



**Alter/Native Landscape Metaphor
of Homer's Aegean:**

A Study of Walcott's Poetry before Omeros

By

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Abstract:

Nobel Laureate, Sir Derek Alton Walcott is regarded as one of the most famous Caribbean poets and playwrights, as he made a notable effort to enrich the West Indian literature and emphasize the Caribbean identity. Through his powerful tone and vivid imagery he was able to spread the reputation of his works all over the world of English reading audience. The diversity of social and political backgrounds deeply affected Walcott's notions and style, especially, his position at the crossroads between Caribbean, British and American culture. Walcott was also greatly influenced by the classicism of the Old World and Homer's epic poetry, in particular. This influence is evident in many of his works like Omeros and The Odyssey: A Stage Version. Furthermore, the setting of the Caribbean landscape; the sea and the natural scenery of coastal beauty, have also deeply affected his work. In creation of a reversible Aegean, long before writing Omeros, Walcott recurrently refers to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey in his early phase of writing. Visioning himself as the Caribbean reflection of Homer, Walcott sets himself in a metapoetic journey through which he tells the story of his native land and the indigenous people. This study aims at surveying the alternation of native metaphors related to the Caribbean setting and the invocation of Homeric elements within the early poetic production of the poet.

ملخص :

يعد السيد ديريك التون والكووت، الحاصل على جائزة النوبل لوربيت، من أكثر الشعراء وكتاب المسرح شهرة بجزر الكاريبي. حيث انه قام بمجهود ملحوظ في إثراء الأدب الهندي الغربي والتشديد على الهوية الكاريبية. فقد أصبح قادرًا على نشر شهرة أعماله في جميع أنحاء عالم قراء اللغة الإنجليزية بواسطة صوته القوي ومخيلته الحيوية. أثر تنوع الخلفيات السياسية والاجتماعية في أفكار وأسلوب الشاعر تأثيرًا عميقًا خاصة عندما كان في مفترق الطرق ما بين الثقافات الكاريبية والبريطانية والأمريكية. كذلك تأثر والكووت تأثيرًا عظيمًا بكلاسيكيات العالم القديم وملاحم هومر بالأخص. وقد كان هذا التأثير ملحوظًا في الكثير من أعماله مثل اوميروس والوديسة: النسخة المسرحية. علاوة على ذلك فقد لعب إطار الموقع الكاريبي حيث البحر والمناظر الطبيعيه ذات الشواطئ الخلابه دورًا كبيرًا في أعمال الشاعر. فقد كان والكووت في محاولات مستمرة لخلق انعكاس كاريبي لبحر الايجه في شعره، حتى قبل كتابة عمله الرئيسي اوميروس، فطالما اشار إلى الالياذه والأوديسة التي كتبها هومر في الحقبة المبكرة من كتاباته. فعندما ظن والكووت إنه النظير الكاريبي لهومر أطلق نفسه في رحلة ميتا شعرية يحكي من خلالها قصة موطنه وإناسه الأصليين. تقدم هذه الدراسة دورها استقصاءً لتبلور الاستعارات المقتبسة من موطن والكووت الأصلي والأجواء الكاريبية واستدعاء العناصر الهومرية في الإنتاج المبكر للشاعر.

The poet, who hears an "O" as in the conch-shell's invocation, seizes "Mer" as both mother and sea and contemplates "Os" as the white surf while it crashes the shore, all through the letters of Homer's Greek name, extends his metapoetic voice even further. On behalf of his nautical experience Walcott refers to The Caribbean, as "a reversible Aegean" to which he belongs; a Greek archipelago of another time, working as his Meta catalyst and the blue horizon surrounding it working as the vessel which carried his thoughts. Walcott's exquisite poetic endeavor goes far beyond his masterpieces, *Omeros* and *The Oyssey: A Stage Version*. This study, as far as it is concerned, will be devoted to surveying Walcott's shorter poems and the significance of the sea, as a strong element of the Caribbean landscape, as a major theme and another metapoetic aspect echoing Homer.

Being raised in Helen of the West Indies, the most valued island in the archipelago constituting the Caribbean setting, Walcott is originally inspired to create a landscape analogy to the Aegean, the homeland of Greek heroism. In spite of the variations, Walcott's representation of the sea was close enough to parallel its iconic portrayal in Greek mythology. According to the Greek, the sea

is everywhere in the Greek landscape. From rugged mountaintops to low-lying plains, the Mediterranean is rarely out of sight. For islanders and coastal villagers the sea is more than a geographical reality, it is a way of life. This was even truer for the Greeks of

Antiquity, who were excellent seafarers and sustained fisheries from the earliest times onward. In fact, the Greeks relied on the sea not only for sustenance and transportation, but also for news, warfare, commercial and political exchange, as well as scientific development. The sea also held a large place in the religious life of the Greeks (Beaulieu 1).

With reference to the Greek influence on Walcott's bond with the sea, Beaulieu adds further that "psychoanalysts have viewed the sea as a representation of the mother figure." (Beaulieu 1) Likely explaining that the interpretation of Walcott's "Mer" syllable, as both mother and sea, was not only a suggestion of its French Patois translation but it was also a mirroring of its implication in Greek heritage. Using Beaulieu's book as a reference we may also render Ma Kilman's method of curing Philoctete by bathing him in ocean water to the Greek credence of the purification powers of the sea:

The sea also held a large place in the religious life of the Greeks. Seawater was used for various kinds of purification, many rituals were held on the seashore, and some festivals required throwing offerings to the gods into the sea. Seafaring was also the occasion for numerous rituals. In this way, the sea pervaded many aspects of ancient life (Beaulieu 1).

Most of the critic's opinions over Walcott's works, especially those which involved Homeric entanglement, were majorly pointed at his lengthy works such as *Omeros* and *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*. Even though Walcott's earlier cycles of poems were a strong indication of his metapoetic tendency to create an emulation of Homer. Starting from his first official collection *In a Green Night* (1962) to all his poetry collections before *Omeros* (1990) like *The Castaway* (1965), *The Gulf* (1969), *Sea Grapes* (1976), *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979), and *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), each cycle had at least one or two poems containing direct or indirect references from Homer and the ancient Greek tradition. Even his later collections such as *The Bounty* (1997), *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000), and *White Egrets* (2010) had poems which continued carrying the influence of the antiquity on the genuine poet.

