

The Gulf Stream and the Epic Drives of Joyce and Walcott

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Epic forms continually reappear in both Ireland and the Caribbean. From Patrick Kavanagh, Eiléan Ni Chuilleanain, and Seamus Heaney in Ireland to Mary Seacole, Alejo Carpentier, and Wilson Harris in the Caribbean, the literary frameworks of modern epics suggest a common impetus to relocate ancient cultural paradigms to modern uses of wandering and return, exile, and displacement at the opposite edges of the North Atlantic. While the connections between Joyce and Walcott may seem the most obvious in their collective indebtedness to ancient epics, in fact a more obscure but shared historical metaphor of the sea in general and a use of the Gulf Stream in particular highlights the relation between these two authors.

The connections between Joyce and Walcott have largely escaped critical attention, both in the Joyce industry and in Caribbean Studies.¹ A treatment, brief though it is, of the relation between these two writers comes in Sheldon Brivic's essay, "Toni Morrison's Funk in *Finnegans Wake*." Brivic calls *Omeros* a "pan-African Homeric epic of the dispossessed" (159). He accurately assesses the relation between Joyce and Walcott. He writes,

Walcott's persona visits Europe and reacts to it as a colonized subject. In Lisbon (Chapter 37) and in London (Chapter 38), he finds oppressive images of religious and imperial authority; but in Ireland (Chapter 39), he feels empathy with people who have had their land and their language taken from them (198–199). This helps him to hail Joyce as "our age's Omeros" and say "I blessed myself in his voice" (200). When the Walcott figure joins some singers in a pub, he senses the presence of Joyce's spirit encouraging them . . . the line "Mr Joyce / led us

all” (201) implies that Joyce is the leader of an inclusive grouping of Walcott’s generation of writers. Joyce, then, is a pioneer in the movement of literary consciousness away from the West. (160)

Brivic is right to suggest that Joyce as a colonial writer seeks out non-Western subaltern images. Given Joyce’s interest in parallax technique, of continually examining an object from multiple directions, perhaps he was not simply looking away from the West but was perhaps even looking toward the base of the Gulf Stream to another archipelago, another chain of islands that provides an origin of water that washes Ireland’s shores. The Gulf Stream links Ireland with a chain of islands at the opposite edge of the North Atlantic. We can then place Joyce and Ireland not simply within a European context but (as Walcott writes Joyce) within a Caribbean one.

The marginal settings of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* provide a striking redress to ideas of high culture so often identified with literature, specifically literature that takes epic formulations as a starting point. As Wollaeger suggests, “relations between dominant powers and specific cultural practices are, at a given historical moment, both various and subject to historical variation” (84). These variations suggest a difficulty in assessing the subtleties of history within and between each work. Within their use of history, of the sea, and of the Gulf Stream, however, the idea of wandering becomes paramount for Joyce and Walcott. Édouard Glissant imagines the importance of errantry specifically in reference to epic literatures.² Errantry means wandering (French *errant*: Latin *errare*: to wander). Glissant explains,

The great founding books of communities, the *Old Testament*, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Chansons de Geste*, the Icelandic *Sagas*, the *Aeneid* [and] the African epics, were all books about exile and often about errantry. This epic literature is amazingly prophetic. It tells of the community, but, through relating the community’s apparent failure or in any case its being surpassed, it tells of errantry as temptation (the desire to go against the root). (15)

What Glissant comes to above is the notion of the importance and recurrence of errantry, of wandering, as a common temptation within epic paradigms. He embraces the idea of rootedness for cultures and individuals but challenges the dominance of a singular or totalitarian root. Paradoxically, it is this singular or totalitarian root that provides a catalyst for errantry, for wandering. Joyce's and Walcott's use of errantry becomes revealed not only in this desire to explore and to move beyond the boundaries of conventional literary and cultural expectation but also in their intentional accent on accidental correspondence. Their modulations of peculiar coincidence provide each text with expressive mews that become labyrinthine in their capacity to challenge readers to discover and deny potential meaning.

Joyce and Walcott embrace errantry in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. Although both writers share a sense of literary inheritance from the Greeks, the relation between the two writers and their use of errantry appears more significant with their treatments of history, geography, and the sea.³ An examination of Joyce and Walcott shows that each writer becomes increasingly captivated by the notion of wandering, whether it is a physical or psychological manifestation of movement, from Stephen's psychic movement on the beach in the "Proteus" episode to Achille's journey back to Africa, to the ancestors who sell him and fail to remember his absence or even to Plunkett's journey of historical creation. Glissant's maxim that "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (11) thus becomes a paradigm for considering Stephen, Achille, and Plunkett, Ireland and the Caribbean, as dynamic characters and organisms of literary relation. What remains important is not the beginning position of either character or either author; what becomes increasingly clear is that their "rootedness" in Dublin and in Saint Lucia falls to the background and what emerges in the forefront are the movements of each author to the European and North American mainlands respectively, and the chartings of various courses apparent in their texts and in their characters specifically.⁴ Glissant inquires about just such a role for modern epics in his work:

I began wondering if we did not still need such founding works today, ones that would use a similar dialectics of rerouting, asserting, for example, political strength but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, all in all, a Poetics of Relation. (16)

Glissant considers the role of epic literature in its ancient formulations and wonders whether it might be useful today. Joyce and Walcott partially answer his question with their works of relation. Neither Joyce nor Walcott is interested in representations of political strength and outright nationalisms in their books, for both writers are far too sophisticated not to realize the dangers for the artist inherent in that direction. In their embracing of errantry in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* which is not “a resolute act of resentment or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment” (18) but rather a desire to explore relation to the Other that undermines the hierarchies of center and margin, core and periphery, both Joyce and Walcott suggest that comparison happens at points of difference and those very differences operate as veiled connections between individuals and cultures. Hence, relation becomes a shared enterprise that becomes a most salient opportunity of “exchange” (8). A comparativist approach to examining the relation between Joyce and Walcott does not seek a simplistic relationship, i.e., identical responses to social or political conditions, but rather, it seeks versions of the same, not absolute similarity. Joyce and Walcott are each highly localized writers, though each left his homeland, and what they both ultimately discover is that the effort to escape any labyrinth, whether it be of culture, nation, or history, only makes you its prisoner.

Within their portraits of errantry, both Joyce and Walcott incorporate history and more specifically the nightmare of history into their narratives. History in *Ulysses* springs to the eye of even the most inexperienced reader almost immediately. What becomes perhaps the most salient connection in the *Telemachiad*, the first three chapters of the novel, and one that Joyce uses later in the work, is the use of the sea, in all of its snot-green, “scrotumtightening” nastiness, as a metaphor for history itself.

In fact, the sea is associated explicitly with a moment in Greek history that assured Greek independence from the threat of Persian domination when in the first episode of *Ulysses* Mulligan says “Thalatta! Thalatta!” (U 1.80), a reference to Xenophon’s *Anabasis*.

The encounter with history in *Ulysses* is easily connected to Glissant’s notion of “errantry.” Joyce’s novel as a whole is a movement away from the centralizing, hierarchical drive of narration so critical to the apotheosis of nineteenth-century literary formations of the novel. Joyce’s inclusivity of theme, subject, character, tone, and technique (into a realm approaching literary infinity) charts a course at once in many directions. Within this wildly innovative and dramatically challenging approach, Joyce incorporates a centralizing metaphor of the sea as a repository of history. While the first pages of *Ulysses* even demonstrate Joyce’s technique, what is perhaps more interesting and certainly more instructive for our purposes is “Proteus,” the locus where Dedalus walks upon Sandymount Strand encountering the sea and history at once.

Stephen’s nightmare of history becomes most personalized in this episode. He is a man haunted and wounded by the past, and precisely because of that haunting, he continues to search for its origins. Stephen’s errantry is not a rejection of his origins but a means through which to engage them. His is not a desire to return but a necessary dialectical “re-routing.” Seidel explains,

“Proteus” is a narration of double worlds, real and mythic, departures, delays, blockings, multiple identities, multiple *loci*. It is an initiatory fable . . . at the heart of the legend is the revelation and transfer of both practical and prophetic knowledge. The legend is engaging because its mechanisms are ambiguous. It mirrors the struggle it is about. Mastery of shapeless forms can never be simple. (109)

The mastery of shapeless forms can also be seen as the mastery of cultural connection and literary inheritance.

For the sea in the “Proteus” episode becomes a metaphor for history itself, not only for the history of Ireland, but for the history of the Dedalus family. Both of these histories function as metaphorical, if not

also typically Joycean comic, territories of affliction. Stephen imagines his father's thoughts on his mother's relations: "O, weeping God, the things I married into! De boys up in de hayloft . . . Highly respectable gondoliers" (*U* 3.65–67). In a striking movement, after the encounter with the imperial minds of Haines and Deasy and the cultural apologist that is Buck Mulligan, Stephen finds himself walking along Sandymount Strand contemplating his origins, his own family, his father. In this movement, Stephen imagines his father foolishly conceiving of the family as gondoliers, as masters of water in service to others. Stephen quickly realizes, "They are coming waves. The whitemaned seahorses, shamping, brightwindbridles, the steeds of Mananaan" (*U* 3.55–57). Mananaan is the Irish god of the sea. It is not only the steeds of Mananaan that are coming out of the sea but Ireland's mythic past as well.

