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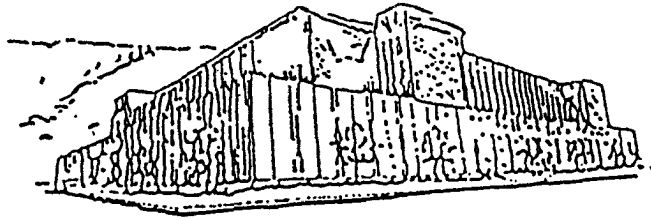
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Sea of History, Sea of Stories:
Piroguing with Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie

by

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B.A. Boston College, 1988

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

July 1996

Approved by:


Chairperson


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Sea of History, Sea of Stories: Piroguing with Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie

Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* would seem, at first glance, to share nothing more than 1990, the year each was published. The former is an 8,000 line epic poem in iambic hexameter, and the latter is an *Arabian Nights*-like fantasy, a novel Rushdie claims originated as a bath tub story for his young son. Nevertheless, in addition to the similarly "hybridized" backgrounds of the authors, the similarities between these two works are not only intriguing, but often compelling. Besides the many textual similarities that can be derived, ranging from common imagery to birds being very nearly the most significant "characters," each work was either the cause (Walcott and the Nobel) or the effect (Rushdie and the Ayatollah's *fatwa*) of its author being placed on a widened world stage. Most significantly, though, both *Omeros* and *Haroun* are representative post-colonial works in that each contests monologic discourses, or what Terry Eagleton calls "truth regimes," which seek to deny all competing claims to authenticity. In the case of Walcott and *Omeros*, that discourse is a linear historiography based on uniform progress, one established and perpetuated by the West, and one that has little value for emergent countries like the islands of the Caribbean. The monologic discourse Rushdie and *Haroun* contest is ostensibly the controlling rhetoric and narrative of fundamentalist Islam; as symbolized by the attempt to limit the diversity of the richly colored "Sea of Stories," though, it is more generally any discourse that attempts to prevent the telling of other stories, whether they be fictional or historical.

This study examines these two works at this point of contestation, and, incorporating the theoretical work of M.M. Bakhtin, Edouard Glissant and others, explores Walcott's and Rushdie's attempts to foster dialogism and thereby assert the validity of competing narratives. Ultimately, realizing that historical narratives are, in a sense, themselves just stories, it will be shown that in both *Omeros* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* the sea becomes the operative metaphor for the cultural hybridity and counter-narratives sought by the emergent peoples of the post-colonial world.

If one's "intercultural 'meld'" (Breslow 267) defined one's lineage, Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie might be brothers. Each writer's personal life and literary career have been profoundly affected by a divided upbringing, and by psychological isolation ensuing from the intellectual hybridization each celebrates. Despite being twin "divided children," though, Walcott and Rushdie would not, perhaps, expect to meet on the open sea. Yet, in 1990 at least, with the publication of the former's *Omeros* and the latter's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, this is exactly where they do conjoin, if not physically in a pair of pirogues, then certainly imaginatively. To say that these works can engage in a sustained, complementary dialogue appears at first nearly inconceivable, so different are they in their respective scopes, agendas, and depths of seriousness. Walcott's *Omeros* is a reinvented epic that seeks nothing less than excavating a meaningful past for a Caribbean people still trying to swim around the detritus of three centuries of colonialism, and to lead that people confidently away from a "dark future down darker street" (*O* 197). The weight of Walcott's project in *Omeros* is perhaps most clearly evidenced by what it brought him: the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature. Although the award was bestowed on him for his collective body of poetry and drama, still *Omeros* was then and is now recognized as his singular achievement to date. Rushdie's *Haroun*, on the other hand, is a novel that he says began as a bath-time story he would tell his son, Zafar, one that begins far more unassumingly than *Omeros*, in a nameless city that stands by "a mournful sea full of glum fish," a city whose inhabitants "belch with melancholy even though the skies

were blue" (H 15). *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* has garnered nearly unanimous praise from its assorted reviewers, but it has nevertheless tended to be seen as lacking the gravity of Rushdie's other novels, and has been largely ignored in the wake of the furor created by *The Satanic Verses*.

As much as the surface differences seem to separate these works, there are intriguing and often compelling similarities between the two. Besides the shared year of publication, each takes as its primary influence a giant of world literature: in the case of Walcott and *Omeros*, of course, it is the epic poetry of Homer, and for Rushdie and *Haroun, The Arabian Nights*. Each work is a testament to its author's delight in playing with language and in blending material from widely disparate sources and influences. Walcott moves fluidly from elevated iambic hexameter to patois dialect, and from startlingly classic English to the curses of Caribbean fishermen; he either responds to, echoes, mimics, parodies, or is simply influenced by, among others, Homer, Dante, Milton, Joyce, Hemingway, V.S. Naipaul, James Anthony Froude, and Western historians. Besides *The Arabian Nights*, Rushdie's influences comprise a Bakhtinian blend ranging from *Heart of Darkness* to *Star Wars*. Each author puns ceaselessly, sometimes mirthfully--Walcott's "but Maud was an adamant Eve" (O 90)--and other times cynically, as in Rushdie's politically-inflected transformation of Kashmir's Dal Lake to "Dull Lake" (H 42). Both *Omeros* and *Haroun* contain the subplot of separated fathers and sons who throughout each work alternately search for each other. The exiled, wandering son in each work is befriended and guided to awareness and wholeness by a bird: the sea swift makes up for the absence of the Homeric gods in *Omeros*,¹ becoming

the unifying figure for both the poet and the hero, Achille, while in *Haroun* it is Butt the Hoopoe, "a tiny crested bird" (*H* 64), who accompanies Haroun on his perilous adventure. Shadows, smoke, and statues are among the central images shared by each work.

Finally, each author professes humble ambitions for his respective work. *Omeros* will do little to dispel the impressions of those critics who feel his poetry is too crafted, yet Walcott still asserts that "it is a book for people, not a conundrum for scholars" (Bruckner C17). Rushdie's transcription of *Haroun* from frivolous bathtub tale to novel was, he says, the fulfillment of a promise to his son.² Both *Omeros* and *Haroun*, however, betray far more seriousness and, particularly in the case of the former, far more ambition than their authors' modest claims would indicate. Such seriousness is revealed on a personal level, beginning with each author's overt inclusion of a version of himself in his story, and by the larger dialogue that has claimed each work and each author: critical discussions of *Haroun* rarely exclude mention of the Ayatollah's *fatwa*--the call for Rushdie's death following publication of *The Satanic Verses*--while *Omeros* and the Nobel have obviously placed Walcott on a widened world stage.

That these authors are now considered on a broader, more collective level would not be surprising even without the drama of death sentences and world prizes, as both Walcott and Rushdie openly presume to write on behalf of repressed peoples. What represses, and what Walcott and Rushdie imaginatively confront in *Omeros* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, are totalizing discourses, discourses which are, Terry Eagleton writes, "as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless" (73). For Walcott, such a discourse is what he sees as the linear narrative of Western history, the

idea of history as an unimpeded upward march of progress, which for the Caribbean islands, as for most formerly colonized countries, is a narrative with little value: "Progress leaving all we small islands behind," writes Walcott in "The Schooner Flight," "Progress is history's dirty joke" (355,356). According to Randolph Hezekiah, escaping a Western conception of progress is a two-fold problem for the Caribbean: not only must it overcome a Western historiography, a conditioned tendency to assess history in terms of "a logical sequence (cause and effect) of facts and dates," but it must also cope with the resulting "stigma of being without a history" (383). A linear historiography, one based on "logical sequence," is nearly useless to the Caribbean, both because the islands' rich array of unalloyed cultures requires more than "the rigid diachrony of orthodox historicism" allows (Dash/"Introduction" xxviii), and because its long-colonized peoples never had the freedom to experience time or to "progress" in a more or less uniform way. As Edward Glissant asserts, "We do not see it (Time) stretch into our past (calmly carry us into the future) but implode in us in clumps" (145). To the West, then, or to anyone who defines history in its traditional sense, the Caribbean might appear to be "without a history," or at least without a history that is something more than a succession of invasions, rebellions, fires, and plantation hardships.

Long before *Omeros*, Walcott suggested that in order to avoid unknowingly perpetuating the tradition of the old colonial world, the job of the writer is to go beyond "the confrontation of history, that Medusa of the New World" ("The Muse of History" 2). Citing such "great poets of the New World" as Neruda, Whitman, Borges, and St.-John Perse, Walcott notes that "these writers reject the idea of history as time for its original

concept as myth, the partial recall of the race. For them history is fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory" ("Muse" 2). History may be fiction, but it is also hegemonic, and, as Walcott's St. Lucia and the other islands have discovered, its occluding effects are painfully real. Walcott's appeal to avoid "the confrontation of history," then, is far from an endorsement of historical passivity. The history he seeks to avoid is only the linear one based on progress; he believes that attempts to derive New World histories using the traditional historiography can lead only to "historical sullenness" (Walcott/Hirsch 79). It is no more healthy, though, and probably not even possible to ignore a confrontation with history altogether, for as Walcott notes, "We contemplate our spirit by the detritus of the past" (Baugh 51). But to assert their own histories, and thereby escape the power of the hegemonic Western history, countries of the post-colonial world must first establish their own conceptions of what Edouard Glissant calls "sequence" and "time scale" (73). As Walter Benjamin writes, "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself" (263).

Both in "The Muse of History" and throughout his poetry, Walcott recognizes this imperative to reconfigure history, to assert a historiography built from fragments and diversity rather than from linearity: a historiography proudly founded on "clumps." Not only does he seek to explode the idea of linearity and to find new ways of interpreting the past, but he also seeks to reduce the importance of history, "that long groan which underlines the past": by emphasizing "celebration" more than "evocation," Walcott

suggests in the Nobel speech, “the sigh of History dissolves” (262). Walcott is hardly the first to strive for such reconfiguring, nor have the attempts been limited to poets. Michel Foucault uses his “archaeology of knowledge” to call for a new historiography, one which “does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect” (159), and in which historical discourse is established “in a discontinuous atemporality” (166). Fredric Jameson reaches for the same diversifying effect when he discusses “the practitioners of alternate or rival interpretive codes” (100), concluding that History is merely one code among other equally valid codes. “The reality of history,” writes Jameson, “... is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form” (82). Recognizing history as a text rather than as some kind of “reified force” (Jameson 102) has opened the door for the New Critics and New Historicists to establish literature as an equally valid text, as “a substitute history” (Eagleton 92) even. Thus, by rejecting the sigh of History and its totalizing discourse (the capitol H, always significant in Walcott’s poetry, will henceforth be used to signify this discourse), Walcott, other post-colonial artists, and theorists alike empower imagination alternately to re-member history and to engender new conceptions of history. In doing so, these artists work towards splintering the until now “authoritative and single” History (Kort 576) into multiple and diverse histories, many of which are told for the first time.

It should be said at the outset, especially to any structuralists who may be reading, that this study will use an abundance of material from essays and interviews in discussing *Omeros*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and their treatments of monologic discourses.

The relevance of starting with Bakhtinian theory and then working down to one of Walcott's interview responses, for example, before finally applying the product to *Omeros* can, of course, be contestable in terms of literary analysis. On the other hand, that this study understands the "intentional fallacy" is evidenced by its finding great significance in a novel that Salman Rushdie asserts is a bathtub story. In the case of Walcott in particular, given his exceptional concern with History throughout his body of work--poetic or otherwise--and considering that a poem like *Omeros* often works in the opposite direction to make his essays and interview statements more meaningful, it would seem remiss not to use his essays and interviews in this manner.

Omeros is a story of depths--sea depths, historical depths, personal depths--out of which come many of these new histories. If, as Frantz Fanon writes, a nascent national literature is marked by its giving to national consciousness "form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons" (240), then Walcott has surely succeeded in *Omeros*. Not only does Walcott open up boundless horizons *before* his island, particularly as symbolized by the ocean, but also *behind* his island, in a past which can be liberated through the imagination. The narrating poet, characters, and reader of *Omeros* are carried through time in a circular, swirling fashion, like the sea swift who travels with the wind: as Walcott explains, "something in time is happening, new into old and old into new" (Walcott/White 36). All are carried across continents and centuries, into a history that is nebulous and smoky, and that, with boundaries that "extend far beyond the window of knowledge" (Terada 190), ultimately serves the storyteller better

than the historian. But it is also a history that must be confronted, and for the characters of *Omeros*, who represent a Caribbean people used to being “mocked as a people without a history” (“Culture and Mimicry” 57), this confrontation is an enlightening one.

