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# Utopian World-Texts : Circulations of Epic Rhythm in James Joyce's Ulysses and Derek Walcott's Omeros

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le : 09 décembre 2022

**Utopian World-Texts  
Circulations of Epic Rhythm  
in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros***

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# List of Abbreviations

## Works by James Joyce

- D* James Joyce, *Dubliners*. 1914. London: Penguin, 2000
- FW* James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*. 1939. Ed. by Robbert-Jan Henkes et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012
- OCPW* James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*. 2000. Ed. by Kevin Barry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008
- P* James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. New York: Norton and Company, 2007
- SH* James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*. 1944. Norfolk: New Directions, 1963
- U* James Joyce, *Ulysses*. 1922. Ed. by Hans Walter Gabler et al. New York: Random House, 1986

All quotations from *Ulysses* are referred to by episode and line number. Quotations from the other texts above are identified by page number.

## Works by Derek Walcott

- AL* Derek Walcott, *Another Life: Fully Annotated*. 1974. Ed. by Edward Baugh and Colbert Nepaulsingh. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009
- O* Derek Walcott, *Omeros*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990
- PDW* Derek Walcott, *The Poetry of Derek Walcott: 1948-2013*. Ed. by Glyn Maxwell. London: Faber and Faber, 2014
- WTS* Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998

All quotations from *Omeros* are identified by chapter and section. Quotations from the other texts above are identified by page number.



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# Introduction

## Relations in the *Tout-Monde*

‘Each island is an opening,’ wrote Édouard Glissant, suggesting that insularity does not amount to isolation, and instead induces extroversion and relationality.<sup>1</sup> Although the aphorism is a reflection on the specific context of the Caribbean, the Caribbean itself is for Glissant an image of the world at large, a product of precipitous migrations and transcultural contact. As a consequence, the archipelago functions as a site where ‘the boundless effort of the world: to become realized in its totality’—what Glissant also refers to as ‘Relation’—manifested itself in full view for the first time.<sup>2</sup> If insularity can be equated with openness, and if islands can appear as stepping-stones towards some form of totality, that is largely on account of capitalist globalisation, a process which has left virtually no island off the map, and which is the material precondition for Glissant’s Relation. Centuries of exploration, conquest, and systematic exploitation by colonial powers gave birth to ever increasing interdependence and connectedness between the various parts of the world. From the seventeenth century onward, the rise of the ‘plantation complex’ turned the Caribbean into a crucible of capitalist globalisation, with the plantation functioning as a laboratory for modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Anticipating Glissant somewhat, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had remarked in the *Communist Manifesto* that the bourgeoisie, in its relentless quest for new markets and sources of profit, was bound to embrace the whole world, and to ‘establish connec-

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<sup>1</sup>‘*Chaque île est une ouverture.*’ Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*. 1981. Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p. 427. My translation. Michael Dash proposes ‘each island embodies openness.’ See Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. 1981. Trans. by Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. 1990. Trans. by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*. 1990. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 73–85.

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tions everywhere.<sup>4</sup> Marx and Engels had already suggested in the *German Ideology* that modern capitalism was engaged in turning history into ‘world-history.’ After the era of commercial capitalism and colonial monopolies, the alliance of large-scale industry and universal competition in the nineteenth century made every nation dependent ‘on the whole world.’<sup>5</sup>

As that world became increasingly subjected to the all-encompassing pressure of capital, it was assumed that the process of economic unification would bring about similar developments in the realm of culture. As early as 1827, Goethe had noted that ‘national literature is now rather an unmeaning term,’ and anticipated the advent of a *Weltliteratur*.<sup>6</sup> The proto-communistic strain in Goethe’s vision (‘I am more and more convinced [...] that poetry is the universal possession of mankind’) was to resurface two decades later in an often-quoted passage in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature.<sup>7</sup>

The process of globalisation, undermining the national foundations of industry and culture alike, was to bring about unprecedented levels of contact, exchange, and relationality. To a certain extent, that prognosis has indeed been fulfilled. As the process of global integration brought all corners of the earth into its orbit, no enclave remained

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<sup>4</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 1848. Trans. by Samuel Moore. New York: International Publishers, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*. 1970. Ed. by C. J. Arthur. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, pp. 55–58.

<sup>6</sup>J. W. von Goethe and J. P. Eckermann, ‘Conversations on World Literature’. 1827. In: *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. Ed. by David Damrosch et al. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 17–25, pp. 22–23.

<sup>7</sup>Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, pp. 12–13. In his chapter entitled ‘The Geography of the Communist Manifesto,’ Martin Puchner reads that passage as a critique of bourgeois *Weltliteratur*, and a performative intervention towards an international literature yet to come, of which the many translations of the *Manifesto* are the first instantiations. See Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 47–58. For an astute reading of the tensions underlying this passage, see Aijaz Ahmad, ‘The Communist Manifesto and “World Literature”’. In: *Social Scientist* 28.7/8 (July 2000), pp. 3–30.

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isolated from contact with the rest of the world, giving rise to what Édouard Glissant has called ‘*le Tout-Monde*’ or ‘Whole-World,’ an aptly hyphenated compound.<sup>8</sup>

It goes without saying that this process unfolded at the price of untold suffering; as Marx and Engels were well aware, capital came into the world ‘dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.’<sup>9</sup> The tendential unification of the world was imposed through a combination of physical violence and economic subjection, aiming ‘not to equality, but to domination.’<sup>10</sup> In other words, the making of ‘world-history’ was a contradictory process, one in which interconnectedness spelled evermore uneven relations.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Rosa Luxemburg spoke of the ‘continuous to and fro in which individual countries appear only as organic parts of a greater whole.’<sup>11</sup> Yet, the organic whole thus produced was still far from harmonious. Instead, global integration took the shape of the scramble for colonies and militarism, with unprecedented degrees of imperialist tension. Luxemburg went on to highlight

the yawning contradiction between an economic foundation that grows tighter and firmer every day, binding all nations and countries into a great whole, and the political superstructure of states, which seeks to split nations artificially, by way of border posts, tariff barriers and militarism, into so many foreign and hostile divisions.<sup>12</sup>

She was responding to the growing threat of the impending world war, which came as a catastrophic confirmation of capital’s irresistible, and destructive, drive for expansion. After decades of feverish imperialist growth, feeding on colonial plunder and exploitation, the outbreak of the war made it clear that the advance of globalisation did not annul, but heightened, national rivalries. Leon Trotsky uttered a similar verdict in his 1914 pamphlet ‘War and the International,’ also known as ‘The Bolsheviki and World Peace,’ written in the months following the beginning of hostilities. The world war, he reflected, signalled the demise of the national state, ‘the breakdown of the present national economic centres, and the substitution of a world economy in [their] stead’:

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<sup>8</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde: Poétique IV*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. The book was translated by Celia Britton in 2020 as *Treatise on the Whole-World*.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*. 1867. Trans. by Ben Fowkes. Vol. One. London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 926.

<sup>10</sup>Such was Ernest Renan’s rationale for colonisation, quoted in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. 1955. Trans. by Joan Pinkham. Monthly Review Press, 2000, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup>Rosa Luxemburg, *Introduction to Political Economy*. 1925. In: *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*. Ed. by Peter Hudis. Trans. by David Fernbach et al. Vol. One. London: Verso, 2013, p. 126.

<sup>12</sup>Luxemburg, *Introduction to Political Economy*, p. 140.

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The forces of production which capitalism has evolved have outgrown the limits of nation and state. [...] The whole globe, the land and the sea, the surface as well as the interior, has become one economic workshop, the different parts of which are inseparably connected with each other. This work was accomplished by capitalism. But in accomplishing it the capitalist states were led to struggle for the subjection of the world-embracing economic system to the profit interests of the bourgeoisie of each country.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of capitalist globalisation, then, lay a fundamental contradiction; the process drew together the various parts of the world into a tightening net, while at the same time heightening national antagonisms and exacerbating oppressive power relations. The world that emerged as a result exhibited that contradiction as a birthmark. While pointing towards a horizon of unprecedented relatedness, it proved unable to live up to that promise, since the tendential integration of the world-system signified essentially an expanding arena of exploitation and competition, creating ‘a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of “advanced” countries.’<sup>14</sup> The First World War was indeed the moment when ‘the unity and the disunity of the modern world [appeared] together.’<sup>15</sup>

In the eyes of Trotsky and Luxemburg, as well as Lenin, imperialism was to be the ‘last stage’ before a world revolution that would do away with all forms of national

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<sup>13</sup>Leon Trotsky, *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*. 1914. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918. URL: <https://archive.org/search.php?query=external-identifier%3A%22urn%3Aoclc%3Arecord%3A1041645565%22> (visited on 11/02/2021), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. 1916. London: Penguin, 2010. The notion of ‘world-system’ was elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein in the four volumes of *The Modern World-System*, which chart the emergence of a European-centred capitalist ‘world-economy’ from the mid-fifteenth to the seventeenth century, and its subsequent consolidation and global expansion. Wallerstein makes a distinction between the early stage of the ‘world-economy’ and its later, fully ‘global’ manifestation, achieved only with the rise of modern industrialism in the nineteenth century. Incidentally, in his prologue to the 2011 reedition of the first volume, Wallerstein makes the astonishing claim that for Marxists ‘the “economy” was a national construct. Classes were national. [...] I was in the process of developing an alternative view of capitalism. In my view, capitalism was the characteristic of a world-system, of the specific variety I called a “world-economy.”’ Yet in the opening pages of Rosa Luxemburg’s already quoted *Introduction to Political Economy*, she argued that capitalist economy could only be understood on a world-scale, and that ‘national economy’ was nothing but ‘a scientific mystification in the interest of the bourgeoisie.’ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. 1974. Vol. 1. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011, p. xx.

<sup>15</sup>Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 15.

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antagonism, competition, and exploitation.<sup>16</sup> To this rather predictable cast, I would add the perhaps unlikely figure of Leopold Bloom, who—albeit at a slight remove from the theoretical sophistication of the Second International—in June 1904 shared similar concerns over ‘inequality and avarice and international animosity’ (*U*, 17.991).

This may seem like an implausible outfit; yet, it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that while Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Lenin were witnessing the unravelling of imperialism, Joyce was working on *Ulysses*. As Tom Stoppard has brilliantly perceived, Joyce and Lenin may well have sat virtually side by side in the same library in Zurich, the former working on *Ulysses*, the latter on *Imperialism*.<sup>17</sup> Franco Moretti has called *Ulysses* ‘a monumental autopsy of an entire social formation,’ the depiction of a world subjected to the logic of commodity circulation, whereby Joyce became ‘the poet of the crisis of classical capitalism in its classical area of development.’<sup>18</sup> Whatever the precise nature of Joyce’s politics—let alone Bloom’s—I would argue that *Ulysses* is as politically relevant, in its own way, as Lenin’s pamphlet, in registering that specific stage in capitalist globalisation known as imperialism.

Almost seventy years later, in 1990, Derek Walcott published his grand poem *Omeros*, which echoes *Ulysses* in many ways, although on the other side of the Atlantic, and at the other end of a troubled century. *Omeros* too resonates with the history of imperialism; it charts the fallout of ‘a devalued empire’ in a post-colonial era, in Walcott’s Caribbean island of Saint Lucia (*O*, 38.2). Yet the narrative also travels across the Atlantic multiple times, to Africa and various European destinations, as well as North America. Like Joyce’s Dublin, Walcott’s Saint Lucia becomes an opening onto the wide world, a stage for what Édouard Glissant calls ‘the intertwined poetics’ which connects any given place with the world at large.<sup>19</sup>

There are many reasons to read *Ulysses* and *Omeros* jointly, as I will argue in the course of this dissertation. Although Joyce’s and Walcott’s trajectories and practices

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<sup>16</sup>The case for revolutionary internationalism was notably rehearsed by C. L. R. James in the late 1930s, as another world war loomed. See C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*. 1937. Ed. by Christian Høgsbjerg. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. For a more recent survey and discussion of imperialism, see Alex Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

<sup>17</sup>Tom Stoppard, *Travesties*. 1974. London: Faber and Faber, 2013. Trotsky too wrote his pamphlet in Zurich, between August and November 1914.

<sup>18</sup>Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken For Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*. 1983. London: Verso, 1997, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*. 1997. Trans. by Celia Britton. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020, p. 74.

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differ significantly, there are striking parallels between them. Both hailed from marginalised peripheries, islands colonised by the same imperial power, and both ultimately achieved international prominence, as their masterworks became enshrined in the canon of ‘English’ literature, under the modernist and postcolonial rubrics, respectively.

Both *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are protean texts, stretching generic boundaries beyond recognition—the former hardly a novel, the latter hardly a poem, neither one an epic in any rigorous sense of the word. The most obvious reason to read them jointly is that both works engage with the Homeric epic, whose presence is inscribed in the two titles, and which serves as a common literary ancestor to *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. I will address the implications of this intertextual engagement in my first chapter. Yet my argument—and the main justification for the foregoing excursus—is that both works encode an experience of global relationality, and in many ways engage with the problematic notion of world-literature. That experience transpires at a thematic level, in the shape of physical displacement, travel, and migration. In ‘Ithaca,’ for instance, Bloom remembers listening to the stories of his father’s journeys. A Hungarian Jewish emigrant, Rudolph Bloom would relate to his son a ‘retrospective arrangement of migrations and settlements in and between Dublin, London, Florence, Milan, Vienna, Budapest, Szombathely,’ which young Leopold would trace on ‘a geographical map of Europe (political)’ (*U*, 17.1907). Ironically, the detail which should have passed unnoticed is underscored by the delayed parenthesis; the map is emphatically ‘political,’ a picture of the fraught landscape of pre-war Europe, riven by borders and boundaries. Thus, when Bloom contributes his own daring thesis on the national question in Barney Kiernan’s pub—‘a nation is the same people living in the same place [...] Or also living in different places’ (*U*, 12.1422)—we should not dismiss the awkward logic (‘the same people’ as who?) as pure nonsense, but appreciate the intricacy of the questions raised. In *Omeros*, migration is even more prominent: the text moves restlessly across the Atlantic, following the routes of the Middle Passage, the hallucinatory return journey to Africa undertaken by Achille, or the enforced displacement of Native Americans on the Trail of Tears. The narrator, shuttling back and forth between continents, appears to follow the migrations of a swift, whose reversible flights eventually stitch the two hemispheres together:

I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;  
her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking  
basins of a globe in which one half fits the next

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into an equator, both shores neatly clicking  
into a globe (*O*, 63.3)

The swift's flight functions as a metaphor for healing—it has carried in its entrails the seed which cures Philoctete's festering wound—but also for historical reconciliation. Earlier in the poem, the swift appears as an arrow shot from the bow of the Bight of Benin, 'her target the ringed haze / of a circling horizon' (*O*, 47.3). Like the 'globe' evoked in the preceding lines, the circularity of the 'ringed haze' and 'circling horizon' conveys the aspiration to recover some form of wholeness. Yet the motifs associated with flight and displacement are merely the most conspicuous instances of the engagement with the world-totality which sustains Joyce's and Walcott's texts, and which I intend to explore at a more fundamental level.

### **Thesis Statement (1): Totality**

In this dissertation, I propose to tease out the ways in which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* engage with an intractable world-totality and, in so doing, gesture towards the resolution of its internal contradictions. To put it more concisely, my wager is that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* can be read as utopian world-texts.<sup>20</sup> Although Joyce and Walcott write from, and about, highly specific locales, I will argue that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are indeed world-texts to the extent that they register 'the boundless effort of the world: to become realized in its totality.'<sup>21</sup> What is at stake is not so much the ultimate success or failure of that endeavour; it may be that the world-totality is structurally ungraspable. What matters to me is the engagement itself, and the utopian glimpses caught along the way towards that receding horizon.

This is of course not to suggest merely that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* should be mined for documentary evidence of globalisation—although there is plenty in both. Nor do I intend to catalogue the many displacements which occur throughout the texts, simply as illustrations of capitalist integration—although the two are obviously related. Rather, I want to focus on the formal, or generic, manifestations of the processes touched upon

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<sup>20</sup>I borrow the notion of 'world text' from Franco Moretti. For him, world texts are characterised by the fact that '[their] geographical frame of reference is no longer the nation-state, but a broader entity—a continent, or the world-system as a whole.' I adopt the hyphenated form 'world-text' in order to be consistent with my use of 'world-literature,' laid out below. Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*. London: Verso, 1996, p. 50.

<sup>21</sup>Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 172.

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by Glissant, in the belief that ‘forms are the abstract of social relationships.’<sup>22</sup> To put it differently, some connection can be mapped between the contradictory social realm of the world-system and *Ulysses* and *Omeros* as cultural facts.

Actually, the totalising ambition which sustains Joyce’s and Walcott’s works is explicitly stated in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. In the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode, a chapter which famously recapitulates the entire history of English literary styles, Joyce advertises the encyclopaedic scope of his ‘chaffering allincluding most farraginous chronicle’ (*U*, 14.1412). In *Omeros*, the narrator’s father communicates a personal *ars poetica* in which the encircling motif surfaces yet again: rhyme, he professes, is ‘the parentheses of palms / shielding a candle’s tongue, it is the language’s / desire to enclose the loved world in its arms’ (*O*, 13.3).<sup>23</sup> In both cases, we encounter the same urge to grasp everything, to say it all or, as Stephen puts it early on in *Portrait*, ‘to think about everything and everywhere’ (*P*, 13). If a poetic device such as rhyme is a means to enclose the whole world, might we not trace other manifestations of that ‘desire,’ not only at the thematic level, but at the formal also?

My intention is precisely to follow this hint and articulate the connection between literary form on the one hand, and the ‘untotalizable totality’ that is the world-system on the other.<sup>24</sup> I should add that this distinction between ‘form’ and ‘content,’ or ‘theme,’ is a convenient, but artificial operation; this manner of posing the problem treats as separate two levels which are in reality functions of one another. Nevertheless, I will turn to the notion of rhythm as a potential bridge between literary form and the potentially ungraspable world-totality which informs it. Before I spell out more fully my reasons for doing so, however, I need to explain what I mean by totality; this, in turn, will feed into my definition of rhythm.

The notion of world-totality, or Whole-World, so central to Glissant’s work, has long been a cornerstone of dialectical thinking, which can be traced back to Hegel, and even to pre-Socratic philosophy. In his *Treatise on the Whole-World* Glissant makes explicit reference to ‘the abrupt, fragmentary texts of the pre-Socratics,’ whose reflections on totality and generalised inter-involvement provide him with an antidote to the ossified

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<sup>22</sup>Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’. In: *New Left Review* 1 (Jan. 2000), pp. 54–68, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup>On this obsessive motif in Walcott, see Sneharika Roy, *The Postcolonial Epic: From Melville to Walcott and Ghosh*. Oxon: Routledge, 2018, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup>I borrow this phrase from Fredric Jameson’s definition of globalisation, laid out in his preface to Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. xii.



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products of modern, that is to say post-Platonic, conceptual thought. Glissant celebrates ‘this feeling that our period has renewed that pre-Socratic era, when the hybridities of islands, the archipelagic thinking and the dreams of the Great-Whole had connected the human to the earthly, or the cosmic.’<sup>25</sup> How exactly are we to understand this notion of ‘the Great-Whole’?

To begin with, we may accept Georg Lukács’s premise that ‘the question of universal history is a problem of methodology that necessarily emerges in every account of even the smallest segment of history.’<sup>26</sup> As a consequence, it is indispensable to assess the nature of the relationship whereby part and whole, segment and totality, actively constitute one another. In other words, we need to start from

the structural fact that the single aspect is not a segment of a mechanical totality that could be put together out of such segments [...]. It must be seen instead as containing the possibility of unravelling the whole abundance of the totality from within itself. But this in turn can only be done if the aspect is seen as aspect, i.e. as a point of transition to the totality.<sup>27</sup>

What is true of ‘universal history’ is no less true of social reality more generally. My rationale for connecting the apparently unrelated phenomena of the capitalist world-system on the one hand, and the rhythms of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* on the other, is that they are part of a single continuum, and must be analysed as such. Fredric Jameson has written extensively on the operations of ‘dialectical criticism,’ whose aim is to perceive any given phenomenon ‘as a moment or single interlocking section in a single articulated process.’<sup>28</sup> Expanding on the holistic view of the world-totality I have just sketched out, I would go further and accept Jameson’s claim that

social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic

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<sup>25</sup>Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, p. 102. For an analysis of the Heraclitean input in Glissant’s notion of totality, see Alexandre Leupin, *Édouard Glissant, philosophe: Héraclite et Hegel dans le Tout-Monde*. Paris: Hermann, 2016, pp. 89–117.

<sup>26</sup>Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. 1923. Trans. by Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971, p. 151.

<sup>27</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 170.

<sup>28</sup>Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. 1971. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 312. For a defence of totality as a heuristic tool, see Fredric Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’. In: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 347–360, pp. 354–6.

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contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the various levels of that reality do manifest themselves as discrete, unrelated phenomena. That is why it is necessary to reconstruct their underlying coherence, to restore the totality which appears to us in fragmented form. Thereupon, Jameson defines the operation whereby a single terminology may be devised in order ‘to analyze and articulate two quite distinct types of objects or “texts,” or two very different structural levels of reality.’<sup>30</sup> This operation he refers to as ‘mediation’ or ‘transcoding.’ My proposition is that rhythm can be used to mediate, or transcode, the social contradictions unravelling within the world-totality, and to inscribe them at the level of literary form.

## The Whole-World and the Semi-Periphery

In this respect, the view from the (semi-)periphery may afford invaluable insights into the functioning of the relational complex that is the capitalist world-system. I will adopt the terminology of the Warwick Research Collective and refer to *Ulysses* and *Omeros* as semi-peripheral texts.<sup>31</sup> The notion of semi-periphery is a relative one, rather than a rigid geographic designation; in our case, it allows us to capture, for instance, the incongruous facts of geo-historical marginality—Ireland, Saint Lucia—on the one hand, and the canonical status of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* on the other. Above all, it alerts us to the oblique positioning of Joyce and Walcott within the literary world-system. By virtue of their semi-peripheral character, as sites ‘where historically non-homogeneous social and symbolic forms, often originating in quite disparate places, coexist in a confined space,’<sup>32</sup> *Ulysses* and *Omeros* may capture the rifts and discrepancies which are constitutive of the world-system, and thus function as privileged ‘point[s] of transition to the totality.’

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<sup>29</sup>Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. 1981. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup>For Benita Parry, peripheries include ‘all societies that have been co-opted or coerced into capitalism’s world system.’ Benita Parry, ‘Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms’. In: *Ariel* 40.1 (2009), pp. 27–55. The Warwick Research Collective define the semi-peripheries as ‘transistor zones’ which function ‘not only hegemonically, transmitting value to core regions, but also counter-hegemonically, circulating new forms of solidarity and international consciousness across the global landscape of combined and uneven development.’ WReC, ‘WReC’s Reply’. In: *Comparative Literature Studies* 53.3 (2016), pp. 535–550, p. 549.

<sup>32</sup>Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 50.

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It is on those terms that I will be speaking of ‘world-literature.’ In using the hyphenated form ‘world-literature,’ I adopt the definition put forward by the Warwick Research Collective as ‘*the literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system.’<sup>33</sup> Thereby, the initial, totalising project of *Weltliteratur* can be critically rearticulated, without obliterating its structural unevenness. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, one may be forgiven for asking whether Goethe’s vision of *Weltliteratur* was anything but a Panglossian delusion. The world of letters does not exist in an ethereal vacuum; it is hardly more idyllic than the ‘real world’ of economic competition and geopolitical power struggles. Although the notion, initially, may have signalled a healthy refusal to abide by borders of any kind, and an aspiration to shed all forms of parochialism, the present globalised world has fallen quite short of the Enlightenment ideal advocated by Goethe. Luxemburg’s diagnosis of the contradictions at the heart of capitalist globalisation is no less true today than it was a century ago. While the era of imperialism and world war signalled the objective bankruptcy of national states and economies under the strain of tendentially globalised productive forces, the failure of world revolution, which ought to have brought into being a truly unified world-totality, allowed the paraphernalia of nations to live on—and, in the words of Ernst Bloch, ‘everything obsolete drifted back into place.’<sup>34</sup>

Besides the ceaseless reconfigurations of the international division of labour, developments in information technologies and means of communication have gone a long way towards ‘binding all nations and countries into a great whole,’ while eruptions of national strife, from border disputes to trade wars and military interventions, keep tearing at the seams. Many critics have addressed the contradictions and inequalities which beset the space of world-literature at all levels, from production to publication and institutional recognition, noting that the universalistic ethos of the discipline often rests on ethnocentric prejudice, and that the homogenising pressure of market forces

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<sup>33</sup>WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup>Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*. 1964. Trans. by Anthony A. Nassar. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 1.

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may turn the field into a literary monoculture.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that the uncritical celebration of concepts such as ‘globalisation’ or ‘cosmopolitanism,’ to say nothing of ‘humanity,’ has a long-standing association with privilege, and often serves to obfuscate the persistence of power relations. We observe just this kind of political sleight of hand in Joyce’s story ‘After the Race,’ in *Dubliners*. The affluent entrepreneur Ségouin, the owner of a motor company and several hotels in France, hosts a dinner party where the guests include Jimmy Doyle, a young Irishman born to a hard-working butcher. Jimmy is thrilled to bond with wealthier people, but when he starts airing anticolonial grievances in the presence of an English guest, threatening to spoil the genteel atmosphere of the occasion, Ségouin adeptly forestalls the undesirable discussion by lifting his glass ‘to Humanity’ (*D*, 39). The maneuver is of course disingenuous. In these circumstances, the invocation of ‘Humanity’ is little more than a rhetorical smokescreen designed to elude the oppressive nature of British rule in Ireland, and thus suppress Jimmy’s vindication. The opening of the story was quite explicit in inscribing the colonial relation onto the very cityscape of Dublin, with the flamboyant racing cars speeding through a ‘channel of poverty and inaction’ while Dubliners ‘raised the cheer of the gratefully oppressed’ (35). As the night progresses, the men drink to their respective countries, ‘Ireland, England, France, Hungary, the United States of America,’ a list whose apparent inclusiveness, like Ségouin’s toast, elides the power imbalances between the places mentioned (40). As the drinking leads to gambling, Jimmy, somewhat intoxicated by the alcohol and the fashionable company, plays recklessly. Unsurprisingly, by the end of the night, ‘Jimmy did not know exactly who was winning but he knew that he was losing’—in fact, the main winner turns out to be the Englishman (41). Thus Ségouin’s toast to Humanity appears as a bourgeois fallacy through and through, an evasion of the national question which makes it complicit with the colonial status quo.

The history of world literature as a discipline is replete with reiterations of Ségouin’s toast. The rise of ‘comparative literature,’ as it came to be known in late nineteenth century Europe, aimed to transcend ‘national one-sidedness.’ The appeal of this vision

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<sup>35</sup>Significant contributions include Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*. 1999. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004; Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007; Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. London: Verso, 2013; Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. London: Verso, 2015; Aamir Mufti, *Forget English!: Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016; Joe Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

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was itself a testimony to the growing concern with nationhood and the rise of modern nation-states, as well as struggles for national independence. The discipline was driven by a purportedly idealist aspiration to cultural pluralism, but often relied on chauvinistic assumptions. The paradox, as Susan Bassnett has noted, is that comparative literature was conceived of ‘as an antidote to nationalism, even though its roots went deep into national cultures.’<sup>36</sup> In 1891 George Edward Woodberry, the first chaired professor in Comparative Literature in the United States, celebrated the advent of ‘that new citizenship in the rising state which [...] is without frontiers or race or force,’ uniting all mankind in a sort of perfect communion, of which comparative literature was a prime manifestation.<sup>37</sup> The prospect of one harmonious *Weltliteratur* encompassing the totality of human intellectual production could be read as an epistemological resolution of the growing tensions between nation-states, as well as the consecration of one’s own nation’s special status, since universalist creeds tended to be tinged with ethnocentrism. Edward Said was rightly critical of the hegemonic agenda that lay behind such apparently disinterested proclamations—not to mention the material realities that have relentlessly given the lie to the promise of a frictionless world since then. This tension underpins Said’s genealogy of comparative literature from Goethe onwards; he extols the initial impulse to evade parochialism and insularism, but criticises at the same time the Euro-American imperialist ethos that accompanied it. As René Étiemble was to lament, *Weltliteratur* often fell short of its proclaimed ambition. Noting that virtually all studies on the subject were dreadfully Eurocentric, excluding almost all literatures produced in Asia or Africa by non-European writers, he concluded that ‘thus presented, *Weltliteratur* is nothing but a celebration of bourgeois ideas and Christian values.’<sup>38</sup> In 1993, Susan Bassnett already observed that ‘comparative literature in one sense is dead,’ a pronouncement echoed ten years later in Gayatri Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*, who

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<sup>36</sup>Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 21. See also Haun Saussy, ed., *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp. 6–9.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup>‘Ainsi présentée, la *Weltliteratur* n’est qu’une mise en valeur des idées bourgeoises et des valeurs chrétiennes.’ René Étiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 24. My translation. For a critique of the ‘disciplinary monoculturalism’ of World Literature (capitalised in its hegemonic, Eurocentric version), see Anke Bartels et al., *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction*. Berlin: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2019, pp. 19–21.

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advocated a 'planetary' focus resting on area studies.<sup>39</sup>

For all its neglect of the unequal nature of the world-system, the initial drive towards a holistic apprehension of world literature remains creditable. In Edward Said's chapter 'Connecting Empire to Secular Interpretation,' he draws on a tradition of 'humanistic learning' and 'secular anthropology' derived from Vico, Herder, Rousseau, or the Schlegel brothers, resting on the belief 'that mankind formed a marvelous, almost symphonic whole whose progress and formations, again as a whole, could be studied exclusively as a concerted and secular historical experience.'<sup>40</sup> He reiterates:

So vast and yet so detailed is imperialism as an experience with crucial cultural dimensions, that we must speak of overlapping territories, intertwined histories common to men and women, whites and non-whites, dwellers in the metropolis and on the peripheries, past as well as present and future; these territories and histories can only be seen from the perspective of the whole of secular human history.<sup>41</sup>

## **Thesis Statement (2): Uneven and Combined Development**

The matter is indeed one of perspective. No matter how dreadfully the ideal of *Weltliteratur* may have fared, I am unwilling to jettison Goethe's aspiration altogether. Like Franco Moretti, I appreciate the negative, critical potential which resides in world-literature as 'a thorn in the side' of national literatures.<sup>42</sup> The notion of 'uneven and combined development' provides a much-needed corrective to the shortcomings of 'World Literature' outlined above. In recent years, it has been put forward most consistently by the Warwick Research Collective, whose *Combined and Uneven Development* is a manifesto of sorts for that approach.<sup>43</sup> The notion derives from the understanding that capitalist accumulation is tendentially global, and structures the world accordingly, although not in a uniform manner. My claim is that, provided one is alert to the

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<sup>39</sup>Susan Bassnett, however, also observed that while the discipline of comparative literature entered a period of protracted crisis in Europe and North America in the 1950s-60s, it enjoyed renewed vitality in other parts of the world, especially in the (former) colonies. There, it was harder to accept the Ségouin variety of universalism, and the intuitions of comparative literature became part of an agenda that sought to question assumptions of Western superiority. See Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, pp. 37-47 and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

<sup>40</sup>Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 44.

<sup>41</sup>Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 61.

<sup>42</sup>Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 68.

<sup>43</sup>WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*.

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contradictory, uneven nature of the world-system, the unfulfilled promise of world-literature can still serve as a powerful heuristic horizon, if nothing else.<sup>44</sup> In this dissertation, I argue that Joyce's *Ulysses* and Walcott's *Omeros* not only respond to, but gesture beyond the entanglements of the capitalist world-system. In other words, I will venture the hypothesis that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* can be read as utopian formations which navigate the tensions underlying that system, and proffer some form of compensatory settlement to its unresolved contradictions. Hence my bid to read them as 'utopian world-texts.'

The notion of 'uneven and combined development' is traditionally associated with Leon Trotsky's analysis of capitalist development in the semi-colony that was Tsarist Russia in his *History of the Russian Revolution*.<sup>45</sup> In such backward countries, Trotsky explained, 'the material and intellectual conquests of the advanced countries,' which had matured on the basis of preexisting social formations over long periods of time, were transplanted as it were ready-made. Therefore, he went on,

although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historic backwardness—and such a privilege exists—permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. [...] The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character.<sup>46</sup>

The combination of heterogeneous formations is therefore a consequence of the uneven development of capitalism across the globe. If we take into account the 'amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms' which underpins capitalist modernisation in the peripheries, we can be more sensitive to the internal discrepancy of the world-system as a whole, and the skewered temporalities which prevail in peripheral areas.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>For those reasons, I will not be drawing on the definition of world literature put forward by David Damrosch, whose emphasis on the circulation of texts 'beyond their culture of origin' presupposes precisely what *Ulysses* and *Omeros* call into question so radically. See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup>See in particular Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*. 1932. Trans. by Max Eastman. Chicago: Haymarket, 2008, pp. 3–12.

<sup>46</sup>Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 5. For an earlier formulation of uneven and combined development, see also Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*. 1928. Trans. by John G. Wright. New York: Pioneers Publishers, 1957, pp. 18–22.

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Once this is understood, the relation between core and peripheries, or semi-peripheries, appears as an essential component of capitalist modernisation. Today, the notion of uneven and combined development is applied primarily to the peripheries or semi-peripheries of the system, but it is interesting to note that the notion was adumbrated by Marx and Engels not in relation to the colonial world, but to the European states where pre-capitalist relations still prevailed long into the nineteenth century. Actually, in *The German Ideology*, settlement colonies—specifically, the United States of America—appear as places that are in advance of the old world. In Europe, the residual presence of antiquated social formations plagues the development of modern relations; by contrast, the new world is unhindered by those vestiges. There, the new can flourish unimpeded, ‘whereas in its home it was still encumbered with interests and relationships left over from earlier periods.’<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx pointed out that in Germany, ‘we suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development.’ While England was the place where capitalist relations had flowered most completely, their development in Germany was compounded by the persistence of an economic and political *ancien régime*, ‘a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations.’<sup>49</sup> Uneven and combined development, the ‘amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms,’ is therefore a structural aspect of the modern world-system, it being understood that peripheries exist *within* the centres no less than outside, allowing for a dynamic, multiscalar approach, rather than a set of crude binarisms.<sup>50</sup>

The history of the Caribbean is a striking illustration of the phenomenon whereby a region is historically constituted as a periphery. The integration of the archipelago into the world-system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries followed an agenda dictated by the European colonial powers; the slave trade and the plantation economy were indeed an amalgam of the archaic (unfree labour) and the new (an export-driven capitalist agriculture), which paradoxically underpinned the flowering of modern capit-

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<sup>48</sup>Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 88.

<sup>49</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 91.

<sup>50</sup>As the WReC argue, peripherality is not ‘a “condition” marked by lack of development, or by mere geographical remoteness from a given “core” or “centre”. Rather, it names the modality of a specific inclusion within a system: a given formation is “peripheral”, that is to say, not because it is “outside” or “on the edges” of a system, but, on the contrary, because it has been incorporated within that system precisely as “peripheral.”’ WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, pp. 123–124.



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alist relations in Europe. Simultaneously, the archipelago was turned into an appendage of the metropolitan powers, its fortunes henceforth determined by those distant seats of power.<sup>51</sup>

Paradoxically, however, the Barbadian historian Hilary Beckles argues that the Caribbean was the crucible for global modernity. As the rise of commercial capitalism in the seventeenth century integrated the various continents into a single economic system, he argues, 'it was in the Caribbean vortex of the Atlantic Basin that this international capitalism took its early cultural and social identity.' Given the intricacy of the trade relations and migrations which went into the making of the archipelago, Beckles goes on, 'the West Indian' appears not as a leftover from a belated or backward periphery, but as 'a futuristic individual.'<sup>52</sup> By an ironic dialectical twist, the periphery does not lag behind but anticipates the emergence of a radically new dispensation.

We encounter a similar logic in Enrique Dussel's contribution to the 1998 volume *The Cultures of Globalization*. Dussel opposes the diffusionist notion of modernity as a purely European phenomenon, and argues instead for a 'planetary' paradigm, that of a world-system organised in terms of centre and periphery. Hence 'modernity is not a phenomenon of Europe as an *independent* system, but of Europe as center.'<sup>53</sup> The centrality of Europe, in turn, is merely the result of exploration, conquest, and colonisation on a unprecedented scale: beginning with the Spanish conquest of Amerindia and the subsequent inflow of precious metals to Europe, Dussel argues, 'the accumulation in the center is for the first time accumulation on a world scale.'<sup>54</sup> The displacement of the European centre of gravity to Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, and later still to London and Paris, merely consolidated the hegemony of the continent over a global complex whose main highway was now the Atlantic ocean. This is a salutary reminder that modernity does not emerge fully formed in 'the West,' but is indeed the product of the heterogeneous relations between centre and periphery; Dussel effectively goes full circle in stating that 'Amerindia [...] constitutes the fundamental structure of the first modernity.'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>See for example Eric Williams's account of the sugar economy in Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*. 1970. New York: Vintage Books, 1984, pp. 111-135.

<sup>52</sup>Hilary Beckles, 'Capitalism, Slavery and Caribbean Modernity'. In: *Callaloo* 20.4 (1997), pp. 777-789, pp. 785-6.

<sup>53</sup>Enrique Dussel, 'Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity'. In: *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. by Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 3-31, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup>Dussel, 'Beyond Eurocentrism', p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>Dussel, 'Beyond Eurocentrism', p. 11.

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Derek Walcott draws repeatedly on this historical paradox. For him, the fractures of Caribbean history are not to be lamented but celebrated as enabling factors. The motifs of erasure and nothingness which plague Caribbean historiography are repurposed towards a poetics of absolute possibility. Echoing Trotsky, he explains that for him and other West Indian writers, ‘what we were deprived of was also our privilege,’ since his generation had ‘the privilege of writing about places and people for the first time and, simultaneously, having behind them the tradition of knowing how well it can be done—by a Defoe, a Dickens, a Richardson.’<sup>56</sup>

The ‘wide page without metaphors’ (*O*, 59.1) is an image of the sea, but also of the poetic undertaking that is *Omeros*, a poem which wrestles with the burden of literary precedent in its effort to articulate the sheer uniqueness of the Caribbean. Throughout, Walcott navigates the tension and interplay between the new and the old: time and again, he plays out the dilemma of the ‘New World’ against the Old, the temptation of Homeric imitation against the singularity of Caribbean reality, the search for genealogical roots against the elation of self-authorship.

Joe Cleary has discussed the case of Irish modernism in terms that are strikingly similar, arguing precisely that the experience of dispossession, alienation, and social breakdown experienced by colonial subjects was in essence an experience of modernity.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Ireland offers another case of peripherality, with a long experience of colonisation, although geographically closer to the European centre. I will return to that history more at length shortly; for now, I merely wish to emphasise the relationship between the peripheral condition and the emergence of artistic practices commonly referred to as modernism. The link between colonialism and modernist experimentation has been observed by many critics. Edward Said, for instance, has pointed out that ‘many of the most prominent characteristics of modernist culture, which we have tended to derive from purely internal dynamics in Western society and culture, include a response to the external pressures on culture from the *imperium*.’<sup>58</sup> Significantly, he cites Leopold Bloom’s Jewishness, a central component of *Ulysses*, as a registration of transcultural encounter, testifying to the dawning sense of imperial disquiet in turn-of-the-century Europe.

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<sup>56</sup>William Baer, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup>Joe Cleary, ‘Introduction: Ireland and Modernity’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*. Ed. by Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 1–24, pp. 6–7.

<sup>58</sup>Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 188–9.

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This is indeed one of the main arguments in Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, where the effects of colonialism are registered in the realm of cultural production. For Eagleton, Irish history is overdetermined by the experience of colonial dispossession and political disruption, the symptoms of which can be traced in Irish literature. This, he argues, is inauspicious terrain for the smooth, orderly narratives conventionally associated with literary realism, which flourished in nineteenth century England. Thus, Eagleton makes the astute observation that modernism 'can thrive more vigorously on the colonial or neo-colonial margins than at the metropolitan centre.' In Ireland as in other colonial peripheries, he suggests, 'the world is less easy to totalize in classical realist fashion, precisely because some of its central determinants lie elusively elsewhere, in the metropolitan country.'<sup>59</sup>.

Fredric Jameson had already proposed in 'Cognitive Mapping' that modernism registered the divorce between lived experience and the unrepresentable structure of the imperialist world-system; the cultural practices subsumed under the category of modernism, Jameson suggests, generate forms 'that inscribe a new sense of the absent global colonial system on the very syntax of poetic language itself.'<sup>60</sup> An expanded version of that argument recurs in 'Modernism and Imperialism' where imperialism is characterised as a system in which, from the point of view of metropolitan experience, unable to envision the totality of imperialism as a whole, 'pieces of the puzzle are missing; it can never be fully reconstructed.'<sup>61</sup> Consequently, modernist art is defined by this radical incompleteness, struggling with 'an outside like the other face of a mirror, which it constitutively lacks, and which can never be made up or made good.'<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Seamus Deane has argued in relation to Joyce that 'to be colonial is to be modern,' and that his characters struggle not with 'the inability to enter into modernity; [but with] the inability to escape from it.'<sup>63</sup>

In a well-known article, Perry Anderson reflects on the problematic definition

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<sup>59</sup>Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. London: Verso, 1995, pp. 298–299.

<sup>60</sup>Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', pp. 349–350.

<sup>61</sup>Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism'. In: Terry Eagleton et al. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, pp. 43–66, p. 51.

<sup>62</sup>Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism', p. 51. In this essay, Jameson then makes a special place for Joyce's *Ulysses*, owing to Ireland's peripherality in relation to the imperial metropolis that is London. For a more recent formulation of this thesis, see Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, eds., *Semicolonial Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup>These quotes are excerpted from the 2000 essay 'Dead Ends: Joyce's Finest Moments,' reprinted in Seamus Deane, *Small World: Ireland 1798-2018*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 167, 175.

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of modernism in relation to the concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘modernisation.’ He articulates the conditions of possibility of modernism as an artistic response to the process of modernisation, in a way that foregrounds the unevenness of the process.<sup>64</sup> Anderson enumerates the historical contradictions which made possible the advent of such a protean movement, whose diverse manifestations only retrospectively came to be labelled modernism. The first of those was the persistence, across much of the continent, of social structures typical of a precapitalist *ancien régime*, which nurtured institutionalised academicism in the artistic realm. Threatening the status quo, however, was the technical revolution ushered in by the growing forces of capitalism, which opened up unprecedented possibilities of human and social development. Lastly, the prospect of far-reaching social upheaval loomed on the horizon, as disenfranchised masses rammed their way onto the political stage. Anderson sums up:

European modernism in the first years of this century thus flowered in the space between a still usable classical past, a still indeterminate technical present, and a still unpredictable political future. Or, put another way, it arose at the intersection between a semi-aristocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or semi-insurgent, labor movement.<sup>65</sup>

This picture, with its insistence on the collision of disparate realities—themselves apprehended as transitional stages, rather than fully drawn out final products—is an exemplary illustration of combined and uneven development.

Accordingly, Jean-Michel Rabaté has stressed the congruence of modernism and the overarching context of imperialism, suggesting that ‘European-centred modernism should be seen in the larger picture of a world caught in the throes of early globalisation.’<sup>66</sup> Focussing on the specific coordinates of Dublin in 1913, he pleads for an assessment of modernism not just as an artistic phenomenon, but as the expression of deep changes in society at large. Noting, incidentally, that the state of the world then corresponded ‘word for word’ with Marx and Engels’s visionary pages from

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<sup>64</sup>Perry Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’. In: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, 1988, pp. 317–333, p. 332.

<sup>65</sup>Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’, p. 326.

<sup>66</sup>Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Dublin, 1913: Irish Modernism and International Modernism’. In: *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*. Ed. by Carol Taaffe Edwina Keown. Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 9–29, p. 25. The notion of ‘early globalisation’ applied to the early twentieth-century is of course a matter of scale, as the preceding discussion will have suggested. Notwithstanding, I subscribe to the argument.

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the *Communist Manifesto*, he stresses the international, cosmopolitan nature of the phenomenon known as modernism. For him, 1913 was

the moment when today's global world came of age, in the current inter-meshing that we know between constant technological inventions, flows of international capital, and the reawakening of particularist claims, whether religious or national or both, that saw in war the only solution to their predicament.<sup>67</sup>

Much recent scholarship has expanded our understanding of that particular moment, underscoring the coexistence of a variety of modernisms, while emphasising their transnational, planetary, or global dimensions.<sup>68</sup>

Andreas Huyssen's article 'Geographies of Modernism in a Globalizing World' emphasises the transnational, rather than international, dimension of modernism. Huyssen puts forward a definition of modernism as 'the cross-national cultural forms that emerge from the negotiation of the modern with the indigenous, the colonial, and the postcolonial in the "non-Western" world.'<sup>69</sup> While the adjective 'international' suggests relations between stable, fixed entities, the transnational evokes 'the dynamic processes of cultural mingling and migration' which together constitute an incipiently 'global,' but not homogeneous, dispensation.<sup>70</sup> This does not amount to denying the local or national element which features prominently in much modernist production, a phenomenon to which the Harlem Renaissance, the Celtic Revival—and James Joyce, for that matter—

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<sup>67</sup>Jean-Michel Rabaté, *1913: The Cradle of Modernism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup>See Matthew Hart, *Nations of Nothing But Poetry: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Synthetic Vernacular Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015; Dougal McNeill, 'Postcolonial and Transnational Modernism'. In: *After Said: Postcolonial Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. by Bashir Abu-Manneh. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 147–161; Eric Hayot and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds., *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016; Alys Moody and Stephen J. Ross, eds., *Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020; Aarthi Vadde, 'Language's Hopes: Global Modernism and the Science of Debabelization'. In: *The New Modernist Studies*. Ed. by Douglas Mao. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 200–224.

<sup>69</sup>Andreas Huyssen, 'Geographies of Modernism in a Global World'. In: *New German Critique* 100 (Winter 2007), pp. 189–207, p. 194.

<sup>70</sup>Huyssen, 'Geographies of Modernism in a Global World', p. 205.

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bear ample witness.<sup>71</sup>

Charles Pollard has written persuasively on the dynamic links between modernism and postcolonial literature, stressing the ‘potential cosmopolitan intersection of modernism and postcolonialism.’<sup>72</sup> In his article on Joyce and Walcott, he repudiates the clear-cut boundary between modernism—defined narrowly as a European movement—and the postcolonial—defined equally narrowly as an adversarial onslaught upon said European tradition. Pollard calls instead for an understanding of modernism that shows its adaptability to contexts beyond the European metropolises, as Walcott’s ‘New World Modernism’ demonstrates. Modernism was indeed appropriated and recast in various ways, along routes of transformative migrations, and Pollard stresses the congruence of Joyce’s modernist attitude to tradition and Walcott’s ‘New World modernism’ in his struggle to find his own voice.

The dynamic relationship between peripherality on the one hand, and the modernist problematisation of representation on the other, is captured in Benita Parry’s notion of ‘peripheral modernism,’ an attempt to understand artistic practices in relation to the social contradictions inherent in the world-system.<sup>73</sup> In Perry Anderson’s article, indeed, he observes that although the modernist moment did not persist in Europe beyond the Second World War, modernism subsequently flowered in the ‘Third World,’ owing to a similar conjunction of social and political factors. Writing in the late 1980s, he remarks that ‘in the Third World generally, a kind of shadow configuration of what once prevailed in the First World does exist today.’<sup>74</sup> The qualification (‘*shadow* configuration’) is indispensable, as the conditions obtaining in the ‘Third World’ differ widely from the initial, European dispensation. Yet, allowing for distortions in the relative weight of the various factors listed by Anderson, it is hard not to feel the relevance of the argument. Declan Kiberd, for instance, has suggested that the modernism of Joyce had strong affinities with the literary practices of postcolonial artists such as Salman Rushdie or

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<sup>71</sup>Terry Eagleton even proposes the notion of ‘nationalist modernism’ (as opposed to capitalist modernity), an attitude consisting in looking back to a distant past as a prefiguration of the future, in order to bracket the recent past of colonial aberration. Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 281 On the Irish Revival, see also Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Emer Nolan, ‘Modernism and the Irish Revival’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*. Ed. by Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 157–172.

