

PLAYS FOR TODAY

WITH CSEC® STUDY GUIDE

Ti-Jean and His Brothers
An Echo in the Bone
Man Better Man



Derek Walcott
Dennis Scott
Errol Hill

CSEC® STUDY GUIDE FOR *TI-JEAN AND HIS BROTHERS* BY
Kenneth Jaikaransingh

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Introduction

The three plays included in this volume have several qualities in common. Not only are the authors all West Indian; the plays themselves emerge from the substratum of Afro-Caribbean life which is reflected in their myths, their pulse, their speech and song. Although they were written at different times in the recent past by authors hailing from Trinidad, Jamaica and St Lucia, all three dramas deal with the supernatural, are essentially about the folk experience, and speak with the rhythms of vernacular idiom. The individual playwrights may have different ends in view and may employ varying dramatic means to reach those ends, but the source of their inspiration is the uniquely Caribbean experience that runs like a subterranean stream through the method and meaning of all three plays.

On the surface, Errol Hill's *Man Better Man* is a comedic folk story about stick-fighters, their courage, desires and fears, set in a colourful carnivalesque environment. These once socially despised *batoniers* are the legendary heroes of folk history. At a time when public freedom, made manifest in the annual carnival celebration, was in danger of being suppressed, the stick-fighters were in the vanguard of the struggle to preserve the festival intact. Thus when Hill opens his play with a Prologue that calls on the old warriors to 'come out in the road' and do battle, he is invoking the spirits of ancestral guardians to preside at the performance of his play and reminding audiences of the recurrent need to protect hardwon freedoms.

Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone* shatters sequential time in a series of dreamlike episodes. Characters effortlessly adopt other personas as racial memory is evoked to flash sequences of black slavery, peonage, and attendant evils before our eyes. Yet the entire action is subsumed in a single evening's performance of the traditional Nine-Night Ceremony which is held to honour the spirit of a departed loved one. By re-enacting, with the aid of ritual possession, the central events that led to the murder of a white estate owner by a black peasant farmer who then drowns in a river while attempting to escape, understanding is shared and atonement made.

In *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, playwright Derek Walcott draws on St Lucian folklore for his story of a poor mother and her three sons who dwell on the edge of a forest. But this forest is magical; it is inhabited by creatures that talk and by the devil and his minions, among them an aborted infant who wishes to be born so that he may taste life. The devil takes other forms. At one time he is Papa Bois, the Old Man of the Forest but wearing now a forked tail, and at another he is the white Planter whose principal aim in life is to enslave the minds and spirits of his black workers. Once again we are in the realm of

fantasy where the actual and the miraculous collide and where man is thrown back on his own resourcefulness for self-preservation.

There are similar resonances, too, in the structure of the plays, although this similarity may not be immediately apparent to the casual reader. At one level, *Man Better Man* and *Ti-Jean* both follow a linear pattern of plot development while *An Echo in the Bone* is layered with swiftly moving temporal changes, back and forth between present and past. More important is the fact that each author seems to be consciously seeking a format that will permit him to encompass the expressive elements that typify life as he has experienced it in the Caribbean. Oratorical speech, chant, song, choruses, drumming, music and dancing, and the underlying tensions that inhabit relations between peoples of different racial ancestry are woven into the fabric of the plays.

For his milieu, Hill takes the giddy atmosphere of carnival, with its wild abandon of caution and propriety, in order to celebrate the exploits of the battling troubadours. Likewise, he adopts the spicy rhymed language of the calypsonian for his dialogue, thus easing the transition from speech to song. Walcott, a renowned poet and weaver of words, takes the versatile Anancy storyteller for his model and unfolds his folktale with the careful formality of a practised craftsman. Like the traditional spinner of stories, he too can speak in many tongues using choral speech, singing and dancing to enhance his presentation. As noted above, the format of Scott's play is patterned on a death ritual during which the past is made manifest through communal submission to the power that resides in drum, word, song and gesture. The search for a West Indian theatrical idiom is then implicit in the plays presented here.

