

# *Music, Body, and the Torture of Articulation in Derek Walcott's "Sainte Lucie"*

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The voice must grovel in search of itself, until gesture and sound fuse and the blaze of their flesh astonishes them.

DEREK WALCOTT, "What the Twilight Says: An Overture"

"THEATRE OF CRUELTY . . . Poor Theatre . . . Holy Theatre": the "cult of nakedness in underground theatre" ("What the Twilight Says" 6)—Derek Walcott decided long ago that primal theatre, as it might be termed generically, is "penitential," enacting "remorse for the genocides of civilization . . . [for having] degraded and shucked the body as food for machines." Thus, when first he committed his plays to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in an attempt to create an environment for West Indian theatre, then virtually absent, the relative "poverty" of nakedness seemed "a gift to the imagination." But innocence is easily corrupted; and, in his own view, as the West Indies adopted the direction of "civilization," art became a luxury, so that the subject of "bare, 'unaccommodated man'" became a subject of "exhaustion" ("What the Twilight Says" 7). When no longer essential, theatre moves indoors.

The same might be said of poetry. Indeed, the relation between the dancer and the dance is one of Walcott's major poetical preoccupations, a theme which he explores through a great range of complex metaphors to promote a synthesis of perspectives. The reader of Walcott's poetry is immersed in a drama of consciousness that is not hampered by the solid realities of the theatre. Its power is its very incompleteness, akin to the "idealistic

striving" of music.<sup>1</sup> Its intensity is such that the body seems as much at issue as the word, so that the reader emerges from "sounding" its depths with an intuition that action can reside in quality of voice, that tone is intimately related to physical sensation, that words and things are in constant flux, presence a condition of absence. The musicality of the poetry is dramatically crucial and should remind us of the project that once fired Walcott's theatrical vision: "if the body could be reduced once more to learning, to a rendering of things through groping mnemonic fingers, a new theatre could be made, with a delight that comes in roundly naming its object" ("What the Twilight Says" 26).

The drama of consciousness that is enacted by "Sainte Lucie," the long poem of Walcott's own island birthplace, is a quest for faith in language. The first section of the poem begins with the names of the island's villages, and, leaving aside the associations of place, the first and simple pleasure is the sound of the words: "Laborie, Choiseul, Vieuxfort, Dennery" (43). The poet returns to these places not physically but through sounding their names, in the hope of discovering their secret, a secret that eluded him as a child. He is no nearer now to knowing the substance of that secret, but he "visualizes" it in terms of transition, a play between body and shadow: "something always being missed / between the floating shadow and the pelican" (43). The child is recalled "crawling under the house-shadow / where the children played house" (43); and from this the poem develops imagery of sound and depth to coincide with the memory itself as a reordering of reality, in the hope of revelation: "the sea-net / of sunlight trolling the shallows"; "that shack on the lip of the sandpit"; the cry of the gulls and the diving of dolphins; and a number of images of vertical extension (ladder, tree, waterspout) that unite opposites (movement up and down, tangible and intangible form) in a natural cycle of change and growth, which is at the same time something like a sea change, a process of transformation that is associated with the renewal of creative power: "grey drifting ladders of rain / and the great grey tree of the waterspout" (43).

The second section begins confidently. There is a longer list of names this time, not of places but of fruits—one name to the line, line after line—a realization in verse of the poetic consciousness that these are the sound of poetry:

Pomme arac,  
otaheite apple,  
pomme cythere,  
pomme granate,  
moubain,  
z'anananas. (43-44)

Now the poet is confident enough to venture a figure of his own making:

z'anananas  
the pine apple's  
Aztec helmet. (44)

But imagination prefigures, even precipitates, a failure of memory:

I have forgotten  
what pomme for  
the Irish potato. (44)

The mixing of imagination and memory continues now of necessity; the pace is headlong, the mood ecstatic, until a pause for breath enables reflection. A quick turning from ecstasy to anguish brings the lament:

Come back to me  
my language.  
Come back,  
cacao,  
grigri  
solitaire,  
ciseau. (44)

The words continue, but the magic of their sound has flown, for the mood has changed utterly. The memory of *ciseau*, the scissors bird, is associated with the knowledge that there are no nightingales in St. Lucia. With this under/*cutting* of memory—a deconstruction where the thing memory made present (the scissors bird) becomes the sign of absence (the nightingale)—the poetic consciousness shifts to Jamaica (as did Walcott himself to gain an

education), for in the “blue depth” of the mountains there, once, he saw a nightingale.

A break in the verse brings the focus of memory and imagination back to St. Lucia, but with no sense of pleasure or even of genuine caring. There is a sense of strain, of imported feeling, of loss of faith—and all it takes is the sound of a word to register cynicism and signify despair:

candles,  
candleflies  
the black night bending  
cups in its hard palms  
cool thin water  
this is important water,  
important?  
imported?  
water is important. (45)

The reader at one level knows but at another is not convinced of the “importance,” although recognizing the symbolic potential (associated with the cup in the palm of a bending figure) of water’s healing power. The *sound* of water is neither mentioned nor referred to by the sound of the poem; but one imagines various rhythmic possibilities of rainfall when one is told:

also very important  
the red rust drum  
the evening deep. (45)

The simile here is “deep / as coffee,” the colour of evening; but coffee has also an immediate association in poetic consciousness with morning, when coffee is “important”—so important that whole “villages [must] shut / [while their inhabitants labour] all day in the sun?” The words left out are significant. Their absence constitutes an evasion of that social insight which the poetic consciousness has been driven towards by “the movement of the verse as part of the thinking process”<sup>2</sup>—namely, that there is a world of social difference between the man who buys the coffee to drink and the man who labours all day so that it can be produced. It is this distinction which leads the reader to a sense of “the villages shut” as meaning the poetic consciousness shut out.

Paradoxically, the means in verse of avoiding the issue in thought is also the means of confronting the reader with the fact of that avoidance—ellipsis, which may be defined in this case as a syntactical *exploitation* of linguistic possibilities of incompleteness. It is easy to condemn the evasion on political grounds. But why does poetic consciousness engage the language paradoxically to deliver a social meaning which it refuses to admit to itself? Here we are dealing not so much with "the movement of verse as part of the thinking process" as with poetry that defines itself more in Romantic terms as a structure of feeling. It may be worth noting, though, Raymond Williams's definition of structures of feeling as "social experiences in solution" (133). As part of the thinking process, the movement of the verse refers to an unstated but dimly acknowledged recognition of "already manifest social formations," which effectively deny the poetic consciousness access to village culture and its language resources. As a structure of feeling, on the other hand, the movement of the verse relates to "emergent formations," and transmits to the reader the refusal of poetic consciousness to face facts and give up idealist striving.<sup>3</sup> In this more positive sense, the effect of ellipsis here is like the effect of music, as Wole Soyinka describes it: "that of a linguistic proposition which is still striving towards total resolution" (43).

At this point, the poem breaks off again, partly to confirm the evasion, partly to clarify the nature of the insight that is being evaded, for the next stanzaic unit finds the spectre of consciousness haunting the schoolyard of his childhood in a nostalgic return to the scene where, once, it was not shut out:

In the empty schoolyard  
 teacher dead today  
 the fruit rotting  
 yellow on the ground,  
 dyes from Gauguin  
 the pomme arac dyes  
 the earth purple, the ochre roads  
 still waiting in the sun  
 for my shadow,  
 O so you is Walcott?  
 You is Roddy brother?  
 Teacher Alix son? (45-46)