Scanning Walcott's shorter poems will not only be confined to the collections, mentioned earlier, as this chapter will provide examples of all Walcott's landscape poems and how far they managed to echo the Greek visionary of the Aegean Sea but of course in Caribbean garment. Ten years before publishing his volume *In A Green Night* (1960), Walcott had written his book, *Epitaph for The Young* (1949), which was an allegory divided into twelve cantos. Included as one of the three books compiling his famous *Juvenilia*, *Epitaph for The Young* aroused many critical opinions about Walcott's apprenticeship as a young poet. The allegory depicted the voyage of life from birth to manhood on board of the boat of human spirit sailing across an archipelago of experience:

Walcott goes to the classic form of the Homeric sea odyssey for the basic framework of his quest, also invoking such modern antecedents as Joyce and Pound. Eliot's modernistic treatment of the interior monologue provides his dominant narrative technique, while the canto format sustains the underlying lyrical intention, harking back through Pound to Dante (Ismond 21).

Patricia Ismond's previous commentary on *Epitaph for The Young*, shows that Walcott briefcased his poem in a Homeric receptacle, then he invoked dominant figures like Joyce and Eliot, who themselves invoked Homer in their masterpieces. Furthermore, Walcott recalls Dante's and Pound's lyricism in formatting the cantos of his work. In its turn, this commentary traces Walcott's early metapoetic ambitions in recalling his predecessors from the onset of his career. Moreover, the depiction of human transformation throughout a spiritual voyage proves that Walcott held the sea in mind as a metaphor for life and he frequently went back and forth in sailing across his imagination to provide such a nautical representation:

Derek Walcott's epic ambitions may be traced back to the beginning of his career. His second volume of poetry, *Epitaph for The Young; xii Cantos* (1949), abounds in references to poems of the epic tradition and specially rewrites the modernists who had (once again) transferred that tradition into

English verse and prose: namely, Eliot, Joyce and Pound (Henriksen 231).

According to Walcott, metapoetry consists of a close reproduction of the metaphoric contexts of the masters, extending to the effort to capture voices and methods intact. The variant blend of metaphors which were included in Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's quest in *The Divine Comedy*, Shakespearean characterization of *Hamlet*, Eliot's *Wasteland* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, were all uniquely reintroduced by Walcott, enhancing his personality and apprenticeship as a young poet.

In 1960 Walcott published his second book of poems, *In A Green Night*, with many poems related to Homer and his conception of the sea like "The Harbour," "Islands" and "A Sea Chantey." "The Harbour" tells a brief story about lost sailors who desperately paddle the calm water to reach the destination called home. Infact, Walcott metaphorically expresses the agony of love through an Odyssey of his own:

That bitter and sly sea, and love raises walls.
Yet others who now watch my progress
outward,
On a sea which is crueler than any word
Of love, may see in me the calm my passage
makes,
Braving new water in an antique hoax;
(*Collection of Poems* 7).

The last line from this excerpt sums up the whole metaphor in the poem. As the torn persona depicts his love story

as "new water" and his raveling boat as "an antique hoax;" referring to the old struggle invoked by the endless homeward voyage of Odysseus, in hope for reunion with Penelope.

In "Islands," Walcott uses the same metaphor, however this time he celebrates his love to a woman, Margaret, by giving her a Helen-like praise. The persona aims at commemorating his lover as " a name / For readers who like travelers praise / Their beds and beaches as the same " (*Collection of Poems* 52). By those readers Walcott is probably referring to the audience of the *Iliad and Odyssey*. As he continues emphasizing that "islands can only exist / if we have loved in them" (*Collection of Poems* 52) just like Paris fell for Helen and Odysseus longed for Penelope.

Among the three poems, his prize winner, "A sea Chantey," was the most popular poem for Walcott's readers. The poem is a pastoral which celebrates the Caribbean setting and its residents. Walcott's technical strategy in this poem was more focused and less imitative strategy; he sets out to echo the liquid sounds of water in the phonics of the poem, and thereby to distil "sea-music". These liquid notes are rung from the sounds that name the distinct features of the setting. Along with Baudelaire's French epigraph from *Les Fleurs Du Mal* (1857) as a preface, Walcott introduces his poem with a skillful play of alliteration, assonance and rhyme as a sequence of the names of islands in The West Indies:

Anguilla, Adina,
Antigua, Canelles,
Andreuille, all the I's
Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles, (*Collection
of Poems* 44)

Within a creative range of similes, the persona hears the names of these islands trembling like needles of anchored vessels, pictures yachts as lilies in their tranquility; and envisions that the flexible, ebony body of the sailing ships and the needles of their masts are threading the archipelagoes refract embroidery in 'feverish waters.' In the depiction of the bravery of the islanders in facing the volcanic nature of the island, Walcott proceeds in making reference to Homer:

 Their shorn, leaning palms,
 Shaft of Odysseus,
 Cyclopic volcanoes,
 Creak their own histories, (Collection of
 Poems 44)

The previous lines show how Walcott was influenced by Homer's nautical masterpieces, even in his early phase of writing. He is definitely comparing the Caribbean to the Aegean; by comparing the volcano's eye to that of Cyclops'. Meanwhile he compares the courage of the island's people, in facing that creak in history, to the shaft of Odysseus, by which gouged the eye of the giant. Odysseus becomes synonymous with boats, islands, seafaring and Walcott's quasi- mythical land and seascapes:

 The sea, a vast and multifaceted symbol in
 Walcott, represents here the space/time
 vacuum between the Caribbean and the
 ancestral world from which it was separated;
 it is, as Walcott once indicated to this writer,
 the visible image of the hiatus between

Africa and the Caribbean.²² This is a face which contrasts with the more familiar one of the sea as source of living, generative energies ("Missing the Sea"). We are, in both of these, a far cry from the calm, paradisaical sea of "A Sea Chantey." (Ismond 72)

Ismond is clearing the nature of Walcott's interpretation of the sea. Besides its resemblance as a source of living and generative energy, the sea obviously stands as a strong motive which compelled Walcott to echo his ancestors' pride. Nothing would fire Walcott's imagination more than the renowned adventures of Homer's protagonists against the sea wilderness, gods and creatures. In fact, those similes, transferred epithets, and felicity of repression are some of the features that mark the beauty of the poem:

"A Sea Chantey", as earlier mentioned, is the most accomplished product of this marriage of joy of craft and landscape. The poem stands out for the musicality and original freshness with which it renders the Caribbean sea setting (Ismond 34).

