

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*: A Commentary

The Wiki*Omeros* Project

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Contents

[Overview](#)

[Commentary](#)

[Bibliography](#)

Overview

This is a version of the Wiki*Omeros* commentary as it currently stands, prepared for Adobe pdf format. It is searchable in Adobe Reader and can be printed out.

Entries are chronological. Glossarial entries are related to the first instance of the term in the text. The headwords (the term or quotation from the text) are followed by a parenthetical reference to the Book, Chapter and Section in which they appear. The [online commentary](#) is also fully searchable.

Primary texts are listed in the [Bibliography](#). Secondary and general reference works are identified in the commentary by an identifying code in parentheses, e.g. (Bib:OED) or (Bib:6); full details can be found in the [Bibliography](#).

Entries for inclusion in the commentary should be submitted on form linked from the Submissions section of the [WikiOmeros portal](#). Responses can be submitted directly from the online commentary.

Commentary

laurier-cannelle (1.I.i). A plant native to St Lucia. Botanical name *Aniba firmula*, the tree's common name on St Lucia consists of the French names of two aromatic plants, bay and cinnamon, both known and used for cooking and ritual since ancient times.

conch (1.I.i). Any of various tropical marine gastropod molluscs, especially of the genera *Strombus* and *Cassis*, with large, often brightly coloured spiral shells and edible flesh.

egret (1.I.i). 'Any of various wading birds similar to herons but usually having white plumage...' (Bib:CCD).

pirogue (1.I.ii). Flat bottomed boat traditionally used in the West Indies for fishing.

[...] **Philoctete. The sore on his shin/still unhealed (1.II.i).** The reference to Philoctete in conjunction to his as yet unhealed and unhealing wound is a link with Homer's Philoktetes who also had a wound in the *Iliad* (see *Iliad* 2:716-25)

frigate [bird] (1.I.i). The frigate bird, from tropical and subtropical seas. It has a long bill, a wide wingspan and a forked tail (Bib:CCD). See also **frigate [warship]**.

Gros Îlet (1.III.i). Northern tip of St Lucia, the location of Rodney Bay; also an island of Martinique, in the Carribean. The name is French for 'large island'. It is part of a group known as the Windward Islands and was the scene of a struggle between the French and English for colonial rule in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Bib:6)

NO PAIN/CAFÉ[...] "Is a prophecy" (2.III.ii). A pun on the French *pain* (bread), the name both suggests a place of relaxation and is an omen foretelling that the owner Ma Kilman will heal Philoctete's sore (6.XLIX.i) and help to ease Dennis Plunkett's grieving (7.LXI.i-iii).

mutual communion (1.V.i). The theme of religion within *Omeros* is one of the major conflicts in the text. Here, Walcott uses Christian terminology to link the Plunketts to their Christian beliefs.

Pigs. Orchids. (1.V.i). Here Walcott links *Omeros* to Homer's *Odyssey* by alluding to 'pigs' (what Circe turns men into) and 'orchids', relating to the island of the Lotus Eaters. Although they are not used in context here, their the text's intertextuality with the Epic Tradition is clear.

Glen-da-Lough (1.V.i). A village in County Wicklow in the Republic of Ireland. Used to explain Maud's heritage, Glen-da-lough also acts as a reference to conflict as it was destroyed by the English in 1398. Walcott fits Maud's homeland into two further themes of the text: naming and colonialism. Like St Lucia's Aruac name, Iounalao, Glen-da-lough, usually spelt Glendalough, has a meaning: 'Valley of two lakes', from the Gaelic *Gleann dá Loch* (Bib:DBP). Invaded by Henry II in 1171, Ireland remained under British rule until the island was partitioned in 1922 into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, a Dominion within the British Empire. Éire abolished the oath of loyalty to England in 1937, maintained neutrality during World War II and became the independent Republic of Ireland in 1949 (Bib:PWE).

khaki shirt/and capacious shorts in which he'd served with Monty (1.V.i). Walcott uses colour throughout *Omeros* to great effect. Here, the inclusion of 'khaki' carries overtones of colonialism as well as the military context to which it is applied here. 'Monty' is Bernard Law Montgomery, later First Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, commander of the British 8th Army in World War II, who defeated Rommel and the Afrika Korps at El Alamein in 1942 (Bib:PWE), a campaign in which Walcott's Major Plunkett fought.

Pro Rommel, pro mori (1.V.i). Latin, meaning 'For Rommel, for death'. Walcott's use of Latin carries echoes of the *Aeneid* and the foundation of Latin Italy. Erwin Rommel, a German general, led the Afrika Korps in North Africa and was defeated by the British at El Alamein in 1942 (Bib:PWE).

the phony pukka/tones of ex-patriates (1.V.i). 'Pukka' derives from the Hindi word 'pakka', meaning 'cooked, ripe or substantial', and in English means 'proper or genuine', of or appropriate to high or respectable society' (Bib:COD). Walcott's 'phony pukka' is an oxymoron, and the use of 'pukka' ironic: using this term to describe the genuine quality of expatriates from Britain is itself an echo of colonialism and its assimilation and destruction of other cultures. An expatriate is someone who, whether by choice, necessity or compulsion, lives away from his homeland, and so might be said, in keeping with Walcott's thematic structure, to be dispossessed of his 'genuine' place.

yellow dress (1.V.iii). An important image for Walcott. Represents Helen as well as being a traditional Caribbean colour.

Memento mori (1.V.iii). A Latin tag, translatable as 'Remember that you will die!', used from ancient times, thus a warning or reminder of the inevitability of death.

a boy on a pounding horse [...] so with our games (1.VI.i). In this part of Book VI, the narrator addresses Omeros, and makes a link between the games of Homeric times that feature in the *Iliad* (wrestling, racing), and the games that are taking place on this beach of St Lucia; here, then, the St Lucian islanders echo the classical heroes of Homer's poetry.