Invoking Edward Kamau Brathwaite on the subject of "nation-language," we have to decide whether or not this latter voice is marginalized in the poem as a whole. The controlling perspective, in the simple sense of what Brathwaite calls "the *most* part of the poem" (38), is obviously in English. And the tone, when it comes to the three "other" lines—which are also the most immediately personal, referring explicitly to the poet, his brother, and his father by name—is elegiac. The exuberance of the natural speech rhythms alludes to a memory of the past and is very much contained by the present sense of loss. Rather, it is contained formally, by the more formal framing language. Then, too, although the poet recalls the teacher from whom as a small boy he learned the importance of names and of naming, the teacher is not given a name. It is this kind of usage that leads Brathwaite to accuse many "mainstream" West Indian poets of marginalizing "nation-language" by their maintaining the controlling perspective in English ("the 'classical,' even *Prosperian element*—the *most* part of the poem" [38]). Walcott's own belief is that a linguistic "fusion of formalism and exuberance" is itself a complex and flexible metaphor both of and for "the West Indian psyche" ("Meanings" 51). But it is obviously important that we consider the various poetic discourses of "Sainte Lucie" in the whole context of the poem.

It should be noted, for instance, that the sense of loss is really too personal to be finally contained, as it might at first seem, by formalism. The death of the teacher haunts poetic consciousness, and utterance of it is like poison in the ear, with proliferating puns—"dyes" is repeated twice, running like a stain through the poem as through the scene it evokes—and the imagery is of rotting fruit. The "ochre roads" that lie across the "purple" earth wait for the shadow of the poet, returning to this place, to fall upon them—an observation that reveals the mindscape of a man who knows his own insubstantiality, a man who is haunted in this place by his father's death. He cannot speak it. That is the intensity of the emotion. His grief in that sense is very formally controlled, contained by elegy. But he so identifies with what he cannot say that the ghosts of the father and the son seem almost one, each a visitant to emptiness, a spectre of person and

place. That is the complex point of another pun, where the "ochre roads" wait in the "sun" for the shadow of the son.

If, purely for the sake of analysis, a distinction is made between sound and sense, it might be argued (in terms of the former) that the dominant element in "Sainte Lucie" is French patois, not because there is more of it than English, but because it represents the striving of the poetic consciousness. Then, too, we must keep in mind that, though the thinking in verse is for the most part in English—because the poetic consciousness is in exile, apparently unable to remember much of its French patois and worried that it might not be able to regain access to the inner experience of the language—the feeling in verse is for the most part in French patois. In other words, the condition of exile, or of an alienated consciousness, precipitates something akin to dissociation of sensibility, which is dramatized by voices in different languages. We have seen already, in the case of ellipsis, that thought does not necessarily control feeling in the poem. It seems wrong, then, to assume that the English element provides the controlling perspective. Ellipsis is an appropriate strategy for the expression of feeling precisely because of its relation, as a form of incompleteness, to French patois—a language which is evocative of feeling in poetic consciousness, but over which memory does not have total recall. It is important to note, too, that the tension generated in the poem between English and French, thought and feeling, is largely suggested in terms of an opposition which we know cannot be maintained—which the poetry itself does not maintain—between sense and sound.

"Nation-language" enters into the poem, I would suggest, as a medium of translation or exchange between thought and feeling, sense and sound, the poet and the community. Far from being marginalized, "nation-language" is a voice from the depth of poetic consciousness, sounding through memory to announce a new, fused sensibility. It is a voice of "seismic quality." In other words, the three lines beginning "O so you is Walcott?" are what Wilson Harris might call the poem's "epicentre," where the voice of "nation-language" "releases a suddenly fissured crack, a suddenly penetrated wall or door, through 'object' or 'slave' functions" (120). It is a voice of disruption, questioning

