

“Divided to the Vein”:  
*Patterns of Tormented Ambivalence  
in Walcott’s “The Fortunate Traveller”*

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DEREK WALCOTT HAS said, “schizoids, in a perverse way, have more personality than the normal person, and it is this conflict of our racial psyche that by irritation and a sense of loss continues to create artists” (*Trinidad Guardian* 1 Dec. 1963: 23). He further asserts in the same article that we are “deprived of what we cannot remember, or what, when we visit its origins never existed the way we imagined, or where we remain strangers, contemptible cousins, the children of indentured servants and slaves.” The picaro in *The Fortunate Traveller* portrays this kind of “tormented ambiguity,” to borrow a term from James Livingston (208). Because the term “ambiguity” is usually associated with meaning rather than with personal attitude, as intended here, “ambivalence” is chosen as the operative word for the purpose of this study.

Poet and persona share this ambivalence, and the artistic process which brings them together is marked by image patterns which map out a journey that simultaneously regresses to the past and advances inevitably into the future. History and memory frequently yield precedence to forward-moving time which eventually becomes apocalyptic vision. A brief consideration of the poet in relation to his consciousness of history, and a sketch of his artistic and psychological involvement with his persona should lead to a more informed analysis of Walcott’s artistry in *The Fortunate Traveller*, an artistry that carries the imprint of the author’s ambivalence expressed in the poem through a pattern of dual, ambiguous and paradoxical elements integrated by the complex personality of the traveller himself.

Despite Walcott’s objections to the “masochistic recollection”

of poets who look to the brutal history of the West Indies for inspiration (Rohlehr 10), he presents in his main persona a quester who is ironically forced to confront his origins and the events of his past in the mirrored reflections of the present. His journey from the old to the new merely provides an unrelenting satire on the evils of the old. Put another way, in *The Fortunate Traveller*, a journey through the modern world of American and European civilization represented, among other things, by the passage across the Mason-Dixon line, is merely a repetition of the old order of victim and victimizer, conquered and conqueror, native dweller and foreign intruder. Walcott, consciously or unconsciously, is negating the statement made in "Laventille": "The middle passage never guessed its end." (*Collected* 86). Instead, *The Fortunate Traveller* illustrates the counterclaim of Brathwaite that the passage has guessed its end. Its end is inextricably bound up in its beginning. The process of the journey and of the quest is not only constructed from the racial memories of the past, but the outcome is shaped by and mirrored in this process.

Not only are the cruel forces of memory projected into the experiences of the present, but there is a tortured convergence of many parallel and divergent elements in Walcott's three-part sequence of poems; the very structure of North-South-North accentuates the contrasting and complementary social realities of the American south with its blatant black-white dichotomies and the north where the lines are more subtly drawn but nevertheless still exist. Throughout *The Fortunate Traveller*, the reader witnesses a convergence of Caribbean, Afro-American and European realities reflected in symbols, myths and geographical landmarks. There is also the contrastive merging of standard language and local dialect, part of what Walcott calls "that dramatic ambivalence [which] is part of what it means to be a West Indian" (cited Hamner 156). In addition, Walcott brings together the concrete and abstract, the biographical and historical, the physical and spiritual, the social and psychological, the linear and cyclical, and the this-worldly and apocalyptic. All of these conflicting elements reveal a poetic mind in conflict, a man who once described himself as "a kind of split writer" with one tradition inside him "going one way, and another going another" (Morris 145); in

Walcott's memorable phrase, he is "divided to the vein." The heartbeat of the fortunate traveller, like that of the creative artist, is also caught between the rhythms of diastole and systole, "like the pause / between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace" (*Traveller* 99).

The image of the pulsebeat and the vein is not one which is merely used to depict the cultural and linguistic contradictions portrayed in "A Far Cry from Africa"; the image is also appropriately chosen by Walcott in his poetic collection *Midsummer* (1984) to describe his own tortuous procedure of artistic composition:

A trembling thought, no bigger than a hurt  
wren, swells to the pulsebeat of my rounded palm,  
pecks at its scratch marks like a mound of dirt,  
oval wings thrumming like a panelled heart.  
Mercy on thee, wren; . . .

. . . . .

but if you died in my hand, that beak would be the needle  
on which the black world kept spinning on in silence,  
your music as measured in grooves as was my pen's.  
Keep pecking on in this vein and see what happens:  
the red skeins will come apart as knitting does.