What the white manager mean to say [...] people nearly die (1.VI.i). Here Helen is shown not to be conforming to the social expectations of the white tourists: she is rude to them and resistant to the idea of tourism. This links to the fact that Walcott himself was not happy with tourism taking over the island of St Lucia. What comes across in this passage is Helen's voice ('she dint take no shit/from white people'), albeit not in direct speech, so that Walcott is shown to represent the voice of the colonised people. This passage links to the end of the narrative, when Helen has given in and become a waitress (7.LXIV.ii).

Change burns [...] in that space [...] sandals swung by one hand (1.VI.ii). Here Helen stands on a beach thinking about her troubles, having just revealed that she is pregnant. She has to make a decision about her future, 'to enter the smoke or to skirt it'. This may refer to a decision whether to go with/against the tourism taking over the island. She is in a 'space', seeming to be caught between the two worlds of St Lucian tradition and Western influence. She is also compared to 'white Helen' of Troy, whilst she herself is a 'black shadow'. This is an example of the black and white imagery recurrent throughout the poem.

Troy (1.VI.iii). Ancient city near Greece, destroyed by fire after a ten-year siege known as the Trojan War, as described in part in Homer's *Iliad*.

Scamander (1.VI.iii). God of the river in Greek mythology (Bib:4).

Agamemnon (1.VI.iii). Leader of the Greek army in the Trojan War.

Argonauts (1.VI.iii). A band of Greek heroes who helped Jason to search for the Golden Fleece in an ancient myth (Bib:4).

Etruscan lions (1.VII.i). A piece of Etruscan art, the Etruscans being a civilization from Italy prior to the Roman Empire (Bib:4).

sapodilla (1.VII.i). Evergreen tree which is native to tropical climates.

Conquistadores (1.VII.i). Spanish explorers and soldiers who colonized the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *Conquistador* is Spanish for 'conqueror'.

Antilles (1.VII.i). A group of islands in the Caribbean consisting of the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles (Bib:CCD).

van (1.VII.i). Hector's taxi or 'transport'. Hector has given up the traditional job of a fisherman to become a taxi driver for tourists.

porpoise (1.VII.iii). Any of several related aquatic mammals, such as the dolphin.

Ogun (1.IX.iii). Name of Yoruba god of iron and war; sometimes referred to as a blacksmith, and a close equivalent of Greek Hephaistos/Roman Vulcan. The Yoruba are a tribe/kingdom which originated in south west of Nigeria, but with pockets of offshoot tribespeople in Togo and the Republic of Benin. The language of the Yoruba people is also called Yoruba.

banyan (1.X.i). Name given by Europeans to the East Indian fig tree, whose branches drop shoots to the ground which take root and support the parent branches, thus covering a large area (Bib:OED). [HW]

allamanda (1.XI.ii). Tropical plant of the Americas, cultivated for its large, funnel-shaped, yellow flowers (Bib:OED). [HW]

bougainvillea (1.XII.i). A tropical plant whose flowers are almost concealed by large, leafy bracts.

Angelus (1.XII.ii). A devotional exercise of the Roman Catholic, commemorating the Incarnation of Christ into man, it consists of versicles, responses and the repetition three times of the Angelic Salutation. The Angelus is performed morning, noon and sunset and is marked by the ringing of the angelus bell (Bib:OED).

Castries (1.XIII.ii). The capital city and chief port of St. Lucia (Bib:CCD).

Afolabe (2.XIV.iii). Creole spelling of Afolabi, an African name of the Yoruba tribe name meaning 'One born of high status'.

frigate [warship] (2.XV.i). A medium-sized square-rigged warship of the 18th and 19th centuries (Bib:CCD), used in the Battle of the Saints. See also **frigate bird**.

Aruac (2.XVII.i). Aruac Indians lived on St Lucia before being dispossessed when the French bought the island in 1651 and, with their African slaves, began earnest colonization in 1746 (Bib:1, Bib:3). Aruac Indians also lived by the Lake of Maracaybo in Venezuela and, according to a collection of Spanish manuscripts, written between 1573 and 1575, these Aruac Indians were barbarous, living in huts and villages on the lake, and though not industrious, were very maritime, energetic fishermen (Bib:2).

the claim by native historians that Helen was its one cause (2.XVIII.i). The Battle of the Saints is again compared to the Trojan War, which in Greek mythology is claimed to be solely over Helen, but may have had wider political and economic causes.

Guadeloupe (2.XVIII.i). Guadeloupe is an archipelago of five islands located North of St Lucia in the eastern Caribbean Sea. Guadeloupe was a French haven during the Battle of the Saints, and was the intended destination of the fleeing French fleet. It is now an overseas department of France.

the sun's gold sovereign (2.XVIII.i). Pun on 'sovereign', meaning both monarch and a British gold coin worth £1. Vocabulary in this semantic field continues in this and the following stanza: 'gilding the coast', 'in Rodney's pocket', 'the cost'. Colonies were very valuable resources.

the Eastern Seaboard from Georgia to Maine (2.XVIII.i). The East Coast of the USA; Maine is the most northerly state on the coast, and Georgia is directly north of Florida. At the time of the Battle of the Saints this was British territory, but fighting for independence.

the Dutch islands (2.XVIII.i). Netherlands Antilles are two groups of islands, one off the coast of Venezuela, and the other between Puerto Rico and Guadeloupe. Walcott is probably referring to the latter, made up of Sint Eustatius, Saba and St. Maarten, which were captured variously by the British, French and Dutch in the later eighteenth century during the American Revolution. Sint Eustatius became rich by ignoring trade embargoes, selling arms to anyone willing to pay, notably American Revolutionaries.

