

Derek Walcott's Early Writing (1948-1962): A Critical Reading



Gavin Herbertson
St Catherine's College
University of Oxford

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Gavin Herbertson
St Catherine's College, Oxford
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Abstract

This thesis offers a critical reading of the poetry and drama Derek Walcott composed between 1948 and 1962. It contends that Walcott's positions on imitation, hybridity and mimicry were influenced by his reading at school and changed little as he aged, but that the narrative currently employed to conceptualise his artistic trajectory has distorted this continuity. Largely comprising imitations of Anglo-European texts produced in the context of a self-avowed apprenticeship, his early writing was celebrated for its maturity and virtuosity in the 1940s and '50s. However, it was retrospectively denigrated by detractors at the University of the West Indies in the 1960s and '70s who framed it as beholden to Europe. Walcott defended his poetics amidst this criticism, but when discussions of hybridity's positive potential gained critical currency in the West from the 1980s onwards, this earlier defence was misunderstood as a shift towards embracing Africa by scholars who could no longer access his earliest work. This gave rise to the idea that he departed from an overreliance on European writing in the early 1970s and developed an increasingly hybrid aesthetic thereafter. That narrative was generalised in the 1990s to formulate a model for Caribbean literature, which was then employed to theorise more widely about the interrelationship between modernist and postcolonial literatures.

By revisioning misconceptions about Walcott's early work through a series of targeted close readings, the thesis challenges the predominant narrative for Caribbean literary history and probes the complex points of intersection that exist between metropolitan and peripheral literatures. In particular, it employs Walcott's early work as a case study to evaluate the four most popular paradigms currently used to conceptualise global literary influence, which variously characterise the ideological traffic between centre and periphery in terms of cross-cultural osmotic diffusion, anti-imperial antagonism, regional polymodernity, and coeval anti-capitalism. Ultimately, it advocates the development of a "tidalectic" Caribbean literary historiography grounded in regionally specific notions of influence and spatiotemporality.

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Introduction

Derek Walcott (1930-2017) is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, but his work has been fundamentally misunderstood. Born and raised on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia, he enjoyed an illustrious career spanning seven decades which saw him win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. His poems and plays proved pivotal in the creation of a West Indian literary tradition and have since become permanent fixtures of high school literature courses and undergraduate modules worldwide. For over thirty years, these programs have taught that his aesthetics developed through a series of stages: he produced derivative imitations of Anglo-European work in the 1940s and '50s, diverged from Western models in the 1960s and '70s, and composed distinctly West Indian work from the 1980s onwards. In revisiting Walcott's very earliest verse and drama, this thesis will employ insights drawn from Caribbean literary criticism, postcolonial theory and global modernism to challenge that developmental narrative and offer a fresh perspective on his writing. In so doing, it will test longstanding convictions of each of these three fields and work towards bridging their divides.

Walcott's early writing was composed in the context of a self-avowed literary apprenticeship, throughout which he honed his craft by imitating famous Anglo-European texts. When his schoolfriends were out playing cricket, he was inside studying Milton and Shakespeare. His appetite was as voracious as his talent was prodigious; he started composing a poem every single day as an eleven-year-old and continued the practice throughout his adolescence and early adulthood. The process of composition remained largely the same: he would copy out a canonical Western poem in his exercise book 'down to its rhyme and meter', but change the 'cultural content' to correspond to a 'Caribbean context'.¹ Aged seventeen, for instance, he climbed up to the lighthouse on Pigeon Island by Rodney Bay and looked out across the channel

¹ Ankhi Mukherjee, *What is a Classic?: Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon* (California: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

between Saint Lucia and Martinique in search of inspiration.² First, he studied Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Duns Scotus's Oxford' (1879):

TOWERY city and branchy between towers;
Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded;
The dapple-eared lily below thee; that country and town did
Once encounter in, here coped & poisèd powers; (1-4)³

Then, he reworked the poem. He replicated elements of its form and rhyme scheme but transformed Hopkins's dreaming spires into the verdant, sandy shore he saw before him. The result was 'As John to Patmos' (1948):

As John to Patmos, among the rocks and the blue, live air, hounded
His heart to peace, as here surrounded
By the strewn-silver on waves, the wood's crude hair, the rounded
Breasts of the milky bays, palms flocks, the green and dead (1-4)⁴

This early practice of adaptive imitation was to prove formative. Having first published a poem in Saint Lucia's national newspaper aged just fourteen – an imitation of Milton called '44' (1944) – he went on to release four poetry collections between 1948 and 1962. The first three of these were self-published over a four-year period, commencing when he was eighteen – *25 Poems* appeared in 1948, *Epitaph for the Young: A Poem in XII Cantos* came out the following year, and *Poems* was published in 1951. *25 Poems* proved nothing short of ground-breaking upon its release: it garnered unprecedented levels of success and quickly became the most widely celebrated book of verse ever published by a writer residing in the West Indies. One contemporary critic declared Walcott 'the most interesting poet so far from the Caribbean' upon reading it, while another suggested the collection 'should be sold abroad to show others what West Indians are capable of'.⁵ The initial print run of 200 sold out quickly, with around an eighth of the volumes being sent to Frank Collymore, then editor of the Barbadian literary magazine *Bim*. Collymore was so

² Bruce King, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 48.

³ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 40.

⁴ Derek Walcott, *25 Poems* (Port of Spain: Guardian Commercial Printery, 1948), p. 5.

⁵ King, pp. 62-3.

impressed that he arranged for the printing of a second edition at his own expense, comprising a further 230 copies.⁶ He gave the first ever lecture on Walcott – to a Bridgetown literary society – and sent a copy of the booklet to the showrunner for the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* radio program, Henry Swanzy, informing him of his 'important discovery'.⁷ Swanzy seconded Collymore's high opinion: he deemed Walcott's collection 'the most remarkable example of writing' he had encountered in his position, dubbed its author a 'genius', and wrote an essay for *Caribbean Quarterly* declaring that 'men of talent like Walcott' would soon build a West Indian literary tradition.⁸ Having been introduced to Walcott's work by Swanzy, Roy Fuller, the celebrated war-poet and future Oxford Professor of Poetry, then went on *Caribbean Voices* to announce that Walcott's collection was 'the most important book of poems [he had] seen for a long time' and predicted that it would become a collector's item in future.⁹ That *25 Poems* was reviewed so extensively – in London and four Caribbean islands – represented an unprecedented feat for a West Indian poet. In the estimation of no lesser figure than V. S. Naipaul, the volume's success demonstrated the 'value of writing' itself to aspiring West Indian authors.¹⁰

After self-publishing his first three collections, Walcott did not release another until he was picked up by the mid-sized London-based publisher Jonathan Cape in 1962. Throughout the intervening decade, he composed and staged a number of plays, submitted work to *Caribbean Voices* (before it ceased broadcasting in 1958), sent poetry to Caribbean literary magazines, worked as a journalist for the *Trinidad Guardian*, and had verse published in several international periodicals, the most notable of which was the *London Magazine* (where he sent work after

⁶ Letter from Frank Collymore to Henry Swanzy dated 28 March 1949, GB 150 MS42/1/5 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

⁷ Edward Baugh, 'In Praise of Colly', *The Caribbean Review of Books* (2008) [online] <<http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/16-may-2008/in-praise-of-colly/>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

⁸ Letter from Henry Swanzy to Derek Walcott dated 17 March 1949, and from Swanzy to Collymore dated 30 March 1949, GB 150 MS42/1/5 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections); H. L. V. Swanzy, 'Caribbean Voices: Prolegomena to a West Indian Culture', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 1 (1949), 21-8 (p. 25).

⁹ Roy Fuller, 'The Poetry of D.A. Walcott', *Caribbean Voices* (22 May 1949). This proved prophetic: in 2011, Allen and Patricia Ahearn estimated that a first edition of *25 Poems* would sell for around 4500 USD at auction. Allen Ahearn and Patricia Ahearn, *Collected Books: The Guide to Identification and Values* (Comus: Quill and Bush, 2011), p. 1998.

¹⁰ V. S. Naipaul, 'Foreword' in *The Adventure of Gurudeva and Other Stories* (London: André Deutsch, 1976), p. 10.

meeting editor Alan Ross in Trinidad in 1960).¹¹ The publication of his first metropolitan volume – *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960* – represents the terminus of my study because it signified his full admission into the international literary sphere. *In a Green Night* reprinted some variants of earlier work along with a host of new compositions and its publication was a second key milestone in the history of West Indian literature. In 1972, Gordon Rohlehr termed the compendium a ‘landmark’ in anglophone Caribbean poetry because it represented the ‘first time West Indian landscape was being genuinely seen, and interpreted by a British West Indian poet’.¹² As Edward Baugh notes, it was also the first time that a West Indian poet ‘writing out of the West Indies and clearly identified with the West Indies’ had been able to get his collection published by a major metropolitan institution.¹³ The book was a commercial success and contemporary reviews were very favourable. Its first print run of 2000 copies sold out by 1967, whereafter it was twice reprinted.¹⁴ The *Sunday Times* called it ‘fresh and moving’, while the *Cherwell* claimed Walcott had written ‘some of the most interesting poetry of his generation’.¹⁵ The work was also reviewed extensively across the Caribbean and its quality led the region’s most renowned man of letters C. L. R. James to hail Walcott as the first true poet of the British West Indies, a figure for whom he had been waiting ‘a very long time’.¹⁶ In fact, the early readership of *In a Green Night* reached as far as Rhodesia and Nyasaland, where Gwyn Richards deemed it ‘excellent’ on national radio.¹⁷

This thesis has grown out of the disparity between the unprecedented standing afforded to these collections when they first appeared and the minimal attention they have since received.

¹¹ Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh (eds.), ‘Reading Another Life: A Critical Essay’ in *Another Life: Fully Annotated* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004), p. 155.

¹² Gordon Rohlehr, ‘Derek Walcott’s *The Gulf and Other Poems*’, *Black Images*, 1 (1972), 66-9 (p. 66).

¹³ Edward Baugh, ‘A History of Poetry’ in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Volume 2: English- and Dutch-Speaking Regions*, ed. by A. James Arnold (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2001), pp. 227-84 (p. 252).

¹⁴ King, p. 181.

¹⁵ Cyril Connolly, ‘The Professor and the Others’, *Sunday Times* (29 April 1962), n.p.; P. N. Furbank, ‘New Poetry’, *Cherwell* (19 May 1962), n.p.

¹⁶ C. L. R. James, ‘A Distinguished Man of Letters Reviews “In a Green Night”’, *Trinidad Guardian* (6 May 1962), p. 10.

¹⁷ Gwyn Richards, ‘In a Green Night’, *Federal Broadcasting Corporation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (May 1962).

Entire monographs have been written on Walcott in which these early collections are not mentioned and, even in a chapter dedicated exclusively to Walcott's earlier poetry, Angelo Righetti does not discuss *25 Poems*.¹⁸ Few critics have written on the texts and even when they have done so it has largely been in passing. Baugh has discussed them on occasion, while Robert Hamner pays 'brief notice' to 'several' of 'the minor poems [...] that were not included in [*In a Green Night*]' in his monograph *Derek Walcott* (1993).¹⁹ John Thieme, Rei Terada and Paul Breslin have all written brief analyses of some of the poems in their books on Walcott, but only Patricia Ismond and Stewart Brown have written full chapters on them.²⁰ Because Walcott's early work has aroused little critical interest, much of it is now confined to a handful of archives in the Caribbean, United States, and United Kingdom. In the case of *25 Poems*, there are only six copies available in libraries around the world, four of which are in the West Indies and two of which are in New York. The other collections have fared little better: there are only nine accessible copies of *Poems* and twelve of *Epitaph*. Only the latter has ever been republished, appearing in the Derek Walcott special edition of *Agenda* poetry magazine (2002). My research seeks to remedy this neglect and reintegrate this material into the critical conversation. It builds on the important interventions earlier scholars have made to our understanding of Walcott's oeuvre by revisiting his earliest work to provide a more holistic sense of his writing. However, before that new perspective can be offered, it is first necessary to explore why Walcott wrote imitatively in his youth, how and why the reputations of the imitations he produced have since suffered, and why his earliest works have not yet been revisited.

¹⁸ Angelo Righetti, "Like solemn Afro-Greeks avid for grades": Individual and Historical Shame in Walcott's Earlier Poetry' in *Poetics and the Politics of Shame in Postcolonial Literature*, ed. by David Attwell, Annalisa Pes, and Susanna Zinato (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 176-91.

¹⁹ Robert D. Hamner, *Derek Walcott* (New York: Twayne, 1993), p. 21.

²⁰ See John Thieme, *Contemporary World Writers: Derek Walcott* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992); Paul Breslin, *Nobody's Nation – Reading Derek Walcott* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Patricia Ismond, *Abandoning Dead Metaphors: The Caribbean Phase of Derek Walcott's Poetry* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2001); Stewart Brown (ed.), 'The Apprentice: 25 Poems, Epitaph for the Young, Poems, and In a Green Night' in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, (Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1991) pp. 13-36.

I. Imitation in a Caribbean Context: Mimicry, Hybridity, and the Critical Landscape

Imitative apprenticeships have been undertaken across the world and throughout history.

According to James Fenton, aspiring poets have always been shameless 'kleptomaniacs' who 'steal' from their 'masters', their 'friends', and even their 'enemies'.²¹ Christine Alexander similarly labels imitation 'a major characteristic' of youthful writing in her landmark study of the phenomenon.²² However, the specific contours of Walcott's apprenticeship were shaped by a number of factors tied to his immediate Caribbean context. Perhaps the most important of these related to the 'sound colonial education' he shared with Shabine, the protagonist of his masterpiece 'The Schooner *Flight*' (1979).²³ As a teenager, Walcott attended a grammar school on Saint Lucia called St Mary's College and he later lauded the 'rigid' grounding in 'Latin, Greek and the essential masterpieces' he had received there.²⁴ Many of his beliefs about literature can be traced back to his early study of classical texts at the school, especially to those by Virgil. This is because, in addition to sourcing the epic superstructure of the *Aeneid* from Homer, Virgil regularly peppered his work with what Gian Biagio Conte terms verbatim 'loans and quotations' from the 'entire' Greek and Roman literary tradition.²⁵ Imitation was not a stumbling block to originality in Virgil's case, so much as 'the condition *thanks to which* it [was] brought into being.'²⁶ When challenged about his reliance on the work of other poets, Virgil emphatically rejected the idea that his imitations came in response to a lack of talent. Instead, he argued that he should be admired for the poetic faculty he possessed which enabled him to transform other poet's work into his own so masterfully.²⁷ Walcott learned at school that writers like Virgil had been imitative, but he also recognised that this did not preclude such poetry being creative or innovative.

²¹ James Fenton, *The Strength of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 21.

²² Christine Alexander (ed.), 'Defining and Representing Literary Juvenilia' in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, ed. by Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 70-97 (p. 77).

²³ Derek Walcott, 'The Schooner *Flight*' in *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986), p. 346.

²⁴ Derek Walcott, 'Meanings', *Savacou*, 2 (1970), 45-53 (p. 51).

²⁵ Gian Biagio Conte, *Stealing the Club from Hercules: On Imitation in Latin Poetry* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), p. 19.

²⁶ Conte, p. 1.

²⁷ Conte, p. 5.

When he spoke about his early study of the classics, Walcott rarely did so in isolation. He generally preferred to group his early study of Roman and Greek authors together with his study of canonical English literature. It was obvious to him, for example, that many of Shakespeare's works were grounded in acts of imitation which would qualify as plagiarism to modern sensibilities. Shakespeare wrote in this way partly because, as William J. Free notes, critical discussion of imitation had become so 'hopelessly confused' by the mid-renaissance that overt 'plagiarism' was often encouraged.²⁸ Walcott did not become an expert in renaissance aesthetic theory at St Mary's. However, as Baugh has shown, he likely had some familiarity with the more prominent works from the period like Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (1595) and Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* (1641).²⁹ Having studied these texts alongside plays by Shakespeare and Marlowe, it became clear to him that the distinction between originality and plagiarism was a fairly recent development: he asked Louis Bourne in 1996 when 'the idea of the apprentice [had] become imitation' and hypothesised, counterfactually, that it was probably 'in our century'.³⁰ Through his schooling at St Mary's, Walcott came to believe that writing imitatively was not an oddity specific to the ancient world, but a fundamental pillar of the English literary tradition, and he retained this view throughout his career.

However, he was also aware that this belief ran contrary to the aims of the colonial project in which his study of classical and renaissance writing had taken place. As he told Robert Brown and Cheryl Johnson, he suspected the emphasis the British colonial education system placed on writers like Virgil originated in Britain's desire to foster belief in a 'certain hierarchical kind of tradition' which reflected 'colonial society' at large.³¹ By championing Hellenism in the Caribbean, the British had been attempting to inculcate the idea in colonial schoolchildren that canonical works were worth studying because they were the most original or universally

²⁸ Free, p. 676.

²⁹ Edward Baugh, *Memory as Vision: Another Life* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 176.

³⁰ Louis Bourne, 'Just a Fisherman: Derek Walcott on *Omeros*', *Agni*, 50 (1999), 1-12 (p. 10).

³¹ Robert Brown and Cheryl Johnson, 'Thinking Poetry: An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 175-88 (p. 176).

applicable, while imitative works were derivative and inferior.³² One aim of this inculcation was to 'perpetuate the colonial condition, by enforcing a temporal sequence' which denigrated the Caribbean.³³ As Emily Greenwood records, British West Indian schools devised curricula prioritising Greek and Roman texts largely because the British wanted their Caribbean subjects to associate anteriority and originality with value and therefore learn to see the New World as 'belated and secondary', internalising a sense of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the motherland.³⁴

To understand why Walcott's early work was celebrated when it first appeared but has since been neglected, it is necessary to recognise that West Indian literary theorists attached considerable importance to these and other colonially inflected associations of literary imitation throughout the 1960s and '70s. Walcott's public disagreements with Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite are illuminating in this regard since the positions the two writers adopted were archetypal of the polarised debates on mimicry and imitation taking place in the Caribbean at the time. Brathwaite's magisterial *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (1971) attacked the region's historic overreliance on imitating European literature by describing an 1801 Jamaican charade in which several discrete events from European history were muddled.³⁵ He was highly disparaging about 'mimicry' of this sort, deeming it one of the 'tragedies of slavery and of the conditions under which creolization had to take place'.³⁶ Adopting V. S. Naipaul's phraseology, he lamented the situation which had 'produced such "mimic men"' and argued the historical 'cultivation' of 'this kind of mimicry' led directly to the Eurocentricity of twentieth-century Caribbean writing. He felt it was because white colonists had encouraged confused mimicry that nonsensical lines like '*The snow was falling in the canefields* [had become] typical of the "educated" West Indian imagination'.³⁷ Brathwaite's charge was literary in scope, but it was

³² See Martin McKinsey, *Hellenism and the Postcolonial Imagination: Yeats, Cavafy, Walcott* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), p. 148.

³³ Emily Greenwood, "'Still Going On': Temporal Adverbs and the View of the Past in Walcott's Poetry', *Callaloo*, 28 (2005), 132-45 (p. 142).

³⁴ Greenwood, p. 132.

³⁵ Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 299.

³⁶ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, p. 299.

³⁷ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, p. 299.

situated in a broader cultural context. As Ana Deumert notes, European colonisers 'desired their colonial subjects to copy their lifestyle, language and culture' as part of their 'so-called "civilizing mission"'; the forced imposition of this mimicry was therefore both an 'expression of colonial power relations' and a 'form of colonial violence'.³⁸ Brathwaite considered imitating European poetic forms and diction to be capitulation in the face of this slow violence.

Having reached different conclusions about literary imitation in response to his reading of Virgil and Shakespeare, Walcott disagreed with Brathwaite, arguing in 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry' (1974) that cultural production always requires mimicry because 'everything is mere repetition'.³⁹ His early work's reliance on imitation stemmed from his Virgilian belief that poets should never aim to be original, which he stated repeatedly throughout his career. He claimed in 2003, for example: 'I've never vaunted about originality. I don't think originality is a quality in poetry'.⁴⁰ Drawing a distinction between repetitive cultural replication in Europe and its counterpart in the Caribbean made no sense within this paradigm because both were characteristically imitative. As Walcott put it, there was 'no line in the sea which said, this is new, this is the frontier [...] and henceforth everything can only be mimicry'.⁴¹ Language everywhere relied on imitation and repetition. To condemn Caribbean usage of English poetic language was to suggest a 'hopeless' condition in which men everywhere were 'no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes'.⁴² This position was distinctively Walcottian but it was not without precedent. It clearly echoed the thinking of earlier Black New World writers like Zora Neale Hurston, who argued in her essay 'Characteristics of Negro Expression' (1934) that the distinction between originality and imitation was false.⁴³ As Henry Louis Gates Jr. has shown, her

³⁸ Ana Deumert, 'Mimesis and Mimicry in Language – Creativity and Aesthetics as the Performance of (Dis-)semblances', *Language Sciences*, 65 (2018), 9-17 (p. 12).

³⁹ Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 16 (1974), 3-13 (p. 7).

⁴⁰ Paula Burnett, 'Derek Walcott on Poetry, Pity and Power: An Interview with Derek Walcott', *Agenda* (2002), 139-53 (p. 47).

⁴¹ Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', p. 8.

⁴² Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', p. 7.

⁴³ Zora Neale Hurston, 'Characteristics of Negro Expression' in *Negro*, ed. by Nancy Cunard (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 24-31.

reasoning likewise implied that notions of imitation, repetition, and revision were fundamental to all art, even Shakespeare's.⁴⁴ To posit that Black writers in the New World had to 'suffer under the burden of avoiding repetition, revision, or reinterpretation [was therefore] to succumb to a political argument that reflect[ed] a racist subtext'.⁴⁵ In Walcott's view, mimicry did not arise from a lack of creativity and imitating Western texts represented neither subservience nor capitulation to colonial violence.

The same year Walcott published his essay on mimicry, he also produced a companion piece called 'The Muse of History' (1974), in which he defined artistic maturity in a New World context as 'the assimilation of features of every ancestor'.⁴⁶ The remark is regularly cited to suggest that, for Walcott, maturity meant embracing his African ancestry at some point in the early 1970s, after which he produced a new, improved sort of poetry less reliant on European models. In other words, his remarks are seen as heralding the second stage of his poetic development. Diana Lyn thus proposes that 'there are three distinct phases in Walcott's difficult maturation that issue in self-knowledge [...] the colonial twilight, the creative twilight, and the twilight that transmutes despair into virtue'.⁴⁷ Walcott's transition from the 'colonial' to 'creative' twilight occurred because 'the mature Walcott' was 'able to place both Africa and Europe in their proper perspective'; 'with maturity' came 'a better understanding that the bonds that bind us are greater than the shibboleths that separate us'.⁴⁸ Writing two decades later, Rita Dove consciously adopts Walcott's phraseology to make a similar judgement about his earlier work: until he 'realizes that assimilation means embracing every culture around one, his early lyrics are often stilted and hollow'.⁴⁹ One problem with these readings is that they are not borne out by Walcott's

⁴⁴ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 209.

⁴⁵ Gates Jr., p. 136.

⁴⁶ Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History' in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 36-64 (p. 36).

⁴⁷ Diana Lyn, 'The Concept of the Mulatto in Some Works of Derek Walcott', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 26 (1980), 49-69 (p. 52).

⁴⁸ Lyn, pp. 62-3.

⁴⁹ Rita Dove, "'Either I'm Nobody, or I'm a Nation'" in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views – Derek Walcott*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003), pp. 53-78 (p. 58).

verse, which changed little. In context, his dubbing maturity 'the assimilation of features of every ancestor' was not a signal that he would embrace African forms, so much as an accusation that Caribbean writers rejecting European influences were philosophically immature. To write, as per Tejumola Olaniyan, that 'Walcott retraced his steps' in the 1970s and 'gradually "began" his "African phase"' is misleading.⁵⁰ In context, Walcott excoriated Caribbean Afrocentrism:

So now we are entering the "African" phase with our pathetic African carvings, poems and costumes, and our art objects are not sacred vessels placed on altars but goods placed on shelves for the tourist. The romantic darkness which they celebrate is thus another treachery, this time perpetrated by the intellectual. The result is not one's own thing but another minstrel show.⁵¹

When he termed maturity the assimilation of features of every ancestor, Walcott was arguing implicitly against Brathwaite and Sylvia Wynter, both of whom had been attempting to reclaim African culture for Black Caribbean poets. According to Brathwaite, reclamation of this sort was necessary for the region because a two-way process of creolisation, between European and African cultures, had not yet occurred. The largely absentee nature of plantation governance ensured that, though the West Indies experienced top-down, European-to-African acculturation, this was not offset by significant, osmotic, bottom-up, African-to-European interculturalisation. If Black West Indian artists could tap into their African heritage, a composite regional aesthetics could be developed. By contrast, Walcott's position was that, since African languages and religions had been lost to the region for the most part, attempts to reintroduce them would be futile, not least because Africa itself had changed since the abolition of slavery. One would need to transplant the culture from a purified version of Africa which did not exist in either the present or the past. Instead, he chose to see the West Indies and the New World more generally in terms of a new Eden, whose history was relevant insofar as it had shaped its modern-day makeup. According to Walcott's model, maturity meant producing work which recognised that

⁵⁰ Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American and Caribbean Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 110.

⁵¹ Derek Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says' in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 3-35 (p. 8).

Caribbean cultures were not simply African transplants, but creolised entities with deep European roots. Writing poetry with a strong influence from Europe would reflect the realities of Caribbean lived experience. Discarding that influence on wishful, ideological grounds was immature fancy.

What my thesis reveals is that the positions Walcott's earliest poems and plays adopted in relation to the Anglo-European tradition were equally as complex as those of his later work. His views on hybridity and mimicry changed little as he aged and his oeuvre was built on fundamentally consistent aesthetic principles. However, this continuity has been disguised by the orthodox, developmental narrative used to conceptualise his artistic trajectory, the origins of which lie in these politicised debates. Walcott's willingness to incorporate material from different cultures was celebrated in the 1940s and '50s, but that same incorporation led to his being lambasted by many of his regional contemporaries in the 1960s and '70s. The first full-scale published work of anglophone West Indian literary criticism did not appear until 1968. Entitled *The Islands In Between*, it was a compendium of eight introductory, single-author essays which framed anglophone Caribbean writing as an exotic, filial extension of British literature. Such framing led Wynter to denounce it for perpetuating a 'branch plant' model of literary theorisation characterised by its adherence to Western critical norms.⁵² The collection's entry on Walcott proposed that his style was derived uncritically from Andrew Marvell and the metaphysicals, but lauded him for that very reason. It argued that the 'greatest nationalist writers' in peripheral spaces had always been those able 'to come to their own predicaments through mastery of the European literary experience'.⁵³ Walcott's early work was said to display 'formidable intelligence and technical control' despite possessing 'little of the area's experienced presence'.⁵⁴ By the time updated compendia like Baugh's *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (1978) and

⁵² Norval Edwards, "'Talking About a Little Culture": Sylvia Wynter's Early Essays', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 10 (2001), 12-38 (p. 16).

⁵³ C. G. O. King and Louis James (ed.), 'In Solitude for Company: The Poetry of Derek Walcott' in *The Islands In Between* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 86-99 (p. 90).

⁵⁴ King and James, p. 92.

Bruce King's *West Indian Literature* (1979) appeared the following decade, however, this older line of thinking had fallen out of favour. Baugh introduced his collection by remarking baldly on 'the importance of literature in the shaping of a people' and, in the compendium's essay on Walcott's play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967), Lloyd W. Brown interpreted the work as overt racial-political commentary, arguing it conveyed 'the full development of a Black revolutionary consciousness'.⁵⁵ That same year, Brown also published the first monograph dedicated solely to the subject of anglophone Caribbean literary history, in which he wrote off Walcott's texts from the 1940s and '50s on account of their 'baldly didactic approach' and 'immature wordiness'.⁵⁶ When forging the narrative for West Indian literary history, critics like Brown interpreted earlier writing through a lens coloured by contemporary regional historicism, which overwhelmingly framed the period between 1930 and 1960 in terms of an inevitable march towards independence.⁵⁷ Elements of Walcott's earliest poetry which did not fit this optimistic paradigm were thus 'ignored'.⁵⁸ Having discarded the early work on these grounds, Brown reattributed the poet's 'emergence' on the literary scene to the 1960s.⁵⁹

The advent of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and '90s then gave rise to the championing of hybrid forms of discourse and previously maligned, culturally hybrid writing like Walcott's started to be celebrated for its inclusivity. As Nikos Papastergiadis notes, the sudden popularisation of hybridity was motivated partly by the 'perverse pleasure' theorists took in reinscribing a 'negative term' as a 'positive sign'.⁶⁰ Or, as Salman Rushdie put, historically marginalised individuals wanted to 'wear with pride the name they were given in scorn'.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Edward Baugh (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (Surrey: Biddles, 1978), pp. 11-16 (p. 11); Lloyd W. Brown, 'The Revolutionary Dream of Walcott's Makak' in *Critics on Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Edward Baugh (Surrey: Biddles, 1978), pp. 58-62 (pp. 60-1).

⁵⁶ Lloyd W. Brown, *West Indian Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 63-4.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Ramchand, 'West Indian Literary History: Literariness, Orality and Periodization', *Callaloo*, 34 (1988), 95-110 (p. 99).

⁵⁸ Ramchand, p. 99.

⁵⁹ Brown, *West Indian Poetry*, p. 119.

⁶⁰ Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory' in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Pnina Werber and Tariq Modood (London: Zed, 2015), pp. 257-81 (p. 258).

⁶¹ Rushdie, quoted in Papastergiadis, p. 258.

Discussions of hybridity since the 1980s have typically focused on the concept's 'potential for inclusivity', in spite of the term's liberal, pejorative use in the heyday of the British Empire by white supremacists to denote intercultural mongrel degeneration.⁶² Although the competing theorisations of hybridity proffered by Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, James Clifford, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are diverse, they all frame the phenomenon in positive, wide-ranging terms. Clifford, for instance, proposes that an increasingly globalised 'appreciation of the mechanism of collage in cultural life' means '[w]e are all Caribbeans now'.⁶³ Whereas Walcott's 'insistence on traditional European forms and on the autonomy of the aesthetic' amidst the 'militant critiques of Eurocentrism in the late 1960s and 1970s' led to his being framed as 'a pre-postcolonial' or 'assimilationist' comprador by many at the time, as Natalie Melas explains, the 'efflorescence' of discourse on hybridity and multiculturalism in the 1980s and '90s made his claims 'for the legitimacy of a mulatto aesthetic' appear 'premonitory rather than anachronistic'.⁶⁴

This changing critical landscape would likely have occasioned a revisioning of the reputation of Walcott's earliest work in the 1990s had it not also given rise to new modes of praxis which made revisiting that work less likely. The nationalist vein of thinking about Caribbean literary history which budded in the 1960s and '70s persisted long after: it underpinned Laurence Breiner's influential textbook *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (1998) and was present in most of the essays in A. James Arnold's edited collection *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (2001). It endured chiefly because of the manner in which regional writing was approached. In the Caribbean, as Kenneth Ramchand notes, 'a largely thematic and socio-cultural criticism predominates [...] and has always done so'.⁶⁵ Literary historians from the region tend to reject analyses foregrounding 'literariness' in favour of sociologically-inflected

⁶² Papastergiadis, p. 258.

⁶³ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 173.

⁶⁴ Natalie Melas, *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 115.

⁶⁵ Ramchand, p. 98.

methodologies.⁶⁶ As a result, texts are not habitually close read. Such an approach was not always popular in Europe and the United States, but the emergence of postcolonial studies in the 1980s occasioned a sea-change in critical attitudes and the widespread adoption of comparable methodologies among scholars working on peripheral writing. As Ato Quayson records, the long 1990s witnessed 'a steady shift in evaluations of the literary-aesthetic domain from the analysis of texts to the analyses of the over-determining discursive formations of which they are seen to be a part'.⁶⁷ Because metropolitan critical interest in Walcott's writing did not begin in earnest until the 1980s, relatively few Western critics had worked on it prior to this shift.⁶⁸ The 1990s then engendered a move even further away from 'close readings occasionally informed by insights from literary theory to more intensively comparative, theoretically informed though still text-based critical discussions'.⁶⁹ Quayson summarises the trend eloquently:

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the collocation of colonial discourse analysis and the interdisciplinary infusions from outside of literary studies proper had the net effect of decisively shifting emphasis in the field away from the examination of literary and aesthetic products as such and toward the exploration of their discursive contexts and conditions of production. The study of rhetorical devices made way for that of discursive ensembles, but discursive ensembles were not couched necessarily in either literary or historical terms. Literature itself was resorted to only as an excuse for illustrating other things. It almost became an embarrassment to pay close attention to the specific details of the literary text itself.⁷⁰

In subsequent years, influential compendia like *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (2011) and *Caribbean Literature in Transition* (2020) have proven transformative for the field of Caribbean literary studies, greatly expanding the range of authors, texts, temporalities, themes and issues in its purview. This expansion has been highly fruitful because it has shone light on many previously underappreciated and forgotten works, but it has also occasioned a reduction in the number of studies probing the work of the region's longer-established canonical

⁶⁶ Ramchand, p. 98.

⁶⁷ Ato Quayson, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 298.

⁶⁸ Elleke Boehmer and Alex Tickell, 'The 1990s: An Increasingly Postcolonial Decade', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50 (2015), 315-52 (p. 319).

⁶⁹ Boehmer and Tickell, p. 316.

⁷⁰ Quayson, p. 299.

authors in depth. One consequence of this has been that Walcott's poetry has neither been analysed very closely nor very often over the last decade. It is by returning to an older mode of critical praxis rooted in targeted close reading that this thesis revises our understanding of his oeuvre. Close engagement with the poems and plays he produced between 1948 and 1962 reveals that they were not simply uncritical reworkings of colonial antecedents. Rather, they were innovative and experimental compositions, deeply rooted in their Caribbean cultural context which adopted complex, nuanced positions in relation to their Western antecedents. As such, the critical commonplace that Walcott abandoned his early poetics, characterised by reverential imitation, in favour of a separate mature poetics, centring on cross-cultural hybridity, requires emendation.

II. Caribbean Literary History, Postcolonialism, and Global Modernism

Emending that narrative contributes substantially to several interrelated fields. First and foremost, it reshapes understanding of Walcott's oeuvre and thereby demonstrates the merit in revisiting maligned earlier work by prominent authors. Re-examining the earliest years of Walcott's artistic trajectory will not only generate a new perspective on the texts he produced in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. It will modify our understanding of everything he wrote. This is because when readers encounter one of his texts, their interpretation is conditioned by what they understand of its author. In Michel Foucault's terms, the author's name 'seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text [...] characterizing, its mode of being'.⁷¹ Any modification to the corpus of work with which an author's name is associated will occasion modifications to interpretations of the entire corpus. If it were established that the same author was responsible for the works of both Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, for example, interpretation of any text previously associated with either name would need to be significantly

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: New Press, 1998), pp. 205-22 (p. 211).

revised.⁷² In much the same way, reintegrating Walcott's early work into scholarly discourse will revision Walcott's author-function which will, in turn, transform how his wider oeuvre is understood. When it comes to Walcott's work, this phenomenon is of acute relevance because he felt that he had always been 'the same person talking' throughout his career.⁷³ In practice, such a feeling was borne out in that his oeuvre was full of repeated phrases and images, many of which recurred both within and across collections. In his Nobel Prize lecture, he termed 'the individual voice' a 'dialect' which 'shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody'.⁷⁴ If the earliest occurrences of lines, phrases, and images are little known, the complexities of this dialect will be missed. So, by offering a new critical reading of Walcott's writing, this thesis will bring about a recalibration of his complete oeuvre.

The second, wider benefit of revisiting Walcott's earliest work is that it will transform the field of anglophone Caribbean literary studies. On that note, it is remarkable how closely the story describing Walcott's artistic trajectory accords with the wider pattern ascribed to Caribbean literary development, beginning with uncritical derivation. As Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju puts it:

It is no exaggeration to assert that Walcott's career as poet and playwright by itself chronicles, and indeed exemplifies the complex development of the Caribbean aesthetics. The stage of assimilation of western forms and adoption of western aesthetics is well represented in his aesthetic repertoire.⁷⁵

The strength of the correlation between the two narratives is no coincidence because the narrative for Caribbean literary history was largely formulated in response critical understanding of Walcott, whom Breiner deemed the 'archetypal regional poet'.⁷⁶ That Walcott's apprenticeship has been misunderstood represents one of the principle reasons why West Indian writing is often seen as having developed in the three distinct stages he terms 'imitation', 'uneasy divergence' and

⁷² Foucault, p. 210.

⁷³ Derek Walcott, quoted in Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 29.

⁷⁴ Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory: The 1992 Nobel Lecture' in *World Literature Today*, 67 (1993), 261-7 (p. 262).

⁷⁵ Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju, 'The Redness of Blackness: Revisiting Derek Walcott's Mulatto Aesthetic', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52 (2006), 12-25 (p. 17).

⁷⁶ Laurence Breiner, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 98.

‘asserted difference’.⁷⁷ The model for Caribbean literary history he and others codified in the 1980s and ’90s posits that anglophone West Indian literature was derivative of European colonial antecedents until the 1950s in prose and 1960s in verse, the period prior having been ‘populated by antecedents, premonitions, and false starts’.⁷⁸ Thereafter, Caribbean texts are seen to have increasingly diverged from those produced in the metropolitan centre until a fully-fledged, hybridised literary tradition had emerged by the 1980s, which often referenced metropolitan antecedents but was no longer beholden to them. This thesis challenges that narrative and lays the groundwork for the construction of a new paradigm for interpreting anglophone West Indian literature. In particular, it challenges the idea that anglophone Caribbean poetry was uncritically derivative of the Anglo-European canon prior to the 1960s. Through close analytical readings of the earliest work of one of the region’s most prominent writers, it undermines the notion that the relationship between anglophone West Indian poetry and the Anglo-European literary tradition was straightforwardly derivative in the 1940s and ’50s.

In making this contribution, my research both draws and builds on a growing body of scholarship which seeks to reframe the narrative for the development of Caribbean literature along similar lines. Alison Donnell was the first critic to attempt this refashioning in a sustained manner. Her impressive monograph *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* (2006) engages in dialogue with earlier revisionary work by critics such as Faith Smith (*Creole Recitations*, 2002), Selwyn R. Cudjoe (*Beyond Boundaries*, 2003) and Evelyn O’ Callaghan (*Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: ‘A Hot Place, Belonging To Us’*, 2004) to demonstrate the manifold ways in which the predominant developmental narrative for Caribbean literature has disguised the complexity of its mutability. In particular, she reveals how the ‘pressures of the critical moment of the 1960s and 1970s’ previously discussed led to poetry which ‘had an investment in European forms and

⁷⁷ Breiner, pp. 108-9.

⁷⁸ Ben Etherington, ‘Daily Decolonization: Poetry, Periodicals, and Newspaper Publishing’ in *Caribbean Literature in Transition, 1920-1970*, 3 vols, ed. by Raphael Dalleo and Curdella Forbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), II, pp. 52-67 (p. 52).

conventions' being denigrated and suppressed.⁷⁹ At that time, the region's literary debates were highly charged, having taken root in an ideological moment characterised by emergent nationalism, civil disobedience, motions towards independence, counter-revolutionary revanchism, and the rise of the international Black Power movement. In such a climate, defining literary history was pivotal in shaping understanding of Caribbean culture, not least because there has 'always' been a strong connection between 'the emergence of a literature and the workings of the socio-political process' in the region.⁸⁰ Hence, as Norval Edwards records, the perception at the time was that 'fundamental cultural and epistemological issues regarding Caribbean identity' were at stake.⁸¹ Whereas Donnell sought to reshape the historical narrative by drawing attention to forgotten female authors active before the alleged birth of Caribbean women's writing in the 1980s, my thesis takes a different approach by revisiting the neglected work of a Nobel Laureate. This distinction is significant because, as Donnell herself recognised, having centred her research on critically neglected writers, she could only offer 'provocations' to those versions of West Indian literary history that had 'emerged to date' rather than offer a 'coherent or alternative' version.⁸² An increasing number of works have since broadened Donnell's scope to revisit other neglected Caribbean authors and texts, though none have yet focused on work by canonical authors. Leah Rosenberg's *Nationalism and the Formation of Caribbean Literature* (2007) documents the existence of a modernist literary scene among the Jamaican creole elites of the early twentieth century. Belinda Edmondson's *Caribbean Middlebrow* (2009) revisits nineteenth- and early twentieth-century West Indian periodicals to uncover a vibrant literary scene among the region's Black and brown middle classes. Raphael Dalleo's *Caribbean Literatures and the Public Sphere* (2011) focuses on the relationship between Caribbean literary endeavours dating back to the plantation era and their political aspiration for an idealised public audience, while his follow-up *American*

⁷⁹ Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.

⁸⁰ Ramchand, p. 96.

⁸¹ Edwards, p. 27.

⁸² Donnell, p. 2.

Imperialism's Undead (2016) foregrounds forgotten anticolonial critiques written by Caribbean intellectuals in response to the US occupation of Haiti (1915-34). Perhaps the most influential text in this vein has been *Beyond Windrush* (2015), a compendium of essays exploring both 'the corpus of Caribbean literature written before Windrush' and contemporary regional work related to the broader spectrum of 'gender, ethnicity, and sexuality'.⁸³ This body of scholarship has led a growing number of critics to argue for what Erin M. Fehskens terms 'a boom that precedes the canonical "beginning" of a predominantly Afro-Caribbean, anticolonial literature in the 1950s'.⁸⁴ The scope of my work is too narrow to survey the extremities of that boom and constitute an alternate Caribbean literary history on its own. What it reveals, however, is that the limits of the phenomenon extend beyond the neglected authors and textual moments within criticism's current conceptual remit. In Walcott's case, a nuanced interrelationship with the Anglo-European canon was present from the outset of his career in the 1940s. By performing close readings of his earliest texts, this thesis works towards the establishment of a new model for anglophone Caribbean literary history prioritising cross-temporal continuity over rupture which accommodates the region's longer-established canonical work.

This new model for Caribbean literary history will, in turn, reshape the more broadly conceived field of postcolonial literary studies because many of the theoretical paradigms employed by postcolonial critics can be traced back to readings of Caribbean texts. As Silvio Torres-Saillant has shown, the 'new marketing of Third World knowledge' under the 'globalizing label' of postcolonial theory in the 1980s occurred 'precisely at the moment' when 'the prominence of Caribbean ideas had begun to command international attention'.⁸⁵ This meant works from the region were given 'relative centrality' by postcolonialists establishing their field.⁸⁶

⁸³ J. Dillon Brown and Leah Reade Rosenberg (eds.), 'Introduction' in *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2015), pp. 18-26 (p. 5).

⁸⁴ Erin M. Fehskens, 'Writing at the End of Empire' in *Caribbean Literature in Transition, 1920-1970*, 3 vols, ed. by Raphael Dalleo and Curdella Forbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), II, pp. 21-36 (p. 21).

⁸⁵ Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 43.

⁸⁶ Torres-Saillant, p. 43.

Given the contemporary vogue for Caribbean writing, fledgling postcolonial criticism drew disproportionately on the 'revolutionary, political, and cultural ideals' found in works by Walcott, C. L. R. James, Édouard Glissant, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Sylvia Wynter, V. S. Naipaul, and others.⁸⁷ Over time, however, the field of Caribbean literary studies has been increasingly 'subsumed' into the 'global epistemic structure' of postcolonial studies.⁸⁸ One consequence of this has been that since the 1980s scholars writing on regional texts have often felt obliged to demonstrate their work's wider relevance by linking it to 'the larger, grander, and more "theoretical" postcolonial field'.⁸⁹ As a result, the 'currency' of regional theory is now regularly and counterintuitively established through its 'presumed rapport with postcolonial theory'.⁹⁰ That the two overlap significantly should come as no surprise given that the latter was shaped so heavily by the former. However, this approach poses a problem to both disciplines. Postcolonialists regularly employ paradigms developed in response to readings of Caribbean work dating from the 1980s, but any flaws in those readings – and the resultant paradigms – are unlikely to be flagged by Caribbeanists trying to demonstrate affinities between the fields. Modifying understanding of Walcott's poetic trajectory will break this closed loop. It will therefore occasion a reassessment of the theoretical paradigms of the wider postcolonial field for which Caribbean theorising proved foundational at the peak of its influence and into which Caribbean literary studies have since been increasingly subsumed.

The postcolonial field is itself situated in relation to the more broadly conceived field of global modernism and, as Laetitia Zecchini has shown in her work on Arun Kolatkar, the 'points of interaction' between these twin disciplines are characteristically 'fecund'.⁹¹ At present, however, several competing and contradictory paradigms are used to conceptualise their

⁸⁷ Ato Quayson, 'The Journal of Commonwealth Literature: The 1980s', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50 (2015), 297-314 (p. 305).

⁸⁸ Torres-Saillant, p. 44.

⁸⁹ Torres-Saillant, p. 43.

⁹⁰ Torres-Saillant, p. 43.

⁹¹ Laetitia Zecchini, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India: Moving Lines* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 4.

interrelationship. This thesis contributes to both fields of study in that, by revisioning our understanding of literary influence in the Caribbean, it opens up common ground between them. Walcott's early range of influence was broad and comprised writing from across the Anglo-European canon. However, when asked in 1963 which authors' works had proven the most instructive, he listed '[Stephen] Spender, [W. H.] Auden, [Louis] MacNeice, [T. S.] Eliot, [Ezra] Pound, [W. B.] Yeats, [Gerard Manley] Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, John Crowe Ransom [and Robert] Lowell'.⁹² In other words, he felt he was most influenced by those early twentieth-century European and American poets critics have labelled the "Euromodernists". The term originates in Chinweizu's writing on Wole Soyinka, where it is hyphenated and used pejoratively, but I follow Jahan Ramazani in employing it descriptively, not as a value judgement.⁹³ By the time Walcott self-published his first collection, he had written over a hundred poems he deemed worthy of dissemination, from which he selected the best twenty-five.⁹⁴ As King records, those he chose were chiefly 'modernistic' – influenced by his reading of Eliot, Pound, Thomas and Auden – while those not included were usually 'Miltonic' or 'Jacobean'.⁹⁵ My reading of Walcott is therefore grounded in the belief that he was a Caribbean modernist, an artist born and raised in the Global South who came of age in the latter half of the twentieth century but whose work nonetheless exhibited prominent modernist characteristics.⁹⁶ My framing Walcott this way stems from my conviction that he and the Euromodernists possessed a common 'set of stylistic tendencies', which J. Dillon Brown has defined cogently:⁹⁷

[Modernists exhibit] a stance of aesthetic oppositionality; a suspicion of literary convention with a concomitant desire for renewal and innovation; an anxiously ambiguous relation to narratives of progress and modernity; a concern with individual consciousness and the ways it can be

⁹² Derek Walcott, 'Context', *London Magazine*, 3 (1963), 36-37 (p. 37).

⁹³ Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980); Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry in a Global Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 102.

⁹⁴ King, p. 56.

⁹⁵ King, p. 56.

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that an intriguing strain of Walcott criticism has developed in the wake of Rei Terada's monograph *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (1992) which considers his work postmodern.

⁹⁷ J. Dillon Brown, 'Modernism and Anglophone Caribbean Literature' in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 295-304 (p. 296).

structured by cultural and linguistic discourse; and an overtly self-reflexive engagement with the contingencies of language, authority, and representation.⁹⁸

Walcott's writing demonstrates these features in abundance, but his style was not derived indiscriminately from Eliot, Thomas or Auden.⁹⁹ His apprenticeship did not involve sitting down and learning a series of techniques by rote, nor did it involve systematic engagement with criticism or textbooks. It was, rather, highly subjective and personal. It involved identifying texts which provoked an aesthetic response and then attempting to reverse-engineer either that response or another by replicating elements of the anterior text. My thesis shows that he did not share the ideologies or assumptions of modernist writers hailing from Europe or the United States and that his poetics were distinctly West Indian despite having been developed in response to Euromodernist antecedents.

III. Paradigms of Global Literary Influence: Methodology and Structure

The predominant conceptualisation of Walcott's poetic development – which frames his early work as uncritically derivative of Euromodernist writing – has arisen from a particular way of thinking about the global dissemination of culture reliant on what James M. Blaut has termed the “diffusionist” principle.¹⁰⁰ Diffusionism suggests that cultural innovation only occurs in Greater Europe – the continent, its settler colonies, and (historically) the Bible Lands – meaning that cultural developments in marginal space like the Caribbean can only come in response to European innovations. The principle's adherents consider every culture outside of Greater Europe imitative, belated, and inferior. Diffusionist thinking was predominant in the West for several hundred years following the advent of European expansionism and – though it is now unusual to see the principle advanced explicitly – it still provides the implicit ideological

⁹⁸ Dillon Brown, p. 296.

⁹⁹ When asked directly whether he considered himself a ‘peripheral modernist’ in 2005, he rejected that categorisation: ‘I’m only a Modernist in the sense that I’m still alive ... I don’t think it’s a style ... But I’m from the periphery’. Untitled interview with Maria Hélène Laforest, printed in Isaac Julien, *Paradise Omeros* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2005), n.p.

¹⁰⁰ James M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), pp. 1-2.

foundation upon which various influential theorisations of cross-cultural influence have been constructed. My critical reading of Walcott's early writing undermines the diffusionist paradigm's core tenet because it reveals that the imitative literature he produced did not inevitably valorise or privilege its European antecedents. It therefore builds on the work of those scholars – such as Zecchini, Partha Mitter, Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb, Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, and Stuart Hall – who view the interrelationship between Euromodernist and emergent postcolonial writing in terms of dialogical transactions and challenges those who frame the relationship as diffusional.

Although the diffusionist approach to conceptualising intercultural exchange retains a degree of influence, its star has dimmed since the advent of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and succeeding decades have given rise to a number of competing theorisations. These were most comprehensively surveyed by Ramazani in his 2015 article 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions'. Ramazani's taxonomy suggests that in addition to the diffusionist paradigm, three alternative paradigm are now regularly employed to conceptualise the traffic between postcolonial and Euromodernist literatures: the first is built on the principle of "writing back"; the second on polymodernist adjacency; and the third on anti-capitalist coequality within a singular world-system.¹⁰¹ Innumerable models of global literary influence have been developed in the last three decades and Ramazani does not suggest that there are only four ways to conceptualise the phenomenon. Rather, he groups the wide array of approaches currently employed into four broad categories characterised by their core principles. Though each has won converts, none has supplanted the others totally, meaning there are now four concurrent, rival strains of criticism. Because Ramazani's taxonomy represents a clear, systematic and comprehensive survey of the field, my thesis uses it as a model to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four principles he discusses when applied to Walcott's early writing. The thinking is that a more holistic narrative for Walcott's artistic development – which

¹⁰¹ Jahan Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions' in *A History of Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 459-78 (pp. 467-70).

recognises that his early imitations were not straightforwardly derivative of Euromodernist work – will need an alternative theoretical grounding to diffusionism. Ramazani's methodology consists of close reading a handful of poems which comment explicitly on the relationship between postcolonialism and modernism. The rationale underpinning his analytic method is clear and convincing: he proposes that 'poetry, if it is to be read as poetry, demands close attention to language and form'.¹⁰² His work is instructive in that it reveals how bringing paradigms of global literary influence into conversation with carefully selected poetic case studies can reshape our understanding of each in new and exciting ways. My thesis takes Ramazani's approach as its starting point but expands the underlying methodology and repurposes it to new ends: the quantity of texts is drastically increased, the focus is productively modified, and the number of authors is streamlined. Every chapter except the last, my methodology consists of close reading case studies from Walcott's early writing to draw conclusions about his intertextual method and then using those conclusions to assesses his early work's compatibility with the governing principles Ramazani describes. The paradigms brought into conversation with Walcott's work serve to highlight its various characteristics, but the conversation between corpus and paradigm is fundamentally dialogic, meaning Walcott's texts equally offer provocations to the theory. Ramazani orders the principles he discusses chronologically, since each was developed in response to the alleged shortcomings of its antecedents. As this ordering is logical, my chapters progress in accordance with his scheme.

Chapter One challenges the diffusionist principle by destabilising the idea that Walcott's early writing was straightforwardly derivative of Euromodernist antecedents. Drawing on Ben Etherington's proposal that Caribbean poets writing in the 1940s 'produced distinctive poetic expressions that deserve discriminating reading', it closely analyses the text of Walcott's first longform poem *Epitaph for the Young* (1949).¹⁰³ Scholarly orthodoxy holds that Walcott uncritically

¹⁰² Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 460.

¹⁰³ Etherington, p. 54.

copied the poem's aesthetic from T. S. Eliot. By contrast, Chapter One proposes that Walcott's poem was a site of 'intensive aesthetic contestation' which challenged, rather than reinforced, the values, texts, institutions, and philosophies associated with the Anglo-European canon when alluding to Anglo-European work.¹⁰⁴ To a greater extent than has yet been realised, Walcott mocked and critiqued the Anglo-European literary tradition, even as he reprised elements of, and required that his audience possessed detailed knowledge of, Anglo-European texts.

Chapter Two then brings Walcott's work into dialogue with the second paradigm of global literary influence to assess how well that paradigm reflects his early relationship with metropolitan art. The second paradigm stands in 'diametric contrast' to its diffusionist counterpart because it defines the relationship between Caribbean and European art in terms of antagonism.¹⁰⁵ Chapter Two weights its pros and cons by centring on two of Walcott's poems in particular – 'Letter to a Painter in England' (1948) and 'Allegre' (1960). The chapter begins with an overview of cutting-edge research into postcolonial artistic intermediality before using the 'Letter to a Painter' as case study to probe the complex interrelationship between Walcott's poetry, Paul Gauguin's art, and Ernest Hemingway's prose. Chapter Two ultimately argues that Walcott imitated Hemingway's intermedial translations of Paul Cézanne by composing verse which reproduced elements of Gauguin's style, but that he did not duplicate that style exactly because of his awareness of Gauguin's racism. Though it provides a credible explanation for Walcott's subversive use of allusion in *Epitaph for the Young*, the antagonistic principle is rejected as the basis of a new narrative for Walcott's work because it cannot account for the ambiguated positioning of his early intermedial imitations.

Chapter Three uses Walcott's early work to evaluate the second alternate paradigm of global literary influence, which posits the existence of multiple discrete modernisms originating in different cultures. It assesses this polymodernist paradigm by foregrounding Walcott's

¹⁰⁴ Etherington, p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 467.

engagement with Irish modernist writing, centring on his early imitations of J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats. In so doing, it lays bare some of the problems with discussing questions of cross-cultural influence in generic or homogenising terms. Chapter Three shows that Walcott framed Ireland's situation as postcolonial, meaning Irish modernist writing did not fit the same mould as other European counterparts. However, it reveals that he was also cautious about drawing excessive inspiration from the country's literature. As such, he dissimilated Irish work, in the sense Melas gives the word, meaning he drew close parallels so as to accentuate difference. This approach bore some resemblance to, but was ultimately distinct from, equivalent approaches taken by contemporary Caribbean writers. For this reason, Chapter Three argues that grouping writers together regionally through the polymodernist paradigm does not reflect the realities of global literary influence.

Chapter Four takes a different approach to Chapter Three. It also challenges the homogenisation upon which the polymodernist paradigm relies but does so by analysing Walcott's engagement with a separate body of work. Rather than centring on Irish literature, it highlights Walcott's early enthusiasm for Japanese art, which none of his regional contemporaries shared. It merges and expands the disparate foci of the two essays previously written about Walcott's early engagement with Japan to investigate his handling of woodblock prints and *Japoniste* drama. To posit "Caribbean modernism", Chapter Four argues that it would be necessary either to diminish Japan's importance for Walcott or to exaggerate its importance for his regional contemporaries. In light of Chapters Three and Four, polymodernity is rejected as the basis of a new narrative describing Walcott's artistic development.

Chapter Five proposes that the complexity of Walcott's engagement with European art is best captured by the last of the paradigms of global literary influence, which views Euromodernist and postcolonial literatures as part of a shared response to the modern capitalist world-system, understood singularly. This paradigm characterises mid-twentieth-century postcolonial writing largely in terms of anti-Western sentiment, after the manner of the

antagonistic paradigm, but does not equate modernism with imperialism. Instead, adherents posit that modernist and postcolonial literatures are 'more or less the same' in that they both form part of 'a shared response to global capitalism.'¹⁰⁶ Chapter Five demonstrates that the world-system paradigm is malleable enough to capture the nuances and contradictions characteristic of Walcott's early engagement with Anglo-European writing. However, this malleability becomes a problem when attempting to use the paradigm to chart a new narrative for the development of Walcott's poetry and drama because the regionally specific contours of the world-system's influence must be mapped. The most important factors to consider when charting a new narrative for his work relate to time, progress, and teleology, since these are the philosophical bases upon which all narratives are constructed. Chapter Five therefore considers Walcott's imitative writing in light of the non-linear, non-teleological regional conceptualisations of history popularised by prominent Caribbean intellectuals such as Brathwaite, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Jamaica Kincaid, and Édouard Glissant. The sort of narrative which emerges from temporally non-linear approaches to history and literature differs considerably from the predominant, teleological model currently used to conceptualise the mutability of Walcott's writing because it collapses distinctions between imitation and originality. It involves understanding texts relationally, rather than chronologically.

Chapter Six then demonstrates the value that this new, regionally inflected conceptualisation of literary influence rooted in the world-system framework yields for discussions of even the most celebrated and extensively analysed Caribbean work. It advocates the widespread implementation of the interleaved reading approach Quayson devised for his study of postcolonial tragedy, through which texts are seen as engaging one another in non-hierarchical dialogue. This methodology takes anterior and posterior works to be mutually illuminating, with no correlation established between chronology and eminence. To demonstrate

¹⁰⁶ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 469.

the value of the new paradigm and its attendant, interleaved critical praxis, Walcott's masterpiece *Omeros* (1990) is brought into conversation with two earlier, largely forgotten plays: *Ione* (1957) and *The Isle is Full of Noises* (1982). Prioritising relationality over chronology reveals that the relationship *Omeros* has with these plays is precisely the same as the one it has with its Ancient Greek antecedents. For Walcott, myths represented the *simultaneous* amalgamation of all extant iterations of any given story, whether they were produced in Greece, the Caribbean, or elsewhere.

Omeros was the magnum opus of an internationally renowned author whose writing has been read and enjoyed the world over. Before we can revision our understanding of his masterwork, however, we must first unthread the long arc of his career, pursuing his poetics back from their pinnacle to his very first collections. In the chapter that follows, this thesis will begin that journey by examining Walcott's youthful imitations of T. S. Eliot to survey the aesthetic foundations upon which his later work was built.

Chapter One: Dismissing Diffusionism

Derek Walcott's early writing has been widely written off as derivative because it was produced in the context of a self-avowed apprenticeship to Anglo-European literature. John Thieme argues Walcott's early verse is 'extremely derivative', Edward Baugh claims it is 'too obviously derivative', and Helen Vendler laments how Walcott's 'voice was for a long time a derivative one'.¹ This has profoundly impacted the way in which his works are approached. When discussing an early poem like 'The Cracked Playground' (1951), for example, Gerald Moore proposes the text's densely packed 'exotic references' are 'typical of early Walcott', whose reliance on allusions to the Anglo-European canon are indicative of his 'derivative relationship' to European writing.² Deeming Walcott's style 'wordy and showy', he goes on to claim that the 'young colonial' looks like an 'intruder' among the 'bric-a-brac of classical statues and literary relics'.³ In his view, the prolixity of immature poems like 'The Cracked Playground' contrasts drastically with 'mature' poetry like 'Laventille' (1965) in which a 'new poetic voice' frees Walcott from his former 'air of provinciality'.⁴

As Harold McDermott suggests, the 'teleological narrative and deterministic logic' implied by such criticism has arisen from a retrospective devaluation of Walcott's first collections.⁵ Moore's appraisal of Walcott's early work exaggerates the differences between 'The Cracked Playground' and 'Laventille' to denigrate the former. Such verse was widely lauded when it first appeared and was generally seen as the work of an accomplished author. In his letter recommending Walcott to Henry Swanzy, for example, Frank Collymore acknowledged that

¹ Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 24; Baugh, 'A History of Poetry', p. 289; Helen Vendler, 'Poet of Two Worlds', *The New York Review of Books* (4 March 1982) [online] <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1982/03/04/poet-of-two-worlds/>> [accessed 7 June 2022].

² Gerald Moore, 'Review: Use Men Language' in *The Routledge Reader of Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 331-5 (p. 334).

³ Moore, p. 334.

⁴ Moore, p. 334.

⁵ Harold McDermott, 'The Mulatto of Criticism' in *Interlocking Basins of a Globe: Essays on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Jean Antoine-Dunne (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), pp. 51-70 (p. 67).

Walcott's 'literary forebears [were] obviously Hopkins, Auden and Dylan Thomas' but concluded 'his work [was] obviously sincere and wonderfully mature.'⁶ He went on to propose that, while it was obvious the writer's style had been influenced by 'many sources as a result of his wide and sympathetic study of the moderns', it was nonetheless unique and 'his own compound'.⁷

Walcott's friend and painting mentor Harold Simmons had earlier recommended his poetry in similar terms when writing to Collymore, claiming it was 'almost unbelievable that he [was] so mature – or premature in thought'.⁸ In Collymore's case, there is no reason not to take him at face value: he became Walcott's champion because of the strength of his verse, befriending him only after he had deemed it precocious. In any case, another early reviewer, unconnected to Walcott personally, similarly remarked that the poet possessed 'a voice matured beyond its years'.⁹ Such precociousness is effaced by the predominant model describing Walcott's development which frames this early work as uncritically derivative of writers like Eliot, Thomas and Auden.

In spite of its flaws, that narrative has nonetheless proven influential beyond the region. In particular, it has been proffered in support of a paradigm for the spread of modernist aesthetics across the globe which characterises the relationship between centre and periphery in terms of cross-cultural osmotic diffusion. According to this line of thinking, modernist innovations took place in the centre – synonymous largely with Europe and its settler colonies – after which they spread unidirectionally to marginal communities like the Caribbean.¹⁰ Some of the diffusionist paradigm's adherents propose that culture spread out from the centre because peripheral cultural agents realised the inherent superiority of Euromodernist innovations, while others ascribe the unidirectional vector of transmission to a belief that writers on the periphery

⁶ Collymore, quoted in Philip Nanton, 'Frank A. Collymore: A Man of the Threshold', *Kunapipi*, 26 (2004), 161-72 (p. 165).

⁷ Frank Collymore, 'An Introduction to the Poetry of Derek Walcott', in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp. 87-95 (p. 89).

⁸ Simmons, quoted in Baugh, 'In Praise of Colly'.

⁹ Quoted in King, p. 63.

¹⁰ Blaut, pp. 1-2.

copied those in the centre in an effort to win the endorsement of a socio-literary establishment with Euromodernist tastes.¹¹ Writing in the latter vein, Kwame Anthony Appiah deems 'postcoloniality' the condition of a 'comprador intelligentsia' comprising 'a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers' who 'mediate' the engagement between centre and periphery.¹² Dipesh Chakrabarty differs from Appiah in his appraisal but nonetheless considers peripheral modernist writing in the European mould an irremediably 'belated' and 'derivative' form of 'colonial mimicry'.¹³ His widely celebrated project to provincialize Europe grew from his belief that any transitional narrative for Indian modernity would 'always ultimately privilege' its European counterpart.¹⁴ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's *Alter/native Modernities* (1999) displays similarly diffusionist thinking when it positions Charles Baudelaire at the fountainhead of its genealogy of global modernism.¹⁵ This chapter challenges the underlying principle upon which the diffusionist paradigm is based and the co-related orthodox narrative for the development of anglophone Caribbean literature by arguing against the scholarly commonplace that Walcott's early work was unquestioningly derivative of its Euromodernist antecedents. Through a sustained close reading of *Epitaph for the Young* ("Epitaph") it reveals how the writer's early allusions to the Anglo-European canon were employed critically, serving to undermine that canon's supposed supremacy. The first section considers theories of allusion to challenge the view that Walcott's text was a pastiche of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) with occasional forays into parody. Eliot and Walcott wrote in very different contexts, for very different audiences, and with very different aims. Though there is broad aesthetic overlap, I propose that when *Epitaph* alluded to the Anglo-European literary

¹¹ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 467.

¹² Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), 336-57 (p. 348).

¹³ Chakrabarty, quoted in Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies', *Modernism/modernity*, 13 (2006), 425-43 (p. 432).

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 32.

¹⁵ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, *Alter/native Modernities* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 4-6.

tradition, it was often in a way which challenged the values with which that tradition was associated.

Euromodernist poetry generally came to Walcott by way of collected editions and anthologies when he was young, but in Eliot's case, he had possessed 'actual volumes' of the verse.¹⁶ In addition to reading these books, he also encountered Eliot's writing at St Mary's because the British Council widely 'disseminated Eliot's recordings into the Caribbean'.¹⁷ Writers like Eliot frequently benefitted from such these 'colonial mechanisms of distribution', while peripheral works did not.¹⁸ This discrepancy is often highlighted by those who believe metropolitan modernism diffused outward from the centre to the periphery, since the power imbalance can be harnessed in support of their view.¹⁹ Because they see the relationship between Euromodernism and modernism on the periphery as unidirectional, adherents of the diffusionist principle characterise that relationship in terms of derivation rather than dialogue. However, even if one grants the unidirectionality of the vector, it does not follow that cultural agents operating in peripheral spheres could only respond to what they had encountered derivatively.

