

“Nothing in that Other Kingdom”:
Fashioning a Return to Africa in *Omeros*
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Abstract: What are we to make of Achille’s imaginary return to Africa in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*? Is it a rejection of Walcott’s earlier theme of postcolonial nostalgia for lost origins? Does it lead to a different conception of postcolonial identity away from notions of new world hybridity and heterogeneity that Walcott had espoused earlier, or is it a complex figuring of racial identity for the Afro-Caribbean subject? My essay answers these questions through a reading of the specific intertextual moments in the poem’s return to Africa passage. The presence of allusions and textual fragments from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Homer’s *Odyssey*, and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in this particular passage of *Omeros* (Book 3) has not received much critical attention so far. Through the use of these modular texts, I argue that *Omeros* not only transforms the postcolonial genre of a curative return to origins and fashions a distinctive literary landscape but also imagines a postcolonial subjectivity that negotiates the polarity between origins and the absence of origins or a fragmented new world identity.

Keywords: Derek Walcott; *Omeros*; intertextuality; postcolonial adaptation; epic canon; paternity

Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990) is an epic of Caribbean life in Saint Lucia and a retelling of the trans-Atlantic histories of descendants of slaves. *Omeros*’ self-referentiality as epic is signaled by its many adaptations of Homeric proper names, plot, and themes to structure a comparison between Aegean narratives of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and black diasporic experiences in the West Indies. Yet as critics have repeatedly noted, Walcott’s poem veers away from affirming parallels be-

tween squabbling Caribbean fishermen travelling among islands in their canoes and Homer's epics, voicing a desire for an epic of life in Saint Lucia without the "vanity" (Walcott, "Reflections on Omeros" 233) of the Homeric veil. While this tension between metaphor and reality has been extensively explored by critics, there remains an understudied conflict in *Omeros*, i.e., the poem's ambivalence as to where to locate the primary components of the identity of the "tribe" of which it sings: in the West Indies that is inhabited by the children of slaves or in an ancestral Africa where the traumatic event of the Middle Passage originated. The imagined voyage to Africa that occurs in the middle of the book is a powerful reminder of slavery and enforced separation from an original homeland, but it is also a representation of a lost home evoked in terms of Western epic tradition. How do we interpret this mediated portrayal of Africa? Does the poem succeed in resolving the tension between the present Caribbean island home and the quest for lost origins in Africa?¹ In this essay, I intend to expand what has been regarded as definitional for the poetics of Euro-modernist adaptation by exploring a very different nature of contact with epic models in *Omeros*.²

Caribbean characters with Greek names such as Achille, Hector, Philoctete, and the beautiful Helen, who is also identified with the island of Saint Lucia, populate *Omeros*' multicultural universe. The poem's title itself is a Greek or archipelagic version of Homer's name, which the poet scans in terms of Antillean patois and the crash of the "white surf": "O was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was / both mother and sea in our Antillean patois" (14). The Saint Lucian blind prophet Seven Seas is depicted as a counterpart of Homer ("Old St. Omere"), and the self-exiled English Major Plunkett and his Irish wife Maud are united in their exotic hope that the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia might "renew the Mediterranean's innocence" (28).

Book 3 of *Omeros*, which describes Achille's journey to Africa in a sunstroke-induced dream, is a multilayered textual tapestry in which several sources collectively influence Achille's symbolic repatriation to Africa. Achille's flight to Africa and his meeting with the shade of Afolabe, his African ancestor, have been usually read in a formalist light of a self-contained textual system either signifying a therapeutic foray

in genealogy and restoration of Achille's African lineage or an anti-rhetorical destabilization of the notion of origins.³ My essay fleshes out the presence of the *Aeneid*, the *Odyssey*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* in *Omeros* and argues that the episode of Achille's return to Africa represents an anti-nostalgic engagement with African origin and its significance for new world identity. *Omeros'* multiple, ironic appropriations from the classics reveal both the innovative and derivative aspects of an imagined African odyssey, an established literary theme in black diasporic literature. Sections one and two explore how *Omeros'* adaptations from classical epic and modernist narrative shape the relationship between pre-colonial African past and postcolonial Caribbean identity.

I. Virgil, Homer, and the Representation of Africa

Omeros bases Achille's journey to an ancestral Africa upon the epic trope of communion with a deceased parent found in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. Both Anticleia and Anchises serve as instruments of "divine authorization" (Quint 62) in their roles as seers and guides to their living sons in Hades and Elysium respectively. This mythologization of African descent through an imported epic tradition is yet another figuration of the absence of history in the Caribbean, which has been an enduring theme in Walcott's poetics of Adamic amnesia in the New World. In a brilliant and elegant formulation, Natalie Melas observes that *Omeros'* aesthetic of "New world comparability" with Homeric epic is a rejection of "postcolonial desire" for history and tradition: "Armed with an inheritance of amnesia, Walcott exchanges the family resemblances of filial continuity for the unrooted affinities of analogy" (129). *Omeros'* transnational and translational synthesis gives it a distinct identity as a postcolonial epic of the African diaspora.

However, there is a significant difference between how classics are used to represent postcolonial Saint Lucia and pre-colonial Africa in the poem. *Omeros'* overall literary creolization is closely tied with the trope of New World Adamic awakening and differs, in its return to Africa passage, from the non-allusive and non-citational imitation of the Virgilian and Homeric underworld plots and unacknowledged borrowing⁴ of the theory of paternity in Joyce's *Ulysses*. The post-colonial Americas signify

the fluctuating and open-ended processes of cultural exchange and creolization⁵ best represented in Aimé Césaire and Saint-John Perse's use of hybrid literary traditions to mark an inaugural scene of "walking to a New World . . . the enormous, gently opening morning of his possibility, the possibility of a man and his language waking to wonder here" (Walcott, "The Muse of History" 53). On the other hand, the Africa of Achille's ancestors is imagined through the closed system of a derivative narrative, patterned on a Virgilian tableau of descent, temporary habitation, and emergence from an underworld of the dead.