The sea and the horizon it forms being the defining elements of Caribbean geography, and remembering Bakhtin’s *chronotope*--“the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84)--it is probably not surprising that the sea is integral to Walcott’s efforts to redefine “sequence” and “time scale” for the islands. Ultimately, as we will see, it is the sea that becomes the operative metaphor for Walcott, the metaphor that carries his conception of the Caribbean's past and its reconfigured history, as well as of its present and future. As such, the sea becomes Walcott’s counter-narrative to what the West has deemed the Caribbean's "history of ennui, defence, disease" (*Another Life* 212); in fact, to cite the title of an earlier Walcott poem, the sea *is* history. But if the sea is history, it is not a familiar narrative, for Walcott's history, like the undulating, erasing surf, is a ceaselessly changing one, always tending towards a dissolution that glorifies the present while de-emphasizing the past. Recalling Glissant’s view that in the Caribbean “History is fissured by histories” (xxix), we might say that with each chapter of *Omeros*--with each of Walcott’s waves--one history flows and another ebbs. We will examine History's smoky allure and its dissolving sigh from a fisherman's pirogue in the story waters of *Omeros*.

Just as Walcott uses poetic imaginings to reshape history, so too is imagination Rushdie’s weapon--the only one available to him during his recent years of hiding--

against another totalizing discourse: the oppressive monologism of fundamentalist Islam. In one of his essays, Rushdie describes the havoc caused by “the apostles of purity, those who have claimed to possess a total explanation” (“In Good Faith” 394). Of course, the most significant “apostles of purity” in Rushdie’s life at the time he wrote this essay (1990) were the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Muslim fundamentalists, who two years earlier had sentenced Rushdie to death and forced his exile because of *The Satanic Verses*. Years later, Rushdie has become a symbol for freedom of expression, as well as for cultural and religious tolerance. Such tolerance, the example of Rushdie implies, must be that which allows totalizing explanations, no matter how revered or sacred they are, to be confronted in honest ways. Literature is one such forum for honest dialogue, one where Rushdie hopes “to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart” (“Choice” 11). In Rushdie’s fiction, this has entailed challenging stereotypes and preconceptions, and taking a skeptical look at religion, politics, and history.

Rushdie seeks “the truth of the tale” in works like *Shame*, *The Satanic Verses*, and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, but one of his purposes in doing so is to reveal “the provisional nature of all truths” (“Imaginary Homelands” 12). And no truths are more provisional than those enforced by the “regimes of power ... which, in suppressing other voices, establish their own as exclusive dogma” (Waugh 53). In *Haroun*, the confrontation with monologic authority is played out as “a clash of languages” (“Choice” 11): after *The Satanic Verses* affair, Rushdie said that one of his imperatives is always “to reoccupy negative images, to repossess pejorative language” (“Choice” 11), and *Haroun*,

beneath its surface simplicity, stridently asserts this strategy of resisting oppression as an undeniable right of the artist. Like Walcott, Rushdie attempts both to reappropriate the monologic language--to make it suit his purposes rather than to turn away from it out of some sense of revenge--and, alternately, to counter it with the dialogism and diversity he celebrates.

Edouard Glissant says of the Caribbean peoples, "We are the roots of a cross-cultural relationship" (67). If the sea, as a metaphor for diversity, becomes for Walcott a way to restate this sentiment, it attains an analogous and equally vital role for Rushdie in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. As Khattam-Shud and his shadowy band of Chupwalas prepare to plug the wellspring of the "Source of Stories" (*H* 162), we are reminded that in the imaginative worlds of Walcott and Rushdie to control the ocean is to control a people's narrative (so, too, in the real world of centuries past, when slave and bounty ships traversed the Atlantic triangle bespeaking colonial dominance³). It makes little difference if the controlling narrative is Western History or the rhetoric of fundamentalist faith: ultimately, each is a monologic narrative imposed by "regimes of power." With *Haroun*, Rushdie indirectly joins the historical discussion with Walcott in that the novel is a response to fundamentalist rhetoric which, seeking as it does to define all aspects of its peoples' culture and to push competing versions of truth into the margins, enacts itself as a controlling historical narrative. The complexities of history and the inadequacy of any single frame of reference for interpreting history may be the central issue of Rushdie's novels; thus, when Haroun and the Guppees seek to preserve the Sea of Stories, we know that one of the things they are fighting for is the legitimacy of diverse and contextual

historical meaning. In *Shame*, a novel that examines the “old and rusted” machine of history (85), Rushdie seems to anticipate *Haroun* and the connection between story and history when he writes that “every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales” (72-3). As a means of preserving “ideological purity” (Craig 396) and power, Islam is no less a “story” than is Western History's narrative, just as the latter can be no less sinister a censor than the former. Betty Jean Craig classifies the fundamentalist Muslims' response to *The Satanic Verses* as “a resistance to the new globalism” (396), and we might say the same of Western historical narratives that deny alternate histories: both resist a diversity that is seen as threatening rather than culturally enhancing. The importance of telling those “other tales” thus becomes even more paramount to writers like Rushdie and Walcott.

Walcott and the Caribbean would have a vested interest in Haroun's attempt to save the sea of stories; the former would be particularly pleased by the Guppee announcement that “they were especially anxious to restore the Old Zone as soon as possible, so that these ancient tales could be fresh and new once more” (*H* 192). Access to the “Old Zone” enables Walcott to drink the waters of the Mediterranean, and to create fresh stories out of the old. Any post-colonial blending of cultures presupposes a blending of languages, a blending of histories, a blending of stories. And, in these two imaginative works, it also presupposes an ocean as colorful as one might expect to see off the coast of St. Lucia, an ocean clear enough to reveal the diversity of Rushdie's multicoloured streams of story, and clean enough to nurture Walcott's “quiet culture” (*O* 296) growing out of the intricately branching coral.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories:
Salman Rushdie's Order of the Open Mouth

The "Streams of Story" (H 167) that pour out of the hole in the sea-bed in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, and that eventually fill the ocean with a colorful "liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity" (H 72), recall a maritime version of Bakhtin's heteroglossia. It is from this library, from this heteroglot mixture of all the stories that have ever been invented, and those still in the process of being invented, that the artist privileged with access to the "Story tap" (H 59) draws material for "new" tales. Because the stories exist in liquid form, they possess "the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories" (H 72). Remembering that *Haroun* is Rushdie's first novel to be published after the Ayatollah's *fatwa* for the supposedly blasphemous author, what is unmistakably at work in the Chupwala attempt to seal off the Source of Stories is the political and very real context of the story. In many of Rushdie's novels, in fact, either violence or repressive figures intervene to deny attempts to assert the multiplicity of truth. The Chupwala episode and, indeed, all of *Haroun* in one sense become Rushdie's response and challenge to Khomeini's attempt to deny artistic freedom.

Rushdie has always recognized the conflict between the writer and the politician, or the writer and any arbiter of power: "They fight for the same territory," he writes. "And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" ("Imaginary

Homelands” 14). We might expand Rushdie's thought (something Rushdie himself might have done in a 1990 version of this 1983 statement) by adding religious versions of truth to the political. As Craige argues, "the belief in a single right way to see the world, to behave, and to worship impels religious fundamentalists to seek ideological purity, to resist amalgamation and integration with believers of other persuasions" (396). Believing in the absolute primacy of their religion, a belief augmented by the threat of an encroaching Western civilization they feel "has lost all sense of distinction between the sacred and the profane" (Appignanesi and Maitland 38), the fundamentalists have little tolerance for or sometimes even understanding of the devices an artist like Salman Rushdie uses in his novels. Thus, it is hardly surprising that, in the case of *The Satanic Verses*, attempts by Rushdie and his supporters to argue for the ambiguity of the offending passages--to argue that some are ironic, that others are part of dream sequences, and that still others are countered or reversed later in the novel--have been largely futile. Disdainful of the claims of art and concerned almost exclusively with literal meanings, the fundamentalist perceives only that the faith has been treated with disrespect "in front of a world audience" (Craige 396). Many of the critics of *The Satanic Verses*, in fact, admittedly either did not read the book, or refused or were unable to consider the literary context of the controversial episodes.⁴ Iran's Ayatollah had only to hear these capsulized passages related to him by an aide to justify condemning Rushdie (and his publishers) for a "well-calculated and extensive plot against Islam" (Weatherby 163), and to exhort Muslims "to execute them quickly wherever they are found, so that no others dare do such a thing" (Tyler A1). As Edward Said offers, the fundamentalist response does not

seem often to derive from an informed reading, but from "much coarser and more instrumental processes whose goal is to mobilize consent, to eradicate dissent, to promote an almost literally blind patriotism" (310). These processes are the all-too-familiar result when an intensely dialogic utterance threatens a monologic force.

Ironically, while *The Satanic Verses* was to varying degrees willingly misinterpreted by this monologic audience, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* seems more overtly offensive to Islam than its predecessor, filled as it is with seeming mocking indictments of Muslim fanaticism, whether religious or political. Although these messages seem to protrude from a rather simple allegory, since they are not articulated literally one might expect that Rushdie's detractors would not be attuned to spotting them. And, indeed, this latter novel has met with little comment from the Islamic world (although one might wonder what additional condemnation can be added to a pre-existing death sentence). Interestingly, Said and other commentators were nearly as critical of the Western response to the controversy, and of the timid support given to Rushdie by writers around the world, as they were of the fundamentalists' blind tyranny. Considering the number of voices that sounded in response to the Ayatollah's *fatwa*, Said bemoaned the fact that the potentially most constructive dialogue was bypassed, for, after token outcries defending the freedom of the artist, "there seemed to be not much further interest either in the Islamic world as a whole or in conditions of authorship there" (306). Given such a void, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* appears as perhaps the most impassioned and convincing of the responses.

Although Rushdie mostly ignores engaging the Islamic world as a whole in *Haroun* (not surprising, if we take him seriously when he says the story was conceived as a

bathtub tale for Zafar), he certainly has plenty to say about conditions of authorship, not only in the Islamic world, but in any situation where alternate versions of truth meet with tyranny. Not only does Khattam-Shud detest and prohibit stories, but he eventually "opposes Speech for any reason at all" (*H* 101). His portrayal leaps out of the fiction for the reader familiar with Rushdie's circumstances, but it is in fact less scathing than a subsequent description of Khattam-Shud as "a skinny, scrawny, snivelling, drivelling, mingy, stingy, measly, weaselly, clerkish sort of fellow, who had no shadow but seemed almost as much a shadow as a man" (*H* 190). A scathing profile, yes, but also a humorous one, and one that brings Khattam-Shud and, of course, the Ayatollah Khomeini, into what Bakhtin calls the "zone of crude contact," the zone of the carnivalesque, where "laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (23). Such an "investigation" generally leads to the "rejection of any straightforward and unmediated seriousness" (Bakhtin 312) advanced by a monologic discourse. It is this very "unmediated seriousness" that Rushdie and his chattering citizens of Gup contest: a univocal and authoritative discourse that "permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions" (Bakhtin 343).

Rushdie's response to the totalizing discourse, which in *Shame* he writes does not spring from the people but "is imposed on them from above" (251), is a generally jubilant dialogism in which he attempts not "to falsify history, but allow a fiction to take off from history" ("In Good Faith" 408). His blending of voices, languages, and sources reflects

not only his personal hybridity as the grown-up "divided child," but also an increasing "cultural interpenetration" (Craigie 395) throughout the world, which inevitably produces conflicts between those who embody such diversity and those who fear it and oftentimes tyrannically deny it. Rushdie's ironization and parodies of sacred texts, which are at the heart of *The Satanic Verses* controversy, are for him honest ways of exploring Islam in this atmosphere of cultural amalgamation: far from creating an "anti-religious novel," Rushdie explains, such an exploration was "an attempt to write about migration, its stresses and transformations, from the point of view of migrants from the Indian subcontinent of Britain" ("Choice" 11).

Rushdie's engagement with "the guardians of religious truth" ("Choice" 11) is similar in its intentions to Walcott's engagement with the guardians of historical truth: both seek not merely--perhaps not even primarily--to defy these univocal truths, but to be free of their presumptive authority. Rushdie warns that "to respect the sacred is to be paralyzed by it" ("Is Nothing Sacred?" 417), while Walcott suggests that to respect History, or to seek history or one's ancestry in "the linear way," is potentially to be paralyzed by the discovery of a "historical bastardy."⁵ In a 1986 interview, Walcott appeals to Caribbean writers' responsibility to counter historical bitterness, to overcome "the chafing and rubbing of an old sore" (History), prefiguring the psychologically paralyzing wounds of slavery and time carried by Philoctete in *Omeros*. "You accept it as much as anybody accepts a wound as being a part of his body," he continues in the interview. "But this doesn't mean that you nurse it all your life" (Walcott/Hirsch 79).