To demonstrate the differences between Walcott's use of allusion and Eliot's, this chapter then focuses on one of Walcott's allusions in particular, which links *Epitaph* to one of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy stories. I have chosen to centre on this allusion because it is characteristic of the way the device functions in the text and because it has not yet been discussed by any critic, despite the line in which the allusion is couched being widely reproduced. By situating Walcott's imagery within a local network of association, this chapter's close reading demonstrates the value of analysing the work in context as a poem from the West Indies of the mid-twentieth century. Once it has been established that Walcott's use of the device differed from Eliot's, the other ways in which his use of the device stood apart are charted. His

¹⁶ Edward Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 50-63 (p. 53).

¹⁷ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 467.

¹⁸ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 467.

¹⁹ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 467.

innovation and willingness to experiment when alluding are shown through a series of close readings of other parts of the poem, after which the role of the device in *Epitaph* is contrasted with its role in the work of his regional contemporaries. Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) is employed as a representative case study. Though Selvon's use of allusion was similar to Walcott's in the sense that readers needed to relate references to specific lines of anterior texts and derive meaning thereof, their approaches also differed quite fundamentally. Windrush writers like Selvon used allusion as a means of invoking literary precedent and thereby situating the West Indian subject matter and language they employed within the Anglo-European tradition. Walcott's allusions, by contrast, were neither proffered in an attempt to situate his work within that tradition, nor formed in an effort to legitimise West Indian writing in the eyes of the Western establishment. His allusions betrayed, instead, a wariness of that very tradition and establishment, which they often served to criticise. Composing *Epitaph* was an act of mimicry in Homi Bhabha's sense, reliant upon 'a difference that is almost the same, but not quite': it involved 'a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline' which produced continual 'slippage', 'excess', and 'difference' in relation to its Eliotic model as part a 'process of disavowal'.²⁰ Space was opened for 'disruption and critique', and for 'appropriation, transgression and mockery' precisely because the 'copy was not faithful'.²¹ It is helpful, therefore, to think of Walcottian allusiveness as a phenomenon related to, but distinct from, other forms of allusiveness developed by modernists of the same generation from the West Indies.

The chapter establishes that Walcott's use of allusion was neither derivative of Eliot's nor equivalent to that of his contemporaries, then suggests why it has been misread as such. It proposes that Walcott's early work's lowly reputation owes more to the highly charged, politically inflected debates about literature which took place at the University of the West Indies in the 1960s and '70s than to the verse itself. In doing so, it builds on Alison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century*

²⁰ Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October – Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* (1984), 125-33 (p. 126).

²¹ Deumert, p. 12.

Caribbean Literature (2006), which convincingly demonstrates how the predominant narrative describing the development of West Indian poetry was distorted by the political contours of Caribbean intellectual history. On the one hand, the criticism produced in the 1960s and '70s was 'especially productive' as it allowed for the recognition of a 'distinctive Caribbean literature'.²² On the other, it generally emphasised rupture and discontinuity, and in so doing, devalued poetry displaying an indebtedness to European antecedents. Once popular verse, like Walcott's early work, was retroactively reconfigured in terms of its deference to colonial models.²³ As Timothy Brennan suggests, because the 'script' was 'largely written afterward and then superimposed' onto Walcott's early work, 'the Walcott found in such poems [...] with their divided sympathies and historical burdens – [was] simply ignored.'²⁴ When forming the narrative for Caribbean literary history, scholars largely took earlier pronouncements about Walcott's derivation at face value, but ought not to have done.

1.I. 'Mind of Europe': Allusion in T. S. Eliot and *Epitaph for the Young* (1949)

Walcott's first book-length poem *Epitaph for the Young* recounts the shipwreck-ridden voyage of a young Saint Lucian sailor who journeys in search of 'ragged islands' (I.35) following the destruction of Castries.²⁵ The text is made up of twelve cantos and operates on at least three levels. Its maritime conceit – inspired by Baudelaire's 'Le Voyage' (1861), Homer's *Odyssey*, and Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (1925) – simultaneously analogises both the speaker's search for his poetic voice and what its earliest reviewer termed 'the human spirit passing through successive circles of trials'.²⁶ With the exception of the second canto, the poem is saturated with

²² Dave Gunning, 'Caribbean Modernism' in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. by Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 910-26 (p. 913).

²³ Gunning, p. 913.

²⁴ Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 199-200.

²⁵ A destination presumably inspired by the real-life Ragged Islands, the final Bahaman stop on Columbus's initial voyage to the New World. A different poem of the same name had previously appeared in *The Voice of Saint Lucia* in 1946, but the posterior text had little in common with the anterior, beyond some shared themes. Derek Walcott, *Epitaph for the Young: A Poem in XII Cantos* (Bridgetown: Advocate, 1949).

²⁶ Keith Alleyne, 'Review: Epitaph for the Young', *Bim*, 3 (1949), 267-72 (p. 267).

ostentatious adaptations of phrasing from anterior texts, notably from the poetry of the Euromodernists and their influences. Every text is allusive in some sense, but Walcott's verse *Künstlerroman* stands apart because of how ostentatiously it is suffused with what he later dubbed its 'visible, deliberately quoted influences'.²⁷

Stewart Brown discussed this ubiquity of allusion in 1991, claiming that it arose either from a 'culturally colonised' mind or from a 'humility' of disposition.²⁸ At times, according to Brown, allusions to anterior texts from the Anglo-European canon served little purpose other than to 'flaunt' Walcott's knowledge of them.²⁹ Echoing the sentiments of an early disparaging review – where it was alleged that Walcott had lifted his 'complete formula' from T. S. Eliot – he placed the poem within the tradition of colonial pastiche which, according to contemporary scholarly orthodoxy, had dominated West Indian poetry until the 1960s.³⁰ He concluded that *Epitaph* remained 'interesting' as a 'researcher's treasure trove of echoes, influences and early attitudes', but next to nothing in the work 'still [spoke] with any authority'.³¹ To this day, Brown's essay remains the cornerstone of criticism, not least because it was the first sustained analysis of *Epitaph* to have been written in the forty years following its publication. The central contention of this chapter, by contrast, is that Walcott's use of allusion was not simply derivative of Eliot's. It was, rather, highly innovative and experimental, having arisen in response to a very specific climate of ideas, rooted in the British West Indies of the mid-twentieth century. Whereas Eliotic allusion represented a tool through which an artificially homogenous European culture could both be constructed and have its increasing complexity conveyed, Walcott's use of the device regularly served to critique the metropolitan literary establishment.³² To understand his poem's allusions, Walcott's early readers needed to adopt fundamentally different hermeneutic strategies

²⁷ Robert D. Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 21-33 (p. 30).

²⁸ Brown, 'The Apprentice', p. 13.

²⁹ Brown, 'The Apprentice', p. 19.

³⁰ Alleyne, p. 267.

³¹ Stewart Brown, "'Spoiler'", Walcott's people's patriot', *Wasafiri*, 4 (1988), 1-15 (p. 11).

³² Having won the Nobel Prize a year prior to *Epitaph*'s publication, Eliot was by then the establishment's central figure.

from those adopted by the readers of the Euromodernists. Unlike Eliot's, Walcott's readers needed to relate allusions to specific lines and phrases in anterior texts.

Allusion is necessarily an imitative gesture because elements present in an older text are written into a new setting, but it does not follow that allusion and innovation are mutually exclusive since one can be innovative in the way one uses the device. To recognise the ways in which Walcott was innovative, however, it is first necessary to establish what is meant by the term 'allusion'. This is complicated in that critics tend to rely on terminology which is imprecise when they discuss the device. Terms like 'echo', 'borrowing' and 'source' remain commonplace, despite a lack of consensus regarding their meaning. In any case, such terms imply a model of literary genealogy in which posterior texts are seen as derivative, with pre-eminence given to anteriority. This is a model Walcott rejected and it is one with several flaws, the most significant of which being that, since all texts will relate to antecedents in some way, no text, excepting the first ever composed, can be considered original. The model suggests, in principle, that literature worsens over time. For this reason, when analysing major authors, it is generally abandoned: critics will say, for example, that Shakespeare 'refined' Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* (1562), rather than 'echoed' it. Although celebrated monographs have been written on allusion, notably Christopher Ricks' *Allusion to the Poets* (2002) and Joseph Pucci's *The Full-Knowing Reader* (1998), these have tended to focus on how and why specific authors employed the technique, largely eschewing analysis of the nature of allusion itself.³³

It was not until 2007 that the first sustained taxonomy of allusion was produced. In an article for *PMLA*, Gregory Machacek resolved some of the larger terminological problems complicating practical critical discussion. In part, he did so by drawing an ontological distinction between two phenomena, both generally termed 'allusion', which are similar, but basically discrete, the first being 'learned reference', the second, 'phraseological adaptation'.³⁴ A learned

³³ Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader* (London: Yale University Press, 1998).

³⁴ Gregory Machacek, 'Allusion', *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 522-36.

reference requires that readers know a specific piece of information which they must then bring to bear on an alluding text to understand it. For example, in Canto V of *Epitaph*, Walcott's speaker remarks, 'Comforter of the afflicted. / We are afflicted with comfort' (V.45-6). To understand this chiasmic formulation, a reader needs to know that 'comforter of the afflicted' is one of the epithets commonly applied to the Virgin Mary. Walcott is thus *alluding* to Mary through his use of the epithet. 'Phraseological adaptation', by contrast, is when the posterior text *reprises* the wording of an anterior text.³⁵ Machacek terms the adapted phraseology in the posterior text a 'reprise' to remove unwanted connotations of derivation. For the same reason, he calls the phrase in the anterior text a 'spur'. Owing to their neutrality, I have adopted Machacek's terminological suggestions, but I do not agree with his broader conceptualisation of allusion. Though his attempt to taxonomise the device is well intentioned, allusion is best understood descriptively, not prescriptively. It is a mode of writing, and reading, which relies on the interrelation of texts to produce meaning. Since there are innumerable ways in which texts can interrelate, there are also innumerable ways in which allusion may operate. Walcott's innovative allusive aesthetic strategies reveal the malleability and scope of the device: his early experiments were undeniably built on allusion, but such experimentation does not fall within Machacek's taxonomic scope.

Before considering the role of the allusion in *Epitaph* it is important to recognise that, when readers interpret any sort of allusion, they do so on two broadly defined levels. On the first, they connect some element of the alluding text, which may be phraseological, formal, or structural, with some extratextual, or intertextual, piece of information, deriving meaning through the interrelationship. On the second, meaning is derived from the device's having been employed: to write allusively is to engage in a kind of rhetorical posturing, or performance, through which, as Machacek rightly points out, one can 'signal an affiliation – literary, political,

³⁵ Machacek, pp. 526-8.

or personal.³⁶ In Walcott's case, these two levels are mutually illuminating. By considering them in tandem, it becomes clear that, though Walcott was learning his craft, he did not do so with uncritical devotion to the Euromodernists. By understanding allusion as a multivalent technique, I argue that, contrary to Brown's assertions, *Epitaph* represented an act of creative self-determination in spite of colonialism. To a greater extent than has yet been realised, Walcott mocked and critiqued the Anglo-European literary tradition, even as reprised elements of, and required that his audience possessed detailed knowledge of, Anglo-European texts.

Since the 1960s, it has consistently been alleged that *Epitaph*'s allusive aesthetic was derived, uncritically, from Euromodernist poetics. It was in this vein, for instance, that Brown suggested the poem 'threatened to clot into thromboses of ventriloquism'.³⁷ When making this argument, scholars generally cite the charge levelled by an unfavourable contemporary review that Walcott had copied his 'complete formula' from Eliot.³⁸ To understand what that charge entailed, it is instructive to look at Eliot's criticism.³⁹ Allusion was valuable to Eliot because it was one of several tools with which he attempted to collocate 'an increasingly diverse set of cultural resources and perspectives' in order to imagine an 'increasingly comprehensive but still contingent' sense of European cultural wholeness.⁴⁰ In his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921), Eliot argued that European poetry was becoming 'more and more comprehensive, more allusive [and] more indirect' in response to the growing 'variety and complexity' of European civilisation.⁴¹ To embody this 'complexity', modern European verse needed to become increasingly dense. Writing allusively was a valuable 'strategy' in this regard since allusion was a device through which poets could 'force' additional meaning into their language.⁴² For Eliot,

³⁶ Machacek, p. 531.

³⁷ Brown, 'The Apprentice', p. 15.

³⁸ Alleyne, p. 267.

³⁹ Walcott was well versed in the work. In the late 1980s, he recalled having frequently read Eliot's essays in his youth, though he claimed he had 'cherished the essays of Eliot not because of his perception but because of their quotations' – Derek Walcott, 'Caligula's Horse', *Kunapipi*, 1 (1989), 138-42 (p. 41).

⁴⁰ Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T. S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁴¹ T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 289.

⁴² Eliot, p. 289.

alluding to works across the Anglo-European canon implied they formed part of a unified, supranational literary tradition, from whose unity the 'mind of Europe' would remain cohesive in spite of the increasing cultural fragmentation he believed modernity was bringing about.⁴³ This collective, racially inflected notion of a 'mind of Europe' was, for Eliot, 'more important than [the poet's] private mind'.⁴⁴ Being a 'mind which changes', it was also constantly shifting.⁴⁵ Europe's mind shifted because it was co-related to the Anglo-European literary tradition, which he believed was fluid. His conceptualisation of that tradition was predicated on his belief that the continent's canonical texts all had a 'simultaneous existence and compose[d] a simultaneous order'.⁴⁶ New additions to the canon were influenced by everything which had come before, but they also exerted a retrospective influence on all anterior texts, through which the latter were constantly refashioned. This synchronic model meant older texts were never 'reassuringly fixed in the past', and that the so-called mind of Europe was in a state of perennial flux.⁴⁷ Every reprise therefore served to reshape its spur, situating both within an ever-changing, European, network of influence. Alluding to anterior texts tied new work to old, and in so doing, Eliot believed, prevented the continent's once proud, homogenous culture from fragmenting further in the face of modernity.

In keeping with this position, Eliot suggested that allusion and imitation were crucial to poetic development in his essay on Philip Massinger (1920): he suggested that while 'immature poets imitate [,] mature poets steal'.⁴⁸ Unlike 'bad poets', who 'deface what they take', those with talent 'make it into something better, or at least something different'.⁴⁹ The theft-based terms in which Eliot made his pronouncements were deliberately provocative, but they were also meta-critical, since the metaphor was itself "stolen" from an anecdote about Virgil, who purportedly

⁴³ Eliot, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Eliot, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Eliot, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Eliot, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Peter D. McDonald, *Artefacts of Writing: Ideas of the State and Communities of Letters from Matthew Arnold to Xu Bing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 85.

⁴⁸ Eliot, p. 206.

⁴⁹ Eliot, p. 206.

defended his own propensity to reprise other poets' lines verbatim by 'turning the matter around' and 'claiming that he should be given credit' for the vigour with which he was able to 'steal' lines and 'turn them into his personal creations'.⁵⁰ In Eliot's conceptualisation, as in Virgil's, the good poet was identifiable as such, not because he created his own lines *ex nihilo*, but because he was able to 'weld' together what he stole into a 'feeling which [was] unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn'.⁵¹ Such thinking accorded with the "Impersonal theory of poetry" Eliot had earlier outlined in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), the literary manifesto Walcott considered the American's 'greatest essay'.⁵² According to Eliot, the most important 'emotion' of a poem resided in the text, not its author, meaning it was 'impersonal'.⁵³ Rather than conveying a poet's 'sincere emotion', great verse produced an emotion which was '*significant*', in that it had 'its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet'.⁵⁴ No work could attain 'impersonality' of this sort without the poet first 'surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done'.⁵⁵ The 'progress of an artist' was, therefore, reliant on 'a continual surrender of himself'.⁵⁶ To reprise lines from other poets, and to incorporate those reprises successfully into a new formulation, was the mark of a good, mature poet. Poetry produced in this way would not be inferior, but superior, on the grounds that it was divorced from the feelings of the poet, who had surrendered his ego to the text. Alluding involved placing lines in a poem at a greater remove from the poet who wrote them down than was otherwise the case. As such, to allude necessarily enhanced the *significant* emotion of the poem, while distancing it from the *sincere*, but lesser, emotion of the poet.

To receive the impression of an increasingly complex, but unified, sense of Europe's collective modern mind, Eliot's readers did not have to recognise, or derive a unique meaning from, every single instance of allusion. That the significant emotion of a poem derived from the

⁵⁰ Conte, p. 5.

⁵¹ Eliot, p. 206.

⁵² Derek Walcott, 'T. S. Eliot: Master of an age', *Sunday Guardian* (10 January 1965), p. 3.

⁵³ Eliot, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Eliot, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Eliot, p. 22.

⁵⁶ Eliot, p. 17.

widespread use of the device was sufficient. In his early review of *The Waste Land*, Edmund Wilson accordingly proposed that 'to feel the force of the intense emotion which the poem is intended to convey' it was necessary to be familiar with only the 'most obvious of Mr Eliot's allusions'.⁵⁷ Given that Eliot initially refused to provide accompanying notes for the poem, and produced an incomplete, misleading set only after having been pushed by his publishers, Wilson's hermeneutic strategy (where allusion was understood as performative) could be seen to have been encouraged.⁵⁸ When readers first approached *The Waste Land*, they would have sensed that the language was allusive, but for the most part, would not have been able to identify a specific textual interrelationship. This was because Eliot made use of what James L. Kugel has termed 'frustrated allusion': language which seems allusive, but with which readers will struggle to locate a specific anterior spur. According to Kugel, the purpose of 'frustrated allusion' is to generate an 'aura of mystery', which will arise even if, or especially if, the implied 'missing information' does not really exist.⁵⁹ In his estimation, the French symbolists – by whose work Eliot was heavily influenced – employed it liberally because they perceived a 'beauty and depth not known in poetry before' in the resultant sense of mystery.⁶⁰ Eliot realised that, aside from mystery, this obscurantism could also portray European cultural complexity. In practice, then, though allusion was employed performatively in both *Epitaph* and the *Waste Land*, the performance differed greatly between the texts.

Where Eliot's allusive aesthetic sought to collocate an ever more diverse set of 'cultural resources and perspectives' so as to reunify what he believed to be an increasingly fragmented European culture, Walcott's did not.⁶¹ Though Walcott's cultural resources and perspectives were diverse, he was neither interested in a sense of European wholeness, nor in collocating his

⁵⁷ Edmund Wilson Jr., 'The Poetry of Drouth', *The Dial*, 73 (1922), 611-6 (p. 612).

⁵⁸ Walcott had read Wilson's review. In *Epitaph*, the epigraph for the sixth canto, 'After faith, drouth', was a clear reprise of the critic's antiquated spelling of 'drouth', the review having been entitled 'The Poetry of Drouth' (1922). Walcott employed the more conventional spelling of 'drought' (VI.78) later in the same canto.

⁵⁹ James L. Kugel, *The Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 38.

⁶⁰ Kugel, p. 38.

⁶¹ Pollard, p. 6.

resources. Walcott was not European and he did not feel he was writing within a pre-established literary tradition. His aim when producing works like *Epitaph* was to establish a tradition from scratch, rather than to reinvent it. He wanted to 'control, order, and give shape to the anarchy of the Caribbean's colonial history', rather than reunify an increasingly fragmented, supranational collective mind.⁶² One reason for the resemblance between the two authors' works, however, was that Walcott creatively tailored elements of Eliot's theorising on poetry and tradition to suit the needs of his project. To that end, as Charles W. Pollard records, Walcott recognised 'the genius' of Eliot's concept of tradition because he realised it was 'flexible enough to incorporate a wide variety of cultural sources' but also 'coherent enough to set these cultural sources in relation to one another'.⁶³ In 'The Muse of History', having quoted Eliot's remarks on 'the culture of a people' being 'the incarnation of its religion', he seconded Eliot in arguing that only 'minor writers' would obsess over a 'fear of imitation'.⁶⁴ So-called 'great poets' would have 'no wish to be different' and 'no time to be original' because they would know that 'originality emerges only when [apprentices] have absorbed all the poetry which they have read'.⁶⁵ He also indicated his adherence to the basic framework Eliot outlined in various interviews, even going so far as to "steal" Eliot's own terminology when doing so, in keeping with Eliot's own "theft" from Virgil. In 1996, for example, he told Louis Bourne that for young poets to learn their craft, they must first engage in a '*complete surrender* in terms of any idea of ambition'.⁶⁶ The language was Eliotic, having been "stolen" from Eliot's claims that the 'progress of an artist' involves 'a *continual surrender* of himself', and that the mechanism of artistic creation is one through which the artist is '*surrendering himself* wholly to the work to be done'.⁶⁷ In a 1989 television interview, Walcott also spoke of how his '*complete surrender* to modelling' had driven him 'to copy out a poem in his

⁶² Pollard, p. 2.

⁶³ Pollard, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 43; p. 62.

⁶⁵ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 62.

⁶⁶ My italics. Derek Walcott, quoted in Bourne, p. 10.

⁶⁷ My italics. Eliot, pp. 18-22.

exercise book' whenever he flicked through one of his Faber volumes of Eliot.⁶⁸ However, Walcott elaborated a 'separate canon' rather than assimilating New World poets to Eliot's universal 'mind of Europe'.⁶⁹

In drawing on Eliot's model for tradition and the contingent "Impersonal theory of poetry" upon which it relied, Walcott was influenced by Euromodernist aesthetics, but, by the logic of the formulation, such influence was relational rather than derivative, meaning he also, simultaneously, reshaped Eliot's work. According to such a formulation, his work could not be derivative, no matter how much it drew on Eliot, since the very idea of derivation implied the sort of diachronic model of literary influence Eliot himself had rejected. Regarding the collation of the region's resources, Walcott felt there were no worthy indigenous resources to collate. When it came to European writing, the resources did not need to be collated since many already had been, chiefly by Eliot. As Maria Cristina Fumagalli notes, 'most of the Dantean echoes in the *Epitaph* are to be found "anthologised" in T. S. Eliot's poems and in his essays about Dante.'⁷⁰ The same could be said for many of the other works to which *Epitaph* alludes. Walcott's allusions were not consciously 'frustrated' like Eliot's. For him, allusion was valuable neither as a tool to force meaning into language, nor as a strategy to reunify an increasingly fragmented region's collective mind. It was, rather, a way to demonstrate familiarity with, while criticising the assumptions of, the Anglo-European tradition in which Eliot's work was situated.

1.II. 'In the Castle of Your Skin': Hans Christian Andersen's *The Swineherd* (1841)

Early on in *Epitaph*'s fourth canto, Walcott's speaker explains that indirect 'abstractions' can sometimes succeed where 'direct application would have failed' (IV.43-4). In other words, one can often make points allusively which would likely be refuted or ignored were they advanced plainly. Across the poem and in accordance with this precept, Walcott's allusions were far more

⁶⁸ My italics. Derek Walcott, quoted in Mukherjee, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Melas, p. 130.

⁷⁰ Maria Cristina Fumagalli, 'Epitaph for the Young: Culture or Mimicry', *Agenda*, 39 (2002), 51-77 (p. 59).

critical of the metropolitan literary establishment than has yet been recognised. To take a widely reproduced line as an example, at the opening of the third canto, the speaker reaches the 'early seas' of 'explored actions' (III.2), corresponding to the painful process of starting to love both a girl and the European literary tradition, the latter of which is represented via the 'foreign thickets', pictures of 'castles, rooks', and general 'oddments / Of an alien culture' (III.22-27). There, one such oddment, the 'crook' of a 'china shepherdess' (III.38-39), seems to pose a question. In response, the speaker declares, 'You in the castle of your skin, I the swineherd' (III.40).

In the build up to this line, the unusual term 'oddments' is allusive: it reprises the 'oddments of all things' (4) gifted to an ageing socialite in Ezra Pound's 'Portrait d'une Femme' (1912).⁷¹ In Pound's poem, which Walcott first read in 1946 (just as he began composing *Epitaph*), the eponymous lady and her mind are likened to the 'Sargasso Sea' (1) because they have been 'swept about' (2) by London and because they have received gifts from 'bright ships' (3). According to Pound's speaker, everything the lady has and is originated elsewhere: all of her possessions and ideas are 'oddments'. Thus, he concludes: 'there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you' (28-30). Following the logic of the allusion, Walcott's speaker's contention is that the Anglo-European literary tradition is comprised wholly of similar 'oddments' and in this sense, like every tradition, it cannot claim the originality of invention, only of unique recombination. The speaker's response to the final oddment, a china shepherdess, is well known because it inspired the title of George Lamming's debut novel *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953). But, how should a reader make sense of it? Obviously, there is a metaphor, where the 'shepherdess', who represents light-skinned women, is inaccessible to the persona, owing to her complexion. Bruce King accordingly related the line to Walcott's lusting after white women, who were unlikely to reciprocate his feelings 'because marriage to a brown

⁷¹ Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems: 1908-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975).

man was socially a step down'.⁷² A strictly biographical reading of this sort is limited, however, because it does not explain why the relationship should be couched in fairy-tale language.

Addressing this point, Angelo Righetti claimed that the 'swineherd' was an amalgamation of Odysseus's friend Eumaeus and the Prodigal Son from Jesus's parable.⁷³ In resolving one problem, though, he created another: neither steadfast friendship nor reformed profligacy have any clear connection to the narrative at this point.

When the line is understood in context, it is clearly an allusion to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy story *The Swineherd* (1841), in which a prince wants to marry a princess who lives in a castle.⁷⁴ To impress her, the young royal presents two exquisite, natural gifts. The first is a rose of great beauty and rarity, while the second is a nightingale of prodigious singing ability. In both cases, the princess and her entourage admire the gift, before becoming disappointed that it is natural rather than manmade. Not one to give up easily, the prince disguises himself as a swineherd looking for work, daubing his face with brown and black mud. Having been hired by the palace, he starts living in a small room by a pigsty, where he adorns a kitchen-pot with bells. When the pot boils, it plays a simple melody, the tune to the Viennese children's song 'O du Lieber Augustin'. Although the lyrics to the song vary, in the line immediately following his mention of the swineherd, Walcott reprises Andersen's version of them verbatim, even doing so in italicised German, a language which he could not speak: '*Ach du lieber Augustin alles ist weg weg weg*' (III.41). The princess is so enchanted upon hearing the melody that she wants to buy the pot. The prince agrees to surrender it for the price of ten kisses from her, to which she eventually consents. Later, he builds a rattle which is capable of playing derivative music. Once more, she is enamoured with it, agreeing to its purchase in exchange for one hundred kisses. The story ends with the emperor catching the princess in the act of kissing the apparent swineherd

⁷² King, p. 68.

⁷³ Righetti, p. 177.

⁷⁴ Hans Christian Andersen, *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales: A Selection*, trans. by L. W. Kingsland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 199-206.

and banishing her from the palace forever. Though the *Swineherd* allusion has since been missed, Walcott would have expected his audience to recognise it, not least because many of them were likely to have been his schoolmates: Andersen's work was widely read and well known by Caribbean schoolchildren in the 1930s and 1940s. At times, V. S. Naipaul discussed the role it played in his development while, in *The Prodigal* (2005), Walcott's speaker recounted how, despite having read the work 'an eternity ago / in his warm island childhood [...] the glacial prose / of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Ice Maiden"' had 'never left' him (V.17).⁷⁵ Walcott was deeply familiar with Andersen's work and had reason to believe his audience would know it fairly well.

Walcott's allusion was to a fairy-tale from the early nineteenth century written in German, for which reason it was in accordance with Eliot's precept that 'good poet[s]' should 'borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.'⁷⁶ However, unlike Eliot, Walcott was not conveying a sense of Europe's increasing cultural complexity. Rather than generating distance as John Figueroa proposes, the allusion actually relies on familiarity.⁷⁷ Stan Smith perceptively points out how whenever Walcott 'deploys a learned allusion or classical tag' in his verse autobiography *Another Life* (1973), he 'translates and explains its ideological use' in a manner wholly '[u]nlike Eliot'.⁷⁸ The German line in *Epitaph* is deployed in precisely this way, since it provides the key to unlocking the reference to Andersen's swineherd in the previous line. Readers must recall the plot of the anterior text in detail, having recognised the lyrics of the song. To make sense of this allusion, they must be aware of Andersen's story in its entirety because the reprised line serves, in William M. Porter's terms, as 'the locus for a much wider complex of significant correspondences between the texts'.⁷⁹ By equating himself to Andersen's swineherd, Walcott's speaker suggests that he cannot rely on

⁷⁵ See, for example: 'Fairy Tale' (2001) [online] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/4266282/Fairy-tale.html>> [accessed 20 February 2020]; Derek Walcott, *The Prodigal* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

⁷⁶ Eliot, p. 206.

⁷⁷ John Figueroa, 'A Note on Derek Walcott's Concern with Nothing', *Revista / Review Interamericana*, 4 (1974), 422-8 (p. 423).

⁷⁸ Stan Smith, 'Darkening English: Post-Imperial Contestations in the Language of Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott', *English*, 43 (1994), 39-55 (p. 51).

⁷⁹ William M. Porter, *Reading the Classics and Paradise Lost* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 33.

natural or authentic artistry to win the approval of metropolitan consumers (the princess). Instead, he must produce art which is vapid and derivative like the pot and the rattle. He must disguise and lower himself like the prince, albeit through an inverted version of the story's disguising of complexion. However, acceptance on these terms would be a pyrrhic sort of victory, since it would necessarily debase the king (the literary establishment) to admit him.

The point is not that Walcott feels unable to write within the tradition, but that he feels apprehensive about doing so. This becomes all the more apparent if one understands Walcott's analogy with reference to the Caribbean context in which it was produced. When a West Indian poem employs the word 'castle', the network of association it summons is highly localised. There have never been ancient forts or citadels in the region. However, there was a common colonial practice of terming European-style townhouses 'castles'. Among the row of impressive townhouses which line the road adjacent to Port of Spain's Queen's Park Savannah, for example, one finds Stollmeyer's Castle, an extravagant townhouse reputed to have been modelled on a wing of Balmoral. In Walcott's play *The Last Carnival* (1982), the owner of one such building rages against their inauthenticity:

This castle. You want to know this castle's history? It was built on cocoa. My great-grandfather brought it stone by imported stone, all the way from France. He had delusions about aristocracy [...] It's an imitation, a stone fantasy. (II.1)⁸⁰

Such castles were never used for defence (in the region, defensive constructions are generally termed 'forts'). Rather than impregnability, they suggest extravagance and inequality, having been built on the profits of slavery to exhibit wealth and to make European settlers feel more at home in the New World. They also imply inauthenticity, being reproductions of Old World beauty – which are often rundown and 'flaking' like the china shepherdess – and derivation, like the

⁸⁰ Derek Walcott, *Three Plays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986), p. 56. There is evidence to suggest that Walcott had his image from *Epitaph* in mind when penning this passage. Slightly earlier in the play, Clodia criticised a white working-class woman in Trinidad for her inability to distinguish between true and inauthentic art, likening her to a 'Watteau shepherdess' because her complexion was 'as cool as porcelain' (I.2).

princess' rattle. The reference to a castle does not suggest Walcott's speaker finds the Anglo-European tradition inaccessible. Rather, it implies that he recognises its origins in colonialism and the inauthenticity required for Caribbean artists to work within it.

1.III. Innovation and Experimentation: 'Allusive Transference' and 'Meta-Allusion'

In addition to critiquing the Anglo-European tradition through allusion, Walcott also developed new and creative ways to employ the device. In 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', he outlined his opposition to the model of New World mimesis V. S. Naipaul espoused in *The Mimic Men* (1967), according to which creativity was impossible in the New World because '[n]o gesture according to this philosophy is authentic, every sentence is a quotation [...] and because it is mimicry, uncreative.'⁸¹ For Walcott, the idea that nothing had come from the region implied a clean canvas on which anything could be made. He saw the lack of a native literary tradition as an opportunity to innovate, rather than as a drawback. In particular, when composing *Epitaph*, he sought to demonstrate the extent to which New World authors could be creative through his implementation of two innovative allusive strategies, which I term 'allusive transference' and 'meta-allusion'. The first of these, allusive transference, involves linking ideas to one another through the connotations of an anterior allusive spur, rather than through a more conventional narrative logic such as chronology, while the second, meta-allusion, employs allusion to articulate and exemplify problems connected to the device itself. Taken together, these strategies demonstrate how quotation need not arise from a dearth of creativity even when it is ubiquitous.

Regarding allusive transference, there are many instances throughout *Epitaph* where Walcott's lines initially seem disjointed. It was partly for this reason that Brown claimed the poem 'never quite comes together.'⁸² In such instances, however, there will generally be a link which comes by way of an anterior intermediary text, to which one of the lines alludes and with

⁸¹ Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?', p. 6.

⁸² Brown, 'The Apprentice', p. 20.

which both share associations. This technique bears some resemblance to the concept of an 'allusive complex', which Allan H. Pasco has discussed in relation to Proust's work. According to Pasco, an allusive complex is an 'interwoven pattern of allusions' which highlights 'various thematic movements' operating 'beneath the surface' of the text.⁸³ Walcott's technique has been termed 'allusive transference', however, because it also bears resemblance to 'metaphoric transference'. Patricia Ismond coined that term to describe a phenomenon common to Walcott's early work where, rather than establishing simple vectors of transference between vehicles and tenors, metaphors bleed throughout individual poems and across poems in his collections. This results in networks of images interconnected connotatively. For example, in Walcott's early sonnet 'A City's Death by Fire' (1948) the speaker begins by asserting anachronistically that he 'wrote the tale by tallow of a city's death by fire' (2).⁸⁴ Thereafter, the wax dripping from his 'candle's eye' is likened to weeping: the candle 'smoked in tears' (3). The metaphoric associations of wax then bleed into the next line when the speaker outlines his desire to write 'in more than wax' (4), referencing the transience of Roman *tabulae rasae*. Six lines later, having wandered about the ruins of Castries – much of which was levelled by an inferno on 19 June 1948 – the speaker asks, 'why / Should a man wax tears, when his wooden world fails?' (9-10).⁸⁵ The sense of 'wax' here is akin to the phrase "wax lyrical". Walcott therefore transfers the transience formerly associated with wax tablets to the town's destroyed wooden buildings, whose impermanence metonymises the transience of man's world at large. The candle's tears have become those of mankind. This instance of the device is also metaliterary because when the concept of wax drips down the poem it mirrors the wax dripping down the candle. As Ismond records, the sonnet and the technique of metaphoric transference were both modelled on Dylan Thomas.⁸⁶

⁸³ Allan H. Pasco, *Allusion: A Literary Graft* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. viii.

⁸⁴ Lines from this sonnet were notably reprised in *Epitaph*. Walcott's speaker re-enacts Psalm 121 at the end of the poem when he looks to the hills and sees a 'a flock of faiths' to whom 'each leaf was a green breath' ('Fire', 11-12). In *Epitaph*, the image is reconfigured as 'shrill green hills' where messengers 'flocked thick as priests' (l.18-19). Similarly, *Epitaph*'s 'city [which] bled papers' (l.14) recalled the sonnet's 'town [where] leaves were paper' (11).

⁸⁵ One local historian deemed the fire 'the greatest calamity to befall a Colony of its size and resources in so short a space of time'. Charles Jesse, *Outlines of St. Lucia's History* (Barbados: Advocate, 1962), p. 47.

⁸⁶ Ismond, p. 28.

Though the related phenomenon of allusive transference recurs throughout *Epitaph*, it is most clearly seen in a stanza from the middle of Canto X:

Fishing the twilight for an alternate voice,
 I teach the word, to a class of several colours,
 That shall grow up to wear their father's flesh.
 Mixture of faces.
 Nakedly leading their reluctance into
 The flowering pages, the whispers of Arden.
 Persepolis. 'Peter'. Who were the Phoenicians?
 Traders, he tarries, merchants at sea, sir.
 Tomorrow teach them Hamlet, after the Tempest,
 I'll break my staff, a schoolmaster's threat. (X.64-73)

Superficially, there seems little to connect the speaker's claim that he must continue '[f]ishing the twilight for an alternate voice' (X.64) to write authentically, and his subsequent anecdote about working at a multi-ethnic school, beginning 'I teach the word, to a class of several colours' (X.65). To understand how the two are linked, readers must recognise that Walcott's first line reprises and modifies the widely reproduced concluding line of Aimé Césaire's French-language masterpiece *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), which Walcott read 'very early' in his career.⁸⁷ In English, Césaire's 'je veux pêcher maintenant la langue maléfique de la nuit', reads, 'I now want to fish the malevolent language of the night'.⁸⁸ In context, the spur relates a sort of prophetic vision in which Black people can articulate their shared experiences through *négritude*. The allusion to the *Cahier* interlinks Walcott's lines because it is only in Césaire's image that the poet's search for an authentic voice and racial theory are commingled. Walcott rejected Césaire's philosophy in his essay 'Necessity of Negritude' (1964), but nonetheless deemed the *Cahier* 'a great poem' of 'magnificent optimism'.⁸⁹ As he later made clear in 'The Muse of History', though Césaire's work was not written in dialect, he felt it had been 'written tonally in Creole'

⁸⁷ Breiner, p. 47. The title of his early lyric 'Pays Natal' (1962) was later modelled on Césaire's text.

⁸⁸ My translation. Aimé Césaire, 'Cahier d'un retour au pays natal' in *Twentieth-Century French Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Hugues Azérad and Peter Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 123-32 (p. 127).

⁸⁹ Derek Walcott, 'Necessity of Negritude (1964)' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp. 20-3 (p. 21).

nonetheless.⁹⁰ He would not directly emulate Césaire, whose ethnographically essentialist ideology he did not accept, but he would seek to replicate in English what the Martinican had done in French, producing a unique poetic idiom not, in this case, from the black 'night' of *négritude*, but from the metaleptic 'twilight' of the British Empire, upon which the proverbial sun was starting to set.⁹¹

After the Césaire allusion, the subsequent link is between teaching a class and asking a student a question. This would be logical enough except that the question posed, 'Who were the Phoenicians?' (X.70), seems to come out of nowhere, pertaining as it does to history, rather than poetry – the 'flowering pages [and] whispers of Arden' (X.69) – which the students are then studying. Once again, to understand the link, readers must spot an allusion to an anterior text: in this case, Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar-Gipsy' (1853). Arnold's poem concludes with an extended comparison in which the speaker equates himself to 'some grave Tyrian trader' (232) who, realising that the Greeks will soon dominate trade on the Aegean, decides to sail West to 'where the Atlantic raves' (246) to establish new points of trade with the 'dark Iberians' (249).⁹² In 'The Spoiler's Return' (1982), Walcott alluded to this westward journey, before extending its trajectory to encompass unfair trade practices in the Caribbean: 'Arnold's Phoenician trader reach this far, / selling you half-dead batteries for your car' (145-6).⁹³ It is the racial component of Arnold's analogy which the Spoiler picks up on and which links the speaker's question about Phoenicians in *Epitaph* to the associations first raised through Césaire. At the same time, it is the allusion to Arnold which links a question about history to the otherwise unrelated study of poetry. And yet, though Arnold's trader is a Phoenician, hailing from Tyre, he is never termed

⁹⁰ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 49.

⁹¹ In *Omeros*, Walcott imitated the style and form of the *Cabier* to frame artistic innovation in the New World in precisely these terms: 'who set out to found no cities; they were the found / who were bound for no victories; they were the bound, / who levelled nothing before them; they were the ground'. Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), p. 22. Later, he called Césaire a '*maître* among makers' whose work was 'always in the haze of [his] mind' ('Elegy: for *Aimé Césaire*', 6-8). Derek Walcott, *White Egrets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010).

⁹² Matthew Arnold, 'The Scholar-Gipsy' in *Poems*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1869), I, pp. 246-58.

⁹³ Derek Walcott, *The Fortunate Traveller* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), p. 58.

such explicitly within 'The Scholar-Gipsy'; when discussing the poem, a teacher would probably adopt the poet's terminology. Walcott's divergent appellation, 'Phoenician', is therefore significant because the term also gestures to the Madame Sosostris section of *The Waste Land*: 'Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor' / '(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)' (l.47-8). It is this association which provides the subsequent link. Eliot's second line – related to pearls and eyes – was adapted verbatim from Ariel's song to Ferdinand in *The Tempest* (l.2.398). Immediately after hearing Peter's response, the speaker makes a mental note to 'teach them Hamlet, after the Tempest' (X.72).⁹⁴

Walcott's use of this strategy was by no means limited to *Epitaph*, nor even to his poetry. It was also employed across early dramatic offerings, most notably in the earliest written of his plays to be staged, *Harry Dernier* (1952).⁹⁵ The protagonist of the radio piece is an alcoholic priest and the last man on earth following an apocalyptic catastrophe. As the final holdout of humanity, he represents its ultimate repository, meaning he feels compelled to keep the spirit of the species alive by cataloguing whatever he can recall. For this reason, his speech touches on everyone 'from Adam to Einstein.'⁹⁶ On account of this density, the play frequently appears incoherent and, given that Dernier is a madman whom the stage directions indicate 'can be heard guzzling whisky as he talks almost in a scream' (p. 2), it is possible to attribute this to the protagonist's inebriation. If, however, one considers Dernier's ramblings from the perspective of allusive transference, a certain method emerges in the madness because, as with *Epitaph*, there is an implicit referential logic interlinking otherwise discordant lines. In this case, Dernier utilises a wide-ranging network of allusion to mediate on the relationship between sex and death.

⁹⁴ T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969); William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, 3rd edn, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Methuen Drama, 2011).

⁹⁵ Derek Walcott, *Harry Dernier* (composed 1946, broadcast 1952) [online] <https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3607517> [accessed 1 June 2022].

⁹⁶ Robert D. Hamner, 'Mythological Aspects of Derek Walcott's Drama', *Ariel*, 8 (1977), 35-57 (p. 41).

This is seen most clearly towards the end of the play when Dernier ponders the idea of 'self murder' (p. 8), after the manner of Hamlet. At this point, his speech is built on a series of ostentatious religious and literary allusions, reprised largely verbatim.

Consider the Lilith of the field . . .
 The soiled horse, Quant. Quant's dead, and you're mad Hieronimo,
 Agnus Dei, O God, God.
 (The voices rise again softly, and his steps again just as the play begun. . .)

It's that skull. There's the skull, Duchess of Malfi still,
 That's Lily. She died, Dernier, she died too. (p. 8)

If one recognises the allusions and runs through them in sequence, one can follow the underlying logic. For example, Dernier's first line, 'Consider the Lilith of the field', is a pun adapted from the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus's instruction to 'Consider the lilies of the field' (Matthew VI.28). In context, Jesus's imperative forms part of a wider argument that people should not worry themselves with earthly considerations, but put their trust in heaven. Evidence of divine love can be seen in the beauty of the natural world, for which the lilies of the field stand metonymically. If God takes care of lilies in this way, he will necessarily devote more care to humanity, about whom he cares infinitely more deeply. Dernier's wordplay functions as a rebuke of this position since 'Lilith' is the name of an apocryphal demonic witch from Jewish mythology whom Adam loved prior to Eve's creation. So, to consider Lilith, as opposed to lilies, is to consider beauty's capacity to lead to sinfulness via temptation, rather than to consider God's benevolence. Because suffering and death originated in such temptation, for Dernier, beauty adduces God's capacity for punishment, not deliverance.

The subsequent phrase, 'The soiled horse', is reprised from *King Lear* (1606) where it connotes sexual voraciousness. At the point in the play where the spur is found, Lear has gone mad and started to hallucinate like Dernier. He can see a 'simp'ring dame' (IV.6.116), whom Edgar and Gloucester cannot, and informs his comrades that, while this dame may show disdain whenever sex is mentioned in public, she is lascivious behind closed doors to the point that

neither '[t]he fitchew, nor the soiled horse, goes to't with a more riotous appetite' (IV.6.120-1).

In this way, Dernier shows self-awareness regarding his insanity, since he self-consciously adopts the phrasing of a crazed man in the process of hallucinating while framing his musing on beauty in terms of sexual temptation and its pitfalls. Following this reprise of Shakespeare, Dernier then addresses himself in the second person, declaring 'you're mad Hieronimo', in reference to Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (c.1582-92?), though the inspiration for this line likely came by way of Eliot, whose speaker concludes at the very end of *The Waste Land* that 'Hieronymo's mad againe' (V.432). In Kyd's work, Hieronimo was a nobleman driven so mad by grief for his murdered son that he assassinated those responsible. His son died following an illicit romantic relationship, so the allusion reiterates the point that sexual desire is bound up in morbid sinfulness. Once again, through allusion, there comes the suggestion that Dernier is self-aware when it comes to his insanity. To that end, the reference is enveloped by his realising that his imaginary former interlocutors Quant and Lily are not real.

From this chain of allusive transference, it becomes clear that sexual temptation is both overwhelming and bound inextricably to death in Dernier's view. Driven mad by this realisation, he seeks God once more and begins a Catholic liturgical recitation commencing 'Agnus Dei'. However, he can find no solace in divinity and his prayer almost immediately terminates in an interjective 'O God, God'. The phrasing here reprises that of Hamlet's first soliloquy, in which the prince wishes suicide were permissible, given how unpleasant and fatuous the world seems.

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world! (I.2.129-34)

The Hamletian parallel is reinforced by the fact that, earlier in the play, Dernier came across a skull, which he labelled 'some withered Cleopatra's brain' (p. 1), in a sardonic refutation of Enobarbus's claim from *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) that 'age cannot wither' the Egyptian queen

(II.2.245). Two lines after the Hamletian interjection, it is this skull which he terms the 'Duchess of Malfi'. Like Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (1613) is a gory revenge tragedy in which the majority of the cast are killed as a consequence of illicit sexual liaisons. Although she dies on stage, the Duchess's skull does not feature in the play. There is, therefore, a commingling of Hamlet with Eliot's claim in 'Whispers of Immortality' (1920) that 'Webster was much possessed by death / and saw the skull beneath the skin' (1-2) in this allusion. Walcott's 'skull' directly alludes to this description of Webster because Dernier identifies the skull as being the 'Duchess of Malfi still'.

In *Epitaph*, when discussing the role and value of the allusive strategies of this sort, Walcott generally wrote 'meta-allusively', which is to say that, as he articulated his points, he simultaneously exemplified them. Early on in Canto IV, for example, as he makes the point that it is difficult to write original verse within a longstanding poetic tradition, he also exemplifies it by bringing a cacophony of other poetic voices from all over the Anglo-European tradition into his poem through allusion:

The voices call, inviolable and veiled
Across the unshrinking sea, from broken temples, from the dust
Whom Ajax ravished in Diana's fane, from the lake district
And the Mantuan marshes, the nightingale and poplar
Lean westward with inviolable voices (IV.17-21)

The Lake District and Mantuan marshes provided inspiration for Wordsworth and Virgil respectively, though the latter may also be a reference to Canto XX of Dante's *Inferno*. Beyond being a simple 'classical reference', to which Emily Greenwood attests, the line 'Whom Ajax ravished in Diana's fane' also adapts verbatim a line (I.1.275) from the anti-heroic version of Aeneas in Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1593).⁹⁷ The 'nightingale', taken in tandem with the

⁹⁷ Emily Greenwood, 'Shades of Rome in the Poetry of Derek Walcott' in *Living Classics: Greece and Rome in Contemporary Poetry in English*, ed. by S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 255-74 (p. 264). Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. by Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2003). Since no extant classical text placed Ajax's rape of Cassandra in Diana's temple, the location was, what William L. Godshalk termed, a 'Marlovian addition'. William L. Godshalk, *The Marlovian World Picture* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 42.

phrase 'inviolable voices', points to the story of Philomel in *The Waste Land* (II.99-103), which in turn points to Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), where Philomela is raped and imprisoned before turning into a nightingale. Given its context, sandwiched between Philomel's nightingale and her 'inviolable voice', the reference to a 'poplar' also recalls Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Binsey Poplars' (1879), in which the felling of trees is likened to murdering a woman. The saturation of allusion exemplifies the difficulty in expressing oneself originally, which is also exactly what the language articulates. As a result, though Walcott's verse is imitative in one sense (he is literally imitating the voices of other poets), it is also highly innovative, because of the experimental meta-allusive framework through which he conducts that imitation.

Having articulated and exemplified the inviolable nature of the voices of canonical poetry, Walcott's speaker feels daunted by the task of developing his own aesthetic. To write without merely repeating what they have said already seems impossible. Twice, he wails in apostrophe, 'O for a voice' (IV.61, 72). Read non-allusively, this lament appears nihilistic. It is as if the speaker has given up entirely. When considered in terms of meta-allusion, however, the picture becomes more complicated. In delivering this lament, the speaker is actually reprising a line from one of William Blake's *Poetical Sketches* (1783): 'O for a voice like thunder' ('Prologue to Edward IV', 1).⁹⁸ The key difference between the spur and its reprise arises from an act of deliberate omission. Whereas Blake's speaker bemoans his voice having no power, creative truncation means that Walcott's pines instead for any voice at all. By reprising Blake's line for his lament, rather than composing his own, Walcott was able to articulate his point, that he had no voice of his own, whilst also exemplifying it, since he therefore had to rely on Blake. However, as this point was being made, it was also being undermined: though the line was Blake's, by whittling it down innovatively, the speaker was able to express his individuality artistically, which was what he was claiming to be unable to do. Ultimately, when the speaker succeeded in

⁹⁸ William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1988), p. 439.

articulating his voice among this cacophony of anterior utterances, it was not through his total rejection of these utterances, but through his creative and experimental implementation of them. Through its innovative deployment of meta-allusion, *Epitaph* thus demonstrates how, even when every sentence is a quotation, as per Naipaul on the New World, it does not follow that every sentiment is expressed inauthentically or uncreatively.

Although I have discussed Walcott's allusive critiques and his innovative allusive strategies separately thus far for the sake of clarity, it is worth pointing out that this separation is not borne out by the poem itself and that various instances of meta-allusion are also critical of metropolitan literary practice. In other words, there are times in *Epitaph* where the speaker alludes to an earlier text to criticise the self-aggrandising role of allusion in metropolitan literary texts at large. Twelve lines after reprising Andersen's German, for example, the speaker invokes a second allusion: he recalls having 'laughed at Appius' (III.54). Interpreting this learned reference hinges upon whether one knows who 'Appius' is. Any reader who does not possess this knowledge can only interpret the reference on the level of 'name-allusion', where, as Kugel points out, 'the best the reader can do is extract whatever associations surround the name itself'.⁹⁹ 'Appius' has an obvious classical resonance, for which reason readers unfamiliar with a specific spur will likely infer classical erudition on Walcott's part, the allusive performance of which, they will conclude, seems Eliotic. However, the allusion to Appius was not supposed to be 'frustrated', since his story would not have been obscure for readers educated in the West Indies of the mid-twentieth century, having appeared prominently in both Roman history and canonical English literature. First recorded in Livy's 'Ab Urbe Condita' (27-9 BCE), it formed the basis of a play by Heywood and Webster (*Appius and Virginia*, c.1625?) and was referenced by Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* (c.1590-93?). Walcott may have known the story from Heywood and Webster, via Eliot, since it was the first play discussed in Eliot's essay on Thomas Heywood,

⁹⁹ Kugel, p. 44.

printed in his *Selected Essays* (1932); fewer than twenty pages after discussing the play, Eliot emphatically commended John Ford's lines, 'They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings, / Let me die smiling' (p. 199), the second of which Walcott reprised verbatim to conclude the subsequent stanza of *Epitaph*, 'The lines drip clearly from our cracked hearts, / Let me die smiling' (III.75).

In any case, he, and most of his anticipated audience, would have encountered the story at school because, in addition to providing material for Jacobean dramatists, Appius's story was also narrated by the Physician in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400). In the 1940s and '50s, West Indian schools were geared towards preparing students for the Cambridge Higher and Advanced School Certificates, excellence in which would enable a student to move to England on a university scholarship. For the English Literature component of the Higher paper, students had to render a passage from the *Canterbury Tales* in modern English, before explaining any obscure words or references and indicating how the extract fit into the story as a whole. Since they did not learn Middle English as a second language and were not allowed copies of the book in the exam, they had to memorise long tracts of text by heart. By consequence, many educated West Indians would have been familiar with Appius's story. Though Brown was certainly correct to point out that, in terms of readership, Walcott's allusiveness would have 'excluded all but a tiny minority of West Indians', the same could be said regarding the composition of poetry in general since only around 2% of West Indian primary school students progressed even as far as secondary school in the 1940s.¹⁰⁰ It would be pointless, as Walcott later argued, to write poetry for the 'common man' who was never going to read it.¹⁰¹ In any case, there was a positive side to this sort of limited readership: Walcott could, in effect, 'gauge' his 'audience almost on an individual basis.'¹⁰² He later wrote sardonically to Swanzy about how he had foreseen

¹⁰⁰ Brown, "'Spoiler'", Walcott's people's patriot', p. 10; Philip M. Sherlock, 'Education in the Caribbean Area', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 1 (1949), 9-18 (p. 13).

¹⁰¹ Derek Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (1997), 229-47 (pp. 241-2).

¹⁰² Breiner, p. 22.

'intellectuals' in the region 'swooning over' the poem's allusive complexity and, given their educational background, he would have expected this coterie at least to recognise Appius.¹⁰³ In this regard, he differed from Eliot, whose allusions could only realistically have been interpreted *en masse* on a non-performative level by the poet himself at the time of publication.

In *Epitaph*, the speaker recounts Appius's story, casting him as a lover who courted his mistress with 'pink and white flowers' (III.55) despite her promiscuity – 'all the crew had held in carnal knowledge' (III.56), 'fifty fornications before' (III.57) – and her callousness – 'she tore his heart and stamped its shreds in dust' (III.59). He then praises Appius's fidelity and patience in the face of such rejection, deeming it almost superhuman: it 'approached the horizons of sainthood' (III.61). In 1976, Kenneth Ramchand proposed that the narrative was a metaphorical rendering of the 'writer's unremitting devotion to his tyrannous craft'.¹⁰⁴ However, to make this association, he wilfully ignored the first line of the story, which contained the allusion to Appius. In that regard, it is remarkable that the Appius narrative as recounted by Walcott in no way reprised the narrative of Livy, Chaucer or the renaissance dramatists. In the anterior works, the broad strokes were always the same. Appius was not a besotted youth. He was a middle-aged judge who fell in love with a plebeian girl called Virginia, who was already engaged to a suitor. In the end, following various nefarious machinations, Appius committed suicide at a mob's behest, while Virginia was killed by her father to save her honour. In place of this tragic plot, Walcott did not simply invent his own comic plot. Rather, he outlined the conventional comic plot of the *adulescens amator*, a stock character from Roman drama who becomes infatuated with a courtesan or peasant girl in spite of his high birth. This substitution functioned as a schoolboy's joke, with Appius's name mocking Eliot's austere use of classical and renaissance allusion. (As William Irwin notes, allusion is often playful since its etymological root, the Latin 'alludere', literally

¹⁰³ Letter from Derek Walcott to Henry Swanzy dated 11 February 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Ramchand, *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (Jamaica: Nelson, 1976), p. 111.

meant 'to jest, mock, [or] play with.')¹⁰⁵ Read in context, the joke was difficult to miss. In the stanza preceding the mention of Appius, Walcott's speaker explained how he had heard 'little [...] of love except through jokes / Given by boisterous uncles in the parlour' (III.42-43). By first contrasting *Epitaph's* Appius with the anterior versions of Appius and by then contrasting this relationship with the relationship between figures in *The Waste Land* and their classical antecedents, contemporary West Indian readers would have recognised that Walcott was not, in this case, adopting Eliot's allusive classicism, so much as critiquing it meta-allusively.¹⁰⁶

1.IV. The Wider Context: Selvon, Naipaul, and the Literary Debates of the 1960s

Though it was innovative and experimental, Walcott's approach to allusion did not exist in a vacuum. At the time, other writers from the Caribbean were also developing novel allusive strategies reliant on their audience's familiarity with specific texts. V. S. Naipaul's oft-cited declaration from *The Middle Passage* (1962) that 'nothing was created in the West Indies' was also meta-allusive, for example, because it reprised James Anthony Froude's infamous assertion that there were 'no people' in the West Indies 'in the true sense of the word'.¹⁰⁷ It therefore exemplified the point about a dearth of regional creativity through its allusive articulation. In Sam Selvon's case, the objective in alluding to the Anglo-European canon resembled Walcott's in that he also aimed to showcase his knowledge of Western texts while positioning his writing in relation to them. For example, his magnum opus *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) opens with a description of London's fog, foregrounding the unreal quality it gives to the city.

¹⁰⁵ William Irwin, 'What Is an Allusion?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59 (2001), 287-97 (p. 292).

¹⁰⁶ Something similar is traceable in Walcott's prefatory dedication to his schoolteacher James Rodway, which was sourced verbatim from Catullus and read 'namque tu solebas / Meas esse aliquid putare nugas' (i.e. 'for you always liked my terrible poems'). The dedication recalled and parodied *The Waste Land's* dedication to Pound, a reprise of lines from Petronius' *Satyricon* which also commenced with 'Nam' (i.e. 'For'). When Fumagalli edited *Epitaph* for *Agenda* magazine (2002), she did not include this dedication. Having discussed this omission with her, it came to light that she had been working from an incomplete set of photocopies.

¹⁰⁷ V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies-British, French and Dutch-in the West Indies and South America* (London: Deutsch, 1962), p. 29; James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies, or The Bow of Ulysses* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), p. 119.

One grim winter evening, when it had a kind of unrealness about London, with a fog sleeping restlessly over the city and the lights showing in the blur as if is not London at all but some strange place on another planet.¹⁰⁸

The description alludes to a famous section of *The Waste Land* in which Eliot describes a morbid early morning London cityscape.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many (l.60-3)

Selvon's fourfold reprise of Eliot's imagery – 'winter', 'unrealness', 'fog' and 'London' – signposts the allusion ostentatiously. Set in 1950s London, his novella details the misadventures of a community of Windrush immigrants navigating life in the city. The allusion to Eliot serves as a means of situating the tale within the Anglo-European literary tradition. To allude to Eliot in this way is, primarily, to suggest that the experience of West Indian migrants in London is a subject worthy of literary treatment. It also signals an indebtedness to Eliot's writing which prefigures the fragmented, polyvocal nature of the text to come.

In addition to being fragmentary, however, Selvon's text was also written in an artificial Trinidadian dialect with features drawn from across the islands. At the time, producing a novel in any sort of nation language was radical. Caribbean dialects were deemed basilects by English institutions, who viewed them in unfavourable terms as they were associated with Black or Indian working-class immigrants. Because of this, they were not considered appropriate for the composition of novels or verse. By alluding to Eliot, Selvon implicitly challenged this position. His suggestion was that his experiments with West Indian speech had many precedents because some of the most canonical authors in the English literary tradition had utilised dialect. One of the most notable of these was the polyvocal *Waste Land*, a poem employing a wide variety of dialectical speech patterns. Indeed, the multiplicity of speaking voices in the poem was a feature

¹⁰⁸ Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 1.

to which Eliot drew particular attention. In the manuscript he gave Pound to edit, for example, the text's first two sections were linked with the wholly capitalised subtitle 'HE DO THE POLICE IN DIFFERENT VOICES'. Drawn from Charles Dickens, the line reprised dialogue from *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), in which a child was praised for changing the way they spoke to impersonate characters in newspaper stories when reading them aloud.¹⁰⁹ This reprise placed Eliot's polyvocality in relation to Dickens, in whose work dialect also featured prominently, and the particular section of *The Waste Land* to which Selvon alluded itself recalled Dickens's descriptions of London's fog. *Bleak House* (1852) famously opens with one such description. To allude to the image of fog, in particular, was to suggest, via Eliot and Dickens, that writing tales about impecunious Londoners, whilst incorporating their distinctive speech habits, had longstanding literary precedent. More than this, Eliot's subsequent line, 'I had not thought death had undone so many' is a direct translation of lines from the *Inferno* in which Dante describes those at the periphery of hell – 'I should not have thought / that death could ever have unmade so many' (III.56-7).¹¹⁰ Given that Dante wrote in his native Tuscan dialect, which was considered crude and unliterary at the time, Selvon's allusion reached beyond Dickens, establishing precedent for his linguistic experiment as far back as the Middle Ages. Selvon's defence of dialect thus recalled Louise Bennett's earlier defence from 'Bans a Killin' (1944).

Yuh gwine kill all English dialec
Or jus Jamaica one?

[...]

Dat dem start fi try tun language
From de fourteen century –
Five hundred years gawn an dem got
More dialec dan we!

[...]

Yuh wi haffi get de Oxford Book
A English Verse, an tear
Out Chaucer, Burns, Lady Grizelle

¹⁰⁹ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 198.

¹¹⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2012).

An plenty a Shakespeare! (12-32)¹¹¹

There was, however, a clear difference between Selvon's use of allusion and Eliot's. By the time Selvon reprised *The Waste Land*, Eliot's incorporation of Dantean phraseology was well known and glossed extensively. Readers familiar with Euromodernist writing would not only recognise Selvon's allusion to Eliot, they would also be aware of the wider network of association comprising Dickens, Dante, and Baudelaire ('Unreal City' is the title of a poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857)). Eliot's first readers would more likely have recognised that the phrasing of 'death had undone so many' was unusual, but focused on interpreting the metaphor itself, which relates listless crowds of workers crossing London Bridge to undead hordes. There is also a clear difference between Selvon's use of allusion and Walcott's. By alluding to Eliot – and via Eliot to Dickens, Dante, and Baudelaire – Selvon sought to legitimise his subject matter and use of the demotic by establishing precedents for both within the Anglo-European tradition. He was not criticising the literary establishment, so much as pre-emptively defending himself against potential criticism from that establishment in the hope that such a defence would facilitate his being admitted to it. Selvon's approach was common to a significant number of contemporary Caribbean writers, most notably the Guyanese novelist Jan Carew, whose bildungsroman *Black Midas* (1958) also sought to legitimise itself by establishing a web of Anglo-European literary precedents. Carew's protagonist Shark studies under a priest said to be able to 'recite whole passages' of Dickens 'from memory' because he has read them 'over and over again', before the plot of the novel overtly mirrors that of *Great Expectations* (1861): Shark's station in life is elevated by a mysterious benefactor atoning for a dark past, after which he falls in love with the mercurial ward of a stern guardian who eventually rebuffs him.¹¹² These Dickensian features resemble Selvon's in that they also reach beyond the Victorian novelist to establish other literary

¹¹¹ Quoted in Jahan Ramazani, 'Louise Bennett: The National Poet as Transnational?', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 17 (2009), 49-64 (pp. 52-53).

¹¹² Jan Carew, *Black Midas* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2009), p. 35.

precedents: the Dickens-obsessed priest himself recalls the maniac in Evelyn Waugh's short story *The Man Who Liked Dickens* (1933) who traps Waugh's protagonist in the Guyanese interior – where Carew's story is set – and forces him to read Dickens's complete oeuvre aloud in perpetuity.

Although Walcott and Selvon both used allusion similarly in the sense that readers needed to be familiar with specific details from Anglo-European texts, their positions were the inverse of one another. As a writer still resident in the Caribbean, Walcott had reservations about modifying his output to conform to the tastes of Western audiences. Having immigrated to London, Selvon sought to demonstrate that his output already conformed to Western literary standards and expectations. One further explanation for this difference is that, as a middle-class well-educated mixed-race writer, Walcott was not insecure about his literary credentials. When composing *Epitaph*, he believed he would soon attend university in England. By contrast, unlike V. S. Naipaul and Kamau Brathwaite – who moved to England because they were awarded scholarships to study at Oxford and Cambridge respectively – Sam Selvon and George Lamming had no formal literary training when they arrived. The posturing their allusiveness implied was not only to show Western audiences that, as West Indians, they could write within the Anglo-European literary tradition. It was also to prove to the Caribbean elites that, despite their backgrounds, they were knowledgeable and capable of the kind of literary connoisseurship associated with their more educated contemporaries.

Much of the criticism levelled at literary allusiveness in the West Indies during this period can also be attributed this educational discrepancy. In Naipaul's comic novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), for example, one finds a depiction of the process of West Indian allusive writing which is damning and satirical.¹¹³ Biswas has to seek help from his son Anand when writing a letter of protest because he is not a learned man: the pair peruse a copy of the *Collins Clear-Type*

¹¹³ V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (London: Picador, 2003, p. 510.

Shakespeare searching for appropriate quotations. As Biswas transcribes lines from the book, he is not concerned with their meaning, so much as with their canonicity. It is that which he believes will give him credibility as a man of letters. Because he has never really read the texts – having consistently been ‘defeated’ by the ‘fatiguing illegibility’ of every Shakespeare play bar *Julius Caesar* (1599) – his quotational cherry-picking represents a cynical effort to flaunt literary knowledge he does not have.¹¹⁴ Naipaul’s point was not that West Indian writers could not allude to the Anglo-European tradition, but that they needed more than surface-level familiarity with the material to which they were alluding when doing so. This was difficult for Windrush writers without literary training, but it was also difficult for aspiring writers who were still based in the Caribbean, such as Walcott. Naipaul argued in ‘Jasmine’ (1964) that Anglo-European literature was basically ‘an alien mythology’ for those who had not left the islands.¹¹⁵ Texts came ‘from afar’, which meant they possessed a ‘peculiar authority’, but they often had little meaning for Caribbean readers because the things they described were unknown in the region.¹¹⁶ To those based in Trinidad, works like Wordsworth’s ‘notorious poem about the daffodil’ could ‘offer only fantasy’.¹¹⁷ Walcott refuted this position, and implicitly defended literary allusion, by arguing that as a ‘colonial child’ growing up in Saint Lucia, ‘the snow and the daffodils’ were ‘more real than the heat and the oleander’ because they ‘lived on the page’ and therefore in ‘the memory of imagination in literature’, which had ‘nothing to do with actual experience’.¹¹⁸

According to C. L. R. James’s 1963 appendix to *The Black Jacobins* (1938), Naipaul’s attack in *Biswas* was not limited to the literary sphere. He was effectively satirising the ‘*modus operandi*’ of British West Indian society at large through its ‘bland reproduction’, though ‘the foreigner may miss [the joke]’.¹¹⁹ Biswas’s harvesting of Shakespeare’s lines was conceived, not solely as an

¹¹⁴ Naipaul, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, pp. 166-7.