Unlike the recurrent shifts, tensions, and half-serious illuminations about the correspondences between Homer's epic material and Caribbean life,⁶ the implicit identification of Africa with the underworld of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* is more tightly imitative, suggesting an allegorization of an African past that is unknowable and imaginable only in limited ways. Moreover, Saint Lucia's autonomy as a distinct landscape is not challenged by the poem's web of epic allusions, but an imagined Africa, on the other hand, is entirely delineated through a governing epic framework. Achille's imaginary navigation to his continent of origin becomes far more interesting when a contradiction emerges from the framing parent texts of Virgil and Homer: the classics both valorize Achille's search for African paternity and elevate the creolized Caribbean present over the past.

The myth of a "redemptive return to the homeland of Africa" marks a shift from the anti-identitarian approach of Atlantic diaspora theorists in that the differences of hybridity and creolization are re-expressed through the unifying history of African roots. Frantz Fanon identifies a shift from the national to the transnational with the ideology of colonialism: "Colonialism's insistence that 'niggers' have no culture, and Arabs are by nature barbaric, inevitably leads to a glorification of cultural phenomena that become continental instead of national" (154). For Fanon, the symbolic value of shared African origination tempers the glorification of denationalized cultural "mutilations": it produces "individuals without an anchorage, without borders, colorless, rootless, stateless, a body of angels" (155). Stuart Hall refers to "the myth of the redemptive return" as "one of the most profound mythic structures of the New World" ("Créolité and

the Process of Creolization” 39).⁷ Speaking of British-Jamaican photographer Amet Francis’ images of the Black Triangle, Hall writes:

Crucially, such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas. They do this by ‘figuring’ Africa as the mother of these different civilizations. The Triangle is, after all, ‘centered’ in Africa. Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the center of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning, which, until recently it lacked. (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 394)

While Hall points out that Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean diasporas “cannot really attempt to return to the west coast of Africa and discover there the Africa they left behind three centuries back,” the notion of imaginary return remains central to rediscovering history “without which no sense of identity is possible” (“Creolization, Diaspora, and Hybridity” 191).

For much of his career, Walcott has espoused the poetics of a dispersed, divided, and hybrid racial and cultural new world identity without recourse to an Africanist discourse of origins. However, *Omeros* evinces direct lines of influence between the tradition of Afrocentric thought in the work of Aimé Césaire and Edward Kamau Braithwaite and the Africa-centered sub-narrative of *Omeros*. Walcott’s poem uniquely creates its own field of confrontation and intersection between a return to Africa and New World identity, inventing figures of travel and migration such as, in Rei Terada’s formulation, the “hyphenating” African sea-swift (16) who englobes “the New / World, made exactly like the Old” as her “wing beat carries these islands to Africa” (319).⁸

In what follows, I will briefly discuss Walcott’s dismissals of the notion of a redemptive return to Africa and his eventual choice of classics to engage with the theme of a journey to the past. The mix of textual influences that shape this episode affirms Tejumola Olaniyan’s observation that “[t]he literary tradition that Walcott has made an intimate part of himself, the center from where he feels and seeks other sources for inspiration, is the Western tradition” (18).

It is not a little surprising that Walcott chooses to depict Achille's imagined self-repatriation as central to the rediscovery of his identity as a West Indian black, particularly given his earlier characterizations of West Indian longing for lost roots as "provincial, psychic identifications, strenuous attempts to create identity" and an expression of "a schizophrenic daydream of an Eden that existed before its exile" ("What the Twilight Says" 18). According to Olaniyan, Walcott's dismissal of the poetics of "debilitating nostalgic quests" is part of his larger attempt to replace chronological history with an Adamic mythic history in which West Indian amnesia opens up the possibilities of reinvention of the New World not absolutely bound to colonialism, shipwreck, and ruins: "Walcott distinguishes two ideas of history: history as time and its original concept as myth. The former's consciousness assumes an unnegotiable polarity between Prospero and Caliban, hence whatever it has to say of the past is channeled parochially through the memories of hero or of victim" (97). The closest parallel to *Omeros*' narrative of a return to Africa occurs in the play *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, where Walcott employs a dream narrative centered on Makak's desire to travel to Africa. While the play attempts to demonstrate how Makak's dream of a spiritual return to Africa can eventually turn out to be heavily freighted with exclusivist ideologies of race, in *Omeros*, Achille's return to Africa is depicted as a legitimizing endeavor to connect with pre-slavery African roots.

Thus, Walcott shuns and yet cannot help but follow the paradigm of spiritual return to Africa in his poetic oeuvre. Walcott's own description of a journey toward an imagined past is particularly helpful in understanding the two significant aspects of this trope that ultimately find expression in *Omeros*: the constricted representational canvas available to portray a journey towards a shadowy past and the haunting potency of such a narrative of return to a lost home:

What to do then? Where to turn? How to be true? If one went in search of the African experience, carrying the luggage of a few phrases and a crude map, where would it end? We had no language for the bush and there was a conflicting grammar in the pace of our movement. Out of this only an image came. A

band of travelers, in their dim outlines like explorers who arrived at the crest of a dry, grassy ridge. . . . The sense of hallucination increased with the actuality of every detail, from the chill, mildly shivering blades of hill grass, the duality of time, past and present piercingly fixed as if the voluble puppets of his childhood were now frighteningly alive. A few pointed out the house with its pebbled back yard, where they had their incarnations a quarter of a century ago, . . . the wild white-lined Atlantic coast with an Africa that was no longer home, and the dark, oracular mountain dying into mythology. It was as if, with this sinewy, tuned, elate company, he was repaying the island an ancestral debt. . . . It was not a vision but a memory, though its detail was reduced, as in dreams and in art. ("What the Twilight Says" 34)

This tension between stereotypical repetition and an irrepressible poetic urge to figure Africa as the source of New World black identity is apparently resolved by Walcott's translation of epic episodes of reunion and parting in the underworld from the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*, advancing an anti-colonial synthesis of derivativeness and creative expansion of the genre. By borrowing Western epic devices, Walcott depicts an African journey that restores connections, both significant and perishable, with ghostly figures.