Along with a pursuit of his own cultural and familial origins, however, the sea also inspires Stephen's general reverie for the past. "Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs," Stephen thinks. He thinks of Eve and the genesis of humanity to his own family, the house of the Gouldings and his father's snobbery towards his mother's relations. The seascape inspires his highly self-conscious mind. He encounters the sea to read the cultural memories it holds for him and the potentialities of cultural connections that it contains and yields:

The grainy sand had gone from under his feet. His boots trod again a damp crackling mast, razorshells, squeaking pebbles, that on the unnumbered pebbles beats, wood sieved by the shipworm, lost Armada. Unwholesome sandflats waited to suck his treading soles, breathing upward sewage breath, a pocket of seaweed smouldered in seafire under a midden of man's ashes. He coasted them, walking warily. A porter bottle stood up, stogged to its waist, in the cakey sand dough. A sentinel: isle of dreadful thirst. (*U* 3.147–154)

Stephen examines the signs on the beach, the refuse of the sea. He sees the Spanish Armada, a broken mast, innumerable specks of sand, and a bottle signifying Ireland's appetite for the drink. In the sea, he sees.

The sea allows Stephen certain vision that is otherwise less accessible to him. Thus, the sea becomes a repository, an entity that takes, preserves, and yields matter up to the poet in an altered form. It is here in this transformation of the flotsam and jetsam of the beach that we find a link to the New World. He takes inspiration from the altered matter and brings forth imaginings of his own: “Ringsend: wigwams of brown steersmen and master mariners. Human shells” (*U* 3.156–157). These imaginings indicate New World cultures, the wigwams, temporary shelter of Native Americans, the brown steersmen, a darker hue than found in Dublin and its environs and perhaps also a New World presence. The sea becomes a repository of the past and a means to connect that past with other cultures, even if only on an imaginary level. This imagining perhaps indicates Stephen’s willingness to foray into the New World for cultural paradigms that have a commonality with Ireland.⁵

Just as Joyce’s historical imagination brings his characters to the New World, Walcott’s historical imagination brings them to the Old World. Just as Joyce’s imagination focuses on the hauntings of the “nightmare of history,” Walcott’s sense of history becomes overtly connected with affliction. He notes that *Omeros* is a work of “affliction” because “he has to be wounded, affliction is one theme/ of this work, this fiction, since ‘I’ is a/ fiction” (28:2–4). Walcott envisions the first person as falling away as he focuses on the wounding of history not simply as a distinct past but also as a living present. For Walcott, the wounds of history enable correlation between the seemingly disparate. These injuries, these damages enable a Glissantian rerouting, a multiple, often unexpected, relationship(s) with the Other. Jahan Ramazani notes that Walcott

Fuses . . . literary prototypes of North and South, Old World and New in an astonishing hybridity that exemplifies the cross-cultural fabric of postcolonial poetry and contravenes the widespread assumption that postcolonial literature develops by soughing off Eurocentrism for indigeneity. Repudiating a separatist aesthetic of affliction, Walcott turns the wound into a resonant cite of interethnic connection within *Omeros*, vivifying the black Caribbean inheritance of colonial injury. (405)

Ramazani correctly points to the importance of wounding as a means of crossing and connection for Walcott. Walcott finds that the “epical splendour” in *Omeros* and in history itself is that “they survived, they crossed” (149). He finds his literary muse not simply in the most obvious or traditional places of inspiration but rather in the history of a people oppressed and surviving.

The wounds of history impact every character in *Omeros*. Walcott describes the journey of Achille back to Africa, across the sea courtesy of a mythic sea-swift.⁶ While we might expect to discover a warm embrace of a son too long lost and mourned in his absence, instead Walcott suggests the inevitability of forgetting, which underscores the limits of history and highlights the wound itself. Afolabe asks, “Why did I never miss you until you returned?/ Why haven’t I missed you, my son, until you were lost?/ Are you the smoke from a fire that never burned?” (139). Indeed Walcott does suggest that forgetting and reconstruction are central to memory and thus to history. Achille is not the only character who searches for and attempts to inhabit, to forget and to reconstruct, history within *Omeros*.⁷ Indeed, History seems almost a character itself. The cultural and linguistic play at hand in *Omeros* related to history and to narrative suggests their thematic fusion and failures at once. For Walcott, history becomes a narrative of chance and error, mistakes and misappropriations. As Charlotte McClure suggests, “Walcott argues history’s linear mentality oversimplifies thinking about things and people, unlike poetry which is anti-linear” (17). Despite the wider presence of history in the work and Achille’s discovery of history through a sea journey (though his history is land-based), the character who most overtly fuses the sea and history in *Omeros* is Major Plunkett.