With *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie affirms that it is the writer's

responsibility to fight the attempted plugging of the story waters. Rushdie's pure love of stories and of storytelling for their own sake is everywhere apparent in his novels, but as Nadine Gordimer says in describing "the essential gesture" of the writer, "Responsibility is what awaits outside the Eden of creativity" (Gordimer 285). For Rushdie, part of this responsibility is to deny the authority of a unitary language; it is to reaffirm that language must be the primary ground of struggle, and that any utterance, regardless of the degree to which it presumes authority, must enter "a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words" (Bakhtin 276). The possibility that Rushdie's detractors and any maintainers of "official versions of truth" continue to resist is that "understanding comes to fruition only in the response" (Bakhtin 272), that the complexities of a world given to "cultural interpenetration" demand open dialogues, or, at the very least, the freedom to respond.

That Rushdie seeks not to antagonize further the Muslim world, but rather to affirm the importance of the freedom of response, is suggested in *Haroun* by the fact that we find not an army of sword-wielding Prince Bolos sallying forth to confront the Chupwala army, but a literary assemblage headed by Kitab, a name derived from the Hindustani word for "book":

In the Pleasure Garden, Haroun noticed large numbers of Guppees of an extraordinary thinness, dressed in entirely rectangular garments covered in writing. 'Those,' Iff told him, 'are the famous Pages of Gup; that is to say, the army. Ordinary armies are made up of platoons and regiments and suchlike; our Pages are organized into Chapters and Volumes. Each Volume is headed by a Front, or Title, Page; and up there is the leader of the entire "Library," which is our name for the army-- General Kitab himself.' (H 88)

Each member of this army is free to discuss and criticize both the battle plan and the leadership, with General Kitab seemingly being "perfectly happy to listen to these tirades of insults and insubordination without batting an eyelid" (*H* 119). At least one critic has advanced that Rushdie raises questions about the efficacy of completely free expression, citing that the Gup army's quarreling "does not lead to superior solutions but just passionless debate" (Kapadia 225). Such a position, however, seems to ignore both the joy that permeates these arguments (which take place in the "Pleasure Garden," adjacent to the Parliament of Gup, otherwise known as the "Chatterbox"), and the eventual strengthening into a common purpose, even if such unity is hesitantly or militantly reached: "All those arguments and debates, all that openness, had created powerful bonds of fellowship between them" (*H* 185).

Conversely, the fully formed, frozen, authoritative language of Khattam-Shud is not only most purely represented by silence, but also recalls Bakhtin and a language he describes as "greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality," and "doomed to death and displacement" (312). Meanwhile, Khattam-Shud's forces, the Chupwalas, turn out to be "a disunited rabble ... suspicious and distrustful of one another" (*H* 185). Denying them the freedom of dialogism's "surface upheavals" (Bakhtin 326) and all their attendant oppositions, dramatized in *Haroun* by the healthy arguments between the Pages of Gup, is ultimately more divisive than allowing it. Even before being "doomed to death and displacement" in the battle with the Pages of Gup, however, the Chupwalas are first individually doomed to internal division. Using imagery that also figures prominently in

Walcott's *Omeros*, Rushdie divides each Chupwala into a "Substance" and a "Shadow." This is not in itself symbolic of their dislocation: when Haroun meets the Shadow Warrior, second in command but not loyal to Khattam-Shud, Haroun learns that the Shadow and Substance "can pull in opposite directions ... but just as often there is a true partnership, and mutual respect" (*H* 132). But when Khattam-Shud teaches the Chupwalas to separate their substances from their Shadows, so that each can go about without the other, we might imagine this detachment as effectively neutralizing the dialogic capacity of the individual. Made uniform by the monologism of the Khattam-Shud, the Substance loses its power to speak meaningfully: "people in the land of Chup hardly talk at all these days" (*H* 129), says Rashid Khalifa after watching the Shadow Warrior struggle to mouth a few words. Meanwhile, removed from what Bakhtin calls "the untamed elements of social heteroglossia" (326), the Shadow becomes an entity that can be manipulated and made to represent monologic dogma.

The Shadow/Substance imagery in *Haroun* is ambiguous, and may be as insignificant as the bubbles in Zafar's bathtub, but in a study of post-*fatwa* Rushdie it is hard not to interpret Khattam-Shud's shadow detachment program as an attempt to limit and reshape the discourse of his people, and ultimately to make it serve his unitary discourse. Not surprisingly, Khattam-Shud's method of neutralizing stories also involves making them "shadowy":

'Now the fact is that I personally have discovered that *for every story there is an anti-story*. I mean that every story--and so every Stream of Story--has a *shadow-self*, and if you pour this anti-story into the story, the two cancel each other out, and bingo! End of story.' (*H* 160)

Khattam-Shud is so accomplished at "the Dark Art of sorcery" that it becomes "no longer possible to tell which is Khattam-Shud's shadow and which is his substantial Self" (*H* 133), and he, as any espouser of monologic doctrine might, comes to believe that his ideology-carrying Shadow is as meaningful as his "substantial Self." Thus, like his anti-stories, Khattam-Shud's shadow, carrying the monologic, fundamentalist discourse, can represent him anywhere in the world, no matter where he resides physically. This, of course, is not good news for the artist who seeks escape from a death sentence in exile: "The Cultmaster Khattam-Shud can be in two places at once!" (*H* 133).

Said has commented on Rushdie's "conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it" (216), making his novels a form of resistance writing, a vehicle for what Said calls "the voyage in."⁶ *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is also resistance writing, a "voyage in" that requires Rushdie to enter various discourses--cultural, political, religious, artistic--in order to contest oppression. In his essay "Outside the Whale," Rushdie asserts "[the] imperative that literature enter such arguments" (100), and in doing so, particularly for an author in the circumstances Rushdie found himself in while writing *Haroun*, he recognizes that he himself cannot help but communicate an "ideologically freighted discourse" (Bakhtin 333). Thus, as much as *Haroun* is indebted to an *Arabian Nights* tradition of storytelling, as is most of Rushdie's fiction, and as much as he would like to tell stories purely for the sake of entertainment (a dream shared by Rashid Khalifa in his desire to escape the world of Snooty Buttoo), Rushdie cannot avoid "the essential gesture":

The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it. The writer loses Eden, writes to be read, and comes to realize that he is answerable....Created in the common lot of language, that essential gesture is individual; and with it the writer quits the commune of the corpus; but with it he enters the commonality of society, the world of other beings who are not writers. (Gordimer 286)

The creative act that led to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was indeed exacted by society. As much as Rushdie would like to maintain that he wrote the novel only for his son, *Haroun* became his responsibility after *The Satanic Verses* nightmare: his responsibility to himself, to his fellow artists, and to the world community. The freedom and diversity that he cherishes required no less essential an "answering word" than *Haroun*. And if he is recognized as merely another ideologue in writing *Haroun*, Rushdie's response might be that "a book is a version of the world. If you do not like it ignore it; or offer your own version in return" ("In Good Faith" 421).

Like Scheherazade in *The Arabian Nights*, we might say that Salman Rushdie also tells stories to forestall death: the figurative death that would come from not being able to write and to be read, or from being silenced by the Ayatollah's fatwa. One of the reasons the world community's often timid and shallow responses to the Rushdie affair are disheartening is that the border of this figurative death--the "Twilight Strip" in *Haroun*--is one we all stand near, for "if the Source itself is poisoned, what will happen to the Ocean--to us all?" (H 87). Every artist's Story Tap pipelines to an ocean threatened by various incarnations of Khattam-Shud, and by various potions of "anti-story," whether it is Rushdie in the Muslim world, Kundera in Czechoslovakia, Gordimer in South Africa,

or Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria. And the dialogue opened by *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is one that not only includes these modern victims of censorship, but stretches as far back--acquiring a Lawrence here, a Dostoyevsky there--as the seventeenth century to John Milton, who, in his *Areopagitica*, equates censorship with degenerate culture.⁷ In a line that offers eerie commentary on such acts as the Ayatollah's *fatwa*, Milton writes, "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book" (201). He goes on unknowingly to become a dialogic companion to Rushdie and Walcott, offering his own conception of language as the place of struggle: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat" (213).

The only way to stop the murder ("Each day we murder new tales!" [*H* 160], boasts Khattam-Shud), and to restore the multicolored clarity of the Sea of Stories, is to send out new stories, to increase the strength of the Pages of Gup. With *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Rushdie hopes to illuminate tyranny, just as Haroun's magical "Bite-a-Lite" exposes the Dark Ship of the Khattam-Shud for what it is:

As the brilliant light of the Bite-a-Lite filled the interior of the Dark Ship, the whole vessel seemed to quiver for a moment, to become a little less solid, a little more shadowy; and the Chupwalas, too, trembled, and their edges softened and they began to lose their three-dimensional form. (*H* 166)

To flood the Land of Chup is also to reveal the detached Shadows to be not Substances, but "flat and shapeless" shadows (*H* 166), shadows which ultimately vanish because "no shadow could survive without someone or something to be attached to, to be the shadow

of" (H 173). And where Khattam-Shud had previously been able to isolate discourse so as to consume it--"He eats words" (H 145)--and to reconstitute it monologically, the light and ensuing openness cause the Cultmaster also to disappear, until he is finally relocated "running for his life" (H 190) from the crashing ice-idol of Bezeban. As for those Chupwalas not separated from their Shadows, they are emboldened to break "the Laws of Silence" (H 186), and they begin both to speak again and to cheer the Guppee liberators.

Haroun realizes that keeping the Source of Stories unobstructed, thereby allowing stories to continue to pour out in their bright array of colors, will be the best method of counteracting the Khattam-Shud's anti-stories, which "had had the effect of muting the colours of the Story Streams, dulling them down towards greyness" (H 122). By clearing up these waters, the ocean will once again be able to support the "many different stories to tell" (*Midnight's Children* 9), where one story becomes, in fact, an accretion of numerous other stories. This restored Sea of Stories will likewise nourish Goopy and Bagha, two of the more memorable characters in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Together, this pair of Plentimaw (meaning "plenty of mouths") Fish form a symbol for the creative process of the literary imagination, and could assuredly swim into Bakhtin's waters and feel at home:

Iff replied that the Plentimaw Fishes were what he called 'hunger artists'-- 'Because when they are hungry they swallow stories through every mouth, and in their innards miracles occur; a little bit of one story joins to an idea from another, and hey presto, when they spew the stories out they are not old tales but new ones. Nothing comes from nothing, Thieftlet; no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old -- it is the new combinations that make them new. (H 86)

Prior to the happy conclusion, as Haroun's contingent passes the Twilight Strip and enters what Rushdie might have named the Monologic Sea, the increasingly poisoned story waters cause Goopy and Bagha to begin "coughing and spluttering" (*H* 139), until finally they can swim no further. Moments later, Haroun notices that "the thick, dark poison was everywhere now, obliterating the colours of the Streams of Story, which Haroun could no longer tell apart" (*H* 146). If the literary imagination does indeed require Bakhtin's "broader world" (415) revealed by heteroglossia, then the Plentimaws, choking in the poisoned sea, are close to the truth when they bemoan, "Now it's Hell!" (*H* 139). "In a world built on sacrosanct certainties," Milan Kundera writes, "the novel is dead" (237).

The world Kundera describes is the very world that Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* crashed up against in 1988. What Rushdie discovered from the violent reception of *The Satanic Verses* is that "one may not discuss the growth of Islam as a historical phenomenon, as an ideology born out of its time" ("Choice" 11). As Craige argues in "Literature in a Global Society," the conflict that grew out of this clash between the "hybridity, impurity, intermingling"-minded Rushdie ("In Good Faith" 394) and a culture that increasingly feels its traditional identity being threatened, is one that we can expect to re-occur often. And as the pressure for "cultural interpenetration" intensifies on a resistant culture like that of the fundamentalist Muslims, a more inclusive and certainly more open dialogue will be required of both sides.