Achille's journey to Africa, spanning the end of Book 2 and much of Book 3, is framed by a cross-cultural frame of epic reference to portray the unknowable world of his ancestral village in Africa, five centuries in the past. At the end of Book 2, Achille suffers a sunstroke in the middle of the Atlantic and sees the ghost of his dead African ancestor:

. . . our only inheritance that elemental noise
of the windward, unbroken breaker, Ithaca's or Africa's, all joining
the ocean's voice,
because this is the Atlantic now, this great design
of the triangular trade. Achille saw the ghost
of his father's face shoot up at the end of the line.
. . . . Then, for the first time, he asked himself who he was. (130)

“This paradigmatic encounter,” as Ian Baucom points out, is preceded by Achille’s realization that instead of a proper genealogical name he has only noise, “but then immediately he learns that noise has a name, he has the Atlantic” (1). However, the appearance of a paternal apparition immediately replaces the New World narrative of genealogical indeterminacy and infinitude with the other side of the story of Africa and the search for roots.

Walcott invents an ancestor for Achille, a deviation that is at odds with the biological parents of Aeneas and Odysseus in the canonical models, and, thus, the adaptation is marked by a transatlantic Caribbean imagination of genealogy. The portrayal of Achille’s “father,” who is several generations removed from his “son,” may appear to complicate the temporal and material earthly father-son bond that is depicted in the modular epics. But the Achille-Afolabe relationship is ultimately opened up to a diversity of multiple perspectives, and the imagined father serves not to fortify the stability of racial identity through generations but stands as a powerful reminder of Achille’s history. It may also appear that Walcott is channeling the much-maligned trope of roots by imagining a singular African ancestor for the West Indian Achille. But, in fact, *Omeros* reevaluates national, cultural, and racial roots as transcultural and translatable entities and not as static, fixed points of reference for the postcolonial Caribbean imaginary: African paternity is not a constitutive force of totalizing discourses of purity in *Omeros* but one aspect of a self-reflexive, variable identity. *Omeros*’ intertextuality in this episode helps to emphasize the African connection not as a bounded phenomenon but as a part of a heterogeneous postcolonial Afro-Caribbean identity.

This meeting with his ancestor, which produces Achille’s hallucination of a return to Africa, has as its model the end of Book V of the *Aeneid*, when a disheartened and travel-weary Aeneas is visited by Anchises’ spirit during his sea voyage and is urged not to give up on his course toward Italy:

then down from the sky the image of his father
Anchises seemed to glide. His sudden words:
. . . . Yet first draw near the lower halls of Dis

and through the lands of deep Avernus seek
my son, a meeting with me. . . .
You will learn of all your race
And of the walls that have been given you. (126)

The meeting in the *Aeneid* is borrowed and then reversed in *Omeros*. Achille follows his ancestor to Africa to also unearth a record of lineage and genealogy. However, he also witnesses severe discontinuities between past and present, an experience that is manifestly different from the one that Anchises provides Aeneas by allowing him a vision of generations of future Romans, through whom he can trace an unbroken lineage. At the same time, *Omeros* also imitates the episode in which Odysseus encounters the spirit of his mother in Hades (Book XI). Virgil's *Aeneid* itself patterns the meeting of Aeneas and Anchises upon Odysseus' encounter with the shade of Anticleia, and *Omeros'* depiction of a return to Africa is interwoven with both epic narratives. Achille's meeting with his ancestor in a sunstroke-induced dream is a trope of recognition and recollection of a vast sweep of history in a momentary flash, a literary device influenced by Dante's *Paradiso*. Walcott locates the source of condensation of time to the brief span of a sunstroke in Achille's dream in Dante's image (canto xxxiii) of the shadow of the hull of Argo—the first Greek warship of antiquity—passing over the head of Neptune at the bottom of the sea. It is an image of light giving way to shadow that revives for a moment the lost history of the Argonauts and the passage of twenty-five centuries ("Reflections" 238). This interlacing of multiple texts introduces Western literary archetypes into the black diasporic plot of redemptive return to the past.

The appearance of the specter of his African parent sets in motion Achille's visionary return to Africa and the search for his origins. In his discussion of postcolonial poetry's quest for home and roots, Jahan Ramazani contends that Walcott arrests the "recuperative dynamics" contained in Achille's return to Africa by drawing out the conflictual relations between precolonial home and diasporic "unhomeliness": "At once ironic and nostalgic, postcolonial poets recathect the precolonial past as a powerful locus of identity, yet self-consciously probe the mul-

tiplicity and constructedness of the home they dislocate in the moment of reinhabiting it” (10). At a textual level, the ceaseless interplay of the etching and erasure of Africa as an original home occurs at the very beginning of Achille’s vision, as Ramazani suggests. This is because Achille’s first glimpse of Africa appears to undercut the narration’s emphasis upon an empowering quest for identity and the advent of an epic odyssey:

It was like the African movies he had yelped at in childhood.
. . . He remembered this sunburnt river with its spindly
stakes and the peaked huts platformed above the spindles
where thin, naked figures as he rowed past looked unkindly
or kindly in their silence . . . (133–35)

Conradesque echoes of a prehistoric Africa exist in conjunction with the “prism of Hollywood rivers, hippopotami and warriors” that indicate, as Ramazani points out, the poet’s skepticism as well as “the continuing postcolonial drive to rediscover the past” (10). While the slippages in the phantasmagorical invention of an ancestral African home certainly emerge in *Omeros*, at a deeper level the poem’s cross-cultural inclusion of epic models shapes the dialectics of postcolonial identity: a desire both to unify with African roots and to also identify Achille as a perpetually displaced West Indian. Yet the choices are not in balance and the Homeric and Virgilian epic plots primarily contribute to a movement away from the culture of origin toward an affirmation of the Caribbean island home, Saint Lucia.

