black child praised in a poem › like black Albertina praised in painting › not like Pinkie, a “pale, black-haired and pre-maturely pretty [St. Lucian child who looked] white” (Ms One 57), who is now dead and buried in Choc Cemetery, and whom the poet used to revere › nor like Thomas Lawrence’s painting of another European Pinkie” (230). This unorthodox annotation allows the reader to follow not only the poet’s thought process, but also the process of poetic analysis from the scholars’ point of view. Other annotations foreground motifs that recur throughout *Another Life* as in the note to line 13 on “amber,” which Baugh and Nepaulsingh find to be a color that references the sunset, a type of resin used to seal paintings, and the use of flame imagery later on in the poem. These generous annotations provide information from Walcott’s manuscripts and correspondence, not commonly available to the public, and model critical analysis of poetry.

The “Critical Essay” serves an important purpose in this volume as it permits Baugh and Nepaulsingh to engage in sustained critical analysis of *Another Life* that effectively links together the fruits of the annotations. Each evocatively titled subsection of the critical essay provides useful information and illuminates multiple avenues of interpretation. The section titled “Before the Poem Came to Be” describes Walcott’s life and early influences, which are essential for seeing the richness of Book One of the poem. Beyond teaching *Another Life*, this brief biography would also serve as an excellent introduction for beginning students or those unfamiliar with Walcott and his work. The second section, “How the Poem Came to Be,” will be of particular interest to students of cultural studies, as well as creative writers, in that it illuminates the often hidden relationship between the artist and the publisher, and between the writer and the greater community of poets. Rather than hindering or antagonizing the writer, the sympathetic readers at Farrar, Straus and Giroux helped Walcott hone the production and improve the quality of his poetry.

In the final section, “What the Poem Came to Be,” Baugh and Nepaulsingh give free reign to their critical faculties and explore the many avenues through which Walcott’s autobiography can be examined. One of the primary questions for the authors in this section is the question of genre, and rightly so. *Another Life* complicates the conventional definitions of

autobiography, poetry, prose and life writing by crossing boundaries and demanding its own characterization. Baugh and Nepaulsingh take up the challenge and do it justice in a way that few can. Their research reveals how deeply Walcott has been immersed in the writings of the Western world and the debate over the limitations of poetry and prose. In their understanding, Walcott partakes in a literary lineage that includes Wordsworth, Shelly and Joyce to name a few. Nevertheless, they do not privilege Walcott's colonial education over his Caribbean connections. Walcott's relationship with Dunstan St. Omer and Harry Simmons, as well as his connections to the emerging nation-states of the Caribbean and the push for federation are explored in depth.

This annotated volume is an asset for teachers of literature and creative writing looking for a new way to present the poetic process in the classroom. Baugh and Nepaulsingh's three categories of analysis – “Before,” “How” and “What” – offer new ways of thinking about the creative process. Scholars with an interest in cultural studies will also find this account relevant as the authors provide extensive information on the relationship between the production of the poem and the production of the book, which highlights their inter-relatedness. Professors looking to add an interdisciplinary dimension to their courses will find the conclusion to “A Critical Essay” particularly beneficial because it focuses on the relationship between poetry and painting, a significant aspect of Walcott's life, as he is also known as a proficient watercolorist.

Outside of the classroom, scholars will find this volume useful as a means of standardizing the language used to discuss Walcott's pre-publication drafts and manuscripts and their location in libraries and private collections around the world. Baugh and Nepaulsingh are methodical and generous scholars who have provided their colleagues with the beginnings of a comprehensive map for Walcott scholarship, which is fitting given Baugh's extensive work on Walcott and Caribbean poetry in general. The only improvement I would suggest in this respect would be to present the numerous sources used as a list prior to the critical essay as I found the multiple references to MS One, MS Two, the Walcott Materials, and the FSG archives difficult to keep track of. This list might also provide the most current location of the materials to facilitate the work of future scholars interested in studying previous drafts and Walcott's correspondence. This minor caveat notwithstanding, Baugh and Nepaulsingh's work in this fully annotated volume stands as a model of clarity and thoroughness for emerging scholars to follow as they undertake their own projects.