It flutters in my palm like the heartbeat thudding to be gone, . . .

(*Midsummer*, XXXVII 50)

It is apparent then that the intense experience of creating poetry is as painfully replete with passionate contradiction and conflict as the quest of the traveller across the rugged landscapes of life. Byron had demonstrated this congruency between art and life and between the artist and his literary pilgrim in *Childe Harold*, a work which bears some resemblances to Walcott's *The Fortunate Traveller*. The Miltonic principle of the poet as a poem and as a creator pulled into the very life of the personages of his creation is endorsed by Walcott in one of *The Gulf* poems: "Resisting poetry I am becoming a poem. / O lolling Orphic head silently howling, / my own head rises from its surf of cloud" ("Moon," *Metamorphoses* 12). Beyond any notion of the "egotistical sublime," however, is Walcott's troubled response to deep racial memory which is inextricably linked with both the process and product of his own creative impulses. In poem 50 of *Midsummer*, he

speaks of how some of his poems lie "where stones are deep, in the sea's memory" (70). The poet associates this memory with his father, Warwick Walcott, whose name is linked with Warwickshire in England. He then speaks of moving his father's grave from the "blackened headstones / in Castries" (70). One need not construct autobiography from this poetic commentary to establish the fictional truth which preoccupies Walcott's imagination here. Evidence adduced thus far helps to delineate the poetic personality behind the creation of the principal quester in *The Fortunate Traveller*. The reader is therefore not surprised to see an interesting pattern of tensions and ambiguities between the attitude and behaviour of the traveller himself and the poet who creates him. There are ironic contradictions and unconscious parallels and divisions which define the movement and direction of the poem and its central personage. Opposites and mirror images appear as part of the dynamic between poet, poem and reader. In our observation of this process we must remember Walcott's words in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture": "the torment of all self-appointed schizoid saints is that they enact their opposite" (*Dream* 32).

We must however move from the author to his creation — the traveller. His prototype is the hero of the picaresque novel, the earliest example of which in English is usually ascribed to Thomas Nashe who like Walcott also wrote for the stage, and who entitled his prose work *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton* (1594). Walcott's slight ironic modification of Nashe's title needs no speculation here. Nashe's traveller experiences the same sense of displacement as Walcott's. Jack Wilton describes himself as "a certain kind of appendix or page, belonging or appertaining in or unto the confines of the English court" (966). He follows "the camp or the court, or the court and the camp." He is "sole king of the cans and blackjacks, prince of pygmies." Unlike Walcott's traveller, he indulges in racy invective, but, like Walcott's traveller, he indulges in wit and terse colloquialisms. These colloquialisms, like those of Walcott's main character, can be combined with aureate rhetoric.

One senses, however, that ambivalence in Jack Wilton is a trait which surfaces as a duality of character; he is a phoney who pa-

rades as a gentleman who displays mock-erudition and pretentious courtly manners. Walcott's adventurer is more serious and controlled by the burden and destiny of his race and background. Irony through incongruous and opposing patterns of behaviour is nevertheless a strong determinant in the world of both travellers. Jack Wilton invites his reader in Latin, "*Paulo maiora canamus* [let us sing of somewhat nobler things]" (966), pedantically citing Virgil's *Eclogues*; but when he tells of what happens after he departs to places outside the court, he dwells on the same rogueries and atrocities which characterized his earlier behaviour, so that environmentally court and camp turn out to be the same. Walcott's traveller often introduces us to Ovid, to Dante and to a catalogue of European satirists such as "big-guts Rabelais," Lord Rochester, Quevedo, Juvenal, Martial, Pope, Dryden, Swift and Lord Byron ("The Spoiler's Return" 60), all of whom are a mere supportive chorus to Spoiler the calypsonian. The journey pursued by the fortunate traveller, like Jack Wilton's, first appears to be diversified as he moves from place to place, but nothing "nobler" occurs: from North to South to North again the traveller encounters an ironic repetition of the same human hardships and calamities. Walcott's vision of the future, however, is more sombre and ominously apocalyptic than Nashe's. Some closer, although brief, examination of the fortunate traveller and of Walcott's poetic interaction with his character would now be more understandable in light of the preceding sketch of the author, his creative process and his persona.