¹¹⁵ V. S. Naipaul, ‘Jasmine’, quoted in John Thieme, *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V.S. Naipaul’s Fiction* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1987), p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Naipaul, ‘Jasmine’, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Naipaul, ‘Jasmine’, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Walcott, ‘The Muse of History’, p. 62.

¹¹⁹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 324.

attack on Windrush writers, but as a critique of the allusive pabulum produced by 'the well-greased West Indian journalist, politician, prime minister.'¹²⁰ A decade prior to the novel's release, articles had appeared in *Caribbean Quarterly* alleging much the same. In A. K. Croston's view, for example, writers like Shakespeare were 'frequently the victim of this sort of thing', especially from 'politician[s] hastily looking round' for an 'apt quotation'.¹²¹ It was in this intellectual climate that Walcott produced *Epitaph*. Though he did not dispute that this empty performative sort of allusion was possible, or even commonplace, he felt that allusion need not be limited to such performativity in the West Indies. Thus, in Canto X of *Epitaph*, employing a societally inflected use of the first-person plural, his speaker opines:

The flutes from antique woodlands usurp the ear,
We are too drunk to look for them on walks,
With cigarettes and beer
We'll drink to any West Indian who
Strips speech of tie and socks. (X.91-5)

Those who criticise overly allusive rhetoric do so, in this configuration, because they are too 'drunk' to go in search of ancient music. Interpreting such language requires greater effort on the part of readers, which many are unwilling to summon. The problem is said to begin at school. Earlier on, a poetry class is characterised by its similar 'reluctance' to be lead 'into / The flowering pages of Arden' (X.68-69). Walcott's use of allusion was reliant on familiarity with specific textual spurs and, in that sense, it resembled the work produced by his regional contemporaries. However, his allusiveness also differed from theirs because it consciously positioned him on the periphery of the Anglo-European tradition.

Although Walcott's employment of the device differed markedly from Selvon's, it proved similarly controversial in the West Indies a decade later because of the state of contemporary politics. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, fledgling nationalist movements across the Caribbean

¹²⁰ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 324.

¹²¹ A. K. Croston, 'Notes on the Reading of Poetry', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 2 (1951/1952), 34-44 (pp. 35-7).

championed modes of artistic expression which were obviously distinct from, or conceived in opposition to, the Anglo-European tradition. Because of this, works which did not condemn colonialism, or which explicitly situated themselves within the Anglo-European literary tradition, were increasingly maligned. R. J. Owens's *Caribbean Quarterly* essay 'West Indian Poetry' (1961) adopts an archetypal position in this regard. The critic claims that West Indian poetry is, and has always been, derivative of metropolitan models, with regional verse rarely straying further than 'pastiche' of European work.¹²² Although Owens singled out Walcott as the worst offender, his attack was not limited to the poet's work. He lamented the wider state of contemporary West Indian aesthetics in similar terms, claiming that writers across the region were all positioning themselves in relation to the Anglo-European canon: authors had 'one eye on [their] performance' and 'one eye on [their] audience's reaction', meaning that they had nothing left to spare for whatever they were attempting to convey.¹²³ Underpinning Owens's assertion was his conviction that, owing to their British-style colonial education, West Indian writers had all been limited to a significant degree by the ideological constraints of writing within, or at least in response to, colonial literary traditions. In his view, decolonisation in the political sphere required concomitant decolonisation in the literary sphere, predicated on the elimination of a reliance on European texts. The more obvious the rejection of European influences, the more effective that rejection would be. The political edge to Owens's argument was not subtle: he concluded by asserting that, because this elimination had not yet taken place, colonialism remained 'very much alive culturally' despite becoming an increasingly 'dead force politically'.¹²⁴

Although Walcott's work was critical of that tradition, issue was taken with the allusive manner in which his criticism was delivered. Even when his message was antagonistic, interpreting that antagonism required fairly specific knowledge of the Anglo-European literary tradition and, in that sense, relied on it. Because of this, Owens declared Walcott had produced

¹²² R. J. Owens, 'West Indian Poetry', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 7 (1961), 120-7 (p. 120).

¹²³ Owens, p. 120.

¹²⁴ Owens, p. 121.

'jackdaw collections from other poets', which were characterisable by 'derivativeness' and 'peppered with stray lines from others'.¹²⁵ Criticism of this sort prompted a backlash from the poet's admirers like C. G. O. King, who bemoaned how 'various critics of West Indian poetry had declared it unoriginal' in a 1964 discussion of Walcott's work.¹²⁶ Though he did not identify Owens by name, King clearly had him in mind, since he quoted from his article directly: detractors 'naively' believed Walcott was 'content to produce "jackdaw collections" from a long line of English poets'.¹²⁷ However, King did not defend Walcott's work by suggesting that it was both critical and derivative of European writing, so much as frame Walcott's allegedly uncritical derivativeness positively. He argued that the merit of Walcott's verse did not lie 'in creating a medium denoted by a cliquish label, but in his power to grasp the elements of his own experience, and to show, by placing them within a universal tradition, that they [were] a meaningful part of the world's experience'.¹²⁸ Because Walcott's early champions did not challenge the argument that his poetry was unquestioningly imitative, that view of his early aesthetics still retains prominence. As such, readers have largely had to rely on the flawed, received wisdom that, barring the work of a handful of exceptions like Una Marson, Thomas MacDermot, and Claude McKay, anglophone Caribbean verse written prior to the 1960s was either derivative of an antiquated British Romantic-Victorian tradition or self-consciously rhetorical, transient, and politically remonstrative in nature.

1.V. 'There is Not a West Indian Literature': Walcott's Prodigal Provincialism

In 'Leaving School' (1965), Walcott recalled how having staged *Henri Christophe* (1949) with some success the same year that he wrote *Epitaph*, he was nonetheless warned by Edgar Mittelhozer against writing further verse-tragedies 'because "they" would never take them'.¹²⁹ This caution

¹²⁵ Owens, pp. 121-5.

¹²⁶ C. G. O. King, 'The Poems of Derek Walcott', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 10 (1964), 3-30 (p. 3).

¹²⁷ King, 'The Poems of Derek Walcott', p. 3.

¹²⁸ King, 'The Poems of Derek Walcott', p. 3.

¹²⁹ Derek Walcott, 'Leaving School – VIII', *London Magazine*, 5 (1965), 4-14 (p. 12).

arose from a belief that prospective audience members would either see the work as colonial pastiche, or not at all, as they had no deep interest in the arts. Walcott heeded the novelist's advice and ceased composing works saturated with ostentatious, linguistically verbatim allusions to anterior Anglo-European writing by the 1960s. The reputations of earlier works have since suffered because they exhibit what Ismond terms a 'literariness' tying them to Europe.¹³⁰ They have been understood largely in terms of colonial derivation and pastiche.

Rather than simply regurgitating Eliot's style, however, Walcott's earliest work engaged in a precocious and sophisticated critique of the metropolitan literary establishment, and it employed allusion in innovative and experimental ways. It therefore displayed the sort of 'risky' experimentation aiming towards the 'poetic decolonization' of the region whose 'fulcrum' Ben Etherington has argued should be located in the 1940s rather than the 1960s.¹³¹ Such experimentation revealed a high degree of self-assurance, contrasting diametrically with the self-deprecating humility Brown discussed. To establish why Walcott felt so self-assured, it is useful to consider what is, perhaps, the most reproduced line from *Epitaph*: 'There is not a West Indian literature' (IV.I). Since the asseveration is affixed as an epigraph with no attribution, scholars have unanimously attributed it to Walcott. In so doing, they have not realised that the statement was an allusive reprise of an argument London-based communist academic Peter Blackman advanced in the West Indian special issue of *Life and Letters* (1948). Walcott had been inspired by Blackman's piece entitled 'Is there a West Indian Literature?'. Given this issue's importance as the first issue of any metropolitan periodical to be devoted solely to West Indian writing, many among his audience would also have read it.

Blackman opened with a damning assessment of the state of West Indian literature, before going on to argue that an overreliance on English thought and aesthetics had rendered West Indian writing 'derivative in poetry and negligible in prose.'¹³² His position accorded with

¹³⁰ Ismond, p. 21.

¹³¹ Etherington, p. 54.

¹³² Peter Blackman, 'Is there a West Indian Literature', *Life and Letters*, 59 (1948), 96-102 (pp. 98-100).

that of Swanzy, who declared there was 'no West Indian canon' in the first volume of *Caribbean Quarterly* the following year.¹³³ It also accorded with C. L. R. James's assertion that for those growing up in Trinidad in the 1930s, 'there was no literature' native to the island.¹³⁴ Swanzy ended his piece by suggesting that 'men of talent like Walcott' would soon 'build' a West Indian canon.¹³⁵ At the end of Blackman's article, the author took a similarly optimistic turn. He proposed that, owing to its makeup, the region offered writers opportunities 'more explosive in quality than any Joyce ventured upon in *Ulysses*', and predicted that, in the future, a West Indian writer would emerge, who, by rejecting 'neither Africa nor Europe' would win global acclaim.¹³⁶ It was almost immediately after Walcott had read this argument that *25 Poems* became such a success. As a result, it was not difficult for him to identify himself with the figure Blackman described. The evidence that he made this association is clear. On 6 March 1966, he wrote a note describing 'Some article I read by whatshisnamenow, in a *Life and Letters* yes, predicting that someday a new Ulysses will come forth out of these emerald, ethnic isles, and sure then he had put his finger on me.'¹³⁷ Rather than belying humility, the allusion to *Life and Letters* in *Epitaph* indicated a high degree of self-confidence. This confidence was rooted in what Antonia MacDonald-Smythe has termed Walcott's 'prodigal provincialism': though he valorised the 'simplicity' of local life in his writing, his growing up on a small island meant he also developed sky-high future 'expectations of success and fame' to the point that he felt 'special', or even 'superior', to those around him.¹³⁸ Coming of age thousands of miles away from the metropolitan centre, he was frequently afforded opportunities he might not otherwise have been. Because he inhabited 'a world where his elders were expecting great poetry from him', he developed such a strong 'sense of vocation', bordering on a 'superiority'.¹³⁹

¹³³ Swanzy, p. 25.

¹³⁴ C.L.R. James, 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The Nineteen-Thirties', *Savacou*, 2 (1970), 54-60 (p. 59).

¹³⁵ Swanzy, p. 25.

¹³⁶ Blackman, p. 101.

¹³⁷ Walcott, quoted in Baugh, *Memory as Vision*, p. 164.

¹³⁸ Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, 'The Privileges of Being Born in ... a Backward and Underdeveloped Society: Derek Walcott's Prodigal Provincialism', *Callaloo*, 28 (2005), 88-101 (p. 90).

¹³⁹ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 45.

As he revealed in 'What the Twilight Says' (1974), he felt confident enough in his poetic abilities to believe that he was 'prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe' when writing poems like *Epitaph*.¹⁴⁰ Rather than seeking to downplay or disguise his early acts of imitation, he foregrounded them by placing an imitative sonnet at the opening of *25 Poems*, the very first line of which – 'Inspire modesty by means of nightly verses' – was a reference to his imitative poetic process. Paul Breslin has argued that the sonnet's placement at the beginning of volume gave it a 'modest beginning'.¹⁴¹ However, placing an ostentatiously imitative sonnet at the front of his first published volume was not an act characterised by modesty or humility. By foregrounding his imitation, Walcott revealed his desire to emulate the most venerated of his predecessors. To that end, his creative imitation of elements of Eliot's aesthetic in *Epitaph* went beyond language and form since he also used a Faber volume of Eliot's work as the poem's typographical model. He purposefully selected 'a typeface that looked like one of the Faber volumes'.¹⁴² The version of his name on the cover, 'D. A. Walcott', was also modelled on Eliot, W. H. Auden, and W. B. Yeats. This self-fashioning further demonstrates his self-assurance, since the typography was designed to encourage his readers to view him in similar terms.¹⁴³ As Walcott told William Baer, modelling *Epitaph* on a Faber edition of Eliot gave him 'the confidence of feeling that [he] was also, in a way, though not [Eliot's] equal, a contemporary poet'.¹⁴⁴ In much the same vein, shortly after having published *25 Poems*, Walcott wrote that he 'would hate to be made an important figure at nineteen'.¹⁴⁵ Statements of this sort were markers of assurance, rather than humility, because he must have believed that his being made an important figure was likely. Despite having published poetry which was clearly imitative, he felt there was a risk he would be afforded prominence and

¹⁴⁰ Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 28.

¹⁴¹ Breslin, p. 54.

¹⁴² King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 59.

¹⁴³ The same could be said of many of his regional contemporaries. In the 1940s and '50s, Arthur James Seymour, Harold Milton Telemaque, Eric Merton Roach, Lawson Edward Brathwaite and many others initialised their first and middle names.

¹⁴⁴ William Baer (ed.), 'An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 194-204 (p. 198).

¹⁴⁵ Walcott, quoted in Baugh, 'In Praise of Colly'.

celebrity in his youth. He felt obliged to practise his craft by imitating Euromodernist work, but he also believed that the skill with which he was able to imitate could warrant recognition, praise and material success.

To get a sense of his confidence, one can also consider the situation from an economic perspective. Walcott was ultimately able to sell out the initial print run of *25 Poems* by 'hawking' the collection at a dollar per copy on the 'street corners' of Castries.¹⁴⁶ However, such success belies the fact that, when producing the volume, he took a considerable financial risk. He had to borrow two hundred silver dollars from his mother to fund its publication. This was a large sum of money which he estimated would have been approximately \$8,000 in 1991, equivalent to around \$14,000 in 2022.¹⁴⁷ Given that his mother was a schoolteacher with a modest salary, had he not been able to sell his work, the result would have been a period of economic hardship for his family. He was therefore relying on his ability to sell 200 copies of his collection in a region where, twenty years later, Mervyn Morris still lamented the near-total absence of 'an audience for serious contemporary poetry.'¹⁴⁸ To put that in context, there were just over seventy thousand people living in Saint Lucia in 1946, of whom only around forty thousand could speak English to any level.¹⁴⁹ Of those who could speak English, only around a third used it at home.¹⁵⁰ So, to justify the expense of printing 200 copies, Walcott needed to feel confident that 1.5% of the country's habitual English speakers would buy his book. By contrast, when Auden self-published his first volume of poetry, which employed similarly imitative aesthetics, his print run was around a fifth the size of Walcott's, comprising roughly 45 copies. At that point, Auden was in

¹⁴⁶ Walcott, 'Leaving School', p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 56. The figure was presumably XCD, not USD. N.B. Walcott's estimate seems excessive. In 1948, the conversion rate for silver dollars was set at 4.8 to the British pound (GBP). This rate was maintained during the transition from the silver dollar to the British West Indies Dollar (BWI\$) in 1949, and from BWI\$ to the East Caribbean Dollar (XCD) in 1965. Since 1976, XCD has been pegged to the United States Dollar instead, at a rate of 1 USD to 2.7 XCD. Accounting for inflation, 200 silver dollars would be worth approximately 1200 GBP, 1600 USD, or 4300 XCD in 2022, roughly 1/3 of Walcott's estimate.

¹⁴⁸ Mervyn Morris, 'Walcott and the Audience for Poetry (1968)' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp. 175-92 (p. 175).

¹⁴⁹ Lawrence D. Carrington, *St. Lucian Creole: A Descriptive Analysis of its Morphology and Syntax* (Hamburg: Buske, 1984), p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ R. B. Le Page, 'The Language Problem of the British Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 4 (1955), 40-9 (p. 42).

his early twenties, had studied English at Oxford, and had cultivated a network of metropolitan literary connections. Even the protagonist of Naipaul's *Mystic Masseur* (1957), who was essentially a caricature of provincial self-delusion, set his sights lower than Walcott: Ganesh Ramsumair planned to sell his self-published book at a third of Walcott's price with a theoretical market eleven times the size; he paid 125 silver dollars to print 1000 copies of his Hindu religious pamphlet, intending to sell it at 36 cents per copy to the Hindu population of Trinidad in the early 1940s, which then stood at around 150,000 people.¹⁵¹

How has Walcott's obvious self-belief been mistaken for humility? To answer that question, it is once again necessary to consider the political climate of the 1960s in which Walcott's early work was denigrated. As Hamner points out, given the 'nationalist fervour' accompanying fledgling Caribbean independence movements at that time, writers who drew on the Anglo-European literary tradition were accused of having their 'feet firmly planted in the camp' of European thought.¹⁵² The idea that one could allude critically was little explored, for which reason it was widely assumed that Walcott was guilty of an act of insecure deference to Euromodernist aesthetics or, as the disparaging reviewer of *Epitaph* put it, of donning a 'top hat in the tropics'.¹⁵³ Though it has since been nuanced, the fundamental assumption that Walcott's engagement with the Anglo-European tradition was derivative rather than critical has persisted since the 1960s and still shapes understanding of the poem. Owing to *Epitaph*'s longstanding poor reputation, scholars have neglected the work, if they have even been able to access it, or engaged with it only fleetingly. One consequence of this lack of interest has been that it has rarely been reprinted. Even in the most complete collection of Walcott's verse published to date, *The Poetry of Derek Walcott: 1948-2013*, only a short extract appears, taken from the second canto, which is notable insofar as it is by far the least allusive part of the poem. The irony is that even

¹⁵¹ There were around 195,000 Indian Trinidadians according to the 1946 census, of whom approximately 77% were Hindu. Kelvin Singh, 'Conflict and Collaboration: Modernizing Indo-Trinidadian Elites (1917-56)', *New West Indian Guide*, 70 (1996), 229-53 (pp. 229-30); V. S. Naipaul, *The Mystic Masseur* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1957), pp. 92-100.

¹⁵² Robert Hamner, 'Introduction: Out of the Ordinary, Derek Walcott', *Callaloo*, 28 (2005), 1-6 (p. 1).

¹⁵³ Alleyne, p. 267.

though, to work effectively, critical allusions to Eliot and Andersen had to be obvious, they have since been overlooked. Though it was not derivative of *The Waste Land*, the hermeneutic strategies through which scholars have interpreted the poem have begun to resemble Edmund Wilson's over time, while Eliot scholars now read *The Waste Land* with an attention to detail befitting *Epitaph*.

Ultimately, the poem's ubiquitous reprise of what Walcott later termed 'other men's lives and lines' (*Another Life*, 1973, 2472) has shifted attention away from individual allusions, towards allusiveness itself and, on a superficial level, the ubiquity of allusion appears Eliotic.¹⁵⁴ But, when close reading the text, one finds that its allusions consistently reveal Walcott's challenges to the Anglo-European tradition, his creative self-determination, and his poetic self-assurance. Throughout the 1950s, when Windrush writers like Selvon alluded to the Anglo-European canon, they often did so uncritically and when politicians did so, the gesture frequently represented a means of legitimising discourse. In this context, *Epitaph* demonstrated the potential value in allusive writing. By employing allusions to popular texts, Walcott revealed how critical allusion could form part of a strategy of colonial resistance in keeping with Bhabha's later pronouncements on mimicry. Analysis of the device in his early poetry reveals a fundamental difference between its function in texts like *Epitaph for the Young* and in Euromodernist work like *The Waste Land*, meaning the former was not straightforwardly derived from the latter. The predominant narrative for the development of anglophone Caribbean literature, which reads Walcott's early poetry like *Epitaph* in terms of derivation, must therefore be rewritten. Upending this narrative will in turn challenge what Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews have termed the 'assumption' that 'creative production' in places like the Caribbean was simply 'reflective and derivative' of Euromodernism.¹⁵⁵ Any new narrative must recognise that, in the Caribbean as in

¹⁵⁴ Derek Walcott, *Another Life: Fully Annotated* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

¹⁵⁵ Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, 'Modernism and Colonialism' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 284-300 (p. 285).

other postcolonial spaces, '*subversion by imitation*' has long functioned as a 'mode of resistance' in the fight against Western cultural hegemony.¹⁵⁶

If the new narrative describing Walcott's poetic development is to reflect the antagonism his early writing displayed in relation to Anglo-European work – as epitomised in his subversive use of allusion – the diffusionist principle of global literary influence cannot serve as its theoretical grounding. An alternate basis must be sought which can account for the hostility and detachment it and other West Indian writing from the period displayed towards metropolitan literature. Of the three alternate paradigms to diffusionism currently used to conceptualise the global dissemination of modernist aesthetics, another accounts for this antagonism far more comprehensively. Having shown that Walcott's imitative early work did not vaunt its Euromodernist models in this chapter, it is now necessary to establish whether the subversive elements identified are to be centred when revisioning our conceptualisation of his oeuvre.

¹⁵⁶ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 165.

Chapter Two: Complicating Antagonism

The second popularly employed paradigm of global literary influence defines the relationship between Euromodernism and its peripheral counterparts in terms of widespread, anti-imperial antagonism. It suggests that peripheral cultural agents like Walcott did not adopt Western standards, but rejected them outright. Such a paradigm could provide the theoretical basis of a new, alternate narrative describing the development of anglophone West Indian literature because it would not frame Walcott's early work as uncritically derivative of its antecedents. The contours of this second paradigm were first codified by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their ground-breaking, co-authored monograph *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). According to their formulation, postcolonial writing involves a 'radical critique of Eurocentric notions of literature and language' dependent upon the 'abrogation' of European power structures and the 'appropriation' of language and writing for 'new and distinctive uses'.¹ In this context, 'abrogation' refers to a 'rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication', while 'appropriation' refers to the logomachic process of 'capturing and remoulding' the language of the centre to new usages, marking 'a separation from the site of colonial privilege'.² This paradigm suggests that, when drawing on Euromodernism, peripheral cultural agents like Walcott were "writing back" to the metropole in an effort to 'destabilize, subvert, reverse, or generally raid and ransack the archive', thereby repudiating colonial hierarchies of literature and language.³ One major benefit of this formulation is that, unlike its diffusionist counterpart, it can account for the seditious way in which much of Walcott's early

¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. i-6.

² Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p. 38.

³ Harry Garuba, "The Island Writes Back: Discourse/Power and Marginality in Wole Soyinka's "The Swamp Dwellers," Derek Walcott's "The Sea at Dauphin", and Athol Fugard's "The Island", *Research in African Literatures*, 32 (2001), 61-76 (p. 67).

verse alluded to the Anglo-European canon, in general, and to the poetry of Euromodernists like T. S. Eliot, in particular.

In discussions of Caribbean literature, the “writing back” formulation underpins a strain of criticism most commonly associated with the work of Kenyan theorist Simon Gikandi, whose impressive monograph *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* came out in 1992. Gikandi’s basic premise is that Caribbean writers could not simply ‘adopt the history and culture of European modernism’ when developing a native literary tradition, but found themselves unable to ‘escape’ from it because it had ‘overdetermined’ regional culture.⁴ In his view, modernist writing in the Caribbean is the antithesis of its Euromodernist counterpart, with whom it engages in an antagonistic relationship, having arisen in response to anxieties about colonialism in general and colonial attitudes to ‘history, language and ideology in particular’.⁵ He posits that Caribbean modernist writing is, at its core, a form of ‘counter-discourse’ which turns away from various ‘outmoded and conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination’.⁶ It was only by ‘subverting colonial modernism’ through poetic *marronage* that Walcott and Brathwaite could become modernists.⁷ This position has since been adopted and refined by many prominent Caribbeanists. In a volume edited by Gikandi, Elaine Savory proposes that because ‘Derek Walcott and Jean Rhys, among others, importantly revision[ed] British or European texts’, West Indian literature should be seen as a ‘powerful and effective rebuttal of British cultural arrogance’.⁸ Critics like Stephanie Pocock Boeninger have argued that Walcott’s poetry and drama “wrote back” to the imperial centre as recently as 2020.⁹

⁴ Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁵ Gikandi, p. 4.

⁶ Gikandi, p. 5.

⁷ Gikandi, p. 256.

⁸ Elaine Savory, ‘Anglophone Caribbean Literature’ in *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature: Volume 2*, ed. by F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 711-58 (p. 718).

⁹ Stephanie Pocock Boeninger, *Literary Drowning: Postcolonial Memory in Irish and Caribbean Writing* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2020), p. 86

One can find evidence of Walcott's rebutting Britain throughout his early writing. The author explicitly acknowledged the 'anti-white anger that was hidden in *25 Poems*' in a letter to Henry Swanzy, for instance.¹⁰ Such rage was present in the very first poem of the volume. The opening lyric, 'Inspire Modesty by Means of Nightly Verses', was modelled on W. H. Auden's 'Petition' (1930).¹¹ Walcott's imitation shared its model's central conceit, being a prayer addressed to an unspecified being, and reprised its structure, since both were sonnets in loose iambic pentameter. On occasion, the vocabulary also bore traces of the imitation. For instance, Auden's volta – 'Cover in time with beams those in retreat' (9) – was rendered 'Provoke the nervous beams near foreign lovers' (10). However, the imitation rebutted its model because it introduced a new theme of racial grievance: Walcott wrote explicitly of the 'fraud that white and black are brothers' (12). Similar sentiments crop up elsewhere in the volume. In 'Travelogue', for example, Walcott's speaker likens European tourists in the Caribbean to 'redcoats' and asserts that the archipelago belongs 'to no one but the luckless [...] red and black tribes' (34-9). Similarly, in 'Letter to a Sailor', the region is framed as a place where rich expatriates 'play / the inheritors of manners and manors, the lords of cane and acre' (40). The punning on Cain and Abel is mordant in that it satirises the expatriates by framing them as modern-day slavers with divine pretensions.

The antagonism was not confined to *25 Poems*. In *Epitaph*, the speaker made reference to his 'ragged hair' (I.74) before dubbing nostalgia the music of a 'persistent piano / Carrying us back to Ole Virginity' (I.79-80) in reference to the official state anthem of Virginia, 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny' (1878). The song adopts the perspective of a freed slave whose 'old darkey's heart' wishes he could work for 'massa and missis' again.¹² Reframing Virginia as 'Virginity' lambasted its racial tone deafness. Walcott also drafted a novel between 1949 and 1952. Entitled *A Passage to Paradise*, it was rejected by both Longman and Cape because they

¹⁰ He referenced it explicitly in a 1952 letter sent to Henry Swanzy. King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 96.

¹¹ Breslin, p. 54; Antonia MacDonald, 'Students: I Present ... the Young Poet Derek Walcott' in *Interlocking Basins of a Globe: Essays on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Jean Antoine-Dunne (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), pp. 208-28 (p. 214).

¹² James A. Bland, *Carry Me Back to Old Virginny* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1878), p. 4.

deemed the tone overly antagonistic. According to Bruce King, the London publishers thought the text 'disgruntled, violent, adolescent, heavy handed, and offensive to everyone, especially the British administration'.¹³ Cape's reader, in particular, considered it 'a violent, inchoate, adolescent' mess characterised by 'ill-directed contempt and indignation' and featuring a hero 'hostile and offensive on all sides'.¹⁴ As the title suggests, the work was an ironic, antagonistic imitation of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). It featured 'a decadent plutocracy, upper civil servants, a rogue preacher, adulteries, drunks, limited opportunities, colour awareness, and silent boundaries'.¹⁵ The text itself is no longer extant, but there is a summary of its contents among Henry Swanzy's papers. Although unattributed, that summary was most likely produced by George Lamming, since Swanzy revealed Lamming was 'looking at' the novel in a letter to Gladys Lindo on 24 September, three months after which he sent a letter to Walcott including a long tract from the anonymous summary which he attributed to 'a fellow West Indian writer'.¹⁶

The evaluation was damning:

[The novel is] a frank, angry report of a territory observed and understood by one whose gifts as a poet we have come to understand are genuine, though misdirected.

[...]

Walcott, whether or not he means it, never succeeds in neutralising the thought-contents of his narrative alongside the opinions of certain characters, and it is the level on which the characters talk that makes the problems they raise unworthy of our attention.

[...]

[O]n the whole, this book is another example of energy misdirected. This writer who has got the tools never manages somehow to put his hands on the right material.¹⁷

Walcott defended himself against criticism of this sort in a reply to Swanzy:

¹³ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 96.

¹⁴ Letter from Jonathan Cape to Henry Swanzy dated 12 September 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

¹⁵ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 96.

¹⁶ Letter from Henry Swanzy to Gladys Lindo dated 24 September 1952; Letter from Henry Swanzy to Derek Walcott dated 30 December, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

¹⁷ George Lamming (?), GB 150 MS42/1/8/198 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

I don't have to put both sides of the case forward because I am not a lawyer but a writer, and if I am interested in bitterness and reaction in the West Indian, among other things, then I think that I am not in any way prostituting my art.¹⁸

He lay the blame for the book's bitterness on England – citing the country's 'treatment, psychological, historical or otherwise of colonials' – and though he accepted that he was possibly 'too bold' in its conceptualisation, he insisted he could not 'cut down on boldness'.¹⁹

When drafting the novel, Walcott was also composing his third volume of verse, *Poems*. The work was published in 1951 and modelled on Auden's debut collection of the same name.²⁰ The tone adopted throughout was largely in keeping with that of the novel. Its air of grievance led some of Walcott's university classmates to suggest he seemed 'angry about racial matters' in a letter they sent to A. J. Seymour, then editor of Guyanese periodical *Kyk-Over-Al*.²¹ Its opening lyric framed writing poetry according to European conventions in terms of a temeritous racial war against the Anglo-European tradition: 'O my shameful, my audacious / Complexion, advancing on the white, cracked turrets, / Waving conscience naked like a sword' (1-3).²² In 'The Cracked Playground', the speaker adopted a similarly martial metaphor, describing subaltern engagement with metropolitan art criticism in terms of 'black acolytes at the feet of Pater' wearing their 'skins for shields, each one a hater' (43-5).

This anti-colonial antagonism was later referenced in 'Hatred by Hatred' (1953), which aired on *Caribbean Voices*. Halfway through, Walcott's persona outlined 'the ancient hatred Europe planned / To make the blackest child a thing / No self-respecting poets sing' (47-9), before admitting outright, 'Such hate of whiteness once I had, that moon / Could set me raving

¹⁸ Letter from Derek Walcott to Henry Swanzy, 20 October 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

¹⁹ Walcott to Henry Swanzy, 20 October 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8.

²⁰ Confusingly, because he refused to provide titles for his first three volumes, Auden's second collection was also called *Poems*. It was published two years after the first by Eliot's Faber and contained 'Petition'. N. B. The title of Walcott's *Another Life* was similarly Audenesque, having been modelled on Auden's *Another Time* (1940).

²¹ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 91.

²² Derek Walcott, *Poems* (Kingston: City Printery, 1951).

hatred's tune' (50-1).²³ Writing poetry according to European conventions was framed as opening 'blackened hearts [...] Bearing the white moon's burden / For testimonial' (21-4). The poem obviously "wrote back" to Rudyard Kipling's 'White Man's Burden' (1899) through the punning, subversive reprise of its title, but the use of the past tense also made clear that Walcott no longer embraced outright antagonism. Writing a year earlier, Walcott explained that 'the distant white cousin theme' which had been important to him throughout his first three collections was felt in a way which had become 'less personal': he believed he had become able to 'observe the prejudices' but 'feel post-observation'.²⁴ The position adopted in 'Hatred for Hatred' accordingly differed from the one taken up in work produced slightly earlier like 'Othello – 1950' (1951). That short lyric was written from the perspective of Shakespeare's protagonist and "wrote back" to Shakespeare by reprising the central motif of Billie Holiday's song 'Strange Fruit' (1939), which likened lynched bodies hanging from poplar trees to strange fruit. When the Moorish general looked back on his relationship with Desdemona, he considered it in the context of the 'Lampoles' which 'budded niggers in Mississippi' (20).

In light of these examples, there certainly appears to be some merit in Dorothy Butchard's argument that 'more contentious elements of Walcott's poetry were effaced in the process of accepting him into an established literary circle'.²⁵ However, concluding that some controversial elements of his early work were retrospectively effaced is not equivalent to suggesting that he was fundamentally antagonistic to Britain, Europe, or the United States. The problem with Gikandi's "writing back" configuration is that many important Caribbean cultural artefacts do not fit its mould. In Walcott's case, as Gerald Moore suggests, 'a deep love of English poetry' was evident in almost 'everything he wrote'.²⁶ He reaffirmed this love on multiple

²³ Derek Walcott, 'Hatred by Voices', *Caribbean Voices* (14 November 1953).

²⁴ Letter from Derek Walcott to Henry Swanzy dated 11 February 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

²⁵ Dorothy Butchard, "'The poet from the periphery': Derek Walcott, Prestige and Literary Centrality" in *Comparative Critical Studies*, 11 (2014), 45-60 (p. 50).

²⁶ Moore, p. 334.

occasions in interview and sardonically claimed that it had been the 'passion, futility and industry of critics' to perpetuate an exaggerated enmity vis-à-vis his relationship with Anglo-European literature.²⁷ Though Brathwaite's relationship with Euromodernism was generally more antagonistic than Walcott's, he also signalled an indebtedness to Eliot on multiple occasions. To accommodate his writing within the 'antagonistic core-periphery model', as Matthew Hart points out, his personal testimony has generally been ignored.²⁸ In particular, critics have overlooked Brathwaite's claim that Eliot aided the development of Caribbean poetry by introducing 'the notion of the speaking voice' into verse, because it arose from a position which was not antagonistic.²⁹ One irony of this sort of misrepresentation is that, by ignoring nuances, a false universal standard is imposed, whereby a significant number of postcolonial texts are hegemonically characterised in terms of the prevalent anti-modernist sentiment of post-war British and American writing.³⁰

Walcott's relationship with the Anglo-European canon was never exclusively oppositional and presupposing that he was "writing back" to the metropolitan centre results in misreading his verse. In 'The Muse of History', he made clear that he believed 'revolutionary literature' arose from a 'filial impulse' which only perpetuated the Anglo-European tradition by 'fighting' it.³¹ The opening poem of *25 Poems*, for example, entitled 'I With Legs Crossed Along the Daylight Watch', shifts from an initial evocation of the predatory role of tourism in the Caribbean to a meditation on the relationship between art, literary publicity, and sexual attraction. The unusual syntax of the opening line signals the poem's indebtedness to Dylan Thomas's poem 'I, in my intricate image, stride on two levels'. That poem opened Thomas's collection *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936), whose title was also reprised for Walcott's volume.³² Towards

²⁷ Walcott, quoted in Edward Baugh, 'Derek Walcott's Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 63 (2017), 357-67 (p. 359).

²⁸ Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 114.

²⁹ Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, p. 30.

³⁰ Jahan Ramazani, 'Modernist Bricolage, Postcolonial Hybridity', *Modernism/modernity*, 13 (2006), 445-63 (p. 448).

³¹ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 36.

³² The two-fold imitation led Collymore to comment on the collection's 'many echoes' of Thomas and suggest that Walcott shared a 'close affinity' with him. (Collymore, 'An Introduction to the Poetry of Derek Walcott', p. 89.)

the end of Walcott's poem, the speaker declares that his life must not 'be made public' until he has 'learned to suffer / In accurate iambics' (15-17). In relation to these lines, Rita Dove suggests that because Walcott came from a 'marginal culture', he was aware of 'how quickly colonial attitudes would label the personal confessions of a West Indian impulsive, lecherous, and non-intellectual'.³³ As such, he felt he had to 'beat the masters at their own game', adopting the 'practiced duplicity of a guerrilla' to achieve poetic success.³⁴ Julián Jiménez Heffernan likewise concludes that 'far from imitating the rich cadences and lexical hybridism of his mongrel dialect, he chose to suffer in the iambics of the imperial idiom'.³⁵ According to O. R. Dathorne, Walcott's ultimate 'development' away from this 'boyhood' suffering became 'identical with the history of his island' since it involved 'a process of change from the slumber of colonial days to an awakening into new national feeling'.³⁶ In response to readings of this sort, Walcott termed this a 'misunderstood part' of the poem.³⁷ He explained that the line did not refer to any struggle he felt writing British English as a West Indian because, growing up, he did not feel any 'internal conflict' between British and West Indian modes of language.³⁸ He had little desire to appropriate or abrogate British English. Rather, the lines conveyed the necessity of learning to express his emotions through the formal constraints of poetry and art. They conveyed his youthful desire to write in, what he termed, a 'very Audenesque way', in which his poetry employed traditional European forms but remained 'true to the immediacy' of the feelings it articulated.³⁹

Later, when reflecting on his early racial anger in an interview, he deemed the concept of race 'ridiculous' and claimed it had meant 'nothing' to him 'past early manhood'; as a mixed race

³³ Dove, p. 55

³⁴ Dove, p. 55

³⁵ Julián Jiménez Heffernan, 'Tropical Sublime: Derek Walcott's Early Poetry' in *Approaches to the Poetics of Derek Walcott*, ed. by José Luis Martínez-Dueñas Espejo and José María Pérez Fernández (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 31-52 (p. 31).

³⁶ O. R. Dathorne, *Caribbean Verse: An Anthology* (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 14.

³⁷ Charles H. Rowell, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', *Callaloo*, 34 (1988), 80-9 (p. 83).

³⁸ Rowell, p. 83.

³⁹ Rowell, p. 81.

writer, he felt 'no loyalties to one race more than to another'.⁴⁰ In 'Meanings' (1970), he made clear, not only that he felt 'absolutely no shame in having endured the colonial experience', but that he felt 'many of what are sneered at as colonial values', such as an Audenesque 'fusion of formalism with exuberance' and a 'delight in both the precision and the power of language', were 'part of the strength of the West Indian psyche'.⁴¹ Remarks such as these do not fit neatly within a model predicated on writing back. Taken in isolation, they lend credence to the view that, owing to their British-style colonial education, even when the West Indian writers of Walcott's generation were breaking new ground, they were nevertheless limited by the ideological constraints of writing within, or at least in response to, the Anglo-European literary tradition. They support the argument that the generation of West Indian writers who came of age in the mid-twentieth century were all derivative of Euromodernism or, as Ferron jokingly put it in Kwame Dawes's *Bivouac* (2010), 'brainwashed by colonialism'.⁴²

The diffusionist paradigm cannot explain Walcott's subversive engagement with Euromodernist writing. Although the "writing back" paradigm provides a credible explanation for his use of allusion and early racial grievances, it cannot account for his wider enthusiasm for, and reliance on, canonical European forms. This chapter therefore charts a middle road between these two extremes. It argues that when developing his modernist aesthetic, Walcott was both enthused by, and wary of, cultural artefacts championed by Europe. To do so, it centres on two poems in particular. The first, 'Letter to a Painter in England', was published in *25 Poems*, while the second, 'Allegre', first appeared in Alan Ross's *London Magazine* (1960), before a variant was printed in Walcott's first metropolitan collection, *In a Green Night*. The poems have been chosen as case studies for two principal reasons. First and foremost, the relationships they establish with metropolitan artistic antecedents are typical of Walcott's early verse. Beyond this, however,

⁴⁰ Leif Sjöberg, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996) pp. 79-85 (p. 83).

⁴¹ Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 51.

⁴² Kwame Dawes, *Bivouac* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2010), p. 30.

elements of Walcott's imitation were also, notably, intermedial, meaning he suffused the poems with features adapted from painting.

As Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl have noted, 'the capacity to paint with words materialise[d] in almost all of Walcott's literary works'.⁴³ This ability to paint with words arose, in large part, because his poetic apprenticeship was undertaken in tandem with an apprenticeship in visual art. When imitating canonical European works, he was also learning how to paint at the studio of a local watercolourist called Harold Simmons where his lessons were taken alongside his prodigiously talented schoolfriend Dunstan St Omer.⁴⁴ Receiving instruction in painting in conjunction with his apprenticeship in verse led Walcott to believe that the two arts did not exist in a binary, which meant that the techniques of one could be fruitfully transferred to the other.⁴⁵ One finds this view articulated in his early verse. In 'The Cracked Playground', for example, his speaker fuses painting and writing when recalling how easily St Omer took 'to the grammar of the instructive brush' (17). Walcott made clear when interviewed that his belief in an artistic intermedial continuum was reinforced by its having been Simmons who first introduced him to recordings of Eliot reading *Four Quartets* (1941).⁴⁶ Such thinking explains why, in his 'Letter to a Painter in England' – which was addressed to Simmons – one finds an early instance of a phenomenon Fumagalli has described, in which, by imitating signature elements of a specific painter's style, but reinterpreting their 'aesthetics and politics' from 'his own standpoint', Walcott evoked and challenged their work.⁴⁷ In the 'Letter to a Painter', Walcott hovered somewhere between derivation and rejection by drawing on, but challenging, the art of Paul Gauguin. Many

⁴³ Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl, *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature: Intermedial Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 109.

⁴⁴ St Omer went on to become a professional artist and design Saint Lucia's post-independence flag.

⁴⁵ The transfer went both ways. In 1950, when reviewing Walcott and St Omer's joint exhibition for *Bim*, Simmons suggested Walcott's 'squiggly lines' came in direct response to the 'bold angular parody' of his poetry. Harold Simmons, 'Art Exhibition: St Omer and Walcott', *Bim*, 5 (1950), 73 (p. 73).

⁴⁶ The teacher often played the recordings he owned to his pupils after their painting sessions. King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ Maria Cristina Fumagalli, 'Morning, Paramin: Derek Walcott, Peter Doig, and an Ekphrasis of Relation', *New West Indian Guide*, 92 (2018), 245-73 (p. 246).

of the artist's paintings appealed to him because they depicted Caribbean landscapes, having been produced in Martinique.

The first section of this chapter lays the theoretical groundwork upon which subsequent sections rely by providing an overview of research into the phenomenon of postcolonial artistic intermediality. In the last two decades, scholars have begun charting the pervasive influence that visual and verbal artworks have exerted on one another across the postcolonial canon. Critics like Tobias Döring, Mary Lou Emery, Neumann and Rippl have all demonstrated the fundamental role visual art has played in shaping peripheral writing. This chapter draws on Emery's insight that Caribbean authors regularly "write back" to Europe through the reinscriptive incorporation of visual features in their work and Döring's argument that rewriting the colonial gaze serves to mark affiliation while maintaining difference. It alleges that Walcott's early intermedial imitations were positioned in a complex relation to the Anglo-European artistic canon, which signalled a degree of indebtedness, especially when it came to the presentation of landscapes, but also worked to strip imitated works of colonial ways of seeing.

The second section probes the relationship between Walcott's writing and Gauguin's painting in particular. It argues that though Walcott admired the Frenchman's depictions of Caribbean landscapes, the relationship between the two was complicated by Walcott's awareness of Gauguin's racism. Despite outlining various affinities with the artist, when it came to praising him, Walcott's commendation was typically tempered by exaggeration and irony. Having established the broad strokes of their relationship, the third section hones in on the influence Gauguin exerted on Walcott's 'Letter to a Painter'. Through close reading, it outlines the role played by Gauguin's synthetism in shaping the work's aesthetic, especially with regard to its nonmimetic use of colour. Because the imitation of Gauguin in 'Letter to a Painter' was inspired by Ernest Hemingway's intermedial imitations of Paul Cézanne, the fourth and final section of the chapter interrogates the relationship between Walcott and the American novelist.

Overall, this chapter contends that Walcott's modernism was characterisable neither by derivation nor by "writing back" because the nuances of his relationships with Gauguin and Hemingway are not wholly reflected by diffusionist or antagonistic paradigms of postcolonial influence. In Walcott's later work, intermediality was one of several tools he used to destabilise the hierarchical centre-periphery model, establishing a polyfocal, culturally egalitarian, network of influence in its place. However, as an apprentice, his approach differed: it relied on conveying identification and misidentification simultaneously. Though the intermediality of Walcott's work resembled Hemingway's, and paralleled the intermediality of other regional writers, its contours were particular, meaning it also does not fit neatly within regionally inflected models for modernism.

2. I. Painting With Words: Neumann, Rippl, and Caribbean Artistic Intermediality

Critics have long noted the frequency with which Walcott's verse discussed, described, interrogated, or approximated elements of European painting. With a title foregrounding visuality, *In a Green Night* contained several openly ekphrastic works, such as 'The Polish Rider', whose title reprised the name of a Rembrandt painting and whose subject was an engraving by Albrecht Dürer. In addition to these, one finds many more works imitating poetry, but suffused with elements drawn from visual art. Walcott's short piece 'Allegre' (1960) was an imitation of John Milton's celebrated lyric, 'L'Allegro' (1645), for instance, but there are several major differences between the two works. Whereas Milton's poem uses a classical-pastoral image system, Walcott's intersperses pastoral images with those drawn from the Saint Lucian countryside. The 'wild bees' (13) and 'hill slopes' (2) of 'Allegre' are complemented by workmen fashioning boats from explicitly Caribbean flora, 'campeche, gommiers, canoe-wood' (20). Throughout, Walcott depicts the Saint Lucian landscape in a manner akin to painting, animating it with an artist's palette. It was, therefore, as Baugh notes, one of the many early poems which configured the Caribbean 'in terms of the European landscapes [Walcott] read about in books

and saw in reproductions of paintings.⁴⁸ The sibilantly beautiful 'sunward sides of the shacks' seem to Walcott's speaker to have been crafted using techniques from the Italian renaissance: they are 'Gilded, as though this was Italy' (5-6). Pigeons appear 'silver' in sunlight (2), before turning 'white / on the warm blue shadows of the range' (3-4), the poem's focus squarely on the role played by colour and light.

In the early 1970s, Walcott continued this ekphrastic trend, employing *Epitaph* as an 'Urtext' for *Another Life*, but enlivening the earlier poem with painterly depictions, ruminations on his time spent with St Omer at Simmons's studio, mediations on the life and work of prominent European artists, and a diverse colour palette, whose liberal employment was reminiscent of visual art.⁴⁹ As Baugh suggests, painting was 'not only a subject' of the memoir, it was fundamental to 'its style and texture', every view having been 'composed and coloured and framed as for a painting'.⁵⁰ Throughout mid-career collections like *Midsummer* (1984), across long-form narrative pieces like *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), and even in his final volume, *Morning, Paramin* (2016), Walcott included 'verbal paintings' whose approximation of, and engagement with, visual art put visibility right 'at the heart' of his poetry.⁵¹ That these 'verbal paintings' were composed according to conventions and perspectives drawn from European art has, however, led some critics to conclude that 'Simmons [...] guided his wards in internalizing the traditions of European Renaissance art' in the late 1940s.⁵² Adherents to this line of thinking consider Walcott's adaptation of European artistic forms, techniques, and perspectives proof that his work was uncritically derivative.

Since the turn of the millennium, literary critics and cultural theorists have taken increasing note of the considerable extent to which the visual and verbal arts have influenced

⁴⁸ Edward Baugh, 'On Being a Caribbean Poet' in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. by Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 93-8 (p. 95).

⁴⁹ Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', p. 23.

⁵⁰ Edward Baugh, 'Painters and Paintings in *Another Life*', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 26 (1980), 83-93 (pp. 83-4).

⁵¹ Robert Benson, 'The Painter as Poet: Derek Walcott's *Midsummer*', *The Literary Review* (1986), 257-68 (p. 259).

⁵² Isidore Okpewho, 'Walcott, Homer, and the "Black Atlantic"', *Research in African Literatures*, 33 (2002), 27-44 (p. 32).

one another across postcolonial works. One problem for Walcott scholars, however, has been that researchers working in this area rarely engage with Caribbean culture and art.⁵³ Of those studies analysing the phenomenon in the region, the most prominent were written by Döring (*Caribbean-English Passages*, 2002), Emery (*Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, 2007), and Neumann and Rippl (*Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature*, 2020). Centring on David Dabydeen's long poem 'Turner' (1994), Döring's work dismisses the distinction between intertextual and intermedial writing.⁵⁴ It argues that West Indian ekphrasis challenges the 'legacy of the colonial gaze' by countering the cultural stereotypes that gaze propagates.⁵⁵ This 're-visionary' challenge is simultaneously 'enabling and restricting', since it serves to mark affiliation while maintaining difference.⁵⁶ Emery's position differs from Döring's in that she emphasises the subversive side of the visual-verbal relation, figuring intermediality as an aesthetic of 'trans-figuration' whose 'countervisions' confront the visual practices 'associated with European colonialism', which typically conflate the visual with the epistemological.⁵⁷ Emery's work also differs from Döring's because it is less focused on the role played by devices like ekphrasis in individual texts and more concerned with the ways in which visibility informs colonial and postcolonial notions of subjectivity.⁵⁸ In her view, Caribbean writers habitually foreground 'alternate sensory experiences' so as to challenge racist misconceptions about sight devised by colonists to justify the transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁹ As a man of African descent, Walcott is said to have written intermedially in an attempt to explore 'modern aesthetics that require Blackness as a constitutive Other'.⁶⁰ In this formulation, his intermedial work strips the 'histories of violence and gestures of control' endemic to European ways of seeing, meaning it functions as a form of

⁵³ Fumagalli, 'Morning, Paramin', p. 247.

⁵⁴ Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 151.

⁵⁵ Döring, p. 207.

⁵⁶ Döring, p. 166; p. 3.

⁵⁷ Mary Lou Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 3.

⁵⁸ Neumann and Rippl, p. 20

⁵⁹ Emery, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Fumagalli, *Morning, Paramin*, p. 247.

‘subversion, exchange and appropriation’.⁶¹ Despite their disparate approaches, these thorough and conscientious studies both make a strong, convincing plea for what Neumann and Rippl term ‘the centrality of vision and visuality in modernist literatures’.⁶²

Neumann and Rippl's co-authored monograph is by far the most wide-ranging study produced in the field so far. Although the critics accept the broad strokes of Emery's central proposition that postcolonial texts often foreground ‘the close relationship between power and visuality’, their sympathies are aligned more closely with Döring's.⁶³ Early on, they state in no uncertain terms that writers like Walcott ‘transcend the “the-empire gazes-back” paradigm’, meaning Caribbean poetry concerned with visuality should not be understood ‘solely’ as a ‘negation of western regimes of vision’.⁶⁴ Their sixth chapter, which looks specifically at Walcott, relates his reliance on ‘double visions, contradictions and productive tensions’ to the broader ‘transformative patterns of repetition and difference’ underpinning Caribbean history and culture.⁶⁵ Their central argument is that, because much of Walcott's poetry mingles verbal and visual art, its intermedial quality evokes and embodies the ‘cultural hybridity and fluidity’ which define the archipelago.⁶⁶ Focusing on *Tiepolo's Hound* in particular, they propose that Walcott ‘oscillates’ between an ‘appreciative vision’ of canonical paintings by Vermeer and Pissarro and a more ‘wary view’ of such works, tied to their role in ‘dominating Caribbean visual practices’.⁶⁷ Drawing on Édouard Glissant's notion of a “poetics of relation”, according to which all cultural identities exist somewhere on a creole continuum, they argue that Walcott's complicated relationship with the masterworks of European art rejects the old ‘centre-periphery paradigm’ in favour of a ‘polycentric model of mutually transformative exchange’ which ‘links together worlds’ without eliding their differences, or respecting any hierarchy.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Emery, p. 188.

⁶² Neumann and Rippl, p. 20.

⁶³ Neumann and Rippl, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Neumann and Rippl, p. 3.

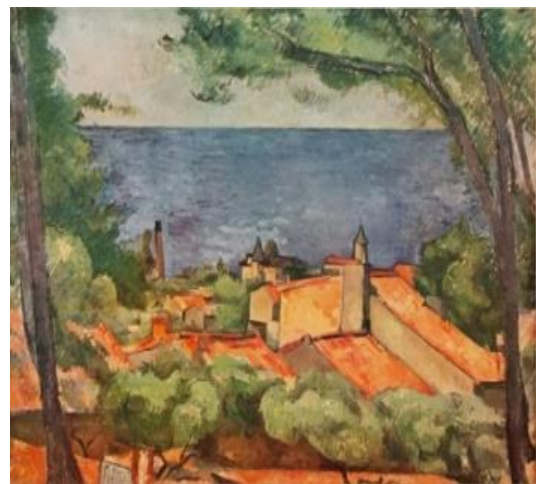
⁶⁵ Neumann and Rippl, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Neumann and Rippl, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Neumann and Rippl, p. 113.

⁶⁸ Neumann and Rippl, p. 115.

This argument is insightful and borne out by analysis of Walcott's poetry. In a wide-ranging interview for *The Paris Review*, he explained to Edward Hirsch that he became very enthusiastic about Cézanne's work when he was young because the Frenchman's palette resembled the colours he saw around him in Saint Lucia: the 'pale orange roofs' of Vigie, coupled with 'the very flat blue' of the sea, exactly resembled Cézanne's paintings of l'Estaque.⁶⁹ To illustrate Walcott's point, on the left is a postcard of Vigie's military buildings from the 1940s and on the right is one of Cézanne's many paintings of the seaside town.⁷⁰



By the time he composed *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott had come to believe that the likeness between Cézanne's palette and Saint Lucia was no coincidence since Cézanne's use of colour could be traced directly to the Caribbean. In a particularly memorable exchange from the poem, Pissarro counsels Cézanne to 'change his dingy palette to colours / brightened by his tutor's tropical eyes' (p. 56). This suggestion that the refulgence of Cézanne's palette was ultimately inspired by Pissarro's childhood spent in the Danish West Indies was an attempt to destabilise the relational

⁶⁹ Edward Hirsch, 'Derek Walcott, The Art of Poetry No. 37', *The Paris Review*, 101 (1986) [online] < <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2719/the-art-of-poetry-no-37-derek-walcott> > [accessed 1 June 2022].

⁷⁰ This painting of the town was the only landscape of Cézanne's reprinted in Craven's *Treasury of Art Masterpieces* (1939), a book twice mentioned in *Another Life*, from which, according to Baugh, 'many of the painterly images and the references to famous paintings [in Walcott's early verse] derive.' (Baugh, 'Painters and Paintings', 84); 'St. Lucia, Vigie, Overview of Military Bldgs, U. 1940s' [online] < <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/st-lucia-vigie-overview-of-military-bldgs-u> > [accessed 1 June 2022]; Paul Cézanne, 'L'Estaque aux toits rouges' in Geneviève Blanc, *L'Oeuvre de Cézanne à L'Estaque, huiles, aquarelles, dessins, 1864-1885* (Marseille: Gaussen, 2019), pp. 97-9.

hierarchy between European and Caribbean art, reliant upon notions of originality and mimicry, in precisely the manner Neumann and Rippl describe.

However, when writing his 'Letter to a Painter in England', Walcott had not yet made this connection and remained convinced by, what he termed, 'the old argument': that 'great works' like the 'coloured pages of Cézanne' chain the hands of postcolonial artists because they serve to 'civilise and colonise' them.

our inheritance
as acolytes was in the printed masterpieces

of museum missals, coloured pages of Cézanne's
gross ecstasies

[...]

the old argument that the great works we admire
civilise and colonise us, they chain our hands
invisibly

(*Tiepolo's Hound*, p. 57)⁷¹

Even though he admired Cézanne in large part because the 'oranges and greens and browns' of the Frenchman's work resembled the 'dry season in Saint Lucia', Walcott avoided imitating Cézanne's palette when describing that very season on the island in his 'Letter to a Painter in England'.⁷² His unwillingness to adopt the palette arose from its association with what Clara Rosa de Lima terms a 'residual *colonised* vision'.⁷³ He differed notably and markedly from Simmons in the weighting he gave to this association. The same year Walcott composed his poem, his mentor published an essay arguing that for 'a strong art [...] to flourish in the West Indies, it must not be rooted in European art'.⁷⁴ This did not mean embracing alternate indigenous perspectives and techniques, however, so much as rejecting the increasingly stylised,

⁷¹ Derek Walcott, *Tiepolo's Hound* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000).

⁷² Hirsch, 'Art of Poetry'.

⁷³ Clara Rosa de Lima, 'Walcott, Painting and the Shadow of Van Gogh', in *The Art of Derek Walcott*, ed. by Stewart Brown (Glamorgan: Seren Books, 1991), pp. 169-90 (p. 182).

⁷⁴ Harold Simmons, quoted in Maria McGarrity (ed.), 'Cataloguing Ireland: Exile and Indigeneity in Derek Walcott's Omeros' in *Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Alison Donnell and Evelyn O'Callaghan (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2015), pp. 140-57 (p. 141).

symbolic modes of art which had gained prominence in Europe following the turn of the century in favour of the older, semi-mimetic or figurative depictions of landscape produced by the Realists, Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Simmons claimed in a 1945 newspaper article that Antillean art could not yet employ 'symbolism in form or colour' because regional artists had 'not yet attained the heritage in art to symbolise' and therefore spoke of the 'strong need' to emancipate West Indian work from the 'academic combinations of colour' increasingly employed in Europe.⁷⁵ Because Simmons instructed Walcott to paint his work using a palette approximating that of older European masters like Cézanne, the apprentice felt he was being taught to view elements of the Caribbean landscape with, what he later termed, an 'imperial eye'.⁷⁶ He therefore depicted Simmons as 'A little man, short-sighted as a brush, / Bent over canvasses, anxious like us to catch / The yellow sunlight in its old Vermeer' ('The Cracked Playground', 13-15). Invoking his tutor's myopia suggests the limitations of applying a perspective drawn from European masters. The studio is accordingly figured in opposition to the local landscape: it stands 'white against the skyline' because it is 'Greek as the marble' (9-10).

The rationale behind Walcott's eventual rejection of Simmons's palette is articulated in the 'Letter to a Painter' itself. When paying homage to his mentor's painting skill in the fourth stanza, he claims Simmons has 'defined with an imperious palette / The several postures of this virginal island' (28-29). On the one hand, this 'imperious' palette suggests technical mastery, while on the other, it indicates imperialism and haughtiness. The island is 'virginal' in the sense that it has not yet been painted (and is therefore an appropriate subject for art, akin to a beautiful young muse), but the adjective also echoes the sort of colonial thinking that held Saint Lucia to be an untouched paradise, despite its having been populated by conquering Carib and autochthonous Arawak peoples for centuries prior to European settlement. The resultant disjunct between the imperiousness of the palette modified from Cézanne and the island's

⁷⁵ Harold Simmons, 'West Indian Artists Need Better Colour Combination', *Voice of Saint Lucia* (18 March 1944), p. 3.

⁷⁶ Derek Walcott, 'On the Beat in Trinidad', *New York Times Magazine* (5 October 1986), p. 38.

virginity seems exploitative, almost rapine. The sense is that his mentor's colour palette is impressive, but flawed, because it bespeaks a Western gaze.

Walcott eventually came to realise that he could engage with works by older European artists like Cézanne without reinforcing colonial hierarchies, but he had not yet arrived at this conclusion when writing 'Letter to a Painter in England'. On those rare occasions when he did model earlier work on Cézanne, the imitations were largely critical of Europe and European culture. In the variant of 'Allegre' published in the October 1960 edition of *London Magazine*, for example, one finds an additional stanza that was later discarded when the poem was collected for *In a Green Night* (1962).

And what of the old bourgeoisie?
Wax apples, wax grapes at their windows,
Flaking in the usual compotier;
In those heights are green flutes and dancing (27-30)⁷⁷

A 'compotier' is a sort of decorative fruit bowl, the French etymological history of which, taken with 'bourgeoisie', implies middle-class pretension. So, the bourgeoisie are equated to wax fruit in a bowl. On their own, however, neither fruit nor wax can flake in any sense. The image alludes to Cézanne's celebrated still-life, *Compotier, Verre et Pommes* (1880), which depicts a bowl overflowing with apples and grapes. The ekphrasis implies criticism. For Walcott, apples painted by Cézanne signified European high culture. In a 1989 speech, he invoked them as emblematic of European art: 'in 1945, breadfruit was comic. It was not an apple that had been celebrated by Cézanne.'⁷⁸ To criticise Cézanne's apples was to criticise the European artistic establishment by which they were venerated. A diligent student of Cézanne's work under Simmons, Walcott knew that the Frenchman's compulsive repainting of subjects meant that, after a time, rotting fruit had to be replaced with wax models. As a consequence, Cézanne's painted fruit often possessed

⁷⁷ Derek Walcott, 'Three Poems', *London Magazine*, 7 (1960), 20-2 (p. 20).

⁷⁸ Derek Walcott, 'The Sea is History' in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*, ed. by Frank Birbalsingh (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 22-8 (p. 26).

‘unnaturally regular, geometrical shapes’.⁷⁹ Walcott’s metaphor suggests the odd-looking nature of these ‘wax’ fruits revealed failed attempts to disguise the deterioration of an already decayed colonial bourgeois class, rather than attempts to prevent decay, as when one coats an apple’s surface in wax. The fruit’s ‘flaking’ in Walcott’s poem is explicable insofar as it refers to the paint of the artwork, rather than the fruit depicted within it. The ‘wax apples’ are ‘flaking’ because, over time, Cézanne’s paint has begun to fragment. His work is, therefore, disintegrating over time, along with the French imperial culture it metonymises.

In contrast with this decay, Saint Lucian rustic life is typified by artistic plenitude. The surrounding hills are home to ‘green flutes and dancing’ (30), imagery which commingles poetry, music, and the visual arts. The description is visual, since it prioritises the colour of the flutes of grass. In *Another Life*, the poet-speaker makes a drunken pact with Gregorias (Dunstan St Omer), following a reference to ‘Cézanne’s boots grinding the stones of Aix’ (VIII.2.1160), in which the youths agree not to leave the island until they have ‘put down [all of its beauty] in paint, in words’ (VIII.2.1186). Shortly after this oath, readers once again encounter a description of Saint Lucia’s beautifully ‘green flutes of grass’ (VIII.2.1223). The image connotes the ebullience of youth and nature because of the associations of green, but it is also doubly intermedial since the collocation with ‘dancing’ indicates musicality: in this sense, the bamboo flutes used in Saint Lucian folk music are akin to pastoral panpipes. Unlike the decayed, bourgeois culture of metropolitan France – indicated through the ekphrasis – Saint Lucia’s rural communities abound in artistic vibrancy.

2.II. ‘Our Creole Painter’: Gauguin, *Tiepolo’s Hound* (2000), and *O Starry Starry Night* (2014)

One obvious alternative to modelling his poetry on Cézanne’s Caribbeanesque landscapes would have been to have modelled his work on poetry from the region. The problem was that few

⁷⁹ Jon Kear, *Paul Cézanne* (London: Reaktion, 2016), p. 168.

worthy models existed in Walcott's view. He saw little merit in local verse, concluding from a young age that there 'simply wasn't any poet in the Caribbean that one could attach oneself to as a disciple.'⁸⁰ In an interview with Dennis Scott, he claimed the 'bulk of West Indian poetry' was 'very, very bad' when he was an apprentice.⁸¹ As such, he seems not to have sought out any local models aside from George Campbell.⁸² Walcott particularly admired Campbell's debut volume, *First Poems* (1945), recalling the ecstasy he felt upon discovering the book in *Another Life* (I.118-25). Campbell's speakers typically produced paeans on Caribbean landscapes in which their descriptions were fused with those of Black female bodies, celebrating both through the mergence.⁸³ In 1980, Walcott published an ode to Campbell, deeming his verse 'the first to stroke the beauty of ebony'.⁸⁴ He also lauded Campbell as 'the first West Indian talking to people, / not to the distant roar of an electorate / Since Claude MacKay had gone into exile, / while others composed black Parnassian'.⁸⁵ Walcott did not feel he could apprentice himself to Campbell, however, because *First Poems* was slight and its author did not produce a follow-up of high calibre. Although, as Dawes proposes, Walcott felt Campbell had given other regional poets 'permission to begin to chart the full range of thoughts and feelings' that surround being a Caribbean person, he did not believe he could be the Jamaican's pupil.⁸⁶

It is possible to see Walcott's pronouncements about the West Indies possessing no native literary tradition and his reluctance to apprentice himself to any regional writer in terms of self-fashioning. In an issue of *Bim* from 1951, Ellsworth McGranahan Keane contended that a 'body of literature that [was] definitely West Indian' had grown up 'within the last two decades', before making reference to A. J. Seymour, H. M. Telemaque, E. M. Roach, Calvin Bowen and

⁸⁰ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 60.

⁸¹ Dennis Scott, 'Walcott on Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996) pp. 10-16 (p. 14).

⁸² Breiner, p. 86.

⁸³ Figueroa, p. 18.

⁸⁴ Derek Walcott, 'George Campbell' in *George Campbell: First Poems* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2012), pp. 6-7 (p. 6).

⁸⁵ Walcott, 'George Campbell', pp. 6-7.

⁸⁶ Kwame Dawes, 'Introduction' in *George Campbell: First Poems* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2012), pp. 13-35 (p. 24).