In 1965, Walcott published his sixth book of poems, *The Castaway and Other Poems*, followed by another book, *the Gulf and Other Poems*, five years later. The two poems, "The Castaway" and "The Gulf" which entitled the two successive books are both related to Walcott's nautical experience as a traveler and a poet. However, the poems through which Walcott recalls Homer the most, also the subject of analysis chosen for

this chapter would be "Crusoe's Island" from *The Castaway* and "Homecoming: Anse La Raye," and "Crusoe's Journal" from *The Gulf*.

Evidently, biographical circumstances affect the poet's style of writing to a large extent. The two volumes were an outcome of an important period of change in Walcott's personal life and career. After years of studying theatre in the United States, Walcott finally got back with an intension to settle down in Trinidad, thus he founded the Theatre Workshop and prioritized his Trinidadian family life and marriage with the West Indian Margaret Maillard. Since then and for twenty years later Walcott has proven his maturity as a poet and artist every time he wrote or worked on a project. His basic model at this point was Defoe's Crusoe, whom he uses to create parallels that dramatize Walcott's psychological progress throughout his experience of negation from his homeland, the sense of exile and his quest for identity as well:

The Castaway introduces a pervasive mood of negation, which contrasts strongly with the elation and affirmative spirit of the earlier phase. This mood of negation extends into *The Gulf* and finds expression in the recurring themes of void, of a personal crisis of belief, and of exile as an artist - themes which stand out in major poems like "The Castaway" and "The Gulf, and "Homecoming: Anse La Raye." (Ismond 43-44).

In a paper called "The Figure of Crusoe," presented at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad in October 1965, Walcott covers an important theme recurrently devised in his poetry. He describes that sense of isolation and estrangement that he experienced after leaving the United States and returning to St. Lucia. Finding out that he became a castaway, Walcott sensed the necessity to express himself intellectually and spiritually.

The involvement of Crusoe's figure emerges in many poems aside from "Crusoe's Island" and "Crusoe's journal." However in these two poems Walcott particularly invokes Homer, for he only uses Crusoe to refer to a desperate Odysseus who chose to give up searching for home and settled down after being ostracized for a long time.

In "Crusoe's Island," Walcott expresses his loss of faith in God. He begins the poem by a simile which compares the glow of the Chapel's bell to that of the sun, which is hammered to the sea by God's anvil. This "blinding shield" (Collection of Poems 68), i.e. the sun, heats the earth like an oven. Walcott embellishes this stanza with a beautiful assonance; Red, Roofs and roar which adds to the heat of expression. In the next stanza, Walcott admits that to him God is dead and adds that the blue sky of Scarborough's beach is the dome which shadows his hedonist philosophy, Where "Bethel and Canaan's heart / lies open like a psalm" (Collection of Poems 68). Worthy of mention that the names of sacred places, Bethel and Canaan, which Walcott refers to, are in fact borrowed from the ancient Greek language long before Christianity. At this point, Walcott expresses his

confusion, whether to choose God's heaven above or that blue heaven on earth, the sea. Although he shows a sense of guilt, the persona explains further the impact of the castaway on him and how it changed his beliefs into thinking that the real god was the sea which carried his life on its back:

The second Adam since the fall,
His germinal
Corruption held the seed
Of that congenital heresy that men fail
According to their creed.
Craftsmen and castaway,
All heaven in his head,
He watched his shadow pray
Not for God's love but for human love
instead. (Collection of Poems 69)

In the second part of the poem, the persona recounts how he lost his mind when he thought of the island as a cure. It turned out that his religious faith is like the "bread" when it "disintegrates in water." His continuous attempts to regain that faith were futile like when stones try to fly in the wind. However, he can never go back and he still perceives God as the blue sea with its white surf. Hence, he believes that this mania was nurtured by the gift of poetry:

Art is profane and pagan,
The most it has revealed

Is what a crippled Vulcan
Beat on Achilles shield
By these blue, changing graves
Fanned by the furnace blast
Of heaven may the mind
Catch fire till it cleaves
Its mold of clay at last (Collection of Poems 71)

After all, Walcott blames it on the art; indeed he curses his mind for tracing it. He uses this beautiful paradox between water and fire, since his island has a volcanic nature. In the previous stanza Walcott recalls Achilles' shield made by Hephaestus, The Greek God of blacksmith, yet Walcott replaces him by Vulcan, The Roman God of fire, for rhyming convenience. To make the reader aware of this change he adds "crippled" as a depiction of Vulcan, to highlight his Greek counterpart. Achilles' shield, which provides a poetic description of the summarized version of human knowledge during the Homeric era, is used by Walcott to convey himself as an artist highly influenced by the Greek art. Showing his guilt, the persona swears by the sea, may his mind burn till his way of thinking changes.

The poem closes with a scene, similar to that of Odysseus, when he is shipwrecked on the land of Phaeacians and later observes Nausicaa and her maids walking and playing on the beach. Echoing Homer, Walcott specifically describes their garments and praises their pride as they walk in their "air of Glory." When the persona witnesses the young girls while they head to vespers, he concludes the poem with a prayer that says no

matter figurative he gets, by means of art or loneliness, he would never be able to bless those girls with his tongue the way that church's bell does.

The sense of alienation extends to the poems of the following collection, *The Gulf and Other Poems*, with another poem recalling Defoe's *Crusoe*. This time, Walcott is scrutinizing the experience; in "Crusoe's Journal," he examines every facet of his characterization of Crusoe and his interpreter is Daniel Defoe. The poem opens with an epigraph from the original *Robinson Crusoe*, which Walcott is about to re-evaluate, followed by the setting of the poem within the first four lines. Throughout a drive past a beach house between the ocean and the forest of *Mundo Nuevo*, the persona of the poem must intellectually judge the surroundings much like *Robinson Crusoe* in Defoe's novel had to gather everything he could from the wreckage of his ship. Walcott depicts his Crusoe as a second Adam in the newness of inhabiting this second paradise; he also compares him to Columbus who accidentally discovered the new world and introduced Christianity to the West Indians. Walcott then parallels the sea to the shape-shifting Greek God, Proteus. The sea in Walcott seems to represent a number of things; among others, it stands for the process whereby the natural geography of the Caribbean tends to display the cultural objects of human history:

All shapes, all objects multiplied from his,
Our ocean's Proteus;
In childhood, his derelict's old age
Was like a god's (Collection of Poems 93).