Nor do the authors mine Caribbean lore merely for the sake of enriching their art. The plays may summon the past but they are not fixed in distant time. Each in its own way carries a message of urgency for Caribbean peoples and, by extension, to all those who must shed the burden of past oppression and take command of their lives in the present. The message is one of courage, endurance and self-reliance, with due reverence for those who went before, in facing up to the challenging times of today's world.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers

The author

Derek Walcott published his first collection of *25 Poems* when he was nineteen years old and his first full-length play, *Henri Christophe*, a drama on the Haitian revolutionary leader, a year later. Walcott has to his credit over a dozen books of poetry and his verse was published regularly in the leading literary journals on both sides of the Atlantic. He also wrote some three dozen plays, fifteen of which have appeared in print.

Walcott was born on the West Indian island of St Lucia and attended the West Indies University of Jamaica where he gained a degree in English and a diploma in Education. Before entering the university, he had already produced several of his short plays in St Lucia and he continued to write and stage his plays while at college. Upon graduation he taught in school for some years until 1957 when he was commissioned to write an epic drama to mark the inauguration of the West Indies Federation in Trinidad. From this time on, Walcott devoted himself primarily to writing and play directing. In addition to his creative writing, he was a feature writer and critic for newspapers in Jamaica and Trinidad.

In 1958 Walcott moved to Trinidad and the following year, in order to produce his plays, he formed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop company which he directed for two decades. He began touring with this company in 1967 and visited several Caribbean lands, the United States and Canada. His plays have also been produced professionally in North America and in Britain.

Walcott received numerous honours for his writing, among them being the Guinness Award for Poetry, the Heinemann Award for Verse, the Royal Society of Literature Award, the Cholmondeley Award, and an Honorary Doctor of Letters Degree from the University of the West Indies. He was the recipient of an Obie Award for his play, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, which was presented by the Negro Ensemble Company in New York in 1971. In 1981 the prestigious 'genius-award' was bestowed on him by the MacArthur Foundation which amounted to a grant of \$250,000 with no stipulations attached. He held the position of Visiting Professor of Poetry and Theatre at Boston University in Massachusetts, USA for over two decades, and was scholar-in-residence at the University of Alberta and Professor of Poetry at the University of Essex.

Derek Walcott died in March 2017.

The play

Derek Walcott, premier Caribbean dramatist and a major poet of our time, called *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* his most West Indian play: 'the least forced, the most spontaneous, the least laboured of my plays so far, both in rhythm and concept'.¹ Walcott wrote it in 1957 during a five-day stay in New York on his first visit to the metropolis, 'out of sheer terror of the place and a fierce but illuminating nostalgia for the untheatrical simplicities of St Lucia, the island where I was born ... It was created under the pressure of sudden loneliness and exile.'

When the play, in a revised version with additional music and songs, was being prepared for a 1970 presentation at the Town Hall in Port of Spain, Trinidad, Walcott elaborated on its genesis and his search for an appropriate form in which to couch his folk-fable. He wished, he said, to write 'a softly

For Peter Walcott

Sample Pages

Characters

CRICKET

FROG

FIREFLY

BIRD

GROS JEAN

MI-JEAN

TI-JEAN

MOTHER

BOLOM

OLD MAN, or PAPA BOIS

PLANTER

DEVIL

Ti-Jean and His Brothers was first performed at the Little Carib Theatre, Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1958 with the following cast:

GROS JEAN William Webb

MI-JEAN Horace James

TI-JEAN Freddie Kissoon

MOTHER { Jean Herbert
 { Veronica Jenkin

BOLOM Russell Winston

DEVIL Errol Jones

FROG Bertrand Henry

The musicians were: John Henderson, Gene Lawrence, Colin Laird and Michael Warren.

The play was revived by the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in June 1970 at the Town Hall, Port of Spain, with original music by Andre Tanker and with the following cast:

CRICKET	Adele Bynoe
FROG	Hamilton Parris
BIRD	Roslyn Rappaport
GROS JEAN	Claude Reid
MI-JEAN	Stanley Marshall
BOLOM	Belinda Barnes
TI-JEAN	Ellsworth Primus
MOTHER	Ermine Wright
PAPA BOIS	} Albert Laveau
PLANTER	
DEVIL	

Prologue

[*Evening. Rain. The heights of a forest. A CRICKET, a FROG, a FIREFLY, a BIRD. Left, a hut with bare table, an empty bowl, stools. The MOTHER waiting*]

FROG: Greek-croak, Greek-croak.