<sup>72</sup>Charles W. Pollard, ‘Traveling with Joyce: Derek Walcott’s Discrepant Cosmopolitan Modernism’. In: *Twentieth-Century Literature* 47.2 (Summer 2001), pp. 197–216, pp. 198–9.

<sup>73</sup>Parry, ‘Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms’.

<sup>74</sup>Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’, p. 329.

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Gabriel Garcia Marquez.<sup>75</sup>

In *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, Joe Cleary defines high modernism as ‘a revolt of the peripheries of the Anglophone literary world against long-established English metropolitan literary dominance.’<sup>76</sup> Drawing on Pascale Casanova’s work, Cleary focusses on ‘international struggles for cultural distinction’ in a competitive world literary system, where actors vie with one another for supremacy or recognition.<sup>77</sup> Cleary stresses the importance of challenges from the peripheries in restructuring the world literary system; one such challenge, he argues, was modernism itself. Over the period from 1890 to 1945, the world literary system underwent a major restructuring, which saw the centre of gravity move from Paris and London to Moscow and New York. Yeats and Pound were at the forefront of a cultural renaissance from the peripheries—Irish and American—in reaction to a ‘decadent’ European civilisation, performing ‘a rhetoric of radical rupture and of transnational as well as national renewal.’<sup>78</sup>

Thus, we may articulate the seemingly discrepant coordinates of Joyce’s Ireland (1922) and Walcott’s Caribbean (1990), as the twin manifestations of a single process, which is simply the logic of capital itself. The differential unfolding of uneven and combined development across the twentieth century makes it possible to grasp both ends of the spectrum as part of a common process. If forms are indeed ‘the abstract of social relationships,’<sup>79</sup> I want to argue that the semi-peripheral coordinates of Joyce’s Ireland and Walcott’s Caribbean are embedded in complex ways in the texture of *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. Both are utopian world-texts because they are shaped by, and engage with, the fractious reality of the world-system in a context of uneven and combined development.

## Circulating Rhythm

Having laid out the wider framework in which this dissertation will evolve, I now come to the notion of rhythm, in the hope that it can help us articulate the dynamic interplay between literary form and social contradictions. It is an understatement to say that the definition of rhythm is slippery. In a famous article published in 1952, the musicologist Curt Sachs asked ‘What is rhythm?’—only to deplore that rhythm was

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<sup>75</sup>Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. 1995. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 339.

<sup>76</sup>Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup>Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, pp. 96–98.

<sup>79</sup>Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, p. 66.

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‘a word without a generally accepted meaning,’ susceptible to the most idiosyncratic definitions.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Denys Harding opened his study of *Words into Rhythm* by lamenting the fact that ‘the word rhythm is given such astonishingly wide application that if we could believe it really meant something, and the same thing in different contexts, we could accept it as a master-key for innumerable locks.’<sup>81</sup> This can be deplored; yet the difficulty to negotiate rhythm is also an invitation to put the notion to a wide variety of uses.

A minimal definition would start from the fact that rhythm can only be conceived as something that unfolds in or through time. In the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, rhythm suggests ‘a movement or spatial arrangement that exhibits some degree of regularity without being mechanical.’<sup>82</sup> Movement indeed presupposes the passing of time. Further, it is difficult to conceive of rhythm as anything else than a set of *relations* between discontinuous events, such as musical beats. Interestingly, the notion of rhythm rests on our ability to perceive discrete iterations as pertaining somehow to a single ensemble or succession. In *The Philosophy of Art*, Friedrich Schelling proposes that rhythm is ‘the periodic subdivision of homogeneity whereby the uniformity of the latter is combined with variety and thus unity with multiplicity.’<sup>83</sup> He celebrates rhythm as the highest aesthetic quality of music and dance; it rests on a tension between unity and variety, between the flux of homogeneous time and the various divisions and subdivisions into which it can be split and articulated. The ‘lowest’ level of rhythm, he contends, is sheer regularity, or isochrony, as opposed to utter disorder. If I produce a series of beats at irregular intervals, the resulting impression is one of disorder; by contrast, if I beat time at regular intervals, an overarching sense of continuity is made to prevail over the merely disparate and the chaotic. Yet the mere repetition of identical beats is monotonous. A ‘higher’ form of rhythm is obtained, Schelling writes, when regular beats are realised with various degrees of intensity or volume; thereby, multiplicity, or diversity, is reintroduced into the homogeneous succession of beats, which now occur at equal intervals without being identical. Rhythm, then, appears as

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<sup>80</sup>Curt Sachs, ‘Rhythm and Tempo: An Introduction’. In: *The Musical Quarterly* 38.3 (July 1952), pp. 384–398, p. 384.

<sup>81</sup>Denys Wyatt Harding, *Words into Rhythm: English Speech Rhythm in Verse and Prose*. 1976. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup>Roland Greene, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, p. 1195.

<sup>83</sup>Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*. 1859. Trans. by Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 110.



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a dialectical playground, where chaos is converted into order by the virtue of a regular pattern, which is in turn at risk of becoming an inert, mechanical sequence—a danger which is overcome by yet another act of subdivision, whereby the uniform beat breaks down into heterogeneous, differentiated iterations. The interplay of uniformity and variety, unity and multiplicity, is indeed the defining factor for Schelling, who concludes with the dictum that ‘Rhythm is the music within music, for the particularity of music is based precisely on its character as the informing of unity into multiplicity.’<sup>84</sup>

We can trace the notion further back in time yet. In a well-known article entitled ‘*La notion de “rythme” dans son expression linguistique*,’ the linguist Émile Benveniste shows that the notion of ‘rhythm’ current in pre-Socratic philosophy was originally distinct from ‘metre’ and, contrary to received wisdom, was not then applied to the motion of the waves, but rather to that of flow. The idea of flux is indeed central to Benveniste’s classic definition of *rhuthmos*, descended from Heraclitean philosophy, and understood as

the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency; it fits the pattern of a fluid element [...]. It is the form as improvised, momentary, changeable. [...] We can now understand how *rhuthmos* meaning literally ‘the particular manner of flowing,’ could have been the most proper term for describing ‘dispositions’ or ‘configurations’ without fixity or natural necessity and arising from an arrangement which is always subject to change.<sup>85</sup>

It thus appears as a versatile notion which embraces ‘the particular configurations of moving,’ or ‘fluctuations’ which govern all things in Heraclitean philosophy.<sup>86</sup>

The emphasis on movement and change, the dialectic between unity and multiplicity, invite us to consider rhythm as a dynamic, self-contradictory notion—which resonates with the preceding observations on the world-totality. In fact, Heraclitus returns us to the thought of Édouard Glissant, whose pre-Socratic inspiration is nowhere more evident than in his engagement with the notion of totality. Thus we begin to envision some underlying coherence, as the intuition of a ‘Great-Whole’ directs us potentially to the Whole-World, or world-totality, but also to the self-contradictory, internally

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<sup>84</sup>Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, p. 111.

<sup>85</sup>Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*. 1966. Trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971, pp. 285–6.

<sup>86</sup>Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, p. 286.

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differentiated complex that is rhythm itself.

Henri Meschonnic has written provocatively on rhythm, especially in his landmark *Critique du rythme*. Drawing on Benveniste, he pleads for an understanding of rhythm which would transcend partial definitions of linguistic meaning, and embrace all the means by which a given discourse produces its own singular ‘*signifiance*,’ a neologism which was coined precisely in order to affirm that ‘there is more than meaning in words.’<sup>87</sup> Over and above the functioning of lexical signification, Meschonnic defines rhythm as

the organisation of markers by which signifiers, linguistic as well as extralinguistic (mostly in the case of oral communication) produce a specific semantics, distinct from lexical meaning, and which I call *signifiance*: that is to say the values pertaining to one discourse and no other.<sup>88</sup>

This means that rhythm is indeed a ‘continuum,’ pervading all aspects of discourse—prosody, intonation, syntax. Rhythm becomes a holistic concept which takes in ‘the organisation of meaning in discourse [...], the organisation of the subject as discourse in a by their discourse.’<sup>89</sup>

In a volume published in 2019 entitled *The Philosophy of Rhythm*, Christopher Hasty notes that the notion of rhythm has the potential to restore the sense of continuity usually lost when we treat entities as separate. Stressing the dynamic nature of rhythm, he proposes to define it ‘not as an already-formed order (of isochronous division, or of fixed pattern), but as the ongoing shaping of events and their succession.’ He goes on to suggest that the succession of events occurring in time need not be reduced to a linear sequence of discrete entities: ‘If we can admit internal relations into the terms of succession and say that no event is without actual and potential involvement in others, then succession can be understood also as continuous.’<sup>90</sup>

The tension between unity and multiplicity thus surfaces in most accounts of rhythm, including Joyce’s own. While in Paris in 1903, Joyce worked on Aquinas’s and Aristotle’s aesthetic theories in the reading room of the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.

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<sup>87</sup>Henri Meschonnic, *Ethics and Politics of Translating*. Trans. by Pier-Pascale Boulanger. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011, p. 58.

<sup>88</sup>Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme: Anthropologie historique du langage*. Lagrasse: Verdier, 1982, p. 217, my translation.

<sup>89</sup>Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme*, p. 217, my translation.

<sup>90</sup>Christopher Hasty, ‘Complexity and Passage: Experimenting with Poetic Rhythm’. In: *The Philosophy of Rhythm: Aesthetics, Music, Poetics*. Ed. by Peter Cheyne et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 233–254, p. 233.

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In one entry dated 25 March 1903, he wrote: ‘Rhythm seems to be the first or formal relation of part to part in any whole or of a whole to its part or parts, or of any part to the whole of which it is part ... Parts constitute a whole as far as they have a common end.’<sup>91</sup>

Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* is a protracted elaboration on this motif. He includes rhythm among the fields which can be accounted for in terms of chaos theory, because it involves ‘all phenomena that depend on the passage of time [...] everything that repeats, reproduces, grows, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes.’<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, he urges us to focus not on results, ‘but [on] processes, dynamics, and rhythms.’<sup>93</sup> Concentrating on the Caribbean, Benítez-Rojo maintains that the archipelago is ‘not just a multiethnic sea or a group of islands divided by different languages,’ but is actually ‘a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one,’ generated by the historical matrix of the plantation.<sup>94</sup> Benítez-Rojo goes further, though. Arguing that ‘each rhythm is itself a flux cut through by other rhythms,’ he proposes that the cultures of the Caribbean function like a polyrhythm, that is to say as ‘rhythms cut through by other rhythms, which are cut by still other rhythms,’ which has the potential to take us to ‘the point at which the central rhythm is displaced by other rhythms in such a way as to make it fix a center no longer, then to transcend into a state of flux.’<sup>95</sup>

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines polyrhythm as ‘the simultaneous use of strikingly contrasted rhythms in different parts of the musical fabric,’ before adding that the term is generally restricted to ‘cases in which rhythmic variety is introduced

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<sup>91</sup>James Joyce, ‘Paris Notebook’. 1903. In: *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*. Ed. by Kevin Barry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 102–105, p. 103. The definition recurs in *Portrait*, when Stephen discusses aesthetics with his friend Lynch, and repeats that rhythm is ‘the first formal esthetic relation of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part’ (*P*, 181).

<sup>92</sup>Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and The Postmodern Perspective*. 1989. Trans. by James Maraniss. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup>Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup>Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup>Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, pp. 18–19. While I am appreciative of Benítez-Rojo’s emphasis on polyrhythm and his notion of a meta-archipelago which transcends its own confines even as it repeats itself, I do not subscribe unconditionally to his overall procedure, which is sometimes laid out in rather cryptic terms—‘the Caribbean machine [is] a metamachine of differences whose poetic mechanism cannot be diagrammed in conventional dimensions, and whose user’s manual is found dispersed in a state of plasma within the chaos of its own network of codes and subcodes,’ p. 19—and liable to essentialising statements, such as the equation of ‘white rhythms’ [*sic*] with ‘the narrative of conquest and colonization,’ while ‘the copper, black, and yellows rhythms’ are by nature ‘turbulent and erratic,’ p. 26.

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as a special effect that is often called “cross rhythm.”<sup>96</sup> It appears that the category of rhythm provides us with a vocabulary which may account for the unfolding of the world-totality, since both are dynamic processes, where multiple levels of replication, subdivision, and differentiation coexist within a unitary framework accommodating an infinity of intersecting cross-rhythms.

### **Thesis Statement (3): Rhythm and Utopian Impulse**

Availing myself of these philosophical insights, I will define rhythm as the dialectical interplay between parts and totality, between the disparate and the whole, which plays out in Joyce’s and Walcott’s texts. As such, it replicates the utopian undertaking of both, as they aim to capture and resolve the tensions constitutive of the world-totality. I will suggest that a ‘utopian impulse,’ which it is time to define, can be located at the level of rhythm.<sup>97</sup>

I borrow the notion of ‘Utopian impulse’ from Fredric Jameson, whose own work elaborates on Ernst Bloch’s engagement with the ‘Utopian function,’ especially in *The Principle of Hope*.<sup>98</sup> Bloch argues that while all cultural products, from the Acropolis to the Strasbourg cathedral, fulfil some ideological function derived from the class society out of which they emerge, that ideological function—collusion with the ruling class, mystification of the exploited—does not exhaust their significance. A ‘cultural surplus’ persists over and above the strictly ideological function of such monuments, whose value is still recognised long after the demise of the slave-owning society of Ancient Greece, or of European feudalism. This surplus, Bloch argues, is precisely ‘the effect of the Utopian function,’ which is the other end of the same ideological stick, in that it

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<sup>96</sup>“In a sense, all truly contrapuntal music is polyrhythmic, since rhythmic variety in simultaneous parts more than anything else gives the voice-parts the individuality that is essential to polyphonic style.’ The definition goes on to distinguish ‘contrasting rhythms within the same scheme of accents’ on the one hand, and ‘contrasting rhythms involving a conflict of meter or accents’ (ie. polymetrics) on the other. Willi Apel, ed., *Harvard Dictionary of Music*. 1944. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, pp. 687–8. See also the definition given in *Caribbean Currents*, stating a polyrhythm exists ‘when two or more regular pulse patterns are combined,’ a feature characteristic of West and Central African rhythmic organisations, enabled by the division of the ‘cell’ into twelve beats, themselves divided variously into groups of twos and threes. See Peter Manuel and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup>In keeping with the standard practice in utopian studies today, I will not capitalise ‘utopia’ and cognate words, unless the capitals appear in quotations.

<sup>98</sup>Central to my concern here is the section entitled ‘Encounter of the Utopian Function with Ideology,’ in Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*. 1959. Trans. by Neville Plaice et al. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, pp. 153–158.

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too aims at ‘the premature harmonization of social contradictions.’<sup>99</sup> In other words, all cultural productions are essentially ambivalent, at once ideological and utopian. They address social contradictions simultaneously in two opposite ways: on the one hand, by writing off the existence of conflict altogether, which is the task of ideology, on the other, by actively anticipating its resolution at some future time, which is the utopian function.

This fundamental ambivalence is the subject of the last chapter in Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*, entitled ‘The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology.’ Following Bloch, Jameson rehearses the claim that a ‘Utopian impulse’ is at work in all cultural productions—from pastoral literature to advertising slogans, and even in the American retail corporation Wal-Mart—pointing, however tentatively and obliquely, to an as yet un-representable dispensation, anticipating the resolution of intractable social contradictions. Thus, Jameson posits the utopian impulse as the object of a ‘positive hermeneutic,’ which is the necessary—and dialectical—counterpart to the more traditional ‘negative hermeneutic’ of ideology critique.<sup>100</sup>

It is worth noting here that utopian studies has been grappling incessantly with problematic definitions. Ruth Levitas hardly exaggerates when she calls utopia ‘an ideological battleground.’<sup>101</sup> In *The Concept of Utopia*, she retraces the genesis of utopian studies, from its nineteenth century forerunners to the stage of academic institutionalisation in the latter half of the twentieth century, a process greatly accelerated with the revival of utopian writing in the 1970s, which led for instance to the founding of the Society for Utopian Studies in 1975. Even so, she writes in conclusion to her study that ‘there is no consensus within utopian studies about the meaning of the term utopia and therefore no agreement about the object of analysis.’<sup>102</sup> Critics differ widely in their appreciations of utopia, defined variously in terms of form, content, and function. While a relative consensus exists on the paternity of the word, attributed to Thomas More on the strength of his 1516 *Utopia*, the notion itself can refer either to a literary genre, to a

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<sup>99</sup>Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 156.

<sup>100</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 271–290. Jameson returns to Bloch in Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso, 2005, pp. 1–9. The case of Wal-Mart is addressed in the essay ‘Utopia as Replication,’ where Jameson proposes to shift the valences of existing social phenomena in order to disclose intimations of alternative futures within them: by this dialectical twist, the dystopian aspects of our real world can be converted into their utopian opposites. See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2009, pp. 410–434.

<sup>101</sup>Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*. 1990. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup>Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 204.

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variety of political and artistic elaborations, as well as to a host of cultural practices, as in the cases of Bloch and Jameson.<sup>103</sup> For her part, Levitas proposes that the constant element of all utopias is ‘desire for a better way of living and being,’ which is a rather capacious definition indeed.<sup>104</sup>

For all the haziness of the notion, the recent years have witnessed growing interest in utopian studies, especially in relation to literary modernism. Matthew Beaumont and Nathan Waddell have studied the flowering of utopian fiction in *fin de siècle* Britain, and in early modernist fiction, respectively, while Nicholas Brown has explored the utopian dimensions of Joyce and African modernist literature, and Wolfgang Wicht has written specifically on utopianism in *Ulysses*.<sup>105</sup> Companions and handbooks have been published, testifying to the vitality of the field.<sup>106</sup> Numerous works have expanded the geographical framework of utopian studies; Lyman Tower Sargent, Jacqueline Dutton, and Bill Ashcroft have drawn attention to utopian traditions outside the familiar Euro-American canon.<sup>107</sup>

In what follows, my understanding of utopia exceeds that of a literary genre—to which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* clearly do not belong. Nor is it synonymous with a more or less clearly defined partisan politics. It would be more accurate to speak of ‘utopianism,’ a rather diffuse notion defined by Lyman Tower Sargent as ‘social

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<sup>103</sup>I return to Thomas More’s *Utopia* in Chapter 4, p. 216. See Thomas More, *Utopia*. 1516. Ed. by George M. Logan. Trans. by Robert M. Adams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. The encyclopaedic *Utopian Thought in the Western World* stretches the historical boundaries of the genre to include the visions of medieval millenarianism. See Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. 1979. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>104</sup>Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, pp. 207–230.

<sup>105</sup>Wolfgang Wicht, *Utopianism in James Joyce’s Ulysses*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2000; Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd. Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England 1870-1900*. Leiden: Brill, 2005; Nathan Waddell, *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Modernist Writing, 1900-1920*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

<sup>106</sup>George Claeys, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds., *The Utopia Reader*. 1999. New York: New York University Press, 2017; Peter Marks et al., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literatures*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

<sup>107</sup>Especially relevant to my purpose is Ashcroft’s chapter entitled ‘Beyond the Nation State,’ which charts the reconfigurations of utopian imaginings towards transnational, cosmopolitan dispensations, in the wake of post-independence disillusionment, see Bill Ashcroft, *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 94–113. See also Sargent’s ‘Colonial and Postcolonial Utopias’ and Dutton’s ‘“Non-Western” Utopian Traditions’ in Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, pp. 200–222, 223–258. Other studies of utopianism from a postcolonial perspective include Greg Forter, *Critique and Utopia in Postcolonial Historical Fiction: Atlantic and Other Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; Ralph Pordzik, *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in New English Literatures*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

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dreaming,’ as opposed to the literary genre of utopia as such, that is to say ‘a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.’ Within that category, Sargent specifies that the subgroup of ‘eutopia’ (or ‘positive utopia’) is expected to be viewed by the reader as ‘considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.’<sup>108</sup> I am therefore not proposing that we should read *Ulysses* and *Omeros* as utopias, or eutopias, in that sense. Rather, I am inclined to test Bloch’s and Jameson’s idea of a utopian ‘function’ or ‘impulse’ operating within the texts, regardless of the stated political views of their authors. For that matter, Sargent’s notion of ‘utopianism’ seems equally relevant. Indeed, the engagement with the world-totality, which I believe is central to both Joyce’s and Walcott’s texts, is itself a utopian gesture, insofar as it anticipates ‘the premature harmonization of social contradictions’ in the world-totality.<sup>109</sup> Put another way, they oscillate between the opposite valences of the Whole-World, captured in Édouard Glissant’s conceptual pairing of ‘*Mondialisation*’ and ‘*Mondialité*’: while ‘*Mondialisation*’ evokes the exploitative, dehumanising nature of the world-system, ‘*Mondialité*’ names the horizon of a unified world-totality in the making, ‘at once multiple and one, and inextricable.’<sup>110</sup>

It follows from this definition that the utopian function can be invested with great critical power. In *Demand the Impossible*, first published in 1986, Tom Moylan devised the category of ‘critical’ or ‘oppositional’ utopias, referring to texts produced in the 1970s by Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ, or Samuel Delany. To him, the strength of this current lies ‘not in the particular social structures it portrays but in the very act of portraying a utopian vision itself.’ The chief merit of such texts, he goes on, ‘is not to foreclose the agenda for the future in terms of a homogeneous revolutionary plan but rather to hold open the act of negating the present.’<sup>111</sup> Matthew Beaumont says as much when he writes that utopia names the effort to defamiliarise the present, to historicise it by considering it as it were from without; from this perspective, utopia is

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<sup>108</sup>Lyman Tower Sargent, ‘The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited’. In: *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994), pp. 1–37, p. 9.

<sup>109</sup>Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 156.

<sup>110</sup>Édouard Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin: Poétique V*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005, p. 15. There does not exist an English translation of the book. Although ‘Globalisation’ is an unproblematic equivalent for ‘*Mondialisation*,’ I am reluctant to accept ‘Globality’ as a translation of the neologism ‘*Mondialité*,’ as the English word fails to convey the specific overtones of the ‘*Tout-Monde*.’

<sup>111</sup>Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. 1986. Ed. by Raffaella Baccolini. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014, p. 26.

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not so much about the future as it is about ‘the outer limit or horizon of the present.’<sup>112</sup>

A case in point is Jack London’s *The Iron Heel*, published in 1907 but set in the years following the violent suppression of the (fictional) Chicago Commune of 1912. The book is presented as a manuscript discovered seven centuries after the events in question; the narrative is therefore framed by editorial interventions in the shape of a foreword and abundant footnotes, designed to make the text intelligible to a readership raised in a classless society known as ‘the Brotherhood of Man,’ after the final success of the revolution.<sup>113</sup> *The Iron Heel* is therefore an odd combination of utopia and dystopia; the bulk of the story is concerned with the depiction of a bloody counter-revolution, while the properly utopian elements are relegated to the paratext. Footnotes are interspersed throughout the narrative, to elucidate the meaning of words pertaining to ‘those irrational and anarchic times’ before the revolution, supposedly unintelligible to readers weaned from capitalistic prejudice and moral degradation—but all too familiar to the actual readers of the novel in the 1900s.<sup>114</sup> By explaining the meaning of concepts such as theft and violence—and even the crude practice of making butter out of milk, rather than in laboratories—the footnotes compel us to regard our present as merely the pre-history of a world in which those realities have become unthinkable.<sup>115</sup> While London’s novel often reads like a heavy-handed political tract, it highlights the ironic distance and oppositional power of utopian—and dystopian—writing vis-à-vis the present, even when utopia itself is not depicted. All we get are glimpses and hints, a utopian light radiating from an imagined future on a decidedly dystopian narrative, which is itself a warning about the actual evolution of capitalist society. This is a demonstration of the way in which utopianism exceeds utopia; it chimes in with Fredric Jameson’s proposition, stated in ‘Utopia as Replication,’ that ‘Utopia is not what can be positively imagined and proposed, but rather what is not imaginable and not conceivable.’ It is, Jameson continues, ‘not a representation but an operation calculated to disclose the limits of our own imagination of the future, the lines beyond which we do not seem able to go in imagining changes in our own society and

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<sup>112</sup>Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.* P. 35. In 1973, Darko Suvin already stressed the importance of utopian ‘estrangement’ as a element of social critique. See Darko Suvin, ‘Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, a Proposal, and a Plea’. 1973. In: *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 17–48, p. 30.

<sup>113</sup>Jack London, *The Iron Heel*. 1907. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 2006.

<sup>114</sup>London, *The Iron Heel*, p. 31.

<sup>115</sup>London, *The Iron Heel*, p. 290.



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world.’<sup>116</sup> As such, it stands as a negation of the reader’s lived experience, of which it bears the shadow or imprint in a critical mode.

If the utopian impulse is so ubiquitous, however, there is a risk that the notion might become diluted and lose any conceptual distinctiveness. If a utopian impulse is latent everywhere, then anything can become a utopia in disguise. As Nathan Waddell remarks, a utopian impulse has been observed at work in a variety of surprising places, from gardening to militant Islamism; accordingly, Waddell proposes to restrict the term utopia to ‘proposals or desires for an ideal place or state of existence which are contained by a fundamental, and potentially debilitating, scepticism towards their own conditions of possibility.’<sup>117</sup> This qualification seems to me useful, as the ‘Utopian clues and traces’ discernible in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are indeed contained by an overarching suspicion of political action.

### **Reading Joyce Politically**

Joyce’s politics has been the subject of intense controversy among critics. For much of the past century, the prevailing critical tradition, originated by Ezra Pound, cast Joyce as an uprooted cosmopolitan aesthete, at best indifferent to the contingencies of political struggles, Irish or otherwise. In the words of Seamus Deane, Joyce was ‘celebrated to the degree that he [was] (mis)understood as an anti-nationalist writer and therefore as both a modernist and an internationalist.’<sup>118</sup> Yet, as Andrew Gibson has demonstrated, Joyce’s political edge was acknowledged by early readers, long before the renewed interest in Joyce’s politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>119</sup> Early readers of Joyce were well aware of the inflammatory politics at work in *Ulysses*. In John Eglinton’s *Irish Literary Portraits*, Joyce was depicted as the ‘enemy’ of the English literary tradition, on which he took ‘revenge’ by mastering it thoroughly while threatening to dismantle it altogether.<sup>120</sup> As Stefan Zweig observed in 1928, in slightly different terms, ‘everything that this ingenious man writes is revenge on Dublin,’

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<sup>116</sup>Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 413. See also Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. xiii.

<sup>117</sup>Waddell, *Modernist Nowheres*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>118</sup>Seamus Deane, ‘Imperialism and Nationalism’. 1995. In: *Small World: Ireland 1798-2018*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 74–93, p. 91.

<sup>119</sup>See in particular Andrew Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 1–20.

<sup>120</sup>John Eglinton, *Irish Literary Portraits*. London: Macmillan, 1935, pp. 144–6.

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asserting that *Ulysses* is infused with ‘an organic power of rebellion.’<sup>121</sup> Joyce himself cultivated the image of a rebel, incriminating the spiritual tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church and the debilitating colonial system imposed on Ireland. In a letter to Nora Barnacle, dated 29 August 1904, he indicted the social system as a whole for slowly killing his mother:

My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity—home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. How could I like the idea of home ? My home was simply a middle-class affair ruined by spendthrift habits which I have inherited. [...] Six years ago I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. [...] Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do. I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond.<sup>122</sup>

This insurgent attitude led him to sympathise with anticolonial movements and even revolutionary socialism, although his involvement with the Irish Republican Socialist Party, at the end of 1903, was shortlived.<sup>123</sup> Joyce’s interest, however, was kindled again in Trieste, where he was a keen follower of the debates within the Italian labour movement, reading the pamphlets of Labriola or Ferrero.<sup>124</sup> Although by 1907 Joyce had admittedly become indifferent to all political ideas, socialist, anarchist, reactionary, or otherwise,<sup>125</sup> he continued to follow the developments of the anticolonial struggle in Ireland, echoes of which permeate his writing as a whole. This was the time when Joyce gave his lectures on Ireland at the Università Popolare in Trieste, voicing militant anticolonial grievances. In ‘Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,’ a lecture delivered in April 1907, he could still declare that

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<sup>121</sup>Robert H. Deming, ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*. Vol. 1. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1970, p. 445.

<sup>122</sup>Richard Ellmann, ed., *Letters of James Joyce*. Vol. 2. London: Faber and Faber, 1966, p. 48.

<sup>123</sup>Peter Costello writes that Joyce’s curiosity led him to sample a variety of socialist doctrines ‘in much the same way that he was then sampling liquors,’ but that ‘he was a feeble socialist at best, his individualism being too well developed for him to be carried away by dreams of collective action.’ See Peter Costello, *James Joyce: The Years of Growth, 1882-1915: A Biography*. London: Kyle Cathie, 1992, pp. 215–6, 266.

<sup>124</sup>For a detailed account of which, see John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2000, pp. 51–52 and Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce’s Politics*. London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1980, pp. 43–66.

<sup>125</sup>See his letter to his brother Stanislaus, dated 1 March 1907, in Richard Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975, pp. 151–3.

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[t]he economic and intellectual conditions of [Ireland] do not permit the individual to develop. The spirit of the country has been weakened by centuries of useless struggle and broken treaties. Individual initiative has been paralysed by the influence and admonitions of the church, while the body has been shackled by peelers, duty officers and soldiers.<sup>126</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages'. 1907. In: *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*. Ed. by Kevin Barry. Trans. by Conor Deane. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 108–127, p. 123.

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, renewed attention has been paid to Joyce's subversive politics, in relation to socialism, libertarian doctrines, and Irish anticolonial nationalism.<sup>127</sup> Seamus Deane's 'Joyce and Nationalism,' published in the 1985 volume *Celtic Revivals*, studies the ways in which Joyce at once engages with, and repudiates politics, an ambivalent operation predicated on the shared performative power of political speech and literary language, whereby 'the act of writing [becomes] an act of rebellion.'<sup>128</sup> Since the 1990s, Joyce has become the focus of much postcolonial criticism, as the near-simultaneous publication of pioneering works by Emer Nolan, Vincent Cheng, Enda Duffy, Maria Tymoczko, and Declan Kiberd indicates.<sup>129</sup> These works question what Emer Nolan has called the 'benign multiculturalism' then dominant in Joycean studies, which assumed that to be modern was to be cosmopolitan, and that nationalist culture was synonymous with the most benighted forms of parochialism. Len Platt has ably explored Joyce's critique of the patrician, socially conservative agenda which underpinned the Irish Revival.<sup>130</sup> Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes co-edited the stimulating volume *Semicolonial Joyce*, testifying to the convergence of postcolonial criticism and Joycean scholarship, while recognising that Joyce—and

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<sup>126</sup>The lecture was delivered in Italian. 'Peelers' is an Irish colloquialism referring to police officers. It is the translation of Joyce's '*doganieri*,' or customs officers.

<sup>127</sup>Jean-Michel Rabaté identifies the 1975 Paris Joyce Symposium as the moment 'when the "apolitical" view of Joyce was shattered.' See Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 38. The most comprehensive account of Joyce's politics is Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*. See also Brian G. Caraher, 'Irish and European Politics: Nationalism, Socialism, Empire'. In: *James Joyce in Context*. Ed. by John McCourt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 285–298.

<sup>128</sup>The essay appears in Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985, pp. 92–107, 99.

<sup>129</sup>Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*. 1995. London: Routledge, 2002; Vincent Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Enda Duffy, *The Subaltern Ulysses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; Maria Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*.

<sup>130</sup>Len Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish: A Study of Joyce and the Literary Revival*. Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1998.

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Ireland—sometimes challenge the tenets of postcolonialism.<sup>131</sup> Andrew Gibson’s historicist approach to the early works as well as *Ulysses* has done much to recontextualise Joyce’s writing, and foreground its engagement with the burning political issues of the day, from the legacy of the Famine to Fenianism, arguing that ‘in *Ulysses*, Joyce works towards a liberation from the colonial power and its culture.’<sup>132</sup>

### **Walcott’s Politics**

Walcott grew up on the island of St Lucia, once a strategic outpost over which the British and French colonial empires clashed multiple times until the end of the eighteenth century. The island remained in British hands after the victory over the French fleet at the Battle of the Saintes in 1782, an episode which features prominently in *Omeros*. By the twentieth century, however, the island had become marginal in economic as well as strategic terms, regardless of its claim to being ‘der twenty-seventh best harba in der worl’ (*AL*, 30). It retained a virtually feudal character inherited from the plantation economy, with large estates in the hands of a white plantocracy, while the mass of population was of African descent.

The Walcott household belonged to ‘an English-speaking high-brown élite’ in a society where skin colour, language, and status were indissociable.<sup>133</sup> This upwardly mobile brown middle class stood precariously between the white British rulers and the black popular masses, who still spoke a French creole bequeathed by the prior occupants. The mulatto middle class had access to education and from its ranks came the professionals, journalists, teachers, political leaders, and intellectuals who tended to occupy the upper rungs of the social ladder.

Most islands in the British Caribbean achieved independence in the latter half of the twentieth century, beginning with Jamaica in 1962. Independence, however, was preceded by an attempt at a West Indian Federation of all the British islands. The West Indies Federation came into existence in 1958, but was defunct by 1962. The

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<sup>131</sup>Attridge and Howes, *Semicolonial Joyce*. See also Marjorie Howes, ‘Joyce, Colonialism, and Nationalism’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. Ed. by Derek Attridge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 254–271.

<sup>132</sup>Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge*, p. 13. See also Andrew Gibson, *The Strong Spirit: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in the Writing of James Joyce, 1898-1915*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Keith Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism: Reading Joyce After the Cold War*. London: Greenwood Press, 2000; G. J. Watson, ‘The Politics of *Ulysses*’. In: *James Joyce’s Ulysses: The Larger Perspective*. Ed. by Robert D. Newman and Weldon Thornton. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987, pp. 39–58.

<sup>133</sup>Bruce King, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 13.

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Federation itself reflected the growing aspirations and influence of a local West Indian intelligentsia, seeking to take advantage of the United Kingdom's reduced influence in the post-war years. As the historian Elizabeth Wallace notes, 'most local support for a British Caribbean nation came from West Indians educated abroad,' reflecting 'black and brown West Indians' desire for more control over their own affairs.'<sup>134</sup> The social turmoil which had engulfed the whole archipelago in the 1930s was also a powerful reminder of the simmering tensions in the region. The post-war turn to decolonisation, however, also conformed to metropolitan interests. With Britain's share in the world market steadily declining in the 1950s, British finance and industry increasingly turned towards European and American markets, while some parts of the colonial empire, including the Caribbean or Pacific islands, became liabilities rather than assets. The rationale for federation involved many factors; the main goal was

to facilitate economic development, create strategic power blocs, prepare the political and administrative ground for the *eventual* transfer of power, and reduce the vulnerability of small states to communist takeover and so maintain British influence and interests in the longer term.<sup>135</sup>

The project was mined from the start, however. The scope of regional integration was less than ambitious; no provisions were made for the free movement of peoples between the islands, and insular customs duties remained in place. The huge disparities between the islands in terms of population and economic weight were inauspicious. Jamaica, the most populated island and a major bauxite exporter, as well as Trinidad, with the second largest population and booming oil revenues, were reluctant at the prospect of having to subsidise the smaller islands in replacement of the United Kingdom. Federation was embraced to the extent that it seemed to betoken financial and political profits for the insular elites; but the pursuit of purely local interests by the leaders of Jamaica and Trinidad proved decisive in the collapse of the project under the strain of those centrifugal forces. Jamaica was the first to secede, in 1962, followed by

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<sup>134</sup> Elisabeth Wallace, *The British Caribbean: From the Decline of Colonialism to the End of Federation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, p. 96.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas J. White, *Decolonisation: The British Experience Since 1945*. 1999. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 26, emphasis in the original. In the same volume, see 'Economics and the End of Empire' pp. 34-38. See also Rafael Cox-Alomar, 'Britain's Withdrawal from the Eastern Caribbean 1965-67: A Reappraisal'. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31.3 (September 2003), pp. 74-106; Spencer Mawby, *Ordering Independence: The End of Empire in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1947-69*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

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Trinidad.<sup>136</sup> The initial enthusiasm quickly subsided, and Wallace observes that it never extended to the mass of the people, for whom the federal government ‘seemed as remote and sometimes almost as unpopular as the British Colonial Office.’<sup>137</sup>

Walcott was an ardent supporter of the federal idea. He wrote the play *Drums and Colours*, an ‘epic drama’ celebrating a syncretic, pan-Caribbean identity in the making, for the inaugural ceremony of the Federation, on 25 April 1958 in Port-of-Spain.<sup>138</sup> Michael Malouf has argued that after the demise of the Federation, Walcott saw himself ‘as an outsider within Caribbean politics.’<sup>139</sup> The failure of the Federation, as well as the rise of Black nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, alienated him from all forms of nationalism, and pushed him to adopt a more clearly ‘international pose,’<sup>140</sup> a trajectory exemplified by the pan-American manifesto that is ‘The Muse of History,’ and eventually by the cosmopolitan epic that is *Omeros* in 1990.

In this respect, it is worth noting the similarity with Édouard Glissant’s political itinerary. Glissant attended the 1956 International Congress of Black Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne, and in 1961 co-founded the *Front Antillo-Guyanais pour l’autonomie*, advocating a pan-Caribbean federation and demanding an end to French rule. It has been noted that his anticolonial commitment in the late 1950s fed into his reflection on concepts such as the *Tout-monde* and Relation. With the British West Indian Federation and Cuban revolution as a backdrop; Caribbean federalism and a Panamerican consciousness went into the making of Glissant’s archipelagic thinking.<sup>141</sup>

The interplay between local attachment and cosmopolitanism has been a constant of

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<sup>136</sup>Wallace takes great pains to exonerate the United Kingdom, and explains the project’s failure primarily by the inexistence of a shared West Indian identity; ‘ultimately,’ she writes, ‘the UK could not decently bribe unwilling peoples to co-operate.’ Notwithstanding her sometimes invidious statements (‘The real and alleged sins of imperial Britain long provided West Indians with a convenient whipping boy [sic],’ p. 228), her detailed account of the conflicting economic interests which led to the undoing of the federation remains valuable. See in particular the sub-chapter ‘Why did the federation fail?’ in Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, pp. 217–227.

<sup>137</sup>Wallace, *The British Caribbean*, p. 219.

<sup>138</sup>Derek Walcott, *Drums and Colours: An Epic Drama*. 1961. In: *The Haitian Trilogy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

<sup>139</sup>Michael Malouf, ‘Dissimilation and Federation: Irish and Caribbean Modernisms in Derek Walcott’s *The Sea at Dauphin*’. In: *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 8.2 (2010), pp. 140–154, p. 151.

<sup>140</sup>Malouf, ‘Dissimilation and Federation’, p. 151.

<sup>141</sup>Axel Arthéron, ‘Vers une approche sociopolitique des origines du concept du Tout-monde chez Édouard Glissant: Du Front Antillo-Guyanais à *Monsieur Toussaint*’. In: *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 30.2 (Autumn 2015), pp. 24–41.

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Walcott's work, more markedly so since the 1980s. In political terms, he has always distanced himself from partisan or 'committed' writing. Interviewed in 1990, Walcott stated that 'as a writer of verse, it is not [his] business to offer political resolutions.'<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Walcott's political statements are few and unremarkable; in the same interview, he goes on to cite Gandhi and Jesus Christ as political models, and urges people to love one another in the face of oppression, when he does not question the existence of oppression altogether. In 1990, in another interview, Walcott makes the claim that 'there is really a fallacy of oppression. The whole idea of oppression is a fallacy, right? Including slavery. [...] If the fallacy is believed, you're a slave; if it's not believed, you are not enslaved,' before concluding that 'what happened was, one tribe captured the other tribe. That is the history of the world.'<sup>143</sup> His aversion to revenge and recrimination sometimes leads him to express views that recall Leopold Bloom at his worst, for instance when he advocates love, 'the opposite of hatred,' as a remedy to 'force, hatred, history, all that' (*U*, 12.1481-85).

Still, Walcott's poetry is often imbued with a critique of social inequities, racism, and the legacies of empire.<sup>144</sup> Paula Burnett writes that notwithstanding his aversion to political factionalism and 'committed' poetry, 'his ethics are essentially socialist.'<sup>145</sup> Insofar as socialism can be so depoliticised as to be equated with universal brotherly love, Burnett may be justified.

My purpose, however, is not to explore Joyce's and Walcott's actual politics. Terry Eagleton has written that 'Joyce's defiantly anti-political aesthetics, like most such modernist gestures, is a politics all in itself.'<sup>146</sup> Indeed, although they repudiate politics as such, Joyce and Walcott articulate utopian imaginings in alternative idioms, at a remove from the conventions of political discourse. Declan Kiberd has called *Ulysses* 'a book of utopian epiphanies, hinting at a golden future which might be made over in terms of those utopian moments,'<sup>147</sup> a dimension also emphasised by Eagleton, for whom Joyce's novel portrays the present in a language which 'anticipates the future,'

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<sup>142</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 159–60.

<sup>143</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 178–79.

<sup>144</sup>On Walcott's critique of neocolonialism and neoliberal capitalism, see for instance Michael R. Griffiths, "'The Fortunate Traveller'" in Transit: On a Walcott Manuscript and the Vicissitudes of North and South'. In: *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 53.3 (2018), pp. 345–362.

<sup>145</sup>Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001, pp. 71, 88.

<sup>146</sup>Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 235.

<sup>147</sup>Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 338.

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in terms that move beyond the limitations of anticolonial nationalism.<sup>148</sup> Sean Seeger has noted that ‘*Omeros* is informed throughout by glimpses of utopian possibility,’ which become available ‘on the condition that we eschew linear temporality.’<sup>149</sup> It is precisely the object of this dissertation to map the utopianism which subtends *Ulysses* and *Omeros*.

### Joyce’s and Walcott’s Cracked Mirrors

At the beginning of *Another Life*, Walcott’s autobiographical poem published in 1974, we see a young man drawing a landscape, as the sun sets and the moon rises on the bay outside his window. The text keeps shifting between pronouns and points of view, but given the autobiographical nature of the poem, we can assume that it is Walcott himself. On the mantel stands a

plaster-of-Paris Venus, which  
his yearning had made marble, half-cracked  
unsilvering mirror of black servants, (*AL*, 5)

an image which, like the passage as a whole, is marked by the contrast between white and black, light and shadow. The draughtsman appears caught in that tension, aspiring to transfigure a reality perceived as diminutive, where even the white of the plaster is only a second-rate substitute for the marble of the original sculpture. This scene, at the opening of one of Walcott’s major poems, reads at once like an allegory and a programme. The ‘half-cracked / unsilvering mirror of black servants’ takes on a symbolic value: the mirror, which traditionally metaphorises the mimetic function of art, is doubly damaged, suggesting that the black servant-artist will produce images that are never simply reflections of reality. In a broken mirror, reflections are fragmented, multiplied, kaleidoscopic. Further, this damaged mirror in the hands of a colonial artist is itself a reflection, since it has a literary precedent: in the opening of *Ulysses*, while discussing artistic matters with Buck Mulligan, Stephen makes the famous pronouncement that Irish art is ‘the cracked lookingglass of a servant’ (*U*, 1.146), a phrase repeated almost word for word in Walcott’s poem. In both cases, the suggestion is that mimesis, or representation more generally, has become dysfunctional, a fact which it is hard not

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<sup>148</sup>Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 297.

<sup>149</sup>Sean Seeger, *Nonlinear Temporality in Joyce and Walcott: History Repeating Itself with a Difference*. New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 86.



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to attribute to the colonial relationship itself, a reading borne out by the insistence on servant figures in the two passages.

I believe that these twin allegories aptly epitomise the concern which underpins this dissertation. Joyce's and Walcott's (half-)broken mirrors may at first seem of little use to represent the world-totality, yielding only fragmentary, disjointed images, unable to cohere into some overall picture. Yet, given the fractured reality of the world-system itself, a broken mirror may paradoxically be more sensitive to its fault lines as well as its underlying unity. Working with broken mirrors, Joyce and Walcott seem to suggest that the act of representation is very much a struggle with social totality, of which the utopian impulse is a critical trace. In this sense, utopianism is not so much a place as a projection, the totalising gesture which aims to articulate in a meaningful way the prevailing unevenness of the present. To the extent that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* register epochal contradictions, they do so not in a passive, but in a rebellious way. They do not merely reflect, but revolt against the contradictions from which they emerge, and to which they proffer a hypothetical utopian compensation.

## Outline

In my first chapter, I address the implications of the Homeric intertext in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. To begin with, I unpack the power dynamics at work in the intertextual relation between Homer's epics and their more recent iterations at the hands of Joyce and Walcott. That relation, I argue, is based on the displacement of the Homeric 'original,' an act which raises the crucial issues of literary value, originality, and ownership. I discuss the complex relationships between Joyce's and Walcott's derivative works, and the canonical texts which they both cannibalise and depart from. What is at stake, however, is not a matter of allusions and references, but a reflection on the incompleteness of national literature. Joyce's and Walcott's works demonstrate the power of peripheral rewritings to turn a canonical literary tradition into a pre-text. In that sense, they articulate a translational politics of literature. Drawing on a variety of insights derived from classical reception studies, translation studies, and contact linguistics, I explore the ways in which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* challenge the notions of authorship, cultural value, and literary property. Joyce and Walcott confound the claims of originality and the monumentalisation of the canon, showing literary tradition to be an ongoing process of circulation, where their own interventions combine and intersect like the distinct layers of a polyrhythm.

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In the second chapter, I show how *Ulysses* and *Omeros* engage with their own status as cultural commodities. Joyce and Walcott reflect on the unevenness of the literary market place, a field where the semi-peripheries are circumscribed and contained by hegemonic forms of representation. Both stage the struggle to achieve some form of agency, and to turn the traumatic past of colonial dispossession into a meaningful history. However, the logic of commodity exchange which presses upon literary production appears to contaminate the economy of the texts themselves. In this chapter, I show that the dysfunctional circulation of tropes and metaphors in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* can be read as a comment on the nightmare of a history whose main determinant is the process of commodification. By subjecting poetic language to the same laws as commodity exchange, Joyce and Walcott alert us to the dystopian dimension of a world-totality whose main unifying force has been the expansion of capital.

*Ulysses* and *Omeros* have both raised questions about literary genre, a concern which surfaces in most critical responses to either text. The categories of epic, novel, and poem, no longer seem exclusive, but mingle and overlap to such an extent that modern definitions of genre are called into question. In Chapter 3, I argue that the interplay between a variety of genres can be read as a manifestation of uneven and combined development, a situation marked by the coexistence of discrepant materials whose assemblage compels us to think through the inter-involvement of cultural formations sometimes treated as sealed off from and exclusive of one another. Further, I suggest that this challenge posed to generic taxonomy can be interpreted as an attempt to reach beyond the confines of printed literature—by returning to archaic forms of epic utterance, or *epos*, and by gesturing towards the overcoming of the divide between print and speech itself. In any case, to the extent that rhythm appears as a transgeneric category, bridging the divide between prose and poetry, orality and literacy, I propose that it is an essential instrument towards a rethinking of literary genre.

Finally, I propose that in the course of Joyce's and Walcott's engagements with the world-totality, language itself is invested with the utopian potential to harmonise the disjointed whole-world. For Joyce, the polyglossia of the world presses hard upon the becoming of the English language, and in turn exposes its composite nature, revealing it to be a multi-layered, heterogeneous amalgamation of other tongues. While Walcott does not subject the English language to the same kind of experimental procedures, he is nonetheless concerned with the linguistic medium in a region marked not only by polyglossia, but also by the process of creolisation. The interplay between unity and

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multiplicity in languages becomes a means to reflect on the self-contradictory nature of the world-totality. In my final chapter, then, I propose that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* represent language contact as a utopian process, one in which languages appear to be fluid, intertwined, caught in a ceaseless process of becoming other.

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# Chapter 1

## Homeric Pre-Texts

The mere juxtaposition of the titles *Ulysses* and *Omeros* cannot fail to suggest a parallel: Joyce's novel is named after the hero of the *Odyssey*, a text whose putative composer, Homer, in turn gives his name to Walcott's poem, although the *Iliad* is a more obvious reference for a story whose main characters are called Hector, Achille, and Helen. Both works point in a similar direction: the third term implicit in the association of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* is the Homeric epic. The inscription of that presence in the very titles of the texts means that a 'Homeric shadow' (*O*, 54.2) is cast over both the novel and the poem. Right from the very threshold, we are made aware of the haunting presence of a figure that has become a byword for literary tradition. Drawing on the insights of classical reception studies, this chapter explores the tensions which run through the intertextual relationship between *Ulysses* and *Omeros* on the one hand, and Homer's epics on the other, before addressing the connection between Walcott and Joyce, *Omeros* and *Ulysses*. I begin with a reflection on the epic genre and the classical canon as hegemonic cultural formations, before looking at the ways in which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* question the politics of authority, cultural ownership, and national literature. In doing so, they highlight the fragility of literary possession, and open up a space for what Emily Apter has called 'radical deownership.'<sup>1</sup> Finally, I propose that Homer's epics function like pre-texts rather than sub-texts, that they are not so much rewritten as written off, a fact whose implications are pursued in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup>Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 399.