Thus, the submerged pattern of intertextual imitativeness aids *Omeros*’ identification of Saint Lucia in particular and the Americas in general as home for the New World African. The latter is achieved by closely following the pattern of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* in which the living protagonist’s journey to an otherworldly place of the dead is quickly followed by his return or emergence into the world of the living. Aeneas’ companion Sybil warns him of the limited amount of time allotted to him in the underworld, and he is swiftly sent away to rejoin his ships and men by his father after their conversation. Similarly, in Book XI of the *Odyssey*, Anticleia urges her son to “hurry back to light” (220). The termination of Achille’s habitation in Africa is preceded by a violent

slave raid and the consciousness of his inability to change the course of history: "He foresaw their future. He knew nothing could change it. / The son's grief was the father's, the father's his son's / . . . And then Achille died again" (146). *Omeros'* representation of the African past as an underworld inhabited by the ghosts of dead ancestors suggests Aeneas and Odysseus' many encounters with the souls of former companions in Dis and Hades and their failure to alleviate their pain or alter their terrible fates in any way. Aeneas and Odysseus journey to the underworld chiefly to collect information vital to their goals in the world of the living. As directed by Circe, Odysseus must meet Tiresias in Hades who will guide him on his journey home to Ithaca, and Aeneas is informed by Anchises of the trials and wars he must undergo before arriving at the shores of a new homeland in Italy. Similarly, Achille's journey to Africa is defined by a singular objective. As the blind oracle Seven Seas points out: "His name / is what he out looking for, his name and his soul" (*Omeros* 154).

An overt borrowing from Virgilian and Homeric epic elements shapes Achille's meeting with his African father, Afolabe, from a distant time. Walcott deftly adapts epic plot to describe Achille's spiritual mission and the effects of this sojourn upon Caribbean life in Saint Lucia, just as Aeneas and Odysseus' brief inhabitation of the underworld allow them to take measure of their future course of action in relation to their new and old homelands respectively. The Caribbean Achille, who is given permission by God to commence on his visionary journey ("Look I giving you permission to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot, / the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion" [134]), repeats the pattern of epic decree that also drives Aeneas' quest:

But those same orders of the gods that now
urge on my journey through the shadows, through
abandoned, thorny lands and deepest night
drove me by their decrees. (154)

Omeros stages a return to Africa as an invented home to replace the absence of historical memory, but this restorative foray is itself constitutive of a gradual separation from Afolabe's Africa, as Achille eventually

wishes to leave the fictional past behind for his West Indian exilic identity. In the beginning, the mystical sea-swift directs Achille to the Africa of his ancestors at the end of Book 2, anticipating the focal episode of Book 3 and emulating the structures of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*: “and he, at the beck of her beak, . . . felt he was headed home” (131). However, in the midst of a reunion with his “tribe,” Achille finds himself “estranged from their chattering” and finds his reflection in the water looking “homesick for the history ahead, as if its proper place / lay in unsettlement” (140).

Walcott adapts traditional epic material by having Achille awaken from his dream passage in the midst of the Atlantic, following Odysseus’ mode of return to Ithaca. Achille’s homecoming to Saint Lucia also indicates a progress toward narrative closure: “the world above him passed through important epochs / . . . Achille, cramped from a sound / sleep, watched the lights of the morning plane as it droned” (155–56). This return of a still sleeping Achille to Saint Lucia closely parallels a “morning homecoming to Ithaca with Odysseus still asleep” (253) in Book 13 of Homer’s epic. When Odysseus wakes from his sleep, which is described as “much like death itself,” he finds himself in the waters of his native land Ithaca: “His sleep was done, but he had been too long away” (261). *Omeros*’ ideological move to privilege the present New World Afro-Caribbean identity above a pre-colonial African identity is signaled by an epic parallel between Achille’s return to Saint Lucia and Odysseus’ homecoming to Ithaca rather than by working with the *Aeneid*. This is because of the continued wanderings of Aeneas in search of a new homeland in Italy after his meeting with Anchises in Elysium. *Omeros*’ correspondences with the *Odyssey* become transparent a little later when Achille’s lover, Helen, is identified as a second Penelope waiting for his return to Saint Lucia from a fishing expedition: “Not Helen now, but Penelope, / in whom a single noon was as long as ten years, / because he had not come back, because they had gone / from yesterday” (*Omeros* 153).

Bruce Loudon differentiates the responses of heroes in the epic tradition from the protagonists of Plato and Cicero who also witness “otherworldly visions”: “Plato’s protagonist (and Cicero’s) wants *to remain* on the other plane of existence where he witnesses *the vision*, whereas both Odysseus

and Aeneas are intent on returning to their cultures. We can characterize the opposite reactions of Odysseus and Aeneas, on the one hand, and Plato's protagonist and Scipio the Younger, on the other, as centripetal vs. centrifugal" (215; emphasis in original). This form of systematic structural imitation, linked tightly to Homeric and Virgilian models of the underworld, challenges, arrests, and terminates the forward movement of plot in an imaginary Africa and brings about the desired resolution of Achille's arrival in Saint Lucia. Just as "the dead Trojan past of Hector cannot be brought back to life and is [replaced] by the Roman future of Aeneas" (Quint 59), Achille's search for origins reveals fragments of the past that have crossed over to become a part of Caribbean culture but cannot coalesce to form an authentic and whole African identity.

The other significant aspect of epical influence concerns the symbolic landscape of Africa. *Omeros'* construction of Africa is a conflation of mythic and Western epic consciousnesses in which the continent emerges as a metaphysical space subsumed under the allegorical landscape of Western epics. Initially, Achille participates in communal rituals and recognizes their corresponding versions in Saint Lucia. However, the Elysium-like atmosphere of Achille's African village is destroyed by the incursion of a successful slave raid that razes the village and turns it "barren" with "doors like open graves" (145).

The correspondences with the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* help to emphasize the disorder and death that turn Africa into a netherworld of ghosts and ruin during the first phase of the Atlantic slave trade. Anticleia's first words to Odysseus express her shock at his presence in the remote Hades: "the living find it hard / to reach this realm: it lies so far beyond / great rivers and dread deeps and, most of all / the Ocean none can cross on foot" (217–18). The nightmarish geography of Hades, situated at the "deep Ocean's end" and the "limit-land," is home to the ghosts of the "listless dead" (217). In *Omeros*, Africa is similarly depicted as a mythopoetic space outside time, and homecoming acquires conflicting resonances.

Shifting conceptions of "home" occur throughout the episode in Book 3 of *Omeros*, ranging from definitions of home as the land of one's ancestors to its metaphorical equation with death. The original version

of home towards which Achille is guided by the sea-swift at the end of Book 2 changes when he experiences a different meaning of home in his African village: “The sadness sank into him slowly that he was home—that dawn-sadness which ghosts have for their graves” (141). Achille realizes “he is moving with the dead” when he meets Afolabe (136). This recognition is one of many that situates Achille’s return to Africa within fluctuating parameters of a curative immersion in one’s original culture and a critique of a nostalgic return that obsessively retraces a path to unrecoverable origins.