Still, even if the Muslim reading of *The Satanic Verses* is less defensible for having been an excessively literal one, both Craige's essay and K.M. Newton's "Literary Theory and the Rushdie Affair" astutely suggest that the world would do well to widen the issues

of the Rushdie affair, which until now have revolved almost exclusively around freedom and censorship, to include the complexities of globalization. Additionally, since the Rushdie controversy has also turned on different ways of approaching literature--literal interpretations by the Muslims opposed to Rushdie's metaphorical, "postmodernist playfulness" (Craig 398)--a wider, more mutually empathetic dialogue would address questions of how to read and what are the functions and effects of art. Newton's argument proposes that anyone who participates in this dialogue must at least consider the possibility of a community's right to reject a text as literature (thereby validating the literal reading), that perhaps those who support Rushdie "are not expressing a disinterested literary judgement but are ideologically motivated by their desire to protect Western values of free speech and free expression from attack" (239). Although it seems obvious that a literal, grammatical reading of the offending passages in *The Satanic Verses* would constitute "under-reading" (Newton 237), Newton rightly calls for greater sensitivity to the Muslim position in the matter, which recalls Said's wish that more energy had been expended in constructive dialogue. Since Muslim defiance cannot possibly be diffused by mere counter-condemnations, it makes great sense to construe dialogic relations and welcome Muslim participation. As Haroun perceives, "If Guppees and Chupwalas didn't hate each other so ... they might actually find each other pretty interesting" (H 125).

Ultimately, it seems that what was purported by the Ayatollah and the Muslims to be a clash of truth against blasphemy is, as Rushdie suggests, rather "a clash of languages," a clash which often reduces to a clash of one word against another, sometimes even one

word against the same word. One of the many ironies of Rushdie's supposed breach of taboo is the fact that the novel's title, *The Satanic Verses*, deemed blasphemous in itself, comes not from Rushdie but from the *Al-Tabari*, one of Islam's canonical sources. Using the title was, Rushdie claims, part of "the process of reclaiming language from one's opponents,"⁸ and part of his (and his characters') larger process of seeking "to become fully human by facing up to the great facts of love, death and (with or without God) the life of the soul" ("Choice" 11). The Muslim leaders' intolerance in denying these goals through censorship, condemnation, and death sentences, reduced honest attention to their position, and polarized the debates into often simplistic battles between authority and disobedience, freedom and repression, speech and silence, light and darkness. These opposites, relevant because of the sharply defined, if narrow, level of discourse created by the fundamentalist Muslim response, may explain why *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was an appropriate follow-up to *The Satanic Verses*. Watching the Shadow Warrior's martial dance,

Haroun thought about this strange adventure in which he had become involved. 'How many opposites are at war in the battle between Gup and Chup!' he marvelled. 'Gup is bright and Chup is dark. Gup is warm and Chup is freezing cold. Gup is all chattering and noise, whereas Chup is silent as a shadow. Guppees love Stories, and Speech; Chupwalas, it seems, hate these things just as strongly.' It was a war between Love (of the Ocean, or the Princess) and Death (which was what Cultmaster Khattam-Shud had in mind for the Ocean, and for the Princess, too). (*H* 125)

Haroun also references and pays tribute to, in Plentimaw fashion, many sources that themselves feature such dualisms: *The Arabian Nights*, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, the tales

of Kafka, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, among others. Like these various works, and as Said, Craige, Newton and others have called attention to, Rushdie recognizes, even with *Haroun*, that the dialogue must be more open and complicated than these dualisms seemingly allow: “But it’s not as simple as that,” Haroun tells himself after noticing all of the opposites at war,

because the dance of the Shadow Warrior showed him that silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly); and that Action could be as noble as Words; and that creatures of darkness could be as lovely as the children of the light. (*H* 125)

Haroun is an appropriate follow-up to *The Satanic Verses*, not only because it exemplifies the discrepancy produced by a discourse that has simplified issues of a complicated controversy, but also because it was also a necessary follow-up, for its author at least. Besides needing to pursue Milton's "immortall garland," to send the political "answer-word," Rushdie needed to defy his isolation by experiencing again the joy and magic of storytelling. We might think of Rushdie early in *Haroun*, when the “Ocean of Notions” is reduced to the “Shah of Blah,” when Haroun realizes that the Mist of Misery has caused his dad to become disenchanted with his art: "When Haroun heard his father say *only a story*, he understood that the Shah of Blah was very depressed indeed, because only deep despair could have made him say such a terrible thing" (*H* 48). After his adventure with Haroun, Rashid recovers the “Gift of Gab” (*H* 206), and storytelling becomes again a means of making magical worlds real. Rushdie would hardly call the events that precipitated *Haroun* an adventure (or perhaps he would), but

telling Haroun's story is nevertheless a vehicle for joining his son in the magical "field of representation" (Bakhtin 27): as he says in the novel's dedication poem, "As I wander far from view / Read, and bring me home to you."

Rushdie's exile has given him plenty of occasion to dream about his own creative Eden--the Eden that Nadine Gordimer says must necessarily be lost for such a writer--where his storytelling would at least be more "pure," less mandated by responsibility. This Eden would probably look something like the study of his North London home, with his son, Zafar, sitting next to him at the word processor, co-writing a version of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* without any need for an overtly personal allegory. Such a novel would be no less dialogic than the existent one, but Rushdie's "most recent semantic instantiation" (Bakhtin 316) could be more like the bathtub tale he and Zafar intended, and therefore less dire and less political. As it is, though, for most it may be reassuring to consider that where there are totalizing discourses there are likely also to be fresh battalions like the Pages of Gup. We might hope that sunlight will eventually dissolve the detached shadows and tear away "the shrouds of silence and shadow" (*H* 188) in all the world's dark places, and that the Pages will then gallop through the open gates as they do in the land of the Chupwalas. And for those artists who drink the Story Waters and create those battalions, those artists who raise the possibility that perhaps "art *is* on the side of the oppressed" (Gordimer 291), let each one receive "the Land of Gup's highest decoration, the Order of the Open Mouth" (*H* 192).

Walcott's *Omeros*:
Towards "A Fresh Language Salty and Shared"

If *Omeros* is too stately to admit water genies, guppees, and plentimaw fish into its coral world, still its waters are just as multicoloured as *Haroun's*. Its most direct influence also flows from the "Old Zone": in "the old age / of the wrinkled sea" (280) comes the moan from the ancient Aegean. Derek Walcott has had a lifelong fascination with the cultures of classical times, and with metaphors from those times that still linger in the modern literary consciousness; this fascination derives in part from Walcott's having begun his career at a time when he and other West Indian artists foresaw an artistic and intellectual flowering in their islands that would parallel that of the ancient Aegean. The lone skirmish in *Omeros* (besides the recreated naval battles in St. Lucia's colonial history), a brief fight between fellow fishermen Achille and Hector, is over nearly before it begins, but it does manage to summon images of Homer's epics. Still, it was not the Homer of "great wars and great warriors" whom Walcott found himself thinking of in writing the poem: "I was thinking of Homer the poet of the seven seas" (Bruckner C13).

Throughout *Omeros* there is an overlapping, shared experience and a common identity between this classical Homer, the blind seer Seven Seas, and the narrating poet himself. In his 1993 stage version of *The Odyssey*, this exchange between Odysseus and Demodocus captures Walcott's sense of the kinship between these various poets:

ODYSSEUS

That's a strange dialect. What island are you from?

DEMODOCUS

A far archipelago. Blue seas. Just like yours.

ODYSSEUS

So you pick up various stories and you stitch them?

DEMODOCUS

The sea speaks the same language around the world's shores.(122)

These lines, together with the intermingling of poets across time in *Omeros*, and with Blind Billy Blue's role as multiple poets in Walcott's *Odyssey*, suggest, as Robert Hamner notes, Walcott's belief in a "commonality of poetic function regardless of place and time" (103). This function, according to Walcott, is to respond to the poet's "elemental awe" and lovingly to assemble the shards of a culture:

It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirloom whose restoration shows its white scars....Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. (Nobel 262)

As we will see, such a restoration for Walcott involves not only re-membering history and creating history through art, but also entails eventually releasing History--or, to use Walcott's word, "dissolving" History--for a more healthy celebration of present possibilities.

The task he sets for himself of reassembling the "cracked heirloom" is a problematic one, given his background and divided loyalties: that Walcott's "Story Tap" at times seems so directly connected to the ancient Mediterranean and other fountains of Western influence has earned him at least a small cadre of critics. With *Omeros*, one might easily

be suspicious of an adaptation of a cornerstone of the Western cultural tradition by a poet who has described himself as "schizophrenic, wrenched by two styles" ("Codicil" 97). *Omeros* fashions itself after the Homeric world, draws from it the names for principal characters, and portrays an island once named Helen, with a "Homeric association" that "rose like smoke from a siege" (*O* 31), forming a potentially troubling foundation in a work that seeks the role of being the "parentheses of palms shielding a candle's tongue" (*O* 75), the role of at once recovering, protecting, and renewing the identity and history of a colonized people.

There is, however, plenty of textual evidence in *Omeros* that shows Walcott to be deflating the traditional epic and re-fashioning it to accommodate his (and the Caribbean's) purposes. And even without this evidence, Walcott acquits himself of many potential criticisms by virtue of positions stated in interviews and in rare but forcefully convincing essays like "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?", in which, for example, he elucidates the positive value of being "wrenched by two styles." To Walcott, there is a big difference between using what he and his people have been given (and then employing Rushdie's strategy of "reoccupying negative images"), and being yoked to the language and narratives of the colonizer. In a 1990 interview with David Montenegro, Walcott makes a declaration that might serve as a defense of the "Homeric association" of *Omeros*:

Obviously, when you enter language, you enter a kind of choice which contains in it the political history of the language, the imperial width of the language, the fact that you are either subjugated by the language or you have had to dominate it. So language is not a place of retreat, it's

not a place of escape, it's not even a place of resolution. It's a place of struggle. (208)

Walcott rejects the rage of the Caliban who feels he "must abuse the master or hero in his own language" (Muse 4), as well as the unhealthy belligerence that Walcott believes is the inevitable result of "historical sullenness." Both the rage and the vengeful sulking are, he feels, ultimately uncreative, and Walcott thus positions himself instead with the Caliban who becomes powerful by mastering the oppressor's language. As Rushdie suggests in *Shame*, liberation comes not merely from advancing alternative stories and histories, but also from actively engaging and critiquing the monologic discourse they replace:

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blind-folded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive.... History loves only those who dominate Her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement. (133-4)

Thus, what others see as of capitulation Walcott and Rushdie see as victory: in "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?", for example, Walcott resolutely claims that "mimicry is an act of imagination" ("Culture" 55). To exclude anything--language, literature, art--because it is somehow not original, or because it is created or influenced by the colonizers, leads only to what Walcott calls "a literature of recrimination and despair" (Muse 2), and amounts to a denial of the sea of stories' "liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity" (*H* 72). It is to employ a similar sort of monologic control as Khatam-Shud: it is to plug the source of stories in the name of Caliban's rage.

Nevertheless, we are left with more subtle contradictions in *Omeros*, contradictions that are unremarked, and that often are unresolvable by turning elsewhere in Walcott's oeuvre. Early in Book Seven, for example, as Omeros leads him up a steep path, the poet mutters, "I have always heard / your voice in that sea, master" (*O* 283). In this invocation of a literary master of the Western cultural tradition, the uglier meaning of the word "master," in the context of Caribbean history, makes the address the poet chooses a curious one. And even if this address is not in itself discomfiting, by following immediately after the poet's stated desire to see "the light of St. Lucia at last through her own eyes" (*O* 282) it contradicts, and perhaps cancels, the poet's stated desire. It's possible that this line of criticism is unfair to Walcott if it ignores both the poet's ready acknowledgment that his servitude represents a wound little different from Philoctete's, and that the possibility that his frequent self-deprecation--"I heard my mouth babbling" (*O* 283), etc.--is less a sign of awe before a Western master as it is an indication of his anguished desire for an authentic poetic voice, the cure for that wound. It also may be that we need to think of Omeros in this passage as being less the Greek Homer and more the universal muse, the poet of the Seven Seas, the one who, like the sea, "speaks the same language around the world's shores." This last possibility, of course, might yield a clarity derived by the reader, but it wouldn't eliminate the textual confusion, the seeming confusion of the narrating poet: one still wonders why there isn't more "struggle" and less adulation in the poet's relationship with his "master" Omeros.