Walcott’s portrait of linear history is a portrait of futility. The futility of history becomes represented through Irish figures in *Omeros*. Plunkett, immediately identifiable as a colonial, is imbued with a sense of history, its loss, and the need to create it. Plunkett, the name itself perhaps a nod to Oliver Plunkett, the Irish Revolutionary, is a man who fought with “Monty” (an indication of English service in the North African campaign with General Montgomery during the Second World War). In a 1977 interview Walcott famously said, “The whole Irish influence

was for me a very intimate one. When the Irish [Presentation] brothers came to teach at the college in St. Lucia, I had been reading a lot of Irish literature: I read Joyce . . . I've always felt some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets because one realized that they were also colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean" (59). Walcott's statement of an "intimacy" with Irish poets has been further explored by critics since his use of Joyce in *Omeros*. Irene Martynick's "The Irish in the Caribbean" suggests that the Maud Plunkett figure in *Omeros* is a mixture, a hybrid, of Homer's Penelope and Joyce's Molly. She suggests that Maud is a representation of "all post-colonials, a third identity that celebrates hybridity" (143). Yet, Maud is more specifically a displaced Irish woman who longs to return to Ireland. This Irish character remains one of the more strikingly stable identities within *Omeros*. In fact, her faithfulness and childlessness appears to be a refusal to enter into an alliance with the Major that would produce such a hybrid colonial heir. This flight of return only becomes possible when she takes on the funeral shroud she has embroidered with birds.

Despite the cultural signifiers that suggest Irishness (Plunkett's name, his Irish wife Maud, and the fact that he drinks Guinness), Plunkett is more often described as an English colonial presence because of his dedication and service to the empire. Walcott explains, "They'd been out here/ since the war and his wound" (25). Plunkett is a man burdened by the past, by a "head-wound" without further description and yet ever present within the text (25). Plunkett sees the consumption in his occupation of the island, of his respite from Southampton and other English ports, "We helped ourselves/ to these green islands like olives from a saucer" (25). His consumption is in preparation for a nice martini at the club. Whatever accounts of an Irish revolutionary past that his name once signified has been forgotten. Plunkett must reconstruct a new history. He knows that "the bill had never been paid" (31). This symbolic bill becomes a toll not just for a meal, for a drink, but for history itself.

Plunkett's desire to create a history is a desire to bring forth his own progeny (he imagines a fictitious ancestor becoming his own son) who was swallowed by the sea some hundreds of years ago. One critic rightly suggests this search itself provides a Joycean echo within the text: "For

Plunkett, as for Leopold Bloom, ‘Only a son [is] missing’ (Terada 203; Walcott 29). Walcott describes the sea-founding of ancestor and progeny in one:

How was the flower immortal when it would flare
only in drought, a flag of the rainy season,
of gathering thunderheads, each with its scrolled hair

wigged like an admiral’s? Then he found the *entry*
in pale lilac ink. Plunkett. One for the lacy trough.
Plunkett? His veins went cold. From what shire was he?

On what hill did he pause to watch gulls follow a plough,
seabag on one shoulder, with his apple-cheeked sheen?
This was his searches’ end. He had come far enough

to find a namesake and a son. Aetat xix.

Nineteen. Midshipman. From the horned sea, at sunrise
in the first breeze of landfall, drown! [emphasis added] (93–94)

Plunkett discovers his son and his father in the sea. The sea functions as a repository that swallows, transforms, and yields for Plunkett, a writer not of verse like Stephen Dedalus, but a creator nonetheless, of connection, of progeny, of history. Plunkett enacts a form of errantry in his use of an *entry* as a catalyst for psychic wandering, “He had come far enough,” and historical creation, “to find a namesake and a son” (91–92). He discovers in his creative endeavor that he must enter the sea and retrieve what it possesses, history.

The relation between Joyce’s conception of history as the sea in “Proteus” and Walcott’s conception of history as a sea for Plunkett suggests an affinity within Ireland and the Caribbean for the sea itself as an unavoidable presence even from within distinctly landed milieus. As Glissant says, “the thing that makes the understanding of every culture limitless is precisely the thing that allows us to imagine, without approaching it, the infinite interaction of cultures” (172–173). Thus, the relationship between the two masters of twentieth-century epic, Joyce and Walcott, becomes infinite in its possibilities. That each writer finds

significance within the sea seems apparent. What is left to discern, however, is the function of the sea not as an historical metaphor alone but also as a means of connectivity within errantry.