The poems of the first section of *The Fortunate Traveller* are subsumed under the title "North," and introduce us to the territorial environment first encountered by the traveller — that is, the New England coastal cities of America. The reader does not, however, meet the persona through the I-pronoun reference till the second poem "Upstate." The first poem, "Old New England," reflects in its title the ironic doubleness of the character's world and the central paradox of the collection of poems: that the new order is the same as the old because the former repeats the same evils as the latter. The visual images of black and white are made to convey meanings which invert their usual stereotypic symbolism; thus, white, normally identified with purity and goodness,

becomes associated with violence and destructive victimization. For example, the “white church spire whistles into space / like a swordfish” (ll. 3, 4) and the “white meetinghouse” “wounds” the hillside with its spire, causing “brown blood” to trickle down (ll. 14, 15); and God uses “the white lance of the church” as his harpoon (ll. 28, 29). Black or brown, however, are colours which are identified with objects that have been defiled or damaged or destroyed by other surrounding forces or influences: for instance, the “Black clippers” are tarred with whales’ blood (l. 1). This blood, in the second stanza of the poem, is associated with the wound produced by the spire of the white meetinghouse (ll. 14, 15). The trail along which the blood is found is “the Indian trail” (l. 14). These images awaken in the mind of the reader the atrocities of early white American settlers who caused the blood of Indians to flow while controlling them with a hypocritical religious system centralized in the “white meeting house” of the church. In this context, the colour black becomes transferred to the destructive religious world of white colonialist settlers, but with the poignant twist of being linked to a nominally good object — the Bible; however, there is a harsh transformation in the meaning of the colour as it assumes the ambiguities of a deceptive, white Christian religion. The good Bible is black, but the reality represented by its use is symbolized by a blackness that is socially stigmatized by those who use the Bible as a weapon. The imagery resonates with these complex meanings:

The hillside is still wounded by the spire  
of the white meetinghouse, the Indian trail  
trickles down it like the brown blood of the whale  
in rowanberries bubbling like the spoor  
on logs burnt black as Bibles by hellfire.

(“Old New England” 3)

Images and ideas are orchestrated to create a mood of tragedy where violence is directed against the victimized, whether it is the whale, the hunted Indian or the masses of native dwellers harpooned to death by the cruelties of organized religion. Added to this list of victims, in a different though strangely related context, are the “farm boys back from ’Nam” (l. 7), called at the end of the poem “our sons home from the East” (l. 33), whom “the

black clippers brought (knotting each shroud round the cross-trees)" (ll. 32, 33). This whole process is ethically rationalized in the consciences of the Old New Englander with the reassurance "that God is meek but keeps a whistling sword" (ll. 27-28).

"Old New England" is a name that captures all the ironic contrasts and ambiguities of colonialist history: geographically, the ship moves along the coastline of a supposedly independent America, but the names of each port of call recalls the cities of the original centre of British colonization: "New London, New Haven and New Bedford" (l. 2). With this older view of foreign dominance comes all memories of the repeated moments of peaceful contact yielding to bloody belligerence. Hence, the "spring wind startles an uproar of marching oaks with memories of war" (l. 111). Memory is awakened by the cyclical forces of nature and time. The spring wind suggests the beginning of a new season of life, but that expectation is reversed by the realities of violent warfare and death. By this means, time becomes an annihilating force, using the past to erase the present and leaving the evidence of this obliteration on the landscape by peeling whole counties from the calendar (l. 12). For Walcott, although memory can be awakened, it, like history, inevitably goes through a process of obliteration. In Walcott's play *Remembrance* (1980), Jordan, who sounds like an alter ego of the playwright, emphasizes this principle when he speaks of his son Frederick: "erase history from your mind and make it your own . . . history, gossip, rumor, and what people go say? Blank it out!" (75). This action, however, is paradoxically counterbalanced by remembering the dead "arranged in your memory, grave after grave, like empty desks in a classroom" (86). The artistic concern with fame and perpetuity that is affected by this paradoxical process can nevertheless be satisfied: "It doesn't matter where you born, how obscure you are, . . . fame and fortune are contained within you. Your body is the earth in which it springs and dies" (*Remembrance* 86). Accordingly, we ourselves become the living monuments and receptacles of the dead past and the glorious future.