The reference to Proteus emphasizes that Walcott is alluding to Odysseus through his image of Crusoe, all three being figures who emerge from the sea and form a different identity in correspondence to the new land they find themselves in:

In his paper on 'The Figure of Crusoe', Walcott gives a succinctly illuminating explanation of the multi-faceted signification of the figure in 'Crusoe's Journal.' To his list of Crusoe's variant mythic identities – Proteus, Adam, Christopher Columbus -- one may add, as critics have usually noted, Odysseus/Ulysses (Baugh 48).

Bringing out Odysseus nautical experience masked by Daniel Defoe's Crusoe, emphasizes that Walcott wanted to transmit the inner complications of Crusoe's figure through the grandeur of Homer's legendary character, Odysseus. The allusion to Homer reaches out to Walcott's other poem, "Homecoming: Anse La Raye," which he dedicates to his colleague and friend St. Omer and probably the one who inspired him to write his lengthy poem Omeros. Besides the subject of the poem, the title includes "Ansa La Raye," a small fishing village in St. Lucia, where Walcott was raised up and received his education. The poem is a narrative which consists of sixty lines of free verse divided unevenly into four stanzas. Throughout his poetic experience the persona of the poem expresses having difficulty in fulfilling the core of The Greek "nostos" or homecoming. His tone of estrangement and meditative reflection elevates as he begins examining the problems of his return to Anse La Raye:

Whatever else we learned at school,
like solemn Afro-Greeks eager for grades,
of Helen and the shades
of borrowed ancestors,
there are no rites
for those who have returned, (Collection of
Poems 127)

In the previous lines, Walcott starts by using the pronoun "we" to link the persona of the poem to the other St. Lucians, whom he refers to as Afro-Greek. The persona then states that although he and his classmates who were eager to learn, had studied Homer, they soon had forgotten his work because the achievement wasn't theirs anyway. He recalls Helen of Troy in particular:

The reference to Helen, after whom St Lucia was named "the Helen of the West," underlines the irony. An implicit reproach is aimed at the anomalies of colonial education which left, in the classical vocabulary "drilled into [the] skulls" of Walcott's generation, such a legacy of mockery (Ismond 75).

In an introduction of his first complication of homecoming the persona explains that when all memories of antiquity are erased, people who have no great history like his nation, have no rites when they return home. The poet here invokes Greek champs, like Odysseus and the famous classic Nostos theme. By

the end of the first stanza the persona devotes all his poetic experience on his one and only interest in the island, a "well-known passage," connoting the beach and its surroundings. In an attempt to magnify the Caribbean content, the poet uses Homeric depiction of items on the island in a chain of creative metaphors:

under the coconuts' salt-rusted swords,
these rotted leathery
sea-grape leaves, the seacrabs' brittle
helmets,
and this barbecue of branches, like the ribs
of sacrificial oxen on scorched sand;
only this fish-gut reeking beach
whose frigate stuck like buzzards overhead
(Collection of Poems 127)

Portraying detritus on the shoreline definitely echoes decaying emblems of Homeric epic. It also brings the idea of a paralleled Caribbean and Aegean even closer to the reader. In an interpretation of the images in the second stanza and their Homeric reference Patricia Ismond comments further:

The poem begins by invoking the classical model of the Homeric return to bemoan the absence of welcoming rites for the hero..... It traces the local counterparts of the classical rituals and symbols in the features and details of the narrow fishing beach scene around which the village huddles. The honor guard of

hoisted swords for the returning warrior hero finds its mocking, parodic counterpart in the dry fronds of the coconut palms and the brown leaves of the sea grape trees native to the setting; helmets are mimicked in the shells of the sea crabs; the sacrificial oxen of the festive ceremony in the dried branches of the coconut palms; and the sea itself echoes not the soothing, healing love-weave of Penelope's loom but the lingering nighttime notes of doom (Ismond 74).

In the third stanza the poet's sense of detachment increases and he feels guilty for the kids who think him a tourist and wishes he wasn't ambitious enough to leave the island. He'd rather stay to watch this "clear infinite, boring, Paradisal sea." The pronoun "we" is now flipped over to a "you." Through this pronoun alternation the poet is about to deliver a sorrowful message to his people:

but hoped it would mean something to
declare today,
I am your poet, yours,
all this you knew,
but never guessed you'd come
to know there are homecomings without
home. (Collection of Poems 128)

In another invocation of Homer in, Walcott metapoetically juxtaposes the story of Odysseus' return to Ithaca. Thus to remind

us how Odysseus was disguised as a beggar when he felt alienated by his wife and son, who might not even recognize him in his natural appearance because he had been away for more than twenty years. Likewise, Walcott's persona is dressed in fancy garments, making him look like an outlander to the poor children who begged him for money. Moreover, when he meets the old fishermen on his way back to the village, only one of them smiles and nods in recognition, but the persona views this gesture with the same detached mood, sarcastically commenting that the fisherman who nods gestures "as if all fate/ swayed in his lifted hand." The situation recalls Penelope's cold meeting of Odysseus, as she barely remembered her husband. Featuring a seascape similar to the Aegean and a culture based on ancestral roots, Walcott's "Homecoming: Anse La Raye" provides a fine example on Walcott's concept of metaphor and explains his metapoetic relationship with the Western tradition and the revolutionary path that he pursues.

In 1973, Walcott secures his international reputation among English writing poets with his long autobiographical poem, *Another Life*. The poem is a deep narrative revolved around three major characters in Walcott's life, Dunstan St. Omer, his boyhood companion, Harold Simmons, the painter and Walcott's mentor, and Andreuille Alcee, his first love. In his poem, Walcott records them respectively as Gregorians, The Master and Anna. The philosophical purpose of the poem works towards threading the relation between art, love and death. According to Walcott, art is the human urge for fulfilment in creativity; love, is the main force and motif of art; and death or mortality is what sets limits to both of them at every turn. The

spirit of art is identified in the personal life of Gregorians, St. Omer; the narrative of love finds expression in the characterization of Walcott' love to Anna, Andrueille; and the shadow of death incarnates itself in the tragedy of The Master, Harold Simmons.