Tom Redcam.⁸⁷ Walcott probably studied the essay since he was an avid reader of the magazine, Keane quoted some of his work directly, and the issue carried some of his poetry. However, more definitive evidence of Walcott's familiarity with this body of work came in an early letter where he expressed his admiration for it: he explained that he had no wish to 'light a beacon that ha[d] been burning with a certain steadiness before in the work of Campbell, Collymore and Seymour, and which Telemaque and Lamming et al. [were] all contributing to.'⁸⁸ This work could (and may) have been perused for insight into descriptions of West Indian landscapes since, as Reinhard W. Sander records, a 'large portion' of the poetry produced by 'A. J. Seymour, Harold Telemaque and Frank A. Collymore' evoked the 'natural qualities' of the islands.⁸⁹ Sander further lists Martin Carter, M. G. Smith, Basil McFarlane, and Philip Sherlock as poets who 'virtually leapt from sterile imitation to exciting innovation' in the 1940s.⁹⁰

A second alternative would have involved modelling his landscape poetry on canonical European verse. However, he did not seek out Anglo-European literature for inspiration either because he felt few canonical works depicted equivalent geographies. The 'Letter to a Painter in England' opened, explicitly, with a rejection of European landscapes. Across the first two stanzas, the speaker suggested that English cities were totally removed from the experience of Caribbean artists. As in *Epitaph*, he articulated the point meta-allusively by adapting phraseology from Euromodernist works by Eliot and Pound. In this case, he reprised exactly the same section of *The Waste Land* that Selvon later reprised to open *The Lonely Londoners*, discussed in the previous chapter. According to Walcott, artists hailing from the 'personal islands' (3) of the Caribbean would find it difficult to find inspiration in a country characterised by 'the strict grey industry / Of cities of fog and winter fevers' (1-2). In 'The Cracked Playground', he reconfigured the same image: 'fame now is England / For you, the grey cathedrals and damp nimble air' (31-

⁸⁷ E. McG. Keane, 'The Contribution of the West Indian to Literature', *Bim*, 4 (1951), 102-6 (p. 103).

⁸⁸ Walcott, quoted in Baugh, 'In Praise of Colly'.

⁸⁹ Reinhard W. Sander, 'The Thirties and Forties' in *West Indian Literature*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bruce King (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 38-50 (p. 48).

⁹⁰ Sander, pp. 47-8.

2). Unlike Selvon, who wanted to situate his work within the Anglo-European literary tradition, when Walcott alluded to this section of *The Waste Land*, it was to distance himself from it.

Walcott felt that the urban environments widely described in Euromodernist writing existed at such a remove from the Caribbean experience that it would be pointless for the region's artists to learn by imitating them cross-culturally.

London could not provide inspiration for West Indians because, having grown up on beautiful islands, they all possessed a 'wild love of landscape' (6) which the city could not satisfy. European cities constrained the natural world to the point that, when the 'prologues of spring / [did] Appear' they had to do so 'behind the rails of city-parks' (8-9), as if imprisoned. The speaker thus opines, in the second stanza, that because it is April 'springtime must be publishing / pink apologies along the black wet branch' (10-11). One finds a similar image in 'The Cracked Playground': 'Soft with apologies, the leaves retract their vows' (8). In the 'Letter to a Painter', however, the metaphor also reprises Pound's haiku-inspired 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913), in which a crowd of Parisian faces are likened to 'Petals on a wet, black bough' (1-2).⁹¹ Distance is created through the allusion because the tenor and vehicle of Pound's metaphor are reversed. As an expatriate in Paris, Pound likened something from the human world – 'an apparition of faces in the crowd' – to something natural – 'Petals' – whereas, having lived his entire life in the Caribbean, Walcott conceived something natural – springtime flowers – in terms of something manmade – published apologies. The point was that the natural world was so limited in European cities that spring was embarrassed to show itself. As a result, Caribbean artists raised to love the natural world could not look to those cities, or art centring on them, for inspiration. The 'simple soul' of the would-be artist was left to 'its own decision' (35) about where to look.⁹²

⁹¹ Walcott reprised the same image in *Epitaph*: 'A mixture of faces, damp faces torn like paper by the black wind' (X.85).

⁹² This 'simple soul' itself reprised the opening of Eliot's 'Animula' (1929): 'Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul' (1). Walcott later wrote back to Eliot by reworking the line to question whether childhood innocence was a privilege of whiteness: 'Issues from the hand of God the coloured boy?' (*Epitaph*, I.39).

In that search for alternate models, Walcott hit upon Gauguin's work. His imitation of the artist was signposted explicitly at beginning of the 'Letter to a Painter' when the 'personal islands' (3) of the Caribbean were termed a place 'for which Gauguins sicken' (4). The reference was to the artist's four-month-long stint in Martinique (June-October, 1887) where he contracted both malaria and dysentery. Walcott troped on this period of disease to suggest that the beauty of the region induced homesickness in exiles like Simmons and to provide a positive point of contrast with the tubercular 'fevers' of London (1). Although Gauguin was born in Paris, Walcott opted to imitate his approach to depicting Caribbean subject matter, in part, because the painter claimed he was descended from New World nobility. Gauguin's mother was Peruvian and believed she had ties to Inca royalty. She moved back to Peru from France in 1850, when Gauguin was eighteen months old, and he spent the next four years of his life in the country, before relocating to Orléans in 1854. The 'Gauguins' who 'sicken' in the 'Letter to a Painter' can be understood as referring metonymically to New World artists like Simmons who are exiled in Europe. They can also be understood in ekphrastic terms as the paintings of Martinique by Gauguin which are themselves stricken with homesickness in a manner akin to Cézanne's 'flaking' apples and grapes. In *Tiepolo's Hound*, Gauguin's New World credentials led Walcott to term the artist 'our creole painter', in a description littered with hagiographic, quasi-messianic, terminology.

the light of redemption came with Gauguin,
our creole painter of *anses*, *mornes*, and *savannas*,

of olive hills, immortelles. He made us seek
what we knew and loved: the burnished skins

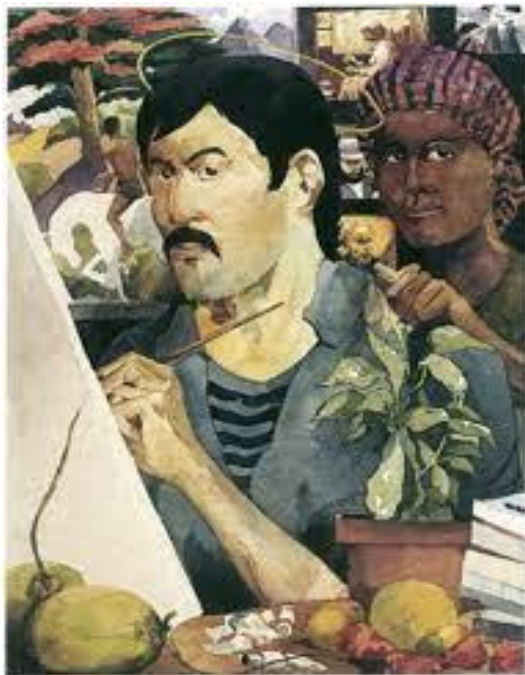
of pawpaws and women, a hill in Martinique.
Our martyr. Unique. He died for our sins.

He, Saint Paul, saw the colour of his Muse
as a glowing ingot, her breasts were bronze

under the palm of a breadfruit's fleur-de-lys,
his red road to Damascus through our mountains

(*Tiepolo's Hound*, pp. 16-17)

In her discussion of this section, Sarah Fulford argues that Gauguin is presented as a sort of 'Caribbean Christ' who is able to 'redeem European art with a biblical intensity'.⁹³ To make her point, she draws attention to the fact that, later in the book, Walcott also included a reproduction of a watercolour he had painted, entitled *Gauguin in Martinique*, in which the artist was depicted with a halo (*Tiepolo's Hound*, p. 20). This painting was one of a triptych of works by Walcott portraying Gauguin, painted between 1986 and 1991. Several critics have noted the remarkable similarity of this painting to a self-portrait of Walcott, which the author also included in *Tiepolo's Hound* (p. 154).



The implication of the similarity between Walcott's painting of Gauguin and his self-portrait appears to be that the author modelled himself on the artist, the latter having been influenced or guided by the people of Martinique, one of whom has a hand on his shoulder. In 'Gauguin' from

⁹³ Sarah Fulford, 'Painting the Sublime in Visible Syntax: Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound*', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 33 (2004), 11-27 (p. 22).

Midsummer, Walcott's persona claimed explicitly that he 'saw in [his] own cheekbones the mule's head of a Breton' (8), in reference to the artist.⁹⁴

Similarly hagiographic descriptions of Gauguin can be found in the work of other major Caribbean writers. In Wilson Harris's novella *Da Silva Da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness and Genesis of the Clowns* (1977), for example, the protagonist's wife Jen boasts of a 'distant cousinship to Paul Gauguin', who is termed a 'master banker, master painter'.⁹⁵ Harris references Gauguin's New World ancestry, explaining that he 'had claimed descent from a wealthy Inca princess'.⁹⁶ Jen's relationship is, therefore, 'to an aristocracy of paint and wealth'.⁹⁷ As in *Tiepolo's Hound*, Gauguin is metaphorically canonised through a likening to Saint Paul on several occasions. Early on, Da Silva's eyes are 'blinded by a fable of massive reflections' after a 'canvas of Manya's' seems to 'arch through Gauguin's Europe into Jen's South American bank' running 'through [her] cul-de-sac into hollow Damascus'.⁹⁸ Later, he wonders whether another character called Paul is living in 'hollow Damascus' and, after stepping off a pavement into the street to help a child, stumbles and falls into a 'curious immovable presence' that envelops him, following which a 'sudden abstract canvas' appears to descend 'out of the sun', which he immediately equates to the 'hollow boat of Damascus'.⁹⁹ As Emery suggests, these references to Gauguin's painterly gaze, commingled with iconography related to Saint Paul, signal 'the importance of vision' in the work.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere, in Jamaica Kincaid's novel *Lucy* (1990), a character called Paul is introduced following the protagonist's description of her 'emotional identification' with Gauguin.¹⁰¹

Soon afterwards, however, the identification with Gauguin is called into question when Lucy realises that, being a 'woman and a servant', the 'social position' she is afforded in

⁹⁴ Derek Walcott, *Midsummer* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1984).

⁹⁵ Wilson Harris, *Da Silva Da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness and Genesis of the Clowns* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 7.

⁹⁶ Harris, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Harris, p. 15.

⁹⁸ Harris, pp. 19-21.

⁹⁹ Harris, pp. 64-6.

¹⁰⁰ Emery, p. 205.

¹⁰¹ Mary Lou Emery, 'Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination: Tropes of Visuality in Writing by Rhys, Kincaid, and Cliff', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 16 (1997), 250-80 (p. 267).

American society is 'altogether different' from the high status the painter enjoyed in France.¹⁰²

Given that Gauguin lost enormous amounts of money on the Parisian stock market, Harris's suggestion that he was a 'master banker' works similarly, Da Silva's veneration of his wife's ancestry being proffered tongue in cheek. That Gauguin was only said to have '*claimed* descent from a wealthy Inca princess', and that the evidence Jen cites in support of the relation is that she was 'born in Peru', further undermines the identification she draws with the painter.¹⁰³

Walcott's opinion of Gauguin was, like those of Harris and Kincaid, more nuanced and ambivalent than the description in *Tiepolo's Hound* suggests if taken at face value. When discussing Walcott's painting of Gauguin, for example, Fulford did not mention that the halo above the artist's head came in reference to the self-portraits Gauguin produced in Brittany, many of which, like *Self-Portrait with Halo and Snake* (1889), depicted him as Jesus. One should be wary, therefore, of reading the effusive, oleaginous praise of Gauguin in *Tiepolo's Hound* non-ironically: Walcott does not see Gauguin as a 'Caribbean Christ', so much as draw attention to the fact, through his poetry and his painting, that was how Gauguin depicted himself. To that end, in the final speech of Walcott's play *O Starry Starry Night* (2014), which stages Gauguin's sojourn with Van Gogh at Arles, the term 'Saint Paul' is applied to Gauguin, as it is in *Tiepolo's Hound*, but the appellation comes from the painter himself. He closes the play by reading aloud a letter he has written to Theo Van Gogh, in which he claims: 'I have met no man as compassionate as your brother, a saint, says Saint Paul to Saint Vincent.'¹⁰⁴ The reference is to an episode earlier in the play where, in a fit of madness, Van Gogh mistakes Gauguin for the apostle. Van Gogh's confusion is amusing because of the sinful nature of much of Gauguin's life. The artist was a deplorable reprobate. Having taken three Polynesian child-brides in Tahiti while still married to his Danish wife, for example, Gauguin infected them with syphilis, before

¹⁰² Emery, 'Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination', p. 267.

¹⁰³ Harris, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Derek Walcott, *O Starry Starry Night* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), pp. 105-6.

dying from complications arising from the disease himself.¹⁰⁵ The signposting phrase in the 'Letter to a Painter', 'for which Gauguin's sicken', also gestures to this episode. The suggestion, in *Tiepolo's Hound*, that he 'died for our sins', after the manner of Christ, is clearly ironic.

Like Kincaid and Harris, Walcott worked to challenge the identification between Gauguin and Caribbean subjectivity. Despite having spent some of his early youth in the New World, the artist did not hail from the Caribbean which meant that, while he was, in some sense, a 'creole painter', he was also a foreign interloper in the region. That interloper status was implied through Walcott's creative use of personal pronouns in *Tiepolo's Hound*: 'His red road to Damascus [comes] through *our* mountains'. However, by the time Walcott penned *O Starry Starry Night*, he was willing to lay the limitation of Gauguin's foreign vision of the Caribbean bare. Early on in the play, Gauguin extols the virtues of painting a landscape in crudely sexual terms, before miming masturbation:

GAUGUIN

Sure, nothing gives me a fiercer erection
than a prone landscape or hills and gorges.
When I see a wet furrow hedged with bush
and sparkling with dew, I can't contain myself.
O the fucking landscape, oh, oh, oh!
(*O Starry Starry Night*, p. 31)

Here, the exploitative, rapine dimension of Simmons's European palette, implied in the 'Letter to a Painter', is rendered explicit.¹⁰⁶ When composing his 'Letter to a Painter', Walcott drew on Gauguin rather than Cézanne, in part, because he had links to the New World and, in part, because he wanted to imitate Gauguin's Caribbean subject matter. However, as with Cézanne, producing an exact, derivative imitation remained problematic. On the one hand, Gauguin was a 'creole' artist who painted Caribbean subject matter. On the other, he was a Frenchman who

¹⁰⁵ Two of these wives married him aged fourteen. The other was thirteen.

¹⁰⁶ Simmons was also heavily influenced by Gauguin. As Baugh has shown, Walcott conveyed this indebtedness meta-allusively in *Another Life*. In the poem's nineteenth chapter, the speaker implicitly equated Simmons with Gauguin by producing a lengthy description of the former's house which drew heavily on the description Gauguin provided of his Tahitian hut in his largely plagiarised and fictitious travel memoir, *Noa Noa* (1901). Baugh, *Memory as Vision*, pp. 63-4.

believed the people of Martinique were primitive and ripe for sexual exploitation. It was because of his complicated relationship to Gauguin that, in his 'Letter to a Painter in England', Walcott imitated elements of the Frenchman's style, and depicted the same subject matter, but did so in a way which challenged many of the painter's convictions.

2.III. 'The Tide Burns Black': Nonmimetic Colour in 'Letter to a Painter in England' (1948)

Gauguin's Martinican landscapes are painted according to the conventions of "synthetism", the post-Impressionist, proto-Fauvist style he honed throughout his later work. According to Walcott, this style involved 'almost flat colour' and made minimal use of either depth or perspective'.¹⁰⁷ It also relied on a nonmimetic palette, leading Van Gogh to conclude, in *O Starry Starry Night*, that Gauguin's style was 'Red grass. Green sky.'¹⁰⁸ In the 'Letter to a Painter', the most notable feature Walcott adapted from synthetism was this heavily stylised use of colour, the imitation of which is clearest in the poem's third stanza:

And you will find it difficult to imagine
This April as a season where the tide burns
Black: leaves crack into ashes from the drought;
A dull red burning like heart's desolation.
The roads are white with dust and the leaves
Of the trees have a nervous spinsterish quiet (14-19)¹⁰⁹

Walcott's imitation of Gauguin focused on his use of colour, in particular, because of the longstanding association between descriptions of vibrant, mimetic hues and Caribbean 'postcard poetry' – the sort of verse produced in the 1930s by the Jamaican Poetry League, chiefly as exotica for Western anthologies.¹¹⁰ Such verse relied on, what Léon Damas termed, 'tracing

¹⁰⁷ Derek Walcott and Ben Okri, 'Skinning the Lion', *The Royal Society of Literature* (2005) [online] < <https://rs.literature.org/library-article/skinning-the-lion-a-dialogue-between-derek-walcott-and-ben-okri/> > [accessed 23 February 2022].

¹⁰⁸ Walcott, *O Starry Starry Night*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁹ The combination of a dark sea, red leaves and barren trees parallels the features of Gauguin's *Fatata Te Miti* (1902), but the 'Letter to a Painter' does not appear to have been modelled on any specific work.

¹¹⁰ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

paper poetics', vaunting the picturesque while 'echoing' metropolitan values 'uncritically'.¹¹¹

Poetry of this sort regularly made use of clichéd imagery, arising from an internalised Western perspective. According to Walcott, it most typically praised the region's 'bright blue seas'.¹¹² By imitating Gauguin's nonmimetic palette, his poetry avoided cliché and, in doing so, sidestepped an issue frequently faced by earlier regional poets like Una Marson. Her much-celebrated lyric 'In Jamaica' (1931) similarly challenged Caribbean poetry's reliance on an alien Western perspective, but nonetheless relied on the conventions of that perspective to some degree. Unlike Walcott, who depicted Saint Lucia as barren, red and black in his 'Letter to a Painter', she made her subversive point through a parodic, but mimetic, listing of her island's perennial lushness ('The flowers bloom on in Jamaica', 3) and beautiful colours ('the white sands of Mo. Bay', 31).¹¹³ In other early poems, Walcott attempted something similar to Marson. The opening stanza of 'North Coast at Night' (1951) adopts a touristic gaze and sardonically employs clichéd mimetic description:

Where blondes and Jews may hide
In their autumnal skin
Securely, from a sky
Incredible as a brochure
Envy the absolute youth
Of blue bays, and white sand (5-10).

'The Sunny Caribbean' (1951) opens similarly:

The perfect supple view
Sways with lace and the cobalt sea
The eye drowns at horizons, the blue
Sky like absurd photography (1-4).

In each instance, the tone is sarcastic, and the point is subverted, but the imagery still resembles that used by the League.

¹¹¹ Ellen Conroy Kennedy (trans.), 'Translator's Introduction' in *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, ed. by Lilian Kesteloot (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. xiii-xxix (p. xvi).

¹¹² Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

¹¹³ Una Marson, 'In Jamaica' in *Heights and Depths: Poems* (Kingston: Gleaner Co., 1931), p. 82.

In the 'Letter to a Painter', by contrast, that the Caribbean is not perennially picturesque is conveyed through Walcott's approximation of Gauguin's palette. Walcott claims the palette would be 'difficult to imagine' (14) for Simmons in reference to Gauguin's penchant for painting ideatively, which stood in contrast to painters like Van Gogh, who relied on reproducing what they were in the process of seeing. To Western eyes, the 'dull red' of the leaves seems autumnal, contrasting with conventional Anglo-European depictions of the month's springtime greenery and vivacity. The 'drought' experienced in the Caribbean dry season ostentatiously differs, for example, from the month's characterisation in a work like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the general prologue of which famously opens with a reference to April's rejuvenating rain: 'Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote' (1-2).¹¹⁴ Unlike *The Waste Land*, which subverted this convention with an insistence that April was 'the cruellest month' (l.1) on account of its rejuvenating powers, Walcott asserted Caribbean alterity by imitating what Maika Pollack terms Gauguin's 'distinctly foreign (as opposed to French) palette'.¹¹⁵ Walcott often painted the region's decaying nature in precisely this way when he composed verse addressed to Simmons. In 'The Pursuit of April – A Letter' (1951), his speaker frames a tree's continual blossoming in terms of a stubborn refusal to succumb to powerful natural forces: the 'pink tree in the normal indigo schoolyard / Resists with blossom the guttural erasures / Of the schoolmaster's wind' (3-5). Later in the poem, the speaker tells Simmons that England's flowering hills should remind him of 'bluer ones at home' (15). In 'The Cracked Playground', the speaker also asserts Caribbean alterity through an inverted seasonality. October's lifegiving powers are contrasted with English autumnal decay:

In England now October with a hush
Turns all to money by a midas touch
Or like a spendthrift he spills coppers still
Banker of lakes and parks, he spends his gold
And winter mints the silver of his cold (19-23).

¹¹⁴ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Jill Mann (London: Penguin, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Maika Pollack, 'Odilon Redon, Paul Gauguin, and Primitivist Color', *The Art Bulletin*, 102 (2020), 77-103 (p. 77).

Emphasising the difference in seasonality between London and the Caribbean through a focus on colour was not uniquely Walcottian. One finds something similar in John Figueroa's sonnet 'At Home the Green Remains' (19948), for example. The poem was composed the same year that Walcott wrote his 'Letter to a Painter', when Figueroa was living as an expatriate in London. Walcott's future professor thus drew on first-hand experience to detail how 'Autumn's yellow stain [is] / Splashed about tree-tops and wet beneath the rake' (3-4) in the city, while in the Caribbean 'the green remains: the palm throws back / Its head and breathes above the still blue sea (9-10).¹¹⁶ Walcott's version of this conceit differs significantly from Figueroa's, however, because the former's palette is symbolic rather than mimetic and reliant upon an extended monetary metaphor whereas the latter's is not. In 'The Cracked Playground', English leaves turn to copper pennies and fall to the ground in October, meaning the lakes and parks are downgraded from gold to silver as winter approaches. This same pecuniary image recurs in 'The Park' (1951) where it once more connects England's autumnal landscapes with a lack of poetic inspiration: 'spendthrift leaves' (2) analogue the composition of uninspired verse and their rotting puns metaliterarily on leaves of paper:

Their green was mine, their loves
 Yellowing by an alchemy of wind,
 And I wrote their deaths in grave
 Orchards of poems without leaves (8-11)

In 'The Cracked Playground', the speaker first invokes his monetary image-system by contrasting the uninspiring, decaying, English autumnal parks with his 'October room' (1) in Saint Lucia, where inspiration is abundant because it is the island's fecund wet season. It is for this reason that, later on, Simmons's studio is said to play host to a 'midas of pink hands / That turns a season gold' and 'spills the neurosis / From a silver glass' (130-1).

¹¹⁶ John Figueroa, 'At Home the Green Remains' in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, ed. by Paula Burnett (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 184.

In the 'Letter to a Painter', Walcott's phrase, 'the tide burns / Black', imitates Gauguin's nonmimetic colour, but unlike the 'dull red', it relies on a fusion of painterly and poetic technique for its effect. It is, therefore, an early example of the sort of verbal painting which Neumann and Rippl suggest 'materialise[d] in almost all of [his] literary works'.¹¹⁷ Readers encounter the tide, in outline, at the end of the fifteenth line, but the colour is not provided until the beginning of the sixteenth. Verb-adjective ordering is atypical when dealing with adjectives of colour in English, but it is conventional to fill in colours after having sketched initial outlines when painting; synthetism, in particular, delineates figures and objects from one another through dark, heavy lines, which are typically drawn first, before the blocks of colour are added. Prior to the line break, the phrase, 'the tide burns', is likely to be understood intransitively, with no complement, giving the impression that the sea is ablaze. In this way, Walcott initially generates a morbid religious air, recalling the Lake of Fire from the Book of Revelation, which is symbolic of eternal pain. The image also evokes Gauguin's masterpiece *Laveuses à Arles* (1888), which features water ablaze. Following the enjambment, however, the tide is coloured with the alliteratively plosive, nonmimetic 'black', whose connotations range from the trauma of the Middle Passage to the volatility of the Caribbean climate. In tandem with April's barren depiction, these associations appear subversive to Western readers, who expect the beauty of the sea to be extolled.

Aside from being a poetic cliché, one issue with depicting the region through a vibrant, mimetic palette was that such a palette implied there was little else worth describing. In that vein, it is worth noting that James Antony Froude, whose infamous assessment of the Caribbean concluded that there were 'no people there in the true sense of the word', also praised Saint Lucia for its landscape of 'fine colours'.¹¹⁸ To his eyes, such colours 'looked oddly out of place by the side of the grimy reproduction of England'.¹¹⁹ This loaded sort of veneration was satirised

¹¹⁷ Benson, p. 259; Neumann and Rippl, p. 189.

¹¹⁸ Froude, p. 119.

¹¹⁹ Froude, p. 119.

explicitly, and effectively, in Kincaid's award-winning novella *A Small Place* (1988). When the reader-tourist stares at the Antiguan sea, they find themselves being overwhelmed by its colours:

The colour of the water is navy-blue; nearer, the water is the colour of the North American sky. From there to the shore, the water is pale, silvery, clear, so that you can see its pinkish-white bottom. Oh, what beauty! Oh, what beauty! You have never seen anything like this.¹²⁰

Such an effusive veneration of the colour of the sea stands in direct opposition to the disdain espoused for the island's people and culture, who are largely hated and ignored.

Beyond sidestepping cliché, Walcott's imitation of Gauguin's palette also enabled him to break free from the implicit hierarchy in Western thinking about colour exhibited by Froude, whose praise of Saint Lucia was backhanded. As Nicholas Gaskill has shown, in the early Victorian era, 'the notion of an evolved, physiological colour sense' was frequently invoked in support of white supremacy.¹²¹ Since then, the 'vague notion' that sensibility to colour is a mark of 'intellectual sophistication' has persisted.¹²² This vague notion is related to, and of a kind with, the racialised notions of sight and practices of seeing devised by colonists at the height of the slave trade that Emery proposes Caribbean artists sought to rework with their focus on vision and visuality. Buildings in the Caribbean are often painted with bright colours, but this practice originated in European colonists wanting their dwellings to reflect heat and had little to do with the aesthetic preferences of Black diasporic communities. However, that the practice originated with Europeans or, as Walcott pointed out in an interview, that it mirrored the sensibilities of the Ancient Greeks, has mattered little to tourists and ethnographers.¹²³ Owing to the persistence of racialised notions of colour perception – and, by extension, preference – when Westerners have praised the Caribbean for its blue seas and pastel-coloured buildings, that praise has suggested

¹²⁰ Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), pp. 12-13.

¹²¹ Nicholas Gaskill, *Chromographia: American Literature and the Modernization of Color* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 24.

¹²² Gaskill, p. 29.

¹²³ Brown and Johnson, p. 183.

inferiority implicitly. Adapting Gauguin's palette enabled Walcott to avoid cliché, but it also meant freeing himself from this association.

Imitating Gauguin's palette was, however, problematised in that, while the Frenchman had developed his use of colour as a means of rejecting European artistic conventions, the motivations underpinning his rejection were themselves rooted in racism. Gauguin had been drawn to Martinique and Tahiti, in large part, because he believed they were primitive islands, with monolithic cultures, which had not yet been tainted by the degenerative influence of modern, cosmopolitan life. Hence, as Pollack explains, 'the brash color blocks in Gauguin's painting' were partly an attempt to 'critique a decline in French culture due to miscegenation' which he believed was typified by the 'free-mixing optical effect of pointillist technique'.¹²⁴ Having arrived in the tropics, Gauguin wrote that he was 'constantly uncertain of some colour [and kept] overcomplicating things', and found himself hesitant to put down the colours he preferred because of lingering 'habits from Europe' which he felt had originated in the 'timidity of expression of bastardized races'.¹²⁵ Gauguin's theorising about primitive colour was more complex than the position adopted in Victorian racist colour theory, however, because unlike his British contemporaries, he believed that the cultural simplicity typified in the colours of the Caribbean implied superiority, rather than inferiority. Gauguin believed that using simple, nonmimetic colour when painting 'paralleled the non-descriptive immediacy and mystery' of the primitive, and in so doing, approached the same sublime 'symbolic form'.¹²⁶

It is therefore remarkable, and potentially surprising, how frequently Walcott's Gauguin draws attention to the Caribbean Sea's simplicity and blueness when waxing lyrical about its beauty in *O Starry Starry Night*: He claims he wants to set up a painting school 'In a new landscape [...] near a blue ocean' (p. 21) and believes he can close his eyes and see the 'blue

¹²⁴ Pollack, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Gauguin, quoted in Pollack, p. 84.

¹²⁶ Linda Goddard, "'Scattered notes': Authorship and Originality in Paul Gauguin's *Diverses choses*", *Art History*, 34 (2011), 352-69 (p. 366).

horizons' of Martinique 'humming with promise' (p. 23). He admires 'emerald Martinique / and its sapphire sea (p. 28), before imagining Martinican palm trees 'muttering prayers to the azure blue / and the white crests of plunging breakers' (p. 32). In other words, Walcott's Gauguin produces the sort of oversimplifying postcard-style verse about bright blue seas in the play which the poet otherwise sought to reject. Despite having been inspired by Gauguin to colour Saint Lucia nonmimetically, Walcott did not apply the same colours to the same elements of the landscape as the Post-Impressionist, whose views on the colours of the Caribbean were rooted in racism. He imitated elements of Gauguin's style, but did not want to present the Caribbean by imitating the oversimplifying, racist elements of the Frenchman's gaze.

Because Walcott deemed his early imitation of Gauguin successful, its legacy can be traced in much of his later work. He overwhelmingly avoided "blue" when describing the sea. As Ben Jefferson notes, throughout his oeuvre, very few descriptions of water make use of the colour's 'imperial cartography':

In *Epitaph* the water is "sparkling in the wind, green water near brown reefs" and again in 'Nearing La Guaira' "nothing is green water". In *Another Life*, Walcott describes the water near his St Lucian home as "oil green" (233) and in *The Prodigal* (2004), Walcott asks his reader to reflect on "the subtleties of the noon sea: lime, emerald, lilac, cobalt, ultramarine".¹²⁷

Beyond his oeuvre, Walcott's imitation of Gauguin has also had a broad, enduring impact on West Indian writing. Rowan Ricardo Phillips's poem 'Two Studies on Derek Walcott' (2013) boldly declares that 'The sea is blue', for example, before clarifying that 'the sea is green, the sea / Is yellow' (12-13).¹²⁸ Walcott himself appears in the poem with 'painted birds dotting [his] painted island in curatorial iambics' and, more importantly, a penchant for caging his 'dark exilic woe behind lines *burned black*' (16-23). In Monique Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch* (2020), the author likewise abandons "blue" when describing the sea, deeming it 'turquoise in the shallow,

¹²⁷ Ben Thomas Jefferson, 'The sea as place in Derek Walcott's poetry', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 48 (2013), 287-304 (p. 300).

¹²⁸ Rowan Ricardo Phillips, *The Ground* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), pp. 56-7.

purple in the deep' instead.¹²⁹ Roffey's veneration of, and presumable indebtedness to, Walcott's early poetry is signposted explicitly thirty pages later: it is only when Miss Rain realises that the book she intends to 'pelt' at Thomas Clayson's head is 'a first edition of Derek Walcott's *In a Green Night*' that she abstains from throwing it.¹³⁰

2.IV. 'White With Dust and the Leaves': Painting and Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)

When modelling his poem on Gauguin's Martinican landscapes, Walcott was inspired by an earlier intermedial approach to writing developed by Ernest Hemingway, the one writer he felt had enabled readers to 'see the Caribbean the way it is'.¹³¹ Indeed, Walcott felt the imitation of painting in verse was possible primarily because he believed an equivalent experiment had already been performed successfully in prose by the novelist, from whom he claimed to have 'learned a lot'.¹³² In a revealing conversation with David Montenegro, he walked the interviewer through the relationship between the opening section of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), which he read when he was very young, and the techniques of watercolour, centring on the novel's first paragraph:

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels.¹³³

In Walcott's view, elements of Hemingway's style in this passage arose from close 'scrutiny' of the techniques of watercolour, and in particular, from 'watching Cézanne' paint.¹³⁴ In this case, he was either mistaken, or speaking metaphorically, since Cézanne died when Hemingway was a

¹²⁹ Monique Roffey, *The Mermaid of the Black Conch* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2020), p. 16.

¹³⁰ Roffey, p. 48.

¹³¹ D. J. R. Bruckner, 'A Poem in Homage To an Unwanted Man', *New York Times* (9 October 1990), p. 13.

¹³² Baer, p. 198.

¹³³ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 13.

¹³⁴ David Montenegro, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 135-50 (pp. 138-9).

small child, meaning the latter never watched the former. However, that Hemingway was influenced by Cézanne when forming his style is well established, having been acknowledged on multiple occasions by the author himself. Most famously, in a letter to Gertrude Stein written in August 1924, Hemingway described how he had been 'trying to do the country like Cézanne and having a hell of a time and sometimes getting it a little bit'.¹³⁵ In *A Moveable Feast* (1964), his memoir about Paris, he also recalled long afternoons spent perusing artworks in the Palais de Luxembourg, 'learning something from the painting of Cézanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough'.¹³⁶ Frustratingly, Hemingway did not go into detail regarding this education, claiming that he was 'not articulate enough' to explain what he learnt to anyone, and that it was a 'secret' in any case.¹³⁷

Over the years, a number of critics have taken up Hemingway's gauntlet and attempted to define this secret. Usually, such explanations foreground that, in several of his later paintings, Cézanne intentionally left 'small areas of canvas blank', encouraging viewers 'to fill spaces with preconscious constructs of complementary line and colour'.¹³⁸ There are clear points of overlap between this practice and Hemingway's iceberg theory of literature, in which the majority of a story is delivered subtextually, leaving readers to derive meaning from omission. For the opening of *A Farewell to Arms*, however, Hemingway appears not to have adapted Cézanne's use of omission, so much as his approach to scene-building. As Emily Stipes Watts records, to produce a landscape, Cézanne would employ 'a series of planes for depth and structural development'.¹³⁹ Accordingly, in Hemingway's first sentence, the larger features of the landscape (the village, the river, the mountains) are sketched. In subsequent sentences, these are then augmented by a

¹³⁵ Quoted in Theodore L. Gaillard, Jr., 'Hemingway's Debt to Cézanne: New Perspectives', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 45 (1999), 65-78 (p. 67).

¹³⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Bantam 1969), p. 13. When Hemingway was in Paris, the painting of l'Estaque in Craven's anthology that Walcott likened to a town in Saint Lucia was one of only three pieces by Cézanne on display at the palace. Kenneth G. Johnston, 'Hemingway and Cézanne: Doing the Country', *American Literature*, 56 (1984), 28-37 (p. 28).

¹³⁷ Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 13.

¹³⁸ Gaillard, p. 67.

¹³⁹ Emily Stipes Watts, *Ernest Hemingway and the Arts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 32.

second plane, comprising soldiers and rocks which, as Walcott points out, are only ever 'skeletonally or sparingly indicated'.¹⁴⁰ Then, there is the description of water, 'swiftly moving and blue in the channels', which, in Walcott's view, encompassed 'exactly the same cubic area' as a 'Cézanne stroke'.¹⁴¹ In *Midsummer*, he framed this granular process of composition in terms of construction, describing 'Cézanne bricking in colour, each brick no bigger than a square inch' (XIX.6). For Walcott, when imitating, the point was not to adopt 'another man's genius', so much as to recognise that he had performed a successful 'experiment' which would be 'useful to all writers afterwards'.¹⁴² So, in this case, the specifics of the imitation are less important than the overall result, which was that Hemingway had successfully approximated techniques from French Post-Impressionist landscape painting in prose. As a result, Walcott believed he could replicate Hemingway's experiment for Gauguin, imitating elements of the painter's work in verse.

It was possible for readers to trace the influence of Hemingway's experiment on the 'Letter to a Painter' because the poem ostentatiously reprised some of the novelist's imagery. Immediately after its opening few sentences, *A Farewell to Arms* devolves into a series of repeated words and phrases which correlate exactly to the eighteenth and nineteenth lines of Walcott's text. In Hemingway, one finds:

Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year [...] and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves. (p. 13)

In Walcott's poem, this is rendered:

The roads are white with dust and the leaves
Of the trees have a nervous spinsterish quiet (18-19)¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Montenegro, p. 138.

¹⁴¹ Montenegro, p. 138.

¹⁴² Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

¹⁴³ In support of this connection between 'Letter to a Painter in England' and *A Farewell to Arms*, several facts are worth noting: in the interview with Montenegro, Walcott identified and discussed Hemingway's focus on 'the dust and the leaves' explicitly; throughout his career, Walcott frequently employed phrasing from Hemingway verbatim

On this occasion, Walcott's desire to signpost his indebtedness came at the detriment of sense. Hemingway's statement, 'the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees' implied that, as they marched, the troops were raising the dust very high, such that it reached those leaves which remained on the branches. The phrase, 'the leaves of the trees', distinguished such leaves from the leaves on the ground, which had begun to fall because the story was set in 'late summer'. Walcott's scene was set in April, and the verbatim reprise of 'the leaves / Of the trees' was tautologous, since there were not two sets of leaves.

It is difficult to frame Walcott's imitation of Hemingway in terms of writing back to the metropolitan centre, given his obvious enthusiasm for the novelist's work. In 2010, he delivered the Robert B. Silvers lecture at the New York Public Library, the principal focus of which was how much he felt 'indebted' to the American.¹⁴⁴ He spoke of how, as a young man living in Jamaica in the 1950s, he, John Hearne and Slade Hopkinson had planned to sail together to Cuba to meet Hemingway, their intention being to present the novelist with a 'surprise tribute from three Caribbean writers'.¹⁴⁵ The plan was abandoned solely on account of a lack of resources. As with Gauguin, Walcott enjoyed Hemingway's work chiefly because of his depictions of Caribbean landscapes and seascapes. According to Walcott, Hemingway 'knew what it all looked like': he had described 'the mountains after rain, the rain that traveled the horizon in slow-moving veils, the sight of leaping marlin, dolphins racing [...] the height of frigates floating above the perennial Caribbean sea'.¹⁴⁶ Hemingway's descriptions of these phenomena all 'brought [the writers] happiness with his prose'.¹⁴⁷ Such 'happiness' stands in direct contrast to the anxious antagonism upon which the "writing back" paradigm is predicated,

or near verbatim (in *Omeros*, he produced at least nine such lines from *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952)); in *Another Life*, he wrote of his early admiration for, and presumable desire to emulate, 'the peeled ease of Hemingway's early prose'.

¹⁴⁴ Derek Walcott and Tracy O'Neill, 'Podcast #121: Derek Walcott on Hemingway, Travel, and First Love' [online] (19 July 2016) <<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/07/19/podcast-derek-walcott>> [accessed 1 June 2022].

¹⁴⁵ Walcott and O'Neill.

¹⁴⁶ Walcott and O'Neill.

¹⁴⁷ Walcott and O'Neill.

which it necessarily complicates. After telling Louis Bourne that Eliotic 'surrender' was a prerequisite of learning to write poetry, Walcott then spoke of the 'tremendous delight' he felt when modelling work on writers like Hemingway, which he termed the 'delight of an apprentice'.¹⁴⁸ He also likened his early period of apprenticeship to the training received by Renaissance *garzoni*, claiming:

No one would go to a painter in the Renaissance period and say to a disciple or an apprentice of Leonardo: "Do your own thing." He'd fuck up the foot and the hands would be wrong.¹⁴⁹

This analogy highlights, not only the impersonality Walcott felt was necessary of apprentices, but also that when modelling his poetry on Hemingway's prose, Walcott felt he was engaging in the same sort of imitation as painters who 'have traditionally copied, imitated, modelled their work on others' throughout their apprenticeships.¹⁵⁰ The 'happiness' Walcott felt reading Hemingway was akin to the 'elation' he described upon encountering the masterpieces of Ancient Greece and Rome in both 'Meanings' and 'What the Twilight Says'.¹⁵¹

Such positivity was diametrically opposed to the terms in which Harold Bloom famously theorised influence, according to which Walcott's engagement with anterior texts by strong writers should have occasioned an "anxiety of influence". In Bloom's formulation, that anxiety would be a prerequisite for his eventual challenge to their patrilineal supremacy, via misreading.¹⁵² Bloom was writing against the 'impersonal notion', popularised by French deconstructionists, that texts grew from 'authorless intertextual loops'.¹⁵³ His narrative of influence involved strong personalities being pitted against one another in a 'highly stylised Freudian conflict'.¹⁵⁴ Such a model could, theoretically, dovetail with the "Empire Writes Back"

¹⁴⁸ Bourne, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ Bourne, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 51.

¹⁵¹ Walcott, 'Meanings', 51; 'What the Twilight Says', p. 4.

¹⁵² Walcott deemed the term "anxiety of influence" an 'ambitious, careerist phrase' with no meaning, designed to make Bloom a 'hot-shot top dog in literary criticism'. Brown and Johnson, p. 186.

¹⁵³ Kevin Brophy, 'The Shadow that is Light: Influence, Imagination and Imitation in Poetry', *Consciousness, Literature & the Arts*, 22 (2009), 67-92 (p. 87).

¹⁵⁴ Brophy, p. 87.

paradigm of postcolonial influence. The problem with Bloom's model when applied to Walcott is that, although the intensity of the poet's emotional response certainly accorded with its prescriptions, the feeling was inverted. By Walcott's account, he was delighted by the sense of discovery he felt when imitatively rewriting, rather than anxious. His delight did not come from the eventual attainment of 'discontinuity or novelty', which Bloom made the 'essential achievement of a strong poet'.¹⁵⁵

It was in keeping with this feeling of 'elation' that Walcott opened 'Allegre' with a bold comparison: 'Some mornings are as full of elation' as the pigeons 'crossing the hill slopes' (1-2). After establishing an equivalence between the delight his speaker felt looking at Saint Lucia in the morning and the birds he depicted with a painterly touch, he went on to liken the Caribbean landscape to the Italian countryside: 'Gilded, as though this was Italy' (6); 'Laughter and doves, like young Italy' (26). The same parallel cropped up in his discussion of Hemingway. Walcott explained how 'in the magical light of a tropical dusk', his first love appeared wreathed in light possessing 'a simplicity that stayed in the descriptions of Hemingway' when he depicted the Caribbean.¹⁵⁶ This light 'was from another country [...] perhaps Italy'.¹⁵⁷ The 'elation' he felt when admiring Saint Lucia's countryside or his girlfriend, Andreuille Alcee, was akin to the 'happiness' that overcame him when reading Hemingway's painterly descriptions of the archipelago.

According to his speaker, such elation was not wholly positive: if it were not harnessed appropriately, 'elation [could] be useless and empty' (28). The sanguinity Walcott felt in associating Caribbean landscapes with those painted by European artists, or described by canonical authors, was meaningless if he did not feel comfortable harnessing it in his verse. The trouble was that, though elements of Caribbean landscapes may have resembled those in Europe, the two were not equivalent, and depicting them as such as meant employing a gaze rooted in,

¹⁵⁵ Brophy, p. 86.

¹⁵⁶ Walcott and O'Neill.

¹⁵⁷ Walcott and O'Neill.

and associated with, colonial exploitation. Colonists of the New World typically understood its landscapes in precisely these relational terms, implying the inferiority of the Caribbean as a result. This tension, between affiliation and rejection, is mirrored in the dual resonance of the title. Milton's 'L'Allegro' is Italian for "the happy man". Walcott's title, 'Allegre', is similar enough to Milton's that it signals the imitation, but Walcott dislocates the earlier phrasing by translating it into Spanish. According to Walcott, when he was growing up in Saint Lucia, the island offered few opportunities, which meant many young men had to move abroad for work. In particular, many emigrated to work on oil rigs in Curaçao, where they lived together in a 'sterile, cactus ridden boom-camp' called 'Campo Alegre'.¹⁵⁸ Their principal outlets were gambling and whoring because the place was, in effect, the largest brothel in the Caribbean. In the late 1940s, the brothel loomed large in the Saint Lucian imagination. By indigenising Milton's Italian title, Walcott imbued it with local, sordid connotations. In this way, he demonstrated the wariness he felt about transplanting European conventions to the Caribbean, even in those instances where he perceived clear analogues, such as he felt existed between Saint Lucia's countryside, Italian landscapes, and the Italianate presentation of the Caribbean in Hemingway's work. The depressing note on which 'Allegre' ends is, therefore, markedly different from the conclusion of Milton's 'L'Allegro', which culminates in the speaker's decision to live mirthfully. It is more in keeping the conclusion of its companion poem 'Il Penseroso' (1645), in which the speaker resolves to live melancholically.

In spite of the elation he felt when relating their work to the Caribbean, Walcott was wary of associating himself too closely with writers from the Anglo-European canon because imitating features of European art and literature in his verse required acts of cross-cultural translation fraught with difficulty. However, ignoring the potential benefits of imitating Anglo-European artworks in which he perceived parallels was also difficult. The most innovative

¹⁵⁸ Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', p. 30. Walcott's misspelling of 'Allegre' occurred because he could not speak Spanish. The word "Alegre" is spelt with a single "l" but, when he wrote of how men 'whored on Campo Alegre' in 'Leaving School', he also used a double letter. Derek Walcott, 'Leaving School', p. 10.

solution he devised to this problem involved reframing artists from Europe and the United States as Caribbeans. In an interview he gave for the *New York Times*, he accordingly dubbed Hemingway one of the 'great Caribbean artists', presumably on the grounds that he spent much of his life living in Cuba.¹⁵⁹ As with Gauguin, when imitating features from the American, Walcott justified his reliance on metropolitan art partly by playing up the creole credentials of the work he imitated. On the whole, however, Walcott's early verse reveals a wariness about imitating art canonised by Europe, including work by artists he admired like Hemingway, Gauguin, and Cézanne, even if such art could be reframed as creole. When imitating Gauguin's synthetist style, he did not do so uncritically. Whereas Gauguin's palette had been devised to convey his belief in the primitive beauty and simplicity of Caribbean culture, Walcott employed a variation of that palette to subvert Gauguin's exploitative gaze. In doing so, as Emery suggests, he stripped away the 'histories of violence and gestures of control' endemic to Gauguin's way of seeing.¹⁶⁰ However, as his respective enthusiasms for Hemingway, Cézanne and Gauguin show, to view this refashioning solely in terms of "writing back" is insufficient: it does not account for the diplopic nature of Walcott's vision. In his early imitations of Anglo-European literature and art, Walcott followed an ambiguated middle road lying somewhere between derivation and antagonism. In works like 'Letter to a Painter' and 'Allegré', he offered a double-edged 're-visionary' challenge to the Anglo-European artistic canon, which signalled affiliation while maintaining difference.¹⁶¹ His approach to figures like Gauguin resembled that of his regional contemporaries, such as Wilson Harris, in the sense that each commingled admiration with criticism. However, the manner in which Walcott conveyed this duality differed from that of his peers because it was not wholly contingent upon irony. His writing was neither characterisable by derivation, nor by "writing back", and though it possessed features in common with Kincaid and Harris, it existed largely *sui generis*.

¹⁵⁹ Bruckner, p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature*, p. 188.

¹⁶¹ Döring, p. 207.

Ultimately, any new narrative describing Walcott's career trajectory built upon the "writing back" paradigm would consider his early imitations attempts to undermine, reverse, disrupt or otherwise repudiate colonial hierarchies of language and literature. The paradigm accords neatly with the subversive nature of his use of allusion in *Epitaph for the Young*. However, a new narrative for Walcott's career development foregrounding anti-imperial antagonism would be misleading because it would misrepresent his self-avowed love of Anglo-European verse, his insistence on learning from metropolitan forms, his veneration of Gauguin, Hemingway and Eliot, and the general sense of elation he felt when imitating. The "writes back" paradigm is not the only alternative to a diffusionist paradigm based on derivation, however. There are two further alternatives, neither of whose merits have yet been assessed.

Chapter Three: Problematising Polymodernity

The second alternative paradigm outlining the influence Euromodernism exerted on its peripheral counterparts accounts more comprehensively for the middle road between adulation and animosity that Walcott's early work charted. This paradigm posits the existence of multiple modernisms, or polymodernities, originating in different cultures. The paradigm's central premise is that various cultures have been able 'reshape modernity and modernism in assimilating them to their regional or local circumstances'.¹ One can trace the intellectual history of this line of thinking back to Michael North, whose monograph *The Dialect of Modernism* (1994) broke new ground by considering the complex interrelationship between the Harlem Renaissance and Euromodernist writing. North's innovative argument was that authors like Stein and Eliot ventriloquised Black voices to co-opt the 'insurrectionary opposition' such voices posed to the 'known and familiar in language'.² Although North readily acknowledged that there were many differences between the two groups, his work was pioneering because it drew out nuances of similarity and divergence between authors who had generally been considered contemporaneous, but disparate. Though he stopped short of asserting polymodernity, North widened the scope of modernist studies beyond the fairly narrow pool of white American and European writers to which it had largely been confined. At the time, as Houston A. Baker Jr. suggests, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance had not been considered "modern" in 'the opinion of any number of commentators'.³ Following North's contribution, a series of similarly innovative articles were then published that further expanded the borders of the field. After the establishment of the Modernist Studies Association (1999), many of these were collated and reprinted in landmark collections, from Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby's *Modernism and Empire*

¹ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 470.

² Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.i.

³ Houston A. Baker Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. xiv.

(2000), which explored the relationship between modernism and British coloniality, to Jani Scadura and Michael Thurston's *Modernism, Inc.* (2000), which destabilised the field's temporal boundaries by considering the haunting influence of modernism on postmodern discourse.

However, the true sea-change came half a decade later when Laura Doyle and Laura Winkel published *Geomodernisms* (2005), an edited collection on race, modernism, and modernity. Responding to Homi Bhabha's call to understand modernism as the 'intersection of multiple and nonsynchronous temporalities', the core contention of the collection was that modernism was neither monolithic nor Eurocentric: as far back as the seventeenth century, all over the world, a plurality of modernisms had 'formed against and through each other'.⁴ By stretching the field's borders in this way, Doyle and Winkel sought to occasion a fundamental rethink of its 'periodization, genealogies, affiliations, and forms'.⁵ Their explicit aim was to dismantle the binarising 'margin and centre assumptions' of the other paradigms by positing the existence of an alternate geomodernist 'web' shaped by 'the circuitry of race, ethnicity, nativism, nationalism, and imperialism'.⁶ The following year, having accepted *Geomodernism's* central tenets, Susan Stanford Friedman went on to interrogate polymodernity's mechanisms further, arguing that when modernities interrelate, they do so in a 'mutually constitutive' fashion: locational modernisms are not discrete entities separated from each other by fixed geopolitical and cultural borders. Rather, their frontiers are 'porous and permeable', enabling the sort of creolising intercultural intermixing outlined by Édouard Glissant.⁷ Glissant's model of culture is grounded in the idea that there is an 'irrepressible fluidity' to 'cultural identities', manifested through 'transculturation' along a creole continuum, which serves to undermine 'essentialist and separatist discourse of race, nation, history, and culture'.⁸ Friedman's conceptualisation proved highly

⁴ Laura Doyle and Laura Winkel (eds.), 'Introduction' in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 1-16 (pp. 1-3).

⁵ Doyle and Winkel, p. 3.

⁶ Doyle and Winkel, p. 6.

⁷ Friedman, pp. 426-8.

⁸ Omaar Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry: Literary Form and Social Critique in Walcott, Muldoon, de Kok, and Nagra* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 24.

influential, and has since provided a general template for study in the field. In the last sixteen years, a wide array of monographs and collections have been published on polymodernity, arguably the most influential of which have been *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012) and Peter Kalliney's *Modernism in a Global Context* (2015).

In Caribbean literary studies, the polymodernist paradigm is most commonly associated with the work of Charles W. Pollard. Writing a decade after Simon Gikandi, but largely in response to his work, Pollard challenged the notion of "writing back" upon which Gikandi's formulation relied. In *New World Modernisms* (2004), he conducted an in-depth analysis of Eliot's influence on Walcott and Brathwaite in an attempt to demonstrate the complexity of the wider relationship between anglophone Caribbean writing and its Euromodernist antecedents. In his view, Walcott and Brathwaite are neither derivative of Eliot nor wholly antagonistic: they are 'neither exclusively literary orphans unrelated to Eliot [...] nor exclusively rebel sons rejecting his and its authority'.⁹ The relationship is akin to that of 'second cousins', who share a 'common family resemblance'.¹⁰ Pollard argues that the West Indian writers who came of age in the middle of the twentieth century 'productively adapted' elements of those Euromodernist strategies and ideals in which they saw value to form their own 'discrepant cosmopolitan modernisms'.¹¹

Critics have identified several problems with Pollard's monograph, most of which are methodological. His study was, for example, limited to texts written in the latter half of the twentieth century. This meant that, though he analysed Walcott's oeuvre at length – basing half of his argument on it – he did not engage with any text of Walcott's written prior to *Crusoe's Journal* (1969). As such, the early work was overlooked in its entirety. This resulted in several notable omissions. For instance, an impressive breakdown of the relationship between Eliot's unfinished verse drama *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932) and Brathwaite's use of jazz rhythms was compelling, but incomplete. It would likely have benefitted from a comparative study of

⁹ Pollard, p. 22.

¹⁰ Pollard, p. 22.

¹¹ Pollard, p. 17.

Walcott's jazz-inspired poem 'Sambo Agonistes' (1951), which was written directly in response to Eliot's work.¹² Critics have also alleged that, in mapping his reading of Walcott and Brathwaite's work onto Eliot so closely, Pollard never quite managed to dispel the 'sense of European primacy' his framework purported to dismantle.¹³ Perhaps the most important issue with his methodology, however, was that it relied on the idea that Eliot was the 'representative figure of modernism'.¹⁴ This chapter challenges that notion. To do so, it outlines the complex nature of Walcott's early relationship to poetry and drama produced by Irish modernists, centring on his imitations of J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats.¹⁵

Over the last few decades, scholars have charted the complex ways in which Ireland's difficult relationship with the British Empire manifested in its literature. In his influential monograph *Inventing Ireland* (1995), for example, Declan Kiberd argued that writing by Synge and Yeats vacillated between defining itself as "postcolonial" and "European" since 'the Irish experience [was] at once post-colonial and post-imperial'.¹⁶ Because of the 'rhetorical equivalence granted to African and Irish subjects in British imperial discourse', and the transatlantic mechanisms of indentured servitude to which Irish peasants were often subjected, some critics have even suggested that Paul Gilroy's conceptualisation of an 'Atlantic world system' might apply 'equally to the Irish' as to Black populations.¹⁷ Ireland's being simultaneously postcolonial and European meant Walcott's engagement with Irish material differed consciously and considerably from his engagement with British and American work. To that end, he told Hirsch that he had always felt 'some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets' because 'they were also

¹² Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo* did not look at texts written prior to the 1950s, meaning he also overlooked Walcott's first three collections.

¹³ Gunning, p. 925.

¹⁴ Pollard, p. 22.

¹⁵ Throughout his apprenticeship, Walcott was also heavily influenced by James Joyce. This chapter centres on his engagement with Yeats and Synge, in particular, because it is focused on poetic and dramatic influences, rather than novelistic ones, and because several excellent comparative studies have been produced on Walcott's relationship with Joyce, most notably Aaron C. Eastley's excellent 'Walcott, Joyce, and Planetary Modernisms' (2018).

¹⁶ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 97.

¹⁷ Ian Baucom, 'Found drowned: The Irish Atlantic', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 22 (2000), 103-38 (p. 112).

colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean'.¹⁸ Saint Lucia and Ireland were both subjected to centuries of British racial discrimination and linguistic oppression. For this reason, Walcott dubbed the Irish 'the niggers of Britain'.¹⁹ Having grown up as a Methodist in a predominantly Catholic country to Britain's west, he felt he could also sympathise with 'the most rebellious aspect of Irish literature, priest-hating and such'.²⁰ In 'Leaving School', he outlined how he understood his early lived experiences in terms of Irish literary imitation. Because his secondary school had been run by Irish Jesuit priests, he likened his schooldays to those of Stephen Dedalus. Like Dedalus, he was 'a knot of paradoxes: hating the Church and loving her rituals, learning to hate England as [he] worshipped her language [...] a Methodist-lecher, a near-Catholic-ascetic, loving the island, and wishing [he] could get the hell out of it'.²¹ In *Epitaph*, Walcott's poetic persona frequently likened himself to Dedalus in precisely this way, while generally distancing himself from Eliot and his personae.

Although Walcott framed Ireland's situation as postcolonial, he was also wary of drawing excessive parallels of this sort, particularly throughout his later work. As Michael Malouf has shown, his 'dialectical method' involved 'systematic attachment' to and 'disavowal' of the country.²² Late in *Omeros*, for example, Walcott's narrator terms Joyce his 'Master', before going on to say that he 'blest' himself in Joyce's voice. Since 'blest' carries 'the double meaning of blessed and wounded', the latter reliant upon the French verb "blesser" (to injure), the sense is that his poetic tutelage under an Irish literary master was both a blessing and a curse. In this case, as Genevieve Abravanel points out, the 'polyglot pun is itself a Joycean trope', meaning Walcott's persona 'seems to borrow Joyce's "voice" in his very evocation of it'.²³ Walcott

¹⁸ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 59.

¹⁹ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 59.

²⁰ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 59.

²¹ Walcott, 'Leaving School', p. 13.

²² Michael Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 125.

²³ Genevieve Abravanel, 'Walcott, Woolf, and Joyce: The Risks of Postcolonial Modernism' in *Modernism, Postcolonialism, and Globalism: Anglophone Literature, 1950 to the Present*, ed. by Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 181-97 (p. 192).

therefore presents the relationship to his Irish forebear, whose work he also imitated and with whose condition he identified, as ambivalent. The point conveyed through the meta-allusion is that, because he was imitating an author who was at once postcolonial and European, his imitation of Joyce blessed and harmed him simultaneously.

In the 1940s and '50s, Walcott did not yet frame imitations of Ireland in terms of self-harm. However, he was still cautious about drawing excessive inspiration from the country. In the fourth canto of *Epitaph*, for instance, when the speaker is unsure whether he should continue trying to learn how to write poetry, he converses with a figure called "Professor Eunuch", largely modelled on James Joyce. The speaker deems Eunuch his 'Bloom' and 'Daedalus', before dubbing him a 'blind bat' (IV.95-109), referencing the fact that Joyce's eyesight diminished considerably as he grew older.²⁴ After a short time, he tires of the professor's rhetoric and his attention shifts towards the man's beautiful daughter. Since Joyce's daughter was named "Lucia" after Saint Lucia, the patron saint of the blind, the speaker's attention refocuses on the Caribbean figured through punning as a beautiful woman (IV.108-112). It 'drifts' away from a well-thumbed volume of *Ulysses* (1922) or *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), 'cracked in the middle' from extensive use, back to his own island. It is because the island inspires him in a way that Joyce's prose cannot that he resolves to keep writing. On the one hand, Walcott mocked Joyce by rendering him blind, impotent, and anodyne. On the other, the version of Saint Lucia he presented was figured through Joycean paronomasia. This episode demonstrates in microcosm what Malouf terms the 'problem of comparing modernisms that are seen as "heterogenous" insofar as they exist on the peripheries' of Euromodernism.²⁵ Because Walcott felt Joyce's work was all about 'being a colonial', he argued it had the 'same theme' as West Indian work.²⁶ To

²⁴ The phrase, 'blind bat', is reprised from Pound's description of Homer in *The Cantos*: 'poor old Homer blind, / blind as a bat' (VII.3-4). The defeatist Professor Eunuch was also partly inspired by the counsel 'give up verse, my boy, / There's nothing in it' (IX.18-19) from the Mr. Nixon section of Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920).

²⁵ Michael Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation: Irish and Caribbean Modernisms in Derek Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin*', *Comparative American Studies*, 8 (2010), 140-54.

²⁶ David Dabydeen, 'A Continual Sense of Isness: An Interview with Derek Walcott', *Agenda*, 39 (2002), 154-63 (p. 156).

share the same theme, however, did not mean that the two were equivalent. Ireland was simultaneously postcolonial and European, meaning many parallels could be drawn, but equivalence could not.

The first half of this chapter centres on the relationship between Walcott's early play *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954) and the 'obvious and acknowledged' Irish model upon which it was based, Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904).²⁷ Following an initial sketch of the major plot points of the two plays, it commences by charting their similarities. The works resemble one another in that they share a common set of themes. Both are concerned, principally, with questions related to the value of commemoration among isolated fishing communities, the role bravado plays among such men, and the relevance of institutional Catholicism on small, colonised islands. *Riders to the Sea* was famously written in an Irish vernacular and Walcott employed an analogous, indigenised register for his characters' speech in *The Sea at Dauphin*. Although, as Breiner points out, 'relatively straightforward mimetic representation of local speech' became 'the rule' across many of his later plays, his use of a local idiom in *Dauphin* represented a radical point of departure from previous work.²⁸ Earlier dramatic offerings had all been written in higher registers and acrolects, ranging from the Doric (*Flight and Sanctuary*, 1946), through the Shakespearean (*Henri Christophe*, 1949), to the Dantean (*Paolo and Francesca*, 1950).²⁹ This decision to experiment with the vernacular was, self-avowedly, inspired by Synge. Walcott had only attempted writing in dialect on one occasion prior to his imitation of Synge's play and the purpose was comic. Although the early lyric 'Kingston – Nocturne' (1951) was largely written in Standard English, the speaker briefly ventriloquised Jamaican nation language when relating the capital at night to imagery from *The Dubliners* (1914), *Ulysses*, and Yeats's 'The Second Coming' (1920):

²⁷ Morris, p. 187.

²⁸ Laurence Breiner, 'Creole Language in the Poetry of Derek Walcott', *Callaloo*, 28 (2005), 29-41 (p. 34).

²⁹ In *Henri Christophe*, the murderers sent to kill Dessalines notably speak in Anglophone Creole, rather than SE verse, approximating the Elizabethan convention of attributing prose to lowly characters and verse to nobles. The rationale behind Walcott's indigenisation of this convention was that Saint Lucians generally considered Kwéyòl a 'marker of low social and educational evolution whose value [was] limited to [...] jokes, proverbs and curses' (Carrington, p. 5).

By lanternlight the pocomania of the Second Coming when
 De Lawd say Him going tyake us by the hand, or in antiphony
 A calypso wafts from the pubs, and Ulysses again
 Postpones Penelope. (17-20)

The postcolonial themes of *The Sea at Dauphin* paralleled those of *Riders to the Sea*, but the two plays adopted diametrically opposing positions in relation to those themes. Although Walcott and Synge's mutual experiments with vernacular speech revealed their shared desire to champion modes of utterance denigrated by colonial hierarchies of language, the specificities of those experiments differed. After outlining some of the most common explanations critics have provided for these points of divergence, my analysis expands upon a theory outlined by Malouf which productively adapts Natalie Melas's concept of postcolonial 'dissimulation'. According to Malouf, peripheral cultural agents imitating work from alternate peripheries often *dissimilate* cross-cultural antecedents, meaning when they draw parallels which highlight commonalities these simultaneously accentuate differences. Walcott was not unique in dissimulating Synge, but the particular approach he took differed from the approaches taken by his Caribbean contemporaries. For this reason, the final part of the section on Synge compares *The Sea at Dauphin* to a similar work by Mustapha Matura. The comparison reveals the necessity of understanding the specificities of Walcott's approach.

Walcott's imitation of Irish work was not limited to Synge, however, since the country's literature also proved highly influential for his poetry. When learning his craft, he also frequently drew on work by Yeats. The second half of this chapter accordingly employs one such imitation as a case study. It compares and contrasts a lesser-studied elegy from *25 Poems* with its Yeatsian model. Walcott's 'Both Sides of the Question' (1948) commemorated two Saint Lucian airmen who were killed while on active duty in World War II. Walcott drew heavily on Yeats's 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' (1919) to compose it. In general, when imitating poetry from the Anglo-European canon, Walcott adopted 'the same rhyme scheme or structure' of his model,

but substituted in his own rhymes in an effort 'to learn the shapes of poetry'.³⁰ When it came to imitating Yeats, however, he typically avoided imitation of this sort, reprising his model's subject matter and concerns instead, while eschewing its form and structure. Hence, although Walcott 'had read Yeats keenly as a schoolboy', as Stewart Brown notes, 'Yeats serves more as a model of purpose [in his early work] than of poetic technique'.³¹ Prior to Yeats's disillusionment with orthodox nationalism, he argued that because 'all literature in every country is derived from models', which are foreign 'as often as not', it is the 'presence of personal elements alone' which can imbue writing with 'nationality'.³² Walcott arrived at an alternate solution: rather than suffusing the Irish models he imitated with personal elements, he accentuated the Caribbean nature of his work through a process of simultaneous recognition and misrecognition. As with Synge, he dissimilated Yeats. In Melas's conceptualisation, dissimulation 'is not an experience of pure difference, but of boundedness'.³³ Intercultural difference 'separates and alienates' agents from different spheres but this separation simultaneously draws attention to the amorphous topography of cultural boundaries and thereby serves to 'implicate individuals into a form of commonality'.³⁴ Walcott's imitative poem relied on a series of implicit parallels between Saint Lucia in WWII and Ireland in WWI and those similarities generated commonality, but in so doing, they simultaneously underscored difference. The concerns of the poem were also notably in keeping with the later imitation of Synge, since both texts foregrounded questions related to memorialisation, sacrifice, and machismo. Writing thirty years after Yeats, from an alternate periphery riven by racialised politics, Walcott suggested that dying on behalf of a colonial empire was futile, not because Saint Lucians would be no better or worse off if Germany prevailed, which had been Yeats's position, but because the eruption of another war suggested humanity

³⁰ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 45.

³¹ Brown, 'The Apprentice', p. 24.

³² Quoted in Steven Matthews, 'Translations: Difference and Identity in Recent Poetry from Ireland and the West Indies' in *Irish and Postcolonial Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Colin Graham (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 109-26 (p. 109).

³³ Melas, p. 93.

³⁴ Melas, p. 94.

was trapped in an endless cycle of conflict and forgetfulness, meaning military martyrdom was ultimately pointless. However, he believed that commemorating the fallen airmen still had value because sending a reminder to the British that such men had fought and died on their behalf might help to dismantle longstanding imperial racial hierarchies.