It is worthwhile considering that these contradictions exist, if only because the effects of being "divided to the vein" ("A Far Cry" 18) might at times work against the battle

Walcott presumes to fight for the Caribbean against its own Khattam-Shud: Western History. When Achille travels in time on the ocean floor in Book Three, three centuries of History, replete with betrayals of his ancestors, transpire above him:

... in its swell
the world above him passed through important epochs

in which treaties were shredded like surf, governments fell,
markets soared and plunged, but never once did the shocks
of power find a just horizon (155)

This History is neither a "just" one, nor is it one that in any sense belongs to Achille or to his people. A linear history, one comprised of heroic figures peopling "important epochs," and featuring "a succession of episodes which can easily be given some casual connection" (Lamming 36), has been denied to the peoples of the Caribbean because of centuries of colonialism. Nevertheless, the Caribbean continues to be weighed against these "important epochs," and, considering that the islands' true histories and culture are not placed in the other balance pan, it is not surprising that they are subsequently found to be lacking. That this Khattam-Shud of History has perpetuated itself is evidenced by the fact that J.A. Froude's now infamous observation about the West Indies that "there are no people there in the true sense of the word with a character and a purpose of their own" (347) is restated seventy-five years later by one of the Caribbean's own luminaries, V.S. Naipaul: "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (27).

To insist on adopting a linear history based on progress, one that moves ever onward

and upward, may be a conditioned inclination even for peoples faced with non-history (there are still school textbooks in the Caribbean that testify to this), but, as Edouard Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, it is also to fall into "the chronological illusion":

It is possible to reduce our chronology to a basic skeleton of "facts," in any combination....Once this chronological table has been set up and completed, the whole history of Martinique remains to be unraveled. The whole Caribbean history of Martinique remains to be discovered. (13)

Returning to Naipaul's assertion, it would seem that the Caribbean writer must either break down the first half of the statement by establishing a new conception of history for the Caribbean, or contest the second half, that "nothing was created in the West Indies." Choosing the latter approach has perhaps had the tendency to lead writers towards the "historical sullenness" that Walcott so bemoans, sometimes to the defensive anger in the more extreme expressions of Negritude. In choosing to confront the former, though, writers like Walcott and Glissant, in works like "The Muse of History" and *Caribbean Discourse*, first destabilize and then, in their imaginative works, reconfigure this notion of History into something more fluid, more circular, more oceanic.

Walcott's oceanic conception of history is most directly presented, outside of his essays and prior to *Omeros*, in "The Sea is History," from his 1979 collection of poems, *The Star-Apple Kingdom*. This poem marks one of Walcott's most explicit attempts to counter and spurn the textbook narratives of Western History, to undo what was ingrained in him as a youth, when, he writes,

I saw history through the sea-washed eyes

of our choleric, ginger-haired headmaster,
 beak like an inflamed hawk's,
 a lonely Englishman who loved parades,
 sailing, and Conrad's prose. (*Another Life* 212)

“The Sea of History” begins contemptuously in what could be imagined as just such a colonial classroom:

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
 Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
 in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
 has locked them up. (364)

In this poem, though, there is at last an alternative to the linear History taught by the headmaster, which for the Caribbean translates to one of "ennui, defence, disease," for, as Mary Fuller writes, "the ocean itself is set against a history demanded, in the form of a catechism or an accusation" (519). The strident arrogance of the colonial headmaster may at first induce a tentative response, but the answers to his questions slowly transform the poet from schoolboy to teacher of the teachers. "But where is your Renaissance?" the schoolboy is asked:

Sir, it is locked in them sea-sands
 out there past the reef's moiling shelf,
 where the men-o'-war floated down;

 strop on these goggles, I'll guide you there myself.
 It's all subtle and submarine,
 through colonnades of coral (365)

The “colonnades of coral,” an image that prefigures one of the concluding metaphors of

Omeros, represent a deeper, more diverse historical memory than the linear one promulgated by the imagined headmaster. With “bone soldered by coral to bone” after the hardships of the Middle Passage, the coral also represents loss, however, and lives now retrievable only through the imagination of the poet. “I’ll guide you there myself,” says the poet, which is significant not merely because he guides the colonial, but because he is a poet: faced with so many fissured histories, and with so many historical fragments, the poet is as important to the Caribbean as the historian in distilling the collective memory. Not only are there relatively few dates, events, and artifacts for the historian to order, but to engage this “subtle and submarine” memory often requires a deep-sea diving of sorts into folkloric and oral traditions, and into an intricate network of cultural relationships.

Conversely, there is nothing subtle and submarine about the monuments, the battles, and the textbooks that tend to define the narrative of History that “The Sea is History” and Walcott's entire oeuvre contest. To Walcott, Western History mostly either “makes similes of people” (Bruckner C13), presumes to metaphorize the ‘Other,’ or, as he poetically suggests in the Nobel speech, spends most of its time sighing nostalgically over ruins.⁹ Ruins and other visual relics of the past have, as Foucault writes, always been important to History, which, “in its traditional form, undertook to ‘memorize’ the monuments of the past, transform them into documents” (7). For emergent countries, the trouble with these monuments is that they document not merely a nation’s or a people’s glory, but often another people’s misfortune and the injustices done to them: as Walter Benjamin explains, “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a

document of barbarism” (258). In *Omeros*, statues and monuments represent an outmoded History, and they are enlivened for the narrating poet only by “the bird in the statue’s hair” (204). However lifeless the poet recognizes this History to be, he realizes that it remains powerful, and that it is not stopped from proclaiming, “from some Caesar’s eaten nose” (*O* 205), that its stony “art” legitimates its power. For the peoples of the monument-less Caribbean, though, the past suggested by these monuments is “better forgotten than fixed with stony regret” (*O* 192).

The counteracting history Walcott searches for is thus not the one read about in the school textbooks, nor, as he notes in the Nobel speech, is it the one that is often visible in the touristically described and defined islands of the present day: “There is a territory wider than this--wider than the limits made by the map of an island--which is the illimitable sea and what it remembers” (266). What the sea remembers is suggested in Walcott’s autobiographical epic, *Another Life*:

a child without history, without knowledge of its pre-world,
only the knowledge of water runnelling rocks,
...
that child who puts the shell’s howl to his ear,
hears nothing, hears everything
that the historian cannot hear, the howls
of all the races that crossed the water,
the howls of grandfathers drowned (285)

The “nothing ... that the historian cannot hear” includes the great naval battles, like the storied Battle of the Saints, which figured prominently in St. Lucia’s fourteen flag changes between France and England. More significant, though, is the “everything ... that

the historian cannot hear," the "howls" and the stories of the most blameless victims of three centuries of colonialism: "It is the sea that holds the secret of the bodies of Carib suicides as well as slaves thrown overboard which are part of the remembered we" (Dash/"Writing" 612). The sea remembers the exile, the fear, and the suffering of the Middle Passage; it neutralizes "the stench from manacled ankles" (*O* 15), muffles the groans of anguish in the slave ships' holds, and ultimately receives on its floor the dispossessed souls "with tinkling leg-irons" (*O* 149), who lose their lives to the march of History, "for the silver coins multiplying on the sold horizon" (*O* 149).

It is to Walcott's credit that he treats both that "nothing" and that "everything" with sensitivity, that he avoids colonizer/colonized polarities in *Omeros*. He is able to create a complex and generally sympathetic portrait of the wounded and expiation-seeking colonial, Major Plunkett, and somehow makes the death of Plunkett's namesake, the young midshipman who dies in the Battle of the Saints, both moving and tragic. Plunkett's research and intention to give Helen and her island their own historical narrative are admirable, but doomed to failure: as he recites "every billet, regiment, / of the battle's numerological poetry" (*O* 91), and claps "conclusive hands" (*O* 100) when he finds Homeric parallels, we realize that, though he's a colonial burdened by guilt, he's still a colonial, and his inevitable Western historiography will be the same one the Caribbean and *Omeros* needs to subvert. "It's all folk-malarkey," Plunkett says when confronted with an aspect of the island's real history, while thinking to himself "history was a cannon, not a lizard" (*O* 92). If his historian's intentions are fatally biased, though, the earnestness of his attempt--"yet it was all for her" (*O* 270)--does eventually separate

him from the glories of an imperial past, and leads him to a more honest and authentic relationship with the island he now calls home. By the end of *Omeros*, Plunkett begins “to speak to the workmen / not as boys who worked with him, till every name / somehow sounded different; when he thought of Helen / she was not a cause or a cloud, only a name / for a local wonder” (*O* 309). When Elsa Goveia says that West Indians will not be able to grasp the complexity of their history “until they can see the white colonists, the free people of colour, and the Negro slaves as joint participants in a human situation which shaped all their lives” (34), the understanding she calls for is one that is likewise needed by the colonials if there is to be a healthy postcolonial future. Plunkett at least achieves this.

More important, though, than mediating the colonizer/colonized polarity, *Omeros* takes pains to establish that there are other histories below the ocean's surface “parchment ... of crinkling water” (*O* 155), in the depths amongst the shipwrecks and the watery graves of those Africans who never completed the Middle Passage. In giving voice to the victims of the slave trade, *Omeros* finds the “love that reassembles” that Walcott calls for in his Nobel acceptance speech. The poet does not merely eulogize these “shadows” from the antipodal coast, but creates histories by imagining a specific loss for each of them:

... They had wept, not for
their wives only, their fading children, but for strange,
ordinary things. This one, who was a hunter,

wept for a sapling lance whose absent heft sang
in his palm's hollow. One, a fisherman, for an ochre
river encircling his calves; one a weaver, for the straw

fishpot he had meant to repair, wilting in water.
 They cried for the little thing after the big thing.
 They cried for a broken gourd. It was only later

that they talked to the gods who had not been there
 when they needed them. Their whole world was moving,
 or a large part of the world, and what began dissolving

was the fading sound of their tribal name for the rain,
 the bright sound for the sun, a hissing noun for the river,
 and always the word "never," and never the word "again." (152)

These are the stories not included in the historical narrative told by the Khattam-Shud of the West. What Walcott strives for with this and other partly factual/partly imagined sequences in *Omeros* is the beginning of a new historiography, one that is “not the business of historians exclusively” (Glissant 65). What would seem to be a linear historiography even on Walcott’s part, involving a look back at the slave trade, is really not so. These people--a hunter, a fisherman, a weaver--are not fixed or memorialized in a moment of progress; they are not even significant in a way that would justify making them part of a traditional historical narrative. Rather, they represent a reality beyond one mandated by any sense of schematic chronology, becoming part of a new historical narrative that “turns the past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present--opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects” (Bhabha 167). If we apply Rushdie's dictum to Walcott--that in writing novels he is "not attempting to falsify history, but allow a fiction to take off from history"--then we might say that Walcott also allows fictions to take off from history, but in so doing he presumes to create a new history.

The stories in Walcott's Caribbean are thus not merely literary, with Homeric and Joycean breakers, among many others, washing up against the shore, but also historical. As in the near confluence of the methods of Plunkett and of the narrating poet for giving Helen (St. Lucia) a history, the former using a linear, historical approach, and the latter a metaphorizing, poetic approach, the literary and the historical close in on each other in *Omeros*: despite the "two opposing strategems" (271), says the poet, "like enemy ships of the line, / we crossed on a parallel" (270). This parallel crossing in one sense represents a departure from Walcott's previous conception of the rival positions of the historian and poet, particularly as elucidated in "The Muse of History." In the essay, "the weight of the present," celebrated through poetry's negation of history, is set against "the rational madness of history" (6). *Omeros*, however, at least during the episode when the poet realizes Plunkett's use of Helen to metaphorize history "was an ideal no different from mine" (*O* 270), shows the poet to be questioning whether the objectives of historian and poet do, in fact, reflect a polarity.

The converging of the "enemy ships" is, in another sense, though, perfectly consistent with Walcott's philosophy, and with ideas constructed in *Omeros*, particularly in the way the image of smoke is used throughout the poem. Of smoke's many connotative associations in *Omeros*, the most prevalent derives from its frequently simultaneous appearance with references to Troy or to History. In this context, smoke becomes a metaphor used in a poetic rendering of his argument in "The Muse of History," where he exhorts New World artists not to be chained to the past, especially when "in time every event becomes an exertion of memory and is thus subject to invention" (Muse 2).

Beyond and between its episodic string of dates, Walcott believes that History's causes and facts become obscured, smoky, and fictive: "the farthest exclamations / of History are written by a flag of smoke" (*O* 99). In Walcott's dramatization of *The Odyssey*, Eumaeus asks Odysseus if the Trojan War was indeed fought for a faithless wife: "Among other things," Odysseus answers. "The smoke has clouded its cause" (114).