Moreover in *The Fortunate Traveller*, there are other dualities. Within this environment, the painful ambiguity of the apparently peaceful church spire which reaches into celestial space seems to

contrast forcefully with a rocket which "pierces heaven" (l. 4); but the reader is compelled, like a Metaphysical poet (a breed Walcott greatly admired [Jones 273]), to yoke the image of peace violently together with images of hostile destruction, for the spire "whistles into space" not only "like a swordfish" (l. 4), but like a rocket. The ambitious thrusts of religion are still linked together with instruments of violence, only now they are augmented by the advancements of technology. The reader witnesses in this process a deconstructive pattern of images collapsing into similarity as an expression of the artistic sensitivities of the poet; these sensitivities are also shaped and activated by the racial memories of a past filled with the dividedness of what may be known as "the commonwealth experience" portrayed so poignantly by the arrivants of Brathwaite's trilogy. Walcott's Traveller, on the surface of things, is not Brathwaite's Arrivant, but despite Walcott's claim that "history cannot be ambiguously recorded" ("The Muse of History" 11), we see a tortuous ambiguity underlying the powerful language of his poem.

In the four remaining poems of the first section of *The Fortunate Traveller*, the persona becomes more clearly defined as the first-person pronoun appears for the first time, providing distinguishing features for the speaker. At this point, it is not that Walcott's "descriptive discipline relents," as Calvin Bedient claims (32), but that it becomes intensely honest as the persona confesses his inner insecurities before a new and yet strangely familiar cultural environment. The initial sentiment expressed is linked with the artistic impulse: "Sometimes I feel sometimes / the Muse is leaving, the muse is leaving America" (ll. 13, 14). In direct conflict with this impulse is the attraction to America: "I am falling in love with America" (6). Compounding the difficulty is the process of cultural acceptance and the thwarted linguistic confusion which Walcott frequently accentuates as a theme of his poetry: "I must put cold small pebbles from the spring / upon my tongue to learn her language" (6). The experience of adapting linguistically is further complicated by the ancient and contemporary associations of geographical names and the histories which both differentiate and identify them. The Carthage of America triggers rich ancient associations with the African city by the same name and in par-



ticular with Cato’s ominous words, *Delenda est Carthago* (“Carthage must be destroyed”) (11). The ambiguities of ancient and modern history become a veritable montage of names and places which transcend time and location, bringing together Caribbean, American, Greek, African and Middle Eastern recollections. All of these particulars are integrated in the poet’s imagination under the counterpointed title “North and South.”

As McCorkle indicates, “travelling and mapping” are a process “where history becomes the knowledge only place can give.” Based on this perspective of history the opening lines of “North and South” “state an ambivalence about the very act of naming” places (McCorkle 3, 4). Moreover, as the journey continues, the vision of the traveller encompasses divergent territory which develops into a Dantean world made from the stuff of Walcott’s literary journeys through the great classics of Western Civilization and his real-life travel through memorable spots near island retreats. The poet magically merges inner and outer landscapes as part of his own dual perspective so that snorkeling over the sunken mythical island of Atlantis, travelling like a tourist in Tobago by a glass-bottomed boat to Buccoo Reef and going through the streets of Manhattan are easily integrated with “the white glare / of the white rose of [Dante’s] inferno”:

to snorkel over Atlantis, to see, through a mask,  
Sidon up to its windows in sand, Tyre, Alexandria,  
with their wavering seaweed spires through a glassbottom boat,  
and to buy porous fragments of the Pantheon  
from a fisherman in Tobago, but the fear exists,  
*Delenda est Carthago* on the rose horizon,

and the streets of Manhattan are sown with salt,  
and those in the North all wait for that white glare  
of the white rose of inferno, all the world’s capitals.

(“North and South” 11)

By collapsing time and place in this way Walcott demonstrates the difficulty of trying “to compute” what he calls “the collage of a closing century” (9). He believes “there is no history, only the history of emotion” (“WTS,” *Dream* 5). The sense of disorientation which affects the traveller also overtakes the poet and the reader here. “The mania / of history veils even the clearest air”

(14). Language becomes a coiled snake, producing "paranoid anxiety" (14, 15); there is a shameful sense of colonialist self-deprecation: "I accept my function as a colonial upstart at the end of an empire, / a single circling homeless satellite" (11). Exile is a strong sentiment as well: "I am thinking of an exile farther than any country," and the present environment becomes "this heart of darkness" (12). The traveller finally identifies with the persecuted fugitive, the Jews of the Diaspora (15) and with the monkey:

I collect my change from a small-town pharmacy,  
 the cashier's fingertips still wince from my hand  
 as if it would singe hers — well yes, *je suis un singe*,  
 I am one of that tribe of frenetic or melancholy  
 primates who made your music for many more moons  
 than all the silver quarters in the till.