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## 1.1 Epic: ‘Imperial, Imperious and Imperative’?

It could be argued that epic was *the* genre best fitted to the logic of imperialism and colonialism. Its long-standing association with political power, its reliance on feats of war and conquest, and its teleological narratives of empire-building, have contributed to the suspicion that epic is a genre predisposed to serve the interests of imperial masters. Nicholas Canny, for instance, has shown that the earliest justifications for British colonisation in the sixteenth century were often derived from the precedent of ancient Rome.<sup>2</sup> Although René Étiemble has argued that ‘the function of “epic” texts shifts depending on eras, peoples, circumstances,’ the conventional epic canon—from Homer to Milton, through Virgil and Camões—does little to dispel the idea that the genre has traditionally been used to consolidate political power and authority.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on a multitude of ‘epic’ texts from various regions of Africa, Eastern Europe, Japan, India, or the Mediterranean, Étiemble has shown that all generalisations are necessarily awkward, given the huge variety of purposes, generic fluctuations, and compositional strategies involved. More recently, in a transcultural study of the genre across time, surveying a wide range of cases from South Africa to the Middle East, David Konstan and Kurt Raaflaub have given a tentative, minimal definition of epics as ‘narratives of heroic events that occurred some time in the past.’<sup>4</sup> But, as they readily admit, that definition raises more questions than it answers: how faithful are the narratives? how are they transmitted, and eventually fixated in written form? by whom and for what purposes? how distant is the past they purport to relate? and what do they reveal, not about the past they claim to resuscitate, but about their own present? I can do no more than raise those issues, as this is not the place to embark on a discussion of the epic genre *per se*. What must be remembered is that the following remarks are tentative generalisations at best. The point is to highlight the construction of the epic genre, its conceptualisation as an instrument of political and cultural hegemony, in order to better understand the treatment to which it is subjected by Joyce and Walcott.

In his discussion of literary genres, Stephen Owen notes that epic is often expected

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<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Canny, ‘The Origins of Empire: An Introduction’. In: *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Origins of Empire*. 1998. Ed. by Nicholas Canny. Vol. One. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 1–33, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>‘la fonction des textes “épiques” varie selon les temps, les peuples les circonstances.’ Étiemble, *Essais de littérature (vraiment) générale*, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, ‘Introduction’. In: *Epic and History*. Ed. by David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 1–6, p. 2.

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to fulfil a foundational role in the narratives of national literary history; in other words, ‘the story of a literature is supposed to have an epic at the beginning.’<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the very notion of ‘literary history’ arose in the nineteenth century, concomitantly with the emergence of the European nation-states. Accordingly, national literary history became a way to assert a nation’s cultural preeminence. To this end, prestigious texts—the older, the better—were excavated, and erected as foundational national monuments. In the nineteenth century, the epic texts of *Beowulf* and the *Chanson de Roland* served that purpose for English and French literature respectively: they became what Marita Mathijssen has called ‘shibboleth texts,’ that is to say ancient works, preferably of an epic or heroic nature, providing an illustrious literary origin for nations in the making.<sup>6</sup> Such endeavours were always precarious, as the case of *Beowulf* makes clear: although it was eventually adopted into the English pantheon, it began its career as an allegedly Danish epic, as it was thought—by a Danish scholar—to have been written in a Danish dialect. There was a time, then, when *Beowulf* was virtually up for grabs, an ironic illustration that epics themselves can be conquered.

The political project of authenticating a ‘national literature’ relied heavily on such medieval epics, which could be read as reassuring proof of the nation’s genealogical depth. Only from this perspective is it possible to appreciate Bakhtin’s definition of epic, based on three criteria: a focus on ‘a *national* epic past,’ with a source in ‘*national* tradition,’ separated from the time of enunciation by ‘an absolute epic distance.’<sup>7</sup> The centrality of nationhood is clear enough; so is the complicity of the genre with political power, while the absolute temporal distance means that the events of the epic are far out of reach, untouchable, that is to say, sacred. Bakhtin’s definition is admittedly one-sided and anachronistic; while it aptly captures the agenda which turned epics into cultural assets towards the formation of a national culture, it fails to account for the variegated history of the genre and the multiple uses it could serve before the era of nation states. To be sure, Bakhtin relies on a stereotypical image of epic as a monological genre, the better to celebrate the polyphony of the novel. Sneharika Roy has convincingly argued that the construction of epic as a univocal, monolithic, authoritarian discourse is itself problematic; even the ‘classic’ political epics deploy what she calls a ‘migratory

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen Owen, ‘Genres in Motion’. In: *PMLA* 122.5 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1389–1393, p. 1390.

<sup>6</sup>Marita Mathijssen concentrates on the Dutch case in Marita Mathijssen, ‘The Editing of National Shibboleth Texts: An Historical Account’. In: *Text* 17 (2005), pp. 223–235. On the construction of ‘national literature,’ see also Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, pp. 228–237.

<sup>7</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 13. Emphasis mine.

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poetics,' producing 'a narrative of national integration at odds with the proliferation of cultural sources that is the pre-condition of its production.'<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, she recognises that the Virgilian model of epic is predicated on the 'telescoping of epic genealogy and prophecy into a teleology of national destiny.'<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding these reservations, Bakhtin's terms are accurate enough for an explicitly political epic like Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is arguably a perfect embodiment of the complicity between epic and political power. David Quint even suggests that the Augustan imperial agenda is inscribed in Virgil's narrative matrix itself, which turns history into teleology. Describing the episode of the battle at Actium, Quint argues that the *Aeneid* 'depicts imperial victory as the victory of the principle of history.' Looking also at Camões's sixteenth century *Lusiad*, with its retrospective prophecy of Portuguese greatness and world conquest, Quint argues that 'epic linearity—the sequential linking of events—becomes a teleology,' which conveniently matches 'the straight line of imperial triumph.'<sup>10</sup>

While the competitive environment of incipient national literatures led to the valuation of vernacular epics, the discipline of classics continued to provide cultural ammunition too. Gilbert Murray, who taught classics at Oxford and Harvard in the first quarter of the twentieth century, was a representative of such discourse. His *Rise of the Greek Epic*, first published in 1907, celebrates the Greek literary tradition as the root of Western culture—the first chapter, entitled 'Greece and the Progress of Man' starts from the premise that 'the seeds of Western civilization are mostly to be found in Greece and not elsewhere.'<sup>11</sup> Ancient Greece, therefore, conveniently prefigures the values of progress and civilisation which underpinned the British imperial ethos.

The epic genre, however, was only one element in the broader practice of canon-making, that is to say, the construction of 'an aristocracy of texts.'<sup>12</sup> As Susan Bassnett has noted,

because of the importance of the written epic in the European tradition, those cultures which had no epic [...] were also downgraded. Homer and

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<sup>8</sup>Roy, *The Postcolonial Epic*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>Roy, *The Postcolonial Epic*, p. 87. For a fuller discussion of Bakhtin's argument, see also Sneharika Roy, 'The Migrating Epic Muse: Conventions, Contraventions, and Complicities in the Transnational Epics of Herman Melville, Derek Walcott, and Amitav Ghosh'. PhD thesis. Paris: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, 2013, pp. 23–27.

<sup>10</sup>David Quint, 'Epic and Empire'. In: *Comparative Literature* 41.1 (Winter 1989), pp. 1–32, pp. 10–14.

<sup>11</sup>Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*. 1907. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>John Guillory, 'The Ideology of Canon-Formation: T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks'. In: *Critical Inquiry* 10.1 (September 1983), pp. 173–198, p. 175.

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the Greeks, the plays of Shakespeare, the poetry of Spenser and Milton, these were the texts against which other works were measured and found wanting.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever comparisons did occur between the imperial canon and the literature produced in the colonies tended invariably to assert the superiority of the former, disregarding the fact that such apparently self-evident categories as ‘literature,’ ‘genres,’ and even ‘texts,’ were themselves historically and epistemologically relative, conditioned by the intellectual traditions of Europe.

The literary aristocracy of the canon is maintained and legitimised by cultural institutions including the school system, academia, and publishing outlets. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen antagonises his classmates when he ranks the poetry of Lord Byron over that of Tennyson. ‘Everyone knows that Tennyson is the greatest poet,’ they retort, while ‘Byron is only a poet for uneducated people,’ in addition to being ‘a bad man’ (*P*, 71). This judgment is enough to turn Stephen into ‘a heretic’ in the eyes of the others, in a clear illustration of the political and moral implications of literary taste. Stephen pays a heavy price for being a literary dissenter: when he refuses to abjure Byron, his classmates beat him up with a cane and a cabbage stump.

In *Stephen Hero*, Stephen had already experienced the repressive practice of canon formation, at the hands of Whelan, the College orator. When Stephen dares to read out publicly an essay in praise of Henrik Ibsen, the figurehead of modern drama, he incurs the wrath of the powers that be. One of Whelan’s main arguments is that Stephen is turning away from the timelessness of Greek art, which comes to be experienced by Stephen as ‘imperial, imperious and imperative’ (*SH*, 101). This adjectival triad resurfaces in the ‘Aeolus’ episode in *Ulysses*, uttered by professor MacHugh in his memorable definition of ancient Rome’s ‘cloacal obsession’ (7.486). In both cases, the polyptoton derived from the Latin *imperium* makes clear the authoritarian aspects of Greek and Roman cultures in the hands of colonial—and clerical—institutions.

Literature is a social practice; it is inevitably caught up in the relations of power that run through society as a whole. As Ankhi Mukherjee writes, the canon has long been ‘a nexus of power and knowledge that reinforces hierarchies and the vested interests of select institutions, excluding the interests and accomplishments of minorities, popular and demotic culture.’<sup>14</sup> The canon, by definition, is that which is to be maintained and

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<sup>13</sup>Bassnett, *Comparative Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Ankhi Mukherjee, *What is a Classic?: Postcolonial Rewriting and Invention of the Canon*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 9.



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preserved. In this enterprise, as Seth L. Schein has shown, classics has occupied a central place.<sup>15</sup> Yet, any canon can be subject to reappraisals and reconfigurations, as aesthetic values and notions of taste fluctuate. Canons, then, are always sites of contest:

Each literary age, movement, or reading formation, marks the place and claims of the canonical as contingent, outlines a program that serves to authorize its own attitudes and poetics, and invents a vatic tradition of its own. Canon formation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [...] is increasingly carried out in deconstructive modes of critical scrutiny that not only challenge orthodoxies of the mind and dogma [...] but the place and claims of the arbiters who have traditionally determined the nature and possibilities of literature.<sup>16</sup>

As these examples demonstrate, the epic genre was indeed enlisted to serve imperial ends. By the same token, however, it became a target for expropriation, and a site where oppositional literary practices could be envisioned.

### 1.1.1 De-centring Homer

Since the 1990s, the discipline of classical reception studies has stressed the need to reassess the significance of Graeco-Latino humanities.<sup>17</sup> Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood have addressed the agenda which underpinned the formation of the European, or Western canon. They show that this enterprise was predicated on a strong exclusionary ethos, and take issue with the notion that Homer was ‘the fountainhead of all Western literature.’<sup>18</sup> Whatever currency the construction of a ‘Western tradition’ may have enjoyed over time, with the comforting reassurance of a straight line originating in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* down to the (European) present, that presumption is simply untenable. First, because ‘Europe’ and ‘the West’ are anachronistic constructs with regard to ancient Greece. Second, because in the light of

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<sup>15</sup>Seth L. Schein, “‘Our Debt to Greece and Rome’: Canon, Class, and Ideology”. In: *A Companion to Classical Receptions*. Ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 75–85.

<sup>16</sup>Mukherjee, *What is a Classic?*, pp. 216–217.

<sup>17</sup>See for instance Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, eds., *Classics and the Uses of Reception*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006; Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, eds., *A Companion to Classical Receptions*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

<sup>18</sup>Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood, ‘Introduction’. In: *Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and the Western Canon*. Ed. by Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 1–26, p. 1.

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twentieth century scholarship on the epic genre, the halo of exceptionalism surrounding Homer appears unwarranted. Beginning with Milman Parry's seminal work on oral epic in the Balkans in the 1930s,<sup>19</sup> scholars have explored various epic traditions across the world, and decentred Homer's place in the canon, showing that 'epic is neither dead nor fundamentally Western.'<sup>20</sup>

Further, the oral dimension of epic has been re-emphasised, thus challenging the primacy of the written word, and suggesting parallels with 'non-canonical traditions rooted in oral performance,' upsetting potential hierarchies—and even definitions—of literary genres.<sup>21</sup> As a result, it is no longer possible to see 'Homer' standing as the towering patriarch and iconic originator over 'the whole of the literature of Europe' as T. S. Eliot famously implied in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.'<sup>22</sup> In his recent book on the uses of antiquity in modern writers, including Walcott, Franck Collin makes a similar case; he stresses the need to 'de-center' Graeco-Latin antiquity, and to conceive of a plurality of hybridised antiquities, rather than a Eurocentric monolith.<sup>23</sup>

Entering into a dialogue with Homer may be a way to challenge the annexation of classics by colonialism, and to explode the fabricated model of a single colonial culture stretching from the British Empire all the way back to Homer. While classical epics traditionally articulate 'monocultural political statements of the Root identity,' in the service of a nationalist agenda, 'postcolonial epic comes full circle, advertising its transnational political vision through hybrid intertextual genealogies that draw on

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<sup>19</sup>Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. Ed. by Adam Parry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

<sup>20</sup>Graziosi and Greenwood, 'Introduction', p. 2. See for instance, on African epics, Isidore Okpewho, 'Rethinking Epic'. In: *Storytelling, Self, Society* 5.3 (2009), pp. 218–242. For a more general, comparative discussion, see John Miles Foley, 'Analogues: Modern Oral Epics'. In: *A Companion to Ancient Epic*. Ed. by John Miles Foley. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 196–212.

<sup>21</sup>Graziosi and Greenwood, 'Introduction', p. 5. The classic reference on epic orality is Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. 1960. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

<sup>22</sup>T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. 1917. In: *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1934, pp. 13–22, p. 14. For a study of Homeric appropriations in Europe at the turn of the century, see the essays in Véronique Gély et al., eds., *Modernités antiques: La littérature occidentale et l'Antiquité gréco-romaine dans la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2014.

The argument is that engaging with classics was not the preserve of any given school or movement, but rather a widespread cultural phenomenon which affected European modernity as a whole, and which could be put to a great variety of uses. See also Leah Culligan Flack, *Modernism and Homer: The Odysseys of H.D., James Joyce, Osip Mandelstam, and Ezra Pound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015 and David Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>23</sup>Franck Collin, *Antiquités décentrées: Walcott, Quignard, Ransmayr*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021, pp. 18–24.

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indigenous and European cultural traditions.’<sup>24</sup> Reclaiming classics may then be read as an act of cultural defiance on the part of the colonised, undermining allegations of cultural—and racial— inferiority, beating the colonisers at their own game by laying equal claims to a culture unduly enlisted into the imperial agenda. As Emily Greenwood cogently puts it,

the reception of the *Odyssey* in anglophone literature in the modern Caribbean is an example of a text that was expropriated by colonial writers to underwrite empire, and has subsequently been revisited and rewritten to undermine empire and its legacies and to revise (perceptions of) the region’s history.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.1.2 Irish Hellenism and the Black Aegean

The nationalist appropriation of epic by conquering nations was always double-edged. The legitimacy conferred by self-authorising textual practices could also be claimed by suppressed polities, as indeed was the case in Ireland. As Justine McConnell has observed, since the Greek and Roman empires were ‘both a model and a cautionary tale for modern imperialists’, they were appropriated by colonial empire-builders in the modern era, but their example could also provide the colonised with material to respond to their own predicaments.<sup>26</sup> The revivalist strain in cultural nationalism often postulated a subterranean link between the modern (aspiring) nation and its alleged forerunners. In Ireland, David Hutchinson traces the first articulations of this strategy to the antiquarian speculations of philologists and historians in the eighteenth century. Figures like Charles O’Conor, Sylvester O’Halloran, or Charles Vallancey ventured that Gaelic Ireland shared linguistic and cultural features with Phoenician civilisation, ancient Greece, and even India.<sup>27</sup>

Such propositions would become a staple of revivalist rhetoric; with folklore providing the missing link in the genealogy of great civilisations, one century later, Yeats

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<sup>24</sup>Roy, *The Postcolonial Epic*, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup>Emily Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 39. For a treatment of classicism in the Black Atlantic as ‘multiple, open, non-canonical, and processual,’ see the essays in Ian Moyer et al., eds., *Classicisms in the Black Atlantic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>Justine McConnell, *Black Odysseys: The Homeric Odyssey in the African Diaspora Since 1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup>John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1987, pp. 55–60.

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could write that ‘the root-stories of the Greek poets are told to-day at the cabin fires of Donegal.’<sup>28</sup> In the interim, the Archbishop of Tuam and Gaelic enthusiast John MacHale had attempted a translation of the *Iliad* into Gaelic, arguing that ‘there is no European tongue better adapted than ours to a full and perfect version of Homer.’<sup>29</sup> In a volume entitled *Irish Literature*, published in 1904, Justin McCarthy reiterates the claim that the oldest myths and legends encapsulate the Irish national genius; much as Homeric poetry gives the key to the history of Greece, Irish legends are regarded as the repository of the Irish character. Whereupon the Greek ancestry of Ireland is again asserted:

One of the names given to the Irish people [...] carries with it and must ever carry the proclamation of its Greek origin. There is indeed in the early literature of Ireland much that still illustrates that Hellenic character. It may therefore be fairly assumed that the Phenicians first and the Greeks afterward left their impress on the development of the Irish race.<sup>30</sup>

These theories were known to Joyce; in his lecture ‘Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,’ delivered in Trieste in April 1907, he cites Vallancey in support of the claim that Gaelic ‘is eastern in origin and has been identified by many philologists with the ancient language of the Phoenicians, the discoverers, according to historians, of commerce and navigation.’ He goes on to assert that Ireland was in fact settled by the Phoenicians, and that ‘the religion and civilization of that ancient people, later known as Druidism, were Egyptian,’ (*OCPW*, 110). Joyce contrasts the glorious days of medieval Ireland, when the country was a seat of learning and intellectual achievement, sending renowned theologians abroad and attracting students from all corners of Europe, to the ‘real butcher’s mess’ it became in the wake of Scandinavian conquest (*OCPW*, 113). At the end of a carefully crafted narrative of glory and downfall, he asks: ‘Is this country destined some day to resume its ancient position as the Hellas of the north?’ (*OCPW*, 124).

Classical texts were also objects of emulation, at a time when (aspiring) nation states were keen to assert their cultural credentials. In an early article, published in 1886, on the poetry of Samuel Ferguson, Yeats put forward a virtual manifesto for a Celtic revival

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<sup>28</sup>W. B. Yeats, ‘The Message of the Folk-Lorists’. 1893. In: *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Early Articles and Reviews*. Ed. by John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre. Vol. 9. New York: Scribner, 2004, pp. 209–213, p. 210.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 164.

<sup>30</sup>Justin McCarthy, ed., *Irish Literature*. Vol. 1. Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1904, pp. vii–viii.

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grounded on heroic literature. He praised Ferguson for restoring the ‘epic interest’ of the Irish landscape, which made him ‘the one Homeric poet of our time.’<sup>31</sup> The Homeric parallel is exploited to the full in the article, on account of Ferguson’s heroic poems, drawing on the Gaelic legends of Deirdre or Cu Chulann. Thus, Yeats argues, Ferguson ‘has restored to us a fragment of the buried *Odyssey* of Ireland.’<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Ferguson, Ireland too has its shibboleth text. The article’s conclusion collapses the nation and the heroic repertoire which is supposed to guarantee its authenticity:

Of all the many things the past bequeaths to the future, the greatest are great legends; they are the mothers of nations. I hold it the duty of every Irish reader to study those of his own country till they are familiar as his own hands, for in them is the Celtic heart.<sup>33</sup>

The theme recurs in *Ulysses*, in the course of the discussion at the National Library; the treatment of epic ambition, however, is radically different. One of the speakers—possibly the poet A.E. although the speech is not clearly attributed—reflects that ‘our national epic has yet to be written’ (9.309). The uncertain attribution of the statement is further complicated, however; the sentence is supposed to be a quotation from the scholar George Sigerson, but is actually an invention based on his 1904 article ‘Ireland’s Influence on European Literature.’<sup>34</sup> As a result, the national epic project rests, rather inauspiciously, on a misquotation by an unidentified speaker. This microscopic incident actually exposes the precariousness of oral transmission, which was supposed to guarantee the authenticity of the folk-lore, as in Yeats’s example quoted above. Ironically enough, the Irish national epic ‘has yet to be *written*’ (my emphasis); in other words, it must be extirpated from its oral medium and given proper textual shape.<sup>35</sup> Yet even that prospect is far from promising, as an adequate candidate must be found to write the epic:

Moore is the man for it. A knight of the rueful countenance here in Dublin.  
With a saffron kilt? O’Neill Russell? O, yes, he must speak the grand old

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<sup>31</sup>W. B. Yeats, ‘The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, II’. 1886. In: *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: Early Articles and Reviews*. Ed. by John P. Frayne and Madeleine Marchaterre. Vol. 9. New York: Scribner, 2004, pp. 10–27, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Yeats, ‘The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, II’, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Yeats, ‘The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, II’, pp. 26–27.

<sup>34</sup>Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s Ulysses*. 1974. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 214.

<sup>35</sup>I come back to the issues of orality and textualisation in more detail in Chapter 3.1, p. 146.

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tongue. And his Dulcinea? James Stephens is doing some clever sketches.  
(9.309-12)

More significant than the revivalist cast including Moore, O'Neill Russell, and Stephens, is the reference to Don Quixote, the 'knight of the rueful countenance,' dressed in pseudo-Gaelic costume. Indeed, Cervantes's novel is the classic registration of the shift from chivalric romance to 'modern' novel.<sup>36</sup> Intoxicated with the tales of knight-errants, Quixote strives to behave heroically in a world where heroism has become inoperative. However, the parodic strain in *Don Quixote* may serve to articulate a modern, unheroic epic, for which *Ulysses* itself is an apt candidate, relying as it does on 'an ironic unity-cum-discrepancy between a humdrum text and a heroic subtext.'<sup>37</sup>

Len Platt observes that the practice of 'corresponding with the Greeks' underpinned the Revival's conservative agenda, articulating the future of Ireland in terms borrowed from the hierarchical, elitist society of Ancient Greece, in a way suited to the interests of the Anglo-Irish intelligentsia. By contrast, in *Ulysses*, 'Hellenism is activated in a hugely exaggerated form, becoming a hilarious literalisation of revivalist attempts to synchronize with the first culture of Europe.'<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Buck Mulligan's ambition to 'hellenise' the island at the beginning of the novel is never fulfilled (1.168). On the contrary, Greece features essentially in degraded forms, devoid of meaning, or as an object of parody. Thus, the Greek language breaks down under the strain of Molly's mispronunciation, when she asks Leopold about the meaning of 'met him pike hoses' (her rendition of the word 'metempsychosis'), prompting him to reflect that Greek is 'only big words for ordinary things on account of the sound' (8.115). Another Greek word obsesses Bloom throughout the day, 'parallax,' but his attempt to remember the meaning culminates in the terse observation that 'Par it's Greek: parallel, parallax' (8.111). Here, the search for meaning founders; the cognate 'parallel' does not bring Bloom any closer to a definition of 'parallax,' a notion tied up with issues of point of view and distorted perception, to which I return below. Bloom's engagement with Hellenism comes to a head when he signs his letter to Martha Clifford with his pseudonym, 'Henry. Greek ee' (11.889) or, alternatively, when he remembers gazing at the Greek statues in the National Museum, 'the splendid proportions of hips, bosom.

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<sup>36</sup>The novelist Milan Kundera, for instance, sees *Don Quixote* as the foundational text of European modernity, the first literary manifestation of a secularised world marked by epistemological and moral relativism; see Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*. 1986. Trans. by Linda Asher. New York: Perennial Classics, 2000, pp. 3–22.

<sup>37</sup>Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 311.

<sup>38</sup>Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish*, pp. 113–115.

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You simply don't knock against those kind of women here' (16.892).<sup>39</sup> Instead of correspondence, we encounter parodic discrepancy.

While Irish revivalists often sought to elevate Ireland by advertising its Hellenic roots, in other contexts, the same parallel could be skewered and redeployed in different ways. The parallel between the Caribbean and the Mediterranean is a long-standing one. It was common practice among slave owners in the Caribbean and America to name slaves after characters from Greek mythology. In chapter 35 of *Omeros*, as the narrator begins his pilgrimage on the Trail of Tears in Georgia, he reflects on

the Greek revival

carried past the names of towns with columned porches,  
and how Greek it was, the necessary evil  
of slavery, in the catalogue of Georgia's

marble past, the Jeffersonian ideal in  
plantations with its Hectors and Achilleuses,  
its foam in the dogwood's spray, past towns named Helen,

Athens, Sparta, Troy. (*O*, 35.1)

Here, we encounter another 'revival,' where the institution of slavery links the Old World and the New in a nightmarish cycle of violence and exploitation.

In the wake of the Spanish military defeat in Cuba in 1898, the Caribbean became, in the words of the Trinidadian historian Eric Williams, an 'American Mediterranean,' a phrase which captures the consolidation of U.S. hegemony in the region.<sup>40</sup> Expanding on Paul Gilroy's concept of a 'Black Atlantic,' and in a very different register, Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson have put forward the notion of a 'Black Aegean' as a space where writers from the African diaspora negotiate the heritage of ancient Greece.<sup>41</sup> While Goff

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<sup>39</sup>Len Platt's chapter 'Corresponding with the Greeks' examines Joyce's ambivalent use of Homeric analogy, in terms that fit neither the English imperialist tradition, nor the Gaelic Revivalist enterprise. In Platt's view, the abundance of Greek material and Homeric correspondences throughout the novel is not an act of deference to literary tradition as such. Rather, he reads *Ulysses* as a subversive exploration of 'the ideological basis of literary value,' as it engages with the text which best exemplifies 'the politics of literary culture, the nationalistic and hegemonic basis of conceptions of literary value.' Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish*, p. 103

<sup>40</sup>Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, pp. 419–27.

<sup>41</sup>Barbara Goff and Michael Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean: Oedipus, Antigone, and Dramas of the African Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.

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and Simpson examine primarily theatrical works of the African diaspora, they derive their theoretical framework in large measure from Walcott's *Omeros*, as a text which posits a non-hierarchical relationship between the Caribbean and ancient Greece.<sup>42</sup> Goff and Simpson articulate the notion of Black Aegean in terms of a dialectic between the processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation which, went into the making of Africa and ancient Greece:

What the Black Aegean reveals about itself historically is that modern Europe reterritorialized Greece as its own, before deterritorializing it in the process of exporting European culture to its colonial possessions. With the next step in the dialectic we are quite familiar: by adapting Greek texts, Africa reterritorializes Greece. As it does so, however, Greece reciprocally reterritorializes Africa, specifically on the grounds that the two domains are the beginnings of diasporas, in which colonization has been a common factor.<sup>43</sup>

The Black Aegean is therefore a site of cross-cultural circulations and identifications, sustained by diasporic engagements with canonical texts. In her study of 'Black Odysseys,' Justine McConnell warns against the danger of regarding such responses to classical texts as merely derivative, as if chronological primacy could be conflated with superiority.<sup>44</sup> It would be ill-advised to establish any kind of hierarchy between classics and modern postcolonial works, as if there existed supra-historical standards of literary value. Such a view would only replicate the colonialist ethos, positing a self-styled 'high civilisation' against a backdrop of belated, diminutive cultural refuse. McConnell instead shows the empowering potential of reappropriating and recasting Homeric narratives for writers such as Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, or Wilson Harris.<sup>45</sup> It is tempting to read Walcott's *Omeros* as an 'epic of the dispossessed,' substituting heroes and battles with the day-to-day struggles of common people.<sup>46</sup> However, instead of exalting the marginalised culture of the Caribbean by showing its affinity with ancient Greece, Walcott desacralises the latter in order to celebrate the former. In an interview, he has declared that

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<sup>42</sup>Goff and Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>43</sup>Goff and Simpson, *Crossroads in the Black Aegean*, p. 49.

<sup>44</sup>McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup>McConnell reads Walcott's engagement with Homer as a reflection on hybridity and cross-cultural exchanges in her chapter 'The "Unread" Homer: Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*,' McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, pp. 107–154.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Hamner justifies the phrase in Robert D. Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997, p. 15.



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the Greeks were the niggers [sic] of the Mediterranean. If we looked at them now, we would say that the Greeks had Puerto Rican tastes [sic]. Right? Because the stones were painted brightly. They were not these bleached stones. As time went by, and they sort of whitened and weathered, the classics began to be thought of as something bleached-out and rain-spotted, distant. People who praised classical Greece, if they were there then, would consider the Greeks' tastes vulgar, lurid [...] as exotica, barbarous exotica.<sup>47</sup>

Like Joyce, Walcott plays ironically with the aspiration to emulate the illustrious examples of Antiquity, which tends to elide the demotic quality of an art that now passes as 'high.' Walcott's Aegean is not an imperial centre, but a disreputable cultural periphery, which serves him to articulate a Black Aegean in non-elitist terms. Emily Greenwood speaks of Walcott's 'estranging engagement with Homer,' a tension similarly captured by Sneharika Roy when she addresses the simultaneous 'disavowal and reappropriation' of epic tropes by Walcott in his effort to engage with his island on its own terms.<sup>48</sup>

Actually, in an unpublished version of Walcott's preface to *The Joker of Seville*, Walcott subjects Shakespeare to a similar treatment, wresting the Bard from his canonical pedestal. In that piece, he wrote that

To many, these adaptations of what are called 'classics' are vulgar, but these people forget that those very classics originated in vulgarity—if by vulgarity we mean the approval of the mob or of the pit. [...] and that vulgarity can extend itself into approval of magnificent speech as much as it does to low comedy, if the language is alive. Shakespeare creolized the classic theater as much as any Third World writer who reinvents these legends—which are, after all, universal—whether they be of Don Juan or Faust.<sup>49</sup>

For Justine McConnell, Walcott's resort to Homeric references is neither an antagonistic gesture nor a subservient homage. The Homeric epics, for Walcott, stand for the cross-cultural diversity of the ancient Mediterranean, much as Shakespeare's 'classics' have their source in the early modern entertainment industry. Fittingly, Walcott is more concerned with the interplay of cultural references than with origins, which leads him to emphasise the subaltern or marginalised aspects of the epics.<sup>50</sup> That is particularly

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<sup>47</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 183.

<sup>48</sup>Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, p. 49 and Roy, *The Postcolonial Epic*, p. 58.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Giuseppe Sofo, 'Creolizing Translation: Derek Walcott's trans(creoliz)ations of *El burlador de Sevilla* and *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*'. In: *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts* 2.2 (2016), pp. 258–276, p. 264.

<sup>50</sup>McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, p. 123.

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the case in his stage version of the *Odyssey*, where the underdog Thersites features prominently, or Eurycleia vindicates the claim that Greece was nurtured by Egypt. Walcott also complicates the episode of the Cyclops, which harps on typical colonial clichés to legitimise the conquest of allegedly uncivilised peoples. Thus, McConnell argues, ‘Walcott’s engagement with the Western canon involves a deliberate departure from the canonical “grand narratives,” in favour of a specifically Caribbean one which approaches the material anew.’<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Mukherjee has observed that for Walcott, ‘the classic is changeable and perfectible, and the act of preserving and relaying tradition is inseparable from renewing it.’<sup>52</sup>

### 1.1.3 ‘A Sound Colonial Education’

As Emily Greenwood has shown, classics could be felt as an alien reality that did not relate to the lived experience of colonial subjects, a manifestation of the imperialist ethos in the realm of pedagogy, as repressive as it was irrelevant.<sup>53</sup> Latin, for instance, was a staple of the Cambridge Certificate examinations until the middle of the twentieth century. The Cambridge examination was the holy grail of the colonial school system, and a gateway to the metropolitan university. As such, classics represented a potential asset for upward social mobility. Familiarity with classics could bring prestige in the shape of social capital, and open up access to high-ranking positions. Indeed, classics could be regarded as ‘a badge of status and a means to social and economic improvement’.<sup>54</sup> While this could spur outstanding pupils such as Eric Williams or C. L. R. James to appropriate the discipline and outdo metropolitan students, as Greenwood ably demonstrates, the pressure could leave a crippling impression on students. The prospects of success were tenuous; the competitiveness and elitism that accompanied the examination were distressing for the unsuccessful mass of schoolboys. Besides, the curriculum was notoriously dismissive of the local reality. As Walcott bitterly remembers, departing from his usually appreciative tone: ‘How could I wish to join a classical tradition when where I was had nothing to do with the vegetation, people or anything remotely referential to Greece or Rome?’<sup>55</sup> Many such examples could be adduced; in Earl Lovelace’s novel *Salt*, for instance, we witness the breakdown

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<sup>51</sup> McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, p. 154.

<sup>52</sup> Mukherjee, *What is a Classic?*, p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> See in particular the chapter ‘Classics as School of Empire’ in Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, pp. 69–111.

<sup>54</sup> Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, p. 110.

<sup>55</sup> Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 181.

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of Alford, a character whose education stems entirely from the metropolitan centre, and who struggles to grow out of the contempt he has been inculcated for all things local.<sup>56</sup> The impression of alienation was reinforced by the official narrative which presented the metropolitan culture as descended from the Graeco-Roman heritage, the better to belittle all things indigenous.

In Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to *Les Damnés de la terre*, he speaks of the new species created by the colonial curriculum as '*les nègres gréco-latins*,' a disquieting expression which bespeaks the epistemological violence of the colonial education system.<sup>57</sup> As if to echo Sartre's formula, Walcott's poem 'Homecoming: Anse La Raye,' published in the 1969 collection *The Gulf*, opens with a nostalgic evocation of the colonial education he received:

Whatever else we learned  
at school, like solemn Afro-Greeks eager for grades,  
of Helen and the shades  
of borrowed ancestors,  
there are no rites  
for those who have returned (*PDW*, 110)

Yet Walcott's evocation of 'Afro-Greeks' is a far cry from the sense of dispossession and abjection conjured up by Sartre. The compound 'Afro-Greeks' suggests the potential for transculturation afforded by the colonial school system and the encounter with classics. Homer, then, becomes one of the poet's 'borrowed ancestors,' in an act of imaginative genealogy. Yet, the disciplinary element is not entirely absent, as the pupils are eager for the master's grades, embracing the hierarchical nature of their tuition. In the poem, the estrangement lies not in the colonial curriculum, but in the poet's subsequent progress and integration into the world market of literature, which ultimately alienates him from his island folk.

In the 'Nestor' episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen teaches a history class in a private school for boys in Dalkey, a well-off suburb to the south of Dublin. Unsurprisingly, the lesson consists of Graeco-Roman history; we observe Stephen interrogating schoolboys on the battle of Asculum and Pyrrhus's victory, in a scene where the colonial determinants of the situation loom large (*U*, 2.1-54). The discussion of military prowess, as well as

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<sup>56</sup>Earl Lovelace, *Salt*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

<sup>57</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Préface à l'édition de 1961'. In: *Les Damnés de la Terre*. 1961. Paris: La Découverte, 2002, p. 17.

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the class divide which sets Stephen apart from the wealthier pupils, heighten Stephen's colonial malaise, opening up a space for his tortuous meditations on Irish history in 'Proteus.' As Vincent Cheng has pointed out, Stephen's history lesson is designed to convey 'the hegemonic perspectives and English versions of Western history.'<sup>58</sup> Actually, in 1878, the Irish education system was reorganised on the lines laid out in the Intermediate Education Act (1878), whose provisions were patterned on the school system of Trinidad. One of the Act's conceptors, Patrick Keenan, had been responsible for the Trinidadian scheme, introducing highly competitive examinations designed to train loyal colonial subjects.<sup>59</sup>

Hutchinson remarks that the requirements of the modern state compelled colonial authorities to devise an educational system aiming to '[eliminate] sub-state loyalties—religious, class, regional and ethnic—by creating a “nation-building” educational system and a bureaucratic career structure that seeks to identify the individual with the interests of the territorial polity.' This has two important consequences; the first is that this education system 'introduces the young to an official culture oriented to the interests of the bureaucratic state rather than to those of their local community,' the second is that 'it is organized so as to create territory-wide hierarchies that associate power and prestige with certain metropolitan centres.'<sup>60</sup>

Yet Stephen is thoroughly ill-equipped to inculcate the self-confident ethos expected of the upper-class boys: 'Welloff people [...] In a moment they will laugh more loudly, aware of my lack of rule and of the fees their papas pay' (2.28). His obsession with discipline and social hierarchy leaves little doubt as to the real mission of the education system in which he is a reluctant participant. Stephen is indeed a poor teacher, and this will turn out to be his final history lesson.

More importantly however, the history lesson triggers in Stephen's mind a meditation on the tyranny of fact and the difficulty to overcome a historical legacy of conquest and colonisation. While this reflection is formulated in abstruse terms borrowed from Aristotelian philosophy, it resonates with Stephen's concern over Ireland's colonial status and the possibility to effect historical change. In other words, what we encounter here is a reflection on utopianism. Thus, Stephen reflects on the retrospective illusion

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<sup>58</sup>Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, p. 165.

<sup>59</sup>The 1878 Act is discussed in Andrew Gibson's astute reading of the school system in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. See Gibson, *The Strong Spirit*, pp. 134–38. On the similarity between the colonial education systems in Ireland the West Indies, see also Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, pp. 282–83.

<sup>60</sup>Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, p. 263.

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which makes us consider actual events as inevitable:

Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass? (2.49)

Historical events, in the shape of military battles, assert themselves with the utmost brutality ('branded' and 'fettered'), aggravating the nightmarish quality of history, from which Stephen is famously 'trying to awake' (2.377). What this amounts to is a struggle between the actual and the possible; if 'that which came to pass' is 'not to be thought away' (2.49), this preclude any alternative imaginings. The danger is that this conception of the past may come to contaminate the present and the future, as in the opening of T. S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' where 'What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present.'<sup>61</sup> In those terms, history appears as the negation of agency. Yet Stephen does glimpse a tentative resolution; he remembers the Aristotelian formula on the 'actuality of the possible as possible' (2.67), a logical conundrum which may open a breach in the linearity of history, from which to survey the way things might have been.

Walcott's memories of his early education bear no trace of disaffection towards the canon or classics. While admitting that this was 'a grinding, merciless system' which harmed a good many young people, Walcott is consistently appreciative of the education system which prevailed in St Lucia in his boyhood.<sup>62</sup> He remembers fondly the 'elation of discovery' upon reading the great classics:

The grounding was rigid—Latin, Greek, and the essential masterpieces, but there was the elation of discovery. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Horace, Virgil—these writers weren't jaded but immediate experiences. The atmosphere was competitive, creative. It was cruel, but it created our literature.<sup>63</sup>

He also recounts that 'it was a privilege to grow up as an English colonial child because politically and culturally, the British heritage was supposed to be mine.'<sup>64</sup> Like Shabine,

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<sup>61</sup>T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963, p. 175.

<sup>62</sup>Derek Walcott, 'Leaving School'. 1965. In: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Robert D. Hamner. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, pp. 24–32, p. 29.

<sup>63</sup>Derek Walcott, 'Meanings'. 1970. In: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Robert D. Hamner. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, pp. 45–50, p. 50.

<sup>64</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 53.

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the protagonist of ‘The Schooner *Flight*,’ he can boast that he has ‘a sound colonial education’ (PDW, 238). Walcott’s views are reiterated in many interviews. In 1982, he praised the high standards of colonial education still prevailing in the Caribbean, the ‘severe discipline of studying,’ the notion that ‘art is not democratic, art is hierarchical,’ as ‘one good aspect of the colonial heritage.’<sup>65</sup>

In ‘Greece,’ a poem which appeared in *The Fortunate Traveller* (1982), Walcott describes himself ascending a promontory, with a heavy ‘body’ on his shoulders. The body turns out to be ‘a great book,’ a slippage encouraged by the polysemy of the Latin *corpus*, denoting a physical body as well as a body of texts, such as may figure in the canon of classics. Against a background saturated with Homeric allusions—where boulders resemble a Cyclops’s teeth, and scattered coconuts on the beach conjure up Trojan and Spartan phalanxes—the poetic voice lays down the book and lets the wind blow the pages away:

I held air without language in my hands.  
My head was scoured of other people’s monsters.  
I reached this after half a hundred years.  
I, too, signed on to follow that gold thread  
which linked the spines down a dark library shelf,  
around a narrowing catacomb where the dead,  
in columns hemmed with gold around the plinth  
of their calf-binding, wait, and came upon  
my features melting in the Minotaur  
at the dead end of the classic labyrinth,  
and, with this blade of agave, hacked down  
the old Greek bull. Now, crouched before blank stone,  
I wrote the sound for ‘sea,’ the sign for ‘sun.’ (PDW, 295-96)

As Edward Baugh suggests, what is dramatised here is not a rejection of classics, but an act of ‘disburdening.’<sup>66</sup> The corpus is not dismissed altogether; rather, the pentametrical ascension of the promontory serves as a necessary preamble before the poet can articulate his own language. Artistic maturation in relation to classics appears as a dialectical process, where the preliminary stages of assimilation are subsumed and transcended, not negated. The penultimate line is cumbersome, with too many stresses for the five beats of the pentameter, and an avalanche of stress clashes—a non-metric

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<sup>65</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 74–75, see also pp. 124–125 and 152–154.

<sup>66</sup>Edward Baugh, *Derek Walcott*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 159.

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reading would naturally render seven stresses—but the last line runs smoothly, with beats and offbeats corresponding to stressed and unstressed syllables, as if to convey the equilibrium reached by the poet at last. If the ‘old Greek bull’ is killed, the poet does not sever the ‘gold thread’ that runs through the ‘classic labyrinth’ of volumes stacked on bookshelves. The ‘dead end’ can only be escaped once the poet virtually becomes one (‘my features melting’) with the Minotaur. Here, as elsewhere in Walcott’s works, the act of repudiation can only be endorsed as the ultimate stage in a sustained process of assimilation. As he makes clear in his essay ‘The Muse of History,’ ‘maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor’ (*WTS*, 37), a statement which echoes T.S. Eliot’s claim in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ that ‘not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.’<sup>67</sup> As Charles Pollard has observed, this process of assimilation, drawing on a multitude of influences, from Homer to Dante and Joyce, allows Walcott ‘to transform imitation into invention,’ and ‘to create his own origins, genealogy, and heritage.’<sup>68</sup>

## 1.2 *Ulysses, Omeros: What’s in a Title*

By virtue of their titles, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* appear as responses to a primordial text, the Homeric epic, which may serve as a token of authority, or a model to be emulated. Indeed, as an early critic put it, the publication of *Omeros* showed Walcott to be ‘another Omeros,’ a compliment which testifies to the enduring value attached to the epic tradition.<sup>69</sup> That Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature two years after publishing the poem is also an indication that measuring up to Homer can mark a writer’s consecration. When Valéry Larbaud stated that ‘with the work of James Joyce and in particular with this *Ulysses* [...] Ireland is making a sensational re-entrance into high European literature,’ a feat associated with the Homeric scope of the novel, he was already performing a similar operation.<sup>70</sup>

However, what happens on Joyce’s and Walcott’s title pages deserves closer atten-

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<sup>67</sup>Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup>Charles W. Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T.S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, p. 1545.

<sup>69</sup>Phoebe Pettingell, ‘Making Epic Connections’. In: *The New Leader* (March 1991).

<sup>70</sup>Valéry Larbaud, ‘Valéry Larbaud on Joyce: 1902-1927’. 1922. In: *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. by Robert H. Deming. Vol. One. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 252–261, p. 253.

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tion. It is impossible to discuss the relationship between *Ulysses* and *Omeros* without addressing the ghostly presence of Homer's epics. And yet, what is intended here is not a study in intertextuality, concerned with identifying parallels or correspondences between episodes from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, on the one hand, and Joyce's and Walcott's texts on the other. Rather, I want to discuss the ways in which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* expose—and potentially undercut—assumptions about Homer, to the extent that those assumptions also bear on the politics of literature more generally. Given the centrality of Homer in the construction of the canon—whether it is defined as 'English,' 'European,' or 'Western'—Joyce's and Walcott's texts provide useful correctives to received literary wisdom since, as Omar Hena puts it, 'by studying literary inheritances belonging to canonical forms, we can see more clearly how the historical inequalities of colonialism and globalization become distilled within the formal properties of poetic texts.'<sup>71</sup>

The point I wish to make here is that in both cases the patronage of Homer is invoked in a rather devious way, which calls into question the very notions of authorship, literary value, and national literature. Indeed, the allusions to Homer and Odysseus are complicated by a layer of linguistic mediation. The hero of the *Odyssey* is not in fact *Ulysses*, but *Odysseus*—*Ulysses* is only his Latinate name; likewise *Omeros* is the modern Greek version of the more familiar, anglicised *Homer*, as if the name had been re-translated, or un-translated back into its original language. In both cases, the better-known designations are dismissed in favour of names that foreground the interference of translation. *Ulysses* evokes Odysseus's Latinised afterlives, as in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As a result, the geo-literary horizon of ancient Greece expands to encompass later epic derivations. In both cases, the pliability of the designation is emphasised, as if to intimate that even the most readily identifiable tokens of tradition are not immune to distortion. While aiming at Homer, the titles seem to miss the mark, however slightly—and however deliberately.

It is known that Joyce was a reader of Butcher and Lang's 1893 version of the *Odyssey*; thus, he would have been familiar with their claim that no Homeric translation is definitive, that 'of Homer there can be no final translation.'<sup>72</sup> Translation appears as an undertaking whose outcome can only be provisional, and which may never reach

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<sup>71</sup>Omaar Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry: Literary Form and Social Critique in Walcott, Muldoon, de Kok, and Nagra*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup>S. H. Butcher and A. Lang, *The Odyssey of Homer Done Into English Prose*. 1893. New York: MacMillan, 1906, p. v.



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a definitive completion. A translation, it would seem, can only approximate its target text, but never quite replace it. By advertising the interference of translation in their titles, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* compel us to reflect on the transitional nature of the texts themselves: what do the titles actually refer to? are we supposed to look to Homer himself, or to reflect on the very operation of referentiality? Although the saying has it that only the fool looks at the finger when the wise man points at the moon, we may be well-advised to pause and reflect on the acts of allusion and translation themselves, rather than their hypothetical referent. Thus, in Walcott's stage version of the *Odyssey*, when Penelope asks the anonymous guest—Odysseus in disguise—if her husband is still alive, his answer could be appended as a commentary to both titles: 'He's turned into a name, wandering the white seas.'<sup>73</sup>

The referential instability of Joyce's and Walcott's titles belies the apparent simplicity of name-dropping. In fact, Homeric scholarship teaches us to approach the name of Homer with caution, as modern notions of authorship are of little help to understand the parameters of cultural production in Ancient Greece. As John Foley has argued, what historical evidence we have at our disposal suggests that 'Homer' may best be understood as a byword for 'the poetic tradition as a long-term, ongoing phenomenon that comprises many individuals' rather than a single individual.<sup>74</sup> Nor is this a particularly recent construction; as Gregory Nagy has observed, in Ancient Greece already, Homer was 'retrojected as the original genius of heroic song, the proto-poet whose poetry [was] reproduced by a continuous succession of performers.'<sup>75</sup> Therefore, whenever mention is made of Homer in this dissertation, it should be remembered that the name connotes the very process of tradition more than it denotes an identifiable authorial figure.<sup>76</sup>

Further, the Homeric connections of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are ostensibly mediated by designations that appear as second-hand. As if to illustrate Emily Greenwood's argument that 'there is no unmediated Greece,' *Ulysses* and *Omeros* aim at a referent whose stability is questionable.<sup>77</sup> The very act of invoking Homer appears laden with

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<sup>73</sup>Derek Walcott, *The Odyssey: A Play*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1993, p. 130.