New England colonies (2.XVIII.i). New England is in the north-east region of what is now the USA, including the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont,

notoriously sympathetic to the idea of independence from the British.

mare's tails (2.XVIII.i). Cirrus fibratus clouds: very high, wispy, 'fibrous' clouds that resemble horses' tails. Large numbers can indicate an approaching storm system.

block their mutinous harbours from arms and men (2.XVIII.i). The revolutionaries in New England were supplied by the French.

flock of V's (2.XVIII.i). Rodney's ticks are compared to the recurring sea swifts, drawing connections between Europe and the Americas.

like that stupid pretense that they did not fight for her face on a burning sea (2.XVIII.i). The Battle of the Saints is again compared to the Trojan War (cf. note: *the claim by native historians that Helen was its one cause* (2.XVIII.i)).

He had no idea how time could be reworded [...] their love of events (2.XVIII.i). The idea of being unsatisfied with a colonial or power-centred record of history and so creating a 'history of the people' was explored in the 'Subaltern Studies' of South Asia in the 1970s.

ziggurat (2.XVIII.i). An ancient Mesopotamian pyramid-shaped tower with a square base, rising in storeys of ever-decreasing size, similar in shape to ancient Central and South American temples by the Aztecs, Maya, &c.

Homeric repetition [...] they saw superstition (2.XVIII.i). Allusion to similarities seen by Plunkett between the Battle of the Saints and the Trojan War. Many of the prophecies in Homer could be taken by a cynic to be superstition accompanied by coincidences.

pig-farm [...] eyes calm as Circe (2.XVIII.i). In the *Odyssey*, Circe is witch who entrances her guests and turns them into pigs.

armoire (2.XVIII.i). From the French, a tall cupboard or wardrobe, originally used for storing weapons.

snake's head; serpentine (2.XVIII.i). Reference to the biblical serpent of Genesis, who tempted Eve (cf. note: *a second Eden with its golden apple* (2.XVIII.i)).

the island's beauty was in her looks (2.XVIII.i). Throughout *Omeros*, St Lucia and Helen are often compared, seen as symbolic of each other or even interchangeable.

a second Eden with its golden apple (2.XVIII.ii). The biblical Eden was lost through Eve's temptation by an apple offered to her by Satan in serpent form. The golden apple of Greek mythology was given by Paris to Aphrodite in preference to Hera or Athene, whose anger at this insult led ultimately to the Trojan War.

Judith (2.XVIII.ii). The biblical Judith killed Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army that had besieged the Jews, after dining with him, saving her people.

Susanna (2.XVIII.ii). The biblical Susanna was accused of adultery in a blackmail organised by lecherous elders who watched her bathing naked. The blackmail was eventually revealed and the elders put to death.

They're meant to help her people, ignorant and pure (2.XVIII.ii). Possible allusion to Kipling's 'White Man's Burden', seen by imperialists as moral justification for colonialism.

On its Caribbean side (2.XVIII.iii). The west side of the island. St Lucia is one of the most easterly of the Windward Islands. The east side of the island faces Africa.

forest of masts with Trojan pride (2.XVIII.iii). The Greek army sent to recapture Helen from Troy is reputed to have been made up of a thousand ships.

sea-grapes (2.XVIII.iii). *Coccoloba uvifera*, commonly known as the sea-grape. A bushy plant that grows near beaches in the Caribbean, it has large, thick leaves and fruit resembling grapes.

midden (2.XVIII.iii). Pile of refuse.

calabash (2.XVIII.iii). Tree whose fruit is used traditionally to make bowls.

Carthage [...] Pompeii [...] Troy (2.XVIII.iii). All ancient cities destroyed and rebuilt. **Pompeii:** a Roman city near modern-day Naples which was preserved in ash from a volcanic eruption from Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD and not rediscovered until 1748.

Compton (2.XX.i). Sir John George Melvin Compton KBE PC is the current Prime Minister of St Lucia. He led St Lucia to independence from the United Kingdom in February 1979.

Atlantic City (2.XXII.i). A town in New Jersey, USA, with many casinos. The reference implies similarities in St Lucia of a busy, westernised beach town, perhaps appropriately as St Lucia borders the Atlantic, and is also symbolic of western influence on the island, seen in the name imposed by the colonists.

Cadence, Country, Reggae (2.XXII.i). Symbolically western, European and American music are mingled with more traditional music of Jamaica with a particular cadence. **Cadence** (Bib:OED): '1b. The measure or beat of music, dancing, or any rhythmical movement... c. Local or national modulation, 'accent'. ... 4. *Music.* The conclusion or 'close' of a musical movement or phrase'. 'Country' refers to **country-and-western**, 'a type of music originating in the southern and western United States, consisting mainly of rural or cowboy songs accompanied by a stringed instrument such as the guitar or fiddle' (Bib:OED). **Reggae** is a 'kind of popular music, of Jamaican origin, characterized by a strongly accentuated off-beat and often a prominent bass; a dance or song set to this music' (Bib:OED).

Plunkett's towel (2.XXII.i). Helen unashamedly steals personal objects from her employers, the Plunketts. Dennis Plunkett recalls how he caught her trying on Maud's jewellery (2.XVIII.i), and Maud claims that the yellow dress Helen frequently wears was stolen ('She looks better in it [...] she stole', 1.V.iii), although Helen insists it was a gift from Maud. Here, there is erotic suggestion in the use of the towel around 'her nakedness', particularly as Plunkett is attracted to Helen and often fantasises about her (e.g., 'the V of a velvet back in a yellow dress', 2.XIX.iii).

clean feet [...] self-anointing (2.XXII.i). The language here evokes anointing with oils and bathing, particularly of the feet, which are key in the epics of Homer, particularly in the *Odyssey*. The rules of *xenia* shown by Homer suggest that a guest should be offered a bath as part of normal hospitality; and it is while bathing the disguised Odysseus that the nurse Eurykleia discovers his identity.

Seven Seas, whom he envied, who couldn't see/what was happening to the village (2.XXII.i). Achille envies Seven Seas for his inability to see the corruption and degradation of St Lucia by western influences. This echoes the way the Narrator envies blind Homer/Omeros for living in an age before modern society's downfall.

Murder throbbed in his wrists (2.XXII.i). This evokes the normal human pulse in wrist points, but also the expression of Achilles' murderous rage when robbed of someone dear to him (Patroklos) in dragging Hector's body in the dust and denying him proper burial (*Iliad* 22).