To understand the complexity of Walcott's engagement with European art, it is necessary to recognise that he did not treat the work of every author in the same way. Walcott's configuration of Ireland as a postcolonial European state with historical elements paralleling the Caribbean meant he handled its literature and Eliot's work differently. As such, the narrative Pollard has constructed regarding Walcott's engagement with Euromodernism is an oversimplification. Unlike Eliot, some writers, like Hemingway, could be reframed as Caribbean artists, while others, like Synge and Yeats, could be figured as postcolonial. These formulations fundamentally affected the aesthetics of the poetry and drama he produced. If a polymodernist paradigm is to be employed as the basis of a new narrative for the development of anglophone Caribbean poetry, that paradigm will need to recognise and account for this complexity.

3.I. 'The Same Thing Synge Had': *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954) and *Riders to the Sea* (1904)

Riders to the Sea is a one-act tragedy set entirely in a spartanly furnished cottage on Inishmaan, one of the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. At the beginning of the play, Synge's protagonist, Maurya, is talking to her daughters, Nora and Cathleen, while they wait anxiously for the body of her son, Michael, to wash up on the shore. His recent death has taken the number of male relatives they have lost at sea to seven: Maurya's husband and father-in-law have both, separately, drowned, along with several of her sons. Only her youngest son, Bartley, remains alive, but he is reckless and, in spite of the risk, wants to sail to the mainland to raise money for the family by selling one of their horses at a fair. Fearing for his safety, Maurya initially plans to stop him by enlisting the services of the local priest, but this fails when the young clergyman

refuses to help on the grounds that 'Almighty God won't leave her destitute [...] with no son living' (p. 41).³⁵ Without his assistance, she is forced to plead with Bartley directly, but this approach also fails and he soon leaves for Galway in spite of her protests. As he is setting off, she believes she sees the ghost of Michael riding behind him on the grey mare he plans to sell, which she interprets as a sign of his impending demise. The vision ultimately proves prophetic. On his way to the port, the horse knocks Bartley into the sea, where he drowns. After his lifeless body has been returned to his family, who bless it with holy water, Maurya consoles herself with the knowledge that, following his demise, there are no longer any male relatives left to lose.

The Sea at Dauphin is also a one-act piece foregrounding the sea's deadliness but, as Walcott himself acknowledged, its plot bears little resemblance to Synge's.³⁶ Composed in 1953, the work was initially read by the University College of the West Indies' drama society, before being staged by Errol Hill's Trinidadian New Company the following year.³⁷ A hit amongst audiences, it became Walcott's first 'minor classic' and went on to win the Best West Indian Play award at Jamaica's 1956 Adult Drama Festival.³⁸ According to Kole Omotoso, *Dauphin* was such a triumph that it 'redeemed' an otherwise lacklustre contemporary Caribbean theatre scene.³⁹ In spite of this acclaim, however, the play is now seen largely as a 'marginal early piece', eliciting only a 'passing interest' among critics more focused on the 'major plays'.⁴⁰ Because it is widely written off as 'juvenilia', as Stephanie Pocock Boeninger suggests, it is now 'little read and less studied'.⁴¹

³⁵ J. M. Synge, 'Riders to the Sea' in *The Shadow Of the Glen and Riders To the Sea* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1905), pp. 39-63.

³⁶ Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', p. 24.

³⁷ Leif Schenstead-Harris, 'Mourning Language with J. M. Synge and Derek Walcott' in *Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Alison Donnell, Maria McGarrity and Evelyn O'Callaghan (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2015), pp. 203-20 (p. 205).

³⁸ Schenstead-Harris, p. 206.

³⁹ Kole Omotoso, *The Theatrical into Theatre: A Study of the Drama and Theatre of the English-Speaking Caribbean* (London: New Beacon, 1982), p. 62.

⁴⁰ Garuba, p. 72.

⁴¹ Boeninger, p. 86

The work centres on two Saint Lucian fishermen who are due to set sail on a dangerously windy day. The first, Afa, is a sardonic forty-year-old bachelor, while the second, Augustin, is an optimistic youth. Augustin implores Afa to let him bring his East Indian godfather, Hounakin, out fishing with them. Though Afa had provisionally agreed to let Hounakin join their venture the previous night when he was drunk, he changes his mind after sobering up. He fears the elderly landsman will attempt to throw himself overboard on account of his wife's recent death. Afa prevails in his dispute with Augustin and, when the two men eventually set sail, they leave the old man onshore among several unnamed women of the island who sing a lament for various drowned fishermen. While they are at sea, however, Hounakin commits suicide by jumping from high rocks into the water. A young French priest attempts to console the men upon their return, but his efforts do little more than enrage Afa, who deems the church an ineffectual vestige of colonial power unable to improve the lives of the local poor: 'look at Dauphin! *Gadez lui!* Look at it! You see? Poverty, dirty woman, dirty children, where all the prayers?' (p. 23). Later on, Jules, the young boy who finds Hounakin's body, comes to Afa and Augustin in search of work. Although they are aware of the risks inherent to their profession, they nonetheless grant his request for initiation into their ranks. The end of the play sees Afa folding nets with another fisherman, called Gacia, as they discuss friends who have died at sea. In spite of their warnings, and the fact his own father was one such man, Jules feels excited to be in their midst.

At first glance, there appear to be many similarities between the two works. Thematically, as Boeninger notes, Walcott 'maintains the central concerns' of Synge's play.⁴² *Riders to the Sea* and *The Sea at Dauphin* both explore the 'poverty and hardship' of life on an isolated island, dramatise points of tension between 'outside influence' and 'local culture', question the relevance of institutional Catholicism in a colonial setting, and frame death at sea as a phenomenon distinct from death on land.⁴³ Walcott's play's principal focus on mourning and memory also resembles

⁴² Boeninger, p. 88.

⁴³ Boeninger, p. 88.

Synge's: not only do characters in both works repeatedly recite the names of those who have drowned, at the climax of each, a drowned body also emerges as the 'central image'.⁴⁴

Hounakin's death resembles Bartley's because both men die by falling from cliffs into the sea.

Taken together, these themes and concerns evoke a shared mood. On the one hand, each play is characterised by a pervasive sense of 'despair', while, on the other, each is also infused with 'a kind of nobility' arising from humanity's perseverance in the face of despondency.⁴⁵

In addition to sharing its principal concerns, *The Sea at Dauphin* also drew on *Riders to the Sea*'s use of the vernacular. One of Synge's aims when composing his play was to dismantle the longstanding connection in English theatre between Irish speech patterns and comedy. As C. L. Innes suggests, the lyricism he employed demonstrated that a 'subaltern group' could, instead, be 'articulate and eloquent'.⁴⁶ Walcott spoke of his indebtedness to this feature of Synge's work in various interviews. He told Robert Hamner, for example, that 'as a young writer coming out of the Caribbean', he felt he had 'the same thing Synge had: a tonally new language, a tonally new set of rhythms, a tonally new people in a sense'.⁴⁷ This was why, as he later revealed to Edward Hirsch, he felt inspired by what Synge had 'attempted to do with the language of the Irish'.⁴⁸ With *Riders to the Sea*, his dramatic forebear had 'taken a fishing port kind of language' and succeeded in getting 'beauty out of it [...] something lyrical'.⁴⁹ It was primarily because the Irishman's experiments incorporating elements of local speech into his work were so 'inspiring' that his play became the 'obvious model' for *The Sea at Dauphin*.⁵⁰

On closer inspection, however, several important differences emerge between Walcott's text and the model on which it was based. After asserting that his play bore little 'resemblance' to

⁴⁴ Boeninger, p. 85.

⁴⁵ Ingy Aboelazm, 'John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea*: a Caribbean Revision', *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 1 (2011), 294-99 (p. 296).

⁴⁶ C. L. Innes, 'Postcolonial Synge' in *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Synge*, ed. by P. J. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 117-31 (p. 129).

⁴⁷ Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', p. 24.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

⁴⁹ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

⁵⁰ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

Synge's 'in terms of plot', Walcott went on to explain that he nonetheless 'learned a great deal from Synge, and a lot from Hemingway [and] Yeats'.⁵¹ As Malouf proposes, Walcott's immediate compulsion to credit Hemingway likely arose from the obvious divergence, in terms of setting and message, between his play and Synge's when presenting 'masculine concerns'.⁵² Regarding setting, *The Sea at Dauphin* shifts the focus of the action away from the domestic space of a grieving mother and her daughters, towards the homosocial world of the fishermen on the beach. In terms of message, Bartley's unwillingness to listen to his mother's words of caution and his resultant death serve as a warning against precisely the sort of self-sacrificing masculinity Afa valorises. Though Afa and Maurya both try and fail to prevent others from risking their lives at sea, their motivations are the 'direct antithesis' of one another.⁵³ Walcott's protagonist refuses to bring Hounakin with him because he fears the old farmer is courting death, but nonetheless leaves him alone onshore. He abandons Hounakin so that he can earn his livelihood from the sea by fishing, which he considers heroic. By contrast, Maurya tries to prevent her son from sailing precisely because, like Afa, he is planning to derive an economic benefit from the sea, the intention of his voyage being to raise money for the family. Ultimately, as Malouf points out, the version of masculinity Afa embodies has more in common with Santiago's foolhardy heroics in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) – a work which won its author the Nobel Prize for Literature the year *The Sea at Dauphin* was first performed – than with anything in Synge, whose plays 'often critically undermined' equivalent feats of masculine bravado.⁵⁴

Beyond their divergent stances on masculinity, the works also differed radically in their presentation of Catholicism. In *The Sea at Dauphin*, the French priest is presented as an incongruous remnant of colonialism, whose attempts to support the men come across as tone deaf, since they are totally divorced from reality. Early on, Afa equates Catholicism with

⁵¹ Hamner, 'Conversation with Derek Walcott', p. 24.

⁵² Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 147.

⁵³ Boeninger, p. 90.

⁵⁴ Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 147.

imperialism, claiming 'God is a white man', whose 'blue eye' is the sky, and whose 'spit' on Dauphin's people 'is the sea' (p. 11). When the priest later attempts to console him in the wake of Hounakin's death, he turns his ire against the clergy specifically, arguing that 'Where they have priest is poverty', evidenced by his belief that 'Dirt and prayers is Dauphin life' (p. 23). As Harry Garuba avers, Afa's 'fulmination against the priest' configures the church as a neo-colonial tool by which colonised people are kept in a state of 'permanent subservience'.⁵⁵ When composing this section of the play, Walcott particularly 'had in mind the church in Gros Islet in which the statue of Mary was surrounded with gold', which stood in poignant contrast to 'the surrounding neighbourhood of the church' comprising 'shacks of poor fishermen'.⁵⁶ His protagonist's attacks on the hypocrisy of institutional religion and its ties to colonialism serve as a visceral, practical counterpoint to the rhetoric offered by the priest, whose counsel is limited to inane, impracticable exegesis. In his attempt to pacify Afa, the reverend can do little more than expound the biblical associations of piscatory life: fishing 'is a sacred profession, Afa, the first saints followed your profession, Saint Pierre, Saint Jean. They were hard-headed men too' (p. 24).⁵⁷ The young priest of *Riders to the Sea* is similarly ineffective and Maurya's initial belief that he 'will stop [Bartley] surely' (p. 43) is soon proven false. However, when Synge's protagonist learns that the clergyman will not agree to help – because he believes God too merciful to let Bartley die – she deems his abstention naïve, rather than pernicious, claiming 'It's little the like of him knows of the sea' (p. 56). Unlike Afa, her criticism of an ineffective priest does not originate in, or lead to, apostacy, and she does not equate Catholicism with colonialism. It is because her 'fundamental faith' is never shaken that, at the very end of the play, she remains able to derive

⁵⁵ Garuba, p. 71.

⁵⁶ King, *Derek Walcott*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ Walcott's treatment of the Catholic Church was considered so harsh, in fact, that reading *The Sea at Dauphin* was proscribed by the institution: Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott – Politics and Poetics* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000), p. 181.

comfort from the knowledge that Michael has received 'a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God' (p. 63).⁵⁸

This closing image foregrounds questions of mourning and memory, both of which are central to any appreciation of Synge's work. *The Sea at Dauphin* shares these core themes, but in Walcott's work, 'memory' and the 'rituals that attend it' come across far more 'ambivalently' than they do in the anterior text.⁵⁹ *Riders to the Sea* presents the loss of collective memory as a 'tragic sign of a waning culture', whereas *The Sea at Dauphin* counterbalances the human yearning to remember and grieve against the productive potential of collective forgetfulness.⁶⁰ Halfway through Synge's play, Maurya outlines the fates of those she has lost to the sea in an act of recitative commemoration: 'There were Stephen and Shawn were lost in the great wind [...] There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night [...] There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over' (p. 57). The constant need to commemorate her sons leads her to conclude that the harsh conditions of life prevailing on provincial islands disrupt the cyclical nature of existence found elsewhere: 'In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old' (p. 49). Because this cycle is broken, life on the island cannot continue in the way it has for much longer. As Synge phrased it in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), across much of Ireland, 'the springtime of the local life [had] been forgotten, and the harvest [was] a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks'.⁶¹ The earlier play similarly lamented the 'impending doom of the culture' on Inishmaan.⁶²

In *The Sea at Dauphin*, Afa also recites the names of those who have drowned, but the cycle of nature is not broken. Early on, he produces a Syngean litany of the dead – 'Since Bolo

⁵⁸ Aboelazm, p. 296.

⁵⁹ Boeninger, p. 88.

⁶⁰ Boeninger, p. 85.

⁶¹ J. M. Synge, *The Playboy Of the Western World. A Comedy In Three Acts* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1907), p. vii.

⁶² Boeninger, p. 86.

drown. Everybody say Boileau would never drown. And Habal, Habal drowning there last year. And in September is not Annelles, Gacia brother they find two mile behind Dennerly [...] his body swell [...] drown like what, like Raphael, and Boileau' (p. 11) – but this is later counterbalanced by his willingness to adopt Jules as an apprentice. Though he is 'an intractable curmudgeon', who claims to have 'no compassion to grow food for children' (p. 7), he nonetheless begins the 'initiation of the next generation' and, in so doing, kickstarts 'another cycle' of island life.⁶³ Afa's memorialising recitations honour the legacy of his friends but, more generally, the play warns against excessive remembrance. Although Afa frequently makes reference to the many young Saint Lucian fishermen who have died while plying their trade, the only death which features in the play itself is that of Hounakin, who kills himself because he is consumed by grief. His death arises from the overwhelming hold his wife's enduring memory has on him. Whereas Bartley paid the price for insufficiently heeding a lesson associated with the deaths of his relatives, Hounakin died for precisely the opposite reason: he was overly focused on his relative's death. Ultimately, the two plays differ because, where *Riders to the Sea* is 'anxious' about the 'loss of memory and cultural meaning' associated with a declining way of life in a rapidly modernising Ireland, *The Sea at Dauphin* argues, fundamentally, against excessive commemoration of the deceased, and in favour of the sort of creative, productive amnesia which would later come to define Walcott's thinking about New World culture and poetics.⁶⁴

In terms of language, Walcott acknowledged that he was greatly inspired by Synge's experimentation with Irish dialect and sought to replicate some of his results. As Linda O'Connor records, Synge composed dialogue for Irish peasants in 'an English that often reads like a word-for-word translation' from the contemporary spoken Gaelic vernacular.⁶⁵ He also purported to reflect the English wording his country's working class actually used, insisting in the

⁶³ Hamner, *Derek Walcott*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ Boeninger, p. 86.

⁶⁵ Laura O'Connor, *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, the British Empire, and De-Anglicization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 76.

preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* that in that play, 'as in [his] other plays', he never employed more than 'one or two words [he had] not heard among the country people of Ireland' (p. v). As Walcott explained in his interview with Hirsch, when imitating a work, proof of concept is more important than nuance of process: 'it isn't that you're adopting another man's genius; it is that he has done an experiment that has worked and will be useful to all writers afterwards'.⁶⁶ With this in mind he developed a new, fictional vernacular for his fisherman which paralleled, but did not exactly replicate, Synge's earlier experiments. When composing *The Sea at Dauphin*, he largely eschewed naturalistic dialogue, opting instead to 'translate the speech of the St. Lucian fishermen' into an 'English-inflected Creole' which could be augmented macaronically, where possible, with snippets of authentic Francophone Kwéyòl.⁶⁷ In other words, the English Creole Walcott's fishermen employed did not correspond to any real-life dialect: the grammar and syntax were transliterated from Saint Lucian Kwéyòl to imbue anglophone dialogue with a francophone tone.

In his 1967 article, 'Why is our Theatre so Tame?', Walcott defended creative license of this sort whilst also distancing his work somewhat from that of his Irish dramatic forebears. Although he acknowledged the existence of 'well-wishers' who saw a fulsome parallel between the state of contemporary Caribbean drama and the twentieth-century Irish Renaissance – arising from 'the same provinciality, the same exuberance, [and] the same richness in dialect' – he proposed these well-wishers generally forgot the realities of Irish drama.⁶⁸ Figures like 'Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, and Lady Gregory' had all considered playwriting an art, meaning their theatre was 'deliberate, planned [and] artificial'.⁶⁹ The success with which their work was met lay, not so much in the provincial exuberance of the language within which they were working, as in their creative approach to utilising that language: the richness associated with Irish dialect on stage was

⁶⁶ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

⁶⁷ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 53.

⁶⁸ Derek Walcott, 'Why is our Theatre so Tame?', in *The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose, 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (New York: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp. 102-4 (p. 102).

⁶⁹ Walcott, 'Why is our Theatre so Tame?', p. 102.

enhanced artificially, and intentionally, by canonical Irish playwrights. Synge did not use words that Irish peasants did not, but the manner in which his characters spoke was often artificial and lyrical, rather than wholly naturalistic. As he made clear in 'What the Twilight Says', Walcott felt as a young boy that the 'patois of the street' contained 'the elation of discovery'.⁷⁰ He was conscious of a 'voluble poetry' in the 'dialect-loud dusk of water buckets and fish sellers' around him.⁷¹ However, writing in dialect was never 'natural to [his] thought'. It was partly because he knew the same held true of Synge, who nonetheless experimented with elements of the vernacular, that he opted to write in an artificial, anglicised approximation of Saint Lucian Kwéyòl.⁷² His stage dialect was, however, less lyrical than that of either Synge or Lady Gregory.

Walcott transliterated the vernacular, rather than composing the work entirely in Saint Lucian Kwéyòl, because to have written in Kwéyòl would necessarily have limited his audience. When composing *The Sea at Dauphin*, he was planning to stage the work in Trinidad and Jamaica, which are both anglophone. To have written in Kwéyòl would have been the equivalent of Synge writing in Gaelic for audiences in London. This practical consideration was reflected in that when lines were delivered in Kwéyòl, characters typically went on to repeat themselves in the fictionalised English Creole dialect immediately thereafter. This solution was elegant, in a sense, because it reflected the real-life speech habits of many Saint Lucians. As the compiler of the first Kwéyòl dictionary explains, many islanders will 'greet each other in Creole and continue their conversation in English with occasional sentences or phrases in Creole'.⁷³ It was not naturalistic, however, because code switching of this sort was principally conducted by 'those better in English', meaning few fisherman would ever converse in such a way.⁷⁴ Elegance notwithstanding, the solution did not prove particularly effective on stage. As Breslin records, when the play was

⁷⁰ Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 4.

⁷¹ Walcott, 'What the Twilight Says', p. 10.

⁷² Jean Antoine, 'Derek Walcott: In Conversation with Jean Antoine', *The Poetry Ireland Review*, 34 (1992), 72-85 (p. 78).

⁷³ Carrington, p. 11.

⁷⁴ Carrington, p. 11.

first performed, some Jamaican reviewers still had problems understanding what was being said.⁷⁵ One reason for this was that for longer excerpts of Kwéyòl, like the verses sung by a chorus of Dauphin women, it was impractical to render full translations without sacrificing the rhythm and pacing of the work. In the published version of the text, Walcott circumvented this problem by providing a translation in parentheses (p. 20), but this was not possible in performance.⁷⁶

In printed versions of the play, Walcott also experimented with a technique Breiner has since termed “punning syntax”, in which sentences ‘appear to be both standard English and creole at the same time’.⁷⁷ Such a technique was self-avowedly inspired by Synge’s experiments with Irish ways of speaking and dialect, but his texts possess no direct analogue. Following its implementation in *The Sea at Dauphin*, punning syntax became a staple of Walcott’s poetic idiom. In the opening lines of “The Schooner *Flight*”, for example, the scene is set with an allusion to Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (c.1370-90). Walcott’s line, ‘In idle August, while the sea soft’ (“Schooner *Flight*”, 1), represents a modified reprise of William Langland’s ‘In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne’ (*Piers Plowman*, 1). The non-Standard syntax – ‘while the sea soft’ – involves a dropped auxiliary and suffix, rather than the implementation of a complement sans verb. In other words, the sense of the line in SE would be the dynamic, ‘while the sea is softening’, rather than the static, ‘while the sea is soft’. It thus poeticises the ‘widespread West Indian habit of turning adjectives into near-verbs’.⁷⁸ This is important because the line opens a poem whose central conceit is that it ‘folds together local history (the collision of European and African in the Caribbean, the aftermath of a racially mixed colonial society) and mythic history’.⁷⁹ In this way,

⁷⁵ Breslin, p. 86.

⁷⁶ Evidence of Walcott’s ongoing concern with this problem can be seen in the edits he later made to the play in publication. As Breslin notes, the version of the script that appeared in 1970 in *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* possessed considerably less Kwéyòl than the version earlier published in *Tamarack Review* (1960) – Breslin, p. 86.

⁷⁷ Breiner, ‘Creole Language’, p. 34.

⁷⁸ Breiner, ‘Creole Language’, p. 34.

⁷⁹ Mary C. Fuller, ‘Myths of Identity in Derek Walcott’s “The Schooner *Flight*”’, *Connotations*, 5 (1995), 322-38 (p. 323).

the line embodies the central concern of the poem. The punning which brings this fusion can be traced to Walcott's imitation of Synge's creative use of dialect, but that imitation differed substantially from its model.

These differences have engendered a debate among scholars regarding the nature of the relationship between *The Sea at Dauphin* and *Riders to the Sea*. Some critics, like Thieme, deem the differences so considerable as to render the relationship between the two works tangential, and of secondary importance.⁸⁰ The main issue with this position is that, despite their differences, the broad strokes of the works clearly resemble one another. Walcott's experimenting with vernacular speech differed from Synge's in its particularities, but the indebtedness remained fairly clear. His views regarding masculinity and Catholicism likewise differed from Synge's, but it is difficult to conclude that the Irishman was side-lined, given that the positions Walcott adopted were on precisely the same issues. Other critics, like Boeninger, have taken the differences as evidence that Walcott configured his work in opposition to European predecessors. They allege that *The Sea at Dauphin* and *Riders to the Sea* resemble each other thematically, but differ in the positions adopted regarding questions of masculinity and memorialisation, because the former 'writes back' to the latter in an attempt to challenge 'many of its assumptions about culture and memory.'⁸¹ The main issue with the "writing back" paradigm when applied to Walcott's relationship with Synge is that *Riders to the Sea* was, itself, a play depicting, and conceived in response to, the conditions of life among a marginalised, colonised community. As Sandra Sprayberry puts it, when plays like *The Sea at Dauphin* engage with Irish texts, they enter into 'dialogue with other texts that are themselves in dialogue with the colonizer'.⁸² To argue that *The Sea at Dauphin* writes back to Irish literature, one must compress this tripartite network into a

⁸⁰ Thieme, p. 53.

⁸¹ Boeninger, p. 86.

⁸² Sandra Sprayberry, 'Sea Changes: Post-Colonialism in Synge and Walcott', *South Carolina Review*, 33 (2001), 115-20 (p. 117)

binary formulation, counterfactually framing Ireland in terms emblematic of the wider European continent, to which it belongs, or the United Kingdom, to which it previously belonged.

A third and final set of critics acknowledge the centrality of the connection between two works originating in the colonial periphery, recognise that there are broad areas of overlap in which more specific differences are situated, and frame their discussion in terms of polymodernity. Aligning himself with this faction, Malouf productively draws on the concept of 'dissimilation', developed by Natalie Melas, to explore the 'inter-peripheral' nature of the plays' relationship to one another, centring on questions of masculinity.⁸³ According to this formulation, 'cross-cultural readings within the colonial peripheries' are best understood as a process of simultaneous 'recognition and misrecognition'.⁸⁴ Despite Walcott's 'apparent identification' with Synge in the play, Malouf argues the relationship between the two is actually *dissimilative*, meaning that it draws upon similarities to create difference.⁸⁵ His position neatly accords with Reed Way Dasenbrock's proposal that, across Walcott's later dramatic work, 'imitation coexists with contestation' in a 'double-voiced relation'.⁸⁶ It also notably dovetails with Timothy Hofmeister's reading of 'As John to Patmos' in terms of a 'complicated process' of analogy, through which 'the poet no sooner introduces similarities between the Aegean and Antillean islands than he breaks them down'.⁸⁷ In this conceptualisation, the two plays' overlapping concerns demonstrate the extent to which topics can resonate throughout nations on the colonial periphery. Similarities between Walcott's work and Synge's are not seen as having arisen from derivation and differences are not seen in terms of antagonism. Because the two texts share concerns, but hail from divergent, peripheral spheres, half a century apart, the positions they adopt in relation to their shared concerns necessarily differ. Walcott's work is said

⁸³ Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 140.

⁸⁴ Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 140.

⁸⁵ Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 152.

⁸⁶ Reed Way Dasenbrock, 'Imitation versus Contestation: Walcott's Postcolonial Shakespeare', *Callaloo*, 28 (2005), 104-113 (p. 105).

⁸⁷ Timothy Hofmeister, 'Classical Analogy as Discursive Act: A Reading of Derek Walcott's "As John to Patmos"', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (1997), 275-92 (p. 276).

to dissimilate Synge's because these differences are conveyed through a foregrounding of interperipheral similarities.

This polymodernist formulation most comprehensively accounts for the nuances of the texts' interrelationship. However, it has not yet been pursued to the fullest extent. The same innovative and compelling argument Malouf makes regarding masculinity can be applied to other thematic concerns, like memorialisation, and linguistic features, such as the use of Creole. Regarding the former, through this paradigm, the note of caution Walcott's play sounds against excessive memorialisation can, for example, be traced to the particularities of the region's history. Difficulties related to collective remembrance in the Caribbean parallel those in Ireland, to a degree, but the two situations are not equivalent. As Kobena Mercer suggests, Black diasporic populations in the West Indies are not faced with 'a history that has been wiped out of collective memory', as in Ireland.⁸⁸ They are, rather, 'haunted by *too much memory*', being perennially 'ghosted by the floating bodies of lost and unnamed ancestors buried beneath the sea'.⁸⁹ Such a history can neither be known nor comprehended fully. It is by foregrounding questions of memorialisation and commemoration, in keeping with Synge, that *The Sea at Dauphin* is able to highlight, through dissimulation, the distinctiveness of fraught collective memory among those West Indian populations descended from slaves. The questions the texts raise in relation to the value of memorialisation stem from a shared set of concerns, rooted in parallel circumstances, but the contrasting positions they adopt regarding those concerns originate in socio-historical divergences rather than cross-cultural parallels.

Regarding Walcott's use of the vernacular, Malouf claims that, rather than 'grounding the play in locality', this 'aestheticized form of language' works to 'unmoor the play from its connection to national space'.⁹⁰ The difficulty in making this argument is that the use of French Kwéyòl seems, more obviously, to anchor the play to Saint Lucia specifically. The title, *The Sea at*

⁸⁸ Quoted in Baucom, p. 113.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Baucom, p. 113.

⁹⁰ Malouf, 'Dissimulation and Federation', p. 142.

Dauphin, works similarly, tying the work, not only to the island, but to a particular quarter thereof. In truth, Walcott's use of the vernacular is one of several ways in which he imbues a work, which is 'neither ahistorical nor essentialized', with a regional quality.⁹¹ As Neumann suggests, using the vernacular is always dissimilative in this sense, because it forges 'new, frequently unpredictable connections between different places, histories, and peoples' in the manner Malouf suggests, but it also accentuates 'localised difference'.⁹² In Walcott's work, the use of Creole can be seen to reflect 'worldly entanglements' and 'Caribbean specificity' simultaneously, without contradiction.⁹³ He and Synge's respective experiments with vernacular speech, simultaneously tempered and augmented by theatrical artifice, indicate a common desire to reinscribe modes of utterance relegated to the base of colonial hierarchies of language. However, their specific approaches to that reinscription differ. The two comparable, but divergent, strategies they deploy when dramatising the vernacular indicate a shared, culturally unmoored, concern, but in so doing, they also reveal key differences, signifying the uniqueness of the challenges faced by playwrights writing about disparate, peripheral, polyglossic communities.

Of the three broad paradigms describing intercultural influence hitherto described, Walcott's early dissimulation of Synge accords most comprehensively with the paradigm predicated on polymodernity. However, because the conceptual divisors employed by adherents of that paradigm are overwhelmingly geographical, the paradigm both homogenises and equivalises Walcott and his Caribbean contemporaries' respective relationships with Irish drama. On that front, Walcott's imitation of Synge was not the only such work produced by a prominent playwright from the anglophone Caribbean. In 1984, the Trinidadian dramatist Mustapha Matura staged an adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World*, entitled *Playboy of the*

⁹¹ Garuba, p. 72.

⁹² Birgit Neumann, "Each phrase go be soaked in salt" – vernacular worlds in Derek Walcott's poetry', *Textual Practice*, 34 (2020), 721-42 (p. 723).

⁹³ Neumann, p. 723.

West Indies, at the Oxford Playhouse. Although *The Sea at Dauphin* and *Playboy of the West Indies* were both imitations of Synge, and though both were produced by West Indian playwrights of the same generation, the latter differed markedly from the former in a number of ways. The aesthetic gulf between these works exemplifies the trouble in attempting to group together writing from authors remote in both style and location – Matura left Trinidad, which is several hundred miles away from Saint Lucia, to live in London when he was twenty-one – under the umbrella of a singular “Caribbean Modernism”.

First and foremost, Matura's work bears a much closer resemblance to Synge's than does Walcott's. As Innes points out, Matura's imitation is ‘almost a line-by-line translation’ of *The Playboy of the Western World* into Trinidadian patois.⁹⁴ Set in 1950, the plot is largely the same, featuring a blustering, self-proclaimed parricide's lionisation by the patrons of a rum shop in the small town of Mayaro, southeast Trinidad, in place of Synge's shebeen in County Mayo. In a 1993 interview, Matura discussed his motivation in producing the work and, in his formulation, Synge's Ireland served chiefly as a metaphorical vehicle through which parallels in Trinidadian culture could be explored: ‘I'm constantly trying to understand the character of Trinidad and the Trinidadians. They are enormously resilient: they will be down, but they will always tell you a joke or offer a drink. That mirrors the Irish’.⁹⁵ As such, *The Playboy of the Western World* functions less as a ‘formative influence’ and more as an ‘analogy’.⁹⁶ In representative fashion, one contemporary theatre reviewer deemed such parallels ‘legitimate’, asserting that in his attempt to set Synge ‘to the pulse of the West Indies’, Matura had successfully managed to ‘uproot a classic and replant it to another place and time’.⁹⁷ Motivated by interperipheral parallels, the relationship between Matura's work and Synge's could not be understood as tangential, nor could it be configured in terms of ‘writing back’. Like Walcott, Matura dissimilates Synge, but the

⁹⁴ Innes, p. 128.

⁹⁵ William Harris, ‘Interview with Mustapha Matura’, *New York Times* (9 May 1993), p. 21.

⁹⁶ Innes, p. 127.

⁹⁷ David Richards, “‘Playboy,’ Transported: A Clever Caribbean Twist on the Synge Classic’, *The Washington Post* (9 December 1988), C1-2.

mechanisms by which their respective dissimilative acts take place are distinct from one another. To group Walcott's approach to dissimilating Synge and Matura's together under a singular banner is to downplay their considerable differences. Such grouping ultimately elides and misrepresents their aesthetics.

Matura's dissimulation of Synge is twofold. It relies on the inclusion of a carnivalesque aesthetic, wholly absent from *The Playboy of the Western World*, working in tandem with ironic metacommentary, similarly unattested in Synge. Regarding the former, although Trinidad's Carnival does not feature directly in the plot, it nonetheless provides an 'aesthetic framework' for the 'refashioning' of Synge's play.⁹⁸ As Kathleen M. Gough has demonstrated, this framework '*re-presents*' the play by 'both mocking it and responding to it'.⁹⁹ Persistently framing elements of the plot in carnivalesque terms renders them ridiculous, but this comic exaggeration also functions satirically, as a means of magnifying issues. The carnivalesque aesthetic therefore functions as a kind of theatrical masquerade, donning the 'guise of social realism' to 'enact and extend', rather than undermine or challenge, the social conflicts adumbrated by Synge.¹⁰⁰ This phenomenon works in conjunction with increasingly pervasive metacommentary, included 'to ironically situate the text'.¹⁰¹ The play's dramatic elements remain 'very close to their Irish precedent' but, as Tobias Döring has shown, Matura differs from Synge in that he introduces a 'new theme into the 'verbal action': 'the fabrication of stories' is framed, with increasing prominence, as a means of 'imposing authority'.¹⁰² Instead of presenting the most accurate reflection of Trinidadian society possible, Matura suffused his work with 'European clichés' about the Caribbean, while ostentatiously marking them as such.¹⁰³ By staging some of the 'dislocating discursive constructs' used by the British Empire to 'domesticate colonial subjects', Matura challenged his audience to

⁹⁸ Kathleen M. Gough, 'Polymorphous Playboys: Irish-Caribbean Shadow Dancing', *Modern Drama*, 48 (Winter 2005), 777-99 (p. 780).

⁹⁹ Gough, p. 781.

¹⁰⁰ Gough, p. 784-9.

¹⁰¹ Tobias Döring, 'Dislocating Stages: Mustapha Matura's Caribbean Rewriting of Synge and Chekhov', *European Journal of English Studies*, 2 (1998), 78-93 (p. 92).

¹⁰² Döring, 'Dislocating stages', p. 88.

¹⁰³ Döring, 'Dislocating stages', p. 92.

‘reflect critically’ on their own ‘conceptual repertoire’.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Walcott, who was writing primarily for a Caribbean audience, Matura’s work was conceived with audiences in Oxford and London in mind. Because the overlap with Synge was otherwise so extensive, those areas in which the plays differed – namely, Matura’s carnivalesque aesthetic and use of self-reflexive performative irony – were magnified. This twofold dissimilative approach ultimately held Synge’s model at a critical distance. Unlike Matura, when imitating Synge, Walcott did not closely parallel the plot or dialogue of the earlier work, nor did he introduce any major new themes. He reprised Synge’s concerns, but the positions he adopted in relation to them differed. In both cases, the approaches are dissimilative, in that similarity is accentuated to highlight difference, but the two are not equivalent.

3.II. ‘Mortal Comedy’: Yeats, Memorialisation, and ‘Both Sides of the Question’ (1948)

Walcott’s imitation of Irish work was by no means limited to Synge, or even to drama. The country’s literature also proved highly influential for his poetry, and much of his early verse was modelled on Irish textual antecedents. He regularly opted to imitate poetry by Yeats, in particular, deeming the writer one of several from whom he learned ‘a lot’.¹⁰⁵ As with Synge, when positioning his imitations in relation to Yeats, Walcott was dissimilative. Modelling his poetry on verse by Yeats meant invoking parallels with Ireland so as to convey the distinctiveness of Saint Lucia’s situation. Walcott explained, on many occasions, that he believed Irish literature was fundamentally ‘about being a colonial’, meaning, not only that works by Yeats possessed ‘the same theme’ as those by Synge, but that both also paralleled the central concerns of West Indian literature.¹⁰⁶ This was why, when seeking a model upon which he could base a double-elegy for two Saint Lucian airmen who died in World War II, Walcott chose ‘An Irish

¹⁰⁴ Döring, ‘Dislocating stages’, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ Hamner, ‘Conversation with Derek Walcott’, p. 24.

¹⁰⁶ Dabydeen, p. 156.

'Airman Foresees His Death' from Yeats's *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919). Throughout the imitation, he addressed many of the same issues he would later interrogate in *The Sea at Dauphin*. The poem was similarly concerned with questions related to sacrifice, bravado, and memorialisation.

Yeats's 'Irish Airman' commemorated the death of Major Robert Gregory, a pilot who served with the Royal Flying Corps in WWI. A flying ace, Gregory shot down nineteen enemy aircraft before he was himself shot down and killed on 23 January 1918.¹⁰⁷ Yeats's poem consists of one sixteen-line stanza, comprising four sections. Each section is made up of four lines of iambic tetrameter, which rhyme fully and alternately. This regularity works in tandem with the content of the poem to convey the speaker's equanimity in the face of the 'tumult' to which he flies (12).¹⁰⁸ Rather than feeling afraid, he approaches death with stolid detachment. Yeats's last four lines are notable because they are structured chiastically, thereby mirroring the psychological balance which they articulate:

I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death (13-16).

Walcott's poem, by contrast, is split into two sonnets, the separation of which is indicated by Roman numerals. Though both sonnets terminate in rhyming couplets, and there are a considerable number of end-rhymes, there is no consistent pattern. This irregularity in the rhyme scheme, coupled with lines ranging from ten to sixteen syllables in length, creates a sense of disorder. The poem was dedicated to 'H.E. and D. Du B.', in reference to Hugh Etienne and Desmond Du Boulay, two Saint Lucian airmen who died in WWII. Prior to his enrolment in the RAF, Etienne had been a civil servant on the island. He died when undertaking a raid on Essen

¹⁰⁷ Edward D. Pickering, 'The Artist's Tragic Flight: Yeats's Portrayal of Major Robert Gregory', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32 (2009), 80-99 (p. 81).

¹⁰⁸ W. B. Yeats, *Poems*, ed. by A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989).

on 5 March 1943, after his plane was shot down off the coast of the Netherlands. Five months later, on 24 August, Du Boulay was also killed. Having enlisted as a Pilot Officer in the Royal Canadian Airforce, he was on a mission to raid Berlin when his plane was brought down near Gusen, Saxony-Anhalt.¹⁰⁹ Walcott must have possessed fairly detailed knowledge regarding the circumstances of both of these deaths, given his speaker's mention of 'sky-shocked children in Berlin and Essen' (7). His work was composed on a similar subject to Yeats's, and reprised its themes, but did not replicate either its form or structure.

Imitating Yeats in this way drew attention to various parallels between the situations of Ireland in WWI and Saint Lucia in WWII. As Walcott made clear in a letter to Swanzy in the early 1950s, he felt the paralleling inescapable: he adopted Yeatsian subject matter because whenever he attempted to frame the 'joy or hatred' that a 'pure poet' – 'a man like Yeats' – felt in his own verse, he 'could only find a mould in voices that were attacking the same things'.¹¹⁰ In an effort to overthrow British colonialism, Irish separatists declared independence in 1916, launching an armed rebellion against imperial rule in Dublin, which Germany sought to aid. Though there was no equivalent uprising in Saint Lucia during WWII, the conflict nevertheless had a significant impact on the island. In September 1940, the British and Americans announced the so-called "destroyers for bases" deal, establishing a US military presence there. In addition to improving roads, the Americans built military airfields, aiming to safeguard trade through the Panama Canal. The implications were manifold. On a personal level, Walcott was saddened that his father's watercolour, *The Coconut Walk*, displayed proudly in his household since infancy, now depicted an avenue which did not exist, as the boulevard had become the runway of what is now

¹⁰⁹ Though four Saint Lucian airmen died serving in WW2, Walcott was probably drawn to Etienne and Du Boulay in particular because of their extreme youth, which paralleled his own situation: Henry Dulieu had also died young, at thirty-four, but Etienne and Du Boulay had only been twenty-one and twenty, respectively. The fourth airman, David Shingleton-Smith, had died even younger, at nineteen, but did not feature. This was likely because of his background (he was the son of wealthy white expatriates) and because of the relatively ignoble nature of his demise (he crashed into a pole while training).

¹¹⁰ Letter from Derek Walcott to Henry Swanzy dated 11 February 1952, GB 150 MS42/1/8 (University of Birmingham: Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections).

George F. L. Charles Airport.¹¹¹ More generally, American servicemen flooded the island because of the deal. Thus, 'Americans were everywhere', according to Garth St Omer's protagonist, Stephenson, in *The Light on the Hill* (1968).¹¹² Although this influx of US military personnel brought wealth and career opportunities to many islanders, Saint Lucia was also affected by periodic shortages of supplies: St Omer's novella describes how people 'fought and pushed for bread' (in the story, the lack of food is so extreme that Stephenson's parents have to gather food from a swamp).¹¹³ Broadly speaking, Irish farmers prospered throughout the war because Britain's overseas markets for food and animals were temporarily cut off. However, as John Dorney records, an 'intensive export of food' resulted, which created 'great hardship' among the urban poor when the price of food skyrocketed.¹¹⁴ This led Maud Gonne, Yeats's muse and the namesake of Maud in *Omeros*, to declare that Britain had embarked upon a policy of deliberate starvation in Ireland, likening the wartime situation to the Great Famine of 1845-52.¹¹⁵ Further parallels in the wartime experiences of the two nations came in the deployment of military personnel overseas and the threat posed by German U-boats. In total, over 200,000 Irishmen served alongside the British forces in WWI, while, in WWII, 94 Saint Lucians formed part of the British Caribbean Regiment.¹¹⁶ Throughout WWI, the Irish coast also played host to a number of submarine skirmishes. In WWII, since Castries was a clear target for U-boats, 'blackout operations' were implemented in the city.¹¹⁷ However, according to Charles Jesse, the 'light-screening regulations' were never 'properly enforced'.¹¹⁸ As a result, despite heavy defensive

¹¹¹ Baugh, *Memory as Vision*, p. 17.

¹¹² Garth St Omer, 'The Lights on the Hill' in *Shades of Grey* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 95.

¹¹³ St Omer, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ John Dorney, 'Ireland and the First World War – A Brief Overview' (9 November 2018) [online] <https://www.theirishstory.com/2018/11/09/ireland-and-the-first-world-war-a-brief-overview/#.YFusfa_7S00> [accessed 23 February 2022].

¹¹⁵ Ian Miller, 'Did Ireland Nearly Starve during the First World War?' (2014) [online] <<https://digestingthemedicalpast.blogspot.com/2014/01/did-ireland-nearly-starve-during-first.html>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

¹¹⁶ Michael S. Healy, 'Colour, Climate, and Combat: The Caribbean Regiment in the Second World War', *The International History Review*, 22 (2000), 65-85 (p. 80). The War Office statistics may be misrepresentative with citizens of other Windward Islands also listed as Saint Lucian.

¹¹⁷ David J. Bercuson and Holger H. Herwig, *Long Night of the Tankers: Hitler's War Against Caribbean Oil* (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2014), p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Jesse, p. 45.

mining, in early March 1942, a German submarine sailed into the city harbour, torpedoing two ships. The attack occasioned a shift in public attitude, after which the threat of war was taken more seriously. The change was akin to the one Lamming described following the sinking of CNS Cornwallis off the coast of Barbados six months later: 'the war felt like history at first', but after 'a large merchant ship was torpedoed in the harbour', people 'expected to hear the bombs fall' (*In the Castle of My Skin*, p. 222).¹¹⁹

To foreground these parallels, Walcott signposted his imitation by deploying some of Yeats's imagery and vocabulary. The eleventh to fourteenth lines of Yeats's poem run:

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds.

In Walcott's poem, the airmen are said to be 'elate in the clouds' (3), while their motivations are similarly deemed unimportant: 'Nor whether they were bored lusters / after medal or memory' (8-9). Much of the phrasing is also ostentatiously Yeatsian. The oxymoron 'mere living' (10), for example, reprises one of Yeats's most famous constructions: it echoes the 'mere anarchy' loosed upon the world at the end of 'The Second Coming' (1921). As Breiner has demonstrated, Walcott typically employed 'patent echoes of rhythm and diction' from Yeats when imitating his work.¹²⁰ In 'Parang' (1962), for example, Walcott's line, 'the wax and the wane of the moon' (13), bears the 'distinctive fingerprint of late Yeats', and the Irishman's particular penchant for poeticising the 'phases of the moon'.¹²¹

By replicating Yeats's fingerprint, Walcott foregrounded the significant parallels he perceived between Ireland and Saint Lucia. However, such paralleling was dissimilative, in that it

¹¹⁹ George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1979), p. 222. Two steam merchants were also torpedoed in the vicinity: in May, SS Norman Price (British) was sunk by a U-boat on its way to the island and, in June, Alegrete (Brazilian) fell victim to a German assault in the channel between Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent.

¹²⁰ Breiner, 'Creole Language', p. 35.

¹²¹ Breiner, 'Creole Language', p. 35.

drew attention to points of similarity so as to accentuate areas of difference. In terms of memorialisation, for example, the situation in Saint Lucia in WWII was not akin to that of Ireland in WWI. Yeats suggests that Major Gregory's death was futile because it came in service of a foreign power, whose concerns were at a total remove from those of the Irishmen enlisted into its service. The deceased airman deserved commemoration principally because he was willing to die for his country in a war he knew was pointless. In Walcott's work, the sacrifice made by the airmen was also presented as futile and worthy of commemoration, but the pointlessness had a different origin. Like Major Gregory, the airmen had died fighting on behalf of a distant colonial empire, which had left them dripping 'in the blood that blame shook off its hands' (10-12). Unlike WWI, however, WWII was primarily fought against an authoritarian, genocidal regime, and since Walcott did not share Yeats's eventual sympathies for Naziism, he believed an Allied victory would serve the best interests of Saint Lucia. The sacrifice was not futile because all outcomes were the same, but because sacrifices of this sort would do nothing to change the world in the long term. His speaker concludes the poem by stating that, throughout history, soldiers have always been 'misled' (19) by the idea they can change the course of human history for the better, believing they 'shall die not for their sakes but man's' (27-28). However, as the epigraph to the elegy indicates, such idealism is misplaced. The work commences with lines from Walt Whitman's 'Reconciliation' (1865), in which, having reflected on the American Civil War, the speaker outlines a model for history marked by cycles of devastation and forgetfulness. He asserts 'that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost' because 'the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world' ('Reconciliation', 1-3). As a colonial subject from the periphery, dying on behalf of the British Empire in WWII was futile, not because the outcome of the war did not matter for colonised nations, as per Yeats's suggestion thirty years earlier, but because the outbreak of a second global conflict implied all such sacrifices, conducted with the intention of bettering humanity, were ultimately in vain. The modern world had not brought about the end

of human conflict. It had simply updated the means by which men were killed. War remained 'tigersome' (20) as ever, and modern 'science' had only 'buil[t] death nearer cheerless stars' (22).

The rhyming couplet at the end of Walcott's first sonnet draws a further parallel with Yeats, but the point of reference is the speaker of 'Easter 1916' (1921), rather than that of 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death'. Once again, Walcott's speaker dissimilates a Yeatsian sentiment by highlighting a parallel circumstance to accentuate regional differences. In this case, however, the point relates to the transformative power martyrdom can have on the reputation of communities, rather than its inability to bring about societal progress. Walcott's lines, 'Their races break clouds of irony by their proud ends, / Casual at school, but now, o star what friends' (13-14), invoke the most famous section of Yeats's poem, in which the speaker explains how the reputations of would-be Irish freedom fighters, which had previously been the subject of mockery, were 'transformed utterly' (39) when such men lost their lives in the 'casual comedy' (37) of the Easter Rising. The connection to Yeats's oxymoronic 'casual comedy' is signposted ostentatiously through an allusive reprise: Walcott's airmen are said to have died in 'mortal comedy' (25). Once again, 'Both Sides of the Question' is Yeatsian in its concern, but, in this case, it dissimilates the anterior text to accentuate a racial dynamic, absent from Yeats, whose work centres solely on nationalism. Du Boulay was a member of one of Saint Lucia's most prominent white families. His ancestors ran slave plantations and his relatives still own the Soufrière and Diamond Estates on the western side of the island. By contrast, Etienne was the very first West Indian of colour to receive a commission in the RAF. Walcott felt the value of their common fate lay, not simply in the heroism entailed by their martyrdom, but in what their enlistment and sacrifice signified for race relations on the island. The men had died for a common cause despite having led lives divided by race. Walcott therefore felt that commemorating their shared sacrifice could help to break down the island's longstanding racial hierarchies.

Ultimately, the major problem with positing the existence of polymodernities is that, to do so, one must introduce new conceptual divisors through which pluralised modernisms can be separated. These have generally been predicated on location. Although the differences between Walcott and Brathwaite's aesthetics have often been exaggerated, the fact remains that there are significant points of variance between their works: if one posits the existence of a West Indian modernism, one groups them together and elides these differences. Moreover, such a grouping, along regional or locational lines, implies that they share more with each other than they share with artists from elsewhere. To that end, it is worth pointing out that *The Sea at Dauphin* was not the only imitation of *Riders to the Sea* produced by a major modernist playwright.¹²² The work also 'lurked in the background' of D. H. Lawrence's *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* (1914) and many elements of Lawrence's play were directly 'transplanted' from Synge.¹²³ Set in an early twentieth-century cottage, *The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd* dramatises the impact difficult, dangerous, low-paying work has on a provincial community. The action unfolds in a mining town of rural Nottinghamshire, the focus of which is Syngean, in that the experiences of the community's women are foregrounded. Aesthetically, the imitation sits halfway between Walcott and Matura: some of Synge's dialogue is reprised in a new idiom, but few new themes are introduced and the plot differs substantially.¹²⁴ Walcott imitated Synge in a way which bore some resemblance to approaches taken by West Indian writers like Matura, but his approach also bore some resemblance to Lawrence's. Positing a distinct "Caribbean modernism" elides differences between Walcott's work and that of other Caribbean authors while exaggerating the differences between his work and that of the Euromodernists. It simultaneously homogenises Euromodernist work, implying that Lawrence had more in common with T. S. Eliot than he had with Walcott. Such framing cannot account for what Amit Chaudhuri has termed Lawrence's

¹²² Federico Garcia Lorca and Bertolt Brecht also modelled works on Synge's play.

¹²³ James Moran, *The Theatre of D.H. Lawrence: Dramatic Modernist and Theatrical Innovator* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 41.

¹²⁴ Moran, p. 42.

'foreignness': his 'breaking away' from 'linearity, progression, and closure' differed markedly from other Euromodernists' 'departure from the same conventions'.¹²⁵

Silvio Torres-Saillant famously argued that Caribbean writing represents 'one differentiated corpus with an internal logic of its own'.¹²⁶ However, any such formulation necessarily requires the delineation of 'the socioaesthetic boundaries of Caribbean literary art', for which a divisor must be chosen.¹²⁷ Torres-Saillant opted to set geographical limits because he felt the region's territories had all developed along a 'remarkably parallel trajectory in the modern period'.¹²⁸ The roots of such thinking can be traced back to the Caribbean heterocosms advanced by Frantz Fanon and Jacques Roumain in the 1930s and '40s. However, as J. Michael Dash has shown, theorising of this sort has never been able to account for the region's sociolinguistic complexity.¹²⁹ Positing a monolithic Caribbean modernism downplays and elides important distinctions related to language and scale. Why should one not emphasise the region's linguistic variance and thereby posit an anglophone Caribbean modernism? Why not highlight the differences between individual islands and argue for Saint Lucian or Barbadian modernism? How can one account for Caribbean writers in exile or those born in the West with Caribbean ancestry?

The polymodernist paradigm is able to account for the middle road Walcott's early work charted between adulation and antagonism with respect to its metropolitan models. It is therefore to be preferred over those rooted in diffusionism or "writing back". However, a new narrative describing Walcott's artistic trajectory built on this paradigm would suggest not only that Euromodernism was monolithic, but that he and his regional contemporaries engaged with British, Irish and American writing the same way. My thesis has indicated that any such framing

¹²⁵ Amit Chaudhuri, *D. H. Lawrence and 'Difference': Postcoloniality and the Poetry of the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 166.

¹²⁶ Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Towards an Aesthetics of West Indian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

¹²⁷ Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics*, p. 2.

¹²⁹ J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), p. 80.

elides important distinctions between regions and works. However, in centring on Walcott's relationship with Irish work, it has not yet interrogated whether polymodernity could provide an effective paradigmatic basis for conceptualising his early imitations of non-European art.

Chapter Four: Decentring Euromodernism

This thesis has so far focused on Walcott's formative engagement with the Anglo-European literary tradition. It has challenged the predominant narrative regarding his poetic development – which characterises his early work in terms of derivation – by charting the complicated middle road he took between adulation and antagonism when imitating European works of art. Because the predominant narrative for the development of West Indian literary history developed in response to various politically charged – but widely accepted – misconceptions about Walcott's apprenticeship which originated in the 1960s, that narrative has also been destabilised. This chapter breaks with its antecedents by widening the scope of analysis to comprise Walcott's interaction with, and subsequent imitation of, non-Western artworks. In so doing, it highlights a second major difference between his work and that of his regional contemporaries. Unlike Brathwaite, who turned to Africa when seeking non-Western inspiration, Walcott looked to Japan throughout his apprenticeship. As an imperial, colonial power situated in East Asia, the country does not fit neatly within established postcolonial binary power paradigms of “centre” and “periphery”. Charting the influence of a semi-peripheral colonial capitalist state on the early work of a post-war modernist from the West Indies in this manner poses a serious challenge to each of the paradigms of influence hitherto discussed.

A significant issue with the diffusionist paradigm, which alleges modernist innovations spread unidirectionally from the centre to the periphery, is that it cannot account for the key role non-Western cultural artefacts played in the development of Euromodernism. Non-Western cultural agents certainly drew on Western forms and techniques, but the relationship between West and non-West was dialogic, rather than dictatorial. As Ramazani puts it, Euromodernism was, to a considerable extent, ‘fuelled by encounters with non-Western cultures’.¹ Kandinsky drew on Maghrebi art, Eliot infused his verse with South Asian sacred texts, and Black American

¹ Ramazani, ‘Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions’, p. 460.

writers like Langston Hughes paid homage to African and Latinx cultures.² The work of semi-peripheral Irish writers like Synge and Yeats was itself 'positioned in a reflective relationship with Japanese modernity', meaning they 'breathed the same air from Japan that sustained [Walcott's] work'.³ Because it challenges the exclusively centre-periphery binary upon which the diffusionist principle is predicated, analysis of Walcott's early relationship with Japan also calls the unidirectional nature of the paradigm's vector of cultural influence into question. An exploration of Walcott's *Japonisme* reveals that, despite being a cultural agent operating in a peripheral sphere, many of his aesthetic strategies were conceived, developed, or fine-tuned in response to his engagement with non-Western material.

The "writing back" paradigm describing the global spread of modernism, according to which similarities between Euromodernist and postcolonial art arose from anti-European antagonism on the part of peripheral cultural agents, is similarly problematised. Walcott's enthusiasm for Japan complicates the picture because his writing either drew on Japanese work directly, in which case the relationship to Euromodernist work was irrelevant, or drew on Japan indirectly, via Euromodernist interpretations of Japanese aesthetics. The willingness of a West Indian cultural agent to incorporate elements of Euromodernist writing into his Japanese imitations necessarily adds a third dimension to the centre-periphery binary, but it also further discredits the notion that he was fundamentally hostile to Euromodernist writing. Walcott frequently opted to incorporate Euromodernist features in his *Japoniste* work, which he need not have done, and would not have done were he wholly antagonistic toward such material.

Regarding the third paradigm, which proposes the existence of polymodernities, there was certainly no wider West Indian *Japonisme*. This chapter demonstrates, however, that it would be remiss to downplay the important role Walcott's interest in Japan played in the development

² Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 468.

³ Aoife Assumpta Hart, *Ancestral Recall: The Celtic Revival and Japanese Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), p. 6; Irene De Angelis, *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. xi.

of his poetry and drama. If one asserts that there is a “Caribbean modernism”, one must either diminish the importance of Japan in Walcott’s work or exaggerate its importance elsewhere. Analysis of his *Japonisme* demonstrates the importance of constructing an alternate narrative for the development of anglophone West Indian literature which is not predicated on polymodernity.

So far, only two studies have been conducted into Walcott’s *Japonisme*. The first of these, Anita Patterson’s ‘Japonisme and Modernist Style in Afro-Caribbean Literature’, came out in 2007, while the second, Laurence Breiner’s ‘The Impact of Japan on Derek Walcott’s Early Plays’, appeared in 2013. Patterson does not centre on Walcott’s engagement with Japan, but on his engagement with Euromodernist *Japonisme*, and orients her analysis around Ezra Pound’s influence on *Epitaph*.⁴ Breiner’s article, by contrast, focuses on the relationship between the films of Japanese auteur director Akira Kurosawa and the three plays Walcott conceived and drafted during two brief stints living in New York (September 1957; October 1958-June 1959), namely, *Ti Jean and His Brothers*, *Malcochon*, and *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Walcott acknowledged his initial indebtedness to Euromodernist *Japonisme*, but he also spoke regularly of his passion for Japanese film. Breiner proposes that this passion was ‘crucial’ for Walcott’s plays because it was chiefly by watching movies that Walcott developed a ‘concrete (if still quite limited) understanding of Japanese aesthetics’.⁵ This chapter builds on both articles by merging and expanding their disparate foci to present a holistic overview of Walcott’s *Japonisme*. In Patterson’s case, the scope is widened beyond *Epitaph* to encompass the impact of Euromodernist *Japonisme* on Walcott’s drama throughout the late 1950s. In Breiner’s, the range of artistic media under discussion is broadened to include woodblock prints and poetry.

⁴ Anita Patterson, ‘Japonisme and Modernist Style in Afro-Caribbean Literature: The Art of Derek Walcott’, *Review of International American Studies*, 2 (2007), 19-24.

⁵ Laurence Breiner, ‘The Impact of Japan on Derek Walcott’s Early Plays’, *Comparative Theater Review*, 13 (2014), 27-38 (p. 36).

Commencing with a brief sketch of the contours of European *Japonisme*, my study charts three of the most important differences between the respective enthusiasms for Japan exhibited by Walcott and the Euromodernists, before exploring how Walcott's *Japonisme* impacted his developing poetics. By the time Walcott was writing, many elements drawn from Japanese art had already been incorporated into the Anglo-European tradition. As with *Epitaph*, in which the bulk of Walcott's allusions to Dante were mediated through Eliot, the vector of transmission from Japan to Walcott was regularly complicated by the fact that, throughout his apprenticeship, the poet often encountered Japanese concepts second hand, through his reading of Euromodernism. Whereas Euromodernists had been drawn to East Asian texts, in part, because of how extraordinary and novel they seemed, Walcott was initially attracted to Japanese work because of the favourable reputation it was afforded in the West. Though European *Japonisme* was overwhelmingly concentrated on older artworks produced during the Edo period (1603-1867), Walcott's focus was wider. It encompassed Edo era woodblock prints and plays, but it also included Kurosawa's movies. As such, he engaged more frequently, and more closely, with contemporary Japan than his Euromodernist counterparts had.

The most significant difference between Walcott's *Japonisme* and European *Japonisme*, however, was that his latter-day enthusiasm for the country's art came in response to an entirely separate set of goals. When Euromodernists had turned to Japan, it had been in an effort to reinvigorate longstanding artistic traditions whose forms and structures they felt were being rendered obsolete by modernising forces. The hope had been that Anglo-European literature would be revitalised if it were suffused with fresh, exotic elements. European *Japonisme* was, therefore, rooted in perceptions of alterity: for the cultural transfusion to succeed, pre-existing and freshly introduced features needed to differ as much as possible. By contrast, Walcott's *Japonisme* originated in his desire to establish a literary tradition native to the West Indies. He was drawn to Japanese work because of the geographic and mythological resemblances he perceived between the country and the Caribbean, and he hoped that imitating Japanese features would

help him to establish an indigenised literary tradition in which elements of regional life with Japanese analogues were reflected as closely as possible.

Having established some of the most significant differences between Walcott's *Japonisme* and that of his Euromodernist antecedents, this chapter then focuses on two works in particular, one of which is poetic, the other, dramatic. The first of these case studies, 'The Hurricane' (1962), was an imitation of Katsushika Hokusai, the premier painter and printmaker of the late Edo period. Walcott's poem incorporated many of the hallmarks of Hokusai's style, from his most popular motifs and dynamic use of contrast, through to his cropped framing and low-angled perspective. However, Walcott's work also differed from Hokusai's in several key ways. Because the imitation was intermedial, it was often the effect, rather than the stimulus, which he approximated. When this was not possible, elements of Euromodernist *Japoniste* poetry were incorporated instead as a proxy. When composing 'The Hurricane', Walcott's turning to Japan was motivated partly by the geographical correspondences he perceived between the country and the Caribbean. His imitation was therefore conducted in an attempt to learn how to depict tumultuous Caribbean weather, meaning he never sought to produce a 'faithful reproduction, or translation, of Japanese art'.⁶ Because Walcott's *Japonisme* stemmed from his desire to establish a West Indian literary tradition, this chapter's analysis of the poem concludes by tracing the techniques Walcott adapted from Hokusai throughout his later oeuvre, before contrasting his approach to depicting tropical storms with the non-*Japoniste* efforts of various West Indian contemporaries. Ultimately, the techniques Walcott adapted from Japan were integrated into the fabric of his poetics, but they did not fit within any broader "Caribbean Modernism", since they were not replicated in the work of the other regional poets of his generation.

The chapter's second case study moves away from poetry to the considerable role that Japanese and *Japoniste* material played in the development of Walcott's drama, centring on his

⁶ Patterson, 'Japonisme and Modernist Style', p. 22.

early play *Malcochon* (1959). Of the three plays Walcott drafted while based in New York, *Malcochon* is the most obviously indebted to Japanese art, having been conceived, according to its author, as a 'deliberate imitation' of Kurosawa's similarly named film *Rashomon* (1950).⁷ *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (1958) was written slightly before Walcott began to study Japan in depth, while *Dream on Monkey Mountain* incorporated Japanese features without having been devised in response to any particular work.⁸ Breiner's analysis of Walcott's *Japoniste* drama focuses primarily on the relationship between his plays and Japanese cinema, foregrounding the role played by ghostly apparitions in both. This study builds on his astute observation that, when drawing on Japanese theatre and film, Walcott was more interested in the 'theatrical' than the dramatic: his *Japonisme* concerned itself with 'props, gesture, posture, movement [and] staging' rather than plots and dialogue.⁹ Although *Malcochon* was a 'deliberate imitation' of Kurosawa, that imitation was intermedial and, while some elements were replicable in new media, stagecraft was not. The aim in imitating Kurosawa was not to reproduce work faithful to Japanese dramatic or cinematic conventions, but to utilise techniques developed by Japanese artists and their European imitators to create a native theatre. For this reason, when imitating, authenticity was subordinate to functionality. As with his imitation of Hokusai, when it came to writing *Japoniste* drama, Walcott regularly commingled his intermedial imitation of Japanese art with features drawn from Euromodernist *Japonisme*.

4.I. Key Differences Between European and Walcottian *Japonisme*

In 1639, Japan implemented a policy of intense isolationism which kept it closed off from much of the rest of the world. This state of *Sakoku* persisted until 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry threatened the country with naval bombardment if its borders were not opened up to

⁷ Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 48.

⁸ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 31.

⁹ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 36. In a 1977 interview, Walcott stated explicitly that he was 'strongly influenced by Japanese Noh theatre' because of its focus on these 'essentials' – Sharon Ciccarelli, 'Reflections Before and After Carnival: An Interview with Derek Walcott' in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by William Baer (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp. 34-50 (p. 37).

international trade. Although the existence of a small Dutch trading concession near Nagasaki meant that various Japanese artefacts were exported to Europe during *Sakoku*, as Ayako Ono explains, these objects were acquired in the context of *Chinoiserie*, an earlier fashion trend rooted in 'fanciful European conception and curiosity about the exotic East'.¹⁰ Prior to Perry's intervention on behalf of the United States government, Europeans wanting Japanese goods were largely interested in acquiring material objects like lacquerware and porcelain, though the Dutch had procured woodcuts as early as 1812.¹¹ However, it was not until 1853 that Japanese works of art started to enter the European market *en masse*. The lifting of restrictions ushered in a second, much larger wave of enthusiasm for Japanese goods, which was catalysed by prominent exhibitions of newly acquired Japanese artworks in both London (1862) and Paris (1867). This second vogue, known as *Japonisme*, differed from the first in that it was characterised by Europe's desire to imitate and learn from Japanese pieces, rather than simply marvel at their exoticism.¹² As Ono records, it was also shorter lived, lasting until around 1920, by which point European artists had already 'picked out what they needed for the creation of their art'.¹³ They started to turn to Africa and Polynesia in search of fresh inspiration.

Historically, *Japonisme* has most frequently been associated with mid-to-late-nineteenth century European painting. Impressionists were captivated by Japanese works for a number of reasons, chief among which was the stylised approach embodied in the *ukiyo-e*, or 'floating world', style then predominant in Japanese visual art. Since the Renaissance, European artists had paid great attention to the 'anatomy of their figures', while their Japanese counterparts had typically 'suggested the outline of a figure with cursory lines'.¹⁴ In Japan, blocks of colour were also used in place of modulated shading which, coupled with a lack of foreshortening, made

¹⁰ Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Manet, Henry, Hornel and Nineteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

¹¹ Karin Breuer, *Japanesque: The Japanese Print in the Era of Impressionism* (London: Prestel, 2010), p. 106.