Troy being a mystery which even Western historians have strained to authenticate to a greater degree than Homer's poetry has, Walcott hardly astonishes when he suggests that what really happened there is concealed by historical smokiness. As an example of history's "slow fade into fiction" (Terada 192), though, there is probably no better symbol than Troy. By using Troy and Homer to assert that "history is written" ("Muse" 2) and therefore arbitrary, if not fictive, Walcott works towards diminishing the legitimacy of History, and validating the writing of new and alternative histories, even if such histories are written by the poet. "Enemy ships of the line," history and story cross on a parallel, and one hardly knows one from the other as they fire their smoky charges. This parallel crossing of history and story, of fact and fiction, is a particularly revealing image for the Postmodern age, and it's one that creates ambiguity regarding the impact on history of its imaginative rendering. Bill Buford recently discussed "the revival of narrative in historical writing" and "the 'new' literary non-fiction," and the tendency to interpret history as story rather than as sociology or statistics ("Seduction" 12). In the same publication, Rushdie placed V.S. Naipaul and many other contemporary novelists at "the leading edge of history, creating this new postfictional literature" marked by the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction ("In Defense" 50). One of the tenets of New

Historicism, at least as delineated by H. Aram Veese, is that “literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably” (2).

But what these convergences do end up obscuring or mitigating are “the conflicting pulls of history and art,” the goal of the former to render experience in an ordered, factual manner, and of the latter to render and extend the meaning of experience creatively (Tagoe 52). The resultant confusion can lead to passionately contested debates like the one over *The Satanic Verses*, a book that Rushdie says was wrongly approached “as a work of bad history” (“In Good Faith” 393). Yet Rushdie himself has not escaped the confusion of “the new postfictional literature,” in one instant defending *The Satanic Verses* as a treatment of Islam as “a historical phenomenon,” and in the next insisting on “the fictionality of fiction” (“In Good Faith” 393). In between these two extremes, Rushdie offers perhaps the most useful analysis when he says that “fiction uses facts as a starting place ... then spirals away to explore real concerns that are only tangentially historical” (“In Good Faith” 409). Thus, although history is only accessible as a text, as Jameson writes, and must eventually fade into some degree of fiction because of the limitations of any frame of reference, yet its conventional status as the opposite of fiction is perhaps now too often minimized. Walcott and Rushdie would certainly agree that history’s devolution into story is indeed only a starting place, and that, as such, the most important goal is not to make new truth claims, necessarily, but to relativize existing truth claims--to expose the ideology and power relations concealed in any story.

Edouard Glissant believes that History and Literature, in their Western manifestations, are not, in fact, “enemy ships,” but allied flag ships. “The linear nature of narrative and

the linear form of chronology," he writes, are notions that not only "reinforce each other" (73), but that also attempt "to put together a total system" (75) which inevitably excludes:

It is against this double hegemony of a History with a capital H and a Literature consecrated by the absolute power of the written sign that the peoples who until now inhabited the hidden side of the earth fought, at the same time they were fighting for freedom. (76)

Thus, not only do such peoples fight a conception of History that is a smoky screen, but also one that frames its narrative with a power-augmenting ideology, like the selective photographer Walcott describes in his Nobel speech, who "can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself" (264). Monologic, totalizing discourses that presume to be authoritative, like Glissant's H and L "double hegemony," become more maddeningly sinister the more they are recognized for their ideology-serving fictiveness, like the "flat and shapeless" detached shadows of Rushdie's Chupwalas. History legitimates, and who it legitimates depends on whether its narrative is written "through the memory of hero or of victim" ("Muse" 2). Of course, History's authors have overwhelmingly been the former, and in the process of writing History they have not only spread their self-supporting ideology, but have dissolved "the authority to interpret into the interpretation itself," creating a single and exclusive "historiographic ideology" (Ashcroft *et al.* 355). If we accept the truth of such convergences as fact and fiction, and H/history and L/literature, as well as the importance for emergent cultures to contest the "historiographic ideology," it is easier to understand Rushdie's, Walcott's, and many other post-colonial writers' revisionist imperative.

Just as he emphatically establishes the smoky untrustworthiness of History, Walcott also stresses the importance of entering its obscurities (both realistically and imaginatively) in search of previously concealed histories, for somewhere within these histories lie connections with the past that the Caribbean peoples need for establishing a collective identity. As Plunkett realizes, "Helen needed a history....Not his, but her story" (*O* 30). For, indeed, we know she both *has* a History, the limited and limiting one supplied for her by the West (despite his good intentions, Plunkett is about to compose just such a narrative), and *needs* a history. As with the weight of the baby she carries, Helen is burdened by centuries of colonial battles and oppression, by her link with the ant-like, coal basket-carrying toils of "those Helens from an earlier time" (*O* 73). The island Helen represents, St. Lucia, is similarly burdened. At one point, the bellowing voice of a St. Lucian DJ--"We movin', man! We movin'!"--carries down the beach to Achille in his canoe. "But towards what?" (*O* 112) the poet wonders. The island no doubt is moving towards defilement and detritus, a postcard paradise for camera-clicking tourists, where the land is evaluated in terms of "views for hotels" by speculators "whose heads," the poet later envisions, "gurgled in the lava of the Malebolge / mumbling deals as they rose" (*O* 289). Meanwhile, the natives' lives, offshoots of a hybridized culture still under-represented, Walcott believes, in historical narratives, are often like "declining" comets (and like Hector's aptly named taxi), lights that spark but "then fade, forgotten, as sunrise forgets a star" (*O* 112).

The question for Helen--woman and island--that will determine the identity of the new life she bears, is also the question for Achille, Plunkett, and Walcott himself. It's a

question that Helen faces as she walks towards a fire on the beach, but one that must be contemplated on a more figurative level: "She has to decide / to enter the smoke or to skirt it" (*O* 34). To enter the smoke, whether through the imagination or actual research, is to get behind the screen of History: it is the way for these characters to search for previously concealed histories and meaningful fragments of the "cracked heirloom," in "the ruptures" of time (Foucault 166), without having to authenticate the History the smoke represents. It is, again to use Foucault's terms, to engage with the "total history," or that History which seeks "a system of homogeneous relations" (9) and to find the spaces of dispersion, to create plurality of meaning, to "*make differences*" (205). In *Omeros*, both the characters' ancestors and those who suffered similarly throughout the world live somewhere in this smoke of History, and wait to be discovered: "smoke signalled the thunder / of the dead" (*O* 59); the "stone-faced souls" (*O* 164) of the Aruac watch Achille through the smoke rising from the bonfire of pomme-Arac leaves; the Plains Indians are concealed within the wintry blizzard of "white smoke" (*O* 175). Achille's time-traveling hallucination, when he meets his African ancestors, is also described as being like "wandering smoke" (*O* 175). When Afolabe asks if his son might be "smoke from a fire that never burned" (*O* 139), the lesson becomes clear to Achille: smoke implies fire--implies an origin--and to refuse to enter the smoke and seek out that origin is to have an unrealized history, to be "only the ghost / of a name" (*O* 138-9).

The power of *Omeros*, its hope for the hybridized culture it celebrates, derives from the fact that its characters choose to get off Hector's careening comet by engaging with and piercing the smoke of History. The poem thus becomes a West Indian emissary of

Fanon's "literature of combat,"¹⁰ where characters fight for their existence as individuals and as a nation. It is a fight to reconceive ("de-linearize") time, to discover what Fanon calls the fluctuating movement of "a performative time," and to recover space that has been commodified by outside interests, like the "passive consumerism" (Glissant 76) that provides the post-independence nourishment of colonial domination. And it is through this fight--a cultural fight transpiring in and around a language once "closed to the meaning of words and ideas other than the established one" (Marcuse 96)--that for Walcott the "Homeric coincidence" (*O* 100) and parallel begin to dissipate, and events are interpreted through new meanings.

By the poem's end, only Helen appears to be skirting the smoke, still serving the tourists and not engaging in the struggle. A waitress at the Halcyon,

... her

head will turn when you snap your fingers, the slow eyes
 approaching you with the leisure of a panther

through white tables with palm-green iron umbrellas,
 past children wading with water-wings in the pool;
 and Africa strides, not alabaster Hellas,

and half the world lies open to show its black pearl.
 She waits for your order ... (*O* 322-3)

That Helen, the most significant female character in the poem, is left to wait for "our" order while the poet and the Halcyon's customers "guess the rest / under the madras skirt" (*O* 322), can be troubling, especially when the other characters are granted their various epiphanies and healings. And, shortly after rejecting literature's "remorse," the

tendency to metaphorize and force coincidences out of historical echoes, for his new directive to see Helen “as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow, / swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone, / as fresh as the sea wind” (*O* 271), the poet nevertheless continues to metaphorize Helen until the very end. In her final appearances she is described as having “that slow / feline smile of a pregnant woman” (*O* 318), as being “dressed / in the national costume: white, low-cut bodice” (*O* 322), with her “slow eyes / approaching you with the leisure of a panther” (*O* 322). Certainly she is still making “a drama out of every passing” (*O* 97).

To conclude from these passages and from the non-resolution of Helen’s story, however, that Walcott's treatment of women has swayed towards prejudice,¹¹ perhaps undercutting the inclusiveness he seeks in *Omeros*, may be to ignore both the complexity of the Helen figure and the poet's frequent acknowledgments of his own limitations. When Achille recognizes that Helen “wished / for a peace beyond her beauty, past the tireless / quarrel over a face that was not her own fault” (*O* 115), and in nearly any reference to Helen, we are led to contemplate not merely a female character, but also a parallel between Helen the woman and Helen the island. Mindful of Rei Terada's claim that the poet often insinuates “Helen's unreality” (192) in *Omeros*, we must remember always to consider Helen's multiple roles, which may make her final appearance in the Halcyon Inn chapter more ambiguous. Helen is much more than a waitress as she strides past the tables: she is also a beautiful island catering to tourists, and to visitors who arrive feeling that here “what they called history could not happen” (*O* 28). We know enough about Helen’s autonomy and defiance to realize that she doesn't *really* wait for our order,

but only appears to; as the island, the fact that she waits is not a gendered or prejudiced diminishment, but the truth. Walcott has never hidden his unease with what tourism has done to the Caribbean,¹² and we therefore can surmise that his narrator is not displaying chauvinistic satisfaction as he gazes at Helen in "the national costume," for might it not be St. Lucia that is wearing the costume?

Helen is thus not merely an ebony beauty who wafts through the poem and drives men mad, a beguiler who sends the principal male characters to the depths, both literally and figuratively: she is also a device for the poet, which explains, perhaps, why she is seen almost exclusively from outside viewpoints, and why the reader is so rarely allowed inside her thoughts. Terada, in discussing Walcott's strategy in using the Helen figure, argues that he "interrogates analogy" (189) with her. At the *Halcyon*, the "interrogation" seems to leave the poet aware that he cannot expect to see Helen as the sun sees her, as the various ways of interpreting Helen converge in this scene and seem "no longer to contest each other" (Terada 196). Depending on whose eyes are transmuting her, Helen can suggest "historical or literary analogues" (Terada 196), such as the Greek Helen or "that battle / for which they named an island" (*O* 322), thus almost making her a metaphor for the convergence of history and story, in that one interpretation of her can be just as valid as another. She can also be an object of male desire, with "just a cleft of a breast" (*O* 322) showing for the customers, or simply, but no less subjectively, she can be a "a fine local woman" (*O* 322). This exploration of "seeing" complicates the figure of Helen by seeming to make her part of Walcott's broader investigation of parallels and similitude in *Omeros*. That a strictly gendered critique of the final sections of *Omeros*

may not be fair to Walcott, though, does not make the poet's continued metaphorizing of Helen necessarily more palatable. Additionally, even the ambiguous shifting from Helen the woman to Helen the island can itself be deemed a disturbing objectification or effacement of Helen: the poet seems to be wielding the very sort of power to signify that he elsewhere labors to deny in Western historical narratives.

The way for Helen--again, woman *and* island--to escape waiting on orders is, the poet suggests, to enter the smoke of History, to search for her identity and heritage. By the end of the poem, it is presumably the goal of Achille, who wants her to give the baby an African name, to help Helen achieve this. Says Ma Kilman of Helen, "that girl / must learn where she from" (*O* 318). The narrating poet can just as quickly ask, however, "Why make the smoke a door?" (*O* 271). This line reflects Walcott's ongoing internal battle between mimicry and originality, as he struggles to free himself from Homeric associations, but we might also think of it as a warning to his characters: the concealed histories within the smoke possibly being so fragmentary as to be disappointing, they must therefore recover what they can and quickly move on, or risk facing historical despair. Says Walcott of his two characters in his play "Pantomime": "They have to confront their history. But once that peak is passed, once the ritual of confrontation is over, then that's the beginning of the play" (Walcott/Hirsch 75). In one sense, then, the birth of Helen's baby, assuming she first confronts her history, could be the beginning of a new story. The "wave-rounded sigh / of her pregnancy" (*O* 322) has the potential to release Helen from the symbolic claims of History, to become a symbol of the Caribbean's future. As Julie Minkler offers, Helen becomes "the concretized version of a

long-awaited Caribbean identity," one which "resists comparison and belongs to no one" (273).