<sup>74</sup>John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1999, p. xi.

<sup>75</sup>Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions*. 1996. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002, p. 92.

<sup>76</sup>Terada writes that 'Walcott's rapprochement with Homer means a rapprochement with not just a poetic ancestor, but with poetic ancestry.' See Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup>Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, p. 6.

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interferences from later traditions, not to mention the very process of translation from one language to another. Joyce himself becomes one of those mediators in *Omeros*: he appears in person in chapter 39, and Walcott has paid tribute to *Ulysses* as an inspiration for *Omeros*, even while admitting that he had never read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>78</sup> While in those texts Homer is summoned to Dublin or Saint Lucia, he does not hail straight from Ancient Greece. His vagaries have already turned him into an irrevocable migrant, endowed with shifting—and potentially unreliable—appellations. The allusions on Joyce’s and Walcott’s title pages, then, are wayward, self-reflexive, and potentially defiant, as the gesture of name-dropping borders on mis-naming.

This may suggest that there can be no simple dialogue between the texts in question. Even as they strive to converse with the Homeric original, Joyce’s and Walcott’s titles question the very notion of originality by embedding marks of adulteration in the Homeric denominations themselves. As if to play on the polysemy of the word *title*, which evokes not just the name of a given work, but also ‘a designation given to a person as a mark of distinction or privilege on account of high social class or rank, or aristocratic status or heritage,’ and even ‘an established or recognized right to something, esp. a legal right to the ownership of land or other property,’ and consequently, ‘a claim made on the basis of such evidence,’ *Ulysses* and *Omeros* seem to combine all these aspects at once.<sup>79</sup> The titles thus become verbal knots, fraught with relations of power, in a reminder that literary tradition too has its epic battle-fields and land wars. The nature of Joyce’s and Walcott’s engagements with Homer is richly textured and irreducible to either reverent imitation or insurrectionary onslaught; yet, the coalescence of invocation, translation and en-titlement, inscribed on the front pages of the novel and the poem, is a powerful intimation that the terrain of literary traditions is a contentious ground. Joyce and Walcott conjure up literary authority, but the solemnity of the occasion is potentially undercut by the impropriety of the invocation. The fool, then, would be the reader who looked straight at the moon, taking the Homeric reference at face-value, without reflecting that the evocation is problematic in the first place.

In fact, throughout Walcott’s poem, ‘*Omeros*’ is little more than a name, whose etymology can be speculated, but whose actual bearer remains disturbingly absent.

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<sup>78</sup>See the 1990 interview with J. P. White, where Walcott declares ‘As a narrative thing, the poem is not like a rewrite of the *Iliad*. I don’t know the *Iliad* and I don’t know the *Odyssey*. I’ve never read them. [...] I’m taking these people as if they were fragments of shards washed upon this shore and looking at them for the first time.’ Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 173–4.

<sup>79</sup>‘Title, n.’ In: *OED Online* (September 2020). Accessed 2 November 2020. URL: [www.oed.com/view/Entry/202602](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/202602).

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When Omeros finally appears in Book VII, even his visual aspect is perplexing, and his identity is revealed only at the cost of great interpretative labour. The narrator is intrigued by a vision glimpsed in the waves of the sea:

and in the clear grooves of the January sea

there was only one coconut shell, but it kept  
nodding in my direction as a swimmer might  
with sun in his irises, or a driftwood log,

or a plaster head, foaming. It changed shapes in light  
according to each clouding thought. (56.1)

This protean apparition, emerging from ‘the old age / of the wrinkled sea,’ remains fundamentally elusive, indistinguishable from its own shadows in the perpetual motion of the waves: ‘They kept shifting shapes, or the shapes metamorphosed / in the worried water’ (56.1). Aptly enough, the shift from a singular (‘it’) to a plural pronoun (‘they’) alerts us once more to the radical instability of the Homeric figure; rather than settle for a single identity, we are invited to consider it as an array of potentialities.

This is in keeping with the pseudo-etymological analysis which opened the poem:

I said, ‘Omeros,’

and *O* was the conch-shell’s invocation, *mer* was  
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,  
*os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes

and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore. (2.3)

While etymology is usually relied on to unearth a putative ‘primary’ or ‘original’ meaning, it is here deployed with an utter disregard for the facts of lexical evolution. The Greek name breaks down into constituent parts which turn out to be largely in French creole (‘our Antillean patois’)—the language spoken by the majority of St Lucians, notwithstanding the status of English as official language.<sup>80</sup> In *Ulysses*, Homer is similarly trans-lated beyond recognition. In a barely noticeable passage in

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<sup>80</sup>I address the poetic and political aspects of this pseudo-etymology more at length in an article titled ‘Tangled Routes, Translation, and Adulteration in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,’ *LEAVES*, forthcoming.

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‘Oxen of the Sun,’ as the narrator lavishes his praise on Theodore Purefoy for his newborn child, Homer makes an odd cameo appearance in Hebrew disguise: ‘For every newbegotten thou shalt gather thy homer of ripe wheat’ (14.1418). By virtue of a linguistic coincidence, a homer is indeed a Hebrew word referring to a unit of measurement, with no relation whatsoever to Greek epic. In ‘O-mer-os’ as well as in the decapitalised ‘homer,’ Homer begins to slip through our fingers as he undergoes extravagant metamorphoses.

### 1.2.1 Stealing Back

It is possible to interpret Joyce’s and Walcott’s Homeric winks in many ways. It is tempting, for instance, to read *Ulysses* and *Omeros* primarily as postcolonial rewritings of canonical texts, in the same way as Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* responds to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a gesture which has come to seem archetypal of ‘postcolonial rewriting.’<sup>81</sup> Against a history of colonial deprivation and silencing, the practice of ‘postcolonial borrowing’ could be seen as an empowering challenge to colonialist narratives and hierarchies. Elaborating on this notion, Elleke Boehmer writes that:

For the once-colonized to interpret Homer or Shakespeare or Dante on their own terms meant staking a claim to European tradition from beyond its conventional boundaries. Take-over or appropriation was in its way a bold refusal of cultural dependency.<sup>82</sup>

The idea is consonant with the play on titles and entitlement, status and title deeds, discernible in *Omeros* and *Ulysses*. That gesture, on the part of former colonial subjects in the twentieth century, is of course a loaded political and cultural act, which no single interpretation can exhaust. Postcolonial critics have explored the dynamics of such intertextual dialogues at length. Since the fateful publication of *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989, the idea has become something of an old saw in the field.<sup>83</sup> Besides ‘writing back,’ avowedly intertextual responses to a literary canon associated, for better

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<sup>81</sup>For a reading of the Brontë-Rhys case, see for instance John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*. 2000. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 139–171. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 1966. New York: Norton and Company, 1999; Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. 1847. New York: Norton and Company, 2001.

<sup>82</sup>Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures: Migrant Metaphors*. 1995. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 195.

<sup>83</sup>Bill Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 1989. London: Routledge, 2002.

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or worse, with imperial authority, have been variously labelled as counter-discursive ‘con-texts [...] that engage in direct, if ambivalent, dialogue with the canon,’<sup>84</sup> or as a ‘productive critical dialogue with literary “classics.”’<sup>85</sup> In any case, the dialogism at the heart of such gestures is always complex, and serves to question assumptions regarding literary tradition, value, and the canon.

Jamaica Kincaid makes a related point in a discussion of cultural ownership and colonisation. Discussing the wide-ranging effects of colonisation, she explains that it was a common practice on the part of Dutch colonisers to appropriate—and rename—exotic flowers, to such an extent that ‘now the world thinks of tulips as Dutch.’ Arguing for a strategy of counter-appropriation on the part of the colonised, she says: ‘What you ought to do is take back. Not just reclaim. Take—period. Take anything. Take Shakespeare. Just anything that makes sense. Just take it.’<sup>86</sup> Citing Shakespeare as a potential target is not innocent; it bespeaks a sense of entitlement to appropriate the author who stands metonymically for the English language and the literature produced in it. For Boehmer as well as Kincaid, culture appears as a site of struggle, where positions are ultimately dependent on ownership. Rather than revering a pantheon of untouchable—metropolitan—‘great writers,’ postcolonial subjects are encouraged to claim them as their own. While it is questionable whether any texts might actually *belong* to any specific set of people, the realities of empire in terms of class, race, and gender, have meant that the enjoyment of ‘Homer or Shakespeare or Dante’ has long been restricted to a minority elite. The colonies were appropriated and plundered by the metropolis, while access to literary studies remained the preserve of a privileged minority, or a debilitating routine suffered by pupils eager to win a scholarship as a means of upward social mobility.<sup>87</sup>

The construction of culture as a terrain with clear-cut boundaries and established property rights is indeed congruent with a class-society, compounded by the multiple layers of oppression that accompany colonialism. Appropriation and control of the land was enforced through the imposition of new boundaries, new names, and property

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<sup>84</sup>John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon*. London: Continuum, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup>McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 167.

<sup>86</sup>Moirra Ferguson and Jamaica Kincaid, ‘A Lot of Memory: An Interview with Jamaica Kincaid’. In: *The Kenyon Review* 16.1 (Winter 1994), pp. 163–188, p. 168.

<sup>87</sup>See for instance Austin Clarke’s schoolboy memories in Barbados, including heavy drilling in Latin, to train the rulers of the newly independent island; or Caryl Phillips’s narrative of the scholarship examination which allows the protagonist of *A State of Independence* to study Law in England. Austin Clarke, *Membering*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2015, pp. 14–15, and Caryl Phillips, *A State of Independence*. 1986. London: Faber and Faber, 1989, pp. 28–29.

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rights.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, culture was subjected to policies that enforced the imperialist ethos.<sup>89</sup> Parallel to material expropriation, then, came the imposition of a tailor-made culture, designed to fashion a native literate elite in the service of the colonial power. Drawing on the Greek and Roman precedents of empire-building, modern colonial powers used classics ‘as a tool of suppression as well as education in the process of colonization.’<sup>90</sup> In his 1961 preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la terre*, Jean-Paul Sartre indicted the forceful imposition of those ‘sonorous gags, high-sounding words which stuck to one’s teeth,’ whereby classics were turned into a disciplinary tool.<sup>91</sup> It may well be that the linguistic distortions observed in the titles of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are subdued reflections on this very process.

In such conditions, the insurgent attitude exemplified by Jamaica Kincaid signifies a refusal to abide by the exclusionary statutes imposed in the literary realm. While this strategy is couched in the very terms of the regime it seeks to challenge (‘Just take it’), the result is not merely a new distribution of proprietary rights. Since the cultural regime ushered in by colonialism relies on an act of initial expropriation, postcolonial writers should have no qualms in subjecting metropolitan culture to the very methods which brought that dispensation into being.<sup>92</sup> The result, however, is not a replication of colonial disenfranchisement, but an enlargement of artistic possibilities. While the colonial regime rested on a confiscatory monopoly, the act of postcolonial reappropriation nullifies the usurped property rights and gestures towards a more egalitarian, communal enjoyment of culture. That strategy is eloquently articulated by Walcott, when he reflects that

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<sup>88</sup>These issues are famously dramatised in Brian Friel, *Translations*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981.

<sup>89</sup>On the politics of English studies, see Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. See also, in an Indian context, Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

<sup>90</sup>McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup>This is my translations for Sartre’s ‘*bâillons sonores, grands mots qui collaient aux dents.*’ The whole sentence, as it appears in Richard Philcox’s 2004 translation, reads: ‘The European elite decided to fabricate a native elite; they selected adolescents, branded the principles of Western culture on their foreheads with a red-hot iron, and gagged their mouths with sounds, pompous awkward words that twisted their tongues.’ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961. New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. xliii. The reference to the French edition is Sartre, ‘Préface à l’édition de 1961’, p. 17.

<sup>92</sup>I am aware that there is a hiatus between ‘postcolonial writing,’ and ‘postcolonial studies’ or criticism. In using the phrase ‘postcolonial writers,’ I refer to writers from the colonies or former colonies, rather than to the latter set of theoretical concerns. On the ‘discrepancy’ between the two, see for instance Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 17, 71.

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Empires are smart enough to steal from the people they conquer. They steal the best things. And the people who have been conquered should have enough sense to steal back.<sup>93</sup>

In his autobiographical poem *Another Life*, Walcott had already depicted himself in the guise of a petty thief, a slave appropriating the master's culture:

I had entered the house of literature as a houseboy,  
filched as the slum child stole,  
appropriated as the young slave appropriated  
those heirlooms temptingly left  
with the Victorian homilies of *Noli Tangere*. (*AL*, 77)

The image of theft ('filching') is exalted as a founding moment in the poet's career, while the trope of slavery resonates with the long history of the Caribbean. The idea that the canon belongs by right to the mother country, Europe, or the West is radically negated. If literary property appears to be the result of usurpation in the first place, writers from the peripheries of Empire are no less entitled to 'steal back'; as Shaun suggests in *Finnegans Wake*, story-telling is always already 'stolentelling' (*FW*, 424). As a result, the fiction of ownership collapses; in the words of Marx, 'the expropriators are expropriated.'<sup>94</sup>

In *Ulysses* as well as in *Omeros*, the Homeric mode is reimagined in ways that question the self-authorising myths of the imperial centre, inviting us to reconsider 'the supposedly hegemonic status of their canonical departure points, opening up fissures in their supposedly solid foundations.'<sup>95</sup> The paraphernalia of epic is revitalised and inflected anew, in the service of a potentially subversive ethos. Thus, Walcott draws on a wide range of non-European, demotic traditions to fashion a protean bardic figure, one that is reminiscent of the African *griot* as well as of the West Indian *conteur*. In Walcott's stage version of the *Odyssey* already, the role of the bard befalls 'Blind' Billy Blue, a blues singer, whose rhymed interventions run through the play, fulfilling a function similar to that of the chorus in Greek tragedy. Early in the play, Odysseus's nurse Euricleia remarks that 'Is Egypt who cradle Greece till Greece mature.'<sup>96</sup> This sounds like an echo of Martin Bernal's provocative thesis in *Black Athena*: in that book,

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<sup>93</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 75.

<sup>94</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 929.

<sup>95</sup>Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup>Walcott, *The Odyssey*, p. 7.

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he argues that the nineteenth century construction of Ancient Greece was to a large extent a fabrication, predicated on the erasure of the African and Asian input in Greek culture, the better to posit a spurious continuity between a whitewashed Greece and English bourgeois civilisation.<sup>97</sup>

In *Omeros*, the character of Seven Seas condenses various archetypal figures more or less associated with Homer; an elderly blind man claiming to have travelled the world, he can be heard singing to himself, ‘muttering the dark language of the blind’ (3.2), in keeping with Homer’s traditional representation as a blind bard. Although we are invited to see him as a reincarnation of Homer, he is also associated to bardic figures from Africa or North America, such as ‘the river griot, the Sioux shaman’ (63.2), a fact which militates against the exclusiveness of the Homeric parallel. Other incarnations include a vagrant glimpsed in Chapter 38, carrying his manuscript of the *Odyssey* through the streets of London. More perplexing is the fact that Achille himself is conflated with Homer/Omeros, as he returns to St Lucia after his hallucinatory journey to Africa. He is hailed by the narrator as ‘Homeros, my nigger’ (30.2); the substitution of Homeros for Omeros suggests adds one more layer of uncertainty to the network of correspondences and identifications which runs through the poem. The addition of an initial *H* invites us to hear the word *home* as Achille is indeed returning to his island, a gesture which both complicates the pseudo-etymology of O-mer-os (2.3), and reinforces the Odyssean theme of the *nostos*, the perilous return journey to one’s homeland. Among the many reincarnations of Homer which people Walcott’s poem, Joyce deserves a special mention; he appears briefly in the Irish chapter, hailed as ‘our age’s Omeros, undimmed Master / and true tenor of the place!’ (39.3), before the ‘real’ Omeros makes his entrance in Book Seven, in the manner described above. That Joyce is called a ‘tenor’ may be an allusion to his musical skills.<sup>98</sup> However, it may also be a comment on the relationship being elaborated between *Omeros* and *Ulysses*, as

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<sup>97</sup>Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985*. 1987. Vol. One. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991. Although Bernal’s work has been subjected to criticism, it paved the way for subsequent scholarship on the cross-cultural influences which shaped ancient Greek culture. For a critique of the myth of Greece as the cradle of Europe/the West, see Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, pp. 2–3, Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, ‘Traveling Multiculturalism: A Trinational Debate in Translation’. In: *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. Ed. by Ania Loomba et al. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 293–316, p. 297, and Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*. 1982. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, p. 5. On Walcott more specifically, see Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 281–282, 303–307.

<sup>98</sup>Joyce was a talented singer, with a passion for Elizabethan pieces. In 1904, he even entertained the idea of touring the south of England, singing old English songs with a lute, but had to give up the plan for lack of money. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*. 1959. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 154.



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the polysemy of ‘tenor’ affords another interpretation. In a metaphor, the ‘tenor’ is the underlying, ‘normal’ term, for which the ‘vehicle’ is substituted. If Joyce is the ‘true tenor of the place,’ he becomes identified with it. That the scene takes place in Ireland is only a partial explanation for the compliment addressed to Joyce, who upon this reading figures as some sort of national poet, the embodiment of ‘the place.’ This allusion is crucial to the poem as a whole, which struggles to come to terms with the temptations of metaphor.<sup>99</sup> If *Omeros* is a sustained intertextual metaphor, substituting for an underlying subtext, we are invited to question the validity of the Homeric parallel, since the ‘true tenor’ turns out to be James Joyce rather than Homer himself. I take this to be an indication that Homer is not so central as the title would suggest—or that he has indeed lost his titles upon his own stories, and has been deprived of his original literary tenure. The proliferation of overlapping correspondences between *Omeros*, the Homeric epics, and a host of alternative cultural sources, destabilises any facile parallels, and calls into question the workings of intertextuality.

## 1.2.2 Homer: From Sub-Text to Pre-Text

The Homeric imprint is even less conspicuous in *Ulysses*. While the First World War sparked interest in the martial prowess narrated in the *Iliad*,<sup>100</sup> Joyce’s interest in the *Odyssey*, the less bellicose of the two, was of a different sort. While in Zürich, at the height of the conflict, he is reported as declaring that he found the subject of Ulysses ‘the most human in world literature,’ an antidote to the rampant militaristic atmosphere of the years in which he composed his novel; he added that ‘Ulysses didn’t want to go off to Troy: he knew that the official reason for the war, the dissemination of the culture of Hellas, was only a pretext for the Greek merchants, who were seeking new markets.’<sup>101</sup> Joyce is drawn to the *Odyssey* not for, but in spite of its associations with conquest and violence.

This, however, does not exhaust the significance of the Homeric parallel in *Ulysses*. T. S. Eliot famously praised Joyce’s ‘mythic method’ as a means to impose order onto ‘the immense panorama of futility and anarchy’ which was life in 1922.<sup>102</sup> Joyce himself insisted on the importance of the Homeric framework to make sense of his novel. When

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<sup>99</sup>I return to the problem of metaphor in the next chapter.

<sup>100</sup>George Steiner, ‘Homer in English Translation’. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*. Ed. by Robert Fowler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 363–375, p. 372.

<sup>101</sup>Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 416–7.

<sup>102</sup>T. S. Eliot, ‘*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth’. In: *The Dial* 75.5 (1923), pp. 480–483, p. 483.

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his aunt Josephine complained about not understanding the story, he reprimanded her for trying to read his novel without having first read the *Odyssey*. In November 1922, he wrote to her:

You say there is a lot of it you don't understand. I told you to read the *Odyssey* first. As you have not done so I asked my publisher to send you an article which will throw a little light on it. Then buy at once the *Adventures of Ulysses* [...] by Charles Lamb. You can read it in a night [...]. Then have a try at *Ulysses* again.<sup>103</sup>

And yet, *Ulysses* always stood in an ambivalent relation to its epic model. While playing up the relevance of the *Odyssey* as the hermeneutic master code to *Ulysses*, Joyce erased the Homeric names of the various episodes, such as 'Proteus,' 'Circe,' or 'Ithaca,' a move which made the text even harder to navigate.

Only a select group of privileged readers, such as Joyce's friend Carlo Linati, were offered schemas, circulated privately at first, which elucidated the Homeric design—besides the intricate web of sometimes perplexing symbols ascribed to each chapter—at the heart of *Ulysses*. Those confidential schemas listed the correspondences between the places and characters of the novel and their Homeric counterparts, among many other layers of symbolic equivalence. On the strength of Joyce's schemas, Valéry Larbaud could claim that the 'key' to *Ulysses* was indeed the *Odyssey*.<sup>104</sup> It is indeed tempting to read *Ulysses* against the *Odyssey*, and to trace the proliferating parallels between episodes, characters, and motifs, along the journey of Stephen-Telemachus and Bloom-Odysseus back to Eccles Street-Ithaca.<sup>105</sup> Yet Larbaud's claim should be taken with a grain of salt. Homeric parallels are numerous, but by no means always accurate, or even helpful. For instance, the episode known as 'Wandering Rocks' has no counterpart in the *Odyssey*, and rests on an allusion to the path *not* taken by Odysseus after leaving Circe's island. While Penelope is proverbially loyal to Odysseus, Molly has an affair with Blazes Boylan, of which Bloom is painfully aware; the suitors are mercilessly slaughtered in the *Odyssey*, but nothing of the sort happens in *Ulysses*. These are only the most conspicuous departures from the Homeric narrative. In his treatment of the *Odyssey*, Joyce is at once meticulously erudite and deliberately negligent. Even when the text does adhere to the Homeric pattern, it sometimes feels like a gratuitous hoax,

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<sup>103</sup>Stuart Gilbert, ed., *Letters of James Joyce*. London: Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 193.

<sup>104</sup>Larbaud, 'Valéry Larbaud on Joyce', p. 260.

<sup>105</sup>This was a central concern of the early reception of *Ulysses*. In addition to Larbaud, see for instance Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study*. 1930. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.

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as when the bow of Odysseus morphs into the trajectory of Leopold Bloom's outdoors urination (17.1192). This has led Sophie Rabau to argue that while Homer is indeed crucial to the schemas, 'except for a very few exceptions, the *Odyssey* is virtually absent from the text titled *Ulysses*.'<sup>106</sup> Ezra Pound likewise treated the *Odyssey* parallels as hardly relevant, 'a scaffold from Homer,' an apparatus necessary for the writing of the book, but ultimately useless to the reader.<sup>107</sup> John Eglinton was even more radical in his appreciation; he argued that *Ulysses* was 'a mockery' running on empty, and that underneath the veneer of Homeric correspondences lay only 'an inner void.'<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Leah Flack reminds us that the Homeric parallel underlying *Ulysses* was actually played up by Joyce in order to stave off accusations of obscenity and formlessness, as if the dignity of the Homeric label could compensate the scenes unpalatable to cultural censors.<sup>109</sup>

While both *Ulysses* and *Omeros* have their grandiose moments, the balance is heavily tipped towards the ordinary and the mundane. The expectations raised by the epic label are largely deflated, suggesting perhaps that the Homeric currency has been devalued. Yet, it remains in circulation. What happens in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* goes beyond (re)appropriation. While Homer is superficially advertised on the covers of each book, he is not so much endowed with alternative meanings, as exposed to be a blank signifier, a cultural currency whose value resides only in the trust it is able to elicit, and the meanings which are ascribed to it. In *Ulysses*, Homer disappears after the title page, as the episodes are deprived of their Homeric titles. In *Omeros*, the chain of metamorphoses and reincarnations threatens Homer with dissolution; the parallels with the *Iliad* are simultaneously emphasised and deflated, 'likeness and unlikeness shimmer like mirages, dissipating when we attempt to grasp them.'<sup>110</sup> John Figueroa goes even further in arguing that *Omeros* 'is in no way written, as it were, over the template of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*'. To him, the Homeric aspect lies in the presence of the sea, while the central characters are common folk, not the noblemen depicted by Homer.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Sophie Rabau, '« Ulysse : Socrate, Jésus, Shakespeare. » Comment lire les schémas Linati et Gorman de Joyce ?' In: *Modernités antiques: La littérature occidentale et l'Antiquité gréco-romaine dans la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Ed. by Véronique Gély et al. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2014, pp. 195–218, p. 195. My translation.

<sup>107</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 264.

<sup>108</sup>Eglinton, *Irish Literary Portraits*, p. 146.

<sup>109</sup>Flack, *Modernism and Homer*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>110</sup>Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 188.

<sup>111</sup>John Figueroa, 'Omeros'. In: *The Art of Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Stewart Brown. Bridgend: Poetry Wales, 1991, pp. 193–214, p. 198.

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One of the major themes in *Omeros* is the extent to which Homeric precedent is at once inadequate and unnecessary to convey the sheer reality of Caribbean experience; the epic is disavowed, or at the very least redefined in alternative terms.<sup>112</sup>

The main point here is that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* engage with Homer in oblique, tangential ways. The Homeric source texts, admittedly unread by Walcott, and virtually erased from Joyce's published novel, are no sooner invoked than they seem to evaporate. Rather than offering reliable templates for retelling, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* circulate elusively, leaving only traces of their intertextual metamorphoses.

My contention is that the Greek words which trouble Leopold Bloom, metempsychosis and parallax, can serve as metaphors for the workings of intertextuality itself. Metempsychosis, as Bloom explains to Molly, means 'the transmigration of the souls,' or 'reincarnation' of the same spirit in different bodies through the ages (*U*, 4.342-73), an apt image for the transmigration of Odysseus to Dublin in the shape of Leopold Bloom. As for parallax, although Bloom remembers coming across the concept in a 'fascinating little book' by Robert Ball (8.110), it is not until 'Ithaca' that the meaning of the word is finally elucidated by the omniscient narrator. Robert Ball was the author of many popular books on astronomy, such as *The Story of the Heavens*, one of the volumes glimpsed on Bloom's shelves in that chapter (17.1374). In *The Story of the Heavens*, we do find a definition of parallax; it is the phenomenon which causes a change in the position of an observer to affect the perceived position of the object under observation. In astronomy, this is what happens when a given star is observed at an interval of six months: over time, the earth's position has undergone a 186-million-mile translation—the diameter of the earth's orbit around the sun—as a consequence of which the star in question may appear to have undergone a slight displacement, known as 'annual parallax.' 'Owing to our position on the earth,' Ball explains, 'we observe the stars from a point of view which is constantly changing.' This may lead us to believe that the stars are in motion, but 'the changes are only apparent, and while oblivious of our own motion, which produces the displacements, we attribute the changes to the stars.'<sup>113</sup> On account of the immense distance between the earth and the stars, however, annual parallax plays a negligible role, which is why the position of the stars appears to remain

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<sup>112</sup>For an elaborate treatment of Walcott's generic recusation, see Gregson Davis, "'With No Homeric Shadow": The Disavowal of Epic in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*'. In: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.2 (Spring 1997): *The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives*. Ed. by Gregson Davis, pp. 321–334.

<sup>113</sup>Sir Robert Ball, *The Story of the Heavens*. 1886. London: Cassell and Company, 1900, p. 443.

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constant. In reality, as we learn in 'Ithaca,' parallax also accounts for the fact that, in spite of appearances, 'so-called fixed stars' are indeed in motion, on a scale which defies our perception. As the narrator explains, they are

in reality evermoving wanderers from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten, of allotted human life [form] a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity. (17.1052)

In other words, the visual effect of the stars' actual motions is annulled by the immensity that lies between them and the earth, resulting in the illusion of immobility. The awareness of parallax, therefore, compels us to correct two contradictory illusions which operate simultaneously: the illusion of movement, and the illusion of fixity. Like metempsychosis, then, parallax alerts us to the hidden motions which go unnoticed below the surface of appearances: just as souls migrate from one body to another, stars wander across unfathomable distances.

Constellations are often named after Greek myths, and it may be the case that stargazing provides a model for the kind of optical illusions which distort our perception of the literary superstar called Homer. In addition to the huge distances which baffle our perception of space, we need to be attentive to the effects of temporal distance, which intervene in astronomy no less than in literary reception. As is well known, stars can appear to shine long after they have actually gone out. Accordingly, Bloom's astronomical meditation ends with the vision of

a mobility of illusory forms immobilised in space, remobilised in air: a past which possibly had ceased to exist as a present before its probable spectators had entered actual present existence. (17.1143)

If parallax is useful to determine the distances between planets and stars, can it not help us negotiate the distance between us and Homer? Like modern reception theory, parallax alerts us to the imperceptible motions which intervene between texts and readers. It compels us to reckon with Homer not as 'a so-called fixed star,' but as a moving target, a wandering literary figure, which may explain why no translation can be final. Conversely, parallax foregrounds the motions which affect the receiving end of textual exchanges; the beholder's position is a crucial factor in that relationship too. These considerations lead us back to Eliot's claim in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that

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no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. [...] [W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it.<sup>114</sup>

In other words, any art requires to be apprehended as a totality, a comprehensive set of relations, rather than a catalogue of discrete works endowed with autonomous meaning. Eliot urges us to conceive of poetry ‘as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written,’ a totality which, therefore, is necessarily modified by the introduction of the new.<sup>115</sup> To put it differently, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* do not so much read like Homeric equivalents as they constitute an intertextual polyrhythm, whereby the ‘original’ texts intersect with the ‘new’ ones.

To sum up, then, Homer is subjected to an ambivalent treatment, and ancient Greece is exposed as a construct freighted with shifting connotations. As Walcott and the Irish revivalists show in their various ways, Homer can be wrested from the metropolitan pedestal on which he has been unduly placed, and reinvested in novel ways. In *Ulysses* and *Omeros*, his authority is both advertised and disowned; his nominal patronage is invoked, while his actual presence evaporates, relegated to the paratext of Joyce’s schemas, and dissolved along with all myths in the final apotheosis of *Omeros* (59.1). The epic ghosts conjured up by Joyce’s and Walcott’s titles never quite materialise; the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not reenacted, but estranged. The Homeric light that shines on in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* is that of stars which may have long gone out, but whose residual brightness is dimly refracted in Joyce’s and Walcott’s cracked looking glasses. The mythic structure is significant on account of its unescapable presence in the text, but also, crucially, because it is conspicuously missing. The act of rewriting appears as a deceptive gesture towards a textual elsewhere, beyond the text we are reading. *Ulysses* and *Omeros* at once allude to, and elude the ‘original’ epic.

When Walcott’s narrator confronts *Omeros*, he confesses to not having read his book: “‘I never read it,’ / I said. “Not all the way through”” (56.3). While this may seem contradictory, given the Homeric conceit which underlies *Omeros*, this admission can in fact be interpreted as the corollary to the poem’s obsession with Homeric precedent. Dennis Plunkett, the English veteran who spends his retirement in St Lucia, is the main victim of this obsession. Tortured by a sense of post-imperial guilt, he undertakes to

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<sup>114</sup>Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, p. 15.

<sup>115</sup>Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, p. 17.

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write a history of the island, a self-defeating endeavour which testifies to his abiding sense of colonial entitlement. The coincidence between St Lucian history and the *Iliad* is first evoked when Plunkett is about to pay for his Guinness at the bar, and glimpses Helen, his former housemaid, passing by:

He smiled at the mythical hallucination  
that went with the name's shadow; the island was once  
named Helen; its Homeric association

rose like smoke from a siege (5.3).

Beginning in Chapter 11, he decides 'that what the place needed / was its true place in history' (11.2), and dedicates himself to historical research on the island. His benevolent condescension towards the island people, 'ignorant and poor,' is exposed as a disguised manifestation of 'the vows of empire' (18.2). Indeed, Plunkett's project relies on Homeric tropes, casting St Lucia as the proverbial 'Helen / of the West Indies' (62.1), a prize over which England and France fought restlessly, like the Trojans and Achaeans in the *Iliad*. His enterprise is founded on the notion that the place can only be celebrated to the extent that it conforms classical models, not because its history is valuable on its own terms. For Plunkett, the Caribbean needs to be ennobled by paraphernalia of classical antiquity; in his eyes, Homer's epic narratives become a retrospective 'prophecy' (18.1). In this respect, Plunkett is the narrator's alter ego. Both attempt to write the island's history in terms derived from antiquity, only to realise at the end of the poem that St Lucia needs neither historical remorse nor literary aggrandisement. The identification between Plunkett and the narrator, both captive to 'forced coincidence,' is stated explicitly as the poem draws to a close, in Chapter 54:

Why not 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? (54.2)

As far as Plunkett and the narrator are concerned, the overarching dynamic of *Omeros* consists precisely in exposing the fallacy of Homeric correspondence. Like Don Quixote, they have to adjust to a world which does not conform the stereotypical narratives inherited from literary tradition.

In 'stealing back' Homer, only to depart from his narratives, Joyce and Walcott engage with literary tradition itself. In Karen Lawrence's study *The Odyssey of Style*

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in *Ulysses*, she discusses Joyce's politics of intertextuality. Lawrence reads *Ulysses* as an anti-authoritarian challenge to 'pater texts,' an eminently derivative text advertising its own citationality. Nor is Homer the only target of this irreverent appropriation: in *Ulysses*, all forms of discourses, from newspapers in 'Aeolus' to women's magazines in 'Nausicaa' are subjected to citation, parody, or pastiche.<sup>116</sup> This strategy, she argues, is at its keenest 'in the language and style of *Ulysses*,' the site where Joyce most radically 'questions the singleness and authority of authorship and the corollary idea of the originality of the author as sources of his own language.'<sup>117</sup> Tradition, in turn, is to be understood not as a definitive archive, but as an ongoing process, which renders past and present simultaneous. Homer is neither attacked nor endorsed; he becomes a metonym for the canon and the production of literary value as a transindividual endeavour. In effect, the expropriation of Homer is congruent with Walcott's vision of 'an international community of poets who are all borrowers and thieves.'<sup>118</sup>

### 1.2.3 Portrait of Walcott as a Reader of Joyce

As I have already suggested, the intertextual relationship is complicated in the case of *Omeros* by the interference of *Ulysses*. Maria McGarrity has listed a number of critical pronouncements recognising Joyce's influence on Walcott, while admitting that the precise nature of that influence is still a matter of debate.<sup>119</sup> In her study, McGarrity draws on Glissant's notions of creolisation and errantry to explore Joyce and Walcott's redeployment of epic literature in the marginalised, contested colonial settings of Ireland and St Lucia. Other critics have pointed out Joyce's relevance to Walcott. Charles Pollard has shown that Walcott's engagement with Joyce was predicated on the shared experience of British colonialism; he traces a Joycean thread running from Walcott's early poem *Epitaph for the Young*, through *Another Life* and culminating in *Omeros*, which allows him to deploy a New World, cosmopolitan modernism.<sup>120</sup> Michael Malouf

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<sup>116</sup>I address the treatment of political discourse and literary styles in 'Cyclops' and 'Oxen of the Sun,' respectively, p. 183 and p. 242.

<sup>117</sup>Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 92–94.

<sup>118</sup>Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup>See the chapter 'Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Epic Drives of Joyce and Walcott' in Maria McGarrity, *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008, pp. 80–120. For an early engagement with the Joyce-Walcott relationship in *Omeros*, see Geert Lernout, 'Derek Walcott's *Omeros*: The Isle is Full of Voices'. In: *Kunapipi* 14.2 (1992), pp. 90–104, pp. 97–100.

<sup>120</sup>Pollard, 'Traveling with Joyce'.



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has focussed on Walcott's strategic identification with Joyce as a way to elaborate his own Caribbean cosmopolitan persona, while evacuating the problems posed by insular nationalism in the post-Federation era.<sup>121</sup> Malouf has also explored how the early, inter-war phase of Caribbean modernism was linked to 'the invention of a transnational, circumatlantic identity' of which Irish nationalism itself was a key component. Ireland's anticolonial struggle could provide a source of inspiration to the likes of Marcus Garvey or Claude McKay, but also a template which could be significantly revised and skewered, as in the case of Walcott.<sup>122</sup> More recently, in what is the first book-length comparative study of Joyce and Walcott, Sean Seeger probes the ways in which both imagine 'non-linear temporalities.'<sup>123</sup>

In what follows, I chart Walcott's identification with Joyce, before moving on to Walcott's conception of tradition, influence, and poetic craftsmanship more generally. Walcott oscillates endlessly between opposite poles: cosmopolitanism and localism, traditionalism and originality. This tension is never resolved; rather, its generative potential is harnessed by Walcott, and deployed centrally in *Omeros*. It seems to me that Walcott's Joycean identification is illustrative of his own poetics more generally, and his positioning on the map of world-literature.

Michael Malouf analyses the way Walcott uses Joyce's life and works 'for mediating his own experience as a young artist and for providing him with a rhetoric of cosmopolitan self-fashioning based in the rejection of nationalism.'<sup>124</sup> For instance, Walcott's 1970 essay 'The Muse of History' bears an epigraph ('History is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake') attributed to Joyce, when in fact it is pronounced by Stephen in *Ulysses* (2.377). Malouf situates Walcott's essay in the context of Black Power nationalism and the critique of post-Federation 'small island nationalism,' expressed in racial or insular terms.<sup>125</sup> Walcott's misattributed quote, in Malouf's reading, serves to erase the specific context in which the pronouncement was made in *Ulysses*, identifying with Joyce himself rather than with his character. The result of this move, Malouf argues, is to blunt the political edge of Stephen's pronouncement, as

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<sup>121</sup>See in particular the chapter 'After a Sundering: Derek Walcott' in Michael Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean Poetics*. New World Studies. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009, pp. 124–172.

<sup>122</sup>Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 142.

<sup>123</sup>Seeger, *Nonlinear Temporality in Joyce and Walcott*.

<sup>124</sup>Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities*, p. 138.

<sup>125</sup>I return to Walcott's engagement with Black Power and Afrocentric nationalism in my discussion of revivalism, see p. 229

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Walcott's identification with Joyce suggests a universalist evasion of Caribbean history and identity politics. Walcott's repudiation of nationalism is based on an aestheticised historical narrative, one in which the discourse of literary influence is mobilised in order to account for the material processes of oppression and colonisation.<sup>126</sup>

Malouf has also written that Walcott's 1954 play *The Sea at Dauphin*, modelled on Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, was 'one of the first successful attempts at a regional theater in its use of St Lucian French-English patois as a dramatic style,' gesturing towards a regional, rather than a strictly national, Caribbean culture, or towards 'a Federationist aesthetic.'<sup>127</sup> Later, Malouf suggests, Walcott's turn to Joyce produces a reversal, to the extent that 'rather than working from the regional to the universal, he uses the universality of Joyce and Homer to arrive at the "local."'<sup>128</sup> The ambivalence of identification is always present, however. Thus, Walcott invokes Joyce in order to expose the fallacy of racialist labels applied to literature. In 1977, when asked about the relation between black and white writers, he dismisses the racial boundary as artistically irrelevant, by drawing a comparison with the status of Joyce, 'the greatest prose innovator of our time': 'You know that Joyce is an Irishman, that he has written about Ireland, very particularly about Ireland; but is that Joyce? An Irish novelist? One can't approach literature that way.'<sup>129</sup> The implication is that Joyce is not 'merely' an Irish novelist, but a writer whose value is irreducible to his national origin. Indeed, Joyce is cited to the extent that he appears to transcend the local confines of Ireland and achieve 'universal' prominence, his literary worth being accepted on a world scale, a condition to which Walcott clearly aspires, as he affirms in a 1983 interview: 'My community, that of any twentieth century artist, is the world.'<sup>130</sup>

The claim that literary works exist in a space beyond the realities of empire—whether racism or national oppression—is double-edged, however. While it seeks to counter the patronising labelling of metropolitan critics, it may also eventually obfuscate the power dynamics that shape the literary field. Walcott's contention that 'ultimately, there is someone whom one reads,' regardless of the writer's historical coordinates, shifts the emphasis to the sphere of reception, erasing the specifics of literary production. For him, the act of reading culminates in a deterritorialised encounter between reader

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<sup>126</sup>Malouf, *Transatlantic Solidarities*, pp. 138–48.

<sup>127</sup>Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 146. See Derek Walcott, *The Sea at Dauphin*. 1954. In: *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

<sup>128</sup>Malouf, 'Dissimilation and Federation', p. 150.

<sup>129</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 47–48.

<sup>130</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 83.

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and writer. While the formulation is, on one level, problematically dehistoricising, Walcott adroitly avails himself of the tension between his own postcolonial condition and the ideal space of literary reception to which he aspires. Indeed, the tension between Joyce's universalism and his Irishness are carefully manipulated by Walcott, depending on the point he wishes to make. After denying that Joyce was merely an Irish writer, Walcott explains that, like Yeats and Joyce, he meant 'to articulate, not [his] own experience, but what [he] saw around [him]':

It's amazing Joyce could say that he wants to write for his race, meaning the Irish. You'd think that Joyce would have a larger, more continental kind of mind, but Joyce continued insisting on his provinciality at the same time he had the most universal mind since Shakespeare. What we can do as poets in terms of our honesty is simply to write within the immediate perimeter of not more than twenty miles really.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the insistence on Joyce's universalism, the shared experience of British colonialism recurs in Walcott's account of his influence. This shared experience extends not just to Joyce, but to other Irish modernist writers such as Yeats and Synge. For instance, in a 1977 interview, Walcott declared:

The whole Irish influence was for me a very intimate one. When the Irish brothers came to teach at the college in St. Lucia, I had been reading a lot of Irish literature: I read Joyce, naturally I knew Yeats, and so on. I've always felt some kind of intimacy with the Irish poets because one realized that they were also colonials with the same kind of problems that existed in the Caribbean. They were the niggers [sic] of Britain. Now, with all of that, to have those astounding achievements of genius, whether by Joyce or Yeats or Beckett, illustrated that one could come out of a depressed, deprived, oppressed situation and be defiant and creative at the same time. As a Methodist in a Catholic country, I also sympathized with the most rebellious aspect of Irish literature, priest-hating and such.<sup>132</sup>

The racism and sectarianism imported by the colonial powers in both islands, and the odds facing aspiring artists in those colonial peripheries, combine to provide a sense of

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<sup>131</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 105.

<sup>132</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 59.

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identification.<sup>133</sup> St Lucia was predominantly Catholic, the British authorities having conceded the management of religious affairs to French Catholic priests in order to avoid disturbances with the local, French creolophone population. Yet the Walcott household was Methodist, a continual source of trouble given the intolerance of the Catholic clergy. After attending the Methodist primary and secondary schools where his mother taught, Walcott won a scholarship to attend St Mary's college, 'a British-styled public school meant to produce an élite.'<sup>134</sup> In 1946, the management of that school was handed over to the Irish Presentation Brothers, the ones alluded to in Walcott's interview, and remembered in the 1965 essay 'Leaving School,' a piece in which Walcott recalls his early identification with Joyce's Stephen, a protagonist struggling with a repressed sexuality, his artistic aspirations clashing against a depressed background.<sup>135</sup> Walcott has referred to Joyce as one of the chief influences, alongside Eliot and Pound, towards his early work *Epitaph for the Young*—a view confirmed by John Thieme, who calls Joyce's *Ulysses* 'a text which acts as a mediating lens for Walcott's responses to Homer in *Epitaph for the Young*'.<sup>136</sup> In the poem, the narrator explicitly identifies with Joyce's Stephen, the struggling colonial artist of *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Discussing the composition of *Omeros*, Walcott returns to Joyce repeatedly.<sup>137</sup>

Yet in a 1975 interview, Walcott also contrasts the West Indian experience to the Irish. While the Irish revival was predicated on 'a metaphor called Ireland', in the West Indies

the only historical legends that one individual writer would have are ethnic legends of sorts. Each one of them is separate because the Indian would have India, the African would have Africa. But the point is that all of these have been erased from the memory or experience of the writer. So, what has not yet been created or is actually being created by its absence, by the

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<sup>133</sup>On the racialisation of the Irish in British colonial discourses, see the classic Lewis Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997 and, more recently, David Lloyd, 'Black Irish, Irish Whiteness and Atlantic State Formation'. In: *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diaspora*. Ed. by Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 3–19.

<sup>134</sup>King, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 22–24.

<sup>135</sup>Walcott, 'Leaving School', pp. 31–32.

<sup>136</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 23, and John Thieme, *Derek Walcott*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 152.

<sup>137</sup>See Derek Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*'. In: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.2 (Spring 1997): *The Poetics of Derek Walcott: Intertextual Perspectives*. Ed. by Gregson Davis, pp. 229–246, pp. 231, 245. I return to Walcott's allusions to *Ulysses* in my discussion of literary genre, on p. 159.

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chaos, by the necessity for it to be created—is a West Indies, a West Indian literature. Now that is being made of the knowledge that there is not one.<sup>138</sup>

Here, Walcott distances himself from revivalism and lays emphasis on the radical novelty of the West Indian experience, where the absence of a local tradition leaves the poet free to fashion one virtually *ex nihilo*. The backward-looking aspect of the Irish revival, however, can be inverted, as when Walcott cites Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* as an influence on his own short play *The Sea at Dauphin*, 'because what I had was the same thing Synge had: a totally new language, a totally new set of rhythms, a totally new people in a sense.'<sup>139</sup>

#### 1.2.4 *Omeros*: a Rewriting of *Ulysses*?

Rewriting Homer was ambitious enough in 1922—rewriting Homer after *Ulysses* is even more so. That Walcott's Homeric intertext has been filtered through *Ulysses* is indicated clearly enough by the appearance of Joyce in person in Chapter 39 of *Omeros*.<sup>140</sup> In that chapter, Joyce is hailed as the modern reincarnation of Omeros, in a gesture of celebration as well as identification. Thus, Walcott deals with two literary creditors, rather than one. Thereby, the derivativeness of *Omeros* is heightened and the text, as Rei Terada has noted, becomes 'explicitly parasitical' on Joyce.<sup>141</sup> Walcott is effectively rewriting Homer in the third degree, through the filter of *Ulysses*.

The conspicuous Irish presence in *Omeros* adds to the sense that *Ulysses* is an important intertext for Walcott. Maud Plunkett is an Irishwoman, married to the English veteran Dennis Plunkett. She comes from county Wicklow and can be heard playing *Airs from Erin* on her piano in Chapter 10, remembering her native Ireland throughout most of the poem. Her name conjures up Maud Gonne, the republican nationalist also known for her association with William Butler Yeats. Like Molly, she is liable to distort Latin or Greek phrases: while Molly inadvertently turns metempsychosis into 'met him pike hoses,' Maud turns the Latin inscription 'Georgius Rex' found on the antique cannons of the island, into 'gorgeous wrecks' (*O*, 17.2), an ironic comment on the fate of martial glory and the passing of empires. Plunkett himself, a World

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<sup>138</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 28.

<sup>139</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 24. I discuss Joyce's and Walcott's attitudes towards revivalism in Chapter 4.1, p. 222.

<sup>140</sup>See the various formulations of this argument in Sidney Burris, 'An Empire of Poetry'. In: *The Southern Review* 27.3 (July 1991), pp. 558–574, p. 561 and Greenwood, *Afro-Greeks*, p. 39.

<sup>141</sup>Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 241.

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War Two veteran, is described as a ‘khaki Ulysses’ (*O*, 52.3), a phrase which echoes Stephen’s pronouncement that ‘Khaki Hamlets don’t hesitate to shoot’ in his discussion of Shakespeare (*U*, 9.133). Although Plunkett’s military career and stiff upper lip make him a representative of the British Empire, he is repeatedly associated with Ireland. Besides being married to an Irish woman, he drinks Guinness in Chapter 5, and stands at a distance from the British expatriates gathering at the Victoria club. Maria McGarrity calls him ‘a decidedly lower-class settler figure,’ an Englishman bearing an Irish name which evokes the Easter Rising leader Joseph Mary Plunkett. McGarrity notes that his name also evokes the head of the Dublin Museum in 1895, an Englishman named Plunkett, who was succeeded by another Plunkett, an Irishman who turned out to be the father of the more famous Joseph Mary Plunkett.<sup>142</sup> Dennis may also evoke another namesake, the Anglo-Irish Horace Plunkett, the proponent of reforestation and advocate of agricultural co-operatives.<sup>143</sup> Another oblique reference to Ireland is discernible in the figure of Lawrence, the waiter at the bar in Chapters 4 and 5. Threading his way amidst the tourists sprawling on the beach ‘like a Lawrence of St. Lucia’ (4.3), he resembles Thomas Edward Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, the British intelligence officer who incited the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, and took part in the subsequent territorial division of the Middle East. That he was born, out of wedlock, to an Anglo-Irish nobleman, and published a translation of the *Odyssey* in 1932, only makes the association more relevant to the implausible transcultural network of *Omeros*.