("North and South" 16)

The monkey as a symbol for Walcott has been explored with complexity in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, but in his essay on "What the Twilight Says," the tense ambiguity of the symbol emerges. On one side the mimic quality of the monkey brings human beings into a darkness which is total, but the journey back to the ape is necessary for the artist-actor to articulate his origins. Walcott explains this ambiguous situation of entrapment:

The noblest are those who are trapped, who have accepted the twilight.

If I see these as heroes it is because they have kept the sacred urge of actors everywhere: to record the anguish of the race. To do this, they must return through a darkness whose terminus is amnesia. The darkness which yawns before them is terrifying. It is the journey back from man to ape. Every actor must make this journey to articulate his origins, but for these who have been called not men but mimics, the darkness must be total, and the cave should not contain a single man-made mnemonic object.

("WTS," *Dream* 5)

For poet then, as for persona, being a monkey is a state of double anguish, one dimension fulfils the demands of our origins, the other the mimetic function of being an artist.

The poems of "South," the middle section of *The Fortunate Traveller*, develop the same patterns of ambiguity already noticed in "North." The complexity of the patterns, however, is increased

by paradoxical interpretations of movement, process and time. Space prevents detailed treatment or elaboration here. Walcott juxtaposes the following contending dualities: movement and stasis: “the tanker that seems still is moving” (38); downward collapse and upward dominance: the fall of the natives’ gods, the traditional order, before the ascendancy of the intruder’s God:

Hurucan  
 You scream like a man whose wife is dead,  
 like a god who has lost his race,  
 you yank the electric wires with wet hands.  
 (“Hurucan” 42)

To this suicidal image of fallen deity Walcott adds the ironic contradictions of termination and continuity: “I decompose, but I composing still” (53). This paradox was introduced in the first section in the poem “Piano Practice,” in the lines: “perhaps the *fin de siecle* isn’t really finished, / maybe there’s a piano playing it somewhere” (10). Walcott is well aware of these playful patterns of representing time, both in its linearity and circularity. Both are controlling reflections of “that tired artifice called history” (38). Moreover, the direction portrayed is linearity which signifies futility; for example, “The shark racing the shadow of the shark” (54). The pattern may also be circularity which reflects meaninglessness:

. . . my premonition of the scene  
 of what passing over this Caribbean.  
 Is crab climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel,  
 and going round and round in the same barrel.  
 (“The Spoiler’s Return” 54)

What exceeds all of this interplay of patterns and this complex network of tensions is Walcott’s contrast of tones expressed in the superlative piece of satire among the pieces of the middle section of *The Fortunate Traveller* — “The Spoiler’s Return.” Walcott achieves these contrasts by juxtaposing the formal tone of the three opening lines of Lord Rochester’s *The Satire Against Mankind* (1675) with the humorously mocking attitude of Spoiler’s calypso on “The Bedbug” (54), a composition sung originally by a popular Trinidadian calypsonian. In addition, Walcott employs the voice of lament through a parody of Naipaul: “I see these islands

and I feel to bawl, / 'area of darkness' with V. S. Nightfall" (54). Tonal shifts are also accomplished through intermittent use of local Trinidad dialect organized according to calypso verbal rhythms: "'Things ain't go change, they ain't go change at all,' / to my old chorus: 'Lord, I want to bawl'" (59). Walcott also changes the tone from this semi-humorous sense of light complaint to a tone of satirical lamentation close to that of a Jeremiad or to Robert Burton's passionate but parodic address to the reader in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. These tonal shifts through an intertextual mingling of literary and oral voices are rooted in the artistic psyche of Walcott, the "divided child" and "cultural schizophrenic."