Since the poem is divided into 4 books, it starts with a prelude-like book, entitled as The Divided Child, which serves as an introduction to Walcott's own beginnings as an artist, an important element of the poet's autobiography, as well as its relevance to the biographies of the other three figures combined in the poem. The second book is entitled as Homage to Gregorians, the third as Anna: "A Simple Flame" and the forth as Simmons' Death: "The Estranging Sea." Each book starts with an epigraph of a different author, conveying the bold lines of the book's versified subject. In the prelude book, chosen for the study, Walcott quotes Marlauk's The Psychology of Art, summing up that "What makes the artist is the circumstance that in his youth he was more deeply moved by the right works of art than by that of the things which they portray" (Collection of Poems 144).

Although the first book connotes the onset of a spiritual odyssey of self-discovery, the portrayal of the Caribbean landscape dominates the larger part of the chapters. Five of the seven chapters of book 1 (chapters 2-6) are devoted to the biography of the island, as the necessary context of this artistic childhood. A thoughtful study of these chapters reveals the incidence of how in his youth, Walcott was "deeply moved" by Homer and The Aegean Sea. The poet initiates his work by

depicting the struggle that he had to go through as a poet and a painter, when it comes to choosing between the undocumented life of the Caribbean and the well-established civilization of Aegean:

Verandahs, where the pages of the sea
Are a book left open by an absent master
In the middle of another life—
I begin until this ocean's
A shut book, and like a bulb
The white moon's filaments wane.
(Collection of Poems 145)

His persona stands in the balcony and reads the pages of the sea as if they resembled an open book written by an "absent master," from another life. By the "absent master" the poet is probably referring to the lack of the identity in the Caribbean due to the mixture of cultures evolving there, since the discovery of the new world. Therefore, the persona dedicates himself to write "again" until the "Ocean's shut" or the "white moon" fades. "The white moon" symbolizes colonialism and European authority, thus, the persona won't stop writing until he dims this light and other peripheral impact dies out in the Caribbean. The persona then confesses that following this reason while writing resulted in releasing the "monster," i.e. belonging to "the wrong age and color." As an heir of colonialism, the poet speaks of himself as the hybrid of his circumstances and of his race.

As the poem progresses, the persona depicts the darkness on the island to convey the decay and distortion left by the

oppressor. He employs the phrase "black hills simplified to hunks of coal," on the island to symbolize slavery and the cruel death of coal-mining slaves in growing the colonizers treasury. The word "amnesia," is used to refer to the state of mind which avoids thinking of the harsh effects of colonialism as the only way to adjust the body to do only the physical effort.

Believing that the role of a true poet is to search beyond the destruction of a nation and enhance the elements of its strength, the poet alternates this melancholic tone with an atmosphere filled with hope of a new tomorrow. Walcott inspired by Thomas Craven's *Treasury of Art Masterpieces*, commences his observations of the works of the mature artist, Harold Simmons and their conveyance. The poet contemplates a new light behind the door which blazes readers' eagerness to learn. Readers' eager minds is thus compared to an "embryo" enfolded in a "pale" or a translucent tissue to convey the upcoming birth of new talents fired by Simmons' paintings. With this hope the poet finally is ready to celebrate the Caribbean culture and get over the ramifications of colonialism. Therefore, he quotes the Jamaican poet George Campbell:

Holy be

The white head of a Negro

Sacred be

The black flax of a black child (*Collection of Poems* 149)

In celebration of humanity and dignity, Campbell's blessing suggests that wisdom and reverence resemble old black men,

similarly vigor and liveliness resemble black young men. Campbell's "green moon," which controls the tide, brings it this time in the favor of the Castries and the poet is now inspired to write a new chapter of the history. Highlighting a sense of rebirth and a chance of change by the end of chapter I, the poet finally anticipates "Another Life" to begin soon on the island.

In chapter II, the poet changes the setting from his native landscape to the house of his mother. With this return to the place where he was raised as a child, the poet aims at describing the positive part of his beginnings by acknowledging the opportunity of being sheltered and having plenty of memories inside the house. Throughout this chapter Walcott pays tribute to his black mother, who, raised, educated, inspired and even helped him financially in his early career as a poet. He gives a detailed account of the activities by his mother all the week, and the ways in which she kept the right order of everything. He recalls shutting the Victrola cabinet on Sundays for "sacred silence." On Mondays, the poet proceeds, his mother stitched for him shirts made of "rain and freshly ironed clouds." The creative metaphor extends to the "foam tub under a blue-soap sky" where his mother plunged her arms to the elbow and washed wet fleets which sailed the yard to dry out. Expressing his fascination of his mother's discipline the poet thus, concludes:

I can no more move you from your true
alignment,
Mother, than we can move objects in
paintings.
Your house sang softly of balance,

Of the rightness of placed things. (Collection
of Poems 157)

Combining the glimpse of hope extracted from chapter I with the pride of his parentage from chapter II, the poet slightly overcomes the trouble of dividedness between his native culture and the old world classicism. In chapter III, Walcott blends native setting with classical metaphor, as he uses the ironic discrepancy between two separate worlds to serve his metapoetic purpose. He gives the residents of the island heroic identities and retrospective characteristics echoed originally from Homer's work. The chapter begins with a contemplative child, who gets inspired by simplified Greek tales from Nathaniel Hawthorne's, Tanglewood Tales and Charles Kingsley's Heroes of Greek Mythology, to epitomize the characteristics of Caribbean counterparts in Walcott's version. When the torch of Demeter, the Greek goddess, flares the question, "Boy! Who was Ajax?" the poet responds:

Ajax,
Lion-coloured stallion from Sealey's
stable,
By day a cart horse, a thoroughbred
On race days, once a year,
Plunges the thunder of his neck, and
sniffs
Above the garbage smells, the scent
Of battle, and the shouting,

He saith among the kitchen peels,
"Aha!"