¹² Ono, p. 1.

¹³ Ono, p. 2.

¹⁴ Amir Lowell Abou-Jaoude, 'A Pure Invention: Japan, Impressionism, and the West, 1853-1906', *The History Teacher*, 50 (2016), 57-82 (p. 60).

depictions of landscapes appear 'oddly flat' to Western eyes.¹⁵ The Impressionists were enthusiastic about these stylised elements of Japanese art, in part, because the rise of photography posed an existential threat to traditional figurative modes of painting. Their appetite was such that, by the end of the nineteenth century, more woodblock prints could be found in Europe than Japan.¹⁶ The influence these works had on the development of Western art was as pervasive as it was significant. It was through their study of Japanese woodblock prints that painters like Monet, Manet and Cassatt formed many of the hallmarks of their styles, while Van Gogh was so intrigued by the prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige that he frequently copied them onto canvas to improve his use of line and form.¹⁷ In his *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889), he indicated the important role woodblock prints had played in developing his style by featuring one hanging in the background behind him. When Cézanne painted Mount Saint-Victoire at 'multiple angles and at different times of day', his project was 'oddly reminiscent' of, and therefore likely inspired by, Hokusai's series of prints depicting Mount Fuji.¹⁸ In short, as Amir Lowell Abou-Jaoude concludes, the captivation and experimentation *Japonisme* engendered in European artists 'established the foundation for modern art.'¹⁹

Although it is most often associated with Impressionist painting, the influence of *Japonisme* extended across the artistic spectrum. Designers and architects like Christopher Dresser, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Frank Lloyd Wright were all inspired by Japanese culture in the creation of their works, while French musician Claude Debussy composed his masterpiece *La Mer* (1905) in response to seeing work by Hokusai.²⁰ When founding the *Journal of Japonisme* in 2016, Gabriel P. Wesiberg pointed out that, while some aspects of the phenomenon, such as these, have been 'carefully studied', others had only recently started 'receiving attention'

¹⁵ Abou-Jaoude, p. 60.

¹⁶ Abou-Jaoude, p. 57.

¹⁷ Abou-Jaoude, p. 60.

¹⁸ Abou-Jaoude, p. 62.

¹⁹ Abou-Jaoude, p. 57.

²⁰ Ono, p. 1; Abou-Jaoude, p. 57.

from scholars and collectors.²¹ In particular, though the impact of *Japonisme* on Anglo-European literature was no less significant than in other spheres, it has not yet been explored to the same extent. Studies in the field have typically focused on Ezra Pound's early enthusiasm for Japanese poetry and Noh plays, which gave rise to a number of related 'dramatic experiments' by Yeats, Bertolt Brecht, and Samuel Beckett.²² As Irene De Angelis proposes, these studies have shown that Japanese literature was a major source of inspiration for some of the most revered and canonical Euromodernist authors, and in doing so, they have demonstrated the 'essential part' East Asian literature played in the 'early stages of modern poetic theory and practice'.²³

In 2007, Patterson demonstrated how clearly the imprint of Pound's *Japonisme* can be seen in Walcott's early work. It is most noticeable at the end of the section of *Epitaph*, discussed at length in the opening chapter, in which lines are linked by way of textual intermediaries. Following the allusive transference between Césaire, Arnold, Eliot, and Shakespeare, the speaker's focus settles on a student of East Asian origin:

A Chinese boy, now in the class, alien traditions, oddments
Of an alien culture.
Li Po, my friend, you will remember
[...]
On the day that you abandoned the wine glass of Rihaku
For the chamber pots of reason.
[...]
I believe that I shall give up the goose quill for a laundry
In far Hao.
A mixture of faces, damp faces torn like paper by the black wind (X.73-85).²⁴

The term 'oddment' is once again reprised from Pound's 'Portrait d'une Femme' (1912). In this case, however, it no longer signifies a china shepherdess, but a Chinese student, named 'Li Po',

²¹ Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'Reflecting on Japonisme: The State of the Discipline in the Visual Arts', *Journal of Japonisme*, 1 (2016), 3-16 (p. 3).

²² Patterson, 'Japonisme and Modernist Style', p. 20.

²³ De Angelis, p. 7.

²⁴ In *Midsummer*, Walcott lamented that he could not write with 'the brevity' of the 'short syllable' (IX.6) or summon 'synthesis in one heraldic stroke / like Li Po or a Chinese laundry mark' (IX.7-8). That such brevity is common to laundry marks suggests the decision to open a 'laundry / in far Hao' would not be to abandon poetic skill entirely, so much as to waste it through misapplication elsewhere.

who shares a name with the premier poet of the Tang Dynasty. In 1916, Pound published 'Epitaphs', according to which Li Po 'died drunk' trying to 'embrace a moon / In the Yellow River' (5-7). In Walcott's *Epitaph*, swift mention is made of his 'wine glass'. After this, Walcott reprises various elements of Pound's short lyric, 'The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter' (1915), written 'After Li Po', in which the speaker addresses his young bride. Pound's construction 'into far Ku-tō-en' (16) is, for example, mirrored in Walcott's 'in far Hao'. Pound could not read Chinese, meaning that he encountered Li Po's poetry exclusively through Japanese translations. For this reason, as Patterson points out, Walcott's reference to Li Po's Japanese name, 'Rihaku', commingles Pound's experiments in Chinese poetry with his *Japonisme*.²⁵ In that regard, towards the end of the stanza, Walcott's line, 'A mixture of faces, damp faces torn like paper by the black wind', reprises the language and style of Pound's haiku-inspired 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913): 'The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals on a wet, black bough' (1-2). Walcott's poem thus moves, via allusive transference, from a focus on the multi-racial makeup of the class, arising from the influx of indentured Chinese labourers to Saint Lucia post-slavery, to Li Po's poetry, via the name of a student, to Japanese poetry, via Pound's reading of Japanese translations.

Walcott's incorporation of Japanese elements may have resembled the *Japonisme* of the Euromodernists, but his turning East differed from theirs in several important ways. Firstly, as this section of *Epitaph* exemplifies, Walcott's incorporation of non-Western influences was complicated by the fact that such influences initially reached him second hand, via Euromodernism. He was writing forty years after *Japonisme* had become outmoded in Europe and, when it came to Chinese and Japanese 'classic theatre', he openly admitted coming to the work 'through Brecht'.²⁶ He likewise recalled how, having temporarily relocated to New York on two occasions, he spent hours looking 'very carefully' at the woodblock prints of Hokusai and

²⁵ Patterson, 'Japonisme and Modernist Style', p. 40.

²⁶ Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 48.

Hiroshige in the city's galleries and museums.²⁷ In doing so, he was consciously imitating Pound's trips to the British Museum Print Room half a century earlier, during which the American pored over thousands of similar *ukiyo-e* prints. It was ultimately through his study of these works, in conjunction with his exploration of Japanese and Chinese poetry, that Pound formulated many of the tenets of Imagism. So, even when learning directly from Japanese art, Walcott was not rejecting the Western status quo as Pound had. He was drawn, paradoxically, to non-Western modes of art precisely because of their veneration by the West.

Walcott's *Japonisme* also differed from earlier European iterations because it was partly rooted in his understanding of contemporary Japanese culture, whereas European *Japonisme* typically overlooked the realities of the country's industrialisation and development. Unlike Walcott's, European *Japonisme* largely relied on a relationship with Japan akin to the one Roland Barthes described in *Empire of Signs* (1970), according to which the 'invented interplay' of Japanese features was more exciting than Japan itself because it alone raised the 'possibility' of a 'revolution in the propriety of [Western] symbolic systems'.²⁸ In the century following Japan's opening up to Western trade in 1853, the country was totally transformed. When Perry coerced the Japanese into abandoning *Sakoku*, the country was feudal, pre-industrial, and led by a military government known as the Tokugawa shogunate. Fifteen years later, the newly enthroned Emperor Meiji embarked on an extensive, revolutionary program of social, economic and political reform, through which Japan rapidly industrialised. By 1895, the country had shifted the balance of power in the Korean peninsula, wresting influence away from the Qing Dynasty after prevailing in the First Sino-Japanese War. Ten years later, Japan defeated the Russian Empire, effectively cementing its status as the region's dominant power. Success in these conflicts brought international prestige, but it also facilitated the establishment of a colonial empire: in 1910, following a series of treaties in which control was increased, Japan formally annexed

²⁷ Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 48.

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 3.

Korea, which it went on to govern for thirty-five years. By the turn of the century, when Pound encountered Japanese poetry and art, the older natural idyll portrayed by Bashō and others had all but ceased to exist. The French Impressionists had likewise been drawn to art depicting an older version of the country which 'existed in the woodblock prints of Hiroshige and Hokusai', but 'not in Tokyo'.²⁹ Many Western artists had been drawn to art from the Edo period because they venerated the pre-industrial idyll it depicted, which they felt was swiftly disappearing in Europe. Little heed was paid to the fact that, by the turn of the century, this idyll had also largely disappeared from Japan.

By contrast, Walcott's *Japonisme* often involved engagement with contemporary Japanese art and culture. His play *Malcochon* (1959) was conceived as a 'deliberate imitation' of *Rashomon* (1950), which was itself an imitation of Ryunosuke Akutagawa's classic short story *In a Grove* (1922). As Breiner suggests, though Walcott's 'Japanese experience' began with reading poetry by Pound and work on Noh theatre by Yeats and Brecht, the 'serendipitous availability' of Japanese films in New York 'powerfully reinforced what he was discovering in his reading'.³⁰ Most of the Japanese films airing in New York at the time were conceived in the *Jidaigeki* mould, meaning they depicted events set before 1868. Walcott's interest in pre-industrial Japan therefore came largely in response to, rather than in spite of, his engagement with, and understanding of, contemporary Japanese culture. Where Euromodernist artists overlooked the fact that, as Japan modernised and militarised, the country's artists replaced older techniques with new ones adapted from the West, Walcott drew inspiration from Japanese movies which, stylistically, had become conspicuously more Western.³¹ He was enthusiastic about films from the 1950s, rather than the 'Kabuki-orientated' films of the early days of Japanese cinema.³²

²⁹ Abou-Jaoude, p. 57.

³⁰ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 28.

³¹ Abou-Jaoude, p/ 62.

³² Lionel Lambourne, *Japonisme: Cultural Crossings Between Japan and the West* (London: Phaidon Press, 2005), p. 223.

Like Noh theatre and woodblock prints, these films were attractive to Walcott, in large part, because they were venerated by the West. His enthusiasm for them was in keeping with a wider contemporary vogue for Japanese movies among Western cinephiles. As Lionel Lambourne records, Kurosawa's movies were considered high art and lauded as 'cutting edge' by 'sophisticated American moviegoers in the late 1950s'.³³ As with European *Japonisme*, this latter-day enthusiasm arose from a period of sustained artistic privation occasioned by isolationist politics. Following Japan's annexation of Korea, the country pursued an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy: between 1931 and 1942, Japan annexed Manchuria, occupied vast swathes of the rest of China, allied with Nazi Germany, bombed Pearl Harbour, and conquered Singapore from the British. This heightened militarism both stemmed from, and contributed towards, an increasingly antagonistic relationship between Japan and the West. One consequence of this antagonism was that 'nothing of any significance [...] emerged from Japan for some decades' in the cultural sphere.³⁴ In the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, the country's art exerted little influence beyond its borders. However, having been defeated by the Allies in 1945, Japan eventually became a *de facto* vassal state of the USA, under whose governance it was demilitarised and democratised. American rule occasioned a period of rapid economic growth, during which Japan was once again reintegrated into the global community, become a fully-fledged member of the United Nations in 1956. The influx of Japanese movies came in response to this reintegration. Because Japanese films had been difficult to access in the West for so long, when American audiences were first exposed to Kurosawa's work, they took to it with an enthusiasm redolent of 'the excitement with which their ancestors greeted [Japanese visual art] a century earlier'.³⁵ Walcott's work can be located within this latter-day vogue for contemporary Japanese work. Though many of these films were set in the Edo period, they were produced in the 1950s.

³³ Lambourne, p. 225.

³⁴ Lambourne, p. 223.

³⁵ Lambourne, p. 225.

The most important difference between Walcott's *Japonisme* and European *Japonisme*, however, was that it was predicated on perceptions of resemblance rather than dissemblance. Poets like Pound and Yeats had already situated themselves within a longstanding artistic tradition. The challenge they faced was that the images, forms, and structures then preponderant within that tradition embodied the kind of Romantic-Victorian thinking about literature that modernity was fast rendering obsolete. Imbuing what they framed as an increasingly 'moribund Western tradition' with Japanese elements was one of several ways they claimed to be revitalising it.³⁶ Japan was not the only country from which features were adopted in service of this revitalisation, nor was literature the only artform into which East Asian features were introduced. In all cases, however, whatever was transplanted from afar needed to differ markedly from whatever was already present in Europe. If extant and introduced elements resembled one another too closely, little would change and the wider project to 'save Western civilization' from its 'increasing senescence' would fail.³⁷ Hence, as Paul Wood records, it was precisely because the Impressionist painters of 1860s Paris thought Japanese woodblock prints 'radically unlike European art' that they found them enticing.³⁸ From the outset, European *Japonisme* was predicated on notions of Western-Japanese alterity.

That Walcott came to Japanese woodblock prints and poetry via Pound led Patterson to conclude that the American was ultimately responsible for a nurturing a 'critically conscious sensibility in Caribbean literature' that would 'give art a new lease on life'.³⁹ One issue with her reasoning is that, when Walcott first turned to Japanese work, a distinct West Indian literary tradition had not yet been established, so it was neither necessary, nor possible, to revitalise the region's 'staid and exhausted forms'.⁴⁰ Unlike Pound and Yeats, Walcott was not motivated by a

³⁶ Rupert Richard Arrowsmith, 'The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System', *Modernism / modernity*, 18 (2011), 27-42 (p. 40).

³⁷ Joe Cleary, *Modernism, empire, world literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 97.

³⁸ Paul Wood, *Western Art and the Wider World* (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 145.

³⁹ Patterson, 'Japonisme and Modernist Style', p. 24.

⁴⁰ Patterson, 'Japonisme and Modernist Style', p. 24.

desire to reinvigorate a tradition. Rather, his engagement with Japanese art stemmed from his desire to develop a poetics which reflected Caribbean culture as closely as possible. His *Japonisme* differed significantly from theirs because it was predicated on notions of similarity rather than difference. To establish a West Indian literary tradition, whatever features were adapted from elsewhere needed to reflect Caribbean culture: the closer the correspondence, the better. Because of this, Walcott's *Japonisme* arose, fundamentally, from a belief in Caribbean-Japanese similitude. In 'Meanings', he discussed this belief in some detail, revealing, for example, how he saw two sets of 'correspondences' between Japan and the Caribbean, related to geography and mythology.⁴¹ Regarding the former, not only are Japan and the Caribbean both archipelagic, both are also volcanic. This means they possess similarly lush vegetation and mountainous topography, in addition to a shared fear of eruptions. Because both territories are located on continental peripheries, each must also endure intense storms on a recurrent basis. For a young artist like Walcott, seeking to depict verdant Caribbean landscapes overshadowed by volcanoes and wracked by hurricanes, the Western canon supplied few models, while Japan offered many.

4.II. 'After Hokusai': Japanese Woodblock Prints and 'The Hurricane' (1962)

It was this first, geographic set of parallels which inspired Walcott to incorporate Japanese elements into his poetry in the early 1960s. According to Breiner, there was 'no sign' of *Japonisme* in the poetry Walcott produced during this period, an absence attributable to the fact that 'little poetry survives' from that time.⁴² In reality, although the impact of Japanese art on his early verse was less pervasive than it was on his drama, it was present and not always subtle. Most notably, his first metropolitan collection, *In a Green Night* (1962), included a fifteen-line lyric entitled 'The Hurricane', which was written, according to its by-line, '*after Hokusai*', the syntax and italicisation of which mirrored Pound's earlier '*After Li Po*'. It is possible to date the composition of this

⁴¹ Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 48.

⁴² Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 27.

imitative piece fairly precisely to the summer of 1960, a year after Walcott left New York for the second time.⁴³ Given the timeline, it seems likely that the work was written in response to Hurricane Donna, the strongest storm of the season, which caused severe damage throughout the Caribbean in August, before hitting the United States. Inspired by the event, or one similar, he decided to compose poetry about a tropical storm. The problem Walcott had was the dearth of appropriate Anglo-European models depicting hurricanes on which he could draw. Because of the temperate nature of their continent's climate, European artists had not poeticised tropical storms very often. Lacking appropriate models, but feeling compelled to write about Hurricane Donna, Walcott returned to the Japanese woodblock prints he had studied the year prior for inspiration.

When composing 'The Hurricane', the most obvious feature Walcott adapted from Hokusai was the Japanese artist's equine motif. The poem opens with a description of tempestuous waves in which they are likened to warhorses – 'Come where on this last shore of broken teeth / All spume and fury of snorting battle-horses' (1-2) – and the horse imagery recurs several lines later – 'charge after charge / Of hurtling cavalry shuddering the shore' (5-6). Not only were horses among the most pervasive images of Hokusai's oeuvre, two of the most iconic prints in which they featured had been on display in New York's Metropolitan Museum when Walcott was there. The first of these, *The Waterfall Where Yoshitsune Washed His Horse* (c.1832), contained a stallion being bathed amidst a powerful river torrent, while the second, *Sekiya Village*

⁴³ The poems in the volume were ordered chronologically according to their date of composition and, before they were collected, many had previously been published in literary magazines and newspapers. A variant of 'Conqueror' appeared in the edition of *Bim* dating to June 1960, while a variant of the titular poem, 'In a Green Night', was published by the *New Statesman* in September. 'The Hurricane' is sandwiched between these poems in the collection, meaning it must have been composed at some point that summer. Since this was over a year after he left New York, the enthusiasm for Japan Walcott felt at this stage in his career also appears to have endured longer than Breiner supposes.

on the Sumida River (c.1830-2?), depicted warhorses charging into the distance along a winding path, their riders' capes billowing intensely.⁴⁴



Japanese prints differ from Western paintings in many ways. When composing 'The Hurricane', one of the most significant differences for Walcott was Hokusai's approach to creating dynamism. To suggest movement in Western art, draughtsman typically employ action lines, blurred edges, reduplication or affine shear. In Hokusai's prints, by contrast, even when subjects are depicted in motion, their outlines remain clearly defined. Instead, a sense of dynamism is created by counterbalancing moving figures in unstable poses against others in stasis. In the print of the waterfall, for example, the force and speed of the water are enhanced through contrast with the stationary horse, which, in turn, seems all the more powerful on account of its immovability. The strength of both water and horse are further compounded by the washermen. The pose adopted by the righthand figure is functional, in the sense that he is leaning sideways to scrub the animal's flank, but his position appears unstable, as if he is on the brink of being swept away.⁴⁵ In the print of galloping horses, the effect is reversed and it is the unstable animals

⁴⁴ Katsushika Hokusai, 'The Waterfall Where Yoshitsune Washed His Horse at Yoshino in Yamato Province' [online] <www.metmuseum.org> [accessed 1 June 2022]; Katsushika Hokusai, 'Sekiya Village on the Sumida River', [online] <www.metmuseum.org> [accessed 1 June 2022].

⁴⁵ Similarly unstable figures suffuse Hokusai's sketched manga, meaning the technique was not solely attributable to technical limitations associated with printing.

whose power and alacrity are enhanced through contrast with a motionless background. There is no wind in the trees, the rice is not being harvested, and the building stands fixed. In 'The Hurricane', Walcott imitated Hokusai's *trompe l'oeil* by having his equine waves crash against an entirely static counterpoint: the 'hurtling cavalry shuddering the shore' are crashing into a 'birdless marge' (6-7). The adjective, 'birdless', stands out because it is so unusual and its negative suffix characterises the shore exclusively in terms of absence. As with Hokusai, Walcott's 'empty area' is not a 'negative space', but a means of creating 'tension between figures and background'.⁴⁶ The waves are rendered all the more dynamic on account of the contrast.

When composing 'The Hurricane', however, Walcott was not only inspired by Hokusai's equine prints. He was also, quite clearly, drawing on the artist's most iconic work, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1831). The framing of the storm in 'The Hurricane' mirrors the framing in the print since both centre on the ocean rather than on a town inland. Because the *ukiyo-e* style Hokusai employed had originally been developed to portray Japanese manners and customs, when its remit later expanded to include depictions of natural scenery, these depictions usually included human figures.⁴⁷ In Hokusai's work, as Muneshige Narazaki argues, these figures were not simply 'lifeless puppets', as they had been in earlier *Yamato-e* landscapes. Rather, they were realised with a 'life of their own', which was 'as much a *raison d'être* for the works as the landscapes themselves'.⁴⁸ The bargemen of *The Great Wave* did not simply feature: they hunkered down while sailing headfirst into the water. In 'The Hurricane', Walcott imitated this component by augmenting his seascape with a similarly vivacious figure. Halfway through, he introduced a 'mad, old fisherman dancing on his barge' while hurtling towards the 'storm's swirling core' (8-

⁴⁶ Breuer, p. 41.

⁴⁷ Muneshige Narazaki, *Hokusai: "The Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji"*, trans. by John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1968), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Narazaki, p. 25.

9). This figure loosely resembles the cowering bargemen in *The Great Wave*. However, some braver, arguably more analogous seafarers also featured in several of Hokusai's other prints.⁴⁹



In terming his bargeman ‘mad’ and ‘old’, however, Walcott was not simply enlivening him with personality traits. He was also situating the figure in relation to Hokusai himself. The artist used five different pen names throughout his career, the last of which was “Gakyo Rojin”, meaning ‘old man, mad about drawing’.⁵⁰ Walcott was aware of the final signature because Hokusai explained his rationale in choosing it in the preface he wrote for his *Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* series, a copy of which was on display at the Metropolitan Museum. Walcott’s readers are commanded to ‘study’ (12) the ‘mad, old fisherman’ revelling in the storm because, like Hokusai, his response to the sheer, unbridled power of nature is one of joy, rather than fear. The implication is that when taking on the challenge of conveying a hurricane, Walcott was imitating, and channelling, this response.

The influence of *The Great Wave* on ‘The Hurricane’ extended further than Walcott’s stormy setting and mad, old fisherman. The poem also utilised an atypical focus akin to that found in the print. *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* was produced as part of a series of works, entitled

⁴⁹ Katsushika Hokusai, ‘Under the Wave off Kanagawa’ [online] <www.metmuseum.org> [accessed 1 June 2022]; Katsushika Hokusai, ‘Choshi in Shimosa Province’ [online] <<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/choshi-in-shimosa-province-katsushika-hokusai.html>> [accessed 1 June 2022].

⁵⁰ Reprinted in: Dora Amsden and Woldemar von Siedlitz, *Impressions of Ukiyo-e* (New York: Parkstone, 2007), p. 228.

Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji, which also featured *Sekiya Village on the Sumida River*. Western artists were intrigued by Hokusai's series because of the surprising way in which many of the prints employed an unusually low perspective, making objects in the foreground appear larger which, in turn, diminished the size of the volcano in the background. Mount Fuji is ostensibly the subject of *The Great Wave*, but it almost blends into the sea. Relegation of this sort was but one of several ways in which the perspectives and foci of Japanese works differed from those of their Western counterparts. As Wood records, Japanese artists also achieved a similar effect by cropping important figures with the 'framing edge' of their prints and paintings.⁵¹ This conveys an 'impression of space' because it implies that there is a 'vast environment, unseen in the actual picture'.⁵² As Karin Breuer notes, a further 'defining feature' of Hokusai and Hiroshige's landscape prints is that they are 'asymmetrical', meaning their 'visual weight is placed off-centre'.⁵³ The majority of the water is on the left-hand side of *The Great Wave*, for instance. In 'The Hurricane', Walcott's storm is given similarly asymmetrical weight, before it is cropped short. It is then diminished through the foregrounding of an alternate subject. The poem is split into two stanzas, but the weighting is obviously uneven, since the second is much shorter than the first. Within the shorter stanza, the speaker's focus abruptly shifts away from the power of the tempest, while it is still raging, and onto the future mindset of the dancing bargeman:

Study the grey storm streak his hair, and prize
More than those hoarse cauldrons heaven has upended
The salt delight of wrinkled eyes,
And his strange sorrow when all storms are ended (12-15).

⁵¹ Wood, p. 145.

⁵² C. J. Holmes, *Hokusai* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2014), p. 250.

⁵³ Breuer, p. 41.

All of a sudden, the poem's principal subject disappears from view. Though the storm has not yet finished, its description is truncated. The speaker breaks away to situate it among a vast series of comparable storms, outside of the poem's descriptive scope, whose termination will one day prompt a peculiar sadness in the Hokusai-bargeman analogue. The sublimity induced by the storm is suddenly and dramatically reduced on account of the storm's repositioning within this wider context, while the figure of the bargeman, who previously appeared foolhardy and miniscule, is drastically and conversely magnified. It is worth noting that, in one of 'the three most famous prints in the series' depicting Mount Fuji on display in New York, it is a storm, and not the mountain, which is relegated to the periphery in this way.⁵⁴ Despite being foregrounded by the title, *Storm Below Mount Fuji*, the tempest is abstracted to a bolt of lightning and confined to the lower righthand corner of the piece.⁵⁵



⁵⁴ Narazaki, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Katsushika Hokusai, 'Storm below Mount Fuji' [online] <www.metmuseum.org> [accessed 1 June 2022].

Some of the hallmarks of Hokusai's style – his subject matter, cropped borders, asymmetrical weighting, use of contrast, and non-Western approach to perspective – could be approximated in verse and integrated into Walcott's poetics, along with a rendering of the artist himself. But, more generally, imitating Hokusai was complicated because the effort was intermedial. Walcott was not aiming to recreate a woodblock print linguistically, which would be impossible, so much as to inculcate, through verse, a reaction in his audience akin to one produced by Japanese visual art. On that front, 'The Hurricane' is like a woodblock print in the sense that it presents a snapshot taken at a fixed point in time, devoid of narrative progress. The poem starts *in media res* and, though hurricanes occur in stages, no reference is made to chronology. This freeze-frame quality is inevitable when one produces a woodblock print, but poetry is not limited to rendering a story implicitly. One consequence of the lack of narrative in a linguistic snapshot is that it will seem more static than an equivalent piece of visual art. To counterbalance this pictorial stasis, which might otherwise undermine the dynamism created through contrast, Walcott saturates his work with deverbal adjectives and action verbs in the present continuous. In the first stanza, the battle-horses are 'snorting', 'hurtling', 'shuddering' and 'deafening', while the bargeman is 'dancing', 'yelling and poling' in the 'swirling' storm. This dynamism is created through wording, and such wording owes nothing to Hokusai. However, the effect created is approximate to the effect generated by Hokusai's work. It is testament to the efficacy of Walcott's solution in this regard that studies into implied motion have demonstrated that the same parts of the brain are activated when participants read action verbs in the present continuous tense as when they encounter unstable figures in Hokusai's art.⁵⁶ When imitating the means was impossible, Walcott often approximated the effect instead.

At times, however, when faced with the same problem, Walcott incorporated features from Euromodernist *Japoniste* writing as a proxy. The specificities of his image system would, for

⁵⁶ Specifically, the V5/MT, the left extrastriate body area, and the left superior temporal sulcus (STS). See: Naoyuki Osaka et al, 'Implied motion because of instability in Hokusai Manga activates the human motion-sensitive extrastriate visual cortex: an fMRI study of the impact of visual art', *NeuroReport*, 21 (2010), 264-7.

example, be similarly impossible in a woodblock print. Horses and water are juxtaposed in Hokusai's work, but the two are not fused to create one image as they are in 'The Hurricane'. Were one to attempt to draw 'hurtling cavalry shuddering the shore', for example, one would have to depict either waves or horses. Any hybrid construction would be neither, rather than both simultaneously. In this sense, Walcott's imagery is non-pictorial. It does not resemble Hokusai, but the haiku-inspired imagery employed by poets like Hilda Doolittle, in whose poem 'Oread' (1914) the vehicle and tenor of a metaphor describing the sea are similarly fused:

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir. (1-6)⁵⁷

Doolittle was an acolyte of Imagism, the aesthetic Pound pioneered in response to his reading of Japanese and Chinese poetry. Though it was not traceable to Hokusai, Walcott's imagery was nonetheless *Japoniste*, in a sense, because it originated in a school of Western poetry obviously influenced by Japan.

Meter and rhythm likewise possess no analogue in visual art but, for these elements, he neither adapted a *Japoniste* aesthetic from Imagism, nor recreated Hokusai's effect. Walcott's aim when imitating Hokusai was not to revitalise West Indian writing, but to establish a distinct native literary tradition. The effect produced by his use of iambic pentameter differed markedly from anything in Hokusai and can be understood fruitfully in the context of this wider aim. The point was not always to recreate Japanese art as closely as possible. Sometimes, it was to fuse Japanese techniques with those already at his disposal. Walcott wanted to produce an imitative poetic piece he could publish, but he also wanted to pioneer new, indigenised aesthetic strategies.

⁵⁷ H. D., *Collected Poems: 1912-1944*, ed. by Louis L. Matz (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p. 55.

Although he was writing several decades after Pound and Doolittle, he nevertheless wrote in pentameter because, unlike them, he saw enduring potential in the form.

To understand why he differed so markedly from his Euromodernist antecedents in this valuation, and why he did not imitate this element of their *Japonisme*, it is helpful to think in terms of “affordance”. According to Caroline Levine, affordance refers to the ‘potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs’.⁵⁸ Because it is not possible to use every form in every way, the term implies that every ‘social or literary’ form affords only a limited ‘range of potentialities’.⁵⁹ Whether or not these formal potentialities can be educed, or even seen, will depend upon context, since no form operates in isolation. Each must circulate in a world ‘jam-packed with other arrangements’ by which it is constrained and unsettled.⁶⁰ Euromodernist writers believed that, by the turn of the century, the potential afforded by pentametric verse had been exhausted. However, because Walcott was situated within an alternate context, he disagreed. He was able to see that such verse might still afford certain untapped possibilities. In particular, because it had not yet been used to depict Caribbean culture and geography at large, he thought it might still prove valuable for regional artists. Instead of using *Japoniste* poetry as a proxy for every poetic element with no analogue in Hokusai, his use of the pentametric form arose from potentialities he believed it afforded in a Caribbean context.

The most notable feature of Walcott’s pentameter is that it is frequently broken. For example, the seventh line – ‘Deafening the birdless marge’ – stands out because it is not iambic pentameter, but hypercatalectic trimeter: three syllables are missing from the expected iambic pentameter, one of which is missing from the start. The line is shorter, which mirrors the absence conveyed by ‘birdless’, and it starts with a stressed syllable, which lends the word ‘Deafening’ an arresting quality in keeping with its denotation. Such disruption is both conventional and novel. Suddenly stressing a syllable at the beginning of a line to reflect the

⁵⁸ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Levine, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Levine, p. 7.

intrusiveness of new content is a technique deployed widely in English metrical verse, and the Euromodernists would have considered it cliché. However, Walcott differed in his estimation because the technique had not yet been used to convey the suddenness of a Caribbean hurricane. Likewise, using a shorter line to present content related to absence is a pervasive technique across canonical English poetry, but the absence had never previously served to reinforce a tropical storm's dynamism through contrast, after Hokusai. Walcott believed not only that English meter still afforded untapped potentialities in a Caribbean context, but that Japanese techniques could help to unlock that potential. His study of Hokusai thus revealed to him Caribbean affordances latent within English poetic form.

This belief in the ongoing value afforded by meter differed markedly from the beliefs of the Euromodernists, but it also differed from the positions taken up by most of his West Indian contemporaries, all of whom faced the same set of challenges when depicting the region's climate. In Brathwaite's view, for instance, the metrical patterning and rigid forms of English poetry made little sense in the Caribbean because, as he famously quipped, 'the hurricane does not roar in pentameter'.⁶¹ As O. R. Dathorne put it, many of Walcott's contemporaries felt European metrical forms were 'worthless' when it came to conveying the wild intensity characteristic of the region's extreme weather events (and the rhythms of Caribbean life more generally) because they 'related more to temperate latitudes'.⁶² Brathwaite rejected iambic pentameter not because, like Pound, he believed all the potentialities it afforded had been exhausted, but because he believed the limited range of potentialities the form innately afforded had never encompassed expressions of West Indian climate. In the section of *History of the Voice* (1984) in which he outlined this position, he identified Anthony Hinkson's 'Janet' (1976) as a poem which effectively realised the potential afforded by an entirely different, indigenous form:

de whole sky shut up
just so

⁶¹ Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice* (London: New Beacon, 1984), p. 10.

⁶² Dathorne, p. 2.

in terror an
den de news break

Hurry man
Hurry chile
Hurry lan'
While you can

Hurricane!

Sirens
Churchbells
Swells o' panic
bustle

bustle
quick quick to de church
mek fuh de shelter
Oh lawd
oh lawd
as de first branch fall (31-49)⁶³

Unlike Walcott's, there is a clear narrative in Hinkson's piece: the movements of the storm are melded with the responses of the villagers whose 'Swells o' panic' mirror the ever-strengthening wind, following a sudden moment in which both storm and 'de news' break. More generally, the motion of the wind and rising tension in the town are conveyed through a fragmented series of images, whose connections are largely thematic and aural, rather than syntactical. The twice-repeated 'bustle', for instance, denotes the jostling crowds struggling to get inside, but the sound of the noun is equally as important as the sense. The 's' forms part of a wider sibilant construction comprising the sirens, bells, and swells, which collaboratively mimic the sound of the wind. Meanwhile, the 'b' works in conjunction with the bells and branch to lend the breaking tree a plosive, onomatopoeic air. Whereas Walcott's approach is to describe the bargeman's 'yelling' amidst the 'cataclysmic sound' of the storm (10-11) in pentametric verse, Hinkson's involves littering his verse with snippets of direct speech, mirroring the sounds of the wind, and patterning his language with a syncopated rhythm suggestive of the hurricane's gusting. In an unusual twist, Walcott's *Japoniste* writing resembled Euromodernist work, despite their being

⁶³ Anthony Hinkson, 'Janet' in *Slavation* (Bridgetown: Unpublished, 1976).

motivated by wholly different reasons, but did not resemble the work produced by his West Indian contemporaries, even though he and they were seeking solutions to the same problem.

The aesthetic Walcott developed to depict Caribbean climate differed markedly from that of his peers, but he seems to have considered his *Japoniste* approach more effective than theirs, evidenced by the fact that elements imitated from Hokusai were retained in other, much later work. As Breiner suggests of Japanese film, Walcott was inspired by his early encounters with woodblock prints to an extent that affected his work 'not only in the short term, but throughout his career.'⁶⁴ At the beginning of the penultimate book of *Omeros*, for example, the speaker is riding out a storm at his home in Saint Lucia. As the weather worsens, his focus rapidly shifts away from the rain falling on hills and fields to a surprising alternative, the response of horses at a racetrack: the 'drizzling light blew across the savannah / darkening the racehorses' hides' until the 'brown patches that the horses had grazed shone as wet as their hides' (p. 221). After the manner of 'The Hurricane', equine and maritime imagery are then commingled:

A skittish stallion
jerked at his bridle, marble-eyed at the thunder

muffling the hills, but the groom was drawing him in
like a fisherman wrapping the slack line under
one fist, then with the other tightening the rein (pp. 221-2)

The speaker's train of thought is temporarily jogged by the rain 'hammering the balcony' outside. Once he has muffled the sound by closing the window, his mind wanders back to the stable:

I closed the French window,
and thought of the horses in their stalls with one hoof

tilted, watching the ropes of rain. (p. 222)

⁶⁴ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 27.

The speaker then mirrors the speaker of 'The Hurricane' by situating the present storm in relation to another, beyond his descriptive scope, after which he concludes with a shift back to the animals:

On the red galvanized
roof of the paddock, the wet sparkled, then the grooms

led the horses over the new grass and exercised
them again, and there was a different brightness
in everything, in the leaves, in the horses' eyes. (p. 222)

It is not simply that Walcott incorporates equine imagery in his description of a hurricane which indicates his lingering indebtedness to Hokusai. He also retains the artist's distinctive approach to focus and perspective. The horses he described lived and raced at 'the savannah', which is to say, at the Queen's Park Savannah racetrack in Trinidad. So, when presenting the impact of the hurricane on Saint Lucia, the poem's focus is on animals over two hundred miles away. The storm's monumental breadth is conveyed, but it is implied, rather than described. In the manner of a Japanese woodblock print, a vast expanse is suggested, but it is cropped from the work. At the same time, the focus on the horses means that the storm itself is largely relegated to the periphery, like its counterpart on Mount Fuji. After Hokusai, the animals loom large, while the tempest is diminished.

4.III. 'Broader Possibilities': Mythology, Dance, and Walcott's *Japoniste* Dramaturgy

The second storm to which the speaker's mind wanders occurs much earlier in *Omeros*, and its depiction owes little to Hokusai. However, it nonetheless remains possible to see in its formulation the imprint of Walcott's early engagement with Japan. In 'Meanings', the second set of 'correspondences' he identified between the country and the Caribbean were mythological. Although he did not go into detail regarding these resemblances in the essay, he discussed them in greater depth elsewhere, most notably in journalism and interviews. Trinidad's 1964 carnival featured a presentation entitled 'Japan – Land of the Kabuki', which was conceived by Carlisle

Chang in response to Tokyo's upcoming hosting of the Olympic Games. In Walcott's review of the performance for the *Trinidad Guardian*, he argued that analogues for Saint Lucian folklore could be seen in Japanese drama:

What [Japanese theatre] parallels in our folklore and dance is its primitive mythology, its devils, thief-heroes, old-men and witch-figures, and, most strikingly of all, its masks [...] Older figures like Papa Bois, Douane, Soucouyant, etc. are as recognizable, and exist in the ancient classical theatre of the Noh.⁶⁵

When outlining his study of Japanese theatre with an interviewer in 1971, Walcott also explained how he started to see 'in the truly West Indian dances [...] the same kind of force you get in the Japanese theatre' following his engagement with Noh plays.⁶⁶ As Breiner points out, what is significant here is that Walcott '*only* recognized (or articulated) that force *after* he saw it in Japanese theater', and it was this recognition which prompted him take 'another look at West Indian dance in that light'.⁶⁷ In other words, he was not aware of the range of artistic *affordances* latent in Caribbean folklore until he had seen analogous potentialities realised in Japanese work.

The initial storm in *Omeros*, which occurs two-thirds of the way through the first book, is configured as a 'hurricane-party' in which Olympian gods dance with their African counterparts. The 'abrupt Shango drums' make 'Neptune rock in the caves', while Ogun hurls down lightning bolts alongside 'his partner Zeus' (pp. 52-3). The hurricane itself is likened to the cyclops Polyphemus who is blinded by Odysseus, since both are monocular: 'The Cyclone, [is] howling because one of the lances / of a flinging palm has narrowly grazed his one eye' (p. 51). This was not the first time Walcott had presented a storm this way. In the poem 'Hurucan' (1981), for example, readers encountered a 'whirling cyclops' (29).⁶⁸ The mythological register was inspired by the fact that the word "hurricane" was derived etymologically, via Spanish, from the name of the Taino storm god, "Hurakán". Similar imagery has also been employed, post-*Omeros*, by other

⁶⁵ Derek Walcott, 'The Kabuki ... Something to Give' in *The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose, 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (New York: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp. 70-2.

⁶⁶ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 37.

⁶⁷ My italics. Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 37.

⁶⁸ Derek Walcott, 'Hurucan' in *The Fortunate Traveller*, pp. 40-4.

Caribbean writers drawing on Walcott. The same equation between cyclone and cyclops recurs in Jamaican poet Ishion Hutchinson's *House of Lords and Commons* (2016), for instance:

[The shore] has rearranged its idea of beauty for the resort
villas, miraculously not rattled by the hurricane's
call it Cyclops – passage through the lives
of children and pigs ('After the Hurricane', 9-12)⁶⁹

In a 2017 interview with Jhinik Sen, Hutchinson recalled how transformative his experience reading Walcott had been when it came to describing Caribbean landscapes:

I found it for myself, a poem by Derek Walcott, in the public library in my town Port Antonio in Jamaica. And, it's called 'Landfall Grenada' [...] the way that the poem described the Caribbean landscape, with a sudden immediacy and authenticity, it gripped me.⁷⁰

Prior to his engagement with Japanese art, Walcott had neither published verse on a hurricane nor featured Caribbean divinities in his work.⁷¹ But, when studying Noh and Kabuki theatre in the late 1950s, the correspondences he perceived between Japanese and Saint Lucian folklore led him to see artistic *affordances* latent in the latter, which he had previously overlooked or dismissed. It was around the time that Walcott began engaging systematically with Japanese art that he began to see artistic possibilities for Saint Lucian mythology which extended far beyond folk tales, festive dances, and carnivals. It was on account of this potential that, when composing *Omeros*, he chose to incorporate the gods of Caribbean mythology into a broader, syncretic formulation alongside their counterparts from Ancient Greece. This hybridised pantheon would not have been realised in the same way, or at all, if not for his earlier *Japonisme*.

The potential Walcott perceived in the analogousness of Caribbean and Japanese mythology was not limited to content, however. He also saw value in the equivalence he drew

⁶⁹ Ishion Hutchinson, *House of Lords and Commons* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2016), p. 51.

⁷⁰ Ishion Hutchinson, 'Writing Poetry is Like Mining, it's Exhausting, Demanding, Says Poet Ishion Hutchinson' (11 February 2017) [online] <<https://repeatingislands.com/2017/02/11/writing-poetry-is-like-mining-its-exhausting-demanding-says-poet-ishion-hutchinson/>> [accessed 23 February 2022].

⁷¹ The sole exception came in the fourth canto of *Epitaph*, in which a brief prayer is offered to the gods of Haitian Vodoo. The tone is mocking and dismissive, rather than reverential.

between the dramatic means through which the mythologies were portrayed. In particular, he felt that many of the techniques employed by Noh and Kabuki theatre were 'peculiarly similar' to those of Caribbean folk performance: the West Indian 'shuffle of the bands', for instance, resembled 'the short, chipping movements of Oriental dance', while the bongo's 'moment of arrest' functioned in a manner akin to the *Mie*, a freeze-frame pose adopted in Aragoto Kabuki performance for around a minute on occasions when emotions run high.⁷² Because of these similarities, he proposed that an awareness of Japanese drama might one day aid the creation of a 'powerful, simple theatre' in the West Indies, very close 'in spirit' to its East Asian counterpart.⁷³ Such a theatre would differ substantially from the dialogue-heavy, naturalistic version predominant in Europe. It would make use of the local dances popularly employed for entertainment, in which masked devils and spirits prominently feature, but would not be considered low art.⁷⁴ Though he acknowledged that there were also clear differences between Japanese and Caribbean dance, the most significant being that one relied on ritual and the other improvisation, he nonetheless believed that 'broader possibilities' for West Indian dramaturgy might be found in Japanese work.

Because Walcott's play *Malcochon* directly imitated Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, some parallels were very clear. The play was set in a disused cocoa-house, for instance, which the initial stage directions indicate is located between 'a painted waterfall with rocks' and 'the edge of a bamboo forest' (*Malcochon*, p. 1). Most commonly associated with East Asia, bamboo is also the national plant of Saint Lucia, and its inclusion as a prop serves to foreground the analogousness of the setting of Kurosawa's movie. The *Japoniste* setting was also enhanced by the style in which the waterfall was painted: according to the caption Walcott included next to the concept art he produced for the production, the waterfall 'should be seen with curly lines of white with spray'

⁷² Walcott, 'The Kabuki ... Something to Give', pp. 70-1.

⁷³ Walcott, 'The Kabuki ... Something to Give', p. 70

⁷⁴ Because they rely on a series of florid, technical, and heavily symbolic gestures whose appreciation requires connoisseurship, Kabuki and Noh theatre have long been associated with high culture and refinement, while, in the Caribbean, masked dance is widely popular, but generally deemed lowbrow.

so as to generate a 'quality of HOKUSAI'.⁷⁵ Throughout the play, a folk narrator tells the story of six people who encounter each other by chance when they all seek shelter from a rainstorm. Having drunk a large quantity of bush-rum, known as "malcochon" in Saint Lucian Kwéyòl, the principal character, a thief and lumberjack called Chantal, forces the others to relate past transgressions connected to the murder of a plantation owner, of which he has been accused. His mute companion, Mou Mou, has, for example, angered the man over some silver spoons, while two other characters, referred to as Charlemagne and Sonson, are connected to the victim by ties of kinship. Kurosawa's film utilises exactly the same conceit: it is also about a group of strangers who meet by chance when taking shelter from the rain. Their quiddities are revealed when four of them offer their own bowdlerised, dishonest accounts of how a samurai warrior came to be murdered in the forest. Beyond this general overlap, there are also a number of clear, more precise parallels between the dramatis personae of the two works. Walcott's protagonist Chantal resembles Kurosawa's protagonist Tajomaru, for instance, since both are bandits of the forest. The former delivers his opening speech having 'clambered down rocks with a leap' before washing his feet in a waterfall's basin, while the latter is pictured 'sprawled on the rocks and drinking from a waterfall' in a late flashback depicting events immediately preceding the start of *Rashomon*.⁷⁶

In addition to these similarities, however, come several key differences. First and foremost, *Malcochon* is a very simple work, of one act, whose half-hour runtime resembles Noh drama, and the texts derived thereof by Brecht and Yeats, rather than *Rashomon*, which runs for around an hour and a half.⁷⁷ Secondly, unlike Kurosawa's movies, which are dialogue heavy, Walcott's play relies largely on music and song. On that front, the very first lines of *Malcochon* foreground the play's accompanying instrumentation – 'In country rumshops when the flute, /

⁷⁵ 'Plays etc (1950-74)', *National Archive of Saint Lucia* (Castries: Saint Lucia), Derek Walcott Papers.

⁷⁶ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 30.

⁷⁷ Because of this brevity, a standard Noh program consists of three plays, selected on the grounds of their complementary themes. When *Malcochon* was first performed in New York, it was similarly presented as one fraction of a larger dramatic program, comprising three discrete works.

The *shac-shac* and the violon / Mix with the smoke and *malcochon*' (p. 1) – but this list is not exhaustive, since later stage directions also refer to a drum – '[*To slow flute and drum*] [...] [*Faster flute and drum*]' (p. 28). In Noh theatre, dialogue is generally 'sparse', since it serves principally as a means through which the playwright can 'frame' the 'movement and music'.⁷⁸ Because the songs in Noh theatre are traditionally performed by a flautist and three drummers, *Malcochon*'s combination of flute and drums reflects that instrumentation, supplementary violin and shak-shak (Antillean maraca) notwithstanding, and possesses little in common with the orchestral score of *Rashomon*.⁷⁹ Finally, in terms of acting style, the naturalistic performances of the actors in Kurosawa's film stand in direct contrast to the ritualised dance employed in Walcott's work. One contemporary New York reviewer hailed, for example, the poignancy with which Walcott's folk narrator imitated the plantation owner's murder using a 'dance-mime' method at the climax of the play.⁸⁰ This dance-mime method is a staple of Noh and Kabuki theatre, and it can be seen throughout Walcott's later work, but it possesses no analogue in Kurosawa.⁸¹

Having initially come to study Japanese drama through the *Japoniste* adaptations of Euromodernists like Brecht and Yeats, Walcott spoke of how he 'began to go to the [primary] texts themselves'.⁸² Although there were several 'relatively accessible' English translations of Noh works available in New York at the time, there is only a 'single piece of concrete evidence' indicating Walcott's familiarity with any particular work.⁸³ A version of the very first lines of the Muromachi-era play *Eguchi* are reprised at the beginning of *Dream on Monkey Mountain* as one of the play's epigraphs. However, because the phrasing Walcott employs in the epigraph does not

⁷⁸ See the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s entry for 'Zeami: Japanese playwright' [online] <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zeami/>> [accessed 4 January 2022].

⁷⁹ The instruments of Noh plays are also accompanied by a chorus of around eight to ten singers whose songs conform to very specific conventions. In *Malcochon*, one finds an equivalent chorus, whose songs reflect features of Noh counterparts, albeit imprecisely. For instance, Noh plays always end with special vocals, called 'kiri-no-utai', and Walcott's play concludes with a song reprised from earlier in the work.

⁸⁰ John Mesler, 'A Similar Quality Could Be Achieved' in *The Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose, 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (New York: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp. 459-60 (p. 459). Unlike *Rashomon*, which does not have a narrator, the Noh canon possesses several analogues for Walcott's *conteur*.

⁸¹ It is clearly traceable in the gestures and dance of *Pantomime* (1978), for example.

⁸² Walcott, 'Meanings', p. 47.

⁸³ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 34.

conform to any of the phrasing used to translate the section of *Eguchi* in any of the accessible compendia, it is not possible to deduce which other primary texts he had read at the time he composed *Malcochon*, if he had yet read any at all. It is possible, on the other hand, to conclude with some degree of certainty that he had encountered specific *Japoniste* works, partly because he acknowledged his indebtedness to particular authors in interviews, and partly because their imprint seems fairly clear. At the very end of *Malcochon*, for instance, as Chantal lays dying, he tells Charlemagne that he wants to show him something, before gesturing to a point on the horizon where he started his day. The imagery employed in the protagonist's final vision is some of the most important in the play:

CHANTAL

You see that place there, a little clearing there in the side of the mountain, that Chantal cut out of the forest? There where a chicken hawk shaking rain from its wing and flying over the valley to the other side of the clouds . . .

OLD MAN

I see the place, old tiger, but the hawk gone now.

CHANTAL

Is there I come from this morning, it look far, eh? It look so far now, and the mist closing it.

[Dies]

(p. 28)

The closing mist Chantal describes represents a radical departure from *Rashomon*, which concludes with a shot of the sun bursting through dissipating rainclouds. Chantal's ultimate vision resembles, instead, the setting of Yeats's first Noh-inspired play, *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), which takes place at a well on a mountainside guarded by a mystical shapeshifting hawk. An old man has camped nearby for fifty years attempting to drink the well's miraculous waters, which provide eternal life but only bubble up infrequently.⁸⁴ He falls into a magical trance whenever they appear and cautions the play's hero, Cuchulain, against similarly wasting his life.

⁸⁴ W. B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 398-419.

Beyond the parallel in setting, there is also an overlap in the naming conventions adopted by the two works. Yeats's old man is only ever referred to as 'OLD MAN' in the script, and the same nomenclature is adopted throughout *Malcochon*. Although the *conteur* informs the audience, right at the start, that one of the six in the rain is 'An old man they calling Charlemagne' (p. 1), the playscript nonetheless attributes all his lines to the 'OLD MAN', in accordance with Yeats's Noh-inspired typecasting convention.

As De Angelis proposes, when composing *Japoniste* theatre, Euromodernists like Yeats 'mediated rather than copied the Noh'.⁸⁵ The Irishman was not attempting to produce adaptations wholly faithful to the conventions of Japanese drama, but experimenting with Japanese work to produce new plays for the Abbey Theatre which local audiences would enjoy. He transplanted elements of Noh theatre largely in service of his wider project aimed at rejuvenating Irish cultural nationalism amidst the anglicising forces of modernity. In other words, his *Japonisme* stemmed from his belief that Japanese theatrical conventions could be harnessed to portray, and therefore revive, local mythology. On that front, *At the Hawk's Well* is a Noh-inspired work, but it is also Celtic Revivalist, its hero and conceit drawn from Irish folklore. Walcott resembled Yeats in that he was not attempting to recreate Noh theatre faithfully when producing Noh-inspired work. He was also mediating, rather than copying. However, his mediation differed from Yeats's because he was drawing on elements of Japanese theatre to develop a native West Indian theatrical tradition, rather than reviving a tradition which had flatlined. Hence, when Edward Hirsch asked Walcott whether he saw himself as a Yeatsian figure, performing a similarly revivalist function in the West Indies, Walcott glibly dismissed the comparison on the grounds that 'Where there's a revival, there must have been a thing before'.⁸⁶ As Jason Allen-Paisant puts it, it was not because Walcott was a revivalist that he was drawn to Noh and Noh-inspired work, but because he 'perceived resonances between Caribbean

⁸⁵ De Angelis, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Hirsch, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 60.

performance and the Oriental theatrical forms used by [Euromodernists]' and 'sought to harness these homologies in his *creation* of a Caribbean theatre'.⁸⁷ This was why, when producing his imitation of *Rashomon*, Walcott's play deviated so extensively from the film. The correspondences Walcott perceived between the Caribbean and Japan in terms of mythology, musicology, and dance led him to compose a new sort of theatrical work, native to the West Indies, which commingled elements drawn from Japanese cinema, Noh theatre, and *Japoniste* drama. Unlike 'The Hurricane', whose by-line foregrounded the imitation of Hokusai, *Malcochon* did not declare itself to be an attempt at rendering Japanese art. Euromodernist *Japonisme* and Kurosawa's cinematic oeuvre operated on a largely equal footing because the cultural provenance of the artistic potentialities realised in these works was of little importance. It did not matter to Walcott if homologies perceived between Japanese and Caribbean art were inauthentic additions occasioned by the mediation of Noh theatre via Brecht and Yeats. He was more likely to draw on *Japoniste* drama for the simple reason that he was more familiar with it than Japanese primary texts.

Ultimately, Walcott's early reading of *Japoniste* poetry, evidenced in *Epitaph*, and his poetic imitation of a woodblock print, after Hokusai, are testament to the important role played by Japanese and Japanese-inspired art in the formation of his early poetics. However, the country's influence was neither confined to, nor primarily working upon, his verse. When it came to theatre, elements of his dramaturgy and stagecraft were shaped, fundamentally, by his enthusiasm for Noh and Noh-inspired theatre. Unlike the Euromodernists, however, the 'delight' Walcott derived from his study of Japanese work did not arise from exoticism, or 'cultural specificity' of any kind.⁸⁸ It was rooted, rather, in the geographic and mythological homologies he perceived between Japan and the Caribbean. When it came to poetry, he was enthused by his belief that, when establishing a native West Indian tradition, techniques drawn

⁸⁷ My italics. Jason Allen-Paisant, 'Body and Gesture in Derek Walcott's Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 37 (2021), 42-57 (p. 45).

⁸⁸ Breiner, 'The Impact of Japan', p. 37.

from Japanese depictions of climate and landscape might *afford* artistic potentialities in a Caribbean context. In terms of drama, he hoped potentialities realised in Japanese theatre might likewise reveal untapped areas of *affordance* latent in regional dance and music, which could be harnessed in the creation of a powerful, simple, indigenised theatre. Walcott's early engagement with Japanese material was fundamental to the development of his poetics but, of those paradigms describing the global spread of modernist aesthetics hitherto discussed, none accounts for it adequately. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the viability of the fourth and final paradigm of global literary influence.

Chapter Five: Establishing Tidalectics

This thesis has so far weighed the merits of three paradigms currently employed to conceptualise the influence Euromodernist writing exerted on nascent postcolonial – particularly Caribbean – literatures. The first of these configures the relationship as unidirectionally derivative because it suggests that modernist features spread from the centre to the periphery where they were adopted uncritically. The predominant narrative for Caribbean literature's development is grounded in this paradigm since it suggests that West Indian poets like Walcott were derivative of Euromodernist antecedents until the 1960s, when their work slowly started to diverge from colonial models. The main issue with grounding a new narrative for Walcott's artistic development in the same diffusionist paradigm is that it cannot account for the antagonism with which he often alluded to Anglo-European texts. It was therefore rejected as the basis of a new narrative in Chapter One. A second paradigm, which configures postcolonial literature in terms of antagonistic "writing back" to the metropolitan centre, accounts for this hostility effectively. However, that paradigm was similarly rejected as the basis for a new narrative for Caribbean literary development in Chapter Two because it is difficult to see the relationship between Caribbean writers and their Western antecedents as fundamentally hostile without downplaying important features. Chapters Three and Four explored the possibility of grounding a new narrative for Caribbean literary development in an alternate, polymodernist paradigm, but such a conceptualisation would posit separate Caribbean and European modernities, structured monolithically. This would not capture the nuances and complexities of Walcott's formative engagements with Irish and Japanese art.

There is a fourth and final paradigm commonly employed to conceptualise the global dissemination of modernist writing and this last alternative to diffusionism could provide the philosophical grounding of a new narrative describing Walcott's aesthetic development. The paradigm configures global modernity as a singular entity brought into being through the advent

of the modern capitalist world-system, understood as a singular entity. Its intellectual origins lie in Immanuel Wallerstein's economic world-systems theory, Fredric Jameson's argument that modernity is a singular phenomenon, and Franco Moretti's proposition that the system of international capitalism is both global and singular.¹ Because this paradigm is predicated on the idea that modernity is 'neither a chronological nor a geographical category', it possesses several advantages over rival theorisations.² One such advantage is that fundamental points of commonality between works of art originating in disparate geographies are revealed, while another is that, within the paradigm, iconoclastic modernist texts attacking imperialism and colonialism can be seen as critical of those projects. (The "writes back" paradigm largely considers them paradoxical embodiments of the very values they malign.) A further advantage of the capitalism-response paradigm is that it is able to accommodate the mutually opposing premises upon which the diffusionist paradigm and the "writes back" paradigm are based. Within the capitalist-response paradigm, it is possible to suggest that some postcolonial texts praised Euromodernist antecedents, that some criticised them, that some hovered between those polarities, and that some did not take up any obvious position. It therefore captures the complexity of the relationship between European and Caribbean writing that Walcott's earliest work displays. This paradigm would consider the complex relationship he adopted towards the Anglo-European literary tradition to be of a kind with, but a regionally and temporally specific variant of, the same ambivalence that writers like Eliot and Pound felt towards that same tradition a generation prior. When Euromodernists alluded to earlier works, they often engaged in a 'mode of ironic distancing', which enabled them to incorporate elements of the antiquated Romanticism which, as John Hollander has shown, they both 'spurned and craved'.³ Walcott's

¹ Jameson and Moretti, quoted in Sharae Deckard, Nicholas Lawrence, Neil Lazarus, Graeme Macdonald, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, Benita Parry, and Stephen Shapiro, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 12; p. 6.

² Deckard et al., p. 13; p. 8.

³ John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 72.

issue with the tradition did not stem from its being antiquated, so much as from its association with, and historic glorification of, colonial forces and institutions. The most significant benefit of this paradigm is that it can account for both these impulses.

One criticism commonly levelled at the capitalist-response paradigm is that it is impractical for literary studies because it is not possible for any one scholar to possess detailed knowledge of all the national literatures from which a singular world literature must be assembled. To tackle this problem, Moretti argued that critics of world literature would need to stop close reading texts. He reasoned that an overly granular focus would blur the bigger picture and individual works would need to be subsumed into wider collectives if critics were to have any hope of comprehending the system in its entirety. He therefore advocated a strategy of “distant reading” which involved assembling a ‘patchwork of other people’s research, *without a single direct textual reading*’.⁴ This suggestion has proven controversial to the point that even some of the more fervent acolytes of the capitalist-response paradigm have deemed it ‘overly provocative’.⁵ It is worth recognising, however, that *distant reading* is not a substitute for close reading, so much as its complement. As Moretti recognised, ‘there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature’.⁶ To observe broad literary trends in other people’s research, that research must itself be thorough and granular. This study focuses on the work Walcott produced during the first fourteen years of his career. For that reason, it is situated within the field of anglophone Caribbean literary studies. It interprets his early work by employing a series of in-depth close readings which foreground his poetic and dramatic influences. Close analyses of the texts reveal that the conventional narrative outlining his development is flawed because it relies on the incorrect notion that his apprenticeship was uncritically derivative of the Anglo-European literary tradition. It is only

⁴ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review*, 1/238 (2000), 54-68 (p. 57).

⁵ Michael Niblett, and Sharae Deckard, ‘Postcolonial Studies and World Literature’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48 (2012), 465-71 (p. 466).

⁶ Moretti, p. 57.

from granular analyses of this sort that regional trends can be established, following which they can be used to reshape wider, supranationalist models using methodologies such as *distant reading*.

A second criticism detractors commonly level at the capitalism-response paradigm is that it equivalises 'vastly discrepant cultural, political, and historical circumstances' surrounding textual production, reception, and distribution.⁷ It is obvious, for example, that responses to capitalism formed in the wake of West Indian slavocracy differed in significant ways from those formed under Russian communism. It was for this reason that Ramazani concluded that no paradigm outlining the relationship between postcolonial writing and Euromodernism could prove sufficient on its own: he wrote of the 'folly of trying to force so complex a literary historical relationship into a single paradigm' because he felt totalising paradigms all oversimplify the nebulous and contradictory processes they articulate.⁸ The capitalist-response paradigm is malleable enough, however, to capture even the most nebulous and contradictory elements of the postcolonial-Euromodernist relationship. As the authors of *Combined and Uneven Development* (2015) make clear, far from implying modernity 'assumes the same form everywhere', the singularity of the world-system model actually implies that modernity is 'everywhere irreducibly specific'.⁹ In a singular world-system, social relations will differ 'in every given instance' for the simple reason that 'no two social instances are the same'.¹⁰ Insisting on singularity does not, *ipso facto*, 'obviate internal heterogeneity', nor does it axiomatically preclude 'unevenness or marked difference'.¹¹ This malleability becomes a problem when attempting to chart a new narrative for the development of anglophone West Indian poetry, however. Because it allows for an endless variety of heterogeneous regionally specific and temporally affected social relations, the model can say little about the specificities of writing in any given region on its own.

⁷ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 470.

⁸ Ramazani, 'Modernist Inflections, Postcolonial Directions', p. 476.

⁹ Deckard et al., p. 12.

¹⁰ Deckard et al., p. 12.

¹¹ Deckard et al., p. 14.

The conceptualisation of history in the Caribbean is the most important regionally dependent factor for my study to consider since any narrative outlining changes in literature will be rooted in a particular perspective on time, progress, and teleology. This chapter therefore uses the work on historical non-teleology, non-linear temporality, and transhistorical simultaneity produced by the archipelago's most prominent cultural theorists to provide the philosophical basis for a new sort of narrative, situated within the wider capitalism-response paradigm. Caribbean ideas about historical linearity notably differ from Western equivalents because Western thinkers have generally characterised history in terms of progressive refinement. West Indians theorists have taken issue with that characterisation partly because it was used to justify colonialism. American expansionism was predicated on a belief in "Manifest Destiny", for example, while older European institutions framed colonial missions of conquest and conversion in refining, civilising terms. However, they have also argued that Western teleological models are incompatible with Caribbean realities. Metropolitan thinkers often propose that society inevitably improves as time advances because their nations have become increasingly affluent since the advent of the modern capitalist world-system, but the same mechanisms which brought about their munificence simultaneously impoverished the Caribbean. European wealth and archipelagic poverty were mutually constitutive. Following the abolition of the slave trade, neither emancipation nor independence catalysed development in the Antilles because of the combined and unequal structure of the capitalist world-system. Although that system presupposes continual growth, its beneficiaries and victims are bound through mechanisms which generate 'growing inequality'.¹² In particular, the modern history of the region has remained overdetermined by the Middle Passage and it has proven difficult for West Indians to equate history with progress in light of that trauma.

¹² Moretti, p. 56.

There is a possible tension between the two modes of discourse which this chapter synthesises. Namely, the overarching Marxist paradigm in which I am situating a regionally specific, non-teleological conceptualisation of history is itself associated with a model which the popular imagination considers universalist and teleological. However, the two are not at odds. Although a linear teleological narrative of social evolution has been ascribed to Marxism which conflates it 'with ideas of unidirectional progress and developmentalism', this represents a 'distortion of Marx's position', as Epifanio San Juan Jr. has shown.¹³ In a late letter, Marx outlined his frustration with this misreading of his work, before explaining that his theorising about Western European societies under capitalism should not be framed in suprahistorical, universalist terms:

[My critic] absolutely insists on transforming my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed, in order to arrive ultimately at this economic formation that ensures, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man [... However,] events that are strikingly analogous, but taking place in different historical milieux, lead to totally disparate results.¹⁴

In Marx's writing at least, modernity 'was never about the "normative" status of Europe or England', but rather about the 'contingent and determined roads taken by capital under unique national circumstances.'¹⁵

The conceptualisations of non-linear temporality and transhistorical simultaneity espoused by Caribbean cultural theorists do not only accord with Marx's own writing, however, they also dovetail with broader and more recent Marxist frameworks of combined and uneven development. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson explicitly

¹³ E. San Juan, Jr., 'Postcolonialism and the Problematic of Uneven Development' in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 221-39 (p. 222).

¹⁴ Marx, quoted in San Juan, Jr., p. 224.

¹⁵ Keya Ganguly, 'Temporality and Postcolonial Critique' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 162-78 (p. 178).

framed his thinking about combined and uneven development according to precepts devised by the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, arguing that:

Modernism must be seen as uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development, or to what Ernst Bloch called the “simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous” [...] the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history’.¹⁶

Bloch introduced his notion of “the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous” in his essay ‘Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics’ (1932), before elaborating the concept further in *Heritage of Our Times* (1934). These works considered the temporal contradictions accompanying the rise of fascism in Germany in light of the non-linear time-space continua described by both Albert Einstein’s general theory of relativity and the Lurianic Kabbalah.¹⁷ In Bloch’s view, notions of a consistent present are undermined by ‘layers of multiple temporality’ through which people are simultaneously ‘embedded in different historical situations and consciousnesses’.¹⁸ He states the point plainly:

Not everyone exists in the same Now. Only their appearance is present in that they are visible today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time as those around them.¹⁹

His model holds that these distempered modes of existence are produced by the ‘derangements of class society’ which separate ‘certain classes and groups of people’ from the means of production.²⁰ Bloch therefore configures history as ‘a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity with [...] unmastered and as yet by no means revealed and resolved corners.’²¹ In practical terms, his multi-layered dialectic implies that agrarian Amish in Lancaster County, factory hands in

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 307.