In *Omeros*, ancestor and the mother continent are united as one, and the Caribbean son must grapple with the African father and the past that he represents before he can reconcile with a Saint Lucian present. Anchises bestows upon Aeneas the vision of a future where the wars and conquests of Aeneas and his descendants would establish the political foundations of Rome. Afolabe, very much like Anchises, is imbued with an aura of deified and sanctified authority and, similarly to Aeneas, Achille approaches his elder with reverence and piety.

While Walcott’s essays may question the therapeutic value of a diasporic black narrative of reunion with the past, *Omeros* illustrates through its series of Virgilian parallels that the construction of a lost paternity may actually help overcome the regressive tendencies of this quest for origins and allow the Afro-Caribbean Achille to recognize the African components of his West Indian cultural identity in the present. Although *Omeros* imitates the Western epic’s external structure of the protagonist’s meeting with the ghost of the father, at the level of genealogy, generation, and historical continuity, this encounter subverts the linear epic program of succession that is predicted by Aeneas’ father: “Anchises was studying the souls of all his sons to come” (161). The unfolding of the triumphant history of empire carried forward by a line of descendants, the great race of “sons of sons” in Anchises’ speech, emphasizes epic’s commitment to an imperial telos directed by conquest and power: “My son, it is beneath Romulus’s auspices / that famous Rome will make her boundaries / as broad as earth itself” (164). The meeting between Achille, Afolabe, and other spirits of his African tribe, on the other hand, underscores the continuing fact of melancholic separation from origins:

Afolabe: Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten
the one

that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago.

what does it mean?

Achille: Well, I too have forgotten.

Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.

The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave
us, trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing.

Afolabe: A name means something . . .

. . . Unless the sound means nothing

Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom? (137)

The dead ancestor realizes that Achille belongs to a future he can neither share nor comprehend, and also, ironically, the living Achille himself appears ghost-like because the loss of ties with his African tribe has rendered him as ephemeral as “smoke”: “And you, nameless son, are only the ghost / of a name. Why did I never miss you until you returned?” (139). The truncated genealogy, the gaps in communication, and Achille’s eventual ascent to the living world, where he can only possess fragments of his Africanness, reveal a complex politics of postcolonial black Atlantic identity. It is an identity balanced by its desire for unifying geographical and racial origins and its self-recognition as an amnesiac collectivity united by nothing but profound historical discontinuity and, thus, open to the politics of syncretic transformations and multiple identifications.

After his return to the familiar world of Saint Lucia, both Achille and the poet-narrator proceed to discover, through a series of epiphanic revelations, that the Antillean islands have absorbed scattered African influences, creating a vacillating dynamic of equivalence and difference vis-à-vis African origins. The latter phenomenon reflects Walcott’s view of Makak in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*:

Makak is an extreme representation of what colonialism can do to a man—he is reduced to an almost animal-like state of degradation. When he dreams that he is the king of a united states of Africa, I am saying that some sort of spiritual return to

Africa can be made, but it may not be necessary. The romanticized, pastoral vision of Africa that many Afro-Caribbeans hold can be an escape from the reality of the world around us. In the West Indies, where all the races live and work together, we have the beginnings of a great and unique society. The problem is to recognize our African origins but not to romanticize them. (*Conversations* 18)

Arguably, this adaptation of Western epics contributes to an ambivalent and contingent anti-romance narrative of return to origins within black Atlantic discourse. The adaptation of concrete details and formal structure from the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey* helps to shape Achille's reunion with the spirit of his paterfamilias. This mythic value of meeting with the dead parent is balanced by Achille's movement away from African origins to a post-colonial Caribbean present, a migration also facilitated by the narratives of the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*.

2. Afolabe and the Question of Paternity in *Ulysses*

Achille's journey to the underworld conforms to the models of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* insofar as it stages a meeting with the father in a mythologized Africa and leads Achille back to Saint Lucia. But there are two ways of describing Achille's meeting with Afolabe, and, in addition to the epic narrative that helps to shape the thematic subject matter of reunion with the father, there is a countervailing appropriation of the modernist trope of the uncertain identity of the father that is pointedly present in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Ultimately, as indicated earlier, Afolabe doesn't adhere completely to the image of sanctified omnipotence that Anchises embodies and is instead closer to a Joycean role of an unstable and fluctuating paternal identity. Walcott indirectly credits Joyce with inspiring him to move beyond a design of thorough-going imitation and towards a translational aesthetic that allowed him "to think of the *Odyssey* in terms of the Caribbean" ("Reflections on *Omeros*" 236). The decision, as Walcott explains, was made in order to avoid a recapitulation of Joyce's own efforts, because *Ulysses* already exists as a "massive parallel . . . that's on a scale that no artist of today with any sensibil-

ity would attempt because then you would be doing a third version of *Odyssey* via Joyce” (“Reflections” 231). However, Walcott does not view *Ulysses* as a twentieth-century “template of the Homeric original” (“Reflections” 231) or a chronologically situated retelling. For Walcott, *Ulysses* is a trail-blazing artistic achievement possessing an original vision of both Homer’s epic and contemporary Irish culture, which can take its place beside the *Odyssey* as an aesthetic production in its own right: “If you think of art merely in terms of chronology, you are going to be patronizing to certain cultures. But if you think of art as a simultaneity that is inevitable in terms of certain people, then Joyce is a contemporary of Homer (which Joyce knew)” (“Reflections” 234).

Joyce, among other modernists, remains a fundamental touchstone for Walcott, and his assimilation of Joyce demonstrates a multi-faceted understanding of Joycean literature as the counterpart of a Caribbean aesthetic taxonomy of adulteration, invention, and the prayerful passionate fusing of “the noble and common language” (*Conversations* 82): “the only god left to Joyce really is language—a sacral, self-surrendering monastic idea” (“What the Twilight Says” 24). Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh’s discussion of the influence of Joyce’s theory of epiphany upon Walcott’s *Another Life* helps to unpack Walcott’s engagement with *Ulysses*’ metaphorical conceptions of history and paternity in *Omeros* that go beyond his more straightforward adaptations of plot and character as in the case of borrowings from Homer and Virgil’s epics (165–71). The description of Achille’s return to Africa utilizes Joycean associations in which the poetic imagination surpasses categories of history and chronology to redefine memory as invention superseding nostalgia. In the analysis that follows, I suggest that the presence of Joycean references bestows a different emotional and thematic structure upon the concept of paternity for the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean subject. By borrowing elements from *Ulysses*, *Omeros* self-consciously demonstrates that it is aiming for something more complex than an idealized reunion between ancestor and descendant from two different worlds.