those “manifest social formations” which would keep the poetic consciousness blocked off from subjective community. “O so you is Walcott?” is a question which signifies in terms of sound as well as sense. In terms of the latter, it is a rhetorical question, stating what is known. It is also a voice from the past, a disembodied voice; although the resurrection of this voice in the present tense of a poetic consciousness denied access to its cultural roots suggests a different rhetorical emphasis, which may be paraphrased as “Walcott? So what?!” In either case, nothing will change. In terms of sound, however, as “nation-language,” it is a force for change, taking nothing for granted—repudiating, as Harris would say, “arbitrary codes of knowledge that exploit gaps or vacancies of memory” (126). An example of such coding, as we have seen, is the “already manifest” class-coding of community, which, for the purpose of alienating poetic consciousness (by making a luxury of art, for example), takes advantage of a failure to remember the “right” language. But the voice of “nation-language” that enters suddenly into the poem translates deprivation (which assumes unity as its point of departure) into dialogue, a much more creative option.

With the ushering in of this new sensibility, memory speaks the past almost as parallel to the present reality. Neither the past nor the present is denied, except as a category, for each is now involved in a synthesis of experience which will have important consequences for language: “I’m a wild golden apple / that will burst with love” (47). How many *pommes* before a “wild golden apple”? This *is* the language of feeling—in English! The final lines of this section of the poem claim simply: “I am a person from St. Lucia / I was born there.” It is the creative conjunction of person and place that is important, not the physical fact of living here or there. The power of the statement, however, comes from a conjunction of thought and feeling, which is brought about *through* language, and represented by the interplay of languages that are different and yet in some sense the same, French patois and “nation-language”:

moi c'est gens St. Lucie  
 C'est la moi sorti;  
 is there that I born. (47)



The final line, according to Brathwaite's definition, is in "nation-language": its sound is part of its meaning; it speaks both to and from community. Yet this line is a direct translation of the one preceding; or is it that the preceding line is the direct translation? We cannot tell. We begin to think that French patois may itself be a "nation-language." But if one line is a direct translation of the other, can both be in "nation-language"? Does a direct translation imply that, if we could decide which line is in translation, that line is really in standard French or English? The point is that all these distinctions have become irrelevant, for the linguistic categories have broken down. Language is no longer a barrier for experience.

The third section of the poem, which is in the narrative song-form of *conte*, is entirely in French patois; the fourth section is the same song in English. Together, they manifest the principle of translation as exchange. Is it Section III or IV that is the translation? An irrelevant question. The English version begins in a formal English which does not match the informal patois of the French version; but at other times the English is more informal than the French. Translation has become a two-way process, a kind of dialogue between the different parts of the poem, mutually reordering. (The stanzaic units vary from one section to another.) Walcott unleashes translation's capacity for what Harris (adopting Jungian terminology) calls *coniunctio*, so that we begin to understand what the poet means when he says: "I will always remain, as long as I write in the West Indies I will always seem to be, a visible imitator, and superficially I *will* always be an imitator" ("Walcott" 82). In both III and IV, however, the story is the same: a comic tale of adultery and prostitution, in which the cuckold is a horn-player:

the guitar man's saying  
 We both are guitar men,  
 Don't take it for anything,  
 We are holding the same beat. (51)

The horn-player is being "horned" by Iona, whose lover tells him to be cool. Love is dishonoured, and so is music. In Africa, two musicians "holding the same beat" is simply poor performance. Here the metaphor is indifference. But who is to blame? We note

the nomenclature of the horn-player—Corbeau, the crow, that least musical of birds which waits upon the dead. His "music" might well be the message of "the grave cry," a caargh (-pe diem?) which Walcott cites in another song-poem as the one tune to which "all man does dance"—that is, "Make haste!"—which Iona does ("Parang" 37). Our purpose, however, is not to lay blame on one or the other. This is a tale that springs directly from the community as a whole—supposedly "heard" by the poet "on an open truck travelling to Vieuxfort, some years ago" ("Sainte Lucie" 48). Yet it is now a part of a poem that the poet is singing—and, if we take account of the context established by those lines which conclude the section (II) preceding the *conte*, he is now singing *to* that community. In this sense, the song is a criticism *of* the community, *by* the community. For poetic consciousness, at the end of Section II, is a kind of disembodied presence, at once within and without community, with the freedom of a poltergeist.