¹⁷ Peter Thompson, ‘Ernst Bloch, Ungleichzeitigkeit, and the Philosophy of Being and Time’, *New German Critique*, 42 (2015), 49-64 (p. 51).

¹⁸ Karam Abu Sehly, ‘The Dialectic of Nonsimultaneity in Bahaa Taher’s *Sunset Oasis*’, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 41 (2019), 131-49 (p. 133).

¹⁹ Ernst Bloch, ‘Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics’, trans. by Mark Ritter, *New German Critique*, 11 (1977), 22-38 (p. 22).

²⁰ Ganguly, p. 174.

²¹ Bloch, ‘Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics’, quoted in Thompson, p. 53.

Scranton and white-shoe lawyers in Philadelphia will all perceive time and history in fundamentally different ways, despite having spent their entire lives within hours of each other.

Keya Ganguly has correctly pointed out that 'there is no reason why Bloch's arguments cannot be adapted to theorize postcolonial situations'.²² In fact, when she reached this conclusion, a handful of critics had already written on the connections between Bloch, theories of combined and uneven development, and postcolonial literatures in general terms. In the opening chapter of Rigby and Booth's *Modernism and Empire* (2000), for instance, Patrick Williams rejects progressivist modern historiographies in favour of a delinearised, Blochian model for global history:

In this perspective, the related but different temporalities and trajectories of modernism and modernity (and imperialism) would be "combined and uneven" within the same social formulation, but there would also be simultaneous untemporalities, in that while at a particular moment modernism might be fully developed in Europe, it might not yet exist at all in Africa, for example.²³

Harry Harootunian similarly argues against the 'presumption of a homogenous continuum of historical time' in favour of heterogenic 'forms or ways of temporalizing history', but his configuration differs from Williams's because he frames these heterogenic temporalities as 'specific cultural form[s] and a consciousness[es] of lived historical time' within a paradigm of 'coeval modernities'.²⁴ He does not see modernism in Africa as lagging behind modernism in Europe, in the manner Williams's remarks imply. Caroline Edwards takes up a similar position to Harootunian when she proposes that theorising on simultaneous nonsimultaneous temporality should be 'central' to any 'comparative and/or post-colonial reading of (geo-)modernisms' concerned with 'uneven' development.²⁵ Other more regionally specific studies have also been

²² Ganguly, p. 163; p. 174.

²³ Patrick Williams, "'Simultaneous untemporalities': theorising modernism and empire' in *Modernism and empire*, ed. by Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 13-38 (p. 31).

²⁴ Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 62.

²⁵ Caroline Edwards, 'Uncovering the "gold-bearing rubble": Ernst Bloch's Literary Criticism' in *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 182-203 (p. 186).

conducted into the relationship between simultaneous nonsimultaneity and peripheral writing. In *Mestizo Modernism* (2003), for example, Tace Hedrick drew on Bloch when reading Latin American writers as modernist, while Joe Cleary invoked Bloch's work to argue greater attention could be paid to the regionally inflected socio-cultural particularities of Irish modernist literary production.²⁶ However, only Bill Ashcroft's essay 'Archipelago of Dreams' (2015) has hitherto considered Caribbean conceptualisations of non-linear temporality in relation to Blochian theorising on temporality in the context of combined and uneven development.²⁷ This chapter builds on Ashcroft's ground-breaking work but, unlike Ashcroft, I do not consider Caribbean and Blochian models to be wholly analogous.

After outlining four innovative geohistorical paradigms espoused by Kamau Brathwaite, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, and Deborah A. Thomas respectively, this chapter argues that Walcott's philosophising about Caribbean non-linear temporality and transhistorical simultaneity accorded closely with theirs. In interviews and essays, he described a similarly repetitive, non-linear model of Caribbean history, mapped onto tidal motion. However, because he was primarily a poet, his most comprehensive probing of the phenomenon appeared in his verse. Although Walcott made many pronouncements related to Caribbean historical non-teleology throughout his career, the first section of the chapter employs his early lyric 'The New Jerusalem' (1948) as a case study. The poem has been selected for two reasons: it both encapsulates his model for Caribbean history succinctly and highlights the uniqueness of that model through a comparison with an alternate model of history, which it deems part of a coeval modernity and therefore inimitable cross-culturally. Unlike most of Walcott's early texts – which foregrounded imitation in the sense that they were modelled on anterior artworks – 'The New Jerusalem' explicitly probed the limits of the phenomenon when applied cross-culturally in the

²⁶ Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-1940* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 25; Cleary referenced in Edwards, 'Uncovering the "gold-bearing rubble"', p. 186.

²⁷ In particular, Ashcroft proposed that Brathwaite's tidalectic model corresponded closely to Bloch's argument that Hegel's 'dialectical movement of Being' needed to give way 'to the "tidalectical" operation of becoming'. Bill Ashcroft, 'Archipelago of Dreams: Utopianism in Caribbean Literature', *Textual Practice*, 30 (2015), 89-112 (p. 101).

real world. The poem was written in response to the advent of Israeli independence in 1948 and contrasted the active role played by Zionist terrorist groups with the passivity Walcott believed typified Caribbean efforts towards independence. Ultimately, Walcott's speaker concluded it would not be possible for those in the West Indies to imitate Israel because history in the archipelago was inescapably repetitive, like the tide. In Israel, where 'history is action' (72), the 'clock fares / Where the fighter paces' (70-1). But, in the Caribbean, one must instead strive after 'eternal comfort' (43) because 'the tide rolls like history' (70). Whereas the Zionists were 'Shapers of their own morning' (9) able to harness 'waves of sea-old discord' (10) and sail into a new, independent future, 'those in the 'wounded nations' of the Caribbean had no choice but to continue howling "Live, love, endure"' (93-4) to heaven in a cry the speaker deemed 'timeless' (93).

The second part of the chapter then focuses more specifically on the notion of transhistorical simultaneity as it applies to literature. As Sean Seeger suggests, because Walcott's views on literary development and imitation stemmed from his wider non-teleological, non-hierarchical historiography, they are best seen as a 'local instance' of an 'all-encompassing pattern'.²⁸ In 'The Muse of History', Walcott claimed the Caribbean tradition was 'based on the concept that the history of the tribe is endless'.²⁹ Because the tribe was already 'inured to despair,' there was 'no beginning but no end' to their art.³⁰ There was no 'history' in such work, 'but flux'.³¹ Elsewhere, he repeatedly made clear that he felt art was 'synchronic and simultaneous', meaning it exerted itself 'across all times and cultures' in 'defiance of chronology and history'.³² Towards the beginning of a lecture delivered to Toronto's York University in 1989, for example, he claimed 'the idea of art has no tense apart from the present'.³³ Later, in

²⁸ Sean Seeger, *Nonlinear Temporality in Joyce and Walcott: History Repeating with a Difference* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 3.

²⁹ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 47.

³⁰ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 47.

³¹ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 47.

³² Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh (eds.), 'Reading Another Life: A Critical Essay' in *Another Life: Fully Annotated* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 153-217 (p. 135).

³³ Walcott, 'The Sea is History', p. 24.

'Reflections on *Omeros*' (1997), he argued that literary concepts were not '*chronological*', but '*simultaneous*', meaning 'the black cut-out of a diving figure' in a contemporary Caribbean work was 'no more historical than the silhouette of a Greek athlete on a vase'.³⁴ The influences of a 'Greek silhouette' could be traced 'back to the Egyptian profile'.³⁵ No artwork could claim the authority of originality since this chain continued *ad infinitum*.

In light of this theorising, the chapter concludes it is fruitful to construct a model outlining mutability in Caribbean literature and poetics which is relational rather than chronological because regional intellectuals like Walcott, Brathwaite, and Glissant have overwhelmingly avoided equivalising history and progress. One major benefit of this atemporal, non-hierarchical, relational model is that it reflects the regionally specific configurations of temporality engendered through the Caribbean particularities of the modern capitalist world-system. Having interrogated the role politicised literary debates in the 1960s played in retroactively traducing early West Indian work, Alison Donnell ultimately advocated the development of a similar model. She argued that the developmental narrative which grew out of that devaluation needed to be replaced with a new model mapping out a 'complex, overlapping and mobile continuum along which content, form and language continually shift'.³⁶ This chapter expands upon Donnell's position by proposing that such a model could benefit from foregrounding Caribbean ways of conceptualising themes related to time, history, imitation, and influence.

5.I. Tidalectic Models of History and 'The New Jerusalem' (1948)

Many of the Caribbean's most prominent cultural theorists have argued that whiggish models of history fail to reflect life in the region accurately. In his *CovVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1999), Kamau Brathwaite famously proffered the Sisyphean image of an old Jamaican woman

³⁴ Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 240.

³⁵ Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 241.

³⁶ Gunning, p. 913.

sweeping her yard each day as the archetypal symbol of life in the region.³⁷ He characterised recurrent activity of this sort in terms of endless repetition rather than change, which no Western equation between history and progress would reflect. On a broader societal level, Brathwaite believed teleological models for history did not work for the region since Caribbean societies had never proceeded in an 'ordered way'.³⁸ The history of the archipelago was better understood in terms of a 'confluence of repetitions' because it involved an incessant series of political 'breaks and reversals' amid a peripatetic 'movement of peoples'.³⁹ As such, he rejected what he termed the synthesising 'one – two – three' telos of Hegelian dialectic in favour of a repetitive model of history typified by small differences and inspired by the motion of the tides.⁴⁰ Characterised by 'the ripple and the two tide movement', his "tidalectic" historiography represented an "alter / native" model to the teleological colonial model.⁴¹ It was predicated on an awareness that while sequences of waves are endlessly repetitive, individual tides are nonetheless unique. Although cycles of swash and backwash repeat continually, there is neither endpoint nor end goal. For this reason, tidalectic change is 'neither forward oriented nor perpendicular', in contrast to the Hegelian dialectic.⁴² Monica Fernandez Jimenez has shown that this approach to literature and history was broadly 'poststructuralist' in that it entailed a process of 'Deleuzian repetition, always entailing difference'.⁴³ Framing the position in post-structuralist terms, one could say that Brathwaite's tidalectic model configured Caribbean history as an 'eternal return of the different' with no telos.⁴⁴

³⁷ Kamau Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (New York: We Press, 1999), p. 30.

³⁸ Ashcroft, p. 101.

³⁹ Sara Baranzoni and Paolo Vignola, 'Rhythms of Locality: A Travel through Caribbean Performances and Literature', *La Delenziana*, 10 (2019), 160-77 (p. 168).

⁴⁰ Brathwaite, quoted in Ashcroft, p. 14.

⁴¹ Brathwaite, quoted in Anna Reckin, 'Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 1 (2003), 1-16 (p. 1).

⁴² Ashcroft, p. 101.

⁴³ Monica Fernandez Jimenez, 'Defying Absolutes and Essentialism in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*: An Epic of 'Traces'', *Miscelánea*, 62 (2020), 29-47 (pp. 30-2).

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, quoted in Baranzoni and Vignola, p. 168.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo adopted a very similar position to Brathwaite's in *The Repeating Island* (1992) when he argued that the 'most distinctive aspect' of Caribbean culture was 'not terrestrial but aquatic'.⁴⁵ By this he meant that it was a 'realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity' where time passed 'irregularly' and resisted being 'captured by the cycles of clock and calendar'.⁴⁶ He went on to argue that archipelagic history was 'a chaos that returns, a detour without a purpose, a continual flow of paradoxes' and likened it to 'a feed-back machine with asymmetrical workings, like the sea'.⁴⁷ Caribbean people were all said to be sailing through the 'seas of time without reaching anywhere' on an endless voyage 'toward the infinite'.⁴⁸ His position has also been translated into poststructuralist terms: Benítez-Rojo proposes that any given moment in the Caribbean is Derridean in that it possesses 'no referent, outside of itself or before and in front of itself [...] it does not describe something [...] it produces or transforms a situation'.⁴⁹

Brathwaite and Benítez-Rojo's theorising on this topic accords with the position of Édouard Glissant, who agrees that Caribbean history requires a 'nonlinear narrative'.⁵⁰ His essay 'History-Histories-Stories' (1989) proposes that 'the Caribbean notion of time is fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory'.⁵¹ In his view, a sense of 'historical consciousness' was not 'deposited gradually and continuously' in the Caribbean as in Europe: it came about very suddenly through a combination of 'contraction, painful negation and explosive forces'.⁵² Because he considers the experience of time passing a 'product of the link between nature and culture', he sees the notion of 'a "single" historical time' as a Western imposition.⁵³ This theorising about the link between

⁴⁵ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. by James Maraniss (London: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 11.

⁴⁶ Benítez-Rojo, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Benítez-Rojo, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Benítez-Rojo, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Baranzoni and Vignola, p. 164.

⁵⁰ Breslin, p. 292.

⁵¹ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 65.

⁵² Glissant, p. 61.

⁵³ Glissant, p. 92.

violence and perceptions of time anticipated Deborah A. Thomas's empirical, anthropological survey of Caribbean temporality, in which she posits that 'recurring moments of exceptional violence has led to an experience of time neither as linear nor cyclical, but as simultaneous, where the future, past, and present are mutually constitutive and has the potential to be coincidentally influential'.⁵⁴ She frames the phenomenon in terms of coeval modernity within a system of combined and uneven development, rather than proffering it as the basis for an alternate modernity: Afro-Caribbean 'ontological alterity' is 'fully embedded within the violences of modernity' and does not rely on a 'condition of being prior, outside or marginal'.⁵⁵ In her view, studying 'alternative temporal reckonings' of this sort disturbs the 'hegemony of western linear notions of time' while allowing for a 'critical reorientation of modern ideologies of temporality [. . .] inexorably linked to linear teleologies of progress, development, and improvement'.⁵⁶

Brathwaite and Bénítez-Rojo's tidalectic models analogue the overarching sweep of regional history but, according to Glissant, the temporal nonlinearity they described also gives rise to an epiphenomenon in which Caribbean subjects perceive history simultaneously. It is because he believes the region's past has 'not yet emerged as history' that he proposes it remains 'obsessively present' in the minds of individual Caribbean people.⁵⁷ For this reason, he suggests that regional literature ought to prioritise perceptions of nonhistory.⁵⁸ In keeping with Glissant's prescription, Caribbean works of fiction often reflect and convey the region's non-linear temporality by foregrounding rhythmicity and repetition. This holds true for both form and language. Regarding the former, Antillean texts are often structured through 'circles and waves of narrative rather than linear, progressive movements'.⁵⁹ For example, Sharae Deckard has

⁵⁴ Deborah A. Thomas, 'Time and the otherwise: Plantations, garrisons and being human in the Caribbean', *Anthropological Theory*, 16 (2016), 177-200 (p. 177).

⁵⁵ Thomas, p. 177.

⁵⁶ Thomas, p. 177.

⁵⁷ Glissant, p. 64.

⁵⁸ Glissant, p. 64.

⁵⁹ Martin Munro, 'Rhythms, History, and Memory in Édouard Glissant's *Le Quatrième Siècle*', *Romantic Review*, 101 (2010), 409-24 (p. 424).

convincingly demonstrated that the 'literary and formal experimentation' of Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014) articulates regional 'anxieties about the inability to summon a future beyond the present'.⁶⁰ Regarding the latter, Henry Louis Gates Jr. has identified language which 'repeats with a difference' as one of the defining features of Black writing.⁶¹ Beyond form and language, however, Caribbean novelists and poets also regularly and overtly articulate the perception of transhistorical simultaneity Glissant and Thomas describe. In Vincentian-American poet Daniel Williams's 'We are the Cenotaphs' (1951), for instance, the speaker comes to terms with his island's history by concluding that 'We are all time' (77) and 'The present is the past' (80).⁶² Likewise, after Ma Taffy recalls Bedward flying in Kei Miller's *Augustown* (2016), the narrator explains how '[w]hen the past takes hold of us, it does not let go easily. We find ourselves, miraculously, in two places at once.'⁶³ In much the same vein, Jamaica Kincaid's narrator in *A Small Place* remarks on emancipation's seeming contemporaneousness for many in the Caribbean:

[Antiguans] speak of emancipation itself as if it happened just the other day, not over one hundred and fifty years ago. The word "emancipation" is used so frequently, it is as if it, emancipation, were a contemporary occurrence, something everybody is familiar with.⁶⁴

After revealing that a sign hangs outside the island's public library which reads 'THIS BUILDING WAS DAMAGED IN THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1974. REPAIRS ARE PENDING', the speaker comments on how it still 'hangs there more than a decade later, with its unfulfilled promise of repair'.⁶⁵ Though a tourist would probably see this as 'a sort of quaintness' on the part of 'people descended from slaves', Kincaid suggests they would be wrong to do so because the passage of time on the island does not accord with Western paradigms: 'in a world

⁶⁰ Sharae Deckard, 'Always Returning from It': Neoliberal Capitalism, Retrospect, and Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, *CounterText*, 4 (2018), 169-91 (p. 169).

⁶¹ Gates Jr., p. 17.

⁶² Daniel Williams, 'We are the Cenotaphs' in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, ed. by Paula Burnett (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 234.

⁶³ Kei Miller, *Augustown* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2016), p. 28.

⁶⁴ Kincaid, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Kincaid, p. 9.

that is twelve miles long and nine miles wide (the size of Antigua) twelve years and twelve minutes and twelve days are all the same'.⁶⁶

Many of the temporal theorisations in this chapter's purview appeared in works published between 1988 and 1993: *A Small Place* was written in 1988, 'History-Histories-Stories' appeared in 1989, *The Repeating Island* was published in 1992, and Brathwaite gave interviews about tidalectic reasoning to Nathaniel Mackey between 1990 and 1993. Given the timeline, it is possible to see the development or publication of wave-based non-teleological constructions of Caribbean history as part of a wider, global response to the breakup of the Soviet Union. However, Caribbean cultural theorists did not suddenly start rejecting teleological narratives for history in the late 1980s. As William Ghosh has shown, they had been dismissing historical models which could not account for the 'slow violence of slavery, indigenous destruction, or post-emancipation subjection' for at least the previous three decades.⁶⁷ Increased recognition of the Caribbean's economic stasis had been forcing the region's historians away from earlier narratives emphasizing 'triumphant overcoming' as far back as the 1960s, with a long-term trajectory towards examinations of colonialism as a 'process of social engineering with profound and long-lasting social, cultural, and psychological effects'.⁶⁸ It is therefore possible that regional writers were responding to Euromodernist authors when formulating their ideas about non-teleology. In that vein, Charles W. Pollard has argued that Eliot's theorising about tradition was attractive to some Caribbean intellectuals principally because it expressed similar 'doubts about the European model of history'.⁶⁹ Caribbean ideas about time and history were not simply transplanted from the Euromodernists, however, because the two differ in significant ways. For instance, though Eliot's configuration of cultural history was non-linear, in a sense, because it proposed that the meaning of past works continually altered in response to new texts and

⁶⁶ Kincaid, p. 9.

⁶⁷ William Ghosh, *V.S. Naipaul, Caribbean Writing, and Caribbean Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 107.

⁶⁸ Ghosh, p. 108.

⁶⁹ Pollard, p. 19.

societal changes, it was also linear, in a more important sense, because that synchronic tradition itself existed in the context of a wider historical narrative predicated on Western decline.

Asserting European culture had continually deteriorated since the heyday of the Middle Ages suggested a model for history conceived in terms as linear as those underpinning the conventional teleological view. The difference was only in polarity. Although they sometimes overlap with earlier Western thinking on temporality, Caribbean theorisations of time and history arose in response to a specific set of regional conditions engendered by the particularities of the modern capitalist world-system.

It may not be a coincidence, however, that a number of Bloch's most important works were translated into English for the first time in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷⁰ *Heritage of Our Times* first appeared in 1991, for example, which was the same year Jameson quoted the work in *Postmodernism*. If Bloch's thinking did exert a direct influence on any of the models within this chapter's purview, that influence can itself be understood within a system of influence predicated on the principle of combined and uneven development. Were one to frame the relationship as straightforwardly derivative and diffusional, one would need to downplay the differences between the various tidalectic historiographies and Bloch's. Though the Caribbean and Blochian models are all grounded in the idea of simultaneous non-simultaneity, Bloch's was nonetheless teleological. It was built around a utopian vision of *Heimat*: his word for the home that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known.⁷¹ For Bloch, the attainment of this state was the *raison d'être* of human existence, and the purpose of literature was its *Vorschein*, or "anticipatory illumination."⁷² In the only work linking Bloch to tidalectics hitherto produced, Ashcroft claimed the Caribbean was 'particularly suited to the concept of *Heimat*' because that concept implies 'a place, even for its inhabitants, of continual arrival and potentiality'.⁷³ The issue with mapping

⁷⁰ David C. Durst, 'Ernst Bloch's Theory of Nonsimultaneity', *The Germanic Review*, 77 (2002), 171-94 (p. 171).

⁷¹ Ashcroft, p. 90.

⁷² Ashcroft, p. 90.

⁷³ Ashcroft, p. 90; p. 105.

Blochian thought onto tidalectics in this way is that the Caribbean frameworks are more obviously Sisyphean than utopian. For example, Benítez-Rojo's suggestion that Caribbean societies are sailing on an endless voyage 'toward the infinite' does not obviously allow for any destination, utopian or otherwise.⁷⁴ Towards the end of his essay, Ashcroft perceptively suggests that Caribbean experiences of modernity might represent a forerunner of those which will eventually occur elsewhere.⁷⁵ His position dovetails with the work of Jean and John L. Comaroff, who argue in their ground-breaking monograph *Theory from the South* (2012) that because of the 'unpredictable, under-determined dialectic of capitalism-and-modernity':

[I]t is the [global] south that often is the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labor are taking shape, thus to prefigure the future of the global north.⁷⁶

This line of thinking recalls C. L. R. James's famous proposition in *The Black Jacobins* (1936) that San Domingo's slaves 'were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time' because they were 'working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories'.⁷⁷ Unlike James, however, Ashcroft frames his assertion that the Caribbean exists on the forefront of modernisation in European, Blochian terms of 'a utopian "Front" space beyond whose horizon lies the promise of "the world as homeness"'.⁷⁸ In other words, although he considers the Caribbean a forerunner of global modernity, he interprets regional theorising from that vantage point in terms of its correspondence to an older European model. The line of reasoning is in keeping with the predominant 'epistemic scaffolding' in Western thought the Comaroffs outline, whereby:

⁷⁴ Benítez-Rojo, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Ashcroft, p. 105.

⁷⁶ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 12.

⁷⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. 86.

⁷⁸ Ashcroft, p. 105.

[Southern] worlds are treated less as sources of refined knowledge than as reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural, and ethnographic minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths.⁷⁹

Rather than employing tidalectic frameworks to confirm the validity of Bloch's theorising, this chapter treats Caribbean models as innovative southern formulations differing from Bloch's because they are neither end-oriented nor utopian.

Seeger and Paul Breslin have both pointed out that Walcott's 'rejection of linear temporality [was] fully compatible with the postcolonial critique of developmental history' outlined by Brathwaite and Benítez-Rojo in that he also mapped temporality onto the tides.⁸⁰ As Ashcroft suggests, the models are so similar that Brathwaite essentially put 'a name to Walcott's argument with history' when coining "tidalectics".⁸¹ Walcott's adherence to a tidalectic model for history also notably led him to posit the epiphenomenal perception of Caribbean simultaneous transhistorical subjectivity in keeping with Glissant and Kincaid. In an interview with Roger Brown and Cheryl Johnson, he proposed that West Indians possessed an 'idea of time' which was 'totally different' to its Western counterpart, before characterising Caribbean regional temporality in synchronic terms: everything that happens in the archipelago 'happens instantly and simultaneously' such that 'the Caribbean experience of history is simultaneous'.⁸² As Todd Presner suggests, thinking of this sort implies that the 'unpredictable haunt of the past within the space of present-day experience complicates the rendering of history into something safely distant, bygone, and beyond'.⁸³ It also broadly corresponds to Bloch's idea that everything in existence contains 'both a past and a future as nonsynchronous realities and driving impulses'.⁸⁴ In 'The Muse of History', Walcott went into greater detail about this belief in Caribbean transhistorical simultaneity, explaining how there was a particular 'sense of history within every

⁷⁹ Comaroff and Comaroff, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Seeger, p. 7.

⁸¹ Ashcroft, p. 102.

⁸² Brown and Johnson, p. 176; p. 182.

⁸³ Todd Samuel Presner, *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 36.

⁸⁴ Thompson, p. 51.

Englishman and European' which made no sense to those in the Third World.⁸⁵ He therefore rejected the Western 'idea of history as time' and proposed that the 'contempt for historic time' demonstrated by Caribbean intellectuals was 'revolutionary' because it implied the 'simultaneity' of the Old and New Worlds.⁸⁶ This rendered the distinction between 'the New and the Old [...] increasingly absurd', meaning the core formulation of Caribbean history was nonsensical: 'what must happen to our sense of time, what else can happen to history itself, but that it, too, is becoming absurd'.⁸⁷ This absurd simultaneity was a direct product of a model for regional history which mapped the passage of time onto the motions of the sea: he continually framed the sea as 'an archive in constant flux' throughout his oeuvre in which 'histories coexist simultaneously rather than sequentially'.⁸⁸ Hence, according to Walcott's tidalectic paradigm, to write imitatively is to engage in a process of cross-temporal transformation rather than derivation. Logically, no time period or culture can be considered superior on the grounds that it came first, nor can any be deemed inferior because it possesses an analogue in the past.

Walcott outlined his non-teleological, sea-based model of history in many essays and interviews, but its contours and implications were most comprehensively surveyed in his poetry. One can find verse mapping Caribbean history onto the motions of the tides as far back as 25 *Poems*, with the phenomenon most thoroughly explored in an early longform lyric called 'The New Jerusalem'. The speaker of that poem meditates overtly on whether colonised nations in the Caribbean should attempt to imitate Zionist terrorist groups in using retributive violence for political ends or whether they should, instead, imitate Christ by 'turning [the] other cheek' (35). He ultimately pledges to continue imitating Christ because he believes that history works tidalectically in the Caribbean. History in the archipelago is characterised by nonlinear motions of eternal return, meaning it produces sons who are all the 'same as [their] fathers' (66). These

⁸⁵ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 58.

⁸⁶ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 58; p. 37.

⁸⁷ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 41.

⁸⁸ David Farrier, 'Charting the "Amnesiac Atlantic": Chiastic Cartography and Caribbean Epic in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 3 (2003), 23-38 (p. 25).

'father's sons' dream of working as 'changer[s]' and 'builder-hand[s]' (59-60), but change is not possible and they are limited to producing 'pinkish imitations' (62) of what came before.

The poem's title can be understood in two contrasting ways, both of which raise questions about historical teleology. Firstly, there is the secular interpretation, relating to the physical city of Jerusalem and reliant upon historical context. In the first stanza, the speaker sets the scene by describing a soldier beneath a clock at midnight, whose chiming is of historical significance: 'history tolls twelve sounds' (7). Since the British mandate to govern Palestine officially expired at midnight on 15 May 1948, these 'twelve pools of sound' (83) are a learned reference conveying the precise moment at which the modern state of Israel came into being.⁸⁹ At that moment, Jerusalem became a new city in the sense that it embarked on a new chapter of its history, under new governance. In the speaker's estimation, this new historical chapter arose from the willingness of some Jewish groups to commit acts of violence. He therefore presents politically motivated violence as a deplorable but necessary tool to make history advance, rather than denouncing it outright. On the one hand, he views it as cruel and unjust, acknowledging its origins in 'hate' (17) and likening it to '[p]laying an eye for a tooth' (19). (By compressing the maxim from Exodus, he suggests that the punishment does not fit the crime.) On the other, he implies that there could be no independence without bloodshed. In the third stanza, the alliterative metaleptic formulation, 'the day of the dog mounts carnage to the skies' (18), relies on its relation to the proverbial wisdom that every dog has its day. According to this logic, despite being perennial historical underdogs, it was a foregone conclusion that the Jewish people would prosper eventually. The challenge to this view comes through the immediate collocation of 'dog' with 'carnage' because this highlights a secondary connotation of dogs, absent from the proverb. Namely, it draws attention to their capacity for ferocity. So, the sense is modified: Israel did not become an independent state because of inevitable teleological progress; violence played a role in

⁸⁹ This predated the composition of the poem by at least a month. In the ninth stanza, the speaker announces, with ironic resentment, that 'their late greatest action is new sewers'. The construction of a sewage network for Castries came about as a result of the great fire there, which took place on 20 June 1948.

the state's creation and would continue to play a role in its survival. The Israelis made their own history.

Later, Walcott's speaker contrasts pacifistic distaste for political violence in the Caribbean with the actions a self-avowed Jewish terrorist organisation called the Lehi. The group were widely and pejoratively known as the Stern Gang:

Boys look at clouds, are pious anarchists,
 Gifted to see shapes in water, as Stern gang Jews
 Refute the passive violence of rabbi, to build
 Safety by bullets, then repent in safety (73-6)

On 6 November 1944, the group gained international notoriety when two of their members assassinated Walter Guinness, 1st Baron Moyne, ardent anti-Zionist, incumbent Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Leader of the House of Lords. Moyne's assassination would have been of particular relevance for those in the Caribbean because, several years earlier, on 5 August 1938, he had been tasked with producing a report into the conditions of life in the British West Indies, following half a decade of regional labour unrest. His findings had been highly critical. According to one contemporary commentator, his report painted a 'sombre and even depressing' picture of a generally 'deplorable' state of affairs.⁹⁰ Saint Lucia, for example, was said to have a 'serious urban problem', Castries having 'sunk into insignificance' following a diminution of trade, resulting in a widely 'unemployed population'.⁹¹ To remedy the situation, he acknowledged the need for constitutional reform, championing the immediate federation of the Leeward and Windward Isles.⁹² However, he dismissed 'extreme' demands for 'the grant of immediate and complete self-government' on the grounds that 'independence [was] irreconcilable with [...] the interests of the home taxpayer.'⁹³

⁹⁰ Walter Fitzgerald, 'The Moyne Report on the West Indies Region', *Nature*, 157 (1946), 254-5 (p. 254).

⁹¹ Walter Edward Guinness Moyne, *West India Royal Commission Report*, Cmd. 6607 (London: HMSO, 1945) [online] <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/1817191.html>> [accessed 28 September 2020], p. 410.

⁹² Moyne, p. 328.

⁹³ Moyne, p. 374.

In the short term, his assassination resulted in the indefinite postponement of parliamentary consideration of the Palestine Committee Report which, having been added to the upcoming parliamentary agenda on 3 November 1944, advocated giving the Jews a state of their own in Palestine. However, the extent to which the killing served as an impediment or spur to independence is unclear because, as Michael J. Cohen rightly suggests, it is 'quite pointless to conjecture' whether the recommendations of the report would have been approved by parliament, and even if they had been, it also remains unknowable what form the resultant Jewish state would have taken.⁹⁴ The key point, from Walcott's perspective, was that terrorism of this sort either furthered the cause of independence, had little impact on it, or at least did not damage it to such an extent that an independent Jewish state was never established. Overall, then, in an Israeli context, Moyne had been a longstanding opponent of Zionist interests, he had been assassinated, and Israel had become independent, whereas, in a West Indian context, his report had rejected independence, there had been little resistance, and the West Indies remained colonies of the British Empire.⁹⁵

To highlight this contrast, the speaker invokes a secondary meaning of the word "gang" in reference to those in the Caribbean. West Indians are not like the Stern Gang. They are the 'same as fathers, and the old gang / That sang at chanties like 'Ol' Man River' (66-8). The lyrics to that song, which Oscar Hammerstein composed for the Broadway musical *Show Boat* (1927), frame slavery in terms of subservience – 'Don't look up / An' don't look down – / You don't dast make / De white man frown. / Bend your knees / an' bow your head' (p. 20) – and map it tidialectically onto water rolling ceaselessly – 'Ah gits weary / An' sick of tryin', / Ah'm tired of livin' / An' skeered of dyin', / But ol' Man River, / He jes' keeps rollin' along' (p. 20).⁹⁶ In 'The

⁹⁴ Michael J. Cohen, 'The Moyne Assassination, November, 1944: A Political Analysis', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 15 (1979), 358-73 (p. 370).

⁹⁵ Walcott was not alone in questioning whether the Stern Gang's violent tactics might prove an effective tool in the fight for independence. Following the English-language publication of leader Menachem Begin's book about the organisation, *The Revolt*, in 1951, various leaders, including Nelson Mandela, consciously drew on, and deployed, Stern Gang tactics in the second half of the twentieth century.

⁹⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II, 'Show Boat' in *American Musicals 1927-1949*, ed. by Laurence Maslon (New York: The Library of America, 2014), pp. 1-98.

Muse of History', Walcott likened the passive doctrine espoused by songs like 'Ol' Man River' to 'a slow, massive groan of surrender', embodying 'the most contemptible expression of the beaten'.⁹⁷ As with Irish literature, he *dissimilated* Israeli history by twinning the two gangs, drawing an interperipheral linguistic parallel so as to accentuate difference. This dissimilative contrast was enhanced by the timeframe. Although Moyne's report had been commissioned in 1938 and had taken around fifteen months to complete, his findings were considered so damning by the Colonial Office that they were not made public in full until the summer of 1945, following VE Day, for fear they would have a detrimental effect on wartime morale. As a result, Moyne's report was published relatively soon after his death in 1944 despite having been written five years prior. Only a year separated the two events in the West Indian public consciousness.

The second, non-secular way in which the title can be understood also raises questions of historical teleology because the idea of an eschatological 'New Jerusalem' permeates much Judeo-Christian scripture. Originally referenced in a sibylline vision from the Book of Ezekiel, the heavenly city is outlined in detail in the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation. Although interpretations of the city's nature and purpose vary considerably, most Christian denominations understand the New Jerusalem as a reward available to those who have followed Christian teaching. In this reading, the suggestion is that those in the Caribbean will inevitably be rewarded with a New Jerusalem if they forego violence. It will either come in this life, because their islands will become self-governing, or in the next, since the biblical notion of the heavenly city is generally framed in terms of a reward bestowed at the end of history.⁹⁸ On that front, an association between the heavenly city and the New World has existed since the advent of European colonisation of the Americas, with various groups having asserted the existence of, or attempted the construction of, the New Jerusalem in the United States or Caribbean, ranging

⁹⁷ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 46.

⁹⁸ The lyrics of 'Ol' Man River' indicate that the river metonymising slave work will only stop rolling at the end of days: 'Here we all work while the white folk play / Pullin' them boats from the dawn till sunset / Gettin' no rest till the judgment day'.

from seventeenth-century New England Puritans, who modelled elements of New Haven on the city outlined in the Book of Revelation, to Jamaican Bedwardists in the 1920s, who associated the heavenly city with a camp in the August Town suburb of Kingston.⁹⁹ In most cases, the intent was to hasten Judgement Day. In *Another Life*, Walcott mocked this tradition: throughout his tongue-in-cheek provincial reimagining of *The Iliad*'s catalogue of ships, he associated the New Jerusalem with various shops frequented by Saint Lucian vagabonds and eccentrics. Thus, 'Vaughan, / battling his itch, waits for the rumshop's / New Jerusalem' (III.2.470) and Mr Weekes sits with his Bible, 'arm crooked all day over a window open / at the New Jerusalem, for Coloured People Only' (III.2.488-9). In so doing, he highlighted the incongruity between a teleological model for history rooted in scripture and Caribbean non-teleology tied to persecution and violence.

In 'The Muse of History', he suggested that while 'the Old Testament epics of bondage and deliverance provided the slave with a political parallel, the ethics of Christianity tempered his vengeance and appeared to deepen his passivity'.¹⁰⁰ Since slaves were denied 'vision of an earthly Paradise', they had to focus their attention on 'the reward offered in the name of Christian suffering', which would come after death.¹⁰¹ Throughout the 'New Jerusalem', he established the same dichotomy by framing Israeli independence in terms of violent retribution, after the manner of the Old Testament, while presenting the reluctance of those in the West Indies to employ violence and hasten independence in terms of Christian restraint, arising from a desire to imitate Christ. The central figure of the poem is a vengeful Israeli soldier with a 'gun's / Grammar in lap' (1), who sees that the 'thunderous god [has] awoken' (82) through the 'old testament in his eyes' (78). By contrast, the speaker's 'people' remain torpid and oppressed. They can never win 'the fight against themselves' (36) since they forever 'turn [the] other cheek to be

⁹⁹ Cecelia Tichi, 'The Puritan Historians and Their New Jerusalem', *Early American Literature*, 6 (1971), 143-55 (p. 148); Martha Warren Beckwith, 'Some Religious Cults in Jamaica', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 34 (1923), 32-45 (p. 41).

¹⁰⁰ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 45.

¹⁰¹ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p. 45.

forgiven' (35); because they employ the 'safest logic', which is to 'love [their] neighbours / 'As [them]selves' (37-8), they can do little more than receive 'waited harms' (38). Even as this pacifistic philosophy is being outlined in the fifth stanza, there is a verbatim interjection from Psalm 137 which appears in ostentatious quotation marks and acts as its violent counterpoint: "If I forget thee Old Jerusalem" (32). The psalm ends with an assertion that, having been conquered and exiled from Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the Israelites will take pleasure in retributive infanticide: 'Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones' (*KJV*, 137.9). Torn between his rejection of violent revenge, which might hasten independence, and Christian pacificism, which is admirable but changes nothing, the speaker finds himself tempted to abandon such philosophising entirely in the final stanza of the poem: 'Is it not better to curse man and live [...] / In thoughtless hills away from any prophet?' (91-2). Although this sort of abandonment may be desirable, he finds it deeply challenging. However, he ultimately commits himself to non-violence in spite of his grave reservations. He is aware that it is because Caribbean people all 'work at the eternal comfort' (43) of Christian doctrine that they are doomed to remain oppressed by imperial powers. He therefore knows his commitment to non-violence forms part of, and metonymises, the wider tendency towards inaction which enables the 'graceless imitators' who established oppressive colonies to continue to 'set in profile / Machinery of class and colour with open throttle' (44-5). He commits to inaction despite this realisation because he cannot see any other course of action in keeping with his Christian values. He is resigned to the idea that Caribbean history cannot advance towards independence because it is neither teleological nor progressive, meaning imitating Israel would fail.

5.II. Artistic Transhistorical Simultaneity and 'Call for Breakers and Builders' (1948)

Walcott deemed temporal non-linearity essential for understanding the political and cultural history of the Caribbean and he felt the same held true for literary history. Evidence for his belief

in non-linear artistic temporality can be found throughout his interviews and essays, but the phenomenon is explored most comprehensively in his verse. His early poetry boasts several examples of precisely the sort of maritime geocultural theorising, analogising a nonlinear model of time, later evinced by Brathwaite and Benítez-Rojo. The title of his short lyric 'Call for Breakers and Builders' (1948), for example, frames the text's conceit in nautical terms. Because of their juxtaposition with "builders", on an initial reading, the titular "breakers" are likely to be interpreted in an antonymic sense, denoting destruction – the idea being that, as the islands transition from colonial rule, elements of West Indian society will need to be demolished and rebuilt. However, across Walcott's oeuvre, "breakers" generally refer to powerful waves which froth when they pass over shallows or hit rocky coasts, rather than to "individuals who break things". This denotation is employed liberally throughout longer works like *Omeros* and can be found in shorter lyrics, such as 'Origins' (1964), whose opening line depicts a 'flowering breaker detonat[ing] its surf' (1). The 'Call for Breakers and Builders' is not an appeal to dismantle colonial structures, but an exploration of West Indian cultural transformation configuring archipelagic history as a non-teleological repetitive process, akin to the cyclical breaking of waves.¹⁰² This configuration implies that whenever culture is renewed on the shores of the Caribbean, the backwash washes it away, leaving fresh 'detritus in which the poet can read meaning or construct a culture'.¹⁰³ Such a configuration resembles the one Brathwaite details in his Neustadt Lecture (1994) very closely:

I have seen the sea outside our yard bring grain by gentle grain out of its granary, coast upon coast, & then in one long sweep of light or night, take all away again A poem tree of tidalectics.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Hitherto, the poem has been located within the tradition of regional 'protest poetry' established throughout the 1930s and '40s by George Campbell, A. J. Seymour and others. In Baugh's estimation, Walcott's poem failed because its optimistic vision was overly abstract and 'straightforward'. Baugh, 'A History of Poetry', p. 251. He also believed its 'exhortatory tone' lacked the 'relative complexity' with which such matters were later handled. Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, p. 34.

¹⁰³ Farrier, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Kamau Brathwaite, 'Newstead to Neustadt', *World Literature Today*, 68 (1994), 653-60 (p. 653).

Aside from an ambiguous 'exploding door' (22) and implied need to 'blast' air (12), Walcott's poem was devoid of destructive language and imagery. Instead, it consistently employed meta-allusion to articulate and exemplify a belief in Caribbean historical non-teleology. This is most easily seen in the second stanza, where the poem's sixth to eighth lines run:

There are no worlds to conquer, but worlds to recreate.
No houses to build except from the falling timbers.
And though the pastures are not new we can plant new grass.

These lines are imitative of anterior analogues in the sense that they are allusive. The sixth line, for example, reprises a famous description of Alexander the Great's megalomania, commonly and erroneously attributed to Plutarch, in which the king weeps upon realising that there are no worlds *left* to conquer. Here, Walcott both articulates the idea that West Indian culture must rework older material rather than create from scratch and exemplifies it because he frames the thought through a reworked description of Alexander. In his speaker's view, one should not lament the fact that European powers, like Alexander, ran out of worlds to conquer. Rather, one should lament the fact that they viewed worlds as conquerable in the first case. Walcott employs the same technique two lines later when he writes of 'pastures [that] are not new'. To put forth the idea that one can only rework fragments of culture in the Antilles, rather than create culture *ex nihilo*, he reprises the final line of Milton's *Lycidas* (1637), 'Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new' (193). Walcott's line is not new, since it alludes to Milton, but the wording and meaning have been modified, in a manner akin to planting new grass in the same field. The sense of the line is that writers must neither reject the poetic traditions of the English language outright nor adopt them uncritically to forge a native West Indian poetic tradition. They must, instead, chart 'new water in the antique hoax' ('The Fishermen Rowing Homeward', 1948, 12). By imitating lines and phrases from anterior works, but repurposing them to new ends, Walcott transformed them cross-temporally and cross-culturally. Rather than exhorting West Indians to destroy colonial poetic or political structures and replace them with homegrown substitutes, his

poem was as a tidalectic commentary on the process of cultural renewal in the archipelago, which, by framing imitation in terms of transformation, suggested violent cultural rupture was neither necessary nor possible.

This native model for cultural (re)generation in the archipelago could be used as the basis of a new narrative for anglophone Caribbean literature. Such a narrative would be grounded in a belief that the Caribbean has been a hybridised, creolising space throughout its recorded history, meaning its poetry did not undergo a fundamental transformation at some point in the 1960s. It would therefore represent the composition of West Indian poetry as an act of syncretic *bricolage* in keeping with the most famous part of Walcott's Nobel Prize speech, in which he proposed the 'exact process of the making of poetry' in the Antilles consisted of reassembling the fragments of a broken vase.¹⁰⁵ West Indian writers would be seen as *bricoleurs* who have always had to make do with 'whatever is at hand', surveying the 'remains of previous constructions or deconstructions' out of necessity, before selecting those features which can be repurposed to solve their problems.¹⁰⁶ One issue with applying the notion of *bricolage* to the Caribbean is that, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's conceptualisation at least, the process is apolitical: in *The Savage Mind* (1962), he describes bricoleurs coming to an 'already existent set made up of tools and materials', comprising 'oddments left over from human endeavours' from which they build something new.¹⁰⁷ In the Caribbean, as Wendy Knepper suggests, one must be careful to avoid framing *bricolage* as an 'apolitical deconstructive strategy' in this way.¹⁰⁸ Political forces have always shaped the 'tools and materials' at the hands of the region's *bricoleurs*. Because the archipelago is one of the parts of the world most disadvantaged by the inequality inherent to the modern capitalist world-system, regional bricolage has always involved 'selective, coerced, forced, and violent

¹⁰⁵ Walcott, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 262.

¹⁰⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. by George Weidenfeld (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Lévi-Strauss, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁸ Wendy Knepper, 'Colonization, Creolization, and Globalization: The Art and Ruses of Bricolage', *Small Axe*, 21 (2006), 70-86 (p. 82).

intermixtures' as well as 'spontaneous meldings, subversive appropriations, and processes of adaptation', and this could be foregrounded in the new tidalectic narrative for Caribbean cultural production.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the narrative could follow Walcott in pointing to the 'white scars' arising from the reconstructive 'process' when discussing the reconstituted vase that is poetry.¹¹⁰ For him, these scars are not flaws in an artwork, but something to be celebrated since they reveal the object's history. He thus 'defends the seams, scars, and visibility of the glue that holds the pieces together in its new form'.¹¹¹ The new narrative charting mutability in regional writing would be predicated on a belief that the main difference between texts composed in the 1940s and 1990s was the nature and provenance of the fragments being reassembled, not the process of reassembly itself. This could be emphasised through the implementation of a new critical lexicon reliant on vocabulary without connotations of either derivation or antagonism. One would speak in terms of *mutability* rather than *development*, *change* rather than *progress*, and *anterior* and *posterior* works in place of *originals* and *imitations*. Anthologies could be structured thematically or alphabetically, in line with Kenneth Ramchand's injunction that West Indian literary 'periodization should not be determined by chronology'.¹¹² The focus would be on inclusivity rather than exclusivity and description in place of prescription. As such, the spatiotemporal limits of the texts under discussion would be fluid and amorphous, emphasising commensurability over division. Such a hermeneutic would be grounded in Caribbean notions of spatiotemporality proffered within the context of a model for combined and uneven development positing coeval modernities. As such, it would be neither hierarchical nor deterministic and – in drawing on the work of Walcott, Brathwaite, Glissant, and Bénítez-Rojo – it would ultimately prove tidalectic in that it would foreground areas of continuity over those of rupture.

¹⁰⁹ Knepper, p. 73.

¹¹⁰ Walcott, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 262.

¹¹¹ Knepper, p. 80.

¹¹² Ramchand, 'West Indian Literary History', p. 102.

Chapter Six: Interleafing Texts

This thesis has so far disrupted the developmental narrative popularly used to conceptualise the trajectory of Walcott's poetics. Through a series of close readings, it has shown that he was not simply devoted to the Anglo-European tradition in the first phase of his career. Rather, analysis of his early work reveals its complex, shifting position within a network of influence comprising earlier metropolitan, peripheral, and non-Western writing. Because complex positioning of this sort remained central to the aesthetic of all subsequent work, a fundamental continuity across his oeuvre has been charted. An alter/native tidalectic version of Caribbean literary history has therefore been proffered in place of the predominant deterministic model. One major benefit of this new model is that it is rooted in regionally specific configurations of non-linear temporality. This chapter will break from the others in that it will not evaluate whether any of the contemporary paradigms for global literary influence accords with conclusions drawn about Walcott's early writing via close reading. Considering that challenge a *fait accompli*, it will, instead, demonstrate what a new model rooted in the anti-capitalist paradigm and foregrounding cross-temporal continuity can bring to discussions of even the most celebrated and widely analysed of Walcott's texts. In particular, it will bring *Omeros* (1990) into conversation with two earlier plays, *Ione: A Play With Music* (1957) and *The Isle is Full of Noises* (1982).¹ Because the teleological model for Walcott's poetic development has been destabilised, these anterior works will not be discussed with the limited level of detail reserved for failed prototypes but with a degree of nuance befitting significant intertexts.

¹ *Ione* and *The Isle is Full of Noises* are only available through the online Alexander Street Press Black Drama database. Derek Walcott, *Ione* (Virginia: Alexandra Street Press, originally published 1957) [online] <https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3607517> [accessed 1 June 2022]; Derek Walcott, *The Isle is Full of Noises* (Virginia: Alexandra Street Press, unpublished) [online] <https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3607772> [accessed 1 June 2022].

As critics have long noted, Walcott's oeuvre is full of repeated phrases and images, many of which recur both within and across collections. Currently, these recurring features are viewed through the prism of teleology. As such, early iterations are seen as inferior drafts of later work. In Fumagalli's essay on *Epitaph*, for example, she concludes that the poem 'contains in embryonic form some of the main preoccupations and strategies of Walcott's later poetry'.² Line Henriksen similarly proposes that posterior texts are 'anticipated' through 'foreshadowing' in his early work, motifs in *Omeros* having been 'prefigured' throughout *In a Green Night*.³ Even Patricia Ismond – arguably the most ardent defender of Walcott's early poetry – suggests revisiting the work is fruitful because it is necessary to comprehend Walcott's 'point of departure' when interpreting his wider oeuvre.⁴ Because it is rooted in a tidalectic model of Caribbean history, this chapter considers Walcott's earlier and later work in non-teleological, non-hierarchical terms. To do so, it employs the same experimental methodology Ato Quayson devised for his work on postcolonial tragedy, which he termed an *interleafed* approach. For Quayson, adopting this approach meant 'oscillating' between the tragic tradition and the postcolonial texts in his purview 'by paying equally serious attention to both in terms of their modalities of expression, their material conditions, and other multidimensional qualities inherent to the two domains'.⁵ He described his strategy in the following terms:

Interleafing [...] means that to take any literary text seriously you have to read it with the subliminal or explicit knowledge of all the various ways in which it is impinged upon by other texts and, may in its turn, impinge upon others. This should be the preliminary starting point, even if you have no idea how these interrelations might be established. In other words, every text is to be read as a portal to other things of literary value and not simply to confirm already established cultural experiences and dispositions.⁶

² Fumagalli, 'Epitaph for the Young: Culture or Mimicry', p. 72.

³ Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety: Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics* (New York: Rodopi, 2006), p. 265.

⁴ Ismond, p. 28.

⁵ Quayson, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 301.

⁶ Quayson, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 302.

Interleafing *Omeros* with Walcott's other work and Ancient Greek texts accords logically with the newly established tidalectic paradigm for Caribbean literary history, which frames regional writing in terms of an oscillating continuum of content, form and language. When applied to Walcott's oeuvre, rather than to a combination of European and postcolonial texts, Quayson's approach involves situating early and late occurrences of lines, phrases, and images along a singular, synchronic poetic spectrum. This differs from simply asserting authorial continuity because it removes any sense of a temporal hierarchy. One major benefit of interpreting Walcott's writing in this way is it helps to uncover considerable points of consistency across his oeuvre. When looking back on his career in the 1990s, he concluded that he had remained 'the same person talking' since the age of 'eighteen'.⁷ Prioritising relationality over improvement by adopting an interleaved approach captures this unity. A second major benefit of employing Quayson's methodology is that it reveals the full range of Walcott's idiolect. In his Nobel Prize speech, Walcott famously argued that poetry is constructed through the 'buried language' of 'the individual voice', which he likened to a 'dialect' which 'shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody'.⁸ Employing an interleaved reading means excavating Walcott's buried language and surveying the contours of his personal dialect.

My discussion of the relationship between *Omeros* and the earlier plays begins with the question most commonly posed about the work, namely, why do so many of the characters in the poem share names with figures from Ancient Greek mythology? The logic in pursuing this line of inquiry is that if an approach yields insight into the most frequently addressed topic of Walcott's most widely interpreted poem, it is probable that equivalent or greater insight can be generated for lesser studied texts and topics. This establishes both the validity and the utility of the method. Centring on *Ione*, the first half of the chapter answers this question by arguing that the relationship between *Omeros* and the earlier play is precisely the same as the relationship both

⁷ Walcott, quoted in Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, p. 29.

⁸ Walcott, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 262.

share with the Homeric poems. In both of Walcott's works, characters were given names with Greek analogues on account of the ambivalent, inevitable, and problematic influence he felt European culture exerted on nascent West Indian art. In his configuration of epic myth, figures from across cultures or time periods parallel one another, but the paralleling is tidalectic, meaning subsequent iterations resemble one another only imprecisely, and the myth represents the *simultaneous* amalgamation of all extant iterations. It is this approach which accounts for the parallels between *Ione* and *Omeros*, which are imprecise, not a desire to rewrite the former as the latter. By highlighting the consistency of this style of mythmaking, the conceptual overlap between *Omeros* and a work written three decades prior further discredits the view that, in 1957, Walcott was an Afro-Saxon unsure what to do with Greek material he poorly, misguidedly, and inappropriately replicated.⁹

The second half of the chapter moves from an exploration of the extratextual rationale for incorporating Greek nomenclature into *Ione* and *Omeros* to an analysis of the effect Greek parallels have when interpreting the latter. This comparative study brings *The Isle is Full of Noises*, an earlier play with a plot drawn from the myth of Philoctetes, into dialogue with Philoctete's storyline in *Omeros*. According to Walcott's most prominent critics, Philoctete's wound is the most important motif in his magnum opus: Edward Baugh believes it is the poem's 'central symbol', while Jahan Ramazani dubs it the text's 'vivid nucleus'.¹⁰ Interleafing *The Isle is Full of Noises* and *Omeros* sheds fresh light on this image by establishing what Quayson terms the 'characterological, cultural [and] conceptual' commensurability of the motif across the intertexts.¹¹ Commencing with a quick sketch of some of the key differences between *Ione* and *The Isle is Full of Noises*, my analysis interrogates Walcott's conceptualisation of the Philoctetes archetype. Because Walcott's approach to mythmaking remained consistent throughout his

⁹ For more on this view, see: Greenwood, "'Still Going On'", p. 142.

¹⁰ Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, p. 189; Jahan Ramazani, 'The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction', *PMLA*, 112 (1997), 405-17 (p. 407).

¹¹ Quayson, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 304.

oeuvre, his conceptualisation of this archetype is simultaneous, emerging at once from both works. At the moment, critics of *Omeros* typically focus on the physical aspect of Philoctete's injury, foregrounding the role the wound plays metonymizing Caribbean historical suffering, rather than laying emphasis on its mental side. An interleaved reading approach reveals the importance of the psychology of the affliction in Walcott's iteration of the myth. Ultimately, by commingling the psychological aspect of Philoctete's wound with the wider historical trauma it metonymized, *Omeros* implied that West Indian societies would only recover from the damage wrought by the Middle Passage if their citizens first healed on an individual, cognitive level.

6.I. *Ione* (1957), *Omeros* (1990), and Walcott's Mythic Method

Why do so many of the character names in *Omeros* parallel those in Greek mythology? The most comprehensive answer to this question so far came in Martin McKinsey's 2008 *Callaloo* article 'Missing Sounds and Mutable Meanings'.¹² The critic's onomatology adopts two distinct approaches, the first of which explores the internal textual rationale for Achille's name, as outlined in Book II, and the second of which focuses on the extratextual rationale. Regarding the former, McKinsey recounts how Walcott's speaker details an episode early on in which British colonial forces are building a fort to defend Saint Lucia against French raids. When constructing the fort, the military work in tandem with African slaves to manoeuvre a heavy, precariously positioned cannon up to a precipice, from which it can fire on the enemy. Achille's father, Afolabe, is among those assigned to the backbreaking task.¹³ When hauling the cannon, his exemplary work ethic so impresses the commander of the British forces that, once it is in position, he is rechristened "Achilles" in recognition of his contribution. Despite its Homeric association, Afolabe's new name would not have been considered exceptional in the West Indies:

¹² Martin McKinsey, 'Missing Sounds and Mutable Meanings: Names in Derek Walcott's "Omeros"', *Callaloo*, 31 (2008), 891-902.

¹³ According to Walcott, the name "Afolabe" was chosen as 'a kind of homage' to the Nigerian actor and playwright Murphy Afolabi. See 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 238.

those perusing the region's historical records will find they encounter many similar names because, throughout the colonial era, Caribbean slaves were habitually forced to take on new, Western names, and many of these were inspired by figures from Greco-Roman history and myth. From then on, such names have remained popular in the archipelago. The name "Achille" is particularly 'common', according to Walcott.¹⁴ There was even a shop on Saint Lucia called "Hector's" when he was young, which was run by a man with sons named "Hector" and "Achille".¹⁵ When Afolabe receives his new name, it means nothing to him because he is unversed in Greek mythology. So, when the time comes to christen his son, he passes on a name which signifies nothing to him other than that it has been his own.

This is why Achille has no answer when he meets an African ancestor demanding to know what his name means during his spirit journey in Book III. The ancestor is so angered by this ignorance he declares that, without a meaningful name, Achille does not exist. To that end, it is worth noting that Saint Lucian naming conventions differ considerably from their West African equivalents. Children on the island are customarily given three first names by their godparents, which are often used interchangeably.¹⁶ They are also likely to acquire a *no savan* (bush name) in childhood and a *no sud* (nickname) in adulthood.¹⁷ As Daniel J. Crowley records, the latter is 'often descriptive of one's tastes or exploits', though it can sometimes be 'an elegant foreign name'.¹⁸ Since various uncoded mechanisms exist through which surnames can be acquired, many islanders also find themselves 'uncertain about which of their names is their "proper" title'.¹⁹ In any case, when freed slaves first chose their surnames, many were 'simply made up'.²⁰ In West Africa, by contrast, names were imbued with significance: true names

¹⁴ Luigi Sampietro, 'Derek Walcott on *Omeros*: An Interview', *Caribana*, 3 (1992-3), 41-44 (p. 39). Names of this sort may have been given 'satirically', but Walcott thought this unlikely, arguing in interview that the most obvious reason a slave-master would rechristen his slave "Achille" was not irony, but that the master felt the slave possessed 'the attributes of Achilles'.

¹⁵ Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 239.

¹⁶ Daniel J. Crowley, 'Naming Customs in Saint Lucia', *Social and Economic Studies*, 5 (1956), 87-92 (p. 89).

¹⁷ Crowley, p. 90.

¹⁸ Crowley, p. 90.

¹⁹ Crowley, p. 90.

²⁰ Crowley, p. 90.

needed to be kept secret so that they could not be used for magical purposes, and public names were often 'changed in the course of life to conform with one's change of status'.²¹ Achille's ancestor's remark therefore prompted the fisherman to lament how 'the deaf sea ha[d] changed around every name', meaning Black West Indians had begun to 'yearn for a sound that [was] missing'. The transition from "Achilles" to "Achille" (pronounced *a-sheel*) occurs because the latter is the Kwéyòl variant of the former. One reason for the change is that it reflects the vernacularisation by which the Greek "Achilleus" became the Latinate "Achilles", with the continuation of this process highlighting the impermanence of all naming conventions. It therefore challenges the hierarchical, imperial model of language which views creolisation as degradation.²² However, with Achille's remarks about missing sounds in mind, McKinsey proposes the dropped "s" can also be seen as emblematic of what Achille is truly missing, a name of African heritage in which he can locate meaning. Overall, the first approach suggests that answer that, within the text itself, the Greek names are honorific in intention, but not in function, since they have been incorporated into an alternate creole system of nomenclature. The naming conventions of the text are akin to those of *The Sea at Dauphin*, where chance played a key role. When composing the play, Walcott asked a group of fishermen to suggest appropriate names for his protagonist, but misheard their suggestion, "Arthur", as the more African-sounding "Afa", which he ultimately decided to employ.²³ To seek philosophical meaning in names such as these is to map African or European ways of thinking onto a Caribbean space.

McKinsey's second approach differs from his first in that it focuses on the extratextual factors underpinning the choice of name, meaning it is this second approach which is most augmented by introducing a comparison with *Ione*. Rather than choosing a single definitive factor, he proposes that the meaning of Achille's name is 'ultimately relative' and to 'a large

²¹ Crowley, p. 90.

²² Joseph Farrell, 'Walcott's *Omeros*: The Classical Epic in a Postmodern World', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96 (1997), 247-67 (p. 264).

²³ Breslin, p. 88.

extent' a function of the 'webbed connections' in which it occurs.²⁴ So, to understand the resonances of "Achille", it becomes necessary to pursue the 'peculiar reverberations of that name backwards and forwards through Walcott's oeuvre'.²⁵ However, without access to Walcott's earliest work, reverberations of this sort could not be pursued to their fullest extent. On his own journey back through Walcott's oeuvre, McKinsey did not address any texts published prior to *Another Life* (1973) and its five-page long 'carnivalized epic catalogue'.²⁶ When discussing this catalogue, he claimed Walcott paraded a number of figures whose names possessed Ancient Greek analogues – Cassandra, Helen, Jason – but found himself 'at a loss what to do' with the colourful cast he established. For this reason, McKinsey concluded the Hellenic rollcall in *Another Life* was the 'blueprint for an unrealized project'.²⁷ This notion that Walcott moved from including a promising but ineffectual 'blueprint' in *Another Life* to the full realisation of his vision in *Omeros* both arose from and fit neatly within the orthodox teleological narrative regarding his work.

But, the narrative underpinning the notion was flawed. So, why "Achille"? Not only does the rollcall in *Another Life* evoke Homer's famous cataloguing of ships in *The Iliad*, meaning it was neither as purposeless nor as confused as McKinsey suggests, it is also not a blueprint composed by someone who did not yet know how to bring characters with Greek analogues to life in a Caribbean setting. The narrative does not fit because, sixteen years prior to the publication of *Another Life*, Walcott had already written and staged *Ione*. First performed for a Jamaican audience, the earlier work purported to dramatise a legend from Saint Lucian folklore in which the Eastern coast of the island was ravaged by fierce, internecine conflict. The major players in this conflict not only had names with Greek analogues, their names were shared with the protagonists of *Omeros*. For this reason alone, it is certainly true, as Sidney Burris has argued, that

²⁴ McKinsey, p. 898.

²⁵ McKinsey, p. 892.

²⁶ McKinsey, p. 896.

²⁷ McKinsey, p. 896.

some of the most important antecedents of *Omeros* are to be found in Walcott's dramatic works.²⁸ However, the position can be taken further: *Ione* represents one of the most important intertexts for *Omeros*, its value equal to that of Homer's *Odyssey*.

As John B. Van Sickle notes, *Omeros* comprises three main intersecting, though often disparate, plotlines.²⁹ The first of these follows the exploits of a globetrotting narrator, whose biography resembles Walcott's own, while the second outlines the fate of the Plunketts, a married couple of Anglo-Irish stock who have settled on the island in their retirement. Of the three major plotlines, however, it is the third which directly reprises the themes and personages of *Ione*. This third plotline, which Van Sickle designates the "village" plot – it takes place in a small settlement on Gros Islet – is woven from two largely separate threads. The first of these charts the development of a love triangle between a beautiful waitress, Helen, and two local fishermen, Achille and Hector. Initially in a relationship with Achille, Helen leaves him for Hector, after which the former is subjected to the aforementioned spirit journey back in time and across the Atlantic, where he seeks his African antecedents and original name. In the ensuing quest, the fisherman witnesses the sacking of his ancestral village, the enslavement of its inhabitants, and their traumatic journey across the ocean in a slave ship. Meanwhile, his love rival abandons his life on the sea to become a taxi driver. This change of career culminates in a fatal crash, which leaves Helen free to return to Achille. Following their reconciliation, she bears a child, though she pointedly refuses to give it the name he prefers.

Structurally, *Ione* is much simpler than *Omeros*. Its singular plot focuses on a feud between two warring clans on the south-eastern side of the island, near Vieux Fort. These clans, the Victorin and Alexandre, are led by two half-brothers who bear a grudge against one other. (The Alexandre patriarch is a bastard who has been disinherited to the benefit of his Victorin sibling). The play's protagonists are the two daughters of the Victorin patriarch. The first, Ione, is a

²⁸ Sidney Burris, 'An Empire of Poetry', *Southern Review*, 27 (1991), 558-75.

²⁹ John B. Van Sickle, 'The Design of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', *The Classical World*, 93 (1999), 7-27 (pp. 7-8).

widow bearing the child of a white American anthropologist, while the second, Helene, is married to a local fisherman named Achille. The feud turns violent when Achille comes home to find his wife naked in bed with Diogene, her cousin and the heir of the Alexandre clan, prompting him to hack his cuckold to pieces, along with Helene's infant son, of whose paternity he is no longer certain. The ending of the play sees a heated confrontation between the two clans and the razing of their homesteads to the ground. Helene is stoned and banished from the island, while Ione is driven to a state of utter devastation when she finds out that, in lieu of the letter she has been expecting from her American lover summoning her to the States, he has sent her fifty dollars on the off chance her child really is his. She heads offstage to commit suicide as a result. The story is simple in theory, but the text can be confusing, not least because the cast list proclaims that Achille is Ione's husband, only for the work itself to clarify, twice, that he is actually the 'husband of Helene' (p. 3; p, 21). Such muddling has contributed to a general state of confusion among critics regarding the work. In the only summary of the story hitherto produced, for example, John Thieme mixed up Achille and Diogene, claiming the former was 'a member of the Alexandre clan' who had engaged in 'adultery' with Helene.³⁰

Once the identities of the characters in *Ione* have been untangled, however, its similarity to the "village" plotline of *Omeros* is striking. Many of the most important characters also share important biographical details and key personality traits with counterparts in the later work. Both works depict the tumultuous fallout of a relationship between a fisherman called Achille and his beautiful, but faithless, partner Helen(e) and, in both cases, the relationship breaks down following the cuckolding intervention of a third party, with a namesake from Ancient Greece, who is then killed. As yet, however, connections between the two works have gone largely unacknowledged by scholarship. This situation has come about because the play is generally unknown, and will be unfamiliar to most critics, Walcott specialists like Martin McKinsey

³⁰ Thieme, *Derek Walcott*, p. 57.

notwithstanding. Even in Maria McGarrity's *Allusions in Omeros* (2015), an otherwise comprehensive 'collection of historical, literary, and cultural notes' for the poem, the entry on "Achille" makes no mention of the earlier play.³¹ (This is not to say that her notes are not thorough: the gloss for Achille is so extensive it even acknowledges Ramazani's argument that an analogue for the lovelorn fisherman can be found in *The Waste Land's* Questing Knight.)³² My discussion of *Ione* and *Omeros* thus represents the first of its kind.