While this section focuses on *Omeros*’ retelling of *Ulysses*’ solution to the straitjacket of primogeniture and teleology, the entire poem itself

alludes to Joyce's novel multiple times.⁹ *Omeros*' return to Africa passage constitutes the poem's most explicit turn to the issue of the father as an organic entity as well as an invented personage in a poem beset with characters like Major Plunkett and the Homer-fixated poet who create elaborate fictions of paternity. Major Plunkett, a British serviceman who has retired in Saint Lucia, and his wife Maud do not have a child and, while tracing his genealogy, Plunkett discovers an eighteenth-century ancestor Midshipman Plunkett who died young in the service of the Royal Navy in the waters of the Atlantic and towards whom Plunkett feels a filial attachment. Towards the end of *Omeros*, Achille is looking forward to the birth of his lover Helen's child who is fathered by his now deceased rival, a tourist taxi driver called Hector. *Omeros*' overall portrayal of lost sons and unknown fathers, which attains its climax in the Achille and Afolabe encounter, closely parallels Stephen's heretical announcement of fatherhood "as a mystical estate." It is founded "upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood. Paternity may be a legal fiction" (196–97). Walcott's characterization of paternity as a nightmarish history of dueling cultural and racial antecedents directly meshes with the Joycean exorcism of the father. The competing binaries of colonial history in the forms of the white ghost and the black ghost have to be sidestepped in order for the poet to find his own voice:

I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper "history," for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have no wish and no power to pardon. ("The Muse of History" 64)

Walcott's own meeting with the ghost of his father, Warwick, early in the poem, sets the stage for the reevaluation of paternity in terms of the colonial pedagogical models of literature and literary inheritance. Although Warwick's spirit tells his son that he "never felt part of the

foreign machinery known as Literature” (68), he invokes Shakespeare’s plays to explain his own demise: “Your mother / sewed her own costume as Portia, then that disease / like Hamlet’s old man’s spread from an infected ear, / I believe the parallel has brought you some peace” (69).

Omeros’ adaptation of *Ulysses*’ modernist supersession of paternity replaces historical memory and its discursive modes of interpellating identity by elevating a non-linear, chronologically unlocalizable fatherhood (“Now that you are twice my age, which is the boy’s, / which the father’s” [68]) over the straightforward teleological, rigid principle of lineage. Alleging a relationship between Shakespeare’s treatment of paternity in *Hamlet* and his own son’s death (“Had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been Prince Hamlet’s twin” [186]), Stephen identifies Shakespeare with the ghost of Hamlet’s father and Hamlet with Hamnet Shakespeare: “*Hamlet, I am thy father’s spirit*, bidding him list. To a son he speaks, the son of his soul, the prince young Hamlet and to the son of his body, Hamnet Shakespeare, who has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever” (177; emphasis in original). Elaborating upon his auto-didactic theory, Stephen observes that John Shakespeare’s death was followed by the composition of *Hamlet*, in which William Shakespeare, now free of the mantle of son, aspires towards an apostolic paternal role for himself:

John Shakespeare rests, disarmed of fatherhood, having devised that mystical estate upon his son. Well: if the father who has not a son be not a father can the son who has not a father be a son? When Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare or another poet of the same name in the comedy of errors wrote *Hamlet* he was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson. (195–96)

Buck Mulligan mocks Stephen’s quasi-philosophical disquisition on biological paternity: “He proves by algebra that Hamlet’s grandson is Shakespeare’s grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father” (19).

Notwithstanding Mulligan's sarcastic deflation of Stephen's theory, Walcott discerns a vital correlation between Stephen's idea of a "mystical" primogeniture and his personal history of an intermingled, creole lineage. Stephen's construct helps Walcott dismantle the cultural and political dogmatism inherent in the recovery of an authentic paternal source. Echoing Shabine in *Schooner's Flight*, Walcott writes that both Ashanti and Warwickshire "intimate my grandfathers' roots, both baptizing this neither proud nor ashamed, this hybrid, this West Indian" ("What the Twilight Says" 9). The subtle appearance of *Ulysses'* language in *Omeros'* return to Africa episode unsettles the notion of authentic racial origins in the poem. While Walcott's adoption of Homer as a literary forebear in *Omeros* coincides with Stephen's elevation of an artistic genealogy over the biological claims of Simon Dedalus, a more complex poetics assimilating a Joycean deconstruction of paternity occurs during Achille's meeting with Afolabe. As Achille arrives at his African village (identified momentarily in the poem as "this branch of the Congo" [135]) on the boat, he is surrounded by a crowd of tribespeople and then comes face to face with his father: "A man kept walking / Steadily towards him, and he knew by that walk it / Was himself in his father, the white teeth, the widening hands" (136). The lines echo Walcott's earlier description of his own father's voice in his verse, and both references to deceased fathers and sons as future fathers are an adaptation of Dedalus' conception of paternity. The multiplicity of textual influences, which include *Ulysses'* deconstructive modernism and classical epic's narrative structure, make this episode a meditation on the shifting nuances of Caribbean identity, as Achille confronts the paradox of the powerful nothingness of pre-slavery African origins that is also the source of his New World identity.