Joyce's use of the sea presents an opportunity to explore his geographic placement of Ireland. In the first episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus states, "All Ireland is washed by the gulfstream" (*U* 1.475). Stephen thus gives voice to his peculiar hydrophobic concern with bathing and purity in response to Buck Mulligan's mockery, "The unclean bard makes a point of washing once a month" (*U* 1.476). Stephen suggests that because Ireland itself is washed he need not be bothered with such prosaic details of life, but in this statement he also reveals a concern for the exploration of origins, of sources whether they be literary, emotional, or geographic. Stephen's mind, highly self-conscious of cultural and personal history, focuses briefly on the Gulf Stream. Through Stephen's utterance, Joyce invokes the geographic significance of his island, as a peripheral nation in a position of domestic cultural servitude on the margins of Europe joined with a stream of water from the Caribbean, from the inception of this modern masterpiece. Using *Ulysses'* story to at once explore and dispel the myths of empire, whether they are of ancient Greece or Europe in the twentieth century, Joyce provides a dynamic introduction to the topic of epic in the modern world of ever expanding empires and increasing global connectivity. As Glissant finds in his *Poetics of Relation*, "Each particular culture is impelled by the knowledge of its particularity, but this knowledge is boundless" (169). Thus, although Joyce writes of Ireland specifically and of the Dublin milieu in Ireland in 1904 particularly and despite Joyce's intense scrutiny of that culture, rather than providing a highly limited or parochial view, he writes of the universal within the singular.

Gifford and Seidman explain that "technically,' Ireland is 'washed' not by the Gulf Stream but by the North Atlantic Drift, into which the Gulf Stream disperses off Newfoundland" (22). While this is a worthwhile technical point, the Gulf Stream can function as a metaphor of connectivity between Ireland and the Caribbean not only because it predictably reveals the geographic relationships and cultural influences from the Old World to the New but also because it reveals the relation-

ship between the British archipelago and the Caribbean archipelago in the reverse, from the New World to the Old. In William MacLeish's *The Gulf Stream: Encounters with the Blue God*, he writes, "I ended up in the west of Ireland, near Galway, looking from a car window at fuchsia bushes ten feet high flashing rose and garnet on the verges . . . a large leafed invader from Chile claiming ground the way kudzu does in the American South" (209). While he notes that Ireland is an imperfect realm in which to find the "true delicacies of the subtropics growing far from their realm," he nevertheless notes the connectivity between Ireland and seemingly removed lands and ends his Gulf Stream journey in the West of Ireland. MacLeish's point evidences the direct geographic relationship and more indirect cultural connectivity between Ireland and the New World. It seems that the Gulf Stream is not alone in its journey from the Caribbean across the Atlantic between continents to rest (either momentarily or permanently) on the margins of Europe.

The Gulf Stream has long functioned as a part of the mythic realm. In Winslow Homer's 1899 painting, *The Gulf Stream*, he positions a single black man wearing shredded trousers on a small boat, encircled by sharks. A violent storm has apparently broken off the mast and rudder, the sails have disintegrated and have become shreds of useless fabric. The man lies alone on the deck looking away from the sharks at his feet. The surrounding water is highly agitated. On the far-off horizon, a lone schooner floats beyond view. Thus, rescue seems remote in the extreme. The figure's isolated wandering comes as an inevitable circumstance experienced within the stream itself. The figure of the man appears static, yet his surroundings suggest extreme turbulence. The Gulf Stream becomes revealed as a complicated geographic metaphor for errantry. It captures the gulf of distance and the stream of connection inherent in movement, in errantry, at once.

Even the most widely available information about the Gulf Stream indicates a more complex view of the current(s). A more practical explanation of the Gulf Stream is found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Here it is described as:

a warm current . . . part of a general clockwise-rotating system of currents in the North Atlantic. It is fed by the westward-flowing North Equatorial current moving from North Africa to the West Indies. Of the northeastern coast of South America, this current splits into the Caribbean Current, which passes into the Caribbean Sea and through the Yucatan Channel into the Gulf of Mexico, and into the Antilles Current, which flows to the north and east of the West Indies. . . . The path of the Gulf Stream becomes twisted as huge swirls of warm water break off. A part of the Gulf Stream forms a countercurrent that flows south and then west. The countercurrent rejoins the Gulf Stream on its seaward side. . . . The main portion . . . continues north, veering more to the east and passing . . . south of Newfoundland, where it breaks up into swirling currents. Some of these eddies flow toward the British Isles. A larger number low south and east, either becoming part of westward-flowing countercurrents or joining the Canary current. (1–2)

This current has been called a “meandering pattern of disconnected filaments” once it reaches European waters (*EB 2*). In fact, the mythology of the Gulf Stream suggests a single, distinct, clear current, yet the actuality of it resembles something much more dynamic. “It is not a simple ribbon of moving water but rather a complicated network of currents that tend to shift course over time, to disappear and then reappear, and to develop eddies along the margins” (*EB 2*).

Despite the prevalent notions of the Gulf Stream as a singular or monolithic one directional course of warm water, what becomes apparent is that the Gulf Stream really flows in a number of directions, incorporates various smaller currents of waters, and ultimately wraps those waters not only through the Caribbean but also around Ireland and back to the Canary Islands and Africa where the flows continue. Thus, the complex, multivalent nature of the Gulf Stream seems an even more suitable metaphor with which to discuss the relation between Joyce and Walcott, and their works themselves. Although Joyce certainly never envisioned himself in the Caribbean and does not appear to make those

connections in *Ulysses* to any noticeable degree, Walcott does envision Joyce within a Caribbean frame.