Joyce is of course not the only canonical writer whose presence is felt in *Omeros*. The rhyme scheme sustained throughout the poem (except for a brief interlude in rhyming couplets in the third section of Chapter 33) is a variation on Dante’s *terza rima*, and the *Inferno* is an obvious intertext for Chapter 58 of *Omeros*, where the narrator ventures into the Malebolge.<sup>144</sup> Shakespeare is another prominent member of this cast; the narrator’s father, who initiates him to his poetic duty, is named Warwick, the Bard’s native shire, and dies of an infection which ‘like Hamlet’s old man’s spread from an

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<sup>142</sup>On the onomastics of Plunkett, see Maria McGarrity, ‘Cataloguing Ireland: Exile and Indigeneity in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*’. In: *Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Ed. by Alison Donnell et al. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015, pp. 140–154, pp. 147–49 and Paula Burnett, ‘Walcott’s Intertextual Method: Non-Greek Naming in *Omeros*’. In: *Callaloo* 28.1 (Winter 2005), pp. 171–187, p. 173.

<sup>143</sup>This Plunkett resurfaces in my reading of ‘Cyclops,’ see 203.

<sup>144</sup>For a detailed study of Walcott’s engagement with Dante, see Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, and the Impress of Dante*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.

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infected ear' (*O*, 12.1). Actually, the dizzying profusion of references is such that, in the words of Geert Lernout, *Omeros* becomes 'the centre of an intertextual web that contains strands from all major works of Western literature.'<sup>145</sup> Yet the proliferation of allusions does not mean that *Omeros* is patterned rigorously after *Ulysses*, let alone the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Jean-Louis Backès even argues that Walcott's *Omeros* stands 'aux antipodes de Joyce.' He contrasts Joyce's—seemingly—scrupulous adherence to a Homeric schema in *Ulysses*, with Walcott's loose appropriation of Homeric names and references, only to confound them in a radically new narrative. Backès concludes that Walcott's relation to Homer is deceptive, resting on nothing more than the 'mirage' of a name.<sup>146</sup> Likewise, Rei Terada argues that *Omeros* elaborates a complex, unstable relation to Homer's epics, where the original reference is often contradicted and disfigured by its rewriting. Given the proliferation of textual sources, from Homer to Shakespeare and Joyce, she writes, 'these multiple models combine to corrupt the purity of any originality.'<sup>147</sup>

Walcott has been quite explicit about the nature of his intertextual play. Discussing *Omeros*, he has stated that

the book is really not about a model of another poem; it is really about associations, or references, because that is what we are in the Americas: we are a culture of references, not of certainties.<sup>148</sup>

His subversion of the hierarchy between original and imitation is translated into chronological terms which extend to the whole process of literary influence. On these grounds, Walcott dismisses the valuation of the original simply on account of historical precedence. 'If you think of art merely in terms of chronology,' he says, 'you are going to be patronizing to certain cultures'; instead, he furthers the view of art 'as a simultaneity,' on account of which 'Joyce is a contemporary of Homer (which Joyce knew).'<sup>149</sup> Not only is linear time irrelevant, but even accuracy to source material is dismissed in favour creative mistakes. Still discussing *Omeros*, Walcott says:

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<sup>145</sup>Lernout, 'Derek Walcott's *Omeros*', pp. 96–7.

<sup>146</sup>Jean-Louis Backès, 'Aux antipodes de Joyce: La littérature occidentale et l'Antiquité gréco-romaine dans la première moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle'. In: *Modernités antiques*. Ed. by Véronique Gély et al. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2014, pp. 255–264, p. 264.

<sup>147</sup>Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 187.

<sup>148</sup>Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 239.

<sup>149</sup>Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 241.

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You know, none of those references is ‘right’! They’re all jumbled up. What I’m saying is that this free-form choice that is typical of work out there, which owes to everything and is referential in that sense, is very American, broadly speaking. [...] It’s not wrong in terms of the associations, however, because every new mythology has screwed up the one preceding it, gotten it wrong, including Christianity. [...] It’s a metaphorical thing: all myth is metaphorical in that respect—it takes what it wants from different mythologies.<sup>150</sup>

The creative process whereby myths are ‘screwed up’ in unpredictable ways echoes Glissant’s definition of creolisation as the collision of diverse cultural ingredients, a limitless intertwining process whose elements are ‘diffracted,’ ‘its consequences unforeseeable.’<sup>151</sup>

### 1.3 From Tradition to Contact Zone

In sum, Joyce and Walcott’s Homeric rewritings alert us to the simultaneous, reciprocal transactions which constitute literary tradition into a contact zone. Those transactions resemble the phenomena studied by the discipline of contact linguistics, also known as contact induced linguistic change. Accordingly, the term ‘contact zone’ is here understood in its linguistic acception, rather than in the sense defined by Mary Louise Pratt as a ‘colonial frontier,’ although there are obvious overlaps.<sup>152</sup> Language contact can refer to a great variety of situations, from relative monolingualism to occasional code-switching between languages in multilingual settings, to functional diglossia (the coexistence of a ‘high’ language used for official purposes and print, and a ‘low’ language spoken in informal settings). The formation of compromise varieties arising out of language contact, a category which includes the process of creolisation, provides one way to grasp Joyce’s and Walcott’s treatment of cultural influence and tradition. Departing from the properly linguistic sense of creolisation, Édouard Glissant proposes that creolisation is ‘an unstoppable process, which mixes the substance of the world, which joins up and changes the cultures of today’s humanities,’ a ceaseless intermixing

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<sup>150</sup>Walcott, ‘Reflections on *Omeros*’, p. 242.

<sup>151</sup>Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 34.

<sup>152</sup>See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 1992. Routledge, 2008, p. 8. On language contact see for instance Donald Winford, ‘Theories of Language Contact’. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Language Contact*. Ed. by Anthony P. Grant. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 51–74; Robert Chaudenson, *Creolization of Language and Culture*. 2001. Trans. by Sheri Pargman et al. London: Routledge, 2002.



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‘unpredictable, [...] never fixed, or stopped, or inscribed in essences or absolutes of identity.’<sup>153</sup>

### 1.3.1 Tradition and the Colonial Talent

In interviews and essays, Walcott has made a number of significant pronouncements on his attitude to the English literary tradition. In doing so, he also formulates a poetics of influence, which can be traced to T. S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent.’ In the main, Walcott acknowledges the alienation of the West Indian artist from the imported metropolitan tradition, declaring that as West Indian writers ‘are both cut off from and are part of [...] the body of writing in English that we were brought up in.’<sup>154</sup> In a 1977 interview he comes back to Eliot’s statement about the Western artistic tradition as an ‘unbroken arc’, an image which applies uneasily to the America, especially in relation to the experience of the African diaspora.

What we have, obviously, is a *broken arc*; we only know half the arc, and anything beyond that half arc has been torn from our memory. I don’t think that there is anything ‘pure’ on this side of the world; the whole feel of it is multitudinous [...] A sensibility that has been broken and re-created is, I think, a more accurate description of our present situation.<sup>155</sup>

As with the broken vase in ‘The Antilles,’ Walcott emphasises the dialectical overcoming of fragmentation and sundering, whereby disparate pieces are reassembled into a new whole, like the intersecting beats in a polyrhythm. His emphasis, however, is on the need to locate oneself within that tradition and, most importantly, to master it and turn it into something new. In Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent,’ the role of the poet is assimilated to that of a catalyst in a chemical reaction. When oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, Eliot writes,

they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected, has remained

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<sup>153</sup>Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, p. 14. For a rigorous linguistic definition of creolisation as a ‘restructuring process’ between various languages conditioned by specific sociohistorical factors, see Salikoko S. Mufwene, *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 6–11.

<sup>154</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 3.

<sup>155</sup>Emphasis in the original. Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 41–42.

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inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum.<sup>156</sup>

Like platinum, the poet works on pre-existing materials, but transforms them into something unforeseeable and radically new. This chemical operation resembles the process of creolisation which, out of the collision of pre-existing materials, produces something distinct from and irreducible to them. Walcott, for his part, reflects on 'tradition and the colonial talent' in his 1965 lecture 'The Figure of Crusoe.' Elaborating on Eliot's chemical metaphor, Walcott presents the poet as a hermit throwing the 'dead bush of tradition' into a bonfire, where the spark of creation at once consumes and transfigures the accumulated material.<sup>157</sup> The image of the bonfire recurs in Walcott's essay 'The Muse of History,' a piece concerned with history and cultural tradition. Walcott begins by asserting that 'maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor' (*WTS*, 36), and goes on to relate the genesis of West Indian artistic consciousness. Out of the experience of enslavement and deportation, he writes,

the tribe in bondage learned to fortify itself by cunning assimilation of the religion of the Old World. What seemed to be surrender was redemption. What seemed the loss of tradition was its renewal. What seemed the death of faith was its rebirth (*WTS*, 43).

The creative appropriation of extraneous material is no loss, but transformation and renewal. Towards the end of the essay, Walcott attacks what he sees as 'provincial concepts of imitation and originality' and puts forward his own standards of poetic worth, kindling once more the bonfire of cultural influence:

We know that the great poets have no wish to be different, no time to be original, that their originality emerges only when they have absorbed all the poetry which they have read, entire, that their first work appears to be the accumulation of other people's trash, but that they become bonfires (*WTS*, 62).

Both these essays refute the vulgar notion of originality as a polar opposite to influence and tradition; instead, Walcott celebrates the unapologetic assimilation of 'other

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<sup>156</sup>Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', p. 18.

<sup>157</sup>Derek Walcott, 'The Figure of Crusoe'. 1965. In: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Robert D. Hamner. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, pp. 33–40, p. 34.

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people's trash' and asserts his commitment to a poetics of apprenticeship, where imitation is a necessary condition to attain maturity.

Alternatively, Walcott has called himself a sponge 'not that I sponge *off* people—but something that I think can absorb whatever it likes.'<sup>158</sup> Walcott's friend and fellow poet Joseph Brodsky has compared Walcott to a literary whale, whose ability to absorb plankton does diminish, but enhances the novelty of his own work:

Walcott is neither a traditionalist nor a modernist. None of the available -isms and the subsequent -ists will do for him. He belongs to no 'school' [...] He can be naturalistic, expressionistic, surrealistic, imagistic, hermetic, confessional—you name it. He simply has absorbed, the way whales do plankton or a paintbrush the palette, all the stylistic idioms the North could offer; now he is on his own, and in a big way.<sup>159</sup>

Likewise, Seamus Heaney has praised Walcott's ability to ventriloquise English literature, while echoing a host of other voices from Latin America and Africa. In 'The Murmur of Malvern', Heaney characterises the duality and unresolved tension that underlie much of Walcott's writing:

Africa and England are in him. The humanist voices of his education and the voices from his home ground keep insisting on their full claims, pulling him in two different directions. He always had the capacity to write with the elegance of a Larkin and make himself a ventriloquist's doll to the English tradition which he inherited, though that of course would have been an attenuation of his gifts, for he also has the capacity to write with the murky voluptuousness of a Neruda and make himself a romantic tongue, indigenous and awash in the prophetic. He did neither, but made a theme of the choice and the impossibility of choosing.<sup>160</sup>

Although Walcott sometimes plays up his own peripheral situation in relation to the metropolitan tradition, as when he claims that 'it's very exciting to be *outside* English literature, English literature in the hierarchic sense,'<sup>161</sup> his emphasis is usually on the organic assimilation of English literature, notwithstanding the colonial context. His

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<sup>158</sup>Quoted in Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, p. 175.

<sup>159</sup>Joseph Brodsky, 'The Sound of the Tide'. 1986. In: *Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Harold Bloom. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, pp. 35–42, p. 50.

<sup>160</sup>Seamus Heaney, 'The Murmur of Malvern'. In: *Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Harold Bloom. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, pp. 5–10, p. 6.

<sup>161</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 68.

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relation to the canon of English poetry owes much to his growing up in a colonial context. In 1977, he says

it was a privilege to grow up as an English colonial child because politically and culturally the British heritage was supposed to be mine. It was no problem for me to feel that since I was writing in English, I was in tune with the growth of the language. I was a contemporary of anyone writing in English anywhere in the world. [...] You know that you just ravage and cannibalize anything as young poet; you have a very voracious appetite for literature. The whole course of imitations and adaptations is simply a method of apprenticeship. [...] I knew I had to absorb everything in order to be able to discover what I was eventually trying to sound like.<sup>162</sup>

Walcott oscillates constantly between a profound reverence towards the tradition of English writing in which he was raised, and the newness of the Caribbean experience, which his generation—in his own account—was the first to articulate in its own right: ‘Our world made us yearn for structure as opposed to wishing to break away from it because there was no burden, no excess of literature in our heads. It was all new.’<sup>163</sup> Hence his conclusion that he stands ‘at the beginning, rather than at the end, of a tradition.’<sup>164</sup>

Ankhi Mukherjee has noted that Walcott’s ‘febrile intertextuality [...] is liable also to be interpreted as symptomatic of a cultural belatedness that leaves poets overwhelmed by the influence of strong precursors,’<sup>165</sup> a view put forward by Helen Vendler in her 1982 article ‘Poet of Two Worlds.’ She criticises Walcott’s reliance on, and imitation of canonical models, to the point of ‘ventriloquism’: ‘it seemed that his learnedness might be the death of him, especially since he so prized it,’ she writes, adding that Walcott was ‘at the mercy of influence.’<sup>166</sup>

Ultimately, however, the opposition between originality and derivativeness appears irrelevant. The two terms appear equally inadequate, as they rely on the myth of

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<sup>162</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 53. In another interview, in 1982, he praises the British colonial education he received in his childhood, its strict discipline and high standards, see Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 74.

<sup>163</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 104.

<sup>164</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 106.

<sup>165</sup>Mukherjee, *What is a Classic?*, p. 80.

<sup>166</sup>Helen Vendler, ‘Poet of Two Worlds’. 1982. In: *Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, pp. 25–33, pp. 27–28. Isidore Okpewho articulates a similar anxiety in Isidore Okpewho, ‘Walcott, Homer, and the “Black Atlantic”’. In: *Research in African Literatures* 33.1 (Spring 2002), pp. 27–44.

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the Romantic genius, struggling to achieve at once radical novelty, uniqueness, and individuality—original, if successful, derivative otherwise. That construction of the artist as a self-fashioning, self-sufficient superman is as historically dated as it is ideologically fraught; it is also dramatically oblivious to the fact that cultural production is not carried out by heavenly monads, but by actual people living in specific material circumstances. The works produced bear the traces—however finely processed and refracted—of those material conditions, including responses to education and the encounter with existing cultural productions. If culture is understood as an ceaseless, unforeseeable interplay of reciprocal influences—whether subterranean or acknowledged—then it becomes possible to ward off accusations of derivativeness as well as to puncture any claims to originality. The interrelatedness of all culture(s) means that it is impossible to circumvent any given text once and for all. Being attentive to influence need not imply *reducing* new works to the sum of the preexisting hypertextual ingredients that go into their making; rather, reading in such a way can afford a better understanding of what it is that texts do. Ultimately, arguing whether a given work is ‘derivative’ appears irrelevant. That is the kind of feeling Walcott seemed to harbour about such discussion, when he was asked if he felt oppressed by the ‘anxiety of influence.’ He castigates the interviewer for even asking:

I’m ashamed of you, using a phrase like that. What does it mean? I’ve heard the phrase; I don’t know what it means. [...] It means nothing. I could reverse it and say the influence of anxiety? What does that mean?<sup>167</sup>

*Pace* the sorry interviewer, the issue appears immaterial to Walcott, whose awareness and vindication of influence, imitation, and apprenticeship are central to his poetic practice. Indeed, Walcott has consistently advocated the view that poetry is a craft to be mastered at the cost of a ‘fierce, devoted apprenticeship,’ a discipline inherited from painting and the reverence owed to the ‘great masters’: ‘The old masters made new masters by the discipline of severity. One’s own voice is an anthology of all the sounds one has heard.’<sup>168</sup> By contrast, he argues,

young poets should have no individuality. They should be total apprentices, if they want to be master. If you get a chance to paint a knuckle on a painting by Leonardo, then you say, ‘Thank God!’ and you just paint a knuckle as

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<sup>167</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 186.

<sup>168</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 83.

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well as you can. [...] For a lot of people in colleges, tradition begins at a broken point, at the point where they say let us break up the pentameter and see what happens. But if you don't know what you have broken, then you cannot know what you are doing.<sup>169</sup>

In yet another interview, he says that he has always appreciated being told that he sounded like someone else, as opposed to the modern obsession with 'the idiosyncratic genius': 'I'm really part of a guild. I don't consider myself to be an individual. And if I were a stonemason in a guild, that would be my contribution to the cathedral.'<sup>170</sup> Walcott remembers modelling himself of the poets he read, writing poems in imitation of Louis MacNeice, T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden, or Hart Crane in an exercise book, on the grounds that 'all you can really do at a young age is apprentice yourself to the craft.' 'I didn't want to be my own kind of writer,' he claims, 'I wanted to write as well as people whom I admired. The last thing I wanted was to be original.'<sup>171</sup> The anonymous, collective nature of medieval art challenges modern notions of authorship and individuality, which are themselves dependent on legal models of ownership whose sources can be traced to the early stages of what Benedict Anderson has called print capitalism.<sup>172</sup>

### 1.3.2 Expropriative Cannibalism

The 'Cannibalist Manifesto' drawn up by Oswald de Andrade in 1928 was the founding text of the Brazilian avant-garde *Revista de Antropofagia*, a movement which staged a flamboyant refusal of the diminutive labels pinned on New World culture, and took pride in digesting all kinds of ingredients towards the formation of a culture where the original and the imitative should become indistinguishable. Oswald de Andrade claims 'I am only concerned with what is not mine,' making the case for a poetics of expropriative

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<sup>169</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 32.

<sup>170</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 148.

<sup>171</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 154, 176, 200.

<sup>172</sup>As Thomas Mallon has noted, the very notion of plagiarism emerged in the sixteenth century as a corollary to the author's intellectual property, at a time when writing became an occupation and a livelihood. On an increasingly competitive market, writers needed to assert the ownership of their products to remain financially viable. See Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989, p. 39. On print capitalism as a pioneering economic sector furthering the advent of the modern nation state, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 2006, pp. 37–46.

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cannibalism which oversteps property rights.<sup>173</sup> The manifesto even inaugurates an alternative era, whose beginning coincides with the swallowing of one Bishop Sardinha by a group of Tupinambà Indians in 1554. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi have argued that while cannibalism is a form of violence, it was also construed as an act of homage by those tribes that engaged in it. Further, they propose cannibalism as a model for radical modes of translation, flouting the bourgeois hierarchy between ‘original’ and ‘copy,’ a paradigm which emerged simultaneously with the rise of colonialism.<sup>174</sup>

Indeed, the motif of cannibalism has the power to disturb stable identities; through the act of ingestion, or incorporation, the boundary between self and other begins to dissolve. In this respect, it provides another way to conceive of the intertextuality of *Ulysses* and *Omeros*, texts which digest and metabolise, rather than imitate, the Homeric corpus.<sup>175</sup> Cannibalism is one of Leopold Bloom’s most consistent obsessions throughout *Ulysses*, beginning with his meditation on the Eucharist in ‘Lotus Eaters,’ continued at Patrick Dignam’s funeral in ‘Hades,’ when corpses are likened to food, and pursued in ‘Aeolus’ and ‘Lestrygonians.’ Observing the communion in All Hallows church, Bloom reflects on the anthropophagic implications of the Eucharist, when believers incorporate the word made flesh, the body of Christ: ‘*Corpus*: body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. Hospice for the dying. They don’t seem to chew it: only swallow it down. Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse. Why the cannibals cotton to it’ (*U*, 5.350). Bloom takes literally the myth of transubstantiation, and ironically points out the family likeness between the cannibalism practised by the Tupinambà and the liturgy of the Catholic mass, while emphasising the cannibalistic dimension of rewriting a ‘corpus’ which is both human corpse and literary body. His comment on the use of church Latin (‘Stupefies them first’), incidentally, also applies to the Latin title of *Ulysses*, an advertising ploy designed to impress potential readers.<sup>176</sup> Attending the funeral of Paddy Dignam in ‘Hades,’ Bloom is led to envision the decomposition of

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<sup>173</sup>Oswald de Andrade, ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’. 1928. In: *Global Modernists on Modernism: An Anthology*. Ed. by Alys Moody and Stephen J. Ross. Trans. by Leslie Bary. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. 35–43, p. 36.

<sup>174</sup>Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, ‘Introduction: Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars’. In: *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Ed. by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. London: Routledge, 1999, pp. 1–18, pp. 1–5.

<sup>175</sup>Walcott openly advocates poetic cannibalism in the interview cited on p. 99.

<sup>176</sup>In ‘Nausicaa,’ Bloom the ad canvasser once again appreciates the communication skills of the Catholic Church: ‘Pray for us. And pray for us. And pray for us. Good idea the repetition. Same thing with ads. Buy from us. And buy from us’ (*U*, 13.1123). In this respect, the drilling of advertising slogans resembles the repetition of Homeric motifs in *Ulysses*.

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corpses as a process whereby dead bodies turn into food, and food into dead bodies. ‘A corpse is meat gone bad,’ he philosophises, ‘well and what’s cheese? Corpse of milk’ (6.982). Conversely, Glasnevin cemetery becomes a site where organic life appears as an uninterrupted process:

I daresay the soil would be quite fat with corpse-manure, bones, flesh, nails. Charnelhouses. Dreadful. Turning green and pink decomposing. Rot quick in damp earth. The lean old ones tougher. Then a kind of a tallowy kind of a cheesy. Then begin to get black, black treacle oozing out of them. Then dried up. Deathmoths. Of course the cells or whatever they are go on living. Changing about. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on feed on themselves.

But they must breed a devil of a lot of maggots. Soil must be simply swirling with them (6.776).

That organic matter carries on living ‘for ever practically,’ independently of any given individual being, sustaining other organisms such as maggots, emphasises the trans-individual dimension of life as a collective, impersonal undertaking. As in the parable of the Angel of Death, remembered by Bloom in ‘Aeolus,’ ‘it’s everybody eating everyone else. That’s what life is after all’ (7.214). Thus, cannibalism is no longer a shocking practice, but the very definition of life, and an appropriate allegory of literature and the process of tradition, whereby texts cannibalise other texts in a continuous process, to the point that you ‘never know whose thoughts you’re chewing,’ as Bloom reflects in ‘Lestrygonians’ (8.718).<sup>177</sup> The congruence between the Eucharist and cannibalism is also exploited in Walcott’s poem ‘Crusoe’s Journal.’ Crusoe, the proto-colonial shipwreck, conveys the teachings of Christ to the island savages, among whom the poet is included. He turns them

into good Fridays who recite His praise,  
parroting our master’s  
style and voice, we make his language ours,  
converted cannibals  
we learn with him to eat the flesh of Christ. (*PDW*, 75)

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<sup>177</sup>On cannibalism as transcultural exchange, and even a form of creolisation, see also Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa’s Gaze*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009, p. 31.



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Here cannibalism appears as an ambivalent process: it is deliberately unclear whether the ‘converted cannibals’ were *already* cannibals before their conversion to the anthropophagic rites of Christianity, or if they have become so in the process of their conversion. In any case, cannibalism is associated with the practice of colonial mimicry, whereby the style, voice, and language of the master are appropriated by the colonised, in what is for Walcott the foundational act of New World writing.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that epic is inscribed in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* primarily as a genre connoting empire, although it already contains elements of self-critical inquiry which enable Joyce and Walcott to repurpose it towards other ends. By staging an intertextual confrontation with Homer, they expose the fault lines within imperial pedagogy and hegemonic conceptions of cultural tradition. Further, the prominence of translation and de-translation in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* underscores the precariousness of literary ownership by radically questioning the validity of all title deeds. If, as Emily Apter suggests, translation ‘throws into arrears the whole idea that authors of “originals” are the sole owners of their literary property,’ Joyce and Walcott may be regarded as translators of the Homeric text.<sup>178</sup> The translated, or de-translated, titles of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* hint at a regime of generalised circulation, which magnifies the workings of culture at large. It foregrounds the relatedness and interdependence of cultural works between them. Against the confiscatory regime which has usurped Homer and his tales, Joyce and Walcott question the very notion of national literature. They redefine Homer’s epics on their own terms, showing tradition to be an ongoing process where all works circulate continually, in ways that are akin to metempsychosis, parallax, or cannibalism. This amounts to an understanding of the world-literary tradition as a transhistoric contact zone, a site of creolisation where languages and literary forms collide, commingle, and generate unpredictable new dialects. Tradition, in other words, circulates. If, as Heraclitus contends, ‘it is not possible to step into the same river twice,’<sup>179</sup> then neither is it not possible to read—let alone rewrite—the same *Odyssey* twice. *Ulysses* and *Omeros* interrupt and modify the tradition into which they become integrated, in the same way as separate rhythms intersect to produce polyrhythms.

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<sup>178</sup>Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 387.

<sup>179</sup>Quoted in Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 1979. London: Routledge, 1982, p. 50.

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## Chapter 2

# ‘Everything was money’: Metamorphosis and Commodity Circulation

In the previous chapter, I showed that Homer is not so central as the titles of *Ulysses* and *Omeros* would suggest. He is subjected to a variety of transformative operations, from translation to expropriation and parallax, which virtually displace him from the texts, or at the very least transmogrify him beyond recognition. Although he is advertised as a subtext, his name turns out to have been a pre-text for Joyce’s and Walcott’s own engagements with literary tradition as such. I also suggested that what is dramatised here is the relationality of that tradition, which binds all works into a continuum of incessant literary transactions, where ancestors are at risk of turning into ghostly shades. In what follows, I want to pursue this line of inquiry by paying attention to the many transactions, poetic as well as financial, which occur throughout *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. I am particularly concerned to unpick the affinities between a variety of literary tropes on the one hand, and the logic of commodity circulation on the other.

Like the exchange of commodities, figures of speech are premised on acts of substitution or metamorphosis, whereby one term is exchanged for another. The Aristotelian theory of metaphor, Paul Ricœur reminds us, rests on three operations: ‘the idea of a *deviation* from ordinary usage; the idea of *borrowing* from an original domain; and the idea of *substitution* for an absent but available ordinary word.’<sup>1</sup> Those substitutions do

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<sup>1</sup>Emphasis in the original. Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. 1975. Trans. by Robert Czerny et al. London: Routledge, 1978, p. 21.

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not happen in isolation; they constitute a chain of transactions and circulations which runs through the text as a whole. Given Joyce and Walcott's shared backdrop of colonial dispossession, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* display a heightened sensitivity to processes of commodification and alienation, which feature so obtrusively in the fabric of colonial life. My contention is that those concerns manifest themselves most acutely in the syntax of metaphor and related tropes involving substitution and metamorphosis.

In this chapter, I begin by addressing the commodification of cultural production itself, as it is staged early on in *Ulysses* as well as in *Omeros*, in ways which emphasise the uneven relationship between core and semi-periphery within the world-system. Then, I show that the logic of commodity circulation threatens to contaminate the landscapes of St Lucia and Dublin, but also the poetic economy of the texts, as in a nightmare where all things become endlessly substitutable.

## 2.1 Writing for Money: Between the Tourist and the Ethnographer

The point I wish to make in this chapter is not merely that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* investigate hallucinatory metaphors as part of a (post)colonial psychopathology; rather, I would argue that the motif of metamorphosis, deployed in a variety of tropes, appears to mirror the logic of capital itself by replicating the operations of commodity circulation. Commodity circulation was of course instrumental in the advent of the capitalist world market;<sup>2</sup> it conquered colonial outlets for metropolitan industry, while simultaneously giving rise to and perpetuating 'a specific mixture of pre-capitalist and capitalist relations of production which *prevents* the universalization of the capitalist mode of production' in the (semi-)peripheries, in other words fostering uneven development.<sup>3</sup>

Joyce and Walcott are alert to the logic of commodification, especially as it attaches to culture and narrative. Ominously enough, *Omeros* opens with a speech delivered by Philoctete, telling how the canoes of the island's fishermen came into existence. It is highly significant that his speech is addressed to tourists who have paid to hear his tale—and among whom readers of the poem are *de facto* included. Then,

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<sup>2</sup>See for instance the chapter on 'The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist' in Marx, *Capital*, pp. 914–926.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*. (1972). London: Verso, 1976, p. 61.

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For some extra silver, under a sea-almond,  
he shows them a scar made by a rusted anchor,  
rolling one trouser-leg up with the rising moan

of a conch. It has puckered like the corolla  
of a sea-urchin. He does not explain its cure.  
'It have some things'—he smiles—'worth more than a dollar.' (*O*, 1.1)

As readers, we are made to share in the voyeuristic enjoyment of Philoctete's story and self-display, in which he indulges 'for some extra silver.' The fisherman Philoctete—like his ancient Greek namesake—has a festering wound on his leg, which is read as a somatic manifestation of the historical trauma of slavery: 'He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?' (3.3). We learn that the wound was actually caused by a rusted anchor. In a poem that so deliberately crosses linguistic boundaries, especially between English and the French creole spoken in St Lucia, it is impossible not to overhear the French *encore*—meaning '(yet) again' or 'still'—in the rusted *anchor*. With this diglossic pun, the enduring pain keeps tormenting Philoctete, and the after-effects of the past are inscribed onto his body in both languages.<sup>4</sup> What is most significant here is that the poem initially coincides with Philoctete's speech, the first line of which is Philoctete's "'This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes'" (1.1). The meretricious quality which attaches to his performance therefore threatens to contaminate the poem itself, turning it into an exotic cultural commodity, packaged for touristic consumption.

Early in *Ulysses*, a similar exchange occurs between Stephen and Mulligan. Upon hearing Stephen's definition of Irish art as 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant,' Mulligan immediately seizes upon the witticism as a potential source of revenue, and urges Stephen to trade his aphorism for money: '- Cracked lookingglass of a servant! Tell that to the oxy chap downstairs and touch him for a guinea. He's stinking with money and thinks you're not a gentleman' (*U*, 1.154). The 'oxy chap' in question is Haines, an English student of Gaelic visiting Ireland to satisfy his curiosity for Irish folklore. That his father amassed a fortune through fraudulent exchanges with colonised peoples—'His old fellow made his tin by selling jalap to Zulus or some bloody swindle or other' (1.156)—only makes Mulligan's scheme more unsavoury. Stephen, who

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<sup>4</sup>For a postcolonial perspective on the motif of the wound, and its many iterations in *Omeros*, see Jahan Ramazani, 'The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction'. In: *PMLA* 112.3 (May 1997), pp. 405–417.

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identifies as ‘a servant of two masters, [...] [t]he imperial British state, [...] and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church’ (1.638-44), is effectively invited to accommodate Haines’s taste for things Irish in exchange for a share in colonial spoils.<sup>5</sup> Pondering the idea later that morning, in ‘Nestor,’ Stephen reflects that the role appointed for him is that of ‘[a] jester at the court of his master, indulged and disesteemed, winning a clement master’s praise’ (2.43). In turn-of-the-century Ireland, native culture has become a raw material to be exploited by the likes of Haines, who is proud to announce that he intends to pay a visit to the National Library later in the day.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the morning, Mulligan makes repeated attempts to peddle bits of native culture to Haines. He arouses his curiosity by giving a rather extravagant version of Stephen’s theory on Shakespeare (‘He proves by algebra that Hamlet’s grandson is Shakespeare’s grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father’ (1.556)), and makes a pretense of speaking Hiberno-English, only in order to add an item to Haines’s ethnographic observations: ‘That’s folk [...] for your book, Haines. Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind’ (1.365). These performances are designed to please Haines by pandering to the Englishman’s expectations of Irish authenticity, while exposing their own nature as contrived representations, in the tradition of the stage Irishman.<sup>7</sup> Mulligan effectively endorses the part refused by Stephen, that of a compliant entertainer in thrall to his master. The arrival of the milkwoman, however, brings Mulligan’s antics to an apt conclusion. An old woman coming from the countryside, she presumably embodies the uncorrupted spirit of the land in the eyes of the Englishman Haines. He addresses her in Gaelic, hoping to converse with a native interlocutor, and persists undismayed even though she asks him ‘Is it French you are talking, sir?’ (1.425), admitting that she does not speak the language. However, although unable to express herself in Irish, she becomes quite loquacious when money is involved. Her single longest sentence consists in the reckoning of the sum owed by the three students for the milk:

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<sup>5</sup>Stephen’s hostility to Church and state can be traced to the blend of Fenianism and socialistic doctrines discernible in *Stephen Hero*. See Gibson, *The Strong Spirit*, pp. 71–85.

<sup>6</sup>For all his curiosity, Haines is unapologetic in identifying as ‘a Britisher’ (1.666). As such, he recalls the participants in the British Association’s Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles, who in the 1890s submitted peasants in the West of Ireland to the distasteful ethnographic procedures in vogue at the time, crane measurements and all. See Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>7</sup>See the chapter on ‘The Fictional Irishman in English Literature’ in Joseph Theodoor Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 85–168.

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Well, it's seven mornings a pint at twopence is seven twos is a shilling and twopence over and these three mornings a quart at fourpence is three quarts is a shilling. That's a shilling and one and two is two and two, sir. (1.442)

The old woman's unpunctuated litany has a nightmarish quality of its own. The repetition of the pattern '*a is b is c*' is disquieting, both in terms of syntax and logic. Whereas one would expect the various terms of the equation to be laid down separately, as in the premise of a syllogism ('*a is b, b is c*'), they are caught in a single, reversible string of metamorphoses, where beginning and end become indistinguishable, and which may just as well be read from right to left as the other way round. The milkwoman's calculation is not only ostensibly concerned with money; it replicates in its syntax the logic of commodity circulation. In this process, money plays the part of a universal equivalent, which can be exchanged for any other commodity. It is 'the absolutely alienable commodity,' to the extent that 'it is all other commodities divested of their shape,' a commodity which 'mirrors itself in the bodies of all other commodities.'<sup>8</sup> It possesses no other quality than that of being substitutable for any other commodity. It is pure exchange-value, a property which it shares with a variety of literary tropes such as metaphor and allegory.

As these two examples indicate, the potential commodification of local culture features prominently in the opening pages of *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. What Haines is to Stephen, the tourists are to Philoctete—an audience whose interest is above all a badge of privilege. While Haines's money can be traced to murky colonial ventures, the tourists eager to hear and photograph Philoctete presumably come from some core capitalist country such as the United States, like the 'barefoot Americans strolling into the banks' despised by Maud (10.3). They are likely cruising through the Caribbean on liners such as the one glimpsed in chapter 13, 'as white as a mirage, / its hull bright as paper, preening with privilege' (*O*, 13.2). From the towering ship, where even the garbage is expensive, tourists throw down coins at the local children who dive in the sea to retrieve them, 'their somersaulting tails / like fishes flipped backwards—as the coins grew in size / in the wobbling depth' (13.2).<sup>9</sup> The violence inherent in that unequal relationship is heightened by the simile which equates the boys with fishes about to be whacked and killed. Eventually, a furious Achille, angry at being photographed,

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<sup>8</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 205. See the section 'The Metamorphosis of Commodities,' pp. 198-210.

<sup>9</sup>The practice is also recorded by George Lamming, whose *In the Castle of My Skin* is an engagement with the commodification of land in Barbados, and a likely intertext for this passage. See George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*. 1953. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010, pp. 115-16.

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sends the tourists away (59.3); yet as the poem draws to a close, photos are still being taken of the picturesque island folk and their ‘photogenic poverty’ (62.1). Although Stephen’s and Philoctete’s responses differ, the (neo)colonial relationship renders them both vulnerable to what Graham Huggan has called ‘the global commodification of cultural difference.’<sup>10</sup> Aijaz Ahmad has retraced the genesis of ‘Third World Literature,’ a category which overlaps to a great extent with that of ‘postcolonial literature’ studied by Huggan. As Ahmad remarked in his critique of ‘Third World Literature,’ the very existence and circulation of works produced in non-metropolitan areas is caught up in ‘structures of global coercion and domination,’ in which the metropole plays a determining part, through the acts of selection, translation, publication, reviewing, and commentary. Thus, the alleged ‘counter-canon’ which emerges as a result is not independent from the pressures still exerted by centres of cultural power.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Walcott’s narrative voice in *Omeros* confesses to a certain degree of collusion with the tourist gaze. The poet, now a literary star living in the United States, is estranged from his native island; returning to St Lucia to visit his aging mother, he gets in one of the tourist vans waiting at the airport. On the way to his hotel, as he observes the changing landscape, where concrete hotel developments encroach on the vegetation and dwarf the antiquated dwellings of the island people, he reflects:

Didn’t I want the poor  
to stay in the same light so that I could transfix  
them in amber, the afterglow of an empire,

preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks  
to that blue bus-stop? (*O*, 45.2)

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<sup>10</sup>Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001, p. vii.

<sup>11</sup>Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. 1992. London: Verso, 2000, pp. 41–45. On the politics of postcolonial canonisation in the context of the Cold War, which resulted in the polarisation of Soviet-realism on the one hand, and the reactive endorsement of modernism by the United States, which in turn exerted a huge influence on the texts co-opted into Euro-American universities under the rubric ‘postcolonial’ or ‘world literature,’ see Joe Cleary, ‘Realism after Modernism and the Literary World-System’. In: *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (September 2012), pp. 255–268. On Walcott’s ‘strategic exoticism,’ and his ‘insider-outsider positioning’ on the stage of world-literature, see Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*, pp. 26–43. For a study of his simultaneous commitment to his native island and his growth to the stature of an ‘international man of letters,’ facilitated by his exploitation of literary procedures familiar to metropolitan audiences (postcolonial modernism), evidenced by the accession of *Omeros* to the status of an ‘instant classic,’ see Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry*, p. 26.

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The guilt-ridden tourist-poet moves through a postcard landscape, indistinguishable from any other seaside view, where the island's beauty has become a financial asset:

the gold sea

flat as a credit-card, extending its line  
to a beach that now looked just like everywhere else,  
Greece or Hawaii. (*O*, 45.2)

The simile which equates the sea with a credit-card is merely the continuation of commodification by other means; it replicates at the poetic level the metamorphosis of use-value into exchange-value, which is made possible by the universal substitutability of money itself. It is worth observing here that the simile merely drives home a point already contained in the adjective 'gold,' which is appended to the 'sea,' and which had already turned it into the precious metal *par excellence*. The collusion between the poet and the tourism industry, then, is not just a matter of bad conscience; it is enacted in the poetic tropes themselves. Like King Midas in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poet has the faculty to turn anything into gold.<sup>12</sup> The blessing, however, proves to be a curse, when Midas realises that his gift extends to food and drink: 'Abundance was unable to relieve / his empty stomach or his burning throat, / so justly tortured by the hateful gold.' Indeed, Midas's 'strange catastrophe / of wretchedness in wealth' resonates with the plight of the island's fishermen, who live in the midst of astounding natural beauty, surrounded by hordes of affluent tourists, but have to eke out a living in the most precarious conditions.<sup>13</sup> As Omar Hena has aptly noted, the texture of *Omeros* registers 'the asymmetric relation between, on the one hand, its poetics of global economy and, on the other, the geopolitical contexts that shape, delimit, and constrain this aesthetic model of globalism by virtue of the inequities of the global literary marketplace.'<sup>14</sup> The exchange between Mulligan and Stephen, as well as Philoctete's performance, thematise the potential commodification of local customs and narratives in a setting overdetermined by the colonial, or neocolonial relationship. That, however, is only the most conspicuous manifestation of a process which runs deeper and threatens to contaminate the economy of the texts as a whole.

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<sup>12</sup>Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. c. 8. Trans. by Charles Martin. New York: Norton and Company, 2004, XI, 141-209.

<sup>13</sup>Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 176-181.

<sup>14</sup>Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry*, p. 28.



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## 2.2 National Allegories

The process of commodification which presses upon the texts in the manner discussed above signals a more general predicament, traces of which can be read on the colonial landscapes of Dublin and St Lucia. Having shown how the texts themselves fall within the orbit of commodity circulation, I now turn to the ways in which commodified landscapes in turn become texts to be read or deciphered.

Édouard Glissant has described the peculiar experience of vertigo which besets historical subjects in the Caribbean. Registering the impact of colonial dispossession on the people of the archipelago, he draws a distinction between *past* and *history*. The former is defined by its overwhelming immediacy, precluding any form of agency in people subjected to the aims of others. By contrast, 'history' suggests a mediated, empowering relation to the past. 'The past, our enforced past, which to us is not yet history, is there (here) nonetheless, harrowing us,' Glissant writes.<sup>15</sup> History is not a given; rather, it is that into which, at the price of a struggle, the raw past must be converted. 'History for us is not merely an absence, but a vertigo. That time which we never owned is to be reconquered.'<sup>16</sup> C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* is a classic example of the way in which historiography is also history-making, by reversing the abjection and dehumanisation imposed on enslaved people, and celebrating their achievements as historical subjects.<sup>17</sup>

Walcott's poem 'The Sea is History,' suggests a similar disjunction between past and history. While the poem consists for the most part in a catalogue of traumatic historical events, from genocide to enslavement, the harrowing past is eventually interrupted, and the poem turns its face to the future. History is projected into an anticipated temporality, unlike anything that has yet happened in the archipelago, and whose advent is eagerly awaited. The poem ends with 'the sound / like a rumor without any echo // of History, really beginning' (*PDW*, 256), a beginning predicated on the negation, or transcendence, of the horrors which constitute the Caribbean past. Glissant's remarks and Walcott's

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<sup>15</sup>'*Le passé, notre passé subi, qui n'est pas encore histoire pour nous, est pourtant là (ici) qui nous lancine.*' Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 226. My translation.

<sup>16</sup>'*l'histoire n'est pas seulement pour nous une absence, c'est un vertige. Ce temps que nous n'avons jamais eu, il faut le reconquérir.*' Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, p. 474.

<sup>17</sup>In the foreword to *The Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James explained that he intended to write a book 'in which Africans or people of African descent instead of constantly being the object of other peoples' exploitation and ferocity would themselves be taking action on a grand scale and shaping other people to their own needs.' C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1938. London: Penguin, 2001.

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poem recall Stephen's declaration that History 'is a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake' (*U*, 2.377), a statement inscribed as the epigraph to Walcott's 'The Muse of History.' I now want to examine two passages in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* where this nightmare is dramatised, and assumes the proportions of a 'national allegory,' where what is at stake is precisely the tension between the crippling, nightmarish past, and the struggle towards historical agency.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.2.1 'Proteus' and the Nightmare of History

When, at the beginning of *Ulysses*, Buck Mulligan intones '*Introibo ad altare Dei*' as he proceeds with his morning shave (*U*, 1.5), we enter a virtual time-warp. We are at once bombarded with projections from multiple dimensions in space, time, and language, which have led Fritz Senn to note that

the novel, whose Latin title suggests a Greek hero based (as Joyce believed) on Semitic tales, begins like a play, with stage directions in the first paragraph and an opening speech by an Irish character whose language is English and who, with a flair for imitation, intones a sentence from the Latin Mass, which is in itself a translation of a Hebrew Psalm.<sup>19</sup>

The depth and density of references make the case for his reading of *Ulysses* as a *polytropic* novel indeed. The word *polytropic*, borrowed from Homer's formulaic characterisation of Odysseus, can be translated as 'of many turns,' suggesting intellectual resourcefulness, but also a propensity for metamorphosis. If the first words pronounced in the novel are borrowed from the Latin Mass, the allusion is not gratuitous. *Ulysses* is indeed a book of transubstantiations and—not always holy—ghosts. Likewise, the opening of *Omeros* is replete with allusions to Christian liturgy. We hear Philoctete telling foreign tourists about the making of canoes, a process which begins with cutting down trees and ends in baptism and rebirth, as the dead logs are given names and re-born(e) on the waves. The prominence of these transformations, which function as

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<sup>18</sup>While I am aware of the arguments sparked by Fredric Jameson's claim that 'all third world texts are necessarily allegorical,' it is not my intention to add anything to that long debate. However, there is a case to be made for Jameson's definition of national allegory as a site where 'the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself.' Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism'. In: *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986), pp. 65–88, pp. 85–86.

<sup>19</sup>Fritz Senn, 'Book of Many Turns'. In: *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Casebook*. Ed. by Derek Attridge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 33–54, p. 38.

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thresholds into the texts, deserves special attention, as they inform our reading of the works at large.

In 'Proteus,' we are presented with a striking case of pathological metaphorisation, a condition explicitly related to Stephen's historical predicament. In the previous chapter, we encountered Stephen teaching what turned out to be his last history class. After a distasteful political discussion with Mr Deasy, the militant Ulster Unionist and headmaster of the school, we now find Stephen walking by the sea on Sandymount Strand. In the course of the confrontation with Deasy, Stephen made his famous pronouncement that 'history [...] is a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake' (*U*, 2.377). In the course of his seaside meditation, Stephen is assailed by that nightmare. It is worth remarking that the episode takes its name from Proteus, the shape-shifting Old Man of the Sea encountered by Menelaus in Book Four of the *Odyssey*. In that episode, Menelaus who has returned from Troy, tells Telemachus about his tribulations. His encounter with Proteus occurs on the isle of Pharos, off the Egyptian coast; the Old Man of the Sea is introduced by Eidothea, his daughter:

Who haunts these parts? Proteus of Egypt does,  
the immortal Old Man of the Sea who never lies,  
who sounds the deep in all its depths, Poseidon's servant.  
[...] And he,  
if only you ambush him somehow and pin him down,  
will tell you the way to go, the stages of your voyage,  
how you can cross the swarming sea and reach home at last.<sup>20</sup>

Eidothea then advises Menelaus how to assault the Old Man of the Sea when he least expects it, as he lies down among his seals, 'like a shepherd with his flock':

He'll try all kinds of escape—twist and turn  
into every beast that moves across the earth,  
transforming himself into water, superhuman fire,  
but you hold on for dear life, hug him all the harder!  
And when, at last, he begins to ask you questions—  
back in the shape you saw him sleep at first—

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<sup>20</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*. 1996. Trans. by Robert Fagles. London: Penguin, 2002, IV, 430-6. In keeping with the argument made in the previous chapter about the simultaneousness and reversibility of literary tradition, all subsequent references to the *Odyssey* will be to Robert Fagles's translation, which was published after, and admittedly influenced by, Walcott's *Omeros*. See Patricia Storace, 'The Art of Translation II: Interview with Robert Fagles'. In: *Paris Review* 151 (Summer 1999), pp. 143–164, p. 151.

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relax your grip and set the old god free  
and ask him outright, hero,  
which of the gods is up in arms against you?  
How can you cross the swarming sea and reach home at last?<sup>21</sup>

Interesting is the fact that, for all his cunning and shape-shifting skills, Proteus allegedly ‘never lies.’ This makes him an appropriate symbol of the tension between truthfulness and deception, which underlies the operations of metaphor. As Stephen apprehends his surroundings, it is as if the Irish sea conjures up visions of the past that impose themselves on his mind’s eye. The landscape becomes the site of an excruciating experience, almost hallucinatory, whereby the past is ruthlessly projected onto, and conflated with the present:

A bloated carcass of a dog lay loll on bladderwrack. Before him the gunwale of a boat, sunk in sand. *Un coche ensablé*, Louis Veuillot called Gautier’s prose. These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here. And there, stoneheaps of dead builders, a warren of weasel rats. Hide gold there. Try it. You have some. Sands and stones. Heavy of the past. [...] Galleys of the Lochlanns ran here to beach, in quest of prey, their blood-beaked prows riding low on a molten pewter surf. Dane vikings, torcs of tomahawks aglitter on their breasts when Malachi wore the collar of gold. A school of turlhide whales stranded in hot noon, spouting, hobbling in the shallows. Then from the starving cagework city a horde of jerkined dwarfs, my people, with flayers’ knives, running, scaling, hacking in green blubbery whalemeat. (*U*, 3.286-306)

Here, the landscape becomes a prism which refracts a history of violence onto the present, and on Stephen himself. Unlike Menelaus, however, Stephen proves unable to ‘pin down’ Proteus, and wrestles inconclusively with a dizzying array of historical visions. History is allegorised with instances of entropy and decay: the dead dog, the sunk boat, the dead builders, and a concluding trinity of ‘famine, plague and slaughters.’ Stephen’s vision conflates the Viking invasions from the eighth century, the Bruce invasion in the early fourteenth century, the famine of 1331 during which Dubliners ate a school of stranded whales, the Black Plague of 1348, and the freezing of the Liffey in the winter of 1338. The landscape is laden with the weight of the past, and the events cohere in a single narrative of endless oppression and suffering.