Yankee-cool-Creole (2.XXII.i). This displays Americanisation of the language as a metaphor for the westernising and changing of the island.

the way it whored/away a simple life that would soon disappear (2.XXII.i, cf. 'daughters to whores'). This suggests the cheapening of the island's values, but also references Helen of Troy, who was made an adulteress when she was given to Paris by Aphrodite. St Lucia's Helen alternately lives with Achille and Hector, and is pregnant by one or the other. [DD]

Soul Brothers (2.XXII.i). An afropop band, formed in 1974, who promoted a traditional type of African soul music (Bib:7).

those stars were too fixed in Heaven/to care [...] forgets a star (2.XXII.i). The Ancient Greeks believed that the dead are sometimes placed into the firmament as a constellation, e.g. Andromeda, a princess of Ethiopia, was placed into the stars as a memorial (Bib:8). Stars represent what is permanent, infinite and unchanging, in contrast with the island in its state of dramatic change. Even as the young turn away from the traditional culture of Africa and the canoes, dubbing it 'longtime shit', the island itself betrays its values and becomes westernised. Helen is metaphorically representative of this when she is seen as 'a meteor ... and her falling arc//crossed over the village'.

the title he gave his transport (2.XXI.i). Achille is here seen experiencing a premonition of the downfall of his friend through the movement of the stars above St Lucia. This mirrors the repeated instances of prediction in Homeric epic, for example when Teiresias the prophet of the Underworld predicts a solitary and difficult homecoming for Odysseus should his men eat the cattle of Helios (*Odyssey* 6:104-117). Foreboding and signs of the future in Homeric epic also often focus upon the skies, but rather than stars they are often told using thunderclaps, the movement of birds etc., for example an eagle is sent by Zeus in *Iliad* 8: 247-9. In Homeric epic auguries in the sky are sent by the gods to convey an omen to mortals. In *Omeros*, Achille notes the speedy and inexorable fall of a star (the star's end is wholly unavoidable, as by the time the movement of its light has reached Achille in St Lucia, the star has of course already fallen millions of light years away in space) and, connecting it to the name of Hector's car (the 'sixteen-seater passenger-van' which we will be told about in 2.XXII), 'he trembled'. Achille clearly recognises that in his change of transport, Hector has exchanged the traditional St Lucian way of life, represented by fishing and canoes, for modernity and a newer, westernised lifestyle and set of values. In doing so he has sealed his doom. Just as Hektor's fate is sealed from the beginning of Homer's *Iliad*, and made more certain by Patroklos' death, so is Walcott's Hector doomed after his purchase of the Comet. Achille expresses the inevitability of Hector's downfall through the simile of the last spark of light in a dying fire hissing out and the image of the falling star. Both presage Hector's death which will occur whilst driving his Comet (6, XLIV).

***Dominus illuminatio mea* (2.XXII.ii).** Meaning 'The Lord (is) my light' (Latin), these are the opening words of Psalm 27 in the Roman Catholic version.

Egypt delivered/back to itself (2.XXII.ii). Like St Lucia, Egypt has experienced periods of French and British rule. In 1882, governance of the country was taken over by the British and this continued until 1922, when Egypt became an independent monarchy (Bib:PWE). Walcott is also referring to Moses delivering the Hebrews from the subjugation of Egypt, as described in Exodus and Numbers (Bib:KJB).

India crumpling on its knees (2.XXII.ii). India was another colony of the British Empire, achieving independence in 1947 (Bib:PWE).

howdah'd elephant (2.XXII.ii). Howdah: 'A seat to contain two or more persons, usually fitted with a railing and a canopy, erected on the back of an elephant' (Bib:OED).

panoply (2.XXII.ii). 'a wide range or collection of different things' (Bib:CALD).

Gurkha (2.XXII.ii). The name of the Hindu ruling caste of Nepal since 1768, it also denotes a Nepalese soldier in the British or Indian Army (Bib:PWE).

Anzac (2.XXII.ii). Acronym of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, volunteers at the forefront of battle at the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915 (Bib:PWE).

Mountie (2.XXII.ii). 'a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police' (Bib:CALD).

Eden's Suez (2.XXII.ii). 'Suez' refers to the Suez Canal, which links Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Suez and the Red Sea, thus allowing trade between Europe and Asia without the need

to navigate around Africa. The canal was built (1859-69) by the Suez Canal Company, in which the British government became the major shareholder in 1875, and led to Egypt becoming an important centre for trade (Bib:PWE). Eden here refers to Anthony Eden (1897–1977), First earl of Avon, who was Prime Minister of Great Britain during the Suez Crisis, an ill-advised attack on Egypt by Israel, Britain and France following President Nasser's nationalisation the Suez Canal in 1956 (Bib:PWE).

Alexandria (2.XXII.ii). Alexandria is a port and city in Egypt, founded by Alexander the Great. Its Pharos lighthouse, built in the third century B.C., was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was also a great seat of learning, and housed a great library, reputedly containing 700,000 volumes (Bib:PWE).

muezzin (2.XXII.ii). 'a man who calls Muslims to prayer from the tower of a mosque (= Muslim holy building)' (Bib:CALD).

Himalayan hill stations (2.XXII.ii). The Himalayas are a mountain range in Asia, separating the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau. Hill stations are towns in the low mountains, popular as holiday resorts during the hot season (Bib:COD). All three countries surrounding the Himalayas have a colonial history: British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan at its independence in 1947; Tibet, conquered by Genghis Khan in 1206, was nominally ruled by the Mongol empire until 1720, when sovereignty passed to China. Some areas of Tibet were absorbed into British India, but subsequently reverted to Chinese governance in 1906; Tibet was declared an autonomous region of China in 1951 and attempts to gain independence were suppressed (Bib:PWE).

lanyard (2.XXII.ii). A short rope or cord used to fasten something to secure it (Bib:OED).

armature (2.XXII.ii). Framework (from French).