In addition to their many similarities, there are also major differences between the characters in Walcott's texts. However, the imprecise parallels between *Ione* and *Omeros* do not suggest that Walcott was redrafting the former in writing the latter. The author was vocal on this point revealing, in a 2015 interview, that he had never had the impulse to revise earlier work and would always 'just write another poem' entirely.³³ The relationship between the two texts is, instead, equivalent to that which each shares with Homer's work. In other words, these three texts exist within a tripartite network of association, rooted in the anti-essentialist approach to epic mythmaking Walcott discussed in his 1997 article, 'Reflections on *Omeros*'. The key point in Walcott's article is that 'Joyce is a contemporary of Homer', by which he means that, when considering literary works which resemble one another, the order of composition is not relevant.³⁴ Certain types of author will always be inclined to produce certain kinds of writing, so the question of who happens to write first is moot. The position is notably in keeping with the position Eliot outlined with respect to Joyce's mythic mode in 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' (1923), according to which the drawing of continuous 'parallels between contemporaneity and antiquity' was akin to a researcher using Einstein's discoveries in 'pursuing his own, independent, further investigations'.³⁵ Scientific practice of this sort would never be condemned for its derivativeness.

³¹ Maria McGarrity, *Allusions in Omeros* (Tampa: University of Florida Press, 2015), p. i.

³² For more on this parallel, see: Michael Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 122.

³³ Ishion Hutchinson, 'A Voice at the Edge of the Sea: An Interview With Derek Walcott', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 91 (2015), 172-5 (p. 175).

³⁴ Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 240.

³⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *The Dial*, 75 (1923), 480-3 (p. 483_).

For Walcott, anterior and posterior works display 'inevitable' similarities because artistic concepts are '*simultaneous* concepts, not *chronological* concepts'.³⁶ Recurrent concepts – such as a bellicose character named "Achille(s)" – are not embodied in one original work and then diminished thereafter. They are a polyrhythmic, tidalectic, synchronic amalgamation of all iterations. For this reason, as Rei Terada suggests, '*Omeros* is as much a restatement as a continuation of Walcott's past concerns and motifs'.³⁷ Similar concepts recur in each of Walcott's works, but each iteration repeats with difference, after the manner of the tides, meaning there is no hierarchy at play. The poem and play can be seen to reflect Walcott's Caribbean artistic sensibility: as with carnival or Jonkonnu, the broad strokes of artworks like *Ione* and *Omeros* resemble one another, but areas of overlap between iterations do not suggest rewriting or derivation.

Unlike his counterpart in *Omeros*, the Achille of *Ione* does not undertake a spirit journey to reconnect with his lost African ancestry upon realising that Helene has been unfaithful. He instead goes on a bloodthirsty rampage following the climactic moment of anagnorisis and murders his love rival. As such, this Achille has little in common with the Achille of *Omeros* temperamentally. His reaction is more in keeping with the actions of his Homeric namesake, who goes berserk following Hector's killing of his beloved companion Patroclus, since both assuage their fury by defeating their enemy in mortal combat. However, *Ione's* Achille also differs markedly from Homer's Achille. The infanticide Achille commits in Walcott's play possesses no analogue in the Greek canon. The most famous example of paternal infanticide in Ancient Greek literature – aside from Heracles's murder of his children with Megara – was committed by Agamemnon on the way to the Trojan War. In the version of the myth penned by Euripides, the Greek ruler was forced to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess Artemis, whom he had offended. As Iphigenia's betrothed, it was Achilles who spoke out against the act

³⁶ Eliot, '*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth', p. 482; Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 241.

³⁷ Terada, p. 210.

most vehemently, making Achilles the polar opposite of *Ione's* Achille in this regard. Far from committing infanticide, the Greek hero did everything in his power to prevent another from doing so. Taken as a whole, the interclan conflict underpinning *Ione* resembles the Trojan war in a very broad way but, as with *Omeros*, episodes do not correlate precisely. Justine McConnell's claim that *Ione* 'parallels' *The Iliad* is perspicacious, but that paralleling is not as close as she suggests.³⁸ Breslin's suggestion that the play is 'a St. Lucian village *Iliad*' must be similarly caveated.³⁹ While it is obvious, for example, that Walcott named the cuckold figure Diogene after Diogenes – the cynic philosopher famed for sexual obscenities – the two have little else in common.

When *Ione* was first performed, however, Walcott's innovative, tidalectic approach to mythmaking was misunderstood, and he drew criticism from some corners for his imperfect replication of Greek textual conventions. According to Norman Rae, writing for Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner*, *Ione's* conceit was excessively academic, meaning the play possessed no 'internal cohesion' or 'binding economic force'.⁴⁰ Though Walcott had 'woven a story to match the Greeks', he had failed to follow the rules governing Greek dramaturgy closely enough, resulting in a botched ending and characters largely devoid of pathos. Writing for the *Trinidad Guardian*, John Grimes was similarly disparaging about the climax, claiming it was 'the weakest part of all'.⁴¹ Rae's interpretation clearly irked Walcott and he wrote a letter in response which the newspaper published two days later. Walcott's letter is telling because the position it outlines is fundamentally, and significantly, the same as the one he later adopted in 'Reflections on *Omeros*'. He felt the charge that he had been too liberal when adapting Greek myth was unfair, not least because *Ione* was 'not based on any Greek tragedy or myth' and he had never been 'trying to

³⁸ Justine McConnell, *Black Odysseys: The Homeric Odyssey in the African Diaspora since 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 109.

³⁹ Breslin, p. 37.

⁴⁰ Norman Rae, 'Ione: Colourful but Academic' in *Derek Walcott, the Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp. 447-9 (p. 447).

⁴¹ John Grimes, 'Company of Players Win Praise for Ione' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert Hamner (Colorado: Three Continents, 1997), pp. 116-7 (p. 117).

make an audience think [or] react like Grecians'.⁴² It was only critics who had viewed the work in this way, seeking out parallels in an effort to force the narrative into a preconceived framework, before concluding that it was a failure because they could not do this neatly. Not only did he consider that assessment unfair, he felt it was beside the point. Walcott spent much of his rebuttal explaining how writers had never been very concerned with scholarly frameworks throughout history and few audiences cared: it would be hard to imagine a crowd of Elizabethans 'listening to *Lear*, and keeping one eye on the lectures on Seneca by T. S. Eliot' or Ancient Greeks 'checking on their Aristotle before they entered the theatres'.⁴³ To write convincingly on West Indian drama, Walcott argued, future reviewers should try to think 'like a West Indian' and not 'like a Greek critic'.⁴⁴ But, if Walcott's aim was to appeal to West Indian audiences by presenting West Indian experiences, why make use of Ancient Greek nomenclature at all?

To understand the purpose of the Greek features in *Omeros* and *Ione*, it is necessary to consider the specific backdrop against which the earlier play was written and staged. *Ione* was the first piece performed by the newly formed Federal Theatre Company, a Jamaican organisation led by Errol Hill, who had become the first extra-mural drama tutor of the University College of the West Indies in 1953. The company comprised actors, directors and stagehands drawn from all over the Caribbean and its core aim was to open a 'new era in Jamaican theatre', as an anonymous article from the *Daily Gleaner* made clear.⁴⁵ For this reason, the staging of *Ione* was intended to represent 'something more than the presentation of just another West Indian play'.⁴⁶ When *Ione* debuted, the creation of the West Indies Federation was fast becoming an 'accomplished fact', meaning the 'closer association' of the peoples of the federated area was

⁴² Derek Walcott, 'A Modern Theatre' in *Derek Walcott, the Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp. 123-6 (pp. 124-5).

⁴³ Walcott, 'A Modern Theatre', p. 124.

⁴⁴ Walcott, 'A Modern Theatre', p. 126.

⁴⁵ Anon, 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre' in *Derek Walcott, the Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp.445-7 (p. 445).

⁴⁶ 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 445.

held to be of increasing importance.⁴⁷ In such a context, many Caribbean intellectuals considered drama an effective means of facilitating cultural exchange throughout the archipelago. It was hoped that the theatre could help to enhance inter-island unity, thereby increasing the likelihood that the new nation would survive. According to the *Gleaner* piece, the Federal Theatre Company had been 'formed with this aim in mind' and, as the opening show of the first full theatre season of exclusively West Indian works, *Ione* was supposed to 'set the pattern' for the future.⁴⁸ Hill's self-avowed vision was of a 'national drama' comprising 'West Indian plays by West Indian writers about West Indian affairs presented by West Indians primarily for West Indian audience'.⁴⁹ The *Gleaner* commentator considered Walcott's work the 'prototype' of this new approach, and thus emphasised the text's Saint Lucian credentials in their write-up: *Ione* was deemed a 'folk-epic set in the hills of St Lucia [...] by the talented St Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott [...] With the heightened interest in the West Indies which Federation has created, Jamaicans will be intrigued with this folk play, which is based on a St Lucian legend'.⁵⁰ Audiences were promised 'all the traditional elements of pride, love, sex, superstition, comedy and tragedy', but no mention whatsoever was made of Greek myth.⁵¹

The anonymous review was also effusive in its praise of the work, which it deemed 'another masterpiece' written in Walcott's 'brilliant prose-poetry style'.⁵² To make sense of the discrepancy in value assigned to the work by Rae and the anonymous reviewer, it is crucial to understand the polarised intellectual climate in which such reviews were produced. Four months after *Ione* was pilloried in the *Daily Gleaner*, Walcott published an article in *Public Opinion*, entitled 'The Sound and Fury of Our Theatre'. The title was a reference to Rae's earlier review, which concluded that, following its botched ending, *Ione* became 'full of sound and fury signifying

⁴⁷ 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 445.

⁴⁸ 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 445.

⁴⁹ Errol Hill, 'The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 18 (1972), 9-40 (p. 34).

⁵⁰ 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 446.

⁵¹ 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 446.

⁵² 'Ione opens new era in Jamaican Theatre', p. 446.

little'.⁵³ In the article, Walcott reiterated his position that the average person on the street would never engage their 'critical faculties or theories as violently as the critics' and, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, pointed out that such a person would 'probably not read Norman Rae's reviews in the *Gleaner*'.⁵⁴ He then went on to describe the recent state of controversy in Jamaican theatre which had divided critics into two broad factions, whose positions prefigured those taken up at the University of the West Indies in the 1960s. The first of these, led by Rae and the *Jamaica Times*'s Harry Milner, disagreed with the nationalist position adopted by the Federal Theatre.⁵⁵ They believed indigenous works were largely inferior to those written abroad, and preferred the selection of foreign classics put on by the Repertory Players. The second was led by those who staged *Ione*. According to Walcott, the Federal Theatre was 'bent hard' on creating drama 'indigenous to the West Indian need for self-authority' because the company was chiefly 'political in aim'.⁵⁶ In his opinion, the problem with this aim was that there was no native theatrical tradition upon which playwrights could draw, meaning the notion of a fully indigenous West Indian theatre was paradoxical. He felt the Federal Theatre Company sidestepped this issue by claiming to have its roots 'in the people', which he deemed code for the 'large mass of Negro or Indian peasants'.⁵⁷ Nativist theatre designed to appeal to the masses would not please the educated, middle-class 'parti-coloured levels of society' and these elites, who disproportionately patronised the theatre, would likely resent the kind of productions the Federal Theatre Company wanted to champion.⁵⁸ Though these factions differed in their positioning, each resembled the other fundamentally because both envisioned the development of a West Indian theatre in accordance with certain Western prescriptions and expectations about the artform: arguing

⁵³ Rae, p. 448.

⁵⁴ Derek Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury of Our Theatre' in *Derek Walcott, the Journeyman Years: Occasional Prose 1957-1974*, 2 vols, ed. by Gordon Collier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), II, pp.4-7 (p. 4).

⁵⁵ In his article, Walcott mistakenly refers to "Harry Miller", either through oversight or design.

⁵⁶ Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 4.

⁵⁷ Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 5.

⁵⁸ Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 5.

Trinidad's annual carnival, Jonkonnu, or Ramleela could provide inspiration for the creation of a regional theatre necessarily implied these modes did not already constitute that theatre.

The divergent approaches taken by *Ione*'s reviewers both typify and stem from this dispute. The anonymous reviewer in the *Gleaner* – who must have had some affiliation with the Federal Theatre Company given that the article was published a week before *Ione* debuted – understood Walcott's work as a native dramatic offering, which depicted Saint Lucian myth, meaning its presentation could cement closer ties between Saint Lucia and Jamaica. Norman Rae, by contrast, considered *Ione* a text in the Aristotelian mode, whose central aim was to engender catharsis, which is why he was so irked by the comedic way in which *Ione* received news of her lover's abandonment at the close.

Despite being praised by one and criticised by the other, Walcott sympathised with both factions. On the one hand, he agreed to compose *Ione* for the Federal Theatre Company's inaugural season, whose aims he acknowledged to be overtly political. On the other, the play he produced employed nomenclature and structural elements with analogues in Ancient Greek epic and tragedy, meaning it could not teach Jamaicans about Saint Lucian myth. Regarding the latter objective, the work is staged via the framing device of a peasant boy trying to entertain two drunk roadmenders at sunset. All three initially speak in Saint Lucian Kwéyòl, which the Jamaican audience would not have understood. The roadmenders demand to be entertained with a folk tale, but reject the boy's initial suggestions. The first of these, dubbed 'Conte Mabouya', refers to a folk story set in Saint Lucia's Mabouya Valley, which Walcott later adapted for the third section of his poem 'Saint Lucie' (1976).⁵⁹ The roadmenders reject that conte because they

⁵⁹ According to a parenthetical epigraph to the version of the conte in 'Saint Lucie', Walcott did not compose the story himself, having heard it 'on the back of an open truck travelling to Vieuxfort, some years ago' (III.1). As Breiner records, readers have often been 'skeptical' about that purported provenance, with many suggesting Walcott devised the song himself on account of its length. (Breiner, 'Creole Language', p. 36). However, there exists strong evidence that Walcott did not invent the tale: the Mabouya section of 'Saint Lucie' was later incorporated verbatim into a musical called *Conte Mabouya, or the Guitar Man's Song* by Derek's twin brother Roderick and, when that musical debuted in 1989, an authorial note in the program explained that the actor Eric Branford had been the one to sing the Mabouya folk-song to Derek decades earlier as the two travelled in a truck together. It is therefore highly likely that Derek took the traditional conte Branford sung and versified it for 'Saint Lucie'. Roderick Walcott, *The Guitar Man's Song, or Conte Mabouya* (Castries: Dunesville Enterprises, 1989), p. 4.

claim 'Tout nommes connaitre ca' (p. 1), which is to say, everybody already knows it. 'Conte Mabouya' is notable in that it shares several key features with *Ione*, the most remarkable of which being that it has a protagonist called Iona, whose storyline overlaps with both Ione's and Helene's. She cuckolds her partner Corbeau and gives birth to another man's children, after the manner of Helen, but this cuckolding then causes Corbeau to abandon her, as the American does Ione. The problem with the nationalist's lauding of *Ione*'s folkloric elements, however, is that there are also major differences between Walcott's play and the traditional conte. The latter possesses no feuding clans, for example, and its story is comic: though Corbeau doubts his children's paternity, he does not kill them like Achille. Instead, he agrees to care for them, before cheating on Iona with prostitutes and encouraging her to believe he has died. In other words, although there are key points of overlap between *Ione* and the folk story the roadmenders reject, the two are not equivalent. The play's suffusive classicism prevented it from strengthening inter-island ties in the manner the nationalist reviewer suggested.⁶⁰ Equally and conversely, those looking to measure the play by Greek standards were to be disappointed. *Ione* did not adhere to the tenets of Greek tragedy because it contained many features adapted from Saint Lucian folklore. The protagonist's climactic abandonment was presented comically, not because Walcott did not know how to write in a Hellenic mould, but because his play had commingled Greek elements with those of a comic conte. Overall, the story the boy recounts is neither a traditional Saint Lucian legend, as per the nationalist's suggestion, nor an 'original myth of classical dimensions', as Judy Stone has proposed in keeping with Rae.⁶¹

Though he sympathised with Rae's position, Walcott's objective when writing *Ione* was, nevertheless, in broad alignment with that of the Federal Theatre Company. He was in favour of federation and believed literature could help bind together the islands which were on the cusp of

⁶⁰ When the boy eventually narrates *Ione*, he begins with the phrase 'Messieurs, crik, crak' and, in so doing, invokes a popular Caribbean storytelling convention whereby the *conteur* starts their tale with an exercise in call and response, yelling out "Crik" to which the audience reply "Crak". For this reason, the nationalist reviewer may not have been aware that the conte was not really traditional.

⁶¹ Judy S. J. Stone, *Studies in West Indian Literature: Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 100.

forming a new nation state. Indeed, his next dramatic offering, *Drums and Colours* (1958), was a three-hour long pageant commissioned by the Extramural Department of the University College of the West Indies on behalf of the government of the new state to commemorate its inauguration. However, his position differed from that of the Federal Company because, as an educated, middle-class, mixed-race writer, he also shared some of the concerns of critics like Rae and Milner. In his view, the 'most nationalist achievement of the West Indies' would not be the creation of a theatre which amalgamated cultures across the federation and was enjoyed by the masses, but the 'amalgamation of all influential cultures in our own society and literature'.⁶² Such a theatre would also need to incorporate the region's Anglo-European cultural elements then championed by its creole middle class. In pursuit of this goal, he called out 'determined nationalists' for being excessively worried about the 'frequent comparisons of the archipelago with the isles of Greece'.⁶³ Arguing that such comparisons were justified because they were part of a longstanding tradition, he noted that Philip Sherlock had once termed the archipelago 'the new Mediterranean'.⁶⁴ *Ione* was conceived as part of this tradition, but Walcott did not model his work according to the precepts espoused by scholars of Ancient Greek tragedy, nor was his Hellenism an attempt to curry favour with the domestic or international literary intelligentsia. He had not been trying to relocate Homer's *Iliad* to the Caribbean with *Ione* and the Hellenic analogues he employed were not part of a failed attempt to write an Aristotelian tragedy catalysed by fate and building towards catharsis. He was, rather, attempting to forge a national, indigenous literary tradition by fusing features from all the cultural influences he felt were significant and, in this way, his rationale for including Achille and Helene in *Ione* both echoed and prefigured his rationale for including Achille and Helen in *Omeros*. It was Walcott's belief that this sort of cultural fusion was a prerequisite for closer political union, and he would later blame the short-lived existence of the Federation of the West Indies on the institution's inability to

⁶² Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 5.

⁶³ Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 6.

⁶⁴ Walcott, 'The Sound and Fury', p. 5.

discard the petty, exclusionary attitudes to culture and nationalism typified through discussions of *Ione*. However, because the play is currently seen as a failed early draft of later work, dating from a time in which Walcott uncritically copied European textual conventions, its position in relation to these debates about West Indian theatricality is little known. Without this context, critics have largely taken the negative assessments pronounced by a handful of partisan contemporary reviewers at face value.

These early reviews have since played a disproportionately important role in shaping understanding of the work. Baugh's opinion that 'the story and the characters do not seem equal to the weight of the literary and classical tradition that has been put upon them', for instance, makes sense only if the play is understood as an attempt at Hellenic writing.⁶⁵ While Baugh's conclusion that the characters do not seem able to bear the weight of the classical tradition is insightful, this is not a flaw so much as the point of the play. Towards the end, when passing judgement on proceedings, several characters explicitly attempt to frame what has happened in terms of Greek epic. Most notably, a beggar interprets the conflict according to a Homeric paradigm, predicated on recurrent archetypes and plots:

How many years from now, they will tell the same story,
[...]
Every war has its shadow, the light of a woman
And she is remembered more than litigation
And contention over a few undecipherable graves. (p. 55)

No sooner has *Ione's* beggar employed this epic framework, however, than he is ridiculed by Achille, who baulks at the idea of understanding Black diasporic experience in this way: 'I must laugh, you with your talk of pride, of kings, that is a joke. You come from such a family. But first, spitter, we are all niggers' (p. 55). In fact, sentiments of a similar ilk pervade the work, being prefigured most vociferously in a speech by Victorin, in which the patriarch claims he cannot be considered a 'king' in the Caribbean because it is ludicrous for such a designation to be applied

⁶⁵ Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, p. 71.

to a descendants of slaves: 'Perhaps, once in Africa, in the old country, / The title of king would not be ridiculous, / But here, is a joke' (p. 24). Unlike Homer's *Iliad*, *Ione* and *Omeros* are not epic in any conventional way. There are no great battles and, apart from the hurricane-party in *Omeros*'s first book, neither work features meddling deities. If they are to be considered epic, it can only be in a manner largely distinct from their classical counterparts, with neither's plot outlining a nation's destiny and neither's characters manifesting immutable, universalisable forces. In *Omeros*, as in *Ione*, this non-universalising, non-essentialist approach is most readily detectable in the narrator's consistent dissimulation of Homeric parallels, even as he draws them. It is this line of inquiry which ultimately leads him to wonder, in a commonly cited passage, when he will finally be able to write without recourse to European mythic archetypes:

All the Greek manure under the green bananas,
under the indigo hills, the rain-rutted road,
the galvanized village, the myth of rustic manners,

glazed by the transparent page of what I had read.
What I had read and rewritten till literature
was guilty as history. When would the sails drop

from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse

shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,
the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros";
when would I enter that light beyond metaphor? (p. 271)

That Walcott composed two works, three decades apart, whose plots and characters parallel both one another and Homer did not suggest myths were universal. The Homeric parallels in *Omeros* and *Ione* can, instead, be seen as a consequence of his hailing from an island with significant European cultural influence, meaning he felt parallels with canonical European literature and myth were drawn inevitably. In *Omeros*, these inevitable parallels are presented both positively and negatively. On the one hand, Trojan myths fertilised the narrator's artistic imagination. Greek 'manure' ameliorated the quality of local soil, enabling the production of fresh 'green bananas', artworks native to the Caribbean and exhibiting local flavour. To have become

fertilising manure, the Greek works must once have been fodder for animals themselves. The biological metaphor therefore implies a circularity that remains in keeping with Walcott's wider views on temporality and derivation: antecedent texts aid the development of subsequent texts, but neither harvest nor text can be seen as superior on the grounds of anteriority.

On the other hand, the 'Greek manure' is a disgusting waste product whose range extends far beyond its usefulness. It lies underneath everything from the banana plantations to the village, where it can serve no function but stink. This reeking influence is so pervasive that it fundamentally shapes the way the narrator views his own island. He sees Saint Lucia through the prism of associations inscribed into language by European forebears like Homer, even though these antecedents hailed from cultures remote in time and location. The unpleasantness of submitting to these parallels is not only implied through the image of manure, it is also represented meta-poetically. The unwanted influence of Greek motifs manifests in the very language used to articulate how unshakeable they are. The enjambment in the lines, 'When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse / shaking off a wreath of flies', results in a two-phased reading. Before they move on to the second line, readers will make sense of the first with reference to the Trojan Horse, only to amend their interpretation a moment later, meaning the speaker's inability to cast off Greek parallels is reflected in the language he uses to express the sentiment. The substitution of 'sails' for 'scales' in the question, 'When would the sails drop / from my eyes', operates similarly. The narrator sees the Caribbean in Homeric terms to the extent that his eyes are said to be covered by a Homeric motif. His malapropism either comes from self-aware punning or Freudian parapraxis. In either case, the nautical blinds he describes serve to distance him from his community, whom he can see only see through an artificial 'glaze'. He seeks to enter the quasi-religious 'light beyond metaphor' in which objects are their own signifiers, shorn of the connotative networks of language, but an idealised poetics of this sort remains hypothetical because language is fundamentally relational. The narrator's pursuit of this light mirrors Walcott's own journey in search of a 'noun without echoes', which he related to

Stuart Hall in a 1993 interview for the BBC.⁶⁶ Because the narrator has been raised on an island steeped in European culture, denying Greek influence outright would involve falsifying the way in which he conceives of his people, resulting in the production of inauthentic art. However, embracing Greek influence means invoking an overbearing network of associations, which also creates distance. Ultimately, because he cannot help but see his island through eyes conditioned by a culture with significant European roots, Walcott's narrator sees the influence of Greek writing on his craft as inevitable. Throughout *Ione* and *Omeros*, the drawbacks of this influence were acknowledged. In the case of the former, however, this acknowledgement has gone unrecognised because of the text's negative reputation, traceable to highly politicised contemporary debates about theatre.

Overall, neither *Ione* nor *Omeros* attempts to recreate an Ancient Greek work in a Caribbean context. However, in the case of the earlier play, treating the work as a failed prototype has led to its being misconstrued. Despite its lambasting by Milner, Grimes, and Rae, *Ione* actually went on to achieve considerable popular success: it was put on in both Saint Lucia and Trinidad after its initial run in Jamaica, and was even performed by a group of students at the Edinburgh Festival.⁶⁷ The work's acclaim was such that Walcott's twin brother Roderick even petitioned to have it restaged to commemorate the ten year anniversary of Saint Lucian independence over three decades after its premiere.⁶⁸ For it to have achieved this level of popularity, audiences could not have seen the work as a failed Greek tragedy. Rather, many must have recognised the play for what it was: an innovative and experimental piece in a rough, but novel, West Indian theatrical style, in which the regional influence of European culture was represented, but not overrepresented. *Ione*'s imprecise Homeric parallels were rooted in the same mythic method Walcott later discussed with relation to *Omeros*, according to which plots and

⁶⁶ Derek Walcott, 'Interview with Stuart Hall' in *The Poet of the Island*, Arena, BBC 2 (1993).

⁶⁷ Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., *Black Dionysus: Greek Tragedy and African American Theatre* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), p. 222.

⁶⁸ Roderick Walcott, 'Letter to Charles, 30 April 1988', *The Roderick Walcott Collection* (University of the West Indies Open Campus, Saint Lucia) F.12.6.

characters repeated with difference, after the manner of the harvest or tides. The artifice inherent to writing in this way was clear to Walcott, but he saw no alternative, given the influence European culture had exerted on both the region and his own perspective.

6.II. *Omeros*, *The Isle is Full of Noises* (1982), and the Politics of Psychosomatic Affliction

Elements of Walcott's play *The Isle is Full of Noises* (1982) were also reprised in *Omeros*. As with *Ione*, the earlier play's importance as an intertext remains unacknowledged, though the two pieces differ in some significant ways. Where *Ione* had been a success, *The Isle is Full of Noises* was a failure, both critically and commercially. Following a single performance run in Connecticut in 1982, during which it was panned by reviewers, it has neither been restaged nor published.⁶⁹ Although its narrative prefigured the third "village" plotline in *Omeros*, it was a variant of that plotline's second thread, rather than its first, centring on the plight of another fisherman named Philoctete in place of Achille and Helen. The fisherman's classical analogue, Philoctetes, was also dramatic, rather than epic: he was discussed fleetingly in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, but featured much more prominently in a play by Sophocles. While the majority of the cast possessed Sophoclean analogues, few shared names with their classical counterparts, with the majority named according to British convention. As such, for this second play, themes related to Walcott's use of Greek nomenclature do not apply.

And yet, differences notwithstanding, these two Omeric intertexts also possess considerable points of overlap. First and foremost, the relationship between *The Isle is Full of Noises* and *Omeros* has regularly been (mis)read as one characterised by revision or redrafting. In the most comprehensive study of the text hitherto produced, for example, the 1982 play was deemed 'a first sketch of Walcott's West Indian Philoctetes' in which the author was testing out

⁶⁹ See, for example: Frank Rich, 'Theater: Douglas Turner Ward Directs Premiere', *New York Times* (2 May 1982), p. 63.

'the possibilities suggested by the myth'.⁷⁰ The consistency of Walcott's approach to mythmaking is also detectable in the work because, as with *Ione*, the parallels between the play and the Sophoclean iteration of the story are imperfect. Whereas the preceding analysis explored the extratextual rationale behind Walcott's paralleling of Homeric names in *Omeros*, this section's subsequent analysis will chart how Sophoclean parallels shape meaning in *The Isle is Full of Noises*, then bring this earlier version of the Philoctetes archetype into dialogue with *Omeros*. The argument is that Philoctetes' wound primarily signified a personal, psychological affliction, which implied remediation of the Caribbean's longstanding societal ills would only occur in the wake of personal healing.

In the Sophoclean version of the myth, Philoctetes is a master archer from Malis who wields the Bow of Heracles, a legendary weapon which never misses its target. Having willingly joined the Greek forces sailing for Troy, he is tricked by Odysseus into disembarking on the uninhabited island of Lemnos, where he is abandoned. The Greek sailors leave him because, having been bitten on the foot by a water-snake while at a sanctuary on the island of Tenedos, he intermittently cries out in pain, which distracts them from performing important religious rites. His wound has also begun to suppurate, releasing a stench they find intolerable. After the Greeks depart, he remains marooned on Lemnos for a decade until, with the end of the war in sight, the Trojan oracle Helenus prophesises that the Greek troops will need the Bow of Hercules if they are to prove victorious. So, Odysseus and Achilles's son Neoptolemus are dispatched to Lemnos to convince Philoctetes to re-join the war effort. Their tricks and entreaties fail, however, and Neoptolemus is eventually persuaded to take Philoctetes back to Greece, though this will mean losing the conflict. Suddenly, with the action all but resolved, the spirit of a deified Heracles descends and details how Philoctetes will kill many Trojans, including Hector's brother Paris, if

⁷⁰ Breslin, p. 246.

he sails to Troy. The marooned marksman agrees to join the fray once he learns that doing so will heal his wound.

The broad strokes of this storyline are reprised in *The Isle is Full of Noises*. At the beginning, the Philoctetes figure – a fictionalised former premier of the West Indies Federation called Sir Lionel Robinson – is spending his retirement in isolation on Pigeon Island, an islet of northwest Saint Lucia which figures prominently in *Omeros*. Early on, the British ambassador to Barbados draws the first of many explicit parallels between Sir Lionel and Philoctetes when he claims that the septuagenarian statesman was forced into exile because he ‘stank like Philoctetes’ from ‘a suppurating wound’ to his foot (p. 5). Sir Lionel is also a marksman of sorts, since much of his day is passed angling with a speargun: his life, according to the dignitary, is spent ‘spear-fishing with the bow of Philoctetes’ (p. 5). The Odysseus figure in the play is Sir Ernest Henry, commonly referred to as “Papa Henry”. He is Robinson’s successor as chief minister for the fictional island of Santa Marta, and has the financial backing of “New Aegean Enterprises”, a US-based multinational conglomerate whose name invokes the “New Aegean” Walcott earlier conceptualised in ‘The Muse of History’. Papa Henry’s paternal sobriquet clearly recalls that of François Duvalier, the Haitian president nicknamed “Papa Doc” who governed the island tyrannically between 1957 and 1971. Since Haitian playwrights clandestinely rewrote and performed several plays by Sophocles to resist Papa Doc’s regime, it is possible Walcott was inspired by their efforts when composing his own.⁷¹ Papa Henry’s plan involves transforming Santa Marta into a paradise for Western tourists with the construction of a new shopping complex and a three-hundred-room luxury hotel. (The scheme parallels Papa Doc’s 1959 arrangement with a Miami-based construction firm ‘to tear down the capital’s waterfront slum, build on the site a shopping and residential center, and relocate the slum dwellers elsewhere’.)⁷²

⁷¹ Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 9.

⁷² The project was never realised because much of its funding was embezzled. O. Ernest Moore, *Haiti: Its Stagnant Society and Shackled Economy* (New York: Exposition Press, 1972), pp. 90-1.

Because Papa Henry is worried about the lingering threat Sir Lionel poses, he dispatches his nephew James, the play's Neoptolemus figure, to try to trick the former premier into surrendering his speargun. James is also Sir Lionel's godson and the biological son of one of the former premier's loyalists, named Achille.

Just as Philoctetes succeeds in convincing Neoptolemus not to take him to Troy in Sophocles' play, Sir Lionel is able to persuade James to switch sides and abandon Papa Henry. From this point on, however, the action differs markedly from the Sophoclean version. Unlike Neoptolemus, the would-be thief takes on a new Yoruba name, "Ajamu", which means "he who fights for what he wants" in English. He then takes Sir Lionel's speargun and uses it to try to assassinate Henry's crooked Minister of Security Babsie Hercules, who is skewered with a spear, but escapes with his life. Ajamu also intends to kill his uncle with the speargun, but he is thwarted in the effort because he is trapped inside a cave by government authorities, who have also captured Sir Lionel and convinced him negotiate on their behalf. James ("Ajamu") would rather die than suffer the ignominy of capture, so burns himself alive. To honour his memory, his body is carried onstage by sailors of the Coast Guard, who have wrapped it in the old flag of the Federation of the West Indies. Then, in a ritual which Walcott's stage directions indicate is 'now African', an ensemble cast chant 'Africa adio', which heals Sir Lionel's wound (pp. 69-70). The recovered former premier proceeds to deliver a moving eulogy for Ajamu, whose sacrifice catalyses the resistance against Papa Henry. The speech is swiftly followed by the islanders' deposing of the despot, the immolation of Babsie Hercules on his Mercedes, and Sir Lionel's reinstatement as leader of Santa Marta.

The two most important motifs in the work are those which link Sir Lionel to the myth of Philoctetes: his speargun, the play's analogue for the Bow of Hercules, and his wound, which parallels that of his Sophoclean counterpart. Both of these entities possess symbolic meaning in Walcott's work which they do not possess in the anterior text. Breslin was the first to demonstrate how, as the primary symbol of Sir Lionel's power, the former represents the

'unifying spirit of the [West Indies] Federation'.⁷³ In the prologue to the play, James's father Achille extolls Sir Lionel's power to draw the federated archipelago 'tight as a bow' (p. 3). Later, when Sir Lionel is arguing with James, he explains: 'It wasn't I alone who drew this bow. I drew this bow with all the strength of the party. I bent the whole archipelago with it' (p. 55). Owing to its curved topography, many writers have conceived of the Caribbean in similar terms: most notably, the arced distribution of the islands inspired James Anthony Froude to subtitle his infamous regional survey "*The Bow of Ulysses*" (1888). In Sir Lionel's case, the metaphorical equation suggests that, were the islands once more to be united and run federally, they would greatly enhance their power. Because regaining the Bow of Hercules is necessary for the Greeks to win at Troy, likening federation to Philoctetes' weapon implies that West Indian nations will be unable to meet their strategic objectives if they remain disarmed metaphorically on account of their fragmentation.

The symbolic role played by the work's second important motif is less clear cut, however. According to Ramazani, Sir Lionel's wound symbolises 'indigenous political corruption', as opposed to Philoctetes' wound in *Omeros*, which signifies 'inherited colonial injury'.⁷⁴ Although Ramazani's conclusions are astute, they are not exhaustive because, in both texts, the wounds are polysemous signifiers. It is certainly true that Sir Lionel's injury connotes political corruption, but this is not the full extent of its meaning, because the wound also comes in response to a personal, psychological affliction. During the pivotal debate between James and Sir Lionel, the latter tells the former that his sores are a 'sign of our people's suffering, a sign of their power's corruption' (p. 54). However, earlier in the same scene, he gives a more detailed and nuanced explanation, in which the wound is said to signify two concepts simultaneously:

When I saw Sir Geoffrey Thwaite's colleague at Magdalen we amused ourselves comparing archipelagos. The Aegean and this one. I taught him African mythology, he taught me Greek, and we discovered what any schoolboy knows, the universalities of myth. He believes in re-incarnation. I believe unless we can join those halves we aren't yet born. I got my sores that way,

⁷³ Breslin, p. 247.

⁷⁴ Ramazani, 'The Wound of History', p. 415.

despite all their real agony their origin is psychic [...] after I saw corruption on the increase, the ulcers budded and flowered into mouths that sang in memory of Philoctetes. I had the wound, I had the speargun as my bow, and I've been waiting for Achilles' son to save me from this rotting island. (p. 50)

An explicit connection is drawn between indigenous political corruption and Sir Lionel's ulcers, which 'budded' as integrity waned. However, the wound is also said to have a psychosomatic cause, originating in Sir Lionel's inability to reconcile the divergent parts of his cultural ancestry. So, the wound metonymizes the decay of regional political integrity post-independence, but it also signifies a divided psyche. By commingling these two ideas in the same symbol, Walcott implies that were greater emphasis placed on unifying disparate cultures within the region, a sustainable federalised state might be realised, which would sound the death knell for widespread political corruption rooted in myopic self-interest and petty nationalism.

This psychological aspect of the affliction is arguably more significant than the physical because it alone is suggested by the work's titular allusion. While the text's paralleling of Sophocles is well-established, it also possesses another key intertext which has not yet been acknowledged. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. sensitively discusses how the title invokes Caliban's claim that his 'isle is full of noises' in Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611), but Wetmore's analysis does not recognise that the title actually functions as a double allusion, pointing towards Shakespeare's play while also inviting comparison with a work by James Joyce, in which psychological affliction is foregrounded.⁷⁵ Although *The Isle is Full of Noises* was first performed in 1982, archival evidence suggests that Walcott had begun drafting it many years earlier. According to Bruce King, he had been planning to put on a play called *The Isle is Full of Voices* at least as far back as 1975.⁷⁶ The change in the wording of the title – from "voices" to "noises" – is subtle, but important, because it corresponds exactly to an editorial emendation made to the text of Joyce's *Exiles* (1918) and, in so doing, establishes that work as a major intertext for Walcott's play. Towards the

⁷⁵ Wetmore, Jr., *Black Dionysus*, p. 222.

⁷⁶ Bruce King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama: 'Not Only a Playwright but a Company': The Trinidad Theatre Workshop 1959-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 220.

end of *Exiles*, Joyce's hero, Richard Rowan, returns from a night spent writing and walking Dublin's strand from end to end, after having given his best friend and love rival, Robert Hand, his consent to try to seduce his wife, Bertha. In early published versions of the text, he returns onstage enigmatically claiming that there are jabbering demons outside and, echoing Caliban, concludes 'the isle is full of voices'. These early versions released by Jonathan Cape, Penguin, and Viking followed the first edition of *Exiles*, published by Grant Richards, which differed from Joyce's fair-copy manuscript in many places. However, in all versions published since 1979 – when Garland released a textual companion for *Exiles* that included a collated list of variants intended to help 'rectify all unauthoritative departures from Joyce's fair copy' – Rowan has deemed the isle 'full of noises' instead.⁷⁷ Because this development occurred in 1979, when Walcott was in the middle of composing his play, his reworking of the title was very likely rooted in a desire to keep the allusion to Joyce up to date.

To understand how this allusion suggests psychological affliction, it is first necessary to establish why Joyce's protagonist quoted Caliban. In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the monster's claim that 'the isle is full of noises' forms the opening statement of a speech of blank verse about how the play's island is beautiful and safe, being full of 'sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not' (III.2.131). This speech is delivered in an effort to pacify the King of Naples's cook, Stephano, who has been startled by Ariel, a spirit of the island, playing strange music while invisible onstage. However, Caliban's assessment is at odds with his earlier confession that, because he once tried to force himself sexually on the exiled Duke of Milan's daughter, Miranda, her father, Prospero, frequently sends the magical spirits he can command to torment him. These torturers come in various guises, and the sounds they make are deeply unpleasant: some come shaped like 'apes' who 'mow and chatter', while others resemble adders 'with cloven tongues' that 'hiss [him] into madness' (I.2.9-14).

⁷⁷ John MacNicholas, *James Joyce's Exiles: A Textual Companion* (New York: Garland, 1979), p. 53.

The noises Richard Rowan hears torture him in much the same way, but the cacophony in *Exiles* is imagined. It comprises the voices of 'those who say they love' Richard telling him to 'despair'.⁷⁸ When he and Robert met his future wife Bertha nine years prior to the play's commencement, both of them fell in love with her. Though Bertha was favourably disposed towards Robert, she nonetheless preferred Richard from the outset. So, in an effort to remove his love rival from the picture, Robert convinced Richard to exile himself to Rome, where he could take up residence as a writer. However, Robert's plans were thwarted as Bertha followed Richard into exile, leaving him alone. Richard was tormented throughout the couple's decade in Italy because he did not know whether Bertha had also slept with Robert. He was especially distressed because the couple had a young son called Archie and he constantly found himself questioning the boy's paternity. The demonic voices he hears on his walk are of 'those who say they love' him, which is to say, they are the voices of his family and friends, like Bertha, Robert and Archie. These voices taunt him after the manner of Prospero's apes and adders. Richard's allusion to Caliban's positive assessment of the island is, therefore, deeply sardonic. Like Caliban, he is tormented by demonic voices following the fallout of attempted sexual misconduct but, unlike Caliban, that misconduct was not his own. To allude to Richard's statement is not to invoke the image of an agreeable island, it is to summon the spectre of a man plagued by doubt and driven to mocking irony.

This doubt relates to a version of Philoctetes rooted in psychological injury because, at the very end of *Exiles*, Richard likens his misgivings about his wife's fidelity to a perpetual wound:

RICHARD

I am wounded, Bertha.

BERTHA

⁷⁸ James Joyce, *Exiles: A Critical Edition*, ed. by A. Nicholas Fargnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), pp. 170-1.

How wounded, dear? Explain to me what you mean. I will try to understand everything you say.
In what way are you wounded?

RICHARD.

(releases his hand and, taking her head between his hands, bends it back and gazes long into her eyes) I have a deep deep wound of doubt in my soul.

BERTHA.

(motionless) Doubt of me?

RICHARD.

Yes.

BERTHA.

I am yours. *(in a whisper)* If I died this moment I am yours.

RICHARD.

(still gazing at her and speaking as if to an absent person.) I have wounded my soul for you—a deep wound of doubt which can never be healed. I can never know, never in this world. I do not wish to know or to believe. I do not care. It is not in the darkness of belief that I desire you. But in restless living wounding doubt. To hold you by no bonds, even of love, to be united with you in body and soul in utter nakedness—for this I longed. And now I am tired for a while, Bertha. My wound tires me.⁷⁹

The allusion to Joyce came because Walcott saw in Richard Rowan a version of the Philoctetes archetype. Joyce's protagonist and the Greek mythological figure both spent around a decade in exile – the former alone on an island, the latter writing in Italy – having been tricked by supposed friends – Odysseus and Robert, respectively – and both suffered from unhealing wounds.

Since the 1960s, a prominent strain of postcolonial criticism has considered Caliban's suffering metonymic of the colonised experience and so one reading of the title would see Walcott invoking a paradigmatic conceptualisation of the relationship between master and slave, dispossessor and dispossessed, in the allusion to the monster's speech. The problem is that, elsewhere, Walcott fervently resisted this paradigm and explained how he did not believe the text of Shakespeare's *Tempest* could support it. In 'The Figure of Crusoe' (1965), for example, he stated in no uncertain terms that postcolonial '(re)creations' of Caliban hailed from a 'Marxist-

⁷⁹ Joyce, pp. 175-6.

evolved' approach 'stretched too far'.⁸⁰ In any case, why invoke Shakespeare via Joyce? It is certainly possible to see Joyce as a colonised writer whose work reflects his condition, but it is also difficult to find in *Exiles* anything approaching a political dimension. The play is widely considered a domestic tragedy, foregrounding 'Ibsenesque naturalism'.⁸¹ Richard Rowan's metaphorical wounding does not occur because he is an Irishman, nor does it obviously symbolise any aspect of the Irish colonial condition: it is a relatively straightforward metaphor related to doubts about his wife's past faithfulness. For this reason, Walcott's titular allusion did not serve to invoke the image of a colonised man waxing lyrical about the positive qualities of his homeland, so much as that of a suffering man constructed after the manner of Philoctetes who, having once been ambitious and idealistic, then spent a decade in exile suffering from a chronic, psychological wound.

It is this psychological aspect of the wound which is most important when interpreting *The Isle is Full of Noises*. Sir Lionel's injury is healed when the populace deposes Papa Henry, bringing his wickedness to an end. However, the injury does not heal because of this regime change. Rather, Papa Henry's overthrow and the healing of Sir Lionel's wound occur simultaneously because they both come in response to Ajamu's death. The physical ailment is only cured once Sir Lionel realises that Achille's son has found a way to reconcile European and African influences without contradiction, a realisation which salves his psychological affliction. Having successfully embodied the twin roles of Neoptolemus and Ajamu, James claims he has 'turned himself into a fire whose fierce acetylene soldered two legends into one man' (p. 63). In so doing, he has provided a roadmap for fusing together the two halves of the fractured Caribbean psyche, the division of which was the ultimate reason for the psychic aspect of the ailment, to which the title alluded. This is why, when Ajamu dies, Papa Henry's personal calypso band commemorate his life by performing an incantation in Yoruba, the words of which – 'Adio

⁸⁰ Derek Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe' in *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. by Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993), pp. 33-41 (p. 36).

⁸¹ David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 156.

Africa adio / Adio Africa adio / Adio Ajamu / Africa Adio' (p. 70) – themselves commingle European and African elements. "Adio" is a Yoruba boy's name, meaning "righteous". So, the calypsonians are literally singing the continent's praises. However, "adio" is also a homophone for "addio", an Italian word for "goodbye". In this way, the phrase means both "Goodbye Africa" and "Righteous Africa" at once.

Although they would not have spoken Yoruba, Walcott's original audience would likely have been familiar with Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi's 1966 hit documentary about African decolonisation, *Africa Addio*. Widely broadcast in the US, the film featured violent clips of independence movements from across the African continent, including the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, whose fomentation had earlier inspired Walcott to compose perhaps the most celebrated of his early poems, 'A Far Cry from Africa' (1956). By invoking Yoruba nomenclature, whilst also alluding to a European work about the struggle for African decolonisation, Walcott's homophonous chant served as an exemplar of precisely the sort of hybridised cultural space for which Ajamu, the figure it was devised to commemorate, stood. The Italian film was especially memorable because it had attracted considerable backlash upon its release, with many commentators deeming it racist. Writing at the beginning of his tenure at the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Roger Ebert termed it 'a brutal, dishonest, racist film [which] slander[ed] a continent and at the same time diminishe[d] the human spirit'.⁸² Chanting the name of such a film in the context of a therapeutic African funerary ritual challenged the prominent racist narrative that contemporary Black independence movements were uniformly characterisable by mob violence and tyranny. Walcott's reinscribing of the phrase "Africa Adio" heralded, instead, a future for the Caribbean grounded in greater political unity and cultural self-actualisation. However, this positive vision of the future could only come after, and in response to, the healing of personal, psychological division.

⁸² Roger Ebert, 'Africa Adio', *Chicago Sun-Times* (25 April 1967) [online] <<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/africa-addio-1967>> [accessed 7 June 2022].

As a result, in both *Omeros* and *The Isle is Full of Noises*, when the wounds of the Philoctetes archetype are eventually cured, the healing comes amidst an African ritual with allegorical overtones, centring on the future of Caribbean subjectivity. A frequent patron of the local rum shop, Philoctete is eventually healed by a syncretic ritual performed by its owner, Ma Kilman, in which elements of obeah and Christian baptism are commingled.⁸³ The proprietor places him in a bush-bath infused with a curative elixir extracted from a plant originating in Africa whose seeds were transported to the island by a sea-swift. She finds the ingredient after having been led by an army of Yoruba-speaking ants deep into the island's central forest, an area historically peopled by Maroons. The syncretic curative ceremony in *Omeros* further resembles the Yoruba ritual in *The Isle is Full of Noises* because both serve to reinscribe language burdened with negative connotations. The inscription of 'Africa Adio' is echoed in the healing ceremony Ma Kilman performs because her ritual alleviates the negativity associated with her surname. The name evokes both damage – being a portmanteau of the violent phrase "kill man" – and repulsion – since it is also a reference to Elizabeth's grotesque love rival, Doris Kilman, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).⁸⁴ Walcott cannot move into the 'light beyond metaphor', but he can indigenise the network of association through a process of alter/native inscription.

In both works, the healing ceremonies are successful because the injuries are partly psychosomatic. According to Fumagalli and Peter L. Patrick, this 'spiritual' aspect of the wound causes considerably more suffering than the 'physical' aspect.⁸⁵ Such reasoning was astute in that it prefigured Walcott's confession, to Maria Hélène Laforest, that Philoctete is 'really afflicted mentally and physically [...] [Philoctete's] bath is curative in the sense that whatever sores his affliction represented [were] mental as well as physical'.⁸⁶ The wound differs from Sir Lionel's

⁸³ Burnett, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ A woman of the same name also features briefly at the beginning of the conte featuring Iona and Corbeau recounted in 'Saint Lucie'. Her relation to Iona is ambiguous in the poem, but Roderick Walcott's version of the story makes clear that she is Iona's disapproving mother.

⁸⁵ Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Peter L. Patrick, 'Two Healing Narratives: Suffering, Reintegration, and the Struggle of Language', *Small Axe*, 20 (2006), 61-79 (p. 70).

⁸⁶ Laforest, n. p.

wound, however, because, in *Omeros*, critical orthodoxy holds that Philoctete's wound symbolises the pain inherited from colonialism and slavery, whereas, in *The Isle is Full of Noises*, Sir Lionel's injury symbolises pain caused by the region's political division and corruption.⁸⁷

Correspondingly, the psychosomatic component of Philoctete's injury does not reflect the seeming irreconcilability of disparate cultural influences because the character is never divided in this sense. He resembles Ajamu, commingling the African and the European without contradiction. Or, as Ramazani puts it, the 'Greco-African' Philoctete is a 'compromise formation' who 'grants cultural authority to Europe' while being 'tropicalized and twisted into a vibrant new figure for African Caribbean rage and suffering' – he therefore serves as a 'bridge by which Walcott crosses his own oppositional divide'.⁸⁸ The nature of Philoctete's psychological wound is not schizophrenic, but traumatic. His wounded psyche both originates in and metonymizes the rankling historical trauma suffered by the region's Black population. Walcott's narrator is explicit on this point:

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles
of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's

but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in the burning garbage,
then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir (p. 43)

As Ramazani points out, Walcott's use of the wound motif in *Omeros* resembles its metonymic use in 'countless' other texts of African diasporic literature to a degree.⁸⁹ However, being partially psychosomatic, Philoctete's suppurating wound also breaks with literary precedent in an important way. Although it derives from the collective trauma of the Middle Passage, the two are not bound in any mystical or magical sense. Philoctete remains wounded because he *believes* his injury is tied to slavery – 'He *believed* the swelling came from the chained ankles'. It is this belief,

⁸⁷ Ramazani, 'The Wound of History', p. 415.

⁸⁸ Ramazani, 'The Wound of History', p. 407.

⁸⁹ Ramazani, 'The Wound of History', p. 406.

not a metaphysical tie, which swells the injury. When he is healed, it is because he reconfigures his understanding of the region's African inheritance, embraces Ma Kilman's ritual, and in so doing, severs the tie. Philoctete's wound is symbolic of a collective wound borne by Black Caribbean communities, but the lingering power of that injury lies in the sense of despair the atrocities of Caribbean history have fixed in the minds of individuals. For the Caribbean islands to remedy their ills on a societal level, individuals must work to fix the damage these ills have occasioned on a personal, psychological level.

Adopting an interleaved reading method in which *Omeros* and *The Isle is Full of Noises* are seen as simultaneous, amalgamating iterations of the same myth thus reveals the central idea both works share with Sophocles, namely, that societal victories are conditional upon individual mental states. After all, the Greeks cannot win until Philoctetes decides to put aside his anger, forgive Odysseus, and re-join the fight. Yet, as with *Ione*, the parallels to classical texts came in response to the problematic, but unavoidable, influence Walcott felt European culture exerted on fledgling writing in the Caribbean. Comparative study thus reveals the imperfection of these parallels, the most notable of which being that in Sophocles's play, Greece's inability to triumph over Troy comes in response to the machinations of fate, not political corruption or the legacy of historical trauma, whereas, in Walcott's work, these hurdles to national progress are tied to the psychological wounding of individuals.

In *Omeros*, however, Philoctete is not abandoned on a desert island for a decade. He is an integral part of his village and, far from being set against his community, he is woven into its very fabric. Once he embraces the Afro-European cultural hybridity embodied in Ma Kilman's ritual, he is able to move beyond the pain of history and his chaining to an imperfect Greek analogue. This embrace is why, by the end of poem, elements of the positive hybrid vision prophesised in *The Isle is Full of Noises*, in which disparate cultural influences are reconciled without contradiction, come to fruition. Cured of the trauma occasioned by his awareness of historical suffering, Philoctete is able to cross-dress with Achille to dance as a female warrior in

the Boxing Day *paille-banane*, a Saint Lucian celebratory Jonkonnu partly European in origin, and partly originating in the ritualistic African ceremonies Achille witnessed on his spirit journey. Having convalesced and severed the link to Sophocles, he is able to take part in the recurring, hybridised artform. Both European and African, the *paille-banane* proffers as an indigenised, syncretic alternative to the seemingly inevitable Hellenic mythmaking upon which Walcott's work previously, but uncomfortably, relied.

Bringing *Omeros* into dialogue with its dramatic antecedents in Walcott's oeuvre ultimately sheds new light on each. Conceptualising mutability across his texts tidialectically gives rise to an innovative mode of criticism emphasising what Quayson terms the 'processual quality of comparison'.⁹⁰ As my study of *Omeros*, *Ione* and *The Isle is Full of Noises* has highlighted, this approach to comparison can illuminate otherwise obscure 'characterological, cultural [or] conceptual' elements in both anterior and posterior works.⁹¹ Interleafing Caribbean texts is not only fruitful, however. It is also the logical corollary of a model for global literary influence grounded in the anti-capitalist paradigm, once regionally specific notions of time, progress, and non-teleology have been factored in. As such, my reading *Omeros* provides a tidialectic template, not only for future studies of Walcott's most celebrated work, but for revisiting work by all other major Caribbean authors. Establishing a non-linear narrative for West Indian literary history and adopting co-related interleafed reading praxes could revision our understanding of the region's literature.

⁹⁰ Quayson, *Postcolonial Tragedy*, p. 304.

⁹¹ Quayson, *Postcolonial Tragedy*, p. 304.

Conclusion

In the third scene of Walcott's very last play, *O Starry Starry Night* (2014), Paul Gauguin asks Vincent Van Gogh to join 'in a tribute' to their 'beloved little city' of Arles. He then spins around, starts to urinate, and sings a simple song aloud whose lyrics are confusing for both character and audience:

GAUGUIN

[Sings.]

Ach, du lieber Augustin, alles ist weg, weg.

VINCENT

That is German. Not French. Who the fuck was Augustin?

[*Translating*]

All is lost, lost, Augustin, but take it easy.
All is not, not lost.

GAUGUIN

The only thing that is lost
is a cascade of golden urine
from the second-greatest pisser in the world.

VINCENT

Who's first? Augustin?

GAUGUIN

Moi! Gauguin.

(p. 18)

Readers may be aware that one of the models Gauguin and Van Gogh painted at Arles was called Augustine Roulin. However, in making that connection, they would likely be puzzled by Gauguin's use of the masculine version of the name and by Van Gogh's confusion regarding Augustin's identity. Gauguin leaves Van Gogh's question unanswered and swiftly moves on to another, seemingly unrelated, topic:

GAUGUIN

God, you're a talker, Vincent!

VINCENT

The government, we should talk about that.
See it! The best artists we respect, unite
in an aesthetic republic, one with light.

GAUGUIN

And women.

VINCENT

And women, too, of course.

Away from the pernicious, vampiric galleries
the shouts of prices in the market,
under the benign rule of our government. (pp. 20-1)

The assertion that Van Gogh is a 'talker' seems unconnected to his reply that the two should discuss municipal affairs. His attack on the government appears as random to the audience as Gauguin's song. Although there is certainly scope for the actors to perform the song and subsequent exchange farcically, neither played for laughs when the piece was first staged: the production at the University of Essex was filmed and the actors did not deliver their lines comically in the available footage. This was likely at Walcott's direction because he appointed both men personally and was heavily involved in rehearsals. Judging by remarks he made in an interview following the work's debut performance, he was also satisfied with what he saw. Not only did he report being 'very proud and pleased with the play and proud of the actors', he also claimed to have felt such 'devastating, devastating joy' that he 'cried a lot [...] with joy at seeing it done'.¹

What was the point of this section if not farce? The question is difficult to answer without recognising the continuity between Walcott's early and late works. However, thinking tidalectically reveals a striking point of resemblance. Despite *O Starry Starry Night*'s having been written a full sixty-four years after *Epitaph for the Young*, Gauguin and the speaker of the poem both reprise exactly the same song from Hans Christian Andersen's *The Swineherd*. In *Epitaph*, the reprise is rendered: 'You in the castle of your skin, I the swineherd. / *Ach du Lieber Augustin alles ist weg weg weg*' (III.40-41). As Chapter One demonstrated, *Epitaph*'s allusion to Andersen served to critique metropolitan literary tastes. Walcott's speaker suggested through the phraseological

¹ 'Nobel Laureate's Joy at World Premiere for *O Starry Starry Night*' (2013) [online] <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/news/event.aspx?e_id=5178> [accessed 23 February 2022].

adaptation that he was reluctant to produce work which would please the masses because doing so would involve creating derivative art like the pot the prince makes in Andersen's story. That pot stood metonymically for all inauthentic, unsophisticated works of art with popular appeal because it won praise from the princess he was attempting to woo even though it could only play the tune of the simple Viennese children's folksong *O du Lieber Augustin*.² Van Gogh dreamt of an ideal world in which he would not need to worry about his work's reception or marketability in precisely the same manner as the speaker from *Epitaph*. The connection between Gauguin's song and Van Gogh's vision of an aesthetic republic therefore came by way of Andersen's anterior intermediary text, to which the former alluded and with which the latter also shared associations. In other words, though he composed *O Starry Starry Night* six decades after *Epitaph*, Walcott employed the same innovative technique of "allusive transference" he had earlier used in the poem. That technique was discussed in Chapter One alongside another, termed "meta-allusion", which involves exemplifying points about allusion as they are articulated. Van Gogh is prompted to present his utopia – in which artists would not need to curtail their vision for their audience's sake – by an allusion to German song lyrics from an old, lesser-known fairy-tale Gauguin sings which he does not recognise. In *Epitaph*, the reference to Andersen's *Swineherd* is traceable because it appears immediately after a line reprising that work's title, but the play differs from the poem in that it offers no signpost at all. Nobody in the audience can realistically be expected to recognise it. The exchange is therefore meta-allusive: it exemplifies precisely what it articulates because *O du Lieber Augustin* is employed for its own sake in Walcott's work, without any consideration given to the audience. The song which prefigures Van Gogh's vision of a world in which artists need not care about the response of their audiences is meta-allusive because it simultaneously realises that vision.

² Gauguin's framing himself as Andersen's swineherd is particularly appropriate, given that he had painted a Breton swineherd shortly before visiting Arles (*The Swineherd*, 1888).

Van Gogh's real-life dream of an independent artists' colony was inspired by his belief that Japanese woodblock printmakers like Hokusai lived and worked together as humble artisans in monastic fashion. His decision to move to Arles along with Gauguin had been intended as a first step towards setting up an equivalent colony, which he hoped Émile Bernard and others would soon join. His *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin* (1888) accordingly figured him as a Buddhist monk, replete with shaved head and Japanese facial features. As such, Walcott's dramatisation of Van Gogh's vision was deeply entwined with the sort of *Japonisme* outlined in Chapter Four. As Van Gogh's *Japoniste* vision was being outlined in *O Starry Starry Night*, however, Gauguin interrupted to suggest the aesthetic republic should be established in the Caribbean:

GAUGUIN

In a new landscape, one without churches
brick barracks, near a blue ocean
and white reefs, I know just where.
For a new school of painting, an academy
built in the open, and the world's centre
will shift from Paris to the tropics.
From Montmartre to Martinique. (p. 22)

Because Van Gogh felt the landscape Gauguin described in the Caribbean closely paralleled his *Japoniste* vision, he replied to his friend in the affirmative, informing him they shared 'one dream' (p. 22). The 'school of painting' Gauguin envisions notably evokes the studio where Walcott was apprenticed to Harold Simmons, not least because the only soldiers' quarters on Martinique in 1888 were located inside Fort Saint Louis and made from stone, whereas Simmons's villa was 'built in the open', overlooking the 'brick barracks' at Vigie which Walcott felt resembled Cézanne's paintings of l'Estaque. Gauguin's speech typifies Walcott's ambivalent presentation of him which, as Chapter Two demonstrated, hovered somewhere between praise and critique. On the one hand, Gauguin wants to destabilise the established, hierarchical centre-periphery model which elevates European art and denigrates work from the Caribbean. On the other, he proffers the latter as an alternative because of his racist beliefs about its cultural simplicity. He lauds

Martinique because he sees it as an unspoiled paradise, 'a new landscape' devoid of the corrupting effects of the modern world. Bereft of religious influence, the island is said to possess a 'blue ocean / and white reefs'. The simple palette he employs in his description of the region is precisely the sort the real-life Gauguin associated with native simplicity and which Walcott deemed racialised, poetic cliché when composing his 'Letter to a Painter in England'. These points of intersection between the phenomena described in Chapters One, Two, and Four appear in *O Starry Starry Night*, but they only become traceable if one interleaves the play with his earliest work. This episode from the play therefore demonstrates in microcosm the benefit of reintegrating Walcott's earliest work back into scholarly discourse.

The author claimed in his Nobel Prize speech that poetry gives voice to an individual's 'buried language'.³ By revisiting his earliest writing, this thesis has excavated the most deeply buried features of his own language and, in so doing, it has reshaped our understanding of his poetic development. The legacies of Walcott's highly successful apprentice works like *25 Poems* and *In a Green Night* were retrospectively tarnished by nationalist critics seeking to separate the region's nascent literary tradition from its Anglo-European counterpart amidst the highly politicised academic climate of the 1960s and early 1970s. My research has demonstrated how bringing these maligned early works into conversation with later texts sheds lights on both while generating a more holistic view of Walcott's oeuvre. As the narrative used to conceptualise his aesthetic trajectory was used to develop a wider narrative for the development of twentieth-century anglophone West Indian literature, it has equally sought to destabilise that second narrative. It has proposed in its place a new sort of narrative predicated on the idea that the Caribbean has always been a hybridised, creolising space characterised by creative fusion, meaning a movement towards hybridity did not develop or accelerate in the 1970s. This new narrative posits that twentieth-century Caribbean literature was fundamentally syncretic and

³ Walcott, 'The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory', p. 262.

traces the mutability of regional aesthetics to an increased diversity in the nature of the materials being combined and recombined, rather than to changes to the creolising process itself. The benefits of this new tidalectic framework are not confined to analyses of Walcott's texts. The same thinking and co-related interleaving methodology could be employed fruitfully to interrogate the oeuvre of any writer from the region.

More broadly, devising a regionally specific framework with which to conceptualise the influence Euromodernist writing exerted on Caribbean literature represents a key step towards unifying the twin fields of postcolonial studies and global modernism. In examining the interrelationship between postcolonial and Euromodernist literatures through the early writing of a prominent Caribbean author, my thesis has worked towards harmonising these disciplines. The value of their mergence for contemporary literary criticism cannot be overstated. If their respective insights can be synergised, the reward will be nothing less than the development of an epistemology able to account for the subtleties and complexities of the most widely read, celebrated, and influential writing of the twentieth century. The advent of postcolonial criticism and theory in the long 1980s was instrumental in widening the scope of literary analysis to include texts originating in peripheral cultures and marginal spaces, and the theoretical paradigms postcolonialists devised in response to Caribbean texts at the time have enriched literary studies immeasurably. Now that one can speak of an established postcolonial canon, the first phase of postcolonial criticism – focused on demonstrating the quality of the texts in its purview and clearing space for new modes of analysis – can be seen to have achieved its objectives. The actualisation of that canon has opened up the possibility of bringing new critical perspectives into dialogue with postcolonial texts, reshaping and broadening our understanding of each to the benefit of both.

The benefits of that dialogue when conceptualising literary imitation are particularly acute. Many Euromodernist poets embarked on similar apprenticeships to Walcott's, but current divisions between postcolonial and modernist studies have obscured the parallels. The way that

Katherine Bucknell writes about Auden's early verse could, for instance, be replicated almost verbatim and applied to Walcott: his 'brilliance' as an apprentice poet lay in his 'talent for imitation'; he spent many years shaping his 'young gift' by imitating features from canonical verse; he 'fell in love with his most important models' and wrote as if he were 'giving new voice' to the whole of English literature.⁴ How different might Auden's imitative writing appear if it were brought into conversation with Walcott's early verse? Or with Bhabha's work on mimicry? Such tidalectic dialogue is of precisely the kind this thesis makes possible. It could both invigorate postcolonial studies and vitalise critical debates about Anglo-European literature.

While Western accounts of influence have, after Harold Bloom, focused on the anxious reception of one's literary forebears, the model of influence that emerges through reading Walcott's early work leaves as much space for the place of joy. This is not an unmitigated joy, or a joy untinged by the complex history of reception between Europe and its onetime overseas possessions, but it remains joy nevertheless, and a joy that illuminates our understanding of Walcott's career and the lasting influence it has had on those that have read his work.

⁴ Katherine Bucknell (ed.), 'Introduction' in *W. H. Auden: Juvenilia, Poems 1922-28* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. xix-xx.

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