Walcott's portrait of Saint Lucia, like Joyce's Dublin, suggests highly contested geographical space. Walcott's portrayal of contested spaces within his text also suggests a concern for geographic, literary, and cultural origins. In a chapter (36) where Walcott identifies "Art" as having "surrendered to History with its whiff of formaldehyde" (182) and explains "Art is immortal and weighs heavily on us,/ and museums leave us at a loss for words./ Outside becomes a museum" (183). He finds later as he meanders outside of the museum and re-enters the "dead air, / down the echoing marble with its waxed air of a pharaonic feast" that he encounters around a corner in this European expanse of captured memory: "I caught the light on green water as salt and clear/ as the island's. Then I saw him. Achille" (183). Walcott discovers his hero in the midst of history though he appears irreparably cut from it (much like Stephen in Dublin or even the figure in the Homer painting). Achille, though present in the narrator's eye, is a man who has "turned his head towards Africa in the *Gulf Stream*, / which luffed him there, forever, between our island/ and the coast of Guinea" [emphasis added] (184). Walcott places his hero in the currents of the Gulf Stream. He locates these currents (much like Joyce) as a means of returning to his past, to Africa, in a swarm of water off the coast of the South American continent.⁸ (Perhaps Walcott is talking about the Antilles current which flows east from the West Indies—this current would begin a journey towards the African continent). He becomes the epic hero whose past and present collide and conflate. As he journeys towards the mythic home, the underworld that is Africa in this journey, he finds that he is recognized, lost, remembered, and forgotten together in an irrevocable historical past and an increasingly inaccessible present memory. Walcott appears to suggest that the museums of Europe as they are swallowed in their own efforts to preserve memory in formaldehyde are akin to an African culture that swallows memory and peoples in its own dream of the present and of the future. He writes, "doubt isn't the privilege of one complexion" (182) just as he acknowledges that next to the coast of Guinea and held within the winds of the Gulf Stream, Achille was "fixed in

a tribal dream,/ in the light that entered another Homer's hand,/ lifting the canvas from the museum" (184). Walcott's hero has entered the palace of history and the modern European museums to lift the canvases and become trapped therein within the currents of history, courtesy of the Gulf Stream; the stream, the seas, the ocean become emblems of a history that wraps him in its embrace.

In Walcott's *Omeros*, he locates his retelling of the *Odyssey* within a specific peripheral geographic space. Walcott's Joycean allusions, most prominent in *Omeros*' 39th chapter, suggest that the metaphorical movement of the Gulf Stream flows at once in many directions. Any study connecting *Ulysses* and *Omeros* must in some way consider the chapter in *Omeros* set in Ireland.⁹ In the latter half of his work, Walcott journeys to the Old World. In Lisbon Walcott finds faded visions of Ulysses' journey in the etymology of Portugal's capital city, its name (according to legend) derived from "Ulissibona" (189). Walcott explains, "their cries modulated to 'Lisbon' as the Mediterranean/ aged into the white Atlantic, their flight, in reverse" (189). When Walcott writes of his arrival in Ireland shortly thereafter, he places the narrator on a lakeshore in the ruins of an abbey not so unlike those commonly found in the West of Ireland. He notes a "square Celtic cross" and the "vertiginous Latin" of the land and searches for a "brook talk the language of old Ireland" (198). What Walcott discovers, however, is no oasis of commonality of imperial subject. Instead he finds faith linked irrevocably to a sniper's bullet in this "nation split by a glottal scream" (198). Walcott writes of a journey to Ireland to search for a "history lesson" from the "child voiced brook" (198). In the voice of water, an element so commonly cleansing, Walcott writes of "splitting heirs, dividing a Shem from a Shaun, an Ireland no wiser as it got older" (198). Walcott discovers a nation divided against itself, trapped in a cycle without apparent end. The text's movement to Ireland establishes a connection between Ireland and the Caribbean in general and Joyce and Walcott in particular. Walcott's use of the sea as a metaphor for history becomes linked to Joyce's use of the sea in that same respect. Walcott uses the sea as a dynamic entity that defies absolute geographic and historical specificity. Despite the sea's tendency towards obscurity, Walcott is able to read the sea, to encounter

it, as a dialogic opportunity to understand the historical past it contains and the present actuality that will soon become its possession.