The poet, too, sees himself at the beginning of a story at the end of *Omeros*, a story and a fresh history that he will help to write. At nearly the same time he warns of the "double hegemony" of history and literature, Edouard Glissant also realizes that the merger of history and literature is not only a natural one, but a crucial one to any people's history. A collective identity, he believes, can only be founded when common ideals are given a voice as they pass through the "elemental awe" of the poet: "That is what we mean when we state that the beginnings of all peoples (from the *Iliad* to the Old Testament, from *The Book of the Dead* of the Egyptians to Europe's chansons de geste) are poetic" (Glissant 236). Walcott expresses a similar sentiment in his Nobel speech, when he places himself in the company of Homer and the first Antillean to win the Nobel Prize, Saint-John Perse:

A boy with weak eyes skims a flat stone across the flat water of an Aegean inlet, and that ordinary action with the scything elbow contains the skipping lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; and another child aims a bamboo arrow at a village festival, another hears the rustling march of cabbage palms in a Caribbean sunrise, and from that sound, with its fragments of tribal myth, the compact expedition of Perse's epic is launched, centuries and archipelagoes apart.... There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn. (265)

It is here, then, in the so-called "self-defining dawn," where Walcott finds his way out of the poet/historian impasse, the impasse that was temporarily created in *Omeros* with the converging "strategems" of Plunkett and the poet. Significantly, after he has been guided

by Omeros to his epiphany, the narrating poet wakes at dawn to his “morning’s gift” (*O* 295) and a feeling of liberation: “My light was clear....The sea was my privilege. / And a fresh people” (*O* 294-5). Here, as in the Nobel speech, “the load-bearing image of dawn/sunrise inherently militates against the retrospectivity of history” (Collier 98). After the poet has connected with a collective memory that dispels historical time, and as he recognizes the “visual surprise” of the islands waiting to be celebrated, History “dissolves” in the dawn, like moonlight dissolved by the light of day.

“I had no nation now but the imagination” (350): Shabine’s words from the 1979 poem, “The Schooner *Flight*,” could be Walcott’s dictum for the Caribbean poet who finds himself or herself in the self-defining dawn. And this imagination imperative is exactly what the modern Caribbean needs from its artists,¹³ for having retrieved the fragments from its fissured histories, and subsequently faced with “such a tangled skein, such a profusion of ingredients ... imagination may offer more clarity than any academic ordering of facts and artifacts” (Fox 331). Thus, although “a thousand [presumably Western!] archaeologists” started screaming (*O* 164), it is symbolically appropriate when Achille unearths an Aruac artifact, only to hurl it immediately over the oleander hedge. After struggling throughout his career to throw History over the oleander hedge, Walcott respectfully constructs alternative histories in *Omeros*, trying to reassemble that “cracked heirloom” and to leave it stronger than it ever was. Given that the poet is needed as much as the historian in the Caribbean today, this effort should not be seen as anything other than a complement to “the growing number of unpublished theses in West Indian history, the fruit of hard work, serious scholarship, and at times nationalist pride” (Rohlehr 74)--

even if readers don't necessarily believe the poet when he says "privileges did not separate me" (*O* 210).

The problem in the Caribbean, and the particular problem for a work like *Omeros*, is that, as Glissant offers, "the poem and the novel are seen ... as exclusively intellectual ... *in that they remain separate from the poetics of the group* (fn. 106). "The group" is always evolving, and is certainly taking more and more pride in Caribbean literature, which may make Glissant's assessment dated before too long, if it's not already, but still one wonders what chance the grandly styled *Omeros* has to "slowly and proudly enter into the popular conscience" (Clark 604). Of course, even if its poetry does not register in the popular conscience, *Omeros*, by virtue of the award it clinched for its author, will impact the people of the Caribbean in other ways: the substantial cash award Walcott received in 1992 enabled him to make immediate investments in the arts in the Caribbean, perhaps making his dream of "an island devoted to art" attainable (Figueroa 3). But if the poetry does have lasting meaning in the region, it will not likely be due to its linguistic marvels, or to its masterful deflation of the classical epic, or to its fight against the monologism of Western History. Rather, the role of *Omeros* in the Caribbean will depend largely on the power of its sensual evocations, on the celebration of the common lives and occupations of the islands, and on the reception to its new narratives of Caribbean history.

A question we are left with, then, is whether the historical fragments that are preserved, and the histories that are supplemented imaginatively in *Omeros*, are rendered convincingly? Does *Omeros* meet the challenge of the narrating poet's father, who bids

his son “walk up that coal ladder as they do in time, / one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme,” thereby “to give those feet a voice” (*O* 75,76)? Comparing Walcott’s poetic vision of the toiling Helens to similar accounts it stands to replace, like the more mechanical version of would-be historian J.A. Froude, who makes the women carrying coal baskets sound nearly robotic,¹⁴ it would seem that Walcott and *Omeros* do succeed. Likewise when we consider that the imagined histories of the slaves-to-be as they endure the Middle Passage and wince from “the one pain / that is inconsolable, the loss of one’s shore” (*O* 151) is one of the many scenes in *Omeros* that do much to ennoble people who otherwise might not live in posterity’s narratives. Dignifying women carrying coal baskets and soon-to-be slaves who miss mending straw fishpots might not seem momentous until we remember that among the tasks of literature are giving life to Bhabha’s “incommensurable narrative subjects,” and revealing “apparently insignificant elements which may be evidence of an unconfessed privation, of a historically denied gesture” (Damato 607).

Still, Walcott’s ambition in *Omeros* is greater than merely imagining histories for people “as if they were fragments or shards washed up on this shore” (White/Walcott 35). The poet of *Omeros* seeks a rebirth of sorts for his people in “a fresh language / salty and shared” (*O* 295), which, if “like Philoctete’s wound, this language carries its cure” (*O* 297), leads to the question of who exactly is cured? The poet, of course, believes *he* has been cured. As his “craft slips the chain of its anchor” (*O* 323), he realizes the pretensions he has been moored to:

In one pit were the poets. Selfish phantoms with eyes
 who wrote with them only, saw only surfaces
 in nature and men, and smiled at their similes,

condemned in their pit to weep at their own pages.
 And that was where I had come from. Pride in my craft.
 Elevating myself. (*O* 293)

The “fresh language” seems at least to suggest a personal escape for the poet from always hearing “the Trojan War / in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman’s shop” (*O* 271), although one wonders if the poet has here revealed another unresolved confusion: is it a new language that he needs, or does he need to hear differently? If the poet succeeds finally in getting the smoke of Troy out of his eyes (even this is uncertain), and if at least three of his main characters (Achille, Philoctete, and Plunkett) are “healed” by poem’s end, what of a wider curative power for this “fresh language” and for a work like *Omeros*? When Achille enters the hold of his boat wielding his cutlass, the poet grants him “the same privilege / of an archipelago’s dawn” (*O* 294-5), a privilege that Walcott describes elsewhere as “Adam’s task of giving things their names.”¹⁵ That a common fisherman and the narrating poet receive this privilege simultaneously suggests that *Omeros* leaves it to everyone on the islands to wake up to this dawn, to see themselves as something like “first guests of the earth” (*Another Life* 294), and to start using this “fresh language” to name things anew. “Rattling into the hold,” Achille might thus represent the poet’s hope for the archipelago, at last “islands not written about but writing themselves” (Nobel 265).

Amidst the healing and various epiphanies in the closing chapters of *Omeros*, Walcott

also takes care to keep the wound of history present. "Affliction is one theme / of this work" (*O* 28) the narrator boldly asserts early in the poem, and Walcott is wise not ultimately to close all of the wounds during the reveling in a suddenly jubilant present. During the Boxing Day celebration that Achille and Philoctete dress up for,

... All the pain

re-entered Philoctete, of the hacked yams, the hold
closing over their heads, the bolt-closing iron,
over eyes that never saw the light of this world,

their memory still there although all the pain was gone. (*O* 277)

The memory remains because History has not and cannot be obliterated, but the pain is gone because now there is a new meaning to the past, and a new history--one that allows at least Philoctete to look back without shame. Even if the various healings in *Omeros* are individual, still this epic, unlike its classical ancestors, centers around not one but multiple heroes. The author's hope seems to lie in a series of such individual awakenings and healings, whose sum eventually achieves a collective cure for the wounds of History and time. Whether or not instances such as Philoctete's Boxing Day experience, instances which continue to augment the histories he both re-members and imagines throughout the poem for the ancestors of the Caribbean peoples, preserve the credibility of Walcott's project in *Omeros*, is perhaps only for the people of these islands to decide.

Even if it doesn't earn its way "slowly and proudly ... into the popular conscience," *Omeros* at least becomes its own answer to the disparaging statements of Froude and Naipaul, prescribing its own agenda for the Caribbean islands by seeking the gesture

"which displaces History in order to give it back another meaning" (Baudot 584). The various meetings at crossroads and meridians in *Omeros*, symbolized by the swift's flight, which repeats "the X of an hourglass" (*O* 189), indicate where this gesture is to be formed, and prefigure, as Homi Bhabha says of Walcott's poetry, "a kind of solidarity between ethnicities that meet in the tryst of colonial history" (231). As noted earlier, Walcott is hardly the first to call for or to establish a new conception of history, nor is he the first to emphasize the present rather than "that long groan which underlines the past." Besides Walcott and Rushdie, many artists and theorists have seemed to respond to this appeal from one of Walter Benjamin's 1955 "Theses of History: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that is in keeping with this insight" (259). In the Caribbean, Edouard Glissant calls for a "cross-fertilization of histories" (93) that reevaluates power and reconfigures time, and George Lamming seeks a new definition of a historical event, one which offers "antagonistic oppositions and a challenge of survival that had to be met by all involved" (36). Foucault writes that his "archaeological description" must include "an attempt to practice a quite different history" (138), one that "would deploy the space of a dispersion" (10). And as Wesley Kort discusses in "Religion and Literature in Postmodernist Contexts," the Postmodern age has been largely compliant in accepting a new attitude towards history, one that escapes subservience: "History, rather than authoritative and single, becomes ... malleable and multiform....When taken as a single story, history will be serving ideology. History is a resource, not a determinant or authorization" (576).

For Walcott, multiplicity will arise when the Caribbean peoples begin using his “fresh language, salty and shared.” That this language must be “salty” as well as “shared” suggests that not only does it still carry “the incurable wound of time” (O 319)--“For us in the archipelago the tribal memory is salted with the bitter memory of migration” (“Muse” 6)--but that it also must contain the character of the sea. Walcott’s treatment of History was foregrounded earlier in this study with Benjamin’s notion that a critique of the concept of historical progression “through a homogeneous, empty time” (263) is central to a reconfigured historiography. It is fitting that Glissant repeatedly suggests that any new conception of Caribbean history will be directly influenced by its geography, which means, of course, in large part by the sea. Landscape, he believes, is “inextricable in the process of creating history” and “its deepest meanings need to be understood” (105-6). Given that a new history in the Caribbean requires new conceptions of “sequence” and “time scale,” if the land and the sea do indeed influence the process of creating history they must first have influenced the perception of time: “We study time as the product of the link between nature and culture, and the phenomenon that among our peoples emphasizes the ‘natural’ nature of time” (92). These links again suggest Bakhtin’s *chronotope* and “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.”