The fifth and final section of "Sainte Lucie" focusses upon the altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church. In the first line, the chapel (which, of course, contains the altar-piece) is described as "the pivot" around which things turn: it "draws all to it" (52). This section of the poem is in three parts. In the first, the valley revolves around the chapel; in the second, the chapel "turns the whole island" (53); and in the third, where inner and outer perspectives coalesce, the vortex and the cosmos are indistinguishable. The overarching structure, then, is one of concentric horizons, and the movement of the poem is both an imaginative descent into the vortex and a bridging of those concentric horizons. Among the metaphors which chart this movement, as we shall see, the most important are those of transformed body, invisible body, and music.

If the chapel is the vortex, then the altar-piece, which is "massive," must be a solid body within this vortex. And if the vortex is in some sense a "psychical pool" (since, as I have implied, the imaginative process of this section of "Sainte Lucie" is embodied in a sea change), then the altar-piece is the body which descends into this pool. As Harris might describe it, the altar-piece is a body in masquerade, transformed by a mask of stone,

evolving into stone as it sinks into "a psychical pool on which concentric circles and horizons appear" (28). In the terms of this argument, the concentric structure of this final section of the poem is a metaphorical movement outward (and, simultaneously, inward) from the vortex. In other words, through a "dynamic relationship between thought and image," structure and metaphor, the poem evolves towards "a blurring of the hard and fast distinctions between such categories as thinking and description, subjective and objective" (Ramchand 117)—which is to say, in this case, that the poem not only evokes but also invokes the sea change which is at once its subject and object. Further, as a body masked and possessed by the spirit of stone, the altar-piece is a "carrier" or vehicle for the rite of passage (death/rebirth) of a stultified culture. It is indeed the body of culture. On the first horizon of expanding consciousness, it is the body of the valley's village culture; on the second horizon, it is the body of the island's culture as a whole; and on the third horizon, it is the body of the world. The sea change is to redeem and transform all three.

Beginning with the first horizon of consciousness, gazing inward to the altar-piece, we perceive,

Like a dull mirror, life  
repeated there,  
the common life outside  
and the other life it holds. (52)

Body and image here are parallel, not separate, realities—for the altar-piece, which I have referred to within this first circle of consciousness as the body of the valley's village culture, is like a mirror—a *repetition* of life. If this "double" body, the mirror image, is dulled, we may take this as a comment upon "the common life outside," the body of culture:

When twenty years ago we imagined cities devoted neither to power nor to money but to art, one had the true vision. Everything else has been the sweated blurring of a mirror in which the people might have found their true reflection. ("What the Twilight Says" 40)

The blurred vision signifies a diseased culture, an endangered body, for, as Walcott says, "innocence has been corrupted and society has taken the old direction" ("What the Twilight Says" 7).

The sea change will be a process of purification, a healing process which must expand to tend the disease of the Old World as well as the New. The agent of purification, as I have said, is the "double" body, the altar-piece. For the altar-piece is double in another important sense: it not only repeats life outside but also holds "the other life." Unlike the culture beyond, where the body is divided from the spirit, the altar-piece is a physical body of metaphysical potency. The culture beyond, as we have seen, is divided too in other related ways: looking at life with "black skins and blue eyes," bodies thinking in one language and moving in another ("What the Twilight Says" 9, 31). But the altar-piece, being metaphysically potent as well as formally repetitive, presents a vision of the potential culture, where oppositions fuse:

two earth-brown labourers  
 dance the botay in it, the drum sound under  
 the earth, the heavy foot. ("Sainte Lucie" 52)

Here, in a single image, in depth and sound, we see the fusion of French (the botay), English (the Keatsian allusion to an Attic frieze), and African (drum) elements.