Debased, bored animal,

Its dung cakes pluming, gathers

The thunder of its flanks, and drags

Its chariot to the next block, where
(Collection of Poems 158)

According to the lines, Caribbean Ajax represents a horse from Sealey's stable, which pulls a cart by day and on annually race days he wafts like thunder to pull his chariot to the next block. The word "debased," suggests that the allusion was made to Ajax the lesser, who according to Homer was less noble than Ajax the great. In connotation of Homeric Ajax's bravery, Walcott depicts the stallion's gallant on race days. Using the word, "garbage" to point out the battle's smell, emphasizes Walcott's sense of irony, as he mocks the Western war history and its trivial causes. Walcott enjoys an impressive ability to pull the contents of his work together in order to grab the continuous attention of his readers. This feature is evident in the choice of his next invocation of Cassandra in the portrait of Berthilia. After taking over Troy in the Iliad, Ajax The Lesser broke into the temple of Athens and raped Apollo's Priestess, Cassandra, thus he was cursed to death. Walcott's portrayal of Ajax, the Greek hero, as a stallion, the synonym for an uncastrated adult male horse, metaphorically conveys his disgraceful bestial sacrilege from the Iliad. Wherefore, the poet ends Ajax's account and inaugurates his depiction of Cassandra in the stanza of Berthilia.

Berthilia resembles the Trojan Princess and priestess of Apollo's temple, who was cursed by Apollo to make true prophecies and never to be believed. The paralysis of Berthilia invokes Cassandra's disability to convince her people with the validity of the prophecies she told. Although Cassandra's children from Agamemnon were both killed in Homer's account, Walcott gives her Caribbean counterpart a model son who clinches her disability. The dutiful son carrying the crippled mother could possibly be a metaphor for the mythological fate which delivered the truthful prophecies which Cassandra made. Ismond also comments on the portrayal of Berthilia in *Another Life* as the following:

The horribly crippled Berthilia, carried on her son's back, occupies her daily perch on the city's sidewalk, where she maintains her unending flow of mutterings: "Cassandra, with her drone unheeded". (CP, 159). What sounds again in Walcott's memory of these mutterings are the intimations of an inner self ravaged in her wretched deformity; which echoes, in turn, the strains of the nakedness of the distress that must have possessed Cassandra, the raw desolation that fuelled her own drone of prophetic utterance (Ismond 151).

In depiction of his next character, Choiseul, the poet identifies him as a chauffeur who "bangs Troy's gates shut!" *The Caribbean Versus Aegean*, progresses in this image, since

Walcott pictures a garage in his island as another Troy and Choiseul the porter of its gate. The driver, who is submissive to his hoarse wife, loves engines and thinks that their reconstruction is easier than human complications. Walcott makes an outstanding shift in the imagery of this part, when he describes how the chauffeur sticks his thumbs in engines to fix them, then he abruptly alarms his readers to Homer's grief, due to his blindness, as if his own complications were also fixed the same way and therefore he went blind.

Once again Walcott recalls Homer's blindness in depiction of the sightless character, Darnley, and his brother Russell who "steers him by the hand." In a metapoetic creation of such parallel, Walcott pairs Homer to Milton whose late blindness, similarly, forced him to dictate his poetry to amanuenses in order to be preserved. Emanuel, his next character, resembles Odysseus. Although he was an "ex-merchant," he is still sailing the Caribbean alone, yet, reached no destination to settle down. Passing by the shores of the island, depicted as "Troy Town," Emanuel's rented oars remind the poet of Troy's fall and the smoke of its burning, ascending over the Aegean sea.

After portraying a temple on the island, Farah and Rawlins, and a man who dresses like a woman, Gaga, the poet invites the reader to guess who his next Greek analogy is, "The most Greek of all, the love that has no name and / Helen?" Thence, he sketches her as follows:

Janie the town's one clear-complexioned
whore,

With two tow-headed children in her tow,

She sleeps with sailors only, her black
Hair electrical
As all that trouble over Troy,
Rolling broad-beamed she leaves
A plump and pumping vacancy,
"O promise me," as in her satin sea-heave
follow
Cries of (Collection of Poems 161)

Although the poem was written long before *Omeros*, the previous characterization of Helen's character highly corresponds to its fullest expression in *Omeros*. Similarly, the depiction of Helen as Janie, the island's most provocative prostitute, bears a penetrating resemblance to her Homeric counterpart. As a local equivalent of Helen of Troy, Janie, who elusively plays hard to get, is involved in multiple relationships but none of her purposes is ultimately achieved. There is an implication that Walcott wanted to convey when he mentions that Janie seeks only white sailors in her affairs, Ismond comments:

That inward Janie represents a facet of dividedness crucial to Walcott's overall testimony on the theme. Hers is a condition which cuts through the entire society "christened, married, and buried in borrowed white" (CP 152), one which Walcott himself knows only too well. As "the town's one clear-complexioned whore" she will sleep

with sailors - meaning white customers - only. From his own deep empathy with that susceptibility, Walcott penetrates to the psychology of that choice, zeroing in on her dream/illusion of whiteness as the never-never paradisaal beyond (Ismond 152).

The characterization of Janie was obviously the last pure Homeric invocation in this chapter. However, Walcott continues giving examples of other characters that resided his hometown and inspired him as a child. He mentions an idiot girl, a thief, black birds, a murderer, a businessman, a step dad and a boatman. Then the letter T comes to symbolize Walcott's version of Troy Town which finally awakens "in its shirt of fire," when the poet magnifies its marginalized society. Since, Walcott listed his characters in alphabetical order; there are still few examples left to highlight. He depicts the characters of Uncle Eric, a drunkard, a black grocer, a saxophonist, and a nicknamed lizard. By the end of this chapter Walcott ascribes these modest examples of the Caribbean society as the heroes of his own myth, who have been neglected for many centuries before he decides to immortalize them with such a great work:

These dead, these derelicts,

That alphabet of the emaciated,

They were the stars of my mythology.
(Collection of Poems 164).

The theme of individual isolation is evident throughout the poem. Walcott isolates himself to work on his art first, and then

he feels isolated by imperialistic mindset surrounding him as a child; who has been studying the Western World's civilization till he became an adult who, in his turn, is responsible for enriching his native culture with his Caribbean stamped literature. The artist's search for self and identity forced him to speculate something great out of the landscape of his native island. Even though he exemplifies creative genius he does not fully belong to either world and thus has to create a world for himself and that is *Another Life* which resembles Homeric greatness on Caribbean grounds.