All in a night's work he saw them simply as twins (2.XXII.ii). Possibly a reference to the constellation Gemini, the stars Castor and Pollux. In Greek mythology, these are the twins sons of Zeus and the mortal Leda (Bib:10); in the *Iliad*, Castor and Polydeukes are the brothers of Helen of Troy, whose absence from the battlefield she observes from the walls of Troy (3.236-8).

his anger (2.XXII.iii). Link with Achilles' anger in the *Iliad*: 'Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles' (1:1).

her pride/shook free of the neck (2.XXII.iii). A metaphor for Helen's hair; women's hair was important in classical epic, e.g. 'lovely-haired girls' (*Odyssey* 6:222).

she wished//for a peace beyond her beauty, past the tireless/quarrel over a face that was not her own fault (2.XXII.iii). A reference to Helen of Troy and her regret at the war that was fought over her (e.g. *Iliad* 3:172-80). Helen's beautiful face has been celebrated in literature, e.g. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (variously dated between 1590 and 1604), referring to Helen of Troy, or as Marlowe had it 'Helen of Greece': 'Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,/And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?' (V:i:97-8).

Achille was angrily filled/with a pity beyond his own pain (2.XXII.iii). This evokes both Achilles' anger (*Iliad* 1:1) and the point when his mother, Thetis, encourages him to feel empathy for Priam when she 'stirred the passion for weeping' (23:14).

fig-trees (2.XXII.iii). Fig trees occur in classical mythology, e.g. Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers who traditionally founded the city of Rome, were suckled by a wolf under a fig tree (Bib:11). A fig-tree sacred to Romulus grew near the Forum in classical Rome (Bib:12) and fig trees occur at various points in classical epic, e.g. the fig tree past which Achilles chases Hector (*Iliad* 22:145-6), and the enormous fig tree which is home to Charybdis (*Odyssey* 12:101-4). In *Paradise Lost*, following Genesis (3.7), Adam and Eve select leaves from the fig tree to cover their postlapsarian nakedness (9:1099-1115), and because of this the fig is thought by some Jewish authorities to have been the forbidden fruit itself

(Bib:13). In the East and West Indies, the term fig is popularly used to denote the banana and cochineal cactus (Bib:OED).

carillon (2.XXIII.i). 1. A set of bells played either by manual action or machinery. 2. 'An air or melody played on the bells' (Bib:OED).

The Church of Immaculate Conception (2.XXIII.i). A common church name in Roman Catholicism, referring to Mary's conception of Jesus [HW] without sin (Bib:COD).

St. Pierre (2.XXIII.i). French equivalent of St Peter, one of the twelve apostles and ordained leader of the Church by Christ, it is also the name of one of a group of French-owned islands off the east coast of Canada, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. This was fought over by the English and French, much like St Lucia.

Vigie promontory (2.XXIII.i). A headland of St Lucia.

river-horses (3.XXV.i). The river-horse is a colloquial term for the hippopotamus.

The endless river (3.XXV.i). This river is redolent of Acheron, the Underworld river which Aeneas must cross in order to speak to his dead father in *Aeneid* 6.

clamped his neck in cold iron (3.XXV.i). Chilling allusion to the chains of slavery.

the prow found its stake [...] piglet [...] sweet-grunting sow (3.XXV.ii). Reference to a repeated prophecy in *The Aeneid* (III 528-32; VIII 58-64, 111-13), suggesting having reached 'home', or a 'haven after toil'.

he knew by that walk [...] himself in his father [...] the widening hands (3.XXV.ii). Reference to the recognition scenes in Homer's *Odyssey* (e.g. XVI 188-219; XIX 467-75; XXIII 205-8). Also suggests similar basis of recognition (e.g. Helen and Menelaos, IV 149-50).

the hair was surf [...] frowning river [...] the sticks of the pier (3.XXV.iii). Personification of a river may be a reference to Homer's *Iliad* XXI 212-382, although here the water is far less violent and being used for descriptive purposes.

"Afo-la-be" [...] What does the name mean? [...] only the ghost of a name (3.XXV.iii). The idea that naming is significant, and gives power and control, is a link to *Paradise Lost* VII 251-2; VIII 272-3, 338-54.

no answer (3.XXV.iii). In previous epics, the purpose of the underworld trip is to find answers, whereas this suggests that such a trip is futile.

where the past was reflected/as well as the future (3.XXV.iii). A vision of the future is a reference to *Aeneid* 6:910-1218, re-enforcing the idea that reconnecting with earlier generations gives knowledge and understanding. The vision of the past here is an addition by Walcott, but suited to this epic because Achilles's real need is to understand his past, not his future.

the hut he had been given/for himself and any woman he chose as his companion (3.XXVI.i). A reversal of Agamemnon's statement in *Iliad* 1:184-5.

withdrew in discontent./He brooded on the river (3.XXVI.ii). A link with Achilles from books 1 to 17 of the *Iliad* (e.g. 1:488-9).

the dawn-sadness which ghosts have for their graves (3.XXVI.ii). Expresses a sentiment similar to Achilles in *Odyssey* XI 487-91.

Fingers of light (3.XXVI.iii). Similar rhetoric to the Homeric style, e.g. *Iliad* 1:477.

prediction and memory (3.XXVII.i). This can be read as a reference to the prolepsis and analepsis used throughout earlier epic poetry.

Then war/came [...] the archers (3.XXVII.i). Slaves were taken either in raids or open warfare, or traded from other tribes. The use of the words 'war' and 'archers' carries epic resonances; slaving raids are *Omeros*' equivalent of the epic's siege of Troy.

Then he returned [...] Both had disappeared (3.XVII.ii). A situation that echoes *Aeneid* 2:959-71, although, unlike Aeneas, Achille has no responsibility for the child and dog.