The dancers "could be Eve and Adam dancing" (53)—but they are not. Now we are given three separate visions of the body of culture, repeated *without* the potency of idealism. First, "This is a rich valley, / It is fat with things" (53). The potential idealism of "rich" is undercut by the word "fat," which signifies the bloated body of capitalism—an undercutting which is confirmed by the dislocation of the lines. Second,

Its roads radiate like aisles from the altar towards  
 those acres of bananas, towards  
 leaf-crowded mountains  
 rain-bellied clouds  
 in haze, in iron heat. (54)

Emotion is curiously absent from this vision of (apparently) idyllic nature. The civilizing element is present in "roads," in "acres," and in "iron"—nature is not unadorned. The potential for romantic idealism is undercut as we see through this vision to the preceding one of "a rich valley." For the poem implicitly superimposes one vision upon another in order to give the altar-piece depth—that is, to convey the sense of a body

descending into a vortex. We cannot help but connect "rain-bellied clouds" with the "fat" body of the "rich," with exploitation and social injustice. The third vision is the more powerful for its ironic relation to the preceding two. These having supplied depth to the field of vision, we focus now directly upon the body of the valley's village culture: we observe a body which is at once "broken," "swollen," "dried," and "gap-toothed" — as a social body, not at all a pleasant-looking specimen.

In the second part of Section V, the solid body or altar-piece having descended like a stone into a psychical pool, "Nobody can see it and it is there" (53). In Ralph Ellison's classic American novel of black consciousness, *Invisible Man*, we witness a similar sea change, with the hibernating anti-hero eventually coming up for air and speaking for his people: "even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play" (568). The body of the text itself is a phantom body, a translation of physical being: "what else could I do? What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through? (*Invisible Man* 568). In Harris's reading of this novel, the solid body (or central protagonist) which sinks into the psychical pool (withdrawal underground) begins to realize its symbolic potential, to translate metaphysical potency into an achievement, as it becomes invisible. The invisibility of the protagonist, Harris insists, is not simply a matter of cultural blindness, or of response to racism:

"invisibility" is also a fissure in the womb of space, a ripple upon uniform premises, a complex metaphor of the imaginative descent. . . .

. . . The stone, because it is solid, vanishes of necessity. Its invisibility is far-reaching irony of concentric capacities in ceaseless, enclosing, yet expanding cycles. (28)

The same is true of the altar-piece in Walcott's poem. As we enter the second circle of awareness, where the altar-piece "turns the whole island," we recognize cultural blindness for what it is: "nobody adores the two who could be Eve and Adam dancing" ("Sainte Lucie" 53). But we also know that the invisible body has descended into the vortex, for the process of synthesis has now begun. There are a number of signs indicating this. First, as I have implied, the integration of opposites is signified by the very

absence/presence of the invisible/solid body, the altar-piece itself. Then we must consider the sexual union of male and female, and the complex interweaving of music and silence, particularly in relation to the accompanying water imagery.

From the altar-piece, where two labourers are re-presented and idealized as two "who could be Eve and Adam dancing," poetic consciousness shifts to the "real" world, where "the real Adam and Eve have coupled / and lie in re-christening sweat" (53). This is not a vision of the past, for the past is present but transformed. It is any Sunday at three o'clock, the time for service in the chapel. The Fall is repeated, but with the *physical* potency of ecstasy translating sin into *coniunctio*, true marriage, true religion

on a Sunday at three o'clock  
when the snake pours itself  
into a chalice of leaves. (54)

Here is the moment of reversal into the sea change, when the descent becomes ascent. Of course, it is not really a reversal, since descent is the pre-condition of ascent. But, whereas in the first part of this section of the poem the altar-piece has the metaphysical potency to idealize the body it re-presents, here the *coniunctio* of human sexuality has the physical potency to enliven the metaphysic. The Fall becomes an act of communion in the most religious sense. It is a complex metaphor of deliverance out of bondage, related to the idea of communion (the Lord's Supper) as a prologue to this "passover." In the Lord's Supper, of course, the body is consumed—the body of the Risen One—in the hope of a new age. Harris relates the Invisible Man, as a body in solution, to this symbolic rite of passage:

Invisible man is a repetitively dying (yet cyclically re-awakening) god who is metaphorically consumed. . . . With each metaphorical death, with each phase of reduction to a cannibalised figure, invisible man undergoes a bleak awakening or re-birth in the envelope of his civilization. (28-29)

In Walcott's poem, the invisible body is the altar-piece, which makes the connection with the dying/re-awakening god the more "apparent." The surfacing body can be seen as the ascent

of the crucified god, who is re-born in the *coniunctio* of sexual intercourse, as a religious act which fuses the metaphysical with the physical. Sexuality is synthesis, true marriage—of male and female, self and other—and, in its devotional aspect, it has the power of John Donne's revelation: "No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe." The snake pouring itself "into a chalice of leaves" reinforces the metaphorical connection between *coniunctio* and at-one-ment, making sexual intercourse a ritual of blood. On the one hand, we seem encouraged to take the misleading Biblical term of "sin offering" literally, so that the sexual rite is a symbolic sacrifice of the body of sin (Adam "has killed snakes") in order to cleanse the sanctuary (altar-piece, invisible body) of impurity with its blood. "Adam and Eve" encourages this Old Testament reading. On the other hand, the chalice inevitably suggests the blood of Christ and the cup of blessing, which is the new covenant for an age of grace. It implies, too, the idea of cannibalism which Harris associates with the Invisible Man. The consuming of the body in sexuality, in the ritual of blood, thus implies the religious function of the invisible body which is the vessel (carrier or "chalice") for the sea change.

Since we are in the second circle of awareness, where the chapel turns the entire island, the implication of *coniunctio* as the condition of rebirth has a certain cultural dimension. After all, the blood in the chalice, in one sense at least, is "poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Now we are given a sabbath vision of a new age:

The sugar factory is empty.  
 Nobody picks bananas,  
 no trucks raising dust on their way to Vieuxfort,  
 no helicopter spraying. (54)

Under the old covenant of exploitation and imperialism, of course, this would imply starvation. The character of concentricity is not only expanding but simultaneously enclosing, which is why Harris views the rebirth of Ellison's Invisible Man as "bleak." Yet this irony of ceaseless death/rebirth is the dialectic of sea change, a constant reordering of the whole. We should not import cynicism into the new age on the basis of the old; eco-

nomie motive may well be re-placed in the reordering of experience:

Considerable concentration is required to descend and to arise within sensual limits that cannot be bypassed, which as a consequence may invoke nemesis or despair but which, by the same token, may pitch the imagination so deep that it gains a configuration of the heights within the pressure of the depths to achieve the actuality of perpetual discovery, of endlessly discoverable peaks of emotion in the arts of freedom and passion for truth. (Harris 71)

This is the significance of Walcott's sexual metaphor in its relation to the altar-piece as a body surfacing from the depths.

In the postcoital silence ("okay, not absolute Adamic silence"), there is "A boy banging a tin by the river, / with the river trying to sleep" (54). The river flows from the act of communion in "re-christening" sweat; and it flows from the silence

which comes from the depth of the world,  
from whatever one man believes he knows of God  
and the suffering of his kind,  
it comes from the wall of the altar-piece. (54-55)

The altar-piece is associated with silence in depth because it is a submerged body; but "It is signed with music" (53). We are told that "nothing can break that silence," and yet "there are little wires of music" which relate the depths to the heights, the altar-piece to the island as a whole. Music is of the heights (passion, art), in dialectical relation to silence, which is of the depths (suffering, faith). This dialectical relation is strengthened by the notion of music as the "sounding" of surfacing. Music is crucial to the sea change. It *constitutes* the movement that must follow the plunge into silent water, the rising from baptism to enter into the covenant community. Music, in this double sense, "sounds" identity:

the valley of Roseau is not the Garden of Eden,  
and those who inhabit it are not in heaven,  
so there are little wires of music  
some marr'on up in the hills, by AuxLyons,  
some christening. (54)

Music is resurrection, rebirth, "idealist striving"; it is naming, in



the sense of sounding identity, and so is intimately related to the "re-christening sweat" of *coniunctio*.