In a progression of mainstream ideas in *Another Life*, Walcott publishes his collection of poems, *Sea Grapes* in 1976. He signs his love for St. Lucia and the Caribbean landscape in his lyric, "Sea Grapes," which is unsurprisingly famous for being the title of the whole collection. "Sea grapes," is a type of fruit which grows on a Caribbean origin shrub, known as "Coccoloba Uvifera." The fruit has a taste which combines a mixture of sweet, sour and almost bitter tastes. Although the title of the poem is quite irrelevant to the content, Walcott employs the bitterish sour taste of sea grapes together with its strong Caribbean relevance to highlight his inner struggle between obsession and responsibility.

The poem opens with a clam Caribbean beach disturbed by a schooner of a ship that is tired of roaming islands and is desperately searching for a glimpse of light which represents hope rather than the light of the sun. The poet who is obsessed with Greek mythology, imagines that probably Odysseus is on board of that ship:

for home, could be Odysseus,
home-bound on the Aegean;
that father and husband's (Collection of
Poems 297)

Odysseus has a responsibility to return home to his wife and son. He is sailing across the Aegean, similarly, the poet, who departs the Caribbean very often yet worries about the major difficulty of coping up with heritage on his way back. This hardship defined as responsibility, incorporates "longing" to obsession, which Walcott represents as "hearing Nausicaa's name in every gull's outcry." Therefore, "gnarled sea Grapes," teaches the poet a valuable lesson, as they taste sweet, at first, like Odysseus' adultery with Nausicaa, but then they become bitter when the two lovers start missing each other. Although he completely loves his island, the poet is somehow twisted and justifies his obsession of Homer through this poem. In depiction of its conclusion, the poet compares the constant conflict of obsession and responsibility to ancient wars, which didn't bring peace to anyone yet, has been the same for all:

for the sea-wanderer or the one on shore now
wriggling on his sandals to walk home, since
Troy sighed its last flame, (CP 297)

According to the poet, both of the sea wanderer and the home established citizen still suffer from the outcome of this metaphoric battle. Walcott marks the beginning of this strife by

invoking the fall of Troy from the *Iliad* and the eye-gouging of Polyphemus, the giant Cyclops from the *Odyssey*. Hereafter, the use of Homeric hexameter became a sanctuary for poets and a conclusion of any "exhausted surf." In this image, Walcott explains that the waves of the Caribbean Sea of poetry have been exhausted, due to the obsession of using the hexametric line to approach Homer. Walcott concludes his poem by stating that, "The classics can console. But not enough." Thus he calls for an end to his inner strife, for his obsession with classics has got to step aside and clear the way for him to carry out his responsibility towards his people. *Sea Grapes* as one of Walcott's dominant lyric allegories, succeeds in dragging the reader to the Caribbean setting with its ocean, sea grapes and culture. In addition, it steers minds to the right direction, enabling them to search beyond the symbolic references he offers in his poem.

The Caribbean Odysseus finally settles down for some time in St. Lucia, in order to administrate his role as a Caribbean poet towards the indigenous people in speaking out their matters through his writings. The dual residency in the Caribbean and the United States of America, has specifically affected Walcott's poetry. The Caribbean phase coincides effectively with his residence in St. Lucia, as he publishes his purely Caribbean collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom*. The poem included in the title, as well as, *The Schooner flight*, are two long poems famous for being considerable forays into the socio-political condition of the West Indies, significant extensions of the poet's concern and anger at the plight of the people. "*The Schooner Flight*," in particular, embodies the Caribbean plight through a weary

protagonist whose cynicism and despair at the national condition conveys Walcott's own strife with history.

The protagonist-narrator of "The Schooner Flight" is a hybrid sailor and poet, nicknamed as Shabine. The nickname is the patois equivalent to "any red nigger," meaning the one who is a breed of both European and African black blood. The narrator secretly sets on a journey on the schooner flight, permanently parting his homeland for two main reasons. First, he feels disillusioned and distressed by the ill conditions of his society and the corruption of values and politics. Second he is torn apart and his heart is caught between his love to his family, wife and children and his love to his mistress. The poem reaches its climax when the schooner is destroyed by a storm, but Shabine manages to survive. Seemingly he becomes more melancholic, however, a wiser man. Lacking the concept of home and identity, the poem ends with the protagonist sailing without determining his geographical destination.

As usual Walcott invests in his metapoetic Odyssey with such an allusive poem. As it evokes the classic story of a man who earns his masculinity and heroism through the torturing love affair and quarrel with the sea. The unstoppable sea wandering together with yearning for home is the main Homeric element Walcott uses in paralleling the Caribbean Sea to the Aegean. Edward Baugh comments on Walcott's career as another Odyssey of literary creation:

In the title poem of *Sea Grapes*, for example,
the poet-persona sees himself as an Odysseus,
forever restless, forever adventuring, torn

between passion and duty. In *A Green Night* maps Walcott's mythology of archipelagoes, his 'litany of islands' (CP 46) threaded by the 'needles' of 'strait-stitching schooners' (CP 44). Echoes of *The Odyssey* inform chapters 5 and 6 of *Another Life*. 'The Schooner Flight' evokes doughty island seamen earning their manhood in the ancient love affair and quarrel with the sea 'that kills them' (CP 347), the ceaseless wandering and yearning that are made to belong as naturally to Walcott's Caribbean as to Homer's Aegean. All the Odyssean motifs adrift on the sea of Walcott's work inform Shabine's fiction, which is his self-portrait, and anticipate the cresting of Walcott's involvement with Homer in *Omeros* and *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*. That Shabine is a poet clinches the analogy with Walcott and Odysseus at one and the same time (Baugh 111).