The middle section concludes with a strong Naipaulian mood which leaves the traveller envying "the octopus with ink for blood" (83), and becoming a "mackerel that leap[s] from its element, / trying to be different — . . . / married to nothing" (82). Although the outlook is pessimistic here, it is important to remember that for Walcott there is a need at times to regress to nothing as the source of creativity. According to him, "If there was nothing, there was everything to be made" ("WTS," *Dream* 4). As Figueroa concludes, speaking of Walcott's preoccupation with nothing in *Another Life*, "nothing" is not preoccupation with vacuity but with the concept of "unhistoricity" applied to the Anglophone Caribbean. "Nothing" is at once a comment on traditional views and a search for identity based on self-knowledge and real knowledge of history, which "rejects acceptance of doctrinaire concepts" (422-28).

The third and final section of *The Fortunate Traveller* (also "North") broadens from the narrower canvas of temporal history explored in earlier sections to a timeless apocalyptic world, which is dramatically introduced by a quotation from the book of Revelation describing the advent of famine during the Tribulation period of the end times. The Christian prophetic calendar thus frames the events of colonial history in a future context to show the coalescence and culmination of the cruelties of the past and those of the present age. This cruel environment surrounds a painful but profitable pilgrimage in which the traveller must eventually come to accept the "twilight" of contradictory and ambivalent ex-

periences as a necessary birthplace for renewed creativity, self-enactment and self-discovery. As Lane argues, Walcott's confrontation with the world results in despair but eventually leads to a renewal which celebrates the power of art and language (65-78).

Caught in this Janus-faced environment, the traveller experiences a schizoid perspective of himself and his world. This condition is mirrored in his use of personal pronouns as he moves back and forth from a singular "I" to a collective "we": "I crossed the canal," . . . "I sat on a cold bench," . . . "I remember / a gekko," . . . "We are roaches," . . . "we are the first / to scuttle . . . / back to Geneva, Bonn, Washington, London" (88-90). This collective focus then returns to the personal: "I cannot bear to watch the nations cry," and "I was rehearsing the ecstasies of starvation," and "I found my pity, desperately researching / the origins of history" (90, 91). But this personal emphasis shifts again when the traveller describes himself collectively as "we savages"; then he returns to a singular focus with "I envisaged an Africa flooded with . . . light" (91). This rapid shifting from an individual to a collective self reflects a self-division which pushes the traveller to search for wholeness of being by "seeking in all races a common ingenuity" (91). The quest however comes to a powerfully disillusioning conclusion, as is poignantly revealed in the closing verse paragraphs of the title piece "The Fortunate Traveller."

The chilling irony of the adjective "Fortunate" is brought home effectively in the following lines which are recollected as a fragment of dialogue, as the traveller leaves England by sea, having received an "Iscaiot's salary": "You are so fortunate, you get to see the world — ." The reply, "Indeed, indeed, sirs, I have seen the world" (92) is weighted with trenchant irony and ambiguity. The meanings are multidirectional in their forcefulness: he has seen the world, but its cataclysmic human tragedies do not make the experience gratifying; if he is fortunate, it is only in the sense that he is not one of the victims, but racial memory may contradict this feeling; he has paid the price to be fortunate — received "Iscaiot's salary," the price of blood. Further, he has seen the world, but the outcome is only a blurred vision ironically underscored by the descriptive line that follows his reply: "Spray splashes the port-holes and vision blurs" (92).

The return to the islands is further marked by a tormented ambivalence as he becomes another Marlow who has peered into the heart of darkness. But unlike Marlow's European capital city of Brussels, the Caribbean setting is the agricultural peasant world of the Africa Kurtz had exploited. Dew is "on the elephant ears of the dasheen. / Through Kurtz's teeth, white skull in elephant grass" the "imperial fiction" still sings (93):

The heart of darkness is not Africa.  
The heart of darkness is the core of fire  
in the white centre of the holocaust.  
The heart of darkness is the rubber claw  
selecting a scalpel in antiseptic light . . .  
("The Fortunate Traveller" 93, 94)

The forceful transposition of white and black images, with the former given the stereotypic meaning of the latter, recalls the first poem of the collection and brings to full circle the gnawing concern of poet and quester, that the new is merely the old in another form. The truth forces home Walcott's problem with history — it contains in its process an unrelenting determinism which universalizes all particulars, repeats all pasts, confounds all rationales, cancels all conclusions and makes all attempts at closure the seedbed of new beginnings. At every stage of the timeline of history the stream of memory bifurcates in backward and forward movements.