CRICKET: Greek-croak, Greek-croak.

[*The others join*]

FROG [*Sneezing*]: Aeschylus me!

All that rain and no moon tonight.

CRICKET: The moon always there even fighting the rain

Creek-crak, it is cold, but the moon always there

And Ti-Jean in the moon just like the story.

[*The BIRD passes*]

CRICKET: Before you fly home, listen,

The cricket cracking a story

A story about the moon.

FROG: If you look in the moon,

Though no moon is here tonight,

There is a man, no, a boy,

Bent by a weight of faggots

He carried on his shoulder,

A small dog trotting with him.

That is Ti-Jean the hunter,

He got the heap of sticks

From the old man of the forest

They calling Papa Bois,

Because he beat the devil,

God put him in that height

To be the sun's right hand

And light the evil dark,

But as the bird so ignorant

I will start the tale truly.

[*Music*]

Well, one time it had a mother,

That mother had three sons.

The first son was Gros Jean.
That son he was the biggest,
His arm was hard as iron,
But he was very stupid.

[Enter GROS JEAN, a bundle of faggots in one hand, an axe over his shoulder, moving in an exaggerated march to music. The CREATURES laugh]

FROG: The name of the second son.
They was calling him Mi-Jean,
In size, the second biggest,
So only half as stupid; now,
He was a fisherman, but
Always studying book, and
What a fisherman; for
When he going and fish,
Always forgetting the bait,
So between de bait and debate ...

CRICKET: *Mi boug qui tait cooyon!*
(Look man who was a fool!)

[Roll of drums. Comic *quatro*, martial]

[Enter MI-JEAN from the opposite side, carrying a book in one hand and a fishing net over his shoulder. Halfway across the stage he flings the net casually, still reading]

BIRD: How poor their mother was?
[Sad music on flute]

FROG: Oh that was poverty, bird!
Old hands dried up like claws
Heaping old sticks on sticks,
too weak to protect her nest.
Look, the four of that family

[Light shows the hut]

Lived in a little house,
Made up of wood and thatch,
On the forehead of the mountain,
Where night and day was rain,
Mist, cloud white as cotton

Caught in the dripping branches;
Where sometimes it was so cold
The frog would stop its singing
[*The FROG stops. Five beats. Resumes*]

The cricket would stop rattling
And the wandering firefly
That lights the tired woodsman
Home through the raining trees
Could not strike a damp light
To star the wanderer home!

[*The music stops. The brothers GROS JEAN and MI-JEAN put their arms around each other, and to heavy drums tramp home*]

CRICKET: I damned sorry for that mother.

FROG: Aie, cricket, you croak the truth!
The life of an old woman
With her husband cold in earth
Where the bamboo leaves lie lightly,
And smell of mouldering flesh,
How well I know that story!
Near where the mother was,
Across the wet and melancholy
Mountain where her hut was, O God,
The Devil used to live!

[*Crash of cymbals. Shrieks, thunder. The CREATURES cower as the DEVIL with his troop of fiends, the Werewolf, the Diabliesse, the BOLOM, somersault and dance across the stage. The sky is red*]

DEVIL: *Bai, Diable-là manger un 'ti mamaille!*
(Give the Devil a child for dinner!)

DEVILS: *Un, deux, trois 'ti mamaille!*
(One, two, three little children!)

[*They whirl around the stage leaping, chanting, then as suddenly go off*]

BIRD: Wow!
Were they frightened of him?

FROG: If they were frightened?
They were frightened of his skin,

CSEC® study guide for *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*

The CSEC English B syllabus

In the current CSEC English B syllabus, there are two examination papers plus a School Based Assessment (Paper 031, which carries 45 marks and a weight of 21 per cent of the total assessment).