Further on in the chapter, the echoes of medieval invasions mingle with the ‘wavespeech,’ ‘the sigh of leaves and waves waiting, awaiting for the fullness of their

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<sup>21</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, IV, 468-77.

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times' (3.465). The landscape, and even the soundscape, are polluted with the nightmare of history from which Stephen is trying to awake. As Andrew Gibson has noted, the 'Telemachiad' inaugurates the drawn out struggle sustained throughout the novel 'to ease off the shackles of a devastating history.'<sup>22</sup> This backdrop of oppression makes the sense of expectancy ('waiting, awaiting for the fullness of their times') all the more urgent and painful.

Paradoxically, however, Stephen's vision conjures up an impression of inexorable timelessness, heavy with a sense of entrapment. Not only that, but the invasions and famines Stephen has in mind pertain to a distant past, predating by far the English conquest in the seventeenth century and the Great Famine of the 1840s, which are admittedly more relevant to his immediate context. Nevertheless, he is engrossed in the fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup> On this account, he appears as a pathological metaphorist. Here, Stephen is indeed engaged in substitution, deviation, and borrowing all at once, unable either to perceive the landscape around him or to focus on the real historical determinations of the present moment, surrounded as he is by a host of metaphors whose vehicles point to elusive tenors. The act of substitution is so pervasive that it even affects Stephen's sense of identity. After envisioning the crowd of Dubliners carving up a whale, he reflects:

Their blood is in me, their lusts my waves. I moved among them on the frozen Liffey, that I, a changeling, among the spluttering resin fires. I spoke to no-one: none to me. (3.306)

The image of the changeling is a fitting one for Stephen at this stage: not only does it convey his sense of utter alienation, it also encapsulates the vertiginous substitutability of times and people which is played out in this passage. For all their variety and apparent lack of connection, the allusions conjured up by the seascape spiral around the central fact of colonial dispossession. Grappling with a sense of historic alienation, Stephen is unable to come to terms with a past over which he has no control. However multitudinous, Stephen's visions of the past are experienced as the eternal return of the same, leaving little room for historical agency, let alone an alternative future. Stephen's vision is indeed of a past that has been imposed from without, not his, in the guise of

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<sup>22</sup>Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup>Andrew Gibson insists that Joyce's 'cultural diagnosis,' especially in *Dubliners*, was centrally determined by the 'seismic tremors' of the Famine, an event which designated synecdochically the pattern of colonial history at large. See Gibson, *The Strong Spirit*, pp. 53–68.

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foreign conquest and material dispossession. That *past*, which has not been processed and made into *history*, is experienced as ineluctable, much like the events of the history class in ‘Nestor.’

The landscape does not just trigger retrospective visions; it is also imbued with language in such a way that it becomes a virtual text. For instance, the silted sands accumulated over centuries are compared to language, in a sentence that is emphatically iambic: ‘These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here.’ The length of the sentence, however, turns the iambic lilt into a dull metre, that might as well go on and on without end. Stephen’s poeticising bout may then be taken as proof of the complicity of language with the curse of the past. The conflation of landscape, history, and subject, arises on the plane of language, whose operations mirror that of metaphor: language too is ‘heavy of the past,’ endlessly allusive, like the sands and stones silted on the beach. All things are indeed pervaded with language, as earlier in the chapter Stephen thought: ‘Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs’ (3.2). The nightmare of history assumes the shape of a hermeneutic delirium. Stephen then goes on to question the notions of national affiliation and identification by projecting himself among the generations of bygone islanders. Significantly, once again, the junction between subject, landscape, and history is enclosed in a tight rhythmic structure, which can be broken down into a quatrain:

- (1) Their blood is in me,
- (2) their lusts my waves.
- (3) I moved among them
- (4) on the frozen Liffey.

The stress pattern is identical in (1) and (3), with only an interchange of pronouns (they/me—I/them), suggesting undifferentiated equivalence. The rhythm is made even more compelling with the similar ending in (1) and (4), as ‘Liffey’ rhymes with ‘in me.’ Although Stephen proclaims a bond with the collective, the vision ends in estrangement: ‘I spoke to no-one: none to me.’ Instead of familiarity, it induces a troubled sense of unhomely community, where the place of the subject is contingent, as befits a changeling. The landscape holds a mirror to Stephen, but among the ghostly crowds of the past, his own reflection appears vicarious and unstable. The relation between Stephen and his surroundings is troubled because he encounters the landscape only as a locus of alienation, where a traumatic past prevents history from ‘really beginning.’ The

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constant interchange between signs and things results in a hallucinatory metaphorisation of the landscape, in a way that multiplies potential correspondences while undermining fixed identifications, a procedure which replicates the novel's simultaneous appropriation and hollowing out of Homeric myth, a structure which seems able to generate intertextual parallels without regard to the content of the story actually being told. The indiscriminate levelling and repetition of historical events and cultural forms seems to be patterned on the global circulation of commodities in the era of imperialism, a system where the commodity form ensures the interchangeability of all things in an infinite cycle of metamorphoses.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2.2 Philoctete's *Brief Account*

It could be said that a similar condition obtains throughout *Omeros*, a text which revolves around a set of literary-historical parallels, as obsessive as they are inadequate to convey the sheer reality of the Caribbean experience. The text relentlessly conjures up oblique correspondences and discrepant allusions; the stories of Achille, Hector and Helen in present day St Lucia are constantly viewed in terms of the Caribbean historical narrative, which is itself filtered through—and distorted by—the prism of Homeric association. In *Omeros*, Helen is at once the central character, the rebellious servant working for the Plunkett couple, but also the nickname for St Lucia, the 'Helen of the West Indies,' which changed hands thirteen times between the French and British Empires, in reference to the Helen of the *Iliad*. Therefore, the text elaborates a mutually referential network, where various threads intermingle and overlap. The historical consciousness thus produced is multi-layered and polysemous, opening up an infinity of potential reinterpretations, as each thing or character becomes the degraded sign of a prior referent.

The cutting down of the trees which inaugurates the poem, like Stephen's seaside walk, is pervaded with harrowing echoes of the brutal history of the Caribbean. The opening of *Omeros* dramatises the experience of loss and erasure caused by colonial conquest. The first line of the poem is uttered by Philoctete, explaining to tourists how

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<sup>24</sup>Terry Eagleton has observed that the appropriation of the Homeric narrative recalls 'the abstract form of commodity exchange itself,' a logic at once inexorable and indiscriminate. See Terry Eagleton, 'Joyce and Mythology'. In: *Essays for Richard Ellmann: Omnium Gatherum*. Ed. by Susan Dick et al. McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989, pp. 310–319, p. 313. On the affinity between the logic of mythological permutation and the commodity form, see also Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 316. Franco Moretti's reading of *Ulysses* in 'The Long Goodbye: *Ulysses* and the end of liberal capitalism' is a valuable contribution to this theme, see Moretti, *Signs Taken For Wonders*, pp. 182–208.

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the fishermen's canoes came into existence: 'This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes' (*O*, 1.1). The whole scene resonates with the history of the Caribbean as a whole, and the fate of the trees is tied to the violence of colonial conquest: 'the trees have to die' at the hands of the fishermen turned 'murderers' (1.1). The wood cutting takes on the dimensions of a national allegory:

Now, over the pastures  
of bananas, the island lifted its horns. Sunrise  
trickled down its valleys, blood splashed on the cedars,  
  
and the grove flooded with the light of sacrifice. (1.1)

The scene is made to echo the annihilation of the Caribs and the Aruacs, who inhabited the region before the arrival of Christopher Columbus, and the subsequent history of colonial rule. The whole chapter is redolent of religious liturgy, as the sacrifice of the trees is accompanied by Achille's 'swift sign of the cross' (*O*, 1.2).

In addition to relying on an extended metaphor which conflates the felling of the trees and the extermination of the island's native inhabitants, the scene is centrally concerned with linguistic issues:

The bearded elders endured the decimation  
of their tribe without uttering a syllable  
of that language they had uttered as one nation,  
  
the speech taught their saplings: from the towering babble  
of the cedar to green vowels of *bois-campêche*.  
The *bois-flot* held its tongue with the *laurier-cannelle*,  
  
the red-skinned logwood endured the thorns in its flesh,  
while the Aruacs' patois crackled in the smell  
of a resinous bonfire that turned the leaves brown  
  
with curling tongues, then ash, and their language was lost. (*O*, 1.2)

The history of conquest is reenacted as a struggle between languages. The original language of the forest, 'the Aruacs' patois,' loses its natural precedence amidst the poem's alternation of English and French denominations for trees. As in the biblical episode of the Tower of Babel, the language of trees is replaced, or displaced, by a



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plurality of discrepant tongues, with intimations of endless conflict to come. However, the process is ambivalent. The derogatory ‘patois’ may refer to any regional dialect regarded as non-standard, especially when set against the supposedly superior, official languages of empire, such as English or French. Yet, in the Caribbean context, the reference to a ‘patois’ may also refer to a variety of Creoles—whether French or English—that is to say, languages which emerged out of prolonged linguistic contact in the specific setting of plantation colonies.<sup>25</sup> This would imply that the allegedly homogenous original, pre-Columbian language spoken by the trees as ‘one nation’ was already plural, made up of various components, thus belying the nostalgic illusion of authenticity also evinced by the text. As Peter Handley rightly notes, most species of trees in the Caribbean were not native to the archipelago but were transplanted there, especially to suit the requirement of the plantation complex. As a result, ‘simply identifying a tree’s name is a complex process that cuts through layers of pre-Columbian, colonial, and postslavery history,’ since Caribbean trees have various names, in which multiple lexical ‘roots’ are sometimes combined.<sup>26</sup> The forest appears as always already creolised, in a way that runs counter to narratives of uncontaminated origins espoused by nationalist mythologies.

With its ‘pillars’ and ‘bearded elders,’ the architecture of the forest stands with hieratic verticality. But the fate of the trees is to be cut down, hollowed out, and turned into canoes. Those floating vessels are bound for the horizontal realm of the sea. The collision of various languages, which characterises the process of creolisation, is foregrounded in the bilingual enumeration of the trees quoted above, but also in Achille’s heteroglossic punning:

He swayed back the blade,

and hacked the limbs from the dead god, knot after knot,  
wrenching the severed veins from the trunk as he prayed:

‘Tree! You can be a canoe! Or else you cannot!’ (1.2)

Here, the tree is being literally dismembered at the same time as it is turned into a canoe.

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<sup>25</sup>Detailed introductions to language contact and evolution can be found in Jeff Siegel, *The Emergence of Pidgin and Creole Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 16–21 and Mufwene, *The Ecology of Language Evolution*, pp. 1–20.

<sup>26</sup>Seven Seas explains the bilingual etymology of the ‘pomme-Arac’ tree to Achille while burning dead leaves. The two components of the word contain a miniature history course of the archipelago: ‘*Aruac* mean the race // that burning there like the leaves and *pomme* is the word / in patois for “apple.” This used to be their place.’ (31.2).

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The alternative between ‘can’ and ‘cannot’ is deceptive; it leaves the tree with no real choice, as ‘cannot’ is a virtual homonym of the French *canot*, which would not be lost on speakers of St Lucian French creole. One may even be tempted to overhear another layer of linguistic playfulness, as the war-like evocation of arms and men, which hinges on a ‘canot,’ echoes the Latin ‘*Arma virumque cano*’ of the first line of the *Aeneid*.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the opening scene of the poem hints at the linguistics of empire-building, be it modern colonial ventures in the Caribbean, or the genesis of the Roman empire sung by Virgil. By virtue of the linguistic discrepancy resulting from centuries of imperial rivalry between France and England over the island of St Lucia, Achille is in a position to play trick which amounts to a ‘Heads I win, tails you lose’ scenario. The apparent alternative between ‘can’ and ‘cannot’ merely conceals the inevitable transformation into either canoe or *canot*. The tree initially appeared as the receptacle of the island’s pre-Columbian past, but it becomes entrapped in the performative webs of imperial languages, which spell only one possible fate. Leaving the terrestrial fixity of the forest, the trunks are to undergo multiple levels of trans-lation—physical navigation as well as verbal alteration. That moment of severance inaugurates a radically different order of being, opening a void bearing the ghostly imprint of the past. Significantly, the cutting of the tree involves severing its ‘veins’, a term used in woodworking, but borrowed from the human veins which channel blood, the typical metaphor of ancestry and filiation.

It should be remarked that this scene too involves various acts of translation. The trees are christened with new names, contingent and erratic, such as Achille’s ‘In God We Troust.’<sup>28</sup> This act of baptism, of naming anew, can be read as a subversion of the vertical order of transmission, in favour of a horizontal act of translation.

The bloodshed recalls the carnage wrought by the first colonists, as related for instance in Bartolomé de las Casas’s classic *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. The Spanish conquest, as told by Las Casas, resulted in the devastation and depopulation of the islands, with the settlers

[drenching] the Americas in human blood and [dispossessing] the people who are the natural masters and dwellers in those vast and marvellous kingdoms, killing a thousand million of them, and stealing treasures beyond

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<sup>27</sup>Translated by Robert Fagles as ‘Wars and a man I sing.’ Virgil, *The Aeneid*. Trans. by Robert Fagles. New York: Penguin, 2006, I, 1.

<sup>28</sup>I explore the onomastics of Achille’s canoe below, p. 130.

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compare.<sup>29</sup>

In very similar terms, the trees are brought down in a way that conjures up scenes of genocide. While forests are often depicted as ‘recuperative sites of postcolonial historiography,’<sup>30</sup> the brutal annihilation wrought on the trees imperils the possibility of historical narrative itself. Indeed, *Omeros* draws a parallel between environmental and human destructions, conflating the native inhabitants and the vegetation of the islands. Like the seascape in ‘Proteus,’ the forest here bears witness to the enduring facts of colonisation and dispossession. In both instances, the landscape itself is the site of a collective trauma which still resonates, in Philoctete’s wound as well as in Stephen’s mind; more than a mere backdrop for historical reminiscence, it becomes a stage where the brutality of history is traumatically re-enacted. Here, the obsessive quality of historical allegories verges on hallucination.

### 2.3 ‘Everything was money’: The Political Economy of Metaphor

In the eighth chapter of *Omeros*, we see Achille diving for shells off the coast of the island. The real theme, however, is money. We learn that Achille is in debt, and his financial prospects seem unfavourable. It is financial necessity which compels him to search the sea floor, in a desperate bid to regain Helen after she has left him for Hector. In the previous chapter, Achille remembered Helen’s first breach of faith, which occurred while he was diving for conchs, desperate for money:

He had not told Helen

they needed quick money. Lobsters was off-season,  
or diving for coral; shells was not to be sold  
to tourists, but he had done this before without

getting catch himself, he knew that his luck would hold. (7.2)

Like Philoctete earlier, Achille is dependent on the tourists, who may illegally buy his shells. There, he surveys an underworld which is a deceptive *El Dorado*, full of gold,

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<sup>29</sup>Bartolomé De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. 1552. London: Penguin, 2004, p. 49.

<sup>30</sup>Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 8.

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silver, coins, bullion, shillings, cents, guineas, moidores and doubloons—respectively, Portuguese and Spanish coins. In just five pages, money is mentioned twenty-four times, in one form or another; the figure rises to twenty-six, if we include the polysemous ‘salvation and *change*’ (*O*, 8.1. My emphasis), and the ‘*poundage*’ of Achille’s heart (*idem*). Yet, these manifold allusions remain elusive: money is wished for, talked about, glimpsed in poetic images, but no solid coin is to be found. Like the bottle preserved in the island museum, the chapter glitters, but is actually crusted with ‘fool’s gold’ (8.1).

On the sea floor, Achille discovers what is allegedly the wreck of the *Ville de Paris*, the flagship of the French fleet in the 1782 Battle of the Saintes, fought against England, and which provides Plunkett with an inexhaustible store of Homeric correspondences.<sup>31</sup> The ship lies on the sea floor, in an underworld guarded by a fantastic creature which is caught in an intricate web of metaphors and metamorphoses. First, the creature is referred to as ‘an octopus-cyclops, its one eye like the moon’ (8.1). Just a few lines down, the image has been reversed, as we observe Achille counting his debt at night, ‘while the moon’s octopus eye / climbed from the palms that lifted their tentacles’ shape. / It glared like a shilling’ (8.1). Put another way, the vision of the ship sparks a chain reaction of poetic metamorphoses: the circulation of myth and poetic image starts with the octopus-cyclops, harking back to Homer; then the octopus’s eye and the moon are yoked together, each becoming the reversible image of the other (the octopus’s eye is like the moon / the moon is like an octopus’s eye), before the moon, eventually, morphs into a shilling. Paul Breslin has noted that Walcott’s metaphors tend to gather momentum and proliferate into other metaphors, generating consecutive metamorphoses.<sup>32</sup> Here indeed, the tenor of the initial metaphor loses logical precedence, as it becomes the vehicle for another tenor, which originally functioned as its own vehicle—a nightmarish loop which is aptly concluded by the image of the coin, the universal vehicle which stands for all images. Thereupon, the narrator adds, ‘Everything was money’ (8.1). In this circulation of images, metaphor indeed functions like money, ‘only as a symbol of itself.’<sup>33</sup> Metamorphoses proliferate, silver and gold are ubiquitous, but ultimately

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<sup>31</sup>As the narrator acknowledges, this is a rather extravagant ‘myth’ (8.1). Actually, the *Ville de Paris* sank off the coast of Newfoundland on its way back to England; see Maria McGarrity, *Allusions in Omeros: Notes and a Guide to Derek Walcott’s Masterpiece*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup>He also notes that Walcott has a tendency to ‘leapfrog his metaphors, so that the vehicle of one generates the tenor for another.’ See Paul Breslin, ‘The Circulation of Metaphor in Derek Walcott’s Poetry’. In: *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 28.2 (Spring 2006), pp. 37–44, especially pp. 38, 42.

<sup>33</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 226.

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immaterial. The precious metals remain elusive; neither the light that ‘paved the ceiling with silver every swell,’ the ‘mutating fishes,’ nor the ‘silvery mackerel’ with their ‘coin-packed scales’ (8.2) bring Achille any tangible benefit. This whole submarine chapter functions like a financial bubble about to explode; the dazzling proliferation of poetic tropes, which seem to generate surplus-value at will, is never converted into material goods; in other words we encounter once again Midas’s ‘strange catastrophe / of wretchedness in wealth.’ The whole economy of the chapter rests on speculation, in both sense of the word: the exchange of money for money,<sup>34</sup> but also the potentially endless reflection of images such as happens when two mirrors face one another.

Yet, once the bubble is punctured, Achille is left with a worthless heap of images. The sea floor is no *El Dorado* but a site of death, peopled by incorporeal shades, much as the underworld visited by Odysseus in Book XI of the *Odyssey*. The bottom of the sea is actually haunted by the corpses of drowned slaves thrown overboard during the Middle Passage, as well as a variety of sailors. Achille appears ‘falling / for fathoms towards his fortune’ (8.1), swimming nearby ‘corpses / that had perished in the crossing, their hair like weeds / their bones were long coral fingers,’ like the ‘coral eyes’ of drowned Portuguese captains (8.2). Echoes of Shakespeare’s *Tempest* are clearly discernible here, especially of Ariel’s song about the drowning of Ferdinand’s father: ‘Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes.’ Indeed, in this chapter, as in Ariel’s song, everything ‘doth suffer a sea-change,’ but not quite ‘into something rich and strange.’<sup>35</sup>

The chapter, which began with the hope that ‘money will change her’ ends in disappointment (8.1).<sup>36</sup> The only change that does happen to Helen is that by the end of the passage, ‘she was a spectre now’ (8.2), out of Achille’s reach. In a reversal of Odysseus’s *nekuia*, it is Achille who encounters the shades of the dead; yet the most disquieting aspect in this passage, I would argue, is the host of bodiless metaphors which haunt these parts.<sup>37</sup>

That Helen should have become a spectre is not entirely surprising. In the previous chapter, she and Achille had a fight on the market, for no apparent reason, which

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<sup>34</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 251.

<sup>35</sup>William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. 1610-1611. Ed. by David Lindley. Cambridge University Press, 2013, I, ii, 396-401. Walcott’s sea floor is perhaps closer to Eliot’s *Waste Land*, where fragments of Ariel’s song reverberate. See Eliot, *Collected Poems*, pp. 54, 57.

<sup>36</sup>It is to be understood that money will change Helen’s mind, although the intimation of another potential metamorphosis is hard to miss.

<sup>37</sup>See Homer, *The Odyssey*, XI.

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ended with Helen leaving in Hector's van. The van is referred to, in that passage and throughout the poem, as a 'transport' (7.1). It is known that the word *metaphor*, precisely, derives from the notion of transport and, in modern Greek, indeed refers to means of transportation.<sup>38</sup> Put another way, the word *metaphor* is merely a metaphor that has become lexicalised, an image for which there is no 'ordinary,' literal term. In fact, this is the definition of a catachresis: 'the use of a borrowed word for something that does not have a name of its own.'<sup>39</sup> I would contend that with Hector's transport, Walcott is taking etymology at its word and reactivating the image which lay dormant in the notion of *metaphor* (not to speak of the 'vehicle' which makes the figurative displacement possible).

Achille's wistful memories of his romance with Helen, '[swaying] together in that metamorphosis / that cannot tell one body from the other one' only heightens the chasm which now separates them (7.3). The metamorphic fusion of their two bodies contrasts with the overwhelming sense of discrepancy which pervades the metaphors in the submarine chapter, and which culminates in the spectralisation of Helen. Two modes of metamorphosis are counterposed here: the perfect fit of two bodies becoming one, on the one hand, and the utter dis-incarnation of the 'spectre' who disappears in Hector's transport-metaphor, on the other.

The conflation of commodity and metaphor is dramatised in compelling terms in the seventh chapter of *Omeros*, a passage which unfolds on a market place:

Where did it start? The iron roar of the market  
with its crescent moons of Mohammedan melons,  
with its hands of bananas from a Pharaoh's casket,  
  
lemons gold as the balls of Etruscan lions,  
the dead moon of a glaring mackerel, it increases  
its pain down the stalls, the curled heads of cabbages  
  
crammed on a tray to please implacable Caesars,  
slaves head-down on a hook, the gutted carcasses  
of crucified rebels, from orange-tiled villas,

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<sup>38</sup>Paul Ricœur notes that Aristotle's use of the verb *phora* (to move or displace) in his discussion of *metaphor* is itself a metaphor, and that 'it is impossible to talk about metaphor non-metaphorically.' See Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, pp. 17–19.

<sup>39</sup>The canonical examples are the 'legs' of a table or the 'foot' of a bed. See Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 209–10.

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from laurels of watercress, and now it passes  
the small hearts of peppers, nipped sapodillas  
of virgins proffered to the Conquistadores.

The stalls of the market contained the Antilles'  
history as well as Rome's, the fruit of an evil,  
where the brass scales swung and were only made level

by the iron tear of the weight, each brass basin  
balanced on a horizon, but never equal,  
like the old world and new, as just as things might seem. (*O*, 7.1)

The enumeration of goods on sale is the occasion for a compulsive jumble of allusions. The analogies range from Ancient Egypt through the Roman Empire to the conquest of the New World and the slave trade, all of them hinging on images of violence and plunder. Severed heads collide with crucified corpses in a vision of history no less nightmarish than Stephen's. The unhealed wounds of history, like the uneven scales at the market, point to a lack of resolution, which leaves the present in a state of perpetual ambiguity, awaiting some form of historical redress. As in 'Proteus' then, the proliferation of backward-looking metaphors can be read as the index of a troubled colonial past. As if to replicate the imposition of imperial history on colonial spaces, Joyce's and Walcott's texts function like palimpsests that exhibit the clash between their overlapping inscriptions. As Peter Childs has aptly noted, empires indeed function like palimpsests, 'placing a mesh over a pre-existing social culture that shows through and changes the colonizing systems that occupy the official economic and administrative surfaces', resulting in complex 'cultural imbrications'.<sup>40</sup> The dense web of allusions, the multiple layers of history, impinge on the present reality and threaten to displace it altogether.

Yet that predicament is exposed, but not embraced; Walcott struggles tirelessly against the kind of retrospective complacency which feeds on endless recrimination. He opposes any poetics based on what he calls 'masochistic recollection', advocating instead the valuation of open possibilities (*WTS*, 44). Later on in *Omeros*, he seeks to negotiate a poetics that breaks from morbid repetition and embraces the sheer presence of things, divested from the clutter of historical or literary references which surrounds

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<sup>40</sup>Peter Childs, *Modernism and the Postcolonial: Literature and Empire 1885-1930*. London: Continuum, 2007, pp. 84–85.

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them.<sup>41</sup> What concerns me here, however, is the fact that this hallucinatory encounter with the past is played out on the market place. In other words, the nightmare of history erupts most vividly on the site where things are brought to be exchanged. In the process, they are rendered mutually equivalent since their respective values are measurable by means of a common unit, which is money. The literary evocation of the market becomes the locus where financial as well as poetic transactions are carried out.

The gruesome imagery suggests that the products on the market have been defeated at the hands of superior powers—Pharaoh, Caesars, Conquistadores—before reaching the scene of commodity circulation, where they feature as metaphors, ‘curled heads of cabbages.’ ‘small hearts of peppers.’ From this perspective, the cryptic opening of the chapter (‘Where dit it start?’) deserves attention. Enigmatically enough, it begins with a question where the pronoun ‘it’ refers to no identifiable object. The rest of the chapter does little to dispel the mystery; recurring twice in the following lines (‘it increases / its pain,’ ‘and now it passes’) this free-floating pronoun, unmoored from any referent, can be read as a grammatical instantiation of pure exchange-value. We are brought face to face with an empty shell, whose ultimate substance, like Proteus himself, it is virtually impossible to pin down. Replicating the very act of exchange and substitution, the pronoun functions—rather, dysfunctions—like a vacant vehicle, drawing attention to its own versatility.

### **2.3.1 ‘Is no sense at all / spending change on transport’**

Not only is the transport associated with Helen’s transformation into a bodiless spectre; it will turn out to be the instrument of Hector’s death. His passenger van, called the Comet, is described in Chapter 22. While Hector turned to this occupation for financial reasons, we learn that he ‘was making no money. The trips were too short,’ even though he made ‘four trips a day when most transports made one’ (22.2). The description of the vehicle is significant:

The Comet, a sixteen-seater passenger-van,  
was the chariot that Hector bought. Coiled tongues of flame  
leapt from its sliding doors. Each row was a divan

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<sup>41</sup>Maria-Cristina Fumagalli argues that Plunkett falls prey to a hallucination which prevents him from seeing the West Indian reality around him as it really is. Plunkett’s condition, she says, exemplifies the logic of catachresis. See Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular*, pp. 213–214.



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of furred leopardskin. Because of its fiery name  
under an arching rocket painted on its side,  
the Space Age had come to the island. Passengers

crammed next to each other on its animal hide  
were sliding into two worlds without switching gears.  
One, atavistic, with its African emblem

that slid on the plastic seats, wrinkling in a roll  
when the cloth bunched, and the other world that shot them  
to an Icarian future they could not control (22.2)

The vehicle is an amalgamation of the archaic and the futuristic, at once an ancient chariot clad in leopard skin, and a hyper-modern rocket manned by Hector, recast as 'a gum-chewing astronaut.' Besides, the Comet is enlisted in the political campaign of Maljo, the fisherman running as a third party candidate against the 'identical factions' competing for power on the island (20.1). Against both the allegedly 'Marxist' party and the 'Capitalist' one, Maljo rents out Hector's van and hires Philoctete to distribute leaflets across the island. With the support of Achille and Seven Seas, the campaign begins in earnest enthusiasm, in the conviction that 'a new age would begin' (20.1).

'Bananas shall raise their hands at the oppressor,  
through all our valleys!' he screamed, forgetting to press  
the megaphone button. They named him 'Professor

Static,' or 'Statics,' for short, the short-circuit prose  
of his electrical syntax in which he mixed  
Yankee and patois as the lethargic Comet

sputtered its sparked broadsides when the button was fixed. (20.1)

The florid language and imagery used by Maljo align him with the narrator of the poem. The circuitousness of metaphors in *Omeros* is replicated in the 'short-circuit prose' of Statics, an image that suggests the liability of poetic language to curve back upon itself and function in a speculative manner. The parallels between Maljo and the poetic speaker are many: Maljo feels 'newly empowered / to speak for those at the backs of streets,' to act as a messianic spokesperson for the downtrodden islanders, a description which resembles the poet's vocation to speak on behalf of the coal women

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and 'to give those feet a voice' (13.3). Put another way, the meta-poetic Comet binds together Maljo's electioneering rhetoric and the poet's craft. If the Comet is the symbol of a utopian future for the destitute, the dawn of 'a new age' ('By the Comet's symbol [Philoctete] knew their time had come'), Maljo's campaign is also a cautionary tale on the complicity of poetry with deceptive uses of language. As the campaign progresses, 'power [goes] to Statics's head.' We see him racing through the island's poor neighbourhoods, 'waving from the parted door / of the gliding Comet, past neglected sections,' voicing Walcottian concerns over the tourist industry, and indulging in no less Walcottian word-play, denouncing the machinery of 'neglection-election':

*Every vote is your ticket, your free ride  
on the Titanic: a cruise back to slavery  
in liners like hotels you cannot sit inside  
except as waiters, maids. This chicanery!  
this fried chicanery!* (20.2, emphasis in the original.)

Like Walcott too, Maljo wrestles with Homeric allusions. He dismisses the two main parties as merely '*one Greek, and the other Trojan,*' both fighting for control over Helen-St Lucia. By contrast, the slogan of his party, the United Force, is that '*only United Love can give you the answers!*' Maljo's politics echoes Leopold Bloom's pronouncement in 'Cyclops,' to the effect that love is the answer to the nightmare of history:

- But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.
- What? says Alf.
- Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. (*U*, 12.1481)

On one level, Bloom's argument is notoriously ineffectual; he is unable to articulate a positive definition of love and has to fall back instead on what love is not. This is an ambivalent move which can be read as evidence of his political inarticulacy; however, Bloom's dialectic is essentially utopian since, in negating the stuff of the existent order ('Force, hatred, history, all that'), it opens up a space whose indeterminacy is precisely its most utopian asset.<sup>42</sup> While Maljo gets intoxicated with his own rhetoric, however,

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<sup>42</sup>See my reading of the 'Cyclops' episode on p. 183.

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Philoctete is dismayed at the bitterness of the political strife. He too wonders ‘why couldn’t they love the place, same way, together, / the way he always loved her, even with his sore?’ Unlike Maljo’s capitalised ‘United Love,’ a mere slogan printed on pamphlets, Philoctete’s love is patterned on a pre-verbal association with the non-human world of the island’s ecosystem; his love, he continues, resembles ‘the way the leaves loved her, not like a pink leaflet / printed with slogans of black people fighting war’ (20.2). In typical romantic fashion, the world of print culture is opposed to the island’s self-sufficient natural beauty, a contrast neatly captured in the binary pairing of ‘leaves’ and ‘leaflet.’

Maljo gives a street party to crown his campaign, but the heavy rain ruins the celebration. The printed material comes to an inglorious end indeed,

Beaded bouquets of balloons, soggy paper-hats,  
rain-corrugated posters, the banner across  
  
two balconies, the cardboard cartons of pamphlets,  
were history this Saturday. (20.3)

The soggy debris of posters, banners, and pamphlets, all equated with ‘history,’ provide a bitter reflection on the world of print culture; Maljo’s ineffectual campaign, mostly carried out thanks to Hector’s Comet, serves as a negative counterpart to the realm of orality which pervades the poem. After Maljo’s political failure, he leaves to Florida and becomes an orange picker. We hear from him later on in the poem, when Ma Kilman informs Seven Seas that ‘his job is to put the oranges in a sack / one by one, as if they is islands.’ As if to emphasise the association of commodity circulation and Maljo’s dysfunctional metaphors, Ma Kilman concludes her narrative of Maljo’s misfortunes with women with the statement that ‘Statics write to say his woman now is the dollar’ (63.1). That Maljo has to emigrate to the United States for lack of opportunities on his native island adds another similarity with Walcott himself, and a sobering reflection on the peripheral writer’s integration into the literary world-system.

The night of the street party is retold from Achille’s point of view in Chapter 21. The scene provides another occasion for a reflection on the metamorphoses occasioned by, and synonymous with, the process of commodification. Achille, mad with jealousy for Helen, assimilates her unfaithfulness to that of the island:

She was selling herself like the island, without  
any pain, and the village did not seem to care

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that it was dying in its change, the way it whored  
away a simple life that would soon disappear  
while its children writhed on the sidewalks to the sounds

of the DJ's fresh-water-Yankee-cool-Creole.  
He sat on *In God We Troust* under black almonds,  
listening to the Soul Brothers losing their soul;

the sandy alleys would go and their simple stores,  
the smell of fresh bread drawn from its Creole oven,  
its flour turned into cocaine, its daughters to whores,

while the DJs screamed,  
    'WE MOVIN', MAN! WE MOVIN'!  
but towards what? (*O*, 21.1)

The association of 'change' with the deadening commodification of the island reinforces the notion that the changes operated by metaphor are complicit with the transformation of the island into small change for American consumption. Indeed, while the street party is supposed to attract following for Maljo's campaign, its political content is imperceptible to Achille, who only notices the way Maljo's campaigning style resorts to the same tricks as the entertainment industry, evidenced by the DJ's 'fresh-water-Yankee-cool-Creole.' In this respect, Achille's stubborn adherence to the name given to his boat, the misspelt 'In God We Troust,' can be read as an act of resistance. The motto featured on dollar bills ('In God We Trust') is comically distorted, and becomes an emblem for Achille's resistance to the logic of commodification which threatens to engulf the island. In sum, Achille's canoe represents the vestigial presence of subsistence fishing, a form which persists in spite of the logic of commodification, and whose very name inscribes that resistance.

The sustained identification of poetic language with commodity circulation and political sloganeering, both symbolised by the printed material of dollar bills and electoral pamphlets, feeds into the overarching dynamic of the poem. When Helen reflects that 'Is no sense at all / spending change on transport' (6.1), she is articulating this central concern, and perhaps giving voice to the poet's bad conscience over his poetic speculations. *Omeros* is poised at the juncture between the two competing realms of orality and print culture, the first associated with the innocence of an Adamic

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language, the second enmeshed in the power relations of print capitalism and hegemonic historiography. Indeed, the Comet-metaphor proves to be Hector's undoing. His reckless driving leads him to his demise in Chapter 65. While driving at full speed on a winding track, he is surprised by a piglet crossing the road; he swerves brutally and crashes into a statue. The association of the Comet with poetic craft is reinforced by the print-like traces left on the road: 'The fated crescent / was *printed* on the road by the scorching tires' (65.1, my emphasis). Hector's fateful end at the end of the poem seems to be the precondition for the poet's approximation of a language unburdened from the weight of connotations, in an ultimate, self-cancelling metamorphosis whose result would be 'a wide page without metaphors' (59.1). There is but a short distance between this 'wide page' and a 'white' page, an image which bespeaks the poem's aspiration to the ineffable. This tension provides the impetus which sustains the poem from beginning to end, gesturing constantly towards the simplicity of a pre-literate, even pre-verbal language, one no longer complicit with the dysfunctional workings of metaphor and the poetic speculation which mirrors the predatory logic of capital in the West Indian semi-periphery.

As the poem draws to a close, both Plunkett and the narrator begin to realise the futility of their literary endeavours. Metaphor has to be abandoned:

Plunkett, in his innocence,

had tried to change History to a metaphor,  
in the name of a housemaid; I, in self-defence,  
altered her opposite. Yet it was all for her.

Except we had used two opposing stratagems  
in praise of her and the island; cannonballs rolled  
in the fort grass were not from Olympian games,

nor the wine-bottle, crusted with fool's gold,  
from the sunken *Ville de Paris*, legendary  
emblems; nor all their names the forced coincidence

we had made them. There, in her head of ebony,  
there was no real need for the historian's  
remorse, nor for literature's. Why not see Helen

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as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,  
swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone,  
as fresh as the sea-wind? (*O*, 54.2)

The ideal language which might capture this ‘fresh’ reality is glimpsed on multiple occasions throughout the poem, always in relation to the natural world: in ‘that elemental noise / of the windward, unbroken breakers’ (24.2), in ‘the water’s / language around the rocks in its clear-running lines’ (25.1), or in the

privilege  
of an archipelago’s dawn, a fresh language  
salty and shared by the bittern’s caw, by a frieze  
of low pelicans.<sup>43</sup> (59.1)

The poet’s desire to speak a non-human, ‘fresh language,’ is of course self-defeating; this aspiration can only be expressed in the very language which it seeks to overcome, gesturing at best towards its own erasure, as when the ocean becomes ‘an epic where every line was erased // yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf’ (59.1). This image echoes the invocation to *Omeros* at the beginning of the poem:

Only in you, across centuries  
of the sea’s parchment atlas, can I catch the noise  
of the surf lines wandering like the shambling fleece  
of the lighthouse’s flock, (2.2)

a passage which invites us to accept the conflation of the epic poet with the sea. While it is no more possible to attain a meta-language by means of words than it is possible to lift oneself up by one’s bootstraps, the painful awareness of language’s defects and incompleteness is a crucial element in the poetic quest of *Omeros*.<sup>44</sup> The longing for

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<sup>43</sup>Other instances of linguistic animism include ‘a brook talk[ing] the old language of Ireland’ (39.1), and the unrecognisable language of the ants heard by Ma Kilman in the forest in Chapter 48.

<sup>44</sup>Nor is this theme specific to *Omeros*. In the poem ‘*Crusoe’s Journal*,’ Robinson Crusoe is cast as a the prototypical West Indian Adam, able to carve a prose out of raw wood in a language unburdened with metaphors:

out of such timbers  
came our first book, our profane Genesis  
whose Adam speaks that prose  
which, blessing some sea-rock, startles itself

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a language 'beyond metaphor' (54.3) receives some form of gratification as the poem draws to a close, in a moment of linguistic epiphany.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.3.2 'Dead treasure, hollow shells'

In *Ulysses*, while Stephen is haunted by the nightmare of history, Bloom the advertising salesman is arguably haunted by the nightmare of commodity exchange. His occupation renders him especially sensitive to the manipulation of language which is often at the heart of advertising. Much of his thinking time is devoted to this quintessentially modern art; he either ponders the merits of the ads encountered in the course his perambulations, or elaborates his own fanciful schemes. Early in 'Lestrygonians,' Bloom is given a leaflet by 'a sombre Y.M.C.A. young man,' urging him to meditate on his salvation: 'Blood of the Lamb. [...] Are you saved? All are washed in the blood of the lamb.' (*U*, 8.5-11), a micro-event which highlights the similar strategies employed by religious and commercial enterprises.<sup>46</sup> Soon after, he observes a 'procession of whitesmoked sandwichmen' (8.123) bearing the letters HELYS on behalf of Hely's stationery shop. Bloom's own projects include an ad for the tea, wine, and spirits merchant Alexander Keyes, based on a slogan involving intimations of Home Rule, but also comprising the formulaic watchwords 'Licensed high class premises. Longfelt want. So on' (7.157). On a more spectacular, if impractical note, Bloom also envisions a mobile display consisting of 'a transparent showcart with two smart girls sitting inside writing letters, copybooks, envelopes, blottingpaper. I bet that would have caught on. Smart girls writing something catch the eye at once. Everyone dying to know what she's writing' (4.141). In 'Ithaca,' we learn that Bloom's meditations tend to revolve around

some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder,  
a poster novelty, with all extraneous accretions excluded, reduced to its  
simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision  
and congruous with the velocity of modern life. (17.770)

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with poetry's surprise,  
in a green world, one without metaphors (*PDW*, 75)

Once again, metaphor is presented as an obstacle which bars access to the immediacy of things, the ideal experience described as 'poetry's surprise.'

<sup>45</sup>I explore this point more at length in Chapter 4.4.5, see p. 257.

<sup>46</sup>This point recurs in 'Nausicaa,' when Bloom hears the bells of the nearby church and reflects: 'Pray for us. And pray for us. And pray for us. Good idea the repetition. Same thing with ads. Buy from us. And buy from us' (*U*, 13.1123).

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While Bloom's imagination is spurred into creative, if ludicrous, flashes by the economic compulsion of his profession, the formulaic nature of advertising slogans which crop up inadvertently in his mind—'Excellent for shade, fuel and construction' (4.193), or 'the world's greatest remedy' (17.1819)—suggests that in the era of the commodity, word patterns are not only designed to increase sales, but actually function like interchangeable tokens. As a matter of fact, print culture as a whole is placed in the shadow of the commodity form, whose inexorable logic surfaces time and again in Bloom's worried meditations. The interchangeability of words is evidenced in 'Aeolus,' the episode set in the offices of the *Freeman's Journal*. The episode is punctuated obtrusively by newspaper headlines, in capital letters, which disrupt—and comment on—the narrative repeatedly, suggesting the encroachments of the commercial press on the supposedly autonomous realm of 'high' literature.

Amidst the clatter of the printing presses, the narrative begins to mimic the mechanical motions of the machines, illustrating the coercive weight of modern print culture, and the 'degradation and routinization of language' under capitalism.<sup>47</sup> Bloom's vision of the machines conjures up the memory of Patrick Dignam's funeral, which took place earlier in the morning, in a language which is borrowed to the obituary rubric: 'This morning the remains of the late Mr Patrick Dignam. Machines. Smash a man to atoms if they got him caught. Rule the world today. His machineries are pegging away too. Like these, got out of hand: fermenting. Working away, tearing away' (7.80). In the narrative, words and formulas resurface at conspicuously short intervals, suggesting that language too is being '[smashed] to atoms.' The clearest instance of this logic occurs in the permutation of words in two consecutive sentences: 'Grossbooted draymen rolled barrels dull thudding out of Prince's stores and bumped them up on the brewery float. On the brewery float bumped dullthudding barrels rolled by grossbooted draymen out of Prince's stores' (7.21). The procedure is not limited to the vicinity of the printing presses, however. In 'Sirens,' an episode which functions like a musical fugue where motifs are interwoven and repeated in various configurations, we encounter similar instances of word permutation, as in the following: 'Miss Kennedy sauntered sadly from bright light, twining a loose hair behind an ear. Sauntering sadly, gold no more, she twisted twined a hair. Sadly she twined in sauntering gold hair behind a curving ear' (11.81). In Bloom's eyes, however, the printing presses uniquely capture the nightmare of endless repetition, in terms which echo Stephen's historical hallucination in 'Proteus.'

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<sup>47</sup>Booker, *Ulysses, Capitalism, and Colonialism*, pp. 40, 62.



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Bloom imagines what would happen if the foreman were to become paralysed, with nobody around to stop the machines: they would ‘clank on and on the same, print it over and over and up and back. Monkeydoodle the whole thing’ (7.102). This motif of eternal repetition, derived from a sector which deals indiscriminately in ‘obituary notices, pubs’ ads, speeches, divorce suits, found drowned’ (7.198), then expands to cosmic proportions.

In the following chapter, as Bloom gazes at the sun, wondering once more about parallax, his astronomical reflections end with a vision of the universe as a chain of inhuman, lifeless metamorphoses: ‘Gasballs spinning about, crossing each other, passing. Same old dingdong always. Gas, then solid, then world, then cold, then dead shell drifting around’ (*U*, 8.581). Like the unmanned presses, the planets would go ‘on and on the same.’ What is common to those two images is their dependence on commodity exchange. In the case of the newspapers, Bloom reflects that ‘it’s the ads and side features sell a weekly, not the stale news in the official gazette’ (7.89). As far as the planets are concerned, the image of the ‘dead shell drifting around’ turns out to be an echo of an earlier scene, when Stephen confronted Deasy in ‘Nestor.’ Receiving his wages in Deasy’s office, Stephen notices the collection of Stuart coins on the headmaster’s desk, ‘base treasure of a bog’ (2.201). Deasy also owns a collection of shells, which prompt Stephen to meditate on the power of money:

Stephen’s embarrassed hand moved over the shells heaped in the cold stone mortar: whelks and money cowries and leopard shells: and this, whorled as an emir’s turban, and this, the scallop of saint James. An old pilgrim’s hoard, dead treasure, hollow shells. (2.213)

Shells were of course an early form of currency, as the ‘money cowries’ remind us. Bloom’s cosmic vision seems contained in the ‘whorled’ shells, which evoke stereotypical scenes of the colonial imagination, such as the leopard or the emir’s turban.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the shells are later qualified in Stephen’s mind as ‘symbols too of beauty and of power [...] symbols soiled by greed and misery’ (2.236), in accordance with Deasy’s shameless defence both of the British empire and the Union. The fate of the demonetised shells, now worthless as exchange value, enduring only as symbols ‘soiled by greed and

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<sup>48</sup>The previous night, the arch-imperialist Haines had a nightmare about a panther. In the morning, Stephen complains that Haines spent the night ‘raving and moaning to himself about shooting a black panther’ (1.61), and later refers to him as ‘the panthersahib’ (3.277), an appellation which underscores his colonial associations.

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misery,' adds to the negative associations of commodity circulation. As in Bloom's inexorable 'same old dingdong,' the cycle of transformations ends inauspiciously.

The climax of Bloom's cosmology is reached later in 'Lestrygonians.' Still musing on the death of Patrick Dignam, Bloom returns to his philosophising, recycling the motifs already encountered with Deasy's 'hollow,' and his own 'dead' shells:

Trams passed one another, ingoing, outgoing, clanging. Useless words. Things go on the same; day after day: squads of police marching out, back: trams in, out. Those two loonies mooching about. Dignam carted off. Mina Purefoy swollen belly on a bed groaning to have a child tugged out of her. One born every second somewhere. Other dying every second. Since I fed the birds five minutes. Three hundred kicked the bucket. Other three hundred born, washing the blood off, all are washed in the blood of the lamb, bawling maaaaaa. (8.476)

Mina Purefoy is an acquaintance of Bloom whose pregnancy is coming to a painful end in the Rotunda maternity hospital. Her labours are the stuff of a later chapter, 'The Oxen of the Sun,' in the course of which Bloom pays her a visit and mixes with Stephen and his friends.<sup>49</sup> Bloom's stoic views on the passing of the dead, balanced against the sum total of the newly born, is interspersed with snippets of the Y.M.C.A. leaflet received earlier ('all are washed in the blood of the lamb'), pointing again to the common logic of economic calculation which underpins both. The lifeless repetition of printing presses, advertising slogans, and religious formulas, produce only 'useless words.' Bloom finally approximates the heart of the matter: private property and the logic of capital accumulation.

Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming on, passing on. House, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. Changing hands. This owner, that. Landlord never dies they say. Other steps into his shoes when he gets his notice to quit. They buy the place up with gold and still have all the gold. Swindle in it somewhere. Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt, Kerwan's mushroom houses, built of breeze. Shelter for the night.

No one is anything. (8.484)

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<sup>49</sup>I return to this episode in Chapter 4.4.1, see 242.

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Once again, Bloom's nightmarish vision seems patterned on that of Stephen in 'Proteus,' although the historical references are no longer specifically Irish. His perception of the cityscape of Dublin with its 'mushroom houses' is overlaid with Egyptian pyramids, the Great Chinese Wall, and the proverbial monuments of Babylon; those are all read as records of the endless exploitation of enslaved, dehumanised toilers.<sup>50</sup> Like Walter Benjamin, Leopold Bloom seems to be aware that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'<sup>51</sup> Bloom's awareness of the machinery of city life is informed by his alertness to class issues. The 'swindle' which ensures the landlord's immortality ('Landlord never dies') is precisely the circuitous route of money, whose manifold metamorphoses are merely stages in the accumulation of wealth for the benefit of a handful of property owners ('They buy the place up with gold and still have all the gold'). The tenants are substitutable in the eyes of capital, one filling in the place left vacant by another, with the result that 'no one is anything.' The nightmare of universal equivalence results in a symbolic extinction, which leaves the city a 'dead shell' in its turn. The point I wish to make here is not only that Bloom is keenly aware of class inequalities, but that his diagnosis on the social order as a whole springs from, and is patterned on, the workings of commodified language at the hands of print capitalism.