Influenced by *Ulysses'* plot of rebellion, in the above lines, Walcott portrays Afolabe as an entity within his son, both alien and identical to the self. This resonates powerfully with the Caribbean subject's desire to grasp a past that is historically elusive and make it a part of the postcolonial present and future. Stephen's theory of the indivisible, singular "essential person" of father and son, which he likens to Shelley's "fading coal" (183), intertwines subtly with the collapse of distinctly separate

historical temporalities and the union of past, present, and future in the act of aesthetic birthing:

As we weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, *so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth*. In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. (183; emphasis added)

Stephen's notion of the permeability of identities and personae or multiple "modes" of begetter and begotten within the artist-subject is interpolated into the story of Achille and Afolabe to embrace the sweep of pre-colonial past and post-colonial present and futures.¹⁰ This idea of a meeting of different identities within the artist's self in *Ulysses* is recreated in Achille's awareness of paternity not as an external form of unified signification that will grant him knowledge of his origins but as a malleable sign of the blurring of boundaries between past and present:

. . . and he knew by that walk it
was himself in his father . . .
He sought his own features in their lifegiver
and saw two worlds mirrored there. (*Omeros* 136)

The encounter between Achille and Afolabe reveals the poem's essentially allusive character; its Joycean trajectory highlights Afolabe's allegorical quality when he is shown as a version of his West Indian descendant, Achille: "the tears glazing his eyes, where the past was reflected / as well as the future" (139).

By way of Derrida's discussion of Plato's *Phaedrus* on the origins of writing, Karen Lawrence points out a direct connection between Stephen's subversion of paternal authority and the act of artistic creation:

Derrida calls Thoth, the god of writing, the “signifier-god,” who stands for or replaces his father, Ra, the Sun-King, just as writing is said to replace or supplant the living voice: “the god of writing is thus at once his father, his son and himself. He cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences . . . he is . . . a sort of joker, a floating signifier, a wild card.” (91)

Stephen’s reworking of the father/son distinction as “different configurations of human identity” (Raleigh 100) provides the context for his later discussions of the “incertitude and authority” of paternity: “Sabellius, the African subtlest heresiarch of all the beasts of the field, held that the father was *Himself his Own Son*” (*Ulysses* 196; emphasis added). Lawrence observes that Stephen’s discussion of fatherhood presents fathers as “legal fictions which posit an ultimate source of meaning, a unifying trope to explain the whole” (89). The conflict between the uncertainty and potency of fatherhood, as Lawrence points out, culminates in Stephen’s aspiration to seek out a literary inheritance to replace his own father: “His idea of paternity frees him from biology. . . . Stephen can trade filiality for fatherhood and biological paternity for literary paternity” (90). This play of differences in the figure of Achille is an expansion and diversification of the conventional “curative plot of return” (Ramazani 59) to African origins and posits new ideas about postcolonial Caribbean identity.

While Lawrence and other critics emphasize Joyce’s re-inscription of paternity as a freely chosen literary inheritance, Stephen’s discussion of paternity also establishes a difference from the Western ideology of legitimate origins by putting forth the hybrid self as a possible substitute to the binary and differentiated schema of father and son. Lawrence astutely observes that in *Ulysses* the relationship between Leopold Bloom, a father without a son, and Stephen, the surrogate son who has broken with his biological father, “manages to convey the desire for reconciliation *and* an unbridgeable gap between generations” (94; emphasis in original). This tug of affinity and estrangement between descendant and ancestor is also present in *Omeros*, and the poem attempts to transcend it through Achille’s multiple incarnations. At a basic level, the influence

of *Ulysses* reveals that Afolabe is not imagined as a distinctly separate character but exists as a double for Achille. This realization is indicated once more after the conclusion of the dream passage to Africa, when Achille gives Helen his reasons for dressing as an African warrior woman on Boxing Day to dance to Philoctete's music:

Achille explained that he and Philo had done this
every Boxing Day, and not because of Christmas,
but for something older, something he had seen
in Africa, when his name had followed a swift,
where he had been his own father and his own son. (275; emphasis added)

The concluding line is a direct restatement of Mulligan's jesting summation cited earlier. Through an enactment of African identity in Saint Lucia, Achille recalls his dream when he had been at once himself, the ghost of his own father, and his son. The stanza outlines a syncretic Caribbean identity made up of ritualistic cultural and psychic aspects of African origination that coexist with the creole elements of contemporary Caribbean society.

On the day after Christmas, observed as Boxing Day, Achille attires himself as a "muscular woman:" "He was someone else today, a warrior woman, fierce and benign. / Today he was African, his own epitaph, / his own resurrection" (273). This scene of idealized primitivization is also, as Walcott repeatedly mentions, a part of the Caribbean carnival of melodrama and role-playing.¹¹ Achille and Philoctete's dance in the guise of androgynous warriors becomes a part of the epic's larger therapeutic absorption of Africa into the narrative of the Caribbean present: "All the pain re-entered Philoctete . . . their memory still there although all the pain was gone / . . . to Achille, / the faster they flew, the more he remembered" (277). Historical memory is channeled into a temporally contained ritual enactment that sustains a consoling connection with the past without allowing a fixation on the past to override the present. It is revealing that Achille's memory of his departure into the past is in the context of his altered appearance for the Boxing Day dance. His metamorphosis into an African warrior woman echoes Achille's ear-

lier Joycean transformation into his own father, implying that origins cannot be recovered in any sense of an authentic whole but reinvented in fluctuating guises and constructed memories as the Caribbean subject resists the complete loss of history due to slavery and colonialism.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen employs Shelley's image of the "fading coal" to connect aesthetic birthing and imagination with a self-generating and momentary union of past, present, and future or memory, self, and potentiality. This idea resonates in Achille's multiple selves in his dream when he transforms into his own ancestor, and the idea becomes a powerful way of expressing the anarchic experience of the loss of a historical record of origins. In an interview, Walcott directly echoes Joyce's subversion of fatherhood: "He thinks he sees a sea-swift pulling a canoe across the Atlantic right up into a river in Africa. So he goes back in time up the river and sees the people who are his ancestors, who are also his children, because time is getting reversed. So there is a duality of meeting his father, who is also his son, etc." (*Conversations* 174). If we take Achille's tripartite self to represent differing periods of history, then *Omeros* can be understood as depicting a collapse of teleology, an ontology of anti-essentialism in which father and son, past and present borrow identities from one another and dissolve boundaries of linear progression between generations.

Walcott extends Joyce's desacralization of paternity to represent a poetic mode of return to Africa that would be different from the romanticized colonial pasts produced by "pastoralists of the African revival" ("What the Twilight Says" 9). Achille's self-embodiment as both father and son in his dream shifts the return to Africa from one of discovery of obscured origins to the expression of a poetic design through which Achille can imagine the relations between an African past and the post-colonial present and future.