Paper 01 is 1 hour 45 minutes long and consists of **three questions**, one from each of the three basic genres: drama, poetry and prose fiction. Each question is made up of between five and seven questions that require **short answers**. All the questions are compulsory. This paper carries 60 marks and a weight of 29 per cent of the total assessment.

Paper 02 is 2 hours 10 minutes long and requires **essay-type answers** to **three questions**, one from each genre: drama, poetry and prose. This paper carries 105 marks and a weight of 50 per cent of the total assessment.

In the drama section, there are two questions, one on each prescribed text. You must therefore answer the essay-type question on *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, if this is the play you have studied. **Only one essay-type question will be based on this text.**

Practice for Paper 02 questions is provided in **Essay questions** (page 260).

The syllabus insists that drama is a unique literary genre. It includes elements of prose and poetry, but teachers and students should always bear in mind the following:

- Plays are meant to be performed, not read.
- Stage directions are cues to actors and directors.
- We understand character in drama primarily through the interactions onstage.
- Lighting, costumes and stage props help to develop character, themes and atmosphere in a production.

Because *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* is a dramatic work, seeing a live or filmed production is highly rewarding. Reading sections of the play in dramatic form (as if for a radio play) leads to discussions about character development and motivation, tone and the thematic concerns of the playwright, and the use of dramatic devices such as production elements and stage business. The ultimate reward probably comes from staging a production in the class or school, after the play has been thoroughly digested.

See page 246 for a key to some **Dramatic and literary terms** that will be useful in your study of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. Brief questions are also included to stimulate your thinking about the play.

Studying the text

A thorough knowledge of the text is essential in preparation for answering questions on *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. At least three readings are recommended.

On the **first reading** you should become familiar with the plot and the main characters, and get some idea of the setting. You should complete this reading without any reference to notes or criticism or commentary. See **Explanatory words, phrases and notes** (page 250) for explanations of unfamiliar words and phrases.

Following the first reading, you should do some background work (see **Preliminary activities** (page 225)).

The **second reading** involves close reading of the text, making notes and observations as you go along. Organize your notes under a series of headings, such as characterization, key themes, structure, dramatic techniques, use of props and other devices. This will help you to develop considerable insight into the play. You can use the **Review questions** (page 256) to focus your thinking, and provide you with practice for the short-answer questions in Paper 01.

Following the second reading, you should read Professor Hill's introduction to this play (pages 4–10), and the sections of this study guide that follow on the author, themes, characters, and dramatic and literary techniques (pages 228–249). See how many of the observations you agree with, or have picked up on your own. Remember as well that you are free to disagree with what critics or observers have said or written, once you can defend your point of view with evidence from the text.

The **third reading** is another fairly close reading, during which you begin to assemble your various perspectives on the play, and prepare to present a position, or defend one, on some aspect of the play as both a literary work and a text for live production.

After this reading, you should look at the **Essay questions** (page 260), which will help you to prepare for Paper 02. Begin by outlining possible answers to the questions listed, as well as to the other questions your teacher provides, or questions you may have seen elsewhere.

Three outstanding plays by three of the Caribbean's greatest playwrights,
brought together in one volume.

Ti-Jean and His Brothers was Derek Walcott's first venture into musical plays and is still his most popular work. A lilting St Lucian folk-tale, it tells the story of a poor family who dwell on the edge of a magical forest haunted by the devil's spirits. The brilliance of Walcott's writing draws us into the realms of fantasy where the actual and the miraculous collide. Now with CSEC® Study Guide.

Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone* is set during a traditional Nine-Night Ceremony held to honour the spirit of the dead. Shattering sequential time in a series of dreamlike episodes, the play takes us back to the time of plantations and slavery – and the savage murder of the white estate owner. Who killed Mr. Charles? The answers lie deep in the racial memory, they 'echo in the bone'.

The giddy atmosphere of carnival is the setting for Errol Hill's *Man Better Man*, a rumbustious, colourful comedy musical about stickfighters. With dance and song the battling troubadours and the calypsonian weave a tale of bravery, superstition and fraudulence. When first performed the *Times* of London described it as 'a blazing, electrifying feast of rhythm and colour'.

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