### 2.3.3 'How can you own water really?'

As I have just suggested, in *Omeros* one form of resistance to the process of commodification is symbolised by Achille's canoe, ironically named 'In God We Troust.' In *Ulysses*, it is also a boat that calls into question the indiscriminate logic of commodity circulation. Early in 'Lestrygonians,' Bloom stops to gaze at a boat on the river; on that boat is an advert for Kino's trousers. Bloom naturally reflects on the design of the ad:

Good idea that. Wonder if he pays rent to the corporation. How can you own water really? It's always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace. Because life is a stream. All kinds of place are good for ads. (8.93)

While it is true that the advertising industry will make use of 'all kinds of place,'

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<sup>50</sup>Michael Kirwan—not Kerwan—was a building contractor, whose 'mushroom houses' in western Dublin were designed for low-earners. Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, pp. 171–72.

<sup>51</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. 1940. In: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. by Hannah Arendt. Trans. by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, p. 256.

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Bloom's question ('How can you own water really?') opens a breach in the all-embracing process of commodification. The fluidity of water makes it hard to grasp ('never the same'), and therefore hard to capitalise on.<sup>52</sup> The Heraclitean overtones of Bloom's meditation on water resurface in other places throughout the novel, especially in the course of Stephen's introspective moments.

Stephen keeps returning to the changeability of the self and the metaphysical predicament of self-identity across time: 'I am another now and yet the same' (1.311), 'I was happier then. Or was that I? Or am I now I?' (8.608), he asks himself throughout the morning. Like water, he realises that he is 'never the same,' a fact which has the potential to disrupt the circulation of money between identifiable economic agents. Reflecting on a debt he owes, Stephen ventures: 'Wait. Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound. [...] But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms. [...] I, I and I. I.' (9.205-12). If only his former self borrowed a pound, why indeed should he now pay it back? The fluidity of personality seems to offer another obstacle to the inexorable circulation of money, between debtor and creditor. Stephen's 'I and I' not only anticipates the Rastafarian personal pronoun, it also calls into question the self-identity of the unitary subject. We are faced once again with the problem of 'the informing of unity into multiplicity,' which underpins the notion of rhythm, and which is here deployed in relation to the soul.<sup>53</sup> Stephen's 'entelechy' is borrowed from Aristotle, who in his *Metaphysics* defines the soul as 'an actuality (*entelecheia*) of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it'.<sup>54</sup> The Greek *entelecheia*, replaced in Aristotle's later writings by the synonym *energeia*, is commonly interpreted as 'actuality.' Although modern commentators acknowledge that both terms were 'as opaque to an ancient Greek as they are to us,' *entelecheia* stands as the opposite to Aristotle's *dunamis*, or 'possible,' the conceptual pairing already encountered in 'Nestor.'<sup>55</sup> Stephen glosses 'entelechy' not only as 'form of forms,' but also as 'the structural rhythm' which might be expressed by a gestural 'universal language' (15.105-108). To be sure, this definition is laid down

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<sup>52</sup>Ironically enough, the trade wars waged by England in the sixteenth century relied on similar arguments. Eric Williams cites Queen Elizabeth's attack on the Spanish monopoly of maritime trade with the West Indies: 'The use of the sea and air is common to all; neither can any title to the ocean belong to any people or private man.' Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, p. 72.

<sup>53</sup>See Schelling's definition in the Introduction to this dissertation, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup>Quoted in Stephen Makin, 'Energeia and Dunamis'. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*. Ed. by Christopher Shields. Oxford, 2012, pp. 400-421, p. 404.

<sup>55</sup>For a commentary of which, see Chapter 1.1.3, p. 66.

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in ‘Circe,’ a passage where even the most serious pronouncements ought to be taken with a pinch of salt, if not dismissed as ‘ pornosophical philotheology’ (15.109).<sup>56</sup> My point here is that, notwithstanding the haziness of Stephen’s metaphysics, his fascination with changeability turns out to be congruent with Bloom’s reflections on fluidity, both providing an alternative mode of circulation to the metamorphoses of the commodity form.

Bloom’s love of water is explained at great length in ‘Ithaca,’ in response to the question: ‘What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier, returning to the range, admire?’ (17.183). The answer takes up a whole page (17.185-228); even by ‘Ithacan’ standards, this is inordinately long. Yet, elaborating on Bloom’s qualms (‘How can you own water really?’), the passage articulates an elemental form of resistance to the process of commodification, which also turns water into ‘white coal’ for exploitation of hydraulic power (17.1711).<sup>57</sup> Bloom loves water for

its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level, [...] its capacity to dissolve and hold in solution all soluble substances including millions of tons of the most precious metals: [...] its vehicular ramifications in continental lakecontained streams and confluent ocean flowing rivers with their tributaries and transoceanic currents, gulfstream, north and south equatorial courses [...] its infallibility as paradigm and paragon: its metamorphoses as vapours, mist, cloud, rain, sleet, snow, hail [...] (17.185-228)

Bloom turns water precisely into an allegory of his own utopian mindset: it is universal, democratic, and superior to the precious metals it contains, presumably including the silver and gold hoarded by the landlords and other profiteers. As opposed to the heavy sand on the beach, which bears down on Stephen, and which proves inadequate when Bloom tries to write a message on it in ‘Nausicaa’,<sup>58</sup> water displays metamorphic qualities which set it at odds with the alienating powers of money, and suggest an alternative kind of circulation. The discrepancy between the realm of uncommodified water and that of finance is also suggested when Bloom remembers that

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<sup>56</sup>I return to the ambivalent politics of Bloom in ‘Circe’ in Chapter 4, 216.

<sup>57</sup>See Michael Rubenstein’s provocative reading of the Dublin waterworks in *Ulysses*, and his suggestion that Joyce’s engagement with public works articulates a response to ‘the depredations of modernity’ while allowing him to affirm ‘modernity’s utopian promise,’ a dialectic which earns *Ulysses* the label of ‘postcolonial comedy of development.’ Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup>‘Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it’ (13.1266).

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once in the summer of 1898 he (Bloom) had marked a florin (2/-) with three notches on the milled edge and tendered it in payment of an account due to and received by J. and T. Davy, family grocers, I Charlemont Mall, Grand Canal, for circulation on the waters of civic finance, for possible, circuitous or direct, return.

[...]

Had Bloom's coin returned?

Never. (17.975)

Bloom's experiment confirms the impersonal nature of money circulation, since his coin never returned. It is also water which allows Bloom to grasp the primordial unity of the material world; the heating of his kettle seems to contain the whole universe:

ignition was communicated from the faggots of precombustible fuel to polyhedral masses of bituminous coal, containing in compressed mineral form the foliated fossilised decidua of primeval forests which had in turn derived their vegetative existence from the sun, primal source of heat (radiant), transmitted through omnipresent luminiferous diathermanous ether (17.258).

In *Omeros* too, the islands are subjected to predatory accumulation. Market forces reduce the landscape and its resources to metaphors for profit, threatening not just the environment but the livelihoods of fishermen like Achille:

In fury, he sailed south, away from the trawlers  
who were dredging the banks the way others had mined  
the archipelago for silver. New silver was

the catch threshing the cavernous hold till each mound  
was a pyramid; banks robbed by thirty-mile seines,  
their refrigerated scales packed tightly as coins,

and no more lobsters on the seabed. All the signs  
of a hidden devastation under the cones  
of volcanic gorges. (60.1)

The result of industrial fishing is the conversion of fish into silver and coins, and a transfer of wealth from the *banks* of the sea to their financial counterparts, as if the metaphors were taken at face value. The potential collusion of metaphor with the

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process of commodification, and the wholesale destruction of the environment, is thus evidenced once more in the final chapters of *Omeros*.

Seven Seas would talk  
bewilderingly that man was an endangered  
species now, a spectre, just like the Aruac  
or the egret (60.1)

Like Helen, the island's inhabitants become spectres. Like the Aruacs—whose extermination was reenacted in Chapter 1—or like a bird species, they are threatened with extinction. The financial motivations behind the relentless extraction of resources resurface when we learn that 'the shrimp were finished, their bodies were curled / like exhausted Caribs in the deep silver mines' (60.1), once again recalling the deadly exploitation of the island's first inhabitants. In Chapter 58, the narrator follows Omeros up the path to Soufrière, where they survey the 'Pool of Speculation,' a Dantean *inferno* peopled by the shades of the politicians and businessmen responsible for the commodification of the island: 'One had rented the sea // to offshore trawlers, whose nets, if hoisted, would show / for thrice the length of its coast' (58.1). The wholesale commodification of the island, its people and its resources, is carried out amidst the 'boiling engines' of the sulphur springs, which the narrator cannot help associate with 'Hephaestus or Ogun,' Greek and Vodun divinities (58.1), reiterating a combination of the modern and the archaic. One of the pits is filled with poets, 'Selfish phantoms with eyes / who wrote with them only, saw only surfaces / in nature and men, and smiled at their similes' (58.3), a disreputable crowd from which the narrator is at pains to extricate himself ('And that was where I had come from. Pride in my craft. / Elevating myself. I slid, and kept falling // towards the shit they stewed in'). The collusion of poetry and capitalist accumulation is pursued practically to the end of the poem.

## Conclusion

While metaphor has been a canonical poetic device at least since Aristotle, in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* it appears in a much less favourable light. The logic of commodification encroaches on literary production, and inscribes itself in the texts not only as a theme, but as an in-built device which presides over the unfolding of the narrative. The displacements, deviations, and substitutions which crop up incessantly in the texts,

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appear as aberrant manifestations of the commodity form, which they replicate at the level of poetic expression. Besides, poetic metamorphoses and substitutions, such as metaphor and allegory, whereby one term is substituted for another, appear to offer a small-scale model of the kind of spectral intertextuality which sustains *Ulysses* and *Omeros*—works which both displace and replace their Homeric originals. Yet, the workings of metaphor also dramatise the inequalities of the literary world market. Most telling is the fact that the logic of commodity circulation contaminates the functioning of literary tropes themselves, spelling a dysfunctional relation to poetic language. Like money, metaphor is hauntingly ubiquitous, with a disquieting potential for reversibility. *Omeros* is centrally concerned with metaphor and its potentially harmful side effects. The temptation to generate metaphorical tropes is ubiquitous throughout the poem, yet it is counterbalanced by an acute awareness of the violence involved in those poetic displacements. The styles of *Ulysses*, on the other hand, appear as interchangeable voices chosen from a catalogue, severed from the tutelary figure of the author.

As my readings suggest, both *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are keenly aware of the inhuman dynamic of commodity exchange and the threat it poses for social life in general, and literary practice in particular. It is as though both texts captured a turning point in the process of capitalist modernisation, the transitional stage marking the ultimate breakdown of the ‘natural economy’ and the advent of large-scale commodity production functioning on a global scale, also known as imperialism. The shattering of pre-capitalist formations—in the shape of subsistence fishing and farming, or handicraft production—leaves virtually no sectors unscathed by the process of commodification. Bloom’s awe at the printing presses in the newspaper offices, Achilles’s imperilled livelihood as a fisherman, and Hector’s demise at the wheel of his Icarian transport, render visible the brutal metamorphosis of the world into exchange value. In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which Joyce and Walcott deploy tropes of circulation and metamorphosis; in this respect, metaphor plays a crucial part, as it both mirrors and defeats the logic of commodity circulation. If any one thing can be substituted or exchanged for another, then there is potentially no limit to the chain of possible transactions.

And yet, some forms of resistance do take place, however insignificant they may appear. On account of the uneven, collisional nature of the transition to commodity production, residues and vestiges live on in the texts, underscoring the incompleteness of capitalist modernisation, and leaving open cracks and fissures through which alternative



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futures may be glimpsed. While poetic language and artistic creation fall prey to the indiscriminate logic of commodity circulation, they also operate in the manner of Fredric Jameson's 'handicraft enclaves,' surrounded by the rising tide of capitalist modernisation, yet providing 'the Utopian vision of a more human production generally.'<sup>59</sup> Thus, they function as resistant forms, holdovers from an era where words and things were not endlessly interchangeable. The persistence of archaic forms, repurposed and recycled at the level of literary genre, is the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>59</sup>Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991, p. 307.

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## Chapter 3

# Works Without a Genre: *Ulysses* and *Omeros* as World-Texts

In this chapter, I address the issue of genre, or form. Although genre and form refer to distinct categories, they overlap to a large extent: I will borrow a minimal working definition of *genre* to David Duff's *Modern Genre Theory*, where the notion is characterised as 'a recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and/or functional criteria.'<sup>1</sup> A genre, then, consists of a relatively stable set of recognisable features, not all of which pertain to form as such. Conventional definitions of the epic genre, for instance, include thematic criteria, such as the relation of 'heroic deeds [...] that bear consequence for the community to which the hero belongs.'<sup>2</sup>

*Ulysses* and *Omeros* seem to deliberately upset generic categories; they adopt an ironic stance towards the boundaries of novel, poetry, epic, and narration itself, which threatens to explode those categories altogether. In appearing to break from traditional generic categories, however, Joyce and Walcott are actually fulfilling an agenda which can be traced to the emergence of Romanticism, and whose anti-authoritarian aesthetic was to be exacerbated by the experimental strain of Modernism.<sup>3</sup> Today, the alleged dissolution of genre is a narrative that is as familiar as it is questionable, and it is not my intention merely to assert that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* register, in specific ways, the disintegration of generic categories—although they certainly do that. Rather, I would argue that the wide range of meta-generic strategies deployed by Joyce and Walcott have

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<sup>1</sup>David Duff, ed., *Modern Genre Theory*. 2000. London: Routledge, 2014, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup>Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 439.

<sup>3</sup>On the link between Romantic aesthetics and the modernist aspiration to a 'total artwork,' see David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

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the ultimate result of reworking orality into the texture of the written work, and this is perhaps the point where the Homeric pre-text, in its association with the oral realm of *epos*, becomes most relevant.

Besides, I will attempt to relate the generic hybridity of Joyce's and Walcott's texts to the context of uneven and combined development by which they are informed. To do so, I will examine the ways in which rhythm is deployed as a central image throughout *Omeros*, before turning to the episode of *Ulysses* known as 'Cyclops.' As Franco Moretti suggests in his discussion of generic diffusion and circulation, 'the morphology of hybrid texts is an invaluable vantage point from which to observe the endless spiral of hegemony and resistance created by world literature.'<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true of *Ulysses* as well as *Omeros*: the generic intricacy of both works, drawing on a dizzying range of pre-existing forms, is one index of the conflictual, uneven nature of world-literature at the level of form.

### 3.1 From *Epos* to Text—and Back

In addition to the politics of intertextuality discussed earlier in the first chapter of this dissertation, there is another way in which *Ulysses* and *Omeros* relate to the Homeric epic. Although the genesis of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is still a matter of discussion among historians, it is beyond doubt that both works baffle modern categories we tend to take for granted, such as 'literature' or 'poetry,' which assumed their present shapes in relatively recent times, in manner largely determined by the advance of print capitalism. Homer's epics emerged in an era where literacy was at best in its infancy, a dispensation difficult to imagine for modern readers accustomed to deal with textual objects.

#### 3.1.1 Epic Utterance and Performance

In *The Experience of Poetry*, published in 2019, Derek Attridge retraces the history of poetry, stressing the experiential quality of poetic creation.<sup>5</sup> He reminds us that in pre-literate societies, such as that which gave birth to the Homeric epics, oral performance played a central part. This means that our modern notion of 'poetry' is hardly an

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<sup>4</sup>Franco Moretti, 'Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*'. In: *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. 2006. Ed. by David Damrosch et al. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 399–408, p. 406.

<sup>5</sup>Derek Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry: From Homer's Listeners to Shakespeare's Readers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

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adequate term for what was then essentially a live *performance*. Although we now have access only to printed texts, those were not the mode of existence of ancient poetry, for which Attridge suggests ‘song’ would be a more accurate term. Those songs were experienced as events happening in time, with the *aidos* blending words and music in a composition that was unique in each performance. Thus, the epics we now tend to view as the foundations of ‘literature’ in fact belonged to a musical repertoire, far removed from the textual tradition which has virtually supplanted it.

The Homeric scholar Gregory Nagy has put forward the notion of ‘composition-in-performance’ to account for the emergence of classical epics.<sup>6</sup> Drawing on the insights of Milman Parry and Albert Lord concerning oral tradition and performance in the Balkans, especially on the formulaic nature of oral composition,<sup>7</sup> Nagy retraces the stages of the process of textualisation, in the shape of an arc spanning a multitude of stages from sheer oral performance to definitive text-fixation. Along this arc, the narrative material became increasingly stabilised, less fluid. Before reaching the definitive textual form which has come down to us, the epics went through a stage of diffusion by rhapsodes, who would draw on a relatively stable set of stories, combined in performance in various ways. To relate this process, Nagy underscores the evolution of metaphors which evoked the origin and diffusion of the epics. The craft of the rhapsodes was understood as analogous to the act of sewing:

The idea conveyed by *rhapsōidós*, ‘he who sews together [*rháptō*] the song(s) [*aidē*]’, corresponds to an idea conveyed by the myths: that many and various fabrics of song, each one already made (that is, each one already woven), become remade into a unity, a single new continuous fabric, by being sewn together. The paradox of the metaphor is that the many and the various become the single and the uniform—and yet there is supposedly no loss in the multiplicity and variety of the constituent parts.<sup>8</sup>

The term *rhapsode* was indeed used to refer to Homer himself, a figure combining the skills of the performer and of the composer. By retracing the origins of epic composition, then, we encounter not the tutelary figure of Homer, but an evolutionary process, a diachronic chain of transmissions which derails the search for a single authority. Instead, the emphasis is on a transindividual endeavour where unity and multiplicity (‘the many and the various’) are coterminous and indistinguishable. More

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<sup>6</sup>Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, pp. 42–53.

<sup>7</sup>On the work of Milman Parry, see below, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup>Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 86.

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confusing still, the epic, the cornerstone of genre theory since Aristotle, appears as a contingent patchwork of fragments stitched together over time. As Haun Saussy notes, in contrast to written records, ‘a work that circulates by word of mouth leaves no such durable sign of its beginnings, and there is no way to track a series of performances back to their original.’<sup>9</sup> The history of textualisation is still a matter of debate, and contemporary analogies afford only tentative models for the hypothetical fixation of ancient epics.<sup>10</sup> Although we may not have a thorough understanding of the process as it actually occurred, it is nevertheless clear that we should attempt to grasp epic within a context of oral composition and performance, rather than treat it as a textual finished product. After all, the primary meaning of the Greek *epos* refers to ‘units of utterance.’<sup>11</sup> Paradoxically enough, then, if we pursue the intertextual threads which end—provisionally—in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*, we may retrace a line of descent that goes *beyond* the textualised epics which inaugurate anthologies such as *The World’s Great Classics*, encountered on the shelves of the barber in *Omeros* (13.1), and thus dissolve the very notion of authorial originality.

By the same token, as we confront the fluid nature of composition-in-performance, we encounter the notion of rhythm, which provides at once a crucial point of contact between *Ulysses* and *Omeros*, and a way out of the tangle of generic hybridity. Indeed, the concept of *song* may be misleading, if we fail to appreciate the centrality of rhythm in oral composition. Attridge insists that the modern dualistic split of words and music as two separate entities would have been alien to that tradition, since ‘a song was composed as a performance and by means of a performance (whether in private or public), and it was enjoyed as a performance’.<sup>12</sup> Some recent observations seem to confirm the ‘mutually sustaining’ relationship between words and music, such as the performances of *griots* in West and Central Africa.<sup>13</sup> In the period discussed by Attridge, performance was the only mode of being of song, each occasion being unique and ephemeral, involving a degree of renewal and improvisation. Neither words nor music was predominant; rather, both were part of the same compositional act, each dimension

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<sup>9</sup>Haun Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and Its Technologies*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>This account is a drastic simplification of a complex process. For a detailed discussion, see for instance the essays collected in Lauri Honko, ed., *Textualization of Oral Epics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000.

<sup>11</sup>John Miles Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>Foley, ‘Analogues: Modern Oral Epics’, p. 201.

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enhancing the other. Attridge thus stresses the centrality of rhythmic features when he reflects that

we tend to think of a complex metrical scheme and a melody as the end-product of a process of composition; but in imagining Greek heroic song we need to think of them rather as vehicles for composition, providing familiar frameworks that would aid in the conjuring up of words and phrases.<sup>14</sup>

The point is that in becoming textualised—a process which unfolded over centuries—the performative, musical dimension of Homeric epic was all but erased. The transition from oral speech to script is not a mere change in the way we access the same content. This change entails an inevitable distortion of the tale. Once committed to space of the page, sound becomes visible; it is not only muted, deprived of the nuances of intonation, but coerced into the linear disposition of graphic notations.<sup>15</sup>

Our modern textual bias makes it difficult for us to grasp the preeminence of rhythm in the emergence of epic. Yet, if we reverse the process and acknowledge those aspects which were at the heart of Homeric compositions, we may begin to reflect on the fault lines and blind spots of our modern categories of genre. If the label ‘literature’ turns out to be an awkward fit for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, petrifying the oral rhythms which gave them shape, then *Ulysses* and *Omeros* may well similarly challenge our assumptions concerning the value of generic taxonomy.

### 3.2 The Phonograph and the Bard

Significantly, Joyce and Walcott have both hinted at the primacy of rhythm as a compositional principle. In ‘Circe’ Stephen muses on ‘the first entelechy, the structural rhythm’ (*U*, 15.107), recalling the aesthetic theories propounded in the ‘Paris Notebook’ and *Portrait* on the relation ‘of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part’.<sup>16</sup> The relation between the different parts of *Ulysses* is indeed a complicated matter; few novels consist in chapter so starkly different from one another, each bearing a name by which it is now commonly designated among critics, alternating not just between viewpoints but between highly different registers and styles. The episodes

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<sup>14</sup>Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry*, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup>On the shift from oral memory to written records, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. 1982. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 95–102.

<sup>16</sup>See in my Introduction, p. 33.

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which compose *Ulysses* behave like individual units, they seem to have a life of their own.<sup>17</sup>

In Walcott's case rhythm is indeed 'structural.' He has claimed that *Omeros* began to take shape the moment he 'came across a rhythm'. Notions of voice, orality, or, in Walcott's words, 'tone' seem to take precedence over generic or formal categories. Interestingly, Walcott equates 'tone' and 'interior rhythm,' as the defining factors towards poetic composition.<sup>18</sup> Elaine Savory has remarked the ease with which Caribbean poets 'explode the boundaries between poetry and prose,' showing Caribbean culture to be 'plural [...] transformative and kinetic' owing to its associations with orature or oral traditions, as well as the context of diaspora.<sup>19</sup> David Lloyd, for his part, has highlighted the ways in which 'the persistence of the oral within and alongside the institutions and practices of a literate and bureaucratic colonial society impacts the peculiar forms of modernity in Ireland,' functioning as a recalcitrant holdover in the face of capitalist modernisation.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout *Omeros*, as I argue in the following pages, Walcott treats rhythm as a primordial, yet vulnerable force, threatened by the onset of capitalist modernity and its machines. In fact, Walcott's distrust of the machine and investment in bodily or natural rhythms rehearses familiar complaints about modernisation, which took shape in the early years of the century. Yet, ironically enough, it was thanks to machines, specifically sound-recording devices, that the rhythms of epic orality were brought to the limelight at the very same moment. Milman Parry was a pioneer in the study of oral story-telling, carrying out extensive fieldwork and recording the tales of the bardic *guslari* in the Balkans in the early 1930s. Noting the highly formulaic nature of their utterances, he suggested that Homer's epics too must have originated in practices of oral story-telling. The recurrence of set phrases, 'Homeric epithets,' such as 'the wine-dark sea' or 'young Dawn with her rose-red fingers,' he argued, was imposed by the

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<sup>17</sup>Molly's final monologue in 'Penelope' is often adapted for the theatre as a self-standing piece. Recent examples include Marina Carr's on-stage monologues in the context of the Paris 'Global Ulysses Event' in June 2022, or Aedín Moloney's 2019 *YES! Reflections of Molly Bloom*, which consisted of an abridged reading of the episode at the Irish Repertory Theatre in New York.

<sup>18</sup>Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 245.

<sup>19</sup>Elaine Savory, 'Anglophone Caribbean Literature'. In: *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Ed. by Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi. Vol. Two. Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 711–758, pp. 731–732.

<sup>20</sup>David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000: The Transformation of Oral Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 4.

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constraints made on the singer's memory and the metrical patterns of oral delivery.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on a store of set formulas allowed the bard to keep the story moving forward without having to dwell on each word, while fulfilling the expectations of poetic metre. In other words, Homer's poetry was 'composed in a diction which [was] oral, and so formulaic, and so traditional.'<sup>22</sup> Returning from Bosnia, Parry attributed his findings to the availability of recording devices, which made possible the study and comparison of a huge corpus of tales circulating orally:

It is even more than likely that someone else would have done this before had it not been for the lack of the mechanical means: it has only been in the last few years that the science of electrical sound recording has given us an apparatus of such a sort that it can record songs of any length and in the large numbers needed before one can draw conclusions, and finally which can make records which are so good that the words on them can be accurately written down for the purposes of close study.<sup>23</sup>

Paradoxically, the era of mechanisation aroused a great amount of mistrust towards machines, with their inhuman regularity. While sound-recording devices made it possible to archive and study oral forms of story-telling structured preeminently by rhythmic imperatives, machines were increasingly seen as dangerous creations that might destroy or at least constrain the 'natural' rhythms of the body, and indeed nullify the human spirit. In D. H. Lawrence's 1920 *Women in Love*, Gerald Crich, the owner of a large coal-mining venture, is mesmerised by the sheer mindless force of machinery, which he imagines as a virtual prosthesis of his own will power, 'a mechanism so subtle and harmonious in its workings that it represents the single mind of man, and by its relentless repetition of given movement, will accomplish a purpose irresistibly, inhumanly.' He works himself to state of 'almost religious exaltation' at the thought of this 'perfect, changeless, godlike medium between himself and the Matter he had to subjugate,' fulfilling an authoritarian ideal of 'pure order, pure mechanical repetition,

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<sup>21</sup>I cite at random from Robert Fagles's *Odyssey*.

<sup>22</sup>Parry explains that each fixed formula 'expresses a given idea in words which fit into a given length of the verse. [...] It gives the words which are best suited for the expression of the idea, and is made up of just those parts of speech which, in the place which it is to fill in the verse, will accord with the formulas which go before and after to make the sentence and the verse. Each formula is thus made in view of the other formulas with which it is to be joined; and the formulas taken all together make up a diction which is the material for a completely unified technique of verse-making.' Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*, pp. 328–29.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm*, p. 57.



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repetition ad infinitum, hence eternal and infinite.<sup>24</sup> This vision of a mechanical world is awe-inspiring, and is challenged throughout Lawrence's novel by an equally strong fascination for the human body, its irrational passions and irrepressible physical drives. Indeed, as Laura Marcus contends in her study of the modernist interest in sound and rhythm,

the fascination with rhythm in the period arose in substantial part from the desire to reclaim, retain or redefine human and natural measures in the face of the coming of the machine and the speed of technological development.<sup>25</sup>

She notes that rhythm was a concept which was both ubiquitous and elusive. This was due in part to the influence of Herbert Spencer's vitalism, which treated rhythm as the universal motion present in all things, from the waves of the sea to the rhythms at work in the human body. The concern for rhythm led to the emergence of 'rhythmics,' an attempt to circumscribe a whole new disciplinary field which would encompass all manifestations of rhythm—visual as well as auditory, physical as well as mechanical—in a project that was holistic and synaesthetic. The attempt foundered, however, as 'its amorphousness as a concept was its most significant, productive and creative feature.'<sup>26</sup> For all its shortcomings, the interest in rhythm was symptomatic of the times, involving psychologists and philosophers, 'rhythm-scientists' as well as artists. Testifying to the vogue of rhythmics was the German psychologist Karl Bücher's 1896 *Arbeit un Rhythmus*. In that book, he compares the 'organic' rhythms of traditional societies, the communal rhythms of agrarian work, elaborated in collective hand-clapping and dances, on the one hand, and the inhuman rhythms imposed on human bodies by the machines of the industrial age.<sup>27</sup>

The tension between the prospect of mechanic dehumanisation and the newly discovered ability to record the human voice is played out in *Ulysses*, when Bloom considers the possibility to take aural photographs of people before they die in order to keep alive their memory among the living, by means of a gramophone:

Besides how could you remember everybody? Eyes, walk, voice. Well, the voice, yes: gramophone. Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it

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<sup>24</sup>D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*. 1920. London: Penguin, 1995, pp. 226–27.

<sup>25</sup>Laura Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails: Sound and Locomotion'. In: *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film*. Ed. by Julian Murphet et al. Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 193–210, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup>Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', pp. 194–195.

<sup>27</sup>Marcus, 'The Rhythm of the Rails', p. 200.

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in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old greatgrandfather. Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseeagain hellohello amawf krpthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. Otherwise you couldn't remember the face after fifteen years, say. (*U*, 6.962)

The unpronounceable onomatopoeias 'Kraahraark' and 'krpthsth' testify to the challenges posed to written literature by the new medium of sound recording, able to operate at a level distinct from lexical units, and to record nuances imperceptible to alphabetic notation. The text's gesturing towards orality can therefore be understood in relation to the crisis of the printed word in the early twentieth century. With the appearance of sound-recording devices such as the phonograph, literature lost 'the monopoly on sonic recording it had enjoyed for millenia.'<sup>28</sup> The archaic *epos* recovered and preserved by techniques of sound-recording is central to the structure of *Omeros*. Throughout the poem, Walcott lavishes metaphors which evoke the communal nature of a transindividual rhythm, which I propose to read as an investment in orality, whereby the eminently literary text that is *Omeros* gestures towards the alternative realm of epic utterance.

### 3.3 World-Texts and Uneven Development

A brief survey of critical responses to *Ulysses* as well as *Omeros* will suffice to show that defining their respective genres has always been contentious. It is a truism that all literary works draw on multiple codes, conventions, resources, and therefore never quite fit the Procrustean bed of normative generic taxonomy, which they modify and reconfigure at every turn. Genres themselves are historical formations, in a constant process of redefinition. Yet I want to argue that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* function in ways that upset the very notion of genre to such an extraordinary extent, precisely because they reengage with archaic forms of orality, with rhythm as 'the most archaic part of language.'<sup>29</sup>

To apprehend the issue of genre, I intend to draw on the theoretical insights of Fredric Jameson and Franco Moretti, because both are sensitive to the interrelations

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<sup>28</sup>Julian Murphet et al., 'Introduction: Sounding Modernism 1890-1950'. In: *Sounding Modernism: Rhythm and Sonic Mediation in Modern Literature and Film*. Ed. by Julian Murphet et al. Edinburgh University Press, 2017, pp. 1-15, pp. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup>Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme*, p. 100, my translation.

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between literary genre and combined and uneven development. Moretti states that his approach combines formalism and sociology; it is predicated on the fact that ‘the social aspect of literature resides *in its form*, and that form develops according to its own laws,’ on the one hand, and that ‘literature *follows* great social changes—that it always comes after. To come after, however, does not mean to repeat (“reflect”) what already exists, but the exact opposite: to *resolve* the problems set by history.’<sup>30</sup> In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson articulates a similar concern with

the mediatory function of the notion of a genre, which allows the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life.<sup>31</sup>

He goes on to assert that

in its emergent, strong form a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, that form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When such forms are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form.<sup>32</sup>

Jameson’s argument is predicated on the notion of the text as ‘a synchronic unity of structurally contradictory or heterogeneous elements, generic patterns and discourses’—in other words, uneven development, or Ernst Bloch’s *Ungleichzeitigkeit*—which leads him to say that ‘properly used, genre theory must always in one way or another project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands.’<sup>33</sup> Such tension is indeed at the heart of my attempt to approach the genres of *Ulysses* and *Omeros*.

In the case of *Omeros*, the range of generic labels applied by critics is disconcerting. To begin with, Walcott himself has expressed doubts about the very notion of genre. In 1990, as Walcott had ‘nearly finished’ the poem, he was asked whether *Omeros* was indeed an epic. He replied somewhat tentatively: ‘Yes. I would think that the design of it, yes.’ However, no sooner is the designation accepted, than some qualification is

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<sup>30</sup>Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 6, emphasis in the original.

<sup>31</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 92.

<sup>32</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 127.

<sup>33</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 128.

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needed: 'It's not like one long poem with a hero. In an epic, you presume that there is no narrator, but I am in this, coming in and out.'<sup>34</sup> In 1992, Walcott was yet more cautious about labelling *Omeros* as an epic, stressing once again the problematic figure of the intradiegetic narrator:

It's long. I don't know. [...] they've been using the word 'epic' a lot. I just reread it again, and I suppose in terms of the scale of it—as an undertaking—it's large and does cover a lot of geographic elements, historical ground. [...] I think the reason why I hesitate about calling it that is I think any work in which the narrator is almost central is not really an epic. It's not like a heroic epic.<sup>35</sup>

He then notes the 'cinematic' qualities of the poem, almost like a film script, before comparing it to a mural, only to conclude by emphasising its novelistic qualities:

In a large poem though, the writing is like a novel, and as in a novel, everything is in there—geographic description, the weather, the characters, and the action, and so on. So, what was exhilarating was to widen yourself to such an extent that you could just bring in everything that you wanted to do.<sup>36</sup>

Although he ultimately denies that *Omeros* is a novel, he still states that his aim was to retrieve for poetry a wider scope than the one to which it had been confined, that of 'small, personal, diaristic considerations.'<sup>37</sup> He is concerned with recovering the narrative sweep of epic for poetry, in an apparent effort to go back to the origins of the genre, cancelling the very distinction between poetry and novel: 'the novel used to be an epic poem.'<sup>38</sup> The novel, then, is defined as the genre which allows one to 'bring in everything [one wants to],' a sort of generic black hole which will readily incorporate any subject matter, high or low, as well as a host of other more conventional genres. Thus, Walcott begins to flout the distinction between poetry and prose in his discussion of *Omeros*.

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<sup>34</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 174.

<sup>35</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 189.

<sup>36</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 190.

<sup>37</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 191.

<sup>38</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 191.

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### 3.3.1 *Ulysses* and the End of the Novel

In this respect, the problems raised by *Omeros* as an unidentified generic object rehearse the critical discussion raised by the publishing of *Ulysses*. Before returning to the wide range of critical assessments of *Omeros*, it is relevant to review some of the more significant responses to Joyce's novel. Already in 1923, T. S. Eliot reflected on the problematic nature of the genre of *Ulysses*:

I am not begging the question in calling *Ulysses* a 'novel'; and if you call it an epic it will not matter. If it is not a novel, that is because the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter. [...] The novel ended with Flaubert and with James.<sup>39</sup>

He went on to attribute the 'formlessness' of *Ulysses* to the fact that Joyce was "'in advance" of [his] time' in registering the demise of the novelistic form.<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps odd that Eliot's chronology of the novel should coincide with that of Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel*: like the conservative Eliot, although from a Marxist standpoint, Lukács attributes the rise and fall of the novel to socio-historical causes.<sup>41</sup> In his account, Flaubert is the first and exemplary figure of bourgeois literary decadence, 'the initiator of the inhuman in modern literature.'<sup>42</sup> The progressive impetus of the rising bourgeoisie had in its day produced the likes of Walter Scott or Honoré de Balzac, the great chroniclers of a history whose unfolding was grasped as a struggle between contending social classes. However, after the revolutions of 1848, the bourgeoisie became more and more conservative, threatened by the specter of its own downfall in the shape of proletarian upheavals. Thus, Lukács argues, bourgeois writers could no longer afford to draw a truthful picture of a social reality from which their class was bound to be wiped away. Neither able nor willing any longer to address the real forces at work in human society, bourgeois writers turned away from the historical truths unpalatable to their class, thus spelling the decline of realism.

After Flaubert, then, the novel can no longer elucidate the coherence of historical processes. As a consequence of social delusion or hypocrisy, narrative itself begins

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<sup>39</sup>Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', pp. 482–3.

<sup>40</sup>Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', p. 483.

<sup>41</sup>Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*. 1937. London: Merlin Press, 1989.

<sup>42</sup>Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 194.

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to disintegrate, yielding nothing more than ‘a collection of episodes’ from which the dynamic thrust of history has disappeared.<sup>43</sup> In Lukács’s account, the age of imperialism marks the complete disintegration of realism, which manifests itself in two complementary ways: on the one hand, history appears to be ultimately unknowable—Eliot’s ‘immense panorama of futility and anarchy’—<sup>44</sup> while on the other hand, when history is captured at all, it is only in the shape of ‘isolated facts, torn from their proper context’, reported with excruciating accuracy.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when Eliot takes stock of the demise of the novelistic form perfected by Joyce, he is implicitly equating the novel as a genre with the kind of realism praised by Lukács.<sup>46</sup> Virginia Woolf reports another comment Eliot made on *Ulysses* as a nihilistic gesture:

The book would be a landmark because it destroyed the whole of the nineteenth century. It left Joyce himself with nothing to write another book on. It showed up the futility of all the English styles.<sup>47</sup>

Eliot’s impression was not idiosyncratic. Brian Penton, a contemporary reviewer, remarked in 1929, that with *Ulysses*, Joyce ‘has conclusively reduced all the pretensions of the realistic novel to absurdity.’<sup>48</sup> The overwhelming, encyclopaedic nature of the text, its pathological ability to relate the most insignificant minutiae occurring on an uneventful day, was perceived as a death sentence on the claims of realism.

Stefan Zweig’s reaction to *Ulysses*, at once coruscating and sympathetic in its bewilderment, registers a similar sense of generic breakdown. After warning potential readers about the sheer weight of the volume—the German translation took up one thousand and five hundred pages—Zweig addresses the undecidable quality of the work in question:

A novel? No, certainly not: a witches’ Sabbath of the spirit, a gigantic ‘Capriccio,’ a phenomenal cerebral *Walpurgisnacht*. A film of psychic situations, buzzing and flitting in ‘Espresstempo’, [...] an orgy of psychology,

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<sup>43</sup>Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 206.

<sup>44</sup>Eliot, ‘*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth’, p. 483.

<sup>45</sup>Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 251.

<sup>46</sup>On the conflation between the novel and realism as such, see Fredric Jameson in Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013, pp. 3–5.

<sup>47</sup>Virginia Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 1953. Ed. by Leonard Woolf. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1982, p. 49.

<sup>48</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 481.

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with a new technical slow moving camera which analyses each movement and emotion down to their atoms.<sup>49</sup>

The perceived cinematic quality of the narrative, which also recalls the precision of the microscope, signals a step beyond realism, into a realm where the indiscriminate profusion of details ultimately annihilates the coherence of the overall picture, a sort of hyperrealism collapsing under its own weight. Zweig concludes his review by stating that *Ulysses* resembles a meteor, a one-off experiment that will ‘remain like an erratic bloc’ in the history of literature:

every comparison for this solitary experiment goes completely amiss. The inner isolation of James Joyce bears no connection to anything previous. It does not match anything and will therein have no successor.<sup>50</sup>

The impression is that *Ulysses* is a *hapax*, including all genres and yet irreducible to any, an impression echoed by Ernst Curtius in the same year when he asked ‘To which genre shall we ascribe *Ulysses*? The book is a chronicle [...]—novel—drama—epos—satire—parody—summa.’<sup>51</sup> In his 1945 article ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature,’ Joseph Frank argued that *Ulysses* functions much like an imagist poem.<sup>52</sup> It does away with sequentiality and the usual attributes of narrative linearity; instead, it functions like a Poundian image, ‘that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.’<sup>53</sup> The instantaneous collision of disparate elements means that the reader ought to read the book—twice—so as to grasp the totality of Dublin, which emerges out of the fragments and allusions making up the text. If modernist poetry provides the protocol for reading *Ulysses*, it is indeed the sign that narrative has undergone a major transformation.

It appears that *Ulysses* was perceived to transcend the confines of the novel as it was then known. Countless more critics have come up against the baffling task of defining *Ulysses*. Karen Lawrence has written about the shift from a rather traditional novelistic narrative in the early chapters to the more experimental sections where voices, styles, and factual details proliferate beyond all expectations, so that ‘part way through *Ulysses* we witness the breakdown of the novel as a form and the creation of an encyclopedia

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<sup>49</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 444.

<sup>50</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 446.

<sup>51</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 469.

<sup>52</sup>Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’. In: *The Sewanee Review* 53.2 (Spring 1945), pp. 221–240, pp. 233–235.

<sup>53</sup>Ezra Pound, ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’. In: *Poetry* 1.6 (March 1913), pp. 200–206, p. 200.

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of narrative choices.’<sup>54</sup> In the later episodes of *Ulysses*, she argues, *parody* undermines the very notion of style, signalling the disintegration not just of the narrative but of the authorial figure itself. For Derek Attridge, ‘we might as well call [*Ulysses*] a novel, although it could equally be called an antinovel,’<sup>55</sup> a phrase also endorsed by Terry Eagleton, who has called *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* ‘monstrous, unreadable, anti-novels.’<sup>56</sup> The celebrated qualities of the realist novel have been taken to their extreme limits, to the point where the excessive accuracy and comprehensiveness of ‘this chaffering allincluding most farraginous chronicle’ become simply unmanageable.

More recently, Declan Kiberd has written that *Ulysses* ‘is not a novel in any meaningful “English” sense of that term,’ evolving somewhere ‘in the interstices’ between the story, the anecdote, and the full-fledged novel.<sup>57</sup> Rather than a symptom of the novel’s obsolescence, however, Kiberd considers *Ulysses* as a transitional stage, owing to the belated rise of an Irish bourgeoisie:

If the epic is the genre of the ancient world, and the novel that of the bourgeoisie, then it is in the troubled transition period between these orders that the forms of art go into meltdown and a radical newness becomes possible.<sup>58</sup>

In this reading, Joyce is no longer the arch-decadent, voicing the death rattle of a doomed bourgeoisie, as in Lukács; rather, the protean, transitional nature of *Ulysses* is a reflection of Ireland’s uneven development, a kaleidoscopic amalgamation of distinct realities and perspectives.

### **Walcott and the Poem of *Ulysses***

It is interesting to note that Walcott himself has addressed the problematic nature of *Ulysses*, in terms that are remarkably consistent. Out of the various pronouncements he has made on the subject, there emerges one constant: *Ulysses* confounds the distinction between prose and poetry. In his essay entitled ‘A Letter to Chamoiseau,’ he has likened Joyce’s novel to Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, calling it ‘a large prose-poem

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<sup>54</sup>Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>Derek Attridge, ‘Introduction’. In: *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Casebook*. Ed. by Derek Attridge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 3–16, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup>Eagleton, *The English Novel*, p. 295.

<sup>57</sup>Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009, pp. 33–34.

<sup>58</sup>Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us*, p. 34.



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that devours the structure of narrative fiction by its ruminative monologues.<sup>59</sup> *Texaco* is indeed a protean novel, the exuberant tale of Martinique from the time of slavery to the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup> Consisting largely of interviews allegedly recorded by an urban planner, it gives voice to a woman descended from slaves, who remembers the anarchistic growth of a shantytown on the outskirts of Fort-de-France. The novel takes great pains to present the interviews as official records, with references to the urban planner's notebooks now supposedly stored at the Bibliothèque Schœlcher. This administrative punctiliousness contrasts with the unstoppable outpouring of oral memory of Marie-Sophie Laborieux, the interviewee, in a manner which recalls Joyce's combination of factual accuracy and narrative extravagance. Even more significant, however, is the fact that Chamoiseau's prose is known for its lavish use of the alexandrine, the canonical twelve-syllable line of French poetry, which he has called his 'internal music.'<sup>61</sup> This is consistent with Walcott's appreciation of the prosodic qualities of prose writing:

*Ulysses* remains a major twentieth-century poem because Joyce was a poet, he wrote like a poet. It's rather amazing that the major novel of our time and, perhaps, a major poem of our time should be *Ulysses*. You can take lines out of *Ulysses* that scan as poetry. A page of Joyce would be enough to make many a poet's career.<sup>62</sup>

He has also argued that *Ulysses* is a typical epic, since the genre is characterised by its 'natural width':

*Ulysses* is an epic because it breathes. It's an urban epic, which is remarkable in a small city. It's a wonderful epic in the sense that the subject is lyrical and not heroic. The subject is a matter of a reflective man, not a man of action, but a sort of wandering Jew. That's the width of that epic, that Bloom is the wandering Jew.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Derek Walcott, *What the Twilight Says: Essays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 219.

<sup>60</sup>Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

<sup>61</sup>Wendy Knepper, *Patrick Chamoiseau: A Critical Introduction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup>Walcott, 'Reflections on *Omeros*', p. 231. Joyce's friend Italo Svevo declared that 'after reading *Ulysses* there can be no doubt that his nose is not very good, but his ear is that of a poet and musician. I know that when Joyce has written a page of prose he thinks that he has paralleled some page of music that he delights in.' Italo Svevo, *James Joyce*. 1927. City Lights Books, pages unnumbered.

<sup>63</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 161.

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Walcott emphasises again and again the unheroic quality of *Ulysses*, a feature shared with his own poem. Neither grand nor bellicose, relatively uneventful, it challenges the values traditionally associated with the epic genre. Walcott's recognition that *Ulysses* 'breathes' resonates with his valuation of rhythm and orality: it is as if the narrative springs from a human breast, its cadence adapted to a live performance, like those studied by Nagy and Attridge. Throughout, Walcott insists that *Ulysses* verges on poetry. He states his case by emphasising the oral aspects of the novel: the 'breathing' of the text, and his own inclination to 'scan' sentences like verse.

### 3.3.2 The Genres of *Omeros*

Readers and critics have been no less perplexed by the nature of *Omeros*. In his contribution to Stewart Brown's *The Art of Derek Walcott*, John Figueroa refers to *Omeros* as 'a sort of novelistic structure of a mosaic kind,' and repeats that it is 'much more a novel than an epic.'<sup>64</sup> Robert Hamner has called it an 'epic of the dispossessed,' capturing the tension at the heart of Walcott's project.<sup>65</sup> Maria-Cristina Fumagalli has called it 'an epic of the self,' depicting a 'spiritual journey' in the manner of Dante.<sup>66</sup> Katherine Burkitt writes that '*Omeros* resists categorization as an epic, although the resonance of the form is always evident.'<sup>67</sup> She proposes a number of alternative terms, 'post-epic' as well as verse-novel,<sup>68</sup> and even 'narrative tapestry.'<sup>69</sup> She argues for the term post-epic, on the grounds that *Omeros*, as well as numerous recent works by figures such as Bernadine Evaristo or Fred D'Aguiar 'operate in the convention of epic whilst also questioning its role in the contemporary world. [...] They locate themselves ambivalently on the cusp of genres [...] at a tangent to that tradition,' centrally concerned with the writing of history and mythology, engaged in a self-reflexive appraisal of the genre itself.<sup>70</sup> More specifically, they question the stereotypical Bakhtinian definition of the epic as a 'completed' genre, celebrating a monologic, authoritative version of the past. Lance Callahan has attempted to negotiate the undecidable nature of Walcott's

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<sup>64</sup>Figueroa, '*Omeros*', pp. 193, 197.

<sup>65</sup>Hamner, *Epic of the Dispossessed*.

<sup>66</sup>Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular*, p. 196.

<sup>67</sup>Katherine Burkitt, 'Imperial Reflections: the Post-Colonial Verse-Novel as Post-Epic'. In: *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*. Ed. by Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Chap. 9, pp. 157–169, p. 158.

<sup>68</sup>Burkitt, 'Imperial Reflections: the Post-Colonial Verse-Novel as Post-Epic', pp. 157–158.

<sup>69</sup>Burkitt, 'Imperial Reflections: the Post-Colonial Verse-Novel as Post-Epic', p. 163.

<sup>70</sup>Burkitt, 'Imperial Reflections: the Post-Colonial Verse-Novel as Post-Epic', p. 159.