Ultimately, how is *Omeros*' transcription of *Ulysses* similar to or different from the poem's adaptation of the epic classics, and how do they collectively affect *Omeros*' representation of the theme of return to Africa? The answer, as my analysis shows, is a nuanced one: interpreting this episode in terms of its intertextuality, one finds that in the derivative form of imaginary return and creative divergences, Africanist vision and

Caribbean homeland, the desire for origins and elusive African roots are closely connected. To varying degrees, borrowings from *Ulysses*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Odyssey* shape Achilles's return to Africa and re-emphasize the protagonist's belonging to his Caribbean island home.

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Notes

- 1 Breslin's influential study of Walcott's poetry analyzes the tensions produced by a marriage between Walcott's Caribbean aesthetic of the absence of history and Western epic: "The question of how a poetics of Adamic pastlessness can appropriate the memorious genre of the epic leads to the deepest tensions, flaws and glories of Walcott's poem" (242). According to Breslin, the tension between Caribbean elements and classic epic armature culminates in a disavowal of the latter as "the characters' recovery from historical alienation reveals the Homeric allusions as symptoms of alienated consciousness rather than as guarantors of meaning" (242). Hamner's impressive book-length study of *Omeros* examines a similar conflict between postcolonial authenticity and conventions of Western

classics in which *Omeros* is commended for visibly subverting epic models: “It is as though he imitates predecessors for the express purpose of emphasizing his deviation from the established pattern” (163). My essay moves away from this rift between epic artifice and postcolonial expression and instead focuses on a different language of harmonization and continuity with Homer and Virgil’s epics in *Omeros*’ return to Africa section.

- 2 An exception would be Hogan’s *Empire and Poetic Voice*. Hogan too points out that Walcott uses Aeneas’ journey to the underworld in Book 6 as the “primary model” (182) for Achille’s return to Africa. While Hogan traces Western textual influences in *Omeros*, my analysis uniquely focuses on a deeper exploration of intertextual patterns and their relations with the black Atlantic genre of return to Africa and Caribbean cultural identity.
- 3 According to Okpewho, Achille’s African “journey” illustrates that “Walcott’s work seems to have moved steadily beyond the paranoia of fragmentation. . . . In sending Achille on an African ‘journey’ to recover his identity, Walcott ultimately embraces the archaeology of knowledge that has been central to the thought of Césaire and Brathwaite” (39). Saint Lucia’s cultural and racial heterogeneity is acknowledged, and yet the primacy of place belongs to “dispossessed elements (which) are finally restored to their due place as the true energies driving Caribbean society. That pride of place basically privileges the Black factor in the Caribbean” (39). On the other hand, Burnett points out that Achille’s symbolic return to Africa “produces no shift in attitude, as the purpose is to demystify the myth of a recoverable African identity” (36). Ramazani emphasizes the continuing strains of creolization and cultural diversity over ethnic genealogies in *Omeros*. According to Ramazani, in Achille’s rediscovery of African roots, “the recuperative dynamic” is curtailed by “Walcott’s scepticism” (10).
- 4 In response to a question about unacknowledged quotations in his poetry, Walcott lays out a notion of artistic apprenticeship vis-à-vis the author’s original voice: “I have always believed in fierce, devoted apprenticeship. . . . One’s own voice is an anthology of all the sounds one has heard. . . . I will never lay claim to hearing my own voice in my work. If I knew what that was, what infinite boredom and repetition would lie ahead, I would fall asleep at its sound” (83).
- 5 Dash characterizes Walcott’s poetic aesthetic as “translational and intertextual” (100), recreating a “Greco-Hellenic-Caribbean, a Homeric America” (99). Through similarities with the literary, expressive cultures of a Hellenic-Mediterranean world, Caribbean cultural diversity best fulfills the promise of “the polyglossia of the Aegean Sea. . . . For Walcott . . . the route to self-discovery in the other America lay through the repossession of the Mediterranean space” (106).
- 6 Referring to the Homeric parallels in general and the particular attempt by Major Plunkett and the poet-narrator to create a Saint Lucian Helen, Walcott says, “If you look at *Omeros*, you will see that the last third of it is a total refutation of the efforts made by two characters” (“Reflections on *Omeros*” 232).

7 Hall situates this trope both within and beyond slavery and black liberationist movements in America and the West Indies:

One cannot understand the culture of the plantation Americas—before and after Emancipation—without a redemptive promise of a return to the Promised Land: though it is translated as “Africa” and the release from the bondage of slavery in Babylon by Rastafarians . . . who often found its promise in borrowed, translated, Christian language of the only book slaves were encouraged to read—the Bible. (39)

8 Terada brilliantly observes that the sea-swift is a metaphor for a hybridizing New World aesthetic: “Walcott’s swift a poetic seamstress, cross-stitches beginning to end. . . . The swift’s hyphenating function is finally the faculty of poetic language itself, scanning disparate textual features” (16).

9 Hogan points out that Walcott “extends” Joyce’s practice of attaching the cast of the *Odyssey* to the characters in *Ulysses* by widening the web of associations of his own characters with the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* as well as with colonial history (191). “Joyce here plays Virgil to Walcott’s Dante. When Walcott says that ‘Joyce led us / all’ (201), he makes Joyce’s Virgilian role almost explicit” (192). See Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*.

10 Scott’s insightful study of James’ *Black Jacobins* similarly discusses the relations between the colonial past, postcolonial present, and possible futures in the “emplotment” (Scott uses “emplotment” to denote the conversion of postcolonial history into a tragic narrative with a plot) of postcolonial history as tragedy: “Consequently, for tragedy the relation between past, present and future is never a Romantic one in which history rides a triumphant and seamlessly progressive rhythm, but a broken series of paradoxes, reversals in which human action is ever open to unaccountable contingencies—and luck” (13).

11 Walcott says, “Carnival, which happens throughout the Caribbean, is a godless festival. It is very African except there is no god. It is interesting that *bacchanal* is the Trinidadian word for Carnival. Yet in Carnival, we have a ritualistic mass form in which the high priest is the poet, the calypsonian, but there is no god . . . the only deity existing in Carnival is art” (38–39). See *Conversations with Derek Walcott*.