The tinkle from coins of the river, the tinkle of irons (3.XXVII.ii). Walcott is contrasting images for lost freedom (irons) and profit (coins), highlighting the profit made in human suffering; both a reference to the wealth of the slave traders and the African tribes that willingly sold their own.

griot (3.XXVII.ii). Pronounced *gri-oh*: West African travelling musician, poet and storyteller (Bib:COD), thus an equivalent of the bard. 'A member of a class of travelling poets, musicians, and entertainers in North and West Africa, whose duties include the recitation of tribal and family histories; an oral folk-historian or village story-teller, a praise-singer' (Bib:OED).

He foresaw their future. He knew nothing could change it (3.XVII.ii). Walcott's addition to the ideas of fate/prophesy contained in the previous epics.

He walked slowly back [...] from the bark bowl (3.XVII.iii). Council meetings feature in every epic (*Iliad* 1:54-305; *Odyssey* 2:6-259; *The Aeneid* 11:319-625; *Paradise Lost* 2:1-504, 3:56-343).

boys who played war (3.XVII.iii). Similar to *Aeneid* V 706-777, although more disturbing in this context.

An oar (3.XVII.iii). The mention of a single oar echoes Odysseus' final journey as described in *Odyssey* 11:121-34, although it also has literal significance because a single oar would be used to guide Achille's pirogue.

death of a brother (3.XVII.iii). As experienced by Achilleus in *Iliad* 18:22-7, 80-2 (although Patroklos was not his brother, they had a similar bond); in both the *Iliad* and *Omeros* the grief spurs Achilleus/Achille to action.

Then a cord[...] heel [...] He fell hard (3.XVII.iii). A reference to Achilleus' heel as his weak spot. This is not sourced from an epic text on The Epic Tradition module but from a later poem written by the Roman poet Statius (Bib:4). Achilles' heel was the only area that remained vulnerable as this was where Thetis held him when he was submerged in the Styx. He is killed by a fatal arrow wound to his heel by Paris (Bib:14c).

bow (3.XVII.iii). Especially when paired with the oar, this can be read as a reference to Odysseus' bow in *Odyssey* 21:11-41, 393-426; however, in *Omeros*, the archer was not saved by his bow, unlike Odysseus.

Monodic (3.XXIX.i). An ode for 1 actor in a Greek play; a poem in which the speaker or poet mourns a death; a style of musical composition having only one melodic line.

Veined mesh of Agamemnon (3.XXIX.i). Contrast here to how Klytaimestra and her lover Aigosthos felt after murdering Agamemnon her husband. The words 'song' and 'twitter' infer joy on Klytaimestra's part, while Helen is mourning with a 'moan' coming from the 'hole in her heart'. Both women are responsible for the deaths of their men (Helen believes Achille has drowned), but display two different reactions.

Not Helen now, but Penelope [...] because he had not come back (3.XXIX.i). Reference to Penelope who waited ten years for her husband Odysseus to return home after the Trojan War (Bib:4). This offers a direct comparison between Helen and Penelope, Odysseus' wife; where earlier Walcott has contrasted Helen with a bad wife (Klytaimestra), he is now comparing her to a good wife, Penelope.

Manumission (3.XXIX.iii). The freeing of slaves, emancipation.

Kings lost their minds [...] Fatel Rozack (3.XXIX.iii). Walcott is using various historical events here to make a timeline:

- 'Kings lost their minds': (too many to choose from; don't know which mad king to include!)
- 'Jesuit [...] Veracruz': a Jesuit convent in Veracruz, Mexico, burned down in 1606
- 'Sephardic merchant [...] Lima Curacao': reference to Jews escaping from the Spanish Inquisition (1470s–mid-16th century)
- 'Wilberforce': William Wilberforce (1759-1833), British Member of Parliament influential in abolishing slavery
- 'Darwin [...] sea': Charles Darwin (1809 -1882), British naturalist. His early research on evolution published in the 1840s and 1850s.
- 'Madrasi [...] Fatel Rozack' (1845): the first immigrant ship to the Caribbean (1845). It brought indentured Indian workers. 'Madrasi' refers both to the region of India where the workers were from and the colourful traditional cotton fabric for which the area is famous. The region is now known as Chennai.

"Buffalo Soldier." [...] the black soldier [...] it was Achille's (3.XXXI.i). Lines from Buffalo Soldier, a song by reggae artist Bob Marley from the album *Legend* (1984). Extract from the lyrics:

Buffalo soldier, dreadlock rasta:
There was a buffalo soldier in the heart of america,
Stolen from africa, brought to america,
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.

I mean it, when I analyze the stench –
To me it makes a lot of sense:
How the dreadlock rasta was the buffalo soldier,
And he was taken from africa, brought to america,
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.

Said he was a buffalo soldier, dreadlock rasta -
Buffalo soldier in the heart of america.

If you know your history,
Then you would know where you coming from,
Then you wouldnt have to ask me,
Who the eck do I think I am.

Im just a buffalo soldier in the heart of america,
Stolen from africa, brought to america,
Said he was fighting on arrival, fighting for survival;
Said he was a buffalo soldier win the war for america.

Walcott uses the lyrics of the song to illustrate the situation and history of most blacks in the Caribbean: where they came from, what they were brought for, &c. This fits with the theme of displacement and searching for home and history which is a common thread through the entire poem.

Sioux (3.XXXI.iii). A term for the Dakota Indian people of North America (Bib:COD). Walcott depicts the enforced relocation of the Sioux people, leaving their land to the European colonisers, in the passages focussed on Catherine Weldon in Chapters 34 and 35.

zouk (6.XLV.i). Walcott is referring to a popular music style that blends Caribbean and Western influences, thus attempting to show how the two worlds can meet without conflict. Significantly, this style of music is heavily underpinned by the use of drums creating underlying tension through the din of war.

but he stayed [...] facing the altar (6.XLV.i). This image of momentary paralysis mirrors that of Achilles in Book 9 of the *Iliad* as he reflects on the fate of man, questioning the heroic warrior code. In this example however Walcott takes the action or, more rightly, inaction as part of Holy Mass, a mark of immense reverence, and subverts it to convey 'remorse'.

a concrete/future ahead of it all (6.XLV.ii). This image refers to the development of the island as a tourist destination threatening its traditional roots. This can be seen as an example of prolepsis: Walcott is making a prophecy. This forms part of the ongoing tension between construction and deconstruction as the 'afterglow of empire' requires dismantling if the island is to grow in national self-hood.

Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise? (6.XLV.ii). Walcott overtly subverts the concept of 'paradise' through the antithetical image of 'poverty' as the two states are polarized; paradise represents an incessant natural supply and self-sufficiency, whilst poverty counters this. This can be seen as a reference to the apparent corruption of the island through tourism, which paradoxically has impoverished the soul of the island.

the gold sea//flat as a credit-card (6.XLV.ii). Significantly, through this image Walcott attempts to unite the tourist and largely capitalist world with the natural beauty of St Lucia, suggesting the two have to be compatible if the island is to survive. The chip of the credit-card serves to evoke the glimmering of the sun's rays on the sea. This image, however, is ambivalent as a credit-card has limitations in that it is only meant to be a temporary safe-guard, which is itself often abused. This limitation extends to the beauty of the island itself as it can only withstand so much destruction.

Cut to a leopard [...] droning its missal. Cut (6.XLV.iii). This example of syntactical parallelism makes this part of the poem resemble a film script in that the imperative 'cut' is directive. This serves to increase the shift and pace in imagery as Walcott presents a kaleidoscopic image of a chase.

Mer was both mother and sea (6.XLV.iii). In French *mer* denotes 'sea' and is phonologically similar to *mère* denoting 'mother'. Here Walcott is linguistically associating natural imagery with the impact of colonisation as he personifies the French tongue as standing for 'both mother and sea'. Thus the island has been bound by the tongue of the possessors. This pairing of sea and mother also parallels Thetis in the *Iliad*, who is both a sea-nymph and Achilles' mother.

no Homeric shadow (6.LIV.ii). Here particularly, although it occurs elsewhere in the text, the image of the shadow represents for the Narrator both the influence of classical epic on the text and its effect on his life.

[Whole chapter] (7.LVII). The episode with the ferryman echoes Virgil's description of the journey across the river Styx (*Aeneid* 6).

hotel (7.LVII.i). St Lucia itself is represented as a hotel, as tourism has appropriated the coastline.

Greek calypso (7.LVII.i). A calypso is a popular kind of satirical West Indian ballad (Bib:CCD); here, Walcott also refers to Kalypso, who holds Odysseus captive on her island (*Odyssey* 5 and 6:245-47).

I heard my own thin voice [...] steadying its wing (7.LVII.i). The Narrator is taking on the role of the bard from Omeros/Seven Seas, as Odysseus does from Demodokos (*Odyssey* 9:2-15).

blinded saint (7.LVII.i). Lucia: 'Feminine form of the old Roman given name *Lucius*, which is probably derivative of Latin *lux* "light"... St Lucia of Syracuse, who was martyred in 304, was a very popular saint in the Middle Ages; she is often represented in medieval art as blinded and with her eyes on a platter, but the tradition that she had her eyes put out is probably based on nothing more than the association between light and eyes' (Bib:DFN). This is also a reference to the convention of blind poets (e.g. Homer, Milton, Seven Seas) in the epic tradition.

wild wife (7.LVII.i). A reference to Helen of Troy.

stitches its tapestry (7.LVII.i). A reference to Helen of Troy, stitching her tapestry of the Iliadic conflict (*Iliad* 3:125-8).

Comte de Grasse (7.LVII.iii). French admiral who joined the fleet for Count d'Estaing in the Caribbean and distinguished himself in the battle for St Lucia in 1780.

Menelaus (7.LVII.iii). Menelaos in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, an Achaian warrior and the husband of Helen of Troy, whose bid to reclaim her from Paris starts the Trojan War. He is portrayed as a wise leader and brave fighter, particularly in his recovery of the body of Patroklos.

strutting a parapet (7.LVII.iii). Reminiscent of the *teichoscopeia* in *Iliad* 3, when Helen of Troy stands at the top of a tower and overlooks the conflict below.

schism/of a starfish (7.LIX.i). A schism is a rent or breach, also used to describe disunity in the Christian church. The starfish, like the sea swift, makes the shape of the sign of the cross.

the Golden Fleece (7.LIX.i). The saga of the quest for the Golden Fleece by Jason and the crew of the Argo. Guarded by a dragon, the fleece became 'a goal for a hero's quest' (Bib:14a).

the wanderings of Gilgamesh (7.LIX.i). *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, probably composed in the later second millennium BC, and thus predating Homer, is a Babylonian epic concerning the 'myth of the flood', so a variant on the Hebrew story of the flood and Noah's ark. Gilgamesh was an historical figure who ruled Uruk (Modern Warka, in Central Iraq), and in the text has parallels with the heroic figures of Odysseus and Hercules (Bib:14b).

It was an epic where every line was erased//yet freshly written (7.LIX.i). A comment on the oral epic tradition? Myths/stories would be slightly altered through each oral transmission as they were passed on.

sough (1.59.i). The word can mean 'A rushing or murmuring sound' and 'A small gutter for draining off water' (Bib:OED), so it is, perhaps, a pun.

the scream of a warrior losing his only soul/to the click of a Cyclops, the eye of its globing lens (1.59.iii). The single lens of the camera is likened to the single eye of the Cyclops (Polyphemos) from *Odyssey* 9 (cf. 'taking/his soul with their cameras', 1.I.i).

'somewhere people interfering/with the course of nature' (7.LX.i). A reference to Dido's attempted sabotage of Aeneas' voyage in *Aeneid* 4. Walcott recasts Dido's all-consuming fury and calls on the gods to create a storm as a capitalist desire to crush Achille and the 'little man', seen later in Achille's anger at the trawlers.