In "The Season of Phantasmal Peace," the concluding piece of the last section of *The Fortunate Traveller*, the forward movement of the stream of history brings a predictable outcome. This poem is an appropriate climax to a dramatic portrayal of divided pilgrimage; the piece is rightly hailed by one reviewer as "the best poem in [the] collection" (Vendler 26). The third horseman of the apocalypse (the Black horse which symbolizes famine [Rev. 6:5]) ushers in an age where "the drawn sword comes in strides" (97). The atmosphere is created in part by absences and presences: love is absent, as we learn from the repeated phrase from 1 Corinthians 13 — "and have not charity" (97); God is absent; for in the third section of the poem we learn that "God is dead" (95); time is absent: "there was no longer dusk, or season, decline of weather" (98). Light is however present, but it is a "phantasmal light / that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever" (98); there

is battle, but paradoxically, it is one in which “starlings [are] wagging peaceful cries” (98); the nations like birds were present with their “multitudinous dialects and twittering tongues” (98).

More significant than the dualities of absence and presence is the ambiguous merging of light and darkness as a pervasive pattern among the images of this final poem. Following the “passage of phantasmal light” is the “icy sunlight”; then there is “the light / that you will see at evening / in yellow October.” Ultimately, as the poem ends there are “falling suns” and a seasonal pause between “dusk and darkness, between fury and peace.” We are however told that this environment is “as our earth is now, it lasted long” (99). The ambiguity is pervasive here at the very end as well, as the statements in Derridean manner keep undermining their own truths. If the season “lasted one moment” like a pause, how can it also last long? If the phantasmal light cannot be severed by the narrowest shadow, how can there be dusk and darkness? In fact we were told “there was no longer dusk” (98). If this is the apocalyptic future, how are things the same as “our earth is now”? These colliding questions make up the tormenting world of the colonial; it is an inner and outer world of “fury and peace,” but this peace is a phantasmal peace, tangible only in a deceptive way, and quite unsubstantial. Walcott provides some insight into this predicament, which is his as well as his colonialist traveller:

Colonials, we . . . had the theatre of our lives. So the self-inflicted role of martyr came naturally, the melodramatic belief that one was a message-bearer for the millennium, that the inflamed ego was enacting their will. In that simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect. (“WTS,” *Dream 4*)

Accordingly, the action and language of life are captured ambiguously in Walcott’s poem, and although he does not see himself as a message-bearer of the millennium, he turns out to be so behind the mask of the central personage of *The Fortunate Traveller*.

There is, however, from this position a sense of light as a motionless point where creative insight is reborn and there is the gift to see things as they are, “halved by darkness.” The closing lines of “A Map of Europe” depict this condition of things:

The light creates its stillness. In its ring  
 Everything IS. A cracked coffee cup  
 A broken loaf, a dented urn become  
 More than themselves, their SELVES, as in Chardin,  
 Or in beer-bright Vermeer,  
 Not objects of our pity.

Within it is no lacrimae rerum  
 No art. Only the gift  
 To see things as they are, halved by darkness  
 From which they cannot shift.

(*Selected Poems* 79)

From this backdrop, the twilight atmosphere of the concluding poem of *The Fortunate Traveller* can be understood with reference to Walcott's metaphysical vision and, in a political sense, to his comments on the figurative use of twilight which "became a metaphor for withdrawal of Empire and the beginning of our doubt" ("WTS," *Dream* 4). This state creates in the artist a dusk-like vision of things:

. . . at every dusk one ignites a city in the mind above the same sad fences where the poor revolve, the theatre still an architectural fantasy, if there is still nothing around us, darkness still preserves the awe of self-enactment as the sect gathers for its self-extinguishing, self-discovering rites. ("WTS," *Dream* 4, 5)

This emphasis on dusk and twilight as a place of discovery and the starting point of birth and creativity is echoed in the first chapter of *Another Life*, where Walcott asserts that we must "begin with twilight," a "twilight eager to complete itself" (3, 4). This environment is appropriate to beginning life *in medias res*, a process through which a "divided child" develops into a poet.

Walcott advances to a more succinct conclusion: "the noblest are those who are trapped, who have accepted the twilight." The fortunate traveller in this sense is a trapped hero for Walcott, who, as artist, has kept the sacred urge "to record the anguish of the race" ("WTS," *Dream* 5).

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