If time, or the conception of time, is understood to be somehow spatial, it makes Walcott’s realization of “an enormous lesson” in what the sea can teach more crucial to his historiography:

Nothing can be put down on the sea. You can't plant on it, you can't live on it, you can't walk on it. Therefore, the strength of the sea gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd. Because history is an intrusion on that immensity....The mind itself tries to absorb part of that immensity, and realizes that its own contributions to the immensity of that thing are simply a bubble, one of many bubbles in an infinite area. There is a strength that is drawn from island peoples in that reality of scale in which they inhabit. There is a sense both of infinity and acceptance of the possibility of infinity, which is strong. And in a way that provides a kind of endurance. It provides a kind of settling of the mind that is equal to the level of the horizon. That is what I have learned from growing up on an island. (White/Walcott 21)

The history that Walcott calls “an intrusion,” of course, is the one whose direction is “linear and progressive,” and the one that must be replaced by a new conception of history that does not, like the horizon, “proceed from A to B to C to D and so on” (White/Walcott 21). For Walcott and Glissant, certainly, the reconstitution of history and time entails “the creative energy of a dialectic reestablished between nature and culture in the Caribbean” (Glissant 65), a reconnection with the landscape and the seascape. “The sea was still going on” (*O* 325) as Achille leaves the beach at the end of *Omeros*, still waiting for more than this one fisherman to “share the privilege of an archipelago’s dawn.” As Edward Brathwaite, one of the Caribbean’s foremost historians and poets, suggests, “the most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since emancipation” is its sense of “not belonging to the landscape” (29)--and to the seascape, we might add. If nature and the sea can teach anything in the Caribbean, it is that the new dialectic must be one of openness: “I think that the Caribbean Sea does not enclose; it is an open sea. It does not impose one culture, it radiates diversity” (Glissant 261).

We have discussed how Walcott uses the ocean as a metaphor, but his “enormous

lesson” suggests another possibility, that there is a more direct relationship between the sea and his artistic process, and between the sea and any new Caribbean historiography. Not coincidentally, D.J.R. Bruckner says of *Omeros* that “the greatest character is the Caribbean Sea itself” (C17); greatest, indeed, for this character contains and transforms History and histories, defines limits for the other characters through its power, while simultaneously suggesting boundless possibilities through its immensity. Bakhtin, in discussing the *chronotope*, argues that “those things that are static in space cannot be statically described, but must rather be incorporated into the temporal sequence of represented events and into the story’s own representational field” (251). The sea certainly seems to be present in *Omeros* in the very manner Bakhtin describes, informing the poem’s metaphors, its conception of and treatment of time, and, seemingly, the very form and structure of the poem itself, which, like the tide, with each new chapter brings some sort of erasure or renewal and “a continual sense of motion” (Walcott/Hirsch 74).

One of the many passages from *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* that inspired its juxtaposition with *Omeros* in this study is one that itself innocently suggests “the link between nature and culture”:

Gup City was all excitement and activity. Waterways crisscrossed the city in all directions--for the capital of the Land of Gup was built upon an Archipelago of one thousand and one small islands just off the Mainland--and at present these waterways thronged with craft of every shape and size, all packed with Guppee citizens, who were similarly diverse ... (H 87)

The word that stands out in this passage after Glissant’s and Bakhtin’s discussion of relationships between space, time, and culture is “similarly.” Like the Caribbean Sea for

Glissant, the geography of Gup City irradiates its peoples with diversity, who then must reflect and embody this diversity when they tell their stories, whether historical or otherwise. Walcott notes a similar connection in the Nobel speech: although he is talking about the sad legacy History has left the Caribbean when he says that “it is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself” (266), he also maintains that the region’s new history is in that geography as well--and certainly in the sea--waiting to be accessed by new voices in a new language. Rediscovering this link, this dialectic between nature and culture, is thus one of the key steps for successful contestations of monologic discourses, like those assumed by Rushdie and Walcott in their respective 1990 works.

Haroun, of course, only tangentially deals with history, but history is, nevertheless, a primary concern throughout Rushdie’s oeuvre: as he writes in *Shame*, “I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change” (92). And because history is, ultimately, just a story, just a text, we can be assured that the Sea of Stories is filled with its share of histories, as is Walcott’s sea. Homi Bhabha asserts that Benjamin’s “‘state of emergency’ is also always a state of emergence” (41), and for Walcott in *Omeros*, as for Rushdie in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, the place of diversity, the place of emergence for new histories and new stories is the ocean:

Why waste lines on Achille, a shade on the sea floor?
Because strong as a self-healing coral, a quiet culture
is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor,

deeper than it seems on the surface; slowly but sure,
it will change us with the fluent sculpture of Time (*O* 296)

This metaphor of branching coral is so serene as to reflect emergence without emergency, and “the fluent sculpture of Time” sounds uncomfortably linear, perhaps, but yet this “patient, hybrid organism” (*O* 297) must exist somewhere if the people it represents are to believe in their cause, and are to overcome the emergency above the surface. With its ceaseless swirling back and forth through time, with its re-versing of “new into old and old into new” (White/Walcott 36), and with its urgent encounters of cultures at the meridians of “the tryst of colonial history,” it is the poem that frames the coral metaphor that carries the sense of emergency. Meanwhile, the image of branching coral, like *Haroun’s* multi-colored streams of story, effectively renders the unique “subterranean convergence” of the Caribbean’s many histories (Glissant 66); it is a poetic expansion of Brathwaite’s phrase, “The unity is submarine.” The unity is not in this case a newly formed totalization ready to replace the old one, but rather an emergent national consciousness, one at last connected to a collective memory that brings new meaning to the past. Like Foucault’s archaeology, its task being “to *make* differences” and thereby cleanse history “of all transcendental narcissism” (203), this consciousness is founded where “contradiction begins” (*O* 297).

The lesson of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* and *Omeros* may be most simply captured in a phrase from Rushdie’s *Shame*: time and history “cannot be homogenized as easily as milk” (6). Like the Sea of Stories with its various denizens--Guppees, Plentimaw Fish, Water Genies, Hoopoes--”too many Others and Elsewheres disturb the placid surface” (Glissant 228) of homogeneity. As they contest the truth claims of

monologic discourses with alternate stories and histories, Walcott and Rushdie are in accord with Bhabha's assertion that "we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical" (256). Each author interprets this mandate as a call to live with a sense of timelessness, to inhabit "any historical moment unencumbered by time" (Tagoe 52), as well as with a sense of temporality, for in that "fluid sculpture of Time" once colonized peoples at last find pride in their contemporaneity. It is fitting, therefore, that after his dream-like adventures beyond time are happily resolved, Haroun wakes to realize it's his birthday, and that a new future awaits: "'Yes,' he nodded to himself, 'time is definitely on the move again around these parts'" (H 211).

Also on the move, as it always has been and always will be, itself suggesting the timeless *and* the temporal, is the sea. And as it washes up against the archipelago, whether it be Gup City or St. Lucia, "in the salt chuckle of rocks, / with their sea pools" there is the sound, "like a rumour without any echo / of History, really beginning" ("The Sea is History" 367). As more people recognize the imperative implicit in Walcott's and Rushdie's works, and connect their own Story Taps to this sea, the capital H itself is redefined, at last justified because it represents inclusiveness, represents "the signs of survival, the terrain of other histories, the hybridity of cultures" (Bhabha 235). Picking up a conch shell from that "salt chuckle of rocks" and blowing on it, once the master's way of summoning the slaves to work, one might now hear the sea's new message: an order of the open mouth to speak a fresh language, salty and shared.

NOTES

- 1 In his review of *Omeros* (p.C17), D.J.R. Bruckner writes, “Some of the most memorable, dazzling characters are birds. Sewed into a quilt that becomes the universe by an old woman...they take flight and fill the skies of the book the way old gods filled the skies of Homer.”
- 2 After the *fatwa*, Rushdie told an interviewer, Gerald Marzorati (“Rushdie in Hiding,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 4 Nov 1990), p.30, “I had made this promise to my son. It seemed to me to be--in my situation--the one promise I was able to keep.” G.R. Taneja adds that Rushdie “even sent the early drafts of the book to his son for his comments, who coolly told him that the Book needed a faster pace.”
- 3 As Rawdon Edwards writes, “The Slave Trade may be described as a triangular trade. Ships loaded with merchandise in European ports, like Liverpool, Middleburg or Nantes, and sailed for the West Coast of Africa where the merchandise was exchanged for slaves at slave ports like Whydah or Coromantyn. After purchasing the slaves and loading them on their ships, the traders sailed across the Atlantic to the Caribbean where the slaves were sold. The ships were then loaded with tropical products with which they sailed back to Europe where they were disposed” (*West Indian History: Examination Guide* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Columbus Publishers, 1971). In *Omeros*, Walcott writes “our only inheritance that elemental noise / of the windward, unbroken breakers, Ithaca’s / or Africa’s, all joining the ocean’s voice, / because this is the Atlantic now, this great design / of the triangular trade” (130).
- 4 See, for example, A.G. Mojtabai’s discussion of this issue in “Magical Mystery Pilgrimage” (*The New York Times Book Review*, 29 Jan 1989), pp.3, 37.
- 5 Walcott, in his interview with Edward Hirsch, explains, “Think about illegitimacy in the Caribbean! Few people can claim to find their ancestry in the linear way. The whole situation in the Caribbean is an illegitimate situation. If we admit that from the beginning, that there is no shame in that historical bastardy, then we can be men” (p.79).
- 6 See Said’s discussion of “the voyage in” in *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.216, 239-261. Although the phrase “the voyage in” might typically suggest an interior journey, interior to the self, Said’s conception is broader, suggesting a variety of types of resistance writing--political, historical, cultural, etc.
- 7 It should be added that Milton’s tract does seem to support censorship of heretical texts (Catholic and Atheist, for example): “I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how Bookes demeane themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors” (200).
- 8 Rushdie discusses the *Satanic Verses* controversy and the project of “reclamation” in his essay “In Good Faith”: “The very title, *The Satanic Verses*, is an aspect of this attempt at reclamation. You call us devils? it seems to ask. Very well, then, here is the devil’s version of the world, of ‘your’ world, the version written *from the experience* of those who have been demonized by virtue of their otherness....The purpose is not to suggest that the Qur’an is written by the devil; it is to attempt the sort of act of affirmation that, in the United States, transformed the word *black* from the standard term of racist abuse into a ‘beautiful’ expression of cultural pride” (p.403).
- 9 Walcott does not talk about History’s tendency to metaphorize in the Nobel Speech, but this is one of the issues with Plunkett’s research (as well as with the poet’s project) in *Omeros*. In Bruckner’s review, Walcott says that History also “similizes”: “One reason I don’t like talking about epic is that I

think it is wrong to try to ennoble people. And just to write history is wrong. History makes similes of people, but these people are their own nouns” (p.C13). See also Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, p.355-6, who discuss History’s narrative methods, and assert that “that which etymologically begins as a description assumes very quickly a power to signify the ‘Other.’”

- 10 In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon explains that “it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space” (240).
- 11 Walcott’s treatment of women in his poetry has provoked occasional criticism. See, for example, Elaine Savory Fido’s “Value Judgements on Art and the Question of Macho Attitudes: The Case of Derek Walcott” (*Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Vol. XXI:1, 1986, pp.109-19).
- 12 Walcott’s opinions about the negative effects of tourism and outside developing interests are unambiguous both in *Omeros* and in the Nobel speech. In his interview with Hirsch, though, he does concede that he revisits the Caribbean so often “that perhaps literally I’m a Tourist *myself* coming from America.” In a line that might remind us of Helen as symbol of the island, he also adds that “a culture is only in danger if it allows itself to be” (78). This line becomes more problematic, though, when we remember Helen’s continual financial difficulties.
- 13 Given the “imagination imperative,” Walcott is especially troubled by what he sees as a “venal, self-centered, indifferent, self-satisfied, smug” middle class in the Caribbean, one which “enjoys its philistinism” and that “pays very short lip-service to its own writers and artists....What’s wrong is this: a legacy has been left by the British empire of amateurism. What we still have as an inheritance is that art is an amateur occupation” (Walcott/Hirsch 77).
- 14 Froude’s account, from *The English in the West Indies*: “The ship was to go on the next morning to the canal works at Darien. Time was precious. Immediately on arriving she had begun to take in coal, Sunday though it might be, and a singular spectacle it was. The coal yard was close by, and some hundreds of negroes, women and men, but women in four times the number, were hard at work. The entire process was by hand and basket, each basket holding from eighty to a hundred pounds weight. Two planks were laid down at a steep incline from the ship’s deck to the yard. Swinging their loads on their heads, erect as statues, and with a step elastic as a racehorse’s, they marched up one of the planks, emptied their baskets into the coal bunkers, and ran down the other. Round and round they went under the blazing sun all the morning through, and round and round they would continue to go all the afternoon” (197-8).
- 15 This phrase originally comes from Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps*, and is used by Walcott as an epigraph to Part 2 of *Another Life*. Later in the poem, Walcott writes “And now we were the first guests of the earth / and everything stood still for us to name” (231); also, “We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world / with Adam’s task of giving things their names” (294).

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