Seven Seas [...] Nature (7.LX.i). We see here how Walcott portrays the ecological problems of modern times, where the balance in Nature is constantly threatened by men. Note once again Walcott's ecological focus.

the scarves of the sybil (7.LX.i). This evokes the Sybil who guards the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6.

he felt betrayed/by his calling (7.LX.i). Achille's self-questioning is akin to that of his namesake in book nine of the *Iliad* (9:318). Walcott ultimately appears to agree with Homer that these moments of self-reflection are overcome in times of extreme emotion, and that we cannot deny our innate purpose or destiny; Achille continues fishing to provide for Helen, and Achilleus returns to battle to help his people after the death of Patroklos.

the sea had to live,//because it was life (7.LX.i). Walcott uses the sea as a metaphor for life itself, and the permanence of life; note the last line of the poem.

like another Aeneas,/founding not Rome but home (7.LX.i). Compare Aeneas' flight from Troy and journey in *Aeneid* 1. Aeneas flees with a symbol of the past (Anchises), the future (Ascanius) and his culture (figurines of the gods). Likewise, Achille attempts to flee with his own culture (his fishing boat),

and a strong symbol of his past (Philoctete, and his freshly healed wound).

the memory sent//a spear into his chest (7.LX.i). Walcott inverts the Virgilian principle of looking to the future to understand one's present: as a postmodernist and a realist, Walcott recognises that this is impossible. Instead, Achille must reconcile his past to understand and appreciate his present.

the phantom of a vanishing race/of heroes (7.LX.ii). Once again, Achille is comparable to Aeneas, presiding over the obliteration of the Trojans.

'Baleine' (7.LX.iii). 'Whale' (French).

He has seen the shut face of thunder, [...] from this life and the other (7.LX.iii). Like Aeneas, Achille has emerged wiser from the Underworld, and after painful reconciliation with his dead ancestors, he has returned home. Cf. 'scarves of the sybil' (7.60.i).

the khaki dog stretched at his feet (7.LXIII.i). This evokes Odysseus' old and faithful dog Argos (*Odyssey* 17:290-327); the khaki dog is a guide of sorts for the blind Seven Seas.

new Helen (7.LXIII.i). This is ambiguous: it suggests the island's new beginnings and resolution of identity, and also refers to Christine as a more pure and innocent Helen who has not been 'colonized' or corrupted.

"legitimate" (7.LXIII.i). This implies that Christine has a sense of identity and is grounded in her roots, and also seems to contrast pointedly with Helen's illegitimate child.

"She very obedient. She will make a good maid" (7.LXIII.i). This is reminiscent of Lavinia in *The Aeneid*, through whom Virgil reassesses the archetypal woman and suggests subservience as a quality that the perfect Roman woman should embody. The term 'maid' is a pun, implying Christine's sexual purity as well as Ma Kilman's overt sense of the girl's suitability for domestic service (cf. **"legitimate"**, 7.LXIII.i).

Cherokee (7.LXIII.i). A member of an Iroquoian North American Indian people, formerly inhabiting much of the southern USA (Bib:OED). The Cherokees were evicted from their homeland by the Indian Removal Act of 1830, a resettlement known as the Trail of Tears, to which Walcott refers in 4.XXV.i. Cf. Sioux (3.XXXI.iii) and Choctaw (7.LXIII.i).

Choctaw (7.LXIII.i). A Muskogean North American Indian people, originally living in Mississippi and Alabama (Bib:OED). Like the Cherokee and Sioux, the Choctaw tribe was evicted from their homeland by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

as if she were the sun (7.LXIII.ii). Helen seems to give out light/glow with pregnancy and the prospect of birth and giving hope.

"songez?" (7.LXIII.ii). Second person plural, present tense of French *songer* meaning 'to dream'. *Songer à* means 'to consider' and *songer que* 'to remember'; here the interrogation mark, and the use of colloquial language reflecting the St Lucians' everyday speech, suggests that this is an abbreviated question (*songez-vous?*), implying the interpretation '(do you) remember?'

chanterelle (7.LXIII.ii). An edible woodland mushroom which has a yellow funnel shaped cap and a faint smell of apricots (Bib:COD). Walcott puns in the term 'the song of the chanterelle'. The word is made up of French *chanter*, 'to sing', and the feminising *elle*, 'she' and thus suggests a female singer. The *OED* also notes another, obsolete, meaning of chanterelle: 'A decoy bird. (In quot. A female partridge used as a decoy.)' (Bib:OED).

the original fault (7.LXIII.ii). A reference to the Christian concept of original sin, and perhaps to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Seven Seas struggles to remember what it was that originally corrupted St Lucia, which contrasts with the wide recognition of the transgression of Adam and Eve.

her hyphen stitched its seam (7.LXIII.iii). An idea common in epic texts, for example Penelope stitching her tapestry (*The Odyssey*) and Helen weaving her web (*The Iliad*). The creation of art by the characters parallels the creation of the text by Walcott. Here, the stitcher is the sea-swift, crossing the seas; the bird is presented as a 'hyphen' linking the continents, one of a variety of metaphorical references linking natural images with the practicalities of language, writing and typesetting used by Walcott (cf. e.g. 'asterisks of rain', 7.LXIV.i, and 'freshly written in sheets of exploding surf', 1.59.i).

laurel (7.LXIII.iii). In classical times, a wreath of laurel was traditionally awarded as a token of victory or preeminence (Bib:COD). Here, in the phrase 'no other laurel but the *laurier-cannelle*'s', Walcott suggests the victory of the native/natural elements of St Lucia. Laurel is also known as bay (Bib:OED) and sacred to Apollo (Bib:9), cf. various references to laurel trees and garlands in the *Aeneid*, e.g.: a laurel stands near the altar in Troy (3:667-9); the winners in the funeral games of Anchises are crowned with laurel (5:319, 694-5); Latinus' people, the Laurentines, are named for the laurel tree in the palace, which is dedicated to Apollo, and it is here that the first omen of Aeneas' arrival takes place (7:78-93).

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