Walcott highlights the relationship between Ireland and the Caribbean and his own relationship with Joyce when he transforms Joyce into a literary character and places him within a unique Caribbean frame. In his creation of Joyce, Walcott spans both edges of the Gulf Stream and re-makes Joyce into a character in a modern Caribbean epic, an epic that winds up making its own Gulf Stream journey as it spans the North Atlantic. After the narrator's sojourn in the west, Walcott moves the scene to Dublin. It is here in this most Joycean of cities that Walcott discovers Joyce:

bloomed there every dusk with eye-patch and tilted hat,
rakish cane on one shoulder. Along the Liffey,

the mansards dimmed to one indigo silhouette;
then a stroke of light brushed the honey-haired river,
and there, in black cloche hat and coat, she scurried faster

to the changing rose of light. Anna Livia!
Muse of our age's Omeros, undimmed Master
and true tenor of the place! So where was my gaunt,

cane-twirling flaneur? I blest myself in his voice,
and climbed up the wooden stairs to the restaurant
with its brass spigots, its glints, its beer-brightened noise. (200)

Walcott discovers Joyce in the dusk of a Dublin day. In this liminal moment, he encounters the shadow of Joyce in an indigo colored image. He casts the ghost of Joyce in the dye of the New World. These stanzas become an homage to a master of twentieth-century literature. Walcott has said that Joyce "wrote the last great novel of the nineteenth century and the first great epic of the twentieth century" all in one work, in *Ulysses*.¹⁰ It is this amalgamation of nineteenth century realism and naturalism in the novel while also bringing forth incredible innovation in that then staid old form that Walcott salutes here. Walcott blesses himself in Joyce's voice just as Stephen Dedalus considers his own pa-

ternal resemblance when recognized in Paris: “You’re your father’s son. I know the voice” (*U* 3.229). The Dedalus family’s connections were at some point quite promising but for Stephen in *Ulysses*, they seem to fall irrevocably into decay. Walcott redeems the paternal relationship in choosing to bless himself in Joyce’s voice and provides a suggestion of his own influence by Joyce and Irish literature, a connection that he called “almost self-evident.”¹¹

Walcott’s coyness when describing Irish and Caribbean literature suggests both the presence and complexity of the relationship between the two authors and cultures. What Walcott ultimately finds in Dublin are his own characters:

“There’s a bower of roses by Bendemeer’s stream”
was one of the airs Maud Plunkett played, from Moore
perhaps, and I murmured along with them, its theme,

as each felted oar lifted and dipped with hammer-
like strokes, was that of an adoring sunflower
turning bright air to her Major. And then I saw him.

The Dead were singing in fringed shawls, the wick-low shade
leapt high and rouged their cold cheeks with vermilion round
the pub piano, the air Maud Plunkett played. (201)

Walcott places his own characters, the Major and Maud, in the Dublin of Joyce’s day. In fact, he writes later “Mr. Joyce/ led us all, as gently as Howth when it drizzles,/ his voice like sun-drizzled Howth, its violent lees/ of moss at low tide, where a dog barks ‘Howth! Howth!’ at/ the shawled waves” (201). Joyce leads the revelers in song. Walcott compares Joyce’s voice with dogs barking “Howth” to highlight Howth as the coastal promontory north of Dublin, a critical location for the genesis of the relationship between Bloom and Molly. Walcott places Joyce at Howth so that Joyce himself becomes wet with water that runs off Howth’s shores into the sea, into the eddies that run along Europe’s margins towards the Canary Islands and Africa and that ultimately return to begin another journey in the Caribbean. Walcott stresses the voice, the paternal notion of inheritance. These revelers include not only the

Plunketts and the characters from “The Dead,” the Conroys, the two Miss Morkans, etc. but also the narrator himself. The voice, however, collapses into the waves as the dogs bark in futility at the incoming water. Water drowns their barks and consumes the singing voices into a “peculiarly liquid”¹² history, a history signified not with the cleansing nature of water, for there are no hydrophobes here, but with a current(s) that refuses to succumb to oceanic obscurity, that is itself symbolic of errantry, the Gulf Stream.

Notes

- 1 The critical effort to understand the relationship between Joyce and Walcott in *Omeros* begins in 1992 with Geert Lernout’s “The Isle is Full of Voices.” In this essay Lernout places Joyce within a number of systemic patterns of influence for Walcott. Beyond the evident Homeric parallels, Lernout suggests that it is the breakdown of “linear narrative” that takes on “thematic” importance and functions as a means of connection between each work. In fact it is this breakdown that provides a salient link between both writers. Joyce and Walcott use this refusal of linear narrative to exploit error and seemingly accidental correspondence. Walcott moves this exploitation further in *Omeros* and creates a conditional aesthetic system based on error and correlation. Joyce would not approach such a universal systemic aestheticism until *Finnegans Wake*.
- 2 Although the “epics” of Joyce and Walcott are inorganic, i.e., are artificially contrived uses of literary paradigms based on the foundation texts of culture(s), for the purposes of this essay, their works will be considered as modern “epics.”
- 3 In an article entitled “All that Greek Manure under the Green Bananas,” Peter Burian explains that *Omeros* is most distinctly not a retelling of *Iliad* (the epic it most closely resembles in character names, etc) but rather “Given the importance of sea, islands, wandering, and return in Walcott’s poetic world, it is hardly surprising that the myth of Odysseus recurs more than any other, and in many guises” (361).
- 4 Walcott notes in his “Meanings” essay that “there is another strange thing for me about the island of Saint Lucia; its whole topography is weird—very cynical, with volcanic mountains and such—giving rise to all sorts of superstitions. Rather like what Ireland was for Yeats and the early Irish poets—another insular culture” (50).
- 5 The number of possible representations of the sea as a metaphor for history in “Proteus” seems infinite. The sea literally becomes a repository for a personal corporeal history when Stephen considers the drowned man, his own inability to resurrect that man. Stephen also compares himself and his own ill ease with the sea implicitly with Mulligan’s mastery of it demonstrated in his ability to save