The volume which follows *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, three years later, is *The Fortunate Traveler*, 1982. By the time Walcott wrote the poems of this volume, he had resumed his dual residency in both the Caribbean and the States. Thus, the volume is a transitional work built on the theme of constant travelling. With many poems invoking Homer and dealing with the Caribbean as The Aegean of Walcott's time, *The Fortune Traveler* forms one of the most significant books chosen for this study. The book is divided into two sections: The North and The

South. The South is the part which includes the majority of poems containing variations of Walcott's cherished sea theme. Walcott opens this part with a poem entitled as "A Sea Change." The poem presents a sweeping shadowy view of the Caribbean future due to the unpleasant change experienced by the Caribbean islands for the first time. In an allusion to slavery and the Black diaspora, Walcott examines this change in a deep historical perspective as his nation has always been burdened by "the weight of chains of centuries" (*The Fortunate Traveler* 21).

The sea theme merges with Walcott's constant involvement with Greek mythology in his second poem, "Map of The New World." The poem's body consists of three shorter poems. Among which the first part stands out as a strong invocation of Homer so as to exemplify the Aegean within the multicolored Caribbean landscape. The first poem is entitled as Archipelagoes. Comparing the lines of the poem to the chain of islands known as archipelagoes, the poet states that at the end the first line, heavy rain begins and it slowly conceals the harbor of the sailing ship of poetry. Losing the sight of islands, the poet thus inaugurates another invocation of Homer's *Odyssey* by paralleling the famous roughness of the Aegean Sea to the uncharted recognition of the Caribbean Sea, which pulls these archipelagoes together:

The ten-years war is finished.
Helen's hair, a grey cloud.
Troy, a white ashpit
by the drizzling sea.
The drizzle tightens like the strings of a harp.

A man with clouded eyes picks up the rain
and plucks the first line of the *Odyssey*.
(*Collection of Poems* 413)

The poet impressively epitomizes the resemblance of the *Odyssey* in few lines. He retells the story of Homer's inspiration, as when the Trojan wars come to an end, the city of Troy becomes an ashpit carried by the sea, and the hair of beautiful Helen becomes a grey cloud, probably causing this drizzle from the sky to the sea surface. The heavy drizzling, thus, tightens up to shape the strings of a harp on which Homer sang his *Odyssey*. The metaphor of the last two lines recalls Homer's blindness, "A man with clouded eyes." It also compares the sharpness of rain drops to shafts and the lines of the *Odyssey* to eyes. So, the blind poet gets inspired by the shafts of rain to pluck the first line of the *Odyssey*.

Walcott's metaphorical expression reaches its highest ranks in his next poem, "Europa," through which he rigorously squeezes his intellectual abilities to extract all potentials of a great imagination. The insomniac narrator is aroused by the fierceness of a full moon night to imagine things around him. He imagines the metamorphoses of a tree to a girl's body bent in foam, and a black hump of a hill to a bull which incarnates Zeus. The moon which overlays the dark cloud which kept the distance between his two imaginary figures, therefore, the two shapes collide together. The poet claims that human horniness leads him to become more insightful about mysterious things like the identity of Gods, for example, Edward Baugh comments further on Europa:

By this manoeuvre, Walcott naturalizes classical mythology, brings it down to Caribbean earth. This process affirms the power of Caribbean imagination to inhabit the mythopoeic dimension. So Walcott can see himself as inheriting the torch: 'The flame has left the charred wick of the cypress; / the light will catch these islands in their turn'(FT 27). (Baugh, 158)

Walcott's next poem from *The Fortunate Traveler* is, "Greece," A title which hints at the content of the poem. The Caribbean narrator mentally surrounds himself with an atmosphere reflective of Greek mythology. He imagines himself climbing a rocky mountain past a site on his island which sounded like the cave where the maniac Cyclops hid with his sharp teeth, "calcareous molars" as jagged as the boulders of the mountain. The narrator is carrying a body around his shoulder and he explains further that this body is a book. Before he reaches the top, he looks down and envisions shaky rooted coconuts as "Trojans and Spartans," wearing helmets from a distance. Thence, he continues climbing the mountain, while groaning, as the sharp rocks have injured his hands. Now he is high enough to view the circling crows above the Homeric Aegean reflection of the Caribbean Sea. The narrator finally manages to reach to the top of this steep mountain, when the real story starts, where there is only him, stones and light. Getting a wider look at the sea from this height inspires the narrator to get rid of the burden of carrying the book. When he throws the book, the narrator frees himself from all the Greek monsters he used to

cram his mind with, like Hector and Achilles, whose pages are eventually scattered by the wind. Closing the poem, the narrator claims a new beginning inspired by the sunny weather and the sea within the Caribbean setting, and he writes on a blank stone "the sound for 'sea' and the sign for 'sun'" (*The Fortunate Traveler* 36). Even though, the end of the poem gives an implication that Walcott will no longer celebrate the Greeks in his works, it conveys his constant will on creating something great out of the collaboration of Greek myth and Caribbean setting. This dialogue between Walcott and himself, as Baugh refers, is a metapoetic device used by Walcott to fortify his identity as a Caribbean poet.

With few poems left, slightly evoking the Greeks and Homeric tradition, *The Fortunate Traveler* marks the end of this study of alternating native metaphors into classic emblems. In "From This Far," Walcott addresses modern Greek poet George Seferis, who translated the myths of Odysseus into modern Greek idioms. Through this poem Walcott elucidates that ancient gods do not belong to the Caribbean and that they were sent dead to his homeland. However, Walcott thinks that only powerful imagination can revive them to their miraculous existence on Caribbean soils. "Hurucan," is another poem in which Walcott celebrates the potential of an indigenous Caribbean mythology with the survival of the one and only Caribs God, "Hurucan," after whom Hurricanes were named.

Henceforth, the one hundred pages of the fortunate traveler's adventures closes, Walcott writes two more books, *Midsummer* in 1984 and *The Arkansas Testament* in 1987, before

he achieves his major success by the publication of his metapoetic book, *Omeros*. The poet, who has enormously been inspired by the horizon, enriches the Caribbean literature with his multifaceted genius of poesy and fulfills his duty towards the indigenous people by articulating their issues through his works. The delightful poetic journey he offers to his readers since his childhood to his maturity, as both poet and artist and above all human, strongly nominates him as Odysseus of the Caribbean, whose wanderings immortalize the experience of creating a whole civilization from naught. Throughout this journey he achieves the promise he vowed in his *Bounty* of life, "In maps the Caribbean dreams/ of the Aegean, and the Aegean of reversible seas" (*The Bounty* 62).

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**Alter/Native Landscape Metaphor of Homer's Aegean:
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