In the final part of the final section of "Sainte Lucie," we enter upon the third horizon of consciousness, where the vortex is perceived as the focus of the wider universe:

after all that,  
 your faith like a canoe at evening coming in,  
 like a relative who is tired of America,  
 like a woman coming back to your house  
 that sang in the ropes of your wrist  
 when you lifted this up. (55)

What is "this" that is lifted up? Is it the lamp that lights upon "the idea of the Virgin / coming and going" (where the pun suggests the conjunction of purity or immaculate conception with sexuality)? Yes. Is it the chalice, the communion cup of blood? Yes. Most significant of all, however, is the lifting up of the voice, of the poem itself, which sings in the poet's blood—a song of freedom in "the ropes" of bondage which are his veins. It is the voice of transition, of consciousness expanding, a bridging of the concentric circles of enclosure in order to visualize truly a "new world" which will include the entire world without national or imperial bias. It is a "configuration of the heights" from a perspective that has absorbed the depths of deprivation. It is the offering of one man, not only to St. Lucia, not only to the world, but to God:

between adorations, one might see,  
 if one were there, and not there,  
 looking in at the windows  
 the real faces of angels. (55)

This transforming vision is conditional upon being simultaneously "there, and not there," as its process of synthesizing the heights and depths—music and silence, art and life. It depends upon that same double life that was reflected by and contained in the altar-piece as both body and spirit ("Nobody can see it and it is there"). But now the inner and the outer world are indistinguishable: who can tell if it is the poet or the angels looking in at the chapel windows? In any case, the angels have "real faces" and we cannot see the poet—although we hear his

voice, as the poem scales the heights, in flesh made word of music.

The darkness of the deprivation out of which "Sainte Lucie" evolves is not Africa. It is the darkness of doubt, which begins, according to Walcott's view of history, with the withdrawal of Empire. It is the darkness of sinking into an unconsciousness which lacks access either through Africa or Europe to "self-respect"—"we were all strangers here" ("What the Twilight Says" 9-10). The condition of divided consciousness can be as crippling as memory, related to obsession, obsession not with the process of selection but with its possible partiality—black/white, past/present, either/or. Alternatively, the torture of articulation need not mean "the jettisoning of 'culture' but, by the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new" ("What the Twilights Says" 17). The altar-piece might be an image of Europe, except that it is "signed with music." The rite of blood might be African, except that it refers to the Crucifixion of Christ. The "dull mirror" might signify the culture of narcissism, except that in the end it has become a window to the soul. The body is the focus for transformation, the image in the mirror. It sinks through the mirror and becomes invisible, for it is consumed by the culture which has chosen this body to carry the burden of its "self-extinguishing, self-discovering rites" ("What the Twilight Says" 5). Music complements the body in this ritual. It visualizes a new order, fluid and free, not confined by reflection—those "mirrors of hard, distorting glass" that surround Ellison's *Invisible Man* (3) until he, too, in his disembodiment, acquires authentic voice and utters the text that utters him, the novel itself—*Jazz Notes from the Underground*: "it was the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn that counted" (568). Music sees through mirrors as through windows, striving to establish a continuous dialogue between inner and outer realities. It issues from the surfacing body of the *Invisible Man* as an expression of his interiority translated into another dimension, a voice always questioning, and so with profound political as well as inseparable, personal consequences: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (Ellison 568).

## NOTES

- 1 The perception of music as idealistic striving comes from Soyinka, "The Critic and Society" 47.
- 2 The general point about Walcott "thinking in verse" comes from Ramchand 116.
- 3 I have adopted the terms "manifest" and "emergent" social formations from Williams 133-34.

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