- a drowning victim. Mulligan's ease with the sea also comes to represent his ease with British norms, the masters of the sea itself. Mulligan then comes not simply to usurp the Tower's geographic space but the very sea that surrounds Ireland. Perhaps Stephen's attempt to transform the nature of the sea into language and poetry in "Proteus" reveals itself as an attempt, though relatively feeble, to reclaim Ireland's sea heritage and perhaps even an outpost guarding against that very sea, the Tower. This notion of attempted island/corporeal resurrections comes in later in "Proteus" when Joyce invokes the Tempest, "full fathom five thy father lies" (3.470), from Ariel's song it is a reference to the lowest point in Ferdinand's life and the rescue of the drowning Alonso, "Of his bones are coral made,/ Those are pearls that were his eyes./ Nothing of him that doth fade/ But doth suffer a sea change/ Into something rich and strange" (I.ii.398–401).
- 6 As Carol Dougherty suggests, "the collocation of poetry and sea travel that is made so explicit throughout Walcott's poetry is also at the heart of the *Odyssey*, in which the hero's travels provide both the occasion for his storytelling and the subject matter of the songs" (353).
- 7 An Homeric precedent for Achilles's journey to the land of his ancestors appears in the *Odyssey*. As Seidel explains, "The Phaeacians, as westerners, could not live in proximity with brutal giants [the Cyclops]. They migrated east as a nation to Scheria, back toward the civilized world [of their ancestors]. But the retrogressive path of the Phaeacian *translation* is feeble effort to stop time by moving back space" (14). The Phaeacians are punished by Poseidon for their aid of a wanderer, their kingdom becomes landlocked and their seafaring culture presumably dies. Although Homeric precedents for Omeros may discomfit some, the importance of maintaining the present home and not searching too long for a lost past seems a salient point of cultural exchange. As Seidel again suggests, "the larger *Odyssey* depicts a culture's coming of age in the Mediterranean. Extremes are endured, from cannibalism to oblivion, and the home kingdom, Ithaca, is renewed" (14). Perhaps Walcott's efforts chart his own culture's coming of age and his own interest in literary renewal?
- 8 Walcott recognizes the geographic significance of island-ness. He writes in his "Antilles" essay, "Antillean art is [a] restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent" (69). Thus Caribbean art becomes significant not only for its subject but because of the geography it represents.
- 9 Robert Hamner's *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros* provides a useful reading of this "Joyce" chapter in *Omeros*. He glosses the readily discernable Joycean echoes and stresses Walcott's "Joycean poetic economy" (116). He also values the intersections of musical forms through the piano keys Maud Plunkett plays. He states, "in the closing scene as we look seaward, the glittering keys of the waves reflect backward on Maud Plunkett's piano" (117). However, these keys also provide a Joycean intersection beyond Maud's playing and Joyce's well-

known love of music. The final line of this section in *Omeros* reads, “its wake glittering like keys” (201). These keys, in fact, echo the final keys of *Finnegans Wake* when the dying Anna Livia, the river woman, considers mortality and transcendence: “The Keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the” (FW628.15–16). Joyce’s consideration of “the keys to heaven” and the solitude of the outcast remain paradoxically central and reflected in the wondrously contingent aspects of Walcott’s creative imagination. Curiously, of all the Joycean elements that Walcott uses in this section, he is also perhaps most subtly referring to Stephen Dedalus, the young artist-hero, who has been cast out from the Martello Tower, his keys given to Haines, an Englishman. Walcott’s stanza begins “from the Martello brought” (201). From the tower are brought the keys to allow a new journey for the artist across the sea.

- 10 Walcott made these comments in a public lecture at the Miami Dade Public Library, Miami, Florida in February 2000.
- 11 Walcott said at the same lecture (Miami Dade Public Library, February 2000), “the relationship between Ireland and the Caribbean seems to me to be almost self-evident.”
- 12 I am indebted for this phrase to Mark Wollaeger who used it at the International Joyce Symposium, Goldsmith’s College, London, June 2000.

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