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(anti-)epic in deconstructive terms, stating that ‘*Omeros* can be neither epic nor anti-epic, neither analog nor reversal of tradition, but must attempt to exploit the semantic void that separates these and other binary pairings.’<sup>71</sup> Joseph Farrell suggests a more dialectical understanding between *Omeros* and epic; for him, Walcott foregrounds precisely the genre’s ‘capacity to reinvent itself through inversion, opposition to epic predecessors, and ironic self reflexion.’<sup>72</sup> *Omeros*, then, expands our definition of the epic, in a way that invites us to grasp the simultaneous combination of various genres: *Omeros* ‘is not epic or novel, but only epic and novel.’<sup>73</sup>

Franco Moretti includes *Ulysses* in his list of works that baffle generic categories, alongside Goethe’s *Faust*, Pound’s *Cantos*, or Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Observing that no single label easily fits those disconcerting texts, Moretti asks why they should be treated as ‘one-off cases, oddities, anomalies,’ and proposes instead that they constitute a category of their own. He designates it alternatively as that of ‘modern epic,’ or ‘world text.’<sup>74</sup> To that list, we may now add *Omeros*.

### 3.3.3 Walcott on the Primacy of Rhythm

The primacy of rhythm is a constant factor in Walcott’s pronouncements on his own poetic practice. When he relates the genesis of his poem ‘The Schooner *Flight*’ (published in his 1979 collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom*), Walcott explains that he intended the poem as a translation of Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, the fourteenth century narrative poem. Yet Walcott did not attempt to translate the plot or story; rather, the impetus came from the rhythm of the Middle English prologue:

In a somer sesun whon softe was þe sonne  
I schop me in-to a schroud A scheep as I were  
In Habite of an Hermite un-holy of werkes  
Wende I wyden in þis world wondres to here<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Lance Callahan, *In the Shadows of Divine Perfection: Derek Walcott’s Omeros*. Ed. by William Cain. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 61.

<sup>72</sup>Joseph Farrell, ‘Walcott’s *Omeros*: The Classical Epic in a Postmodern World’. In: *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World: The Poetics of Community*. Ed. by Suzanne Wofford et al. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 270–300, p. 283.

<sup>73</sup>Farrell, ‘Walcott’s *Omeros*’, p. 287.

<sup>74</sup>Moretti, *Modern Epic*, pp. 1–4.

<sup>75</sup>William Langland, *The vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*. 1393. URL: <http://name.umd.umich.edu/AJT8124.0001.001> (visited on 20/06/2022).

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The four-beat alliterative verse of medieval poetry resonates powerfully in the opening lines of ‘The Schooner *Flight*’:

In idle August, while the sea soft,  
and leaves of brown islands stick to the rim  
of this Caribbean, I blow out the light  
by the dreamless face of Maria Concepcion  
to ship as a seaman on the schooner *Flight*. (PDW, 237)

It is true that the two poems are also linked thematically, as both relate a speaker’s departure into the wide world. Yet the similarities are aural, first and foremost. Although Walcott does not adhere strictly to the distribution of alliterations across each line, and even toys with the pentameter in the second line, he nonetheless follows a loose four-beat cadence which does recall Langland. What is significant is that his account of the poem’s genesis reverses the conventional primacy of content over form—the latter being the sole object of the translation, the former usually getting ‘lost’ in the process. Walcott gives pride of place to the rhythm of the poem: ‘The test of a translation, I think, is *tone*, not even accuracy, or [else it would be] a rhythmic type of accuracy.’<sup>76</sup> Walcott’s valuation of tone is couched in the same terms as Henri Meschonnic’s important work on rhythm. For Meschonnic, rhythm is the most subjective component in writing. Rhythm, he argues, is irreducible to verbal elements, and must be understood instead as analogous to the human voice; an idiosyncratic signature functioning at a level distinct from lexical units, fully able to convey nuances running beneath the surface of articulated language and verbal signs. In rhythm, he argues, ‘you hear not sound, but subject [...]. For the mode of signifying lies predominantly—and a lot more so than in the meanings of words—in rhythm, the way language is in the body.’<sup>77</sup> Rhythm, in other words, transcends semiotics, and manifests a bodily presence within language, ‘a gesturing of meaning’ which recalls the physical realm of oral delivery and performance.<sup>78</sup> This privileging of tone, of rhythmic accuracy, recurs in Walcott’s accounts of *Omeros*, and

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<sup>76</sup>Derek Walcott and E. A. Markham, ‘Derek Walcott and E A. Markham Read and Talk’. In: *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 28.2 (2006), pp. 95–107, p. 103, emphasis in the original.

<sup>77</sup>‘Parce que dans le rythme, au sens où je le dis, on n’entend pas du son, mais du sujet. [...] Parce que le mode de signifier, beaucoup plus que le sens des mots, est dans le rythme, comme le langage est dans le corps, ce que l’écriture inverse, en mettant le corps dans le langage.’ Henri Meschonnic, *Poétique du traduire*. Lagrasse: Verdier, 1999, pp. 28–29, my translation.

<sup>78</sup>Meschonnic, *Ethics and Politics of Translating*, p. 64. On the bodily dimension of rhythm, see also Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme*, p. 73.

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may explain why he was so hesitant about the reductive label of ‘epic.’<sup>79</sup>

The same urge to translate a rhythm has indeed left a trace in the opening of *Omeros*. In 1968, Walcott attempted to translate Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, but never completed the translation, of which only unpublished fragments subsist. Giuseppe Sofo has shown that Walcott took great pains to convey the litany of Césaire’s ‘*Au bout du petit matin*,’ a formula repeated no less than twenty times in the opening pages of the poem.<sup>80</sup> Sofo notes that Walcott opted for a plurality of translations, rather than repeating the same formula. Walcott’s translations of ‘*au bout du petit matin*’ range from ‘At daybreak’s end’ to ‘At foreday morning’ and ‘At dawn’s end’ or ‘At dawn’s edge,’ and other propositions.<sup>81</sup> Walcott himself has discussed the experience of translating Césaire, and stressed the aural, rhythmic quality of the task.<sup>82</sup> What is most significant, however, is that some of the formulas chosen to translate Césaire found their way into the early stages of the composition of *Omeros*. Before settling for ‘This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes’ (*O*, 1.1), the opening words of the poem pronounced by Philoctete, Walcott actually considered variants which recall his engagement with Césaire, such as ‘This was how, *once day break*, we chop down them canoes’ or ‘This is how, *foreday morning*, we make them canoes.’<sup>83</sup> This is not only a testimony to Césaire’s life-long influence on Walcott, but also another demonstration of the way in which *Omeros* is a translational, derivative text, informed not just by intertextual memories but by the lingering presence of orality.

What is striking is that in spite of the uncertainties surrounding the proper designation for *Omeros*, in virtually all discussions of the poem’s genre, Walcott keeps returning to rhythm as the matrix from which the poem emerged. Thus, he invokes Dante and Homer to characterise the form of the poem as ‘roughly hexametrical with a terza rima form. It’s like a combination of a Homeric line and a Dantesque design.’<sup>84</sup> In a later interview on *Omeros*, Walcott balances the merits of the pentameter and hexameter, preferring the latter because it allows him more space for ‘the prose—the narrative

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<sup>79</sup>Walcott explains that the language in this poem is ‘tonally’ Trinidadian rather than St Lucian, even though the dialect is not an accurate rendition of Trinidadian speech. See the interview conducted by Maria Cristina Fumagalli in Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular*, p. 279.

<sup>80</sup>Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*. 1939. In: *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire: Bilingual Edition*. Trans. by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshelman. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017, pp. 3–62.

<sup>81</sup>Sofo, ‘Creolizing Translation’, pp. 266–71.

<sup>82</sup>Walcott and Markham, ‘Derek Walcott and E A. Markham Read and Talk’, pp. 104–105.

<sup>83</sup>Sofo, ‘Creolizing Translation’, p. 169, my emphasis.

<sup>84</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 174.

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experience in the poem,’ as if to distance himself from the more sonorous pentametrical tradition in English literature. In a 2001 interview, he reiterates:

The hexametric meter gives you more flexibility and gives you more of a prosaic width. In fact I just got a review from the *New York Times* saying that all my work is really rhymed prose. For me that’s the greatest compliment I can be paid.<sup>85</sup>

It may seem paradoxical that Walcott, who is a staunch advocate of poetic apprenticeship and a ruthless critic of *laissez-faire* in matters of prosody and versification, should be so eager to emulate the qualities of narrative prose. Yet the contradiction is only apparent. Throughout *Omeros*, Walcott’s verse remains skillfully crafted.<sup>86</sup> The appeal of the prosaic suggests that the opposition between prose and verse is not absolute. While Walcott admires the ‘poetic’ qualities of Joyce’s prose, he aspires to make his own verse as ‘prosaic’ as possible. This amounts not only to a recognition that each can approximate the other, but that the poet must indeed strive to attain that liminal state where they become indistinguishable.

In yet another interview, Walcott gives an alternative version of the genesis of *Omeros*. He remembers beginning writing in blank verse, ‘without knowing what [he] was doing,’ before the *terza rima* scheme as it were imposed itself. He goes on to discuss the choice of the metre:

I thought that the—and this is very technical, but it may be of interest—the usual meter for heroic or narrative verse in English is pentametrical. But the echo of the pentameter, it seems to me, it’s felt to be a little conventional and a little pre-determined. And, of course—I think—even if you add rhyme to that, you have a risk of either quatrains or couplets.

So, I preferred to use a longer line, a hexametrical line. Because I felt that **the prose—the narrative experience in the poem**—would’ve had less of a sort of an epic echo if it were in hexameter as opposed to if it were in pentameter—in which it would already begin to certainly have echoes of Milton, or Tennyson—something Victorian—in terms of the measure of it. **And I don’t think that the pentameter would’ve allowed me the kind of**

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<sup>85</sup>José María Pérez Fernández, ‘An Interview with Derek Walcott’. In: *Approaches to the Poetics of Derek Walcott*. Ed. by José Luis Martínez-Dueñas Espejo and José María Pérez Fernández. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001, pp. 169–181, p. 179.

<sup>86</sup>The only departure from *terza rima* and hexameter occurs in Chapter 33.3 when the poem abruptly shifts to tetrametric rhyming couplets.

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**prosaic space that I wanted for the action of the narration—the prose element in it.** I think that in the pentametrical measure ordinary things tend to get over-emphasized by the beat—I think. Whereas here there is more flexibility, more caesuras. You can relax, you can pick up—accelerate as you wish.

And then the rhyme design, the terza-rima design. It's almost a combination or a Homeric meter with... Although I don't know Greek. But I'm not sure that it's fair to Homer to do him in pentameter. I don't know Greek, but I feel that his is a much more relaxed line; relaxed, but at the same time giving you more space for action than the pentameter—which announces itself as being important, in a sense. And it's very difficult to navigate banality in the pentameter.<sup>87</sup>

Rhythmic considerations are again preeminent here. It is interesting to note that they are informed by an acute sense of tradition; the pentameter is not assessed purely on its intrinsic qualities as a five-beat line, but as the metre of Milton and Tennyson, carrying the weight of a heroic tradition. By contrast, the hexameter is not only far less canonical to an English ear, but closer to prose, and therefore better suited to accommodate the 'prosaic space' in which the action may unravel.

To come back to the discussion of epic, Sampietro then asks if '*Omeros* is not, then, the great Caribbean epic.' Walcott answers that he never intended to 'redeem history', but merely to 'celebrate the diurnal, day-to-day heroism of people':

And that's why I resist so much the idea of this poem as being epic in its undertaking. It has elements of epic. It has widths. It has a variety of subjects, and—I suppose—you can say it has heroes, in a way. But there is not a sort of label outside that says: I will now undertake to—you know—to justify, or condemn, or redeem history.<sup>88</sup>

The generic designation of *Omeros* is therefore endlessly refined and complicated by Walcott himself. His hesitations and pauses in Sampietro's interview are indices to Walcott's own perplexity, as though he were trying to come to terms with an unidentified literary object. His reluctance about the epic designation stems from a refusal to cast *Omeros* as a work of either revenge or redemption. This positioning is consistent with Walcott's longstanding disavowal of literary recrimination. In 'The Muse of History,' he attacks the 'epic poets,' by which he means the African revivalists or pastoralists,

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<sup>87</sup>Derek Walcott and Luigi Sampietro, *Derek Walcott on Omeros: An Interview*. URL: <http://users.unimi.it/caribana/OnOmeros.html> (visited on 01/09/2021), my emphasis in bold.

<sup>88</sup>Walcott and Sampietro, *Derek Walcott on Omeros*.

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whose nostalgic undertakings are tainted with a masochistic complacency (*WTS*, 44). By contrast, he concludes his critique with the rejoinder that ‘the epic poem is not a literary project. It is already written; it was written in the mouths of the tribe, a tribe which had courageously yielded its history’ (45). He goes on to praise ‘the epic poetry of the work song and the early blues,’ imbued with ‘the willing of spiritual victory,’ and finds lingering traces of a communal, unwritten epic, in the form of folk legends (46–48). In *Omeros*, indeed, while the attempt to rewrite Homer’s stories is disavowed, the real ‘epical splendour’ is located in the anonymous, collective strength of the Middle Passage survivors (28.1).

Walcott’s discussion of the genre of *Omeros* sheds light on the precarious divide between prose and poetry, a theme which is itself a long-standing *topos* of criticism. Walt Whitman had already remarked in ‘Ventures, on an Old Theme’ that ‘the time has arrived to essentially break down the barriers of form between prose and poetry.’ He called for a poetry no longer constrained by ‘arbitrary and rhyming metre,’ yet ‘subtly and necessarily always rhythmic,’ and able to soar ‘to the freer, vast, diviner heaven of prose.’<sup>89</sup> In similar fashion, although with very different political overtones, Charles Baudelaire had envisioned ‘the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm or rhyme, supple enough and striking enough to suit lyrical movements of the soul, undulations of reverie, the flip-flops of consciousness.’<sup>90</sup>

The roots of this quest for a prosaic verse can be retraced further still, to the aesthetic programme of early Romanticism. In the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth had vindicated the use of ‘a selection of language really used by men,’ praising the ‘simple and unelaborated expressions’ of ‘low and rustic life.’<sup>91</sup> Rejecting the stilted conventionality of the poetry then in vogue, he professed to emulate the simplicity of prose—while adhering ‘to the strict laws of metre’—arguing that

not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose, when prose is well written.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Walt Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1982, pp. 1056–7.

<sup>90</sup>Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen: Little Poems in Prose*. 1869. Trans. by Keith Waldrop. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup>William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 96–97.

<sup>92</sup>Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802*, p. 101.



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Although he excepts metre from the discussion, and values prose chiefly for its straightforward vocabulary, Wordsworth inaugurates the search for a diction that is closer to ‘ordinary speech,’ as opposed to the lifeless decorum of poetic conventions. The anti-authoritarian, populist strain in Wordsworth’s argumentation can be seen to anticipate the radical, democratic ethos of Whitman, as well as the libertarian avant-gardism of modernist experiments, of which ‘free verse’ is the most spectacular outgrowth. The antinomies of prosaic verse and poetic prose offer a wide range of possibilities, which have been put to various uses as the samples of Wordsworth, Whitman, and Baudelaire illustrate.

Although Walcott upholds the necessity of metre and rhyme, he rehearses similar issues. Walcott is working towards the qualities of prose *from within* the constraints of metre and rhyme. His concern is not so much to convey the ‘undulations of reverie’ as to repurpose metrical verse towards a communal experience of narration. In this sense, his aspiration is indeed epic rather than lyrical. His main object is story-telling, with a concern for the potential audience or listeners. While oral performance relied on the simultaneous presence, and even intimacy, of singer and audience, literacy sunders the spheres of production and consumption, severing the writer from their potential readers. The alienation of the modern writer is captured by Stephen when he wonders, ‘who ever anywhere will read these written words?’ (*U*, 3.414).

I would argue that Walcott’s desire to reconcile the qualities of prose and poetry bespeaks a nostalgic, or utopian yearning for a dispensation which would collapse the binary opposition altogether. George Saintsbury, whose *A History of English Prose Rhythm* was the main source of inspiration for Joyce’s ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ actually remarked that in Old English literature, prose and verse were so similar as to be virtually indistinguishable: ‘there is not metre in the poetry, and there is a very fair amount of rhythm in the prose.’<sup>93</sup> For Walcott, the search for a condition beyond prose and verse also involves an attempt to overcome the divide between the oral and the written: ‘There is no difference in the Caribbean between oral and written. No matter what the anthologists and the anthropologists may say, they are the same thing. Nor are there two languages; there’s only one, one melody.’<sup>94</sup> Walcott not only claims that he wants to recover lost ground for poetry, whose narrative ingredient has been lost to prose, but

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<sup>93</sup>George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prose Rhythm*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1912, pp. 13–14.

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, p. 138.

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effectively denies the relevance of the print/speech distinction.<sup>95</sup>

As these statements amply demonstrate, Walcott's treatment of the epic mode is consistently critical. 'One aspect of the epic is presumptuousness,' the narrator reflects in an early version of *Omeros*, which did not find its way into the printed text.<sup>96</sup> While he aims to revive the narrative ambition which sustained the great, canonical epics, inherited from oral story-telling, he is also wary of the political agenda that lies behind modern iterations of the genre. Line Henriksen refers to this malaise as 'epic anxiety,' a condition which stems from the prestigious pedigree of the epic genre and its place in the literary canon.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.4 'Form as a Struggle'

The preceding remarks should suffice to discourage any attempt to place *Ulysses* and *Omeros* at any single point on a map of literary genres. For one thing, if such a map existed, it would surely look very different from any modern geographical map, with neatly drawn boundaries separating sovereign nation-states. More likely, it would consist mostly in contested areas, with no official language or currency, ambivalent contact zones, all intersecting and overlapping, interfering with each other in complex ways. Indeed, as Stephen Owen suggests, 'viewed historically, genre looks less like a map than a long series of family lineages, legislating endogamy but crisscrossed by wondrous migrations, mutations, and miscegenations.'<sup>98</sup> The complications that spring from any discussion of genre in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* can only be resolved, I believe, by placing these works in a world-system shaped by combined and uneven development. In different ways, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* adopt a frame of reference which exceeds that of the nation-state, encoding the experience of globality on multiple scales—the restless migrations from the Caribbean to Africa, Europe, and North America, in *Omeros*, or the repercussions of global events at the local level in *Ulysses*—but, most of all, registering a moment when the alleged modernisation of the whole world has not eradicated 'archaic' forms, which still coexist more or less awkwardly with the latest word in multinational

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<sup>95</sup>On the reactivation of non-Western, oral forms of epic at work in *Omeros* see also Farrell, 'Walcott's *Omeros*'.

<sup>96</sup>Derek Walcott, 'Omeros'. Galley proofs. Box 20 Folder 3. Derek Walcott Collection, 1989.

<sup>97</sup>Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety: Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, pp. 121–125. This issue is discussed the present work in Chapter 1.1, p. 52.

<sup>98</sup>Owen, 'Genres in Motion', p. 1392.

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capital.

In a world of generalised relations and interdependence, it is not surprising that genres should collide and mingle with ever greater intensity. That literary genres are transitional and dynamic was already known to the Russian Formalists. In the 1920s, Yury Tynyanov argued that genres can only be understood from an evolutionary perspective, not as static entities surviving through the ages. Genres are always in a process of becoming, competing with one another; from this perspective, the principle of literary evolution is encapsulated in Tynyanov's twofold process of 'struggle and supplanting.' He suggests that genres emerge and displace one another according to laws of motion:

At a period when a genre is disintegrating, it shifts from the centre to the periphery, and a new phenomenon floats in to take its place in the centre, coming up from among the trivia, out of the backyards and low haunts of literature.<sup>99</sup>

When considering the factor of uneven and combined development, we may be in a better position to apprehend the possibility that discrete, non-synchronous categories may blend and coexist in a given work. Such phenomena are not unique to peripheral contexts; nevertheless, it would be difficult to deny the link between generic experiments and the experience of discrepant historical formations.<sup>100</sup>

Following Tynyanov, Franco Moretti suggests that we consider 'form as a struggle'. Norms, conventions, modes of discourse migrate, clash, and commingle in unpredictable ways. To account for those complex derivations and transformations, Moretti articulates the contradictory notions of evolution as Darwinian *divergence* (one given species branching into various offshoots over time, to the point of giving birth to new species) and the notion of *diffusion* (often from core to periphery). He retraces the historical diffusion of the novel from a European core to a wide variety of peripheries. What happens, however, is not sheer duplication, but *interference*. The point is that

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<sup>99</sup>Yury Tynyanov, 'The Literary Fact'. 1924. In: *Modern Genre Theory*. Ed. by David Duff. Trans. by Ann Shukman. London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 29–49, pp. 33–34.

<sup>100</sup>In addition to Chamoiseau's *Texaco*, one is tempted to cite also his *Chronique des sept misères*, which chronicles a similar clash in post-war Martinique, between the subsistence agriculture and local markets tended by sub-proletarian *jobbeurs*, on the one hand, and the arrival of metropolitan supermarkets on the other. The corollary of this epochal shift is the demise of oral story-telling, registered in *Solibo Magnifique*, a novel which reads like the sequel of *Chronique*. See Patrick Chamoiseau, *Chronique des sept misères*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988; Patrick Chamoiseau, *Solibo Magnifique*. 1988. Paris: Gallimard, 1991.

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plots would appear travel fairly well, but styles much less so, thus giving rise to original, unpredictable creations in the periphery. Moretti goes on:

The result is a hybrid form that does indeed ‘amalgamate different traditions,’ [...] But for many of these texts, *dissonance* would be more precise than amalgamation: dissonance, disagreement, at times a lack of integration between what happens in the plot, and how the style evaluates the story, and presents it to the reader. *Form as a struggle*: this is what we have here: a struggle between the story that comes from the core, and the viewpoint that ‘receives’ it in the periphery. That the two are not seamlessly fused is not just an aesthetic given, then, but the crystallization of an underlying *political* tension.<sup>101</sup>

That political tension surfaces when given forms are recycled and repurposed in ways that bear little resemblance to their ‘original’ context.

The appeal of the novel for Walcott can be explained by the capaciousness of the genre. While the word ‘novel,’ derived from Romance languages, was used in the late fourteenth century to designate factual narratives of recent events, it later came to refer to secular tales and fictional narratives. Taking shape in the interstices between codified literary genres, the novel began its career as a peripheral form indeed, ‘out of the backyards and low haunts of literature,’ which ‘supplanted’ most of its rivals to become the hegemonic literary form.<sup>102</sup> The novel’s hegemonic formlessness has led Fredric Jameson to state that ‘the novel is the end of genre.’<sup>103</sup> Indeed, as the Warwick Research Collective argue,

the peculiar plasticity and hybridity of the novel form enables it to incorporate not only multiple literary levels, genres and modes, but also other non-literary and archaic cultural forms—so that, for example, realist elements might be mixed with more experimental modes of narration, or older literary devices might be reactivated in juxtaposition with more contemporary frames, in order to register a bifurcated or ruptured sensorium of the space-time of the (semi-)periphery.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Moretti, ‘Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*’, p. 406.

<sup>102</sup>For a transnational perspective on the emergence of the novel in the modern era, see Jack Goody, ‘From Oral to Written: An Anthropological Breakthrough in Storytelling’. In: *The Novel: History, Geography, and Culture*. Ed. by Franco Moretti. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 3–36.

<sup>103</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 137.

<sup>104</sup>WRcC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 26.

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Dante's terza rima and Homer's hexameter are recycled in a text where they assume original valences. The Homeric hexameter and its formulaic style were to a large extent mnemonic devices motivated by the oral performance of heroic song; Dante's rhyme scheme, binding each tercet to the next, carried mystical intimations in relation to the Holy Trinity. As Sean Seeger has noted, *Omeros* combines pre-modern and modern forms, 'assemblages that participate in multiple times at once,' a formal feature which is inseparable from the fact that even on at the level of plot, 'every event always simultaneously partakes of elements drawn from any number of events.'<sup>105</sup> In *Omeros* these devices are recycled even though their function has little in common with those earlier motivations.

### 3.4.1 Walcott's 'Ancestral Beat'

When Walcott's narrator encounters the ghost of his father Warwick in Chapter 12, the poem seems to reflect on the phenomenon of peripheral distortions of literary form. Warwick, himself an amateur poet, was named after the home county of William Shakespeare, and embodies the complications of literary transmission. With his son, they visit their former house, 'now familiar and unfamiliar,' which has been turned into a printery, where 'pink handbills whirred under their spinning negative' (12.1). This moment is highly significant within the poem as a whole. This chapter and the following formulate an *ars poetica* which is also a reflection on the transformative collisions which accompany literary transmission. Warwick appears to have played a crucial part in the narrator's poetic vocation:

'In this pale blue notebook where you found my verses'—  
my father smiled—'I appeared to make your life's choice  
and the calling that you practise both reverses

and honours mine from the moment it blent with yours.

Now that you are twice my age, which is the boy's,  
which the father's?

'Sir'—I swallowed—'they are one voice.' (12.1)

In this passage concerned with poetic filiation, the printer's 'spinning negative' can be read as a symbol of the contradictory process whereby an original is both replicated and

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<sup>105</sup>Seeger, *Nonlinear Temporality in Joyce and Walcott*, pp. 170–72.

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reversed.<sup>106</sup> This twofold movement is captured in Warwick's recognition that his son's vocation 'both reverses // and honours [his]' even as they '[blend]' together and become 'one voice.' Warwick goes on to articulate his own sense of peripherality:

I was raised in this obscure Caribbean port,  
where my bastard father christened me for his shire:  
Warwick. The Bard's county. But never felt part  
of the foreign machinery known as Literature. (12.1)

The world of letters is presented as an awe-inspiring machine, both inhuman and alien. Warwick, by contrast, appears as an outsider to the club, a tangential presence later replicated in the narrator's location on 'the provincial edge of an atlas' (33.1).

In Chapter 13, Warwick and his son continue discussing literature. After visiting their house, they approach the harbour of Castries. There, Warwick recalls observing the women who would carry baskets of coal to supply the ships at anchor. The scene elaborates on an opposition which is central to Warwick's advice between, on the one hand, the physicality of labour and poetic craft, and on the other, the inhuman realm of machinery and mechanical motion. Working against the 'foreign machinery' as well as the symbolic violence of a capitalised 'Literature,' Warwick describes the toiling women in an ambivalent way. He conjures up images of 'hell' and 'inferno,' yet their lot is dignified, 'each spine straight as a pole, / and with a strength that never altered its rhythm' (13.2). As the following lines make clear, the evocation of rhythm inaugurates a series of associations which turn those women into emblems of poetry:

The carriers were women, not the fair, gentler sex.  
Instead, they were darker and stronger, and their gait  
was made beautiful by balance, in their ascending  
  
the narrow wooden ramp built steeply to the hull  
of a liner tall as a cloud, the unending  
line crossing like ants without touching for the whole  
  
day. [...]

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<sup>106</sup>In 'Aeolus,' Bloom is intrigued by the craft of the typesetter, arranging letters for Patrick Dignam's obituary from right to left: 'Reads it backwards first. Quickly he does it. Must require some practice that. mangiD kcirtaP' (*U*, 7.206).

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and the endless repetition as they climbed the  
infernal anthracite hills showed you hell, early. (13.2)

The parallels between the women and the writing of poetry abound: they climb up and down a narrow causeway, striving for balance, like words or beats in lines of poetry. Their ceaseless procession forms a line which is said to be ‘unending’—an affirmation no sooner stated than it is upset by the line break which divorces the adjective from the noun (‘unending / line’). Their comings and goings, however, are trapped in an ‘endless repetition,’ finally equated with hell itself. The insistent conceit that links their work to poetry is reinforced by the presence of the *liner*, which seems complicit in their exploitation, and is itself caught in the deadening repetition of circuitous routes, constrained by the imperatives of mass tourism.

Warwick draws on the strenuous labour of the women to deliver his guidance to the aspiring poet:

Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet  
and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,  
one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme.

Because Rhyme remains the parentheses of palms  
shielding a candle’s tongue, it is the language’s  
desire to enclose the loved world in its arms;

or heft a coal-basket; only by its stages  
like those groaning women will you achieve that height  
whose wooden planks in couplets lift your pages

higher than those hills of infernal anthracite. (13.3)

The conceit now expands to incorporate the feet of the women, equated with the homonymous *feet* of classical prosody. The father urges the narrator to climb ‘in their footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat / of those used to climbing roads,’ and concludes by urging his son ‘to give those feet a voice.’ Rhythm appears as a principle that transcends individual agency, a structuring pattern to which the poet must conform. The ‘ancestral beat’ is presented as a communal legacy to be preserved. Likewise, the passage formulates an aesthetic that is conservative in the full sense of the word, as the veneration for Rhyme—note the capitalisation—is owed to something that ‘remains,’

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like a divinity threatened with oblivion or neglect. The poet is assigned a ‘duty,’ a votive dedication to the ritualised patterns of the women’s hieratic comings and goings. The father’s humbling advice includes a warning against the lure of fame, symbolised by the liner itself (‘Fame is that white liner’) peopled with anonymous tourists, who engage with the island only to the extent that they throw coins at the bands of children scuffling in the water below, an allegory of the peripheral writer discussed earlier in this dissertation.<sup>107</sup>

The assimilation of poetic craft to the women’s back-breaking toil is problematic. The depiction of the coal-carriers has been noted for its self-serving aestheticisation of exploitation; Omar Hena, for instance, observes that the passage dramatises ‘a desire to redress colonial economy,’ couched in a paternalistic ‘rhetoric of duty’ which merely testifies to the poet’s alienation from his subject.<sup>108</sup> Paul Breslin, however, notes that ‘the self-aggrandizement diminishes when we remember that what the poet gives is finally only given *back*, having been first acquired from the women his verse will celebrate.’ Indeed, Warwick reminds the narrator that ‘your own work owes them // because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhymes.’ The poet’s duty to ‘give those feet a voice’ appears as an act of restitution, suggesting ‘reciprocity rather than unmitigated appropriation.’<sup>109</sup>

What concerns me here, however, is the sustained investment in rhythm as an archaic holdover which endures in the narrator’s poetry. Working against the homogeneous mechanical time of the printing presses or the liner’s engines, the poet draws on the resources of the ‘ancestral’ and the ‘unending,’ adjectives which suggest the abiding presence of a relation to time which defies the temporality of capitalist modernity.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>See Chapter 2.1, p. 106.

<sup>108</sup>Hena, *Global Anglophone Poetry*, pp. 36–38. See also Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 165–66 and Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 191–93.

<sup>109</sup>Paul Breslin, *Nobody’s Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 260.

<sup>110</sup>Lance Callahan has rightly pointed out that the passage attempts to forge an ‘organic correlation’ between the poem’s rhythm and that of the objective world. Yet I am not entirely convinced by his rather sweeping conclusions on Walcott’s experiments in rhythm, premised on the existence of some undefined ‘uniquely Caribbean’ essence. Callahan suggests, for instance, that Walcott’s protean metres reflect ‘some of the most deep-seated elements of the West Indian psyche,’ and that ‘the metrical contract of *Omeros* may be meant to represent the sense of cultural insecurity which seems to permeate West Indian society.’ Callahan, *In the Shadows of Divine Perfection*, pp. 49–50. Charles Pollard strikes a similar chord when he writes that Walcott ‘turns to end rhyme to transmit the exuberant pulse of the Caribbean experience’ and that his creolisation of Homer and Dante conveys ‘a unique Caribbean rhythm, an irregular beat that is most often heard in the popular music of jazz, calypso, or reggae,’ see Pollard, *New World Modernisms*, p. 167.



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My purpose here is not to catalogue the metrical and prosodic devices used by Walcott; rather, I mean to unpick the ways in which rhythm is allegorised throughout the poem, as an index of the generic self-awareness of *Omeros*. To put it briefly, rhythm appears to oscillate between two poles: the conservative adherence to a primeval pattern, on the one hand, and the celebration of renewal on the other. In both cases, however, it appears as a transindividual flux which has the potential to bind people together across time and space.

In Chapter 9, a destitute Achille has found employment on the Plunketts' pig-farm. We find him adapting to this new, unfamiliar environment, unable to shed the attributes of the fisherman he was: 'His canoe was a concrete trough / in Plunkett's pig-farm. A broom his oar.' We see him hurling pailfuls of water at the walls of the pig-sty 'in repetitious rage, the way that combers hit / a braced sea rock, streaming' (9.1). The proverbial wrath of Achilles in the *Iliad*

The chapter goes on to relate a truly epic hurricane, described in terms reminiscent of a Homeric battle, with 'thudding lances of rain.' The focus then moves to Hector, who finds himself at sea, caught in the tempest, trying to rescue his canoe. Hector struggles with all his might, but is eventually overpowered by the wind and crashing waves, and abandons his foundering ship. The concluding lines show him no longer fighting, but yielding to the rhythm of the waves:

he rode a trough for a while,  
padding on his back, to measure the right rhythm  
  
of the crests, then slid down a slow-gathering wall  
like a surfer: once he caught the beat, he could swim  
with the crumbling surf, not against the sea's will,  
  
letting it spin him if it chose, even if it chose  
to treat him like its garbage; then he felt the swirl  
of fine sand and staggered up straight in the shallows. (9.2)

As often in the poem, the sea is endowed with qualities that evoke poetic creation. What saves Hector in this occasion is his ability to submit to the rhythm of the sea, to '[catch] the beat' and behave towards it as a surfer with the swell. In contrast to the preceding lines that saw him grapple with the waves, trying hard to prevail over the inhuman power of the sea, he is saved when he surrenders to its agency, recalling Walcott's admission

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that *Omeros* began when a rhythm took hold of him. This early engagement with rhythm is brought to a climax in the third section of that same chapter, when the cyclone engulfs the island. That section consists in a mock-heroic account of the ‘hurricane-party,’ a jam session between the gods of various distinct pantheons ‘where Ogun can fire one with his partner Zeus’ (9.3). Like Erzulie and Damballa, also included in the guest list, Ogun is a divinity invoked in Vodun rituals, now rubbing elbows with Greek gods such as Zeus and Neptune. Homer’s Cyclops, blinded by Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, appears to be morphing into the allegorised Cyclone, ‘howling because one of the lances / of a flinging palm has narrowly grazed his one eye.’ The slippage between Cyclops and Cyclone encapsulates the spirit of the section, which celebrates this ecumenical gathering of apparently unrelated gods. While the gods carouse, however, the island is devastated by the hurricane, the banana crops destroyed, and the cattle drowned. Nonetheless, chapter ends on a hopeful note; the day after the storm, ‘Achille bailed out his canoe under an almond / that shuddered with rain. There would be brilliant days still, / till the next storm, and their freshness was wonderful’ (9.3). The regenerative power of the island in the face of natural disasters must be read in the light of the preceding emphasis on the rhythm of the ocean. Inaugurating a motif which runs through the poem all the way to the final line (‘When he left the beach the sea was still going on’ [64.3]), this chapter posits rhythm as a primarily a non-human force, which cannot be resisted but only yielded to.

That rhythm is also a signifier of connectivity is clearly indicated by the treatment of Plunkett. The similarities between him and the narrator are well-known: both occupy themselves with more or less misguided literary projects, both are wounded, and Plunkett even appears as a father figure to the narrator.<sup>111</sup> More surprising perhaps is the fact that Plunkett shares in the poem’s obsession with rhythm and rhyme, albeit in his own singular way. In Chapter 19, he remembers his time in the World War Two, his dead brothers-in-arms, and the generations of cadets he later trained before St Lucia acquired her independence. Here, it is Plunkett’s drilling which evokes the rhythmic qualities of poetry:

Christ forgive him,  
for mockery of the midshipmen from whom home  
could never be drilled, courage was out of fashion,

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<sup>111</sup> ‘There was Plunkett in my father’ (52.3).

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just as the faith had gone out from every hymn,  
till only rhythm remained; and what was rhythm  
if over their swinging arms there was not passion,

not only for England, but some light that led them  
beyond their drill-patterns like rooks? For him they shone  
the sword hilts with rags. Not honour, but service;

the bugler's summons not for brazen renown,  
but it threaded their veins, privates and officers,  
like Maud's needles. (19.1)

After Hector's exploits at sea and the coalwomen's drudgery, we now encounter another figuration of rhythm coming from an unexpected quarter, in the barracks' drilling-ground. Yet the associations are finely elaborated, and chime with Walcott's overall treatment of rhythm as a poetic principle. Emphasis is laid once again on the vestigial quality of rhythm ('till only rhythm remained') although in this case it is projected as the most enduring quality in a hymn, that which outlasts even the loss of faith in the words. It forms a pair with the (patriotic) 'passion' that is supposed to animate the cadets. The whole reminiscence is of course tinged with Plunkett's nostalgia for Britain's lost imperial grandeur. The sense of decline, of an empire 'ebbing' (5.3), added to the conflation of Plunkett's and the narrator's points of view, all make it delicate to settle on a definitive interpretation of the closing lines; yet we encounter once again the yearning for a communal experience, linking individuals together and with past generations as well. Due to his own background and values, Plunkett can only conceive of such an experience in the terms of a military corps, finding poetry in regimental discipline and 'the rhyming steps of the college cadet force' (54.1). Yet 'Maud's needles' offer an understated alternative to the martial framework of the passage.<sup>112</sup>

The rhythm of the ocean is again explored at length in Chapter 24, as Achille is at sea with his mate. The moment is one of elation—'and his heart trembled with enormous tenderness' (24.1)—as Achille embraces the horizon and the beauty of his island. The motion of rowing conjures up poetic scansion: 'but the wrists wrenched deftly after the lifted stroke / mesmerizing him with their incantatory / metre' (24.1). As they move farther away from the island, the shore disappears. The scene becomes awe-inspiring with the frail ship suspended over the abyss, 'where no anchor has enough

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<sup>112</sup>I return to Maud's stitching in the next chapter, see p. 257.

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rope and no plummet plumbs. / His cold heart was heaving in the ancestral swell / of the ocean' (24.2). Once again, we encounter an 'ancestral' pattern, almost overwhelming. The metre is 'incantatory,' suggesting the virtually magic power of ritualised formulas. Achille is then submerged with the memory of all the dead at sea, the drowned fishermen he has heard about, but also 'the nameless bones of all his brothers / drowned in the crossing, plus a Midshipman Plunkett.' The conflation of the sea and poetry is further elaborated, as we see Achille standing on his boat 'in the lace wreaths of the Caribbean anthem' (24.2). Like Hector during the storm, Achille yields to the power of the ocean: 'He is riding the swell / of the line now.' We then see him 'scooping with one hand over the rocking gunwale / with the beat of habit, a hand soaked in its skill' in order to preserve the texture of the sails. The imagery of rhythm is pervasive. The emphasis on conservation recurs as the narrator asserts the bond which links him to Achille:

and here is my tamer of horses,

our only inheritance that elemental noise  
of the windward, unbroken breakers, Ithaca's  
or Africa's, all joining the ocean's voice (24.2)

Once again, the notions of 'inheritance' and continuity ('unbroken breakers') are bound up with the flux of rhythm, which becomes a means to commune with the primal voice or noise of the ocean—a fitting transition that announces Book Three, where Achille is transported to Africa and confronts his ancestors, only to realise that this continent is not his home.

After his return, we find Achille washing his canoe to the beat of Bob Marley's 'Buffalo Soldier':

the system's beat  
thudded in Achille's head that replayed the echo,  
as he washed the canoe, of a Marley reggae—

'Buffalo soldier.' Thud. 'Heart of America.'  
Thud-thud. Mop and pail. He could not rub it away.  
Between the soft thud of surf the bass beat wider,

backing his work up with its monodic phrasing. (31.1)

He then has a vision of himself as Buffalo soldier facing Indian riders. The landscape becomes laden with historic hallucination:

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Then, pennons in reggae-motion, a white bonnet  
in waves of heat like a sea-horse, leading them in  
their last wide charge, the soft hooves pounding in his skull,

Red Indians bouncing to a West Indian rhythm,  
to the cantering beat which, as he swayed, the scull  
of the lance-like oar kept up like a metronome, (31.1)

His canoe becomes a horse, the palm trees and waves become Indian head-dresses, and his oar becomes a rifle,

then slowly he fired the oar  
and a palm-tree crumpled; then to repeated cracks

from the rifle, more savages, until the shore  
was littered with palm spears, bodies: like Aruacs  
falling to the muskets of the Conquistador. (31.1)

This is an echo of the wood cutting scene in Chapter 1, with a return of the conceit linking the native Aruacs with the island's trees in a common experience of slaughter. What is noticeable here is the rhythmic dimension of Achille's experience, triggered by the beat of Marley's song which morphs into the horses' cavalcade, and culminates in the 'repeated cracks' of rifle shots. Echoes continue to reverberate in the following section, as Achille rakes the dead leaves which fill up the 'rusted drum' in Philoctete's garden, and burns them in a bonfire which resonates with the sound of 'crackling branches' (31.2). This scene, where the poem echoes itself and multiplies allusions to previous passages, exemplifies the residual quality of rhythm even at the scale of the text.

In Chapter 40, a passage which takes us to the Aegean coast aboard Odysseus's ship, the connectivity of rhythm is metaphorised by the slave's drum, which itself echoes the 'rusted drum' already encountered in Philoctete's garden: 'The crew stare like statues at that feigned detachment / whose heart, in its ribs, thuds like the galley-slave's drum' (40.1). The drum's reverberations link the two archipelagos, Caribbean and Aegean, across the Atlantic, which is later once more conflated with that rhythmic instrument in the image of 'the hot, lazy drum of the sea' (48.3). The crew, a group of slaves, then address Odysseus in a language oddly reminiscent of Trinidadian calypso, before concluding rather irreverently 'fuck you and your war,' as 'the metre / of the long oars slowly settled on a rhythm / as the prow righted' (40.2). The strokes of the oars

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matching the slaves' heartbeats are another illustration of the longing for a harmony between personal rhythm and external time, in an activity which, like the drudgery of the coalwomen, is emphatically physical, and therefore the object of the narrator's phantasm:

They knew the drifting  
Caribbean currents from Andros to Castries  
might drag them to Margarita or Curaçao, [...]

Then the strokes match heartbeat to oar,  
their blistered palms weeping for palms of olive trees. (40.2)

The 'match' between heartbeat and oarstroke seems to conform to Warwick's lecture on rhythm and balance. In both cases, the poet's identification either with the coal-carriers or with the galley slaves contributes to the valuation of an aestheticised form of manual labour, and its investment as a 'handicraft enclave' beset by the increasingly inhuman rhythms of machines.<sup>113</sup>

The poetic investment in rhythm is sustained until the end of the poem, when Philoctete and Achille perform their dance as 'androgynous / warriors.' The drum resurfaces:

The drummer's wrists  
whirred like a hummingbird's wings, and, to Achille, the  
  
faster they flew, the more he remembered, blent  
to his rite; then suddenly the music ceased. (55.3)

The drumming connects the scene not only to the Aegean episode already mentioned, but to all instances where 'the hot, lazy drum of the sea' has been heard in the poem (48.3). In the final chapter, as we attend the narrator's funeral, he gets ready to encounter the shades of the other characters who have passed away in the course of the poem:

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<sup>113</sup>The aspiration to emulate manual labour through poetry is a constant in Walcott, as in the poem 'Cul de Sac Valley' from the 1987 collection *The Arkansas Testament*. The speaker reflects on his 'craft' and imagines himself as a carpenter,

as consonants scroll  
off my shaving plane  
in the fragrant Creole  
of their native grain (*PDW*, 365).

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In its earth-trough, my pirogue  
with its brass-handled oarlocks is sailing. Not from  
  
but with them, with Hector, with Maud in the rhythm  
of her beds trowelled over, with a swirling log  
lifting its mossed head from the swell; let the deep hymn  
  
of the Caribbean continue my epilogue (64.1).

The final fusion of the narrator with his own artifact is achieved by means of a rhythm which conjures up the motion of the waves and collapses the archipelago with rhythm itself, by virtue of the rhyme which binds 'rhythm' and 'hymn.' Further on:

reluctantly now,  
like Achille's, my craft slips the chain of its anchor,  
  
moored to its cross as I leave it; its nodding prow  
lettered as simply, ribbed in our native timber,  
riding these last worried lines; its rhythm agrees  
  
that all it forgot a swift made it remember  
since that green sunrise of axes and laurel-trees,  
till the sunset chars it, slowly, to an ember. (64.2)

The poet's polysemous 'craft' refers simultaneously to the art of poetry and to a boat like Achille's, both 'ribbed in our native timber,' whereby the poet finds another identification with an impoverished but skillful mariner, while furthering the identification of the trees and languages. The act of remembrance is once more associated with the rhythm of the waves, whose 'worried lines' blend with those of the poem.

As is often the case, these motifs can be traced to Walcott's essay 'The Muse of History':

In tribal, elemental poetry, the epic experience of the race is compressed in metaphor. In an oral tradition the mode is simple, the response open-ended, so that each new poet can add his lines to the form, a process very much like weaving or the dance, based on the concept that the history of the tribe is endless. There is no dying fall, no egotistical signature of effect; in short, no pathos. The blues is not pathos, not the individual voice, it is a tribal

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mode, and each new oral poet can contribute his couplet, and this is based on the concept that the tribe, inured to despair, will also survive: there is no beginning but no end. The new poet enters a flux and withdraws, as the weaver continues the pattern, hand to hand and mouth to mouth (*WTS*, 47).

Recalling the Homeric rhapsode, Walcott's oral poet 'enters a flux' into which his own intervention adds new stitches, subsequently taken up by others. Walcott then elaborates on the tension between that communal, oral source, and its transformation by individual poets. In the process, they have to effect a qualitative leap, as

the West Indian poet is faced with a language which he hears but cannot write because there are no symbols for such a language and because the closer he brings hand and word to the precise inflections of the inner language and to the subtlest accuracies of his ear, the more chaotic his symbols will appear on the page, the smaller the regional dialect, the more eccentric his representation of it will become, so his function remains the old one of being filter and purifier, never losing the tone and strength of the common speech as he uses the hieroglyphs, symbols, or alphabet of the official one (49).

The poet then has to shuttle constantly between the spoken vernacular and the written language, effectively becoming a phonograph, a recording device with the special task of filtering and purifying the communal, spoken vernacular.

### 3.5 'Cyclops': From Island to Archipelago

Many critics have noted the political relevance of 'Cyclops.'<sup>114</sup> Patrick Parrinder has called it 'the most politically committed piece of fiction that Joyce ever produced'<sup>115</sup> and Declan Kiberd considers it as 'Joyce's most coruscating critique of Irish nationalism and its attendant psychology.'<sup>116</sup> The episode dramatises some of the burning issues most prominent in Ireland at the turn of the century. The scene unfolds in Barney Kiernan's pub, and is the occasion for a complex narrative experiment. As the characters embark on a heated discussion of colonialism, nationalism, state power, and cultural identity, the

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<sup>114</sup>For a sample of which, see Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge*, p. 124. See also Nels Pearson, *Irish Cosmopolitanism: Location and Dislocation in James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, and Samuel Beckett*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015, pp. 27–30.

<sup>115</sup>Patrick Parrinder, *James Joyce*. 1948. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 172.

<sup>116</sup>James Joyce, *Ulysses: Annotated Student's Edition*. 1922. Ed. by Declan Kiberd. London: Penguin, 1992, p. 1057.



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episode is related alternately by two unnamed narrators; the first an unsympathetic figure whom Joyce privately identified as Thersites, the other a parodic story-teller whose speech is saturated with revivalist clichés.<sup>117</sup>

The narrative revolves to a great extent around the confrontation between Bloom and a character, also unnamed, known only as ‘the Citizen,’ who appears as a larger-than-life embodiment of nationalist phrase-mongering. Richard Ellmann hardly exaggerates when he calls him a ‘chauvinist,’ a ‘flagwaver and xenophobe.’<sup>118</sup> Yet, there is more to the chapter than the clash between Bloom and the Citizen—not to mention the fact that the binary opposition between the two is itself precarious and needs qualification. In *Cosmopolitan Style*, Rebecca Walkowitz stresses the hopeless triviality of the discussion on the concept of ‘nation,’ and suggests that the passage ‘emphasizes vernacular, personal, and economic details’ in order to ‘disrupt philosophical abstractions both of nationalism and of cosmopolitanism.’<sup>119</sup>

Nor is it particularly original to state that the episode can be read as an experiment in literary polyphony—or, to use an alternative image, an exercise in literary cannibalism. Feeding on a huge variety of pre-existing discourses, ‘Cyclops’ parodies the repertoire of the Gaelic Revival, pub gossip, anticolonial debates, melodrama, or the society pages from fashionable newspapers. Yet it is dubious whether the parodies can be ascribed to a single narrative voice. As Karen Lawrence contends, they seem to emerge anonymously, like the headings in ‘Aeolus,’ exhibiting the encyclopedic quality of an episode where individual voices are submerged. In ‘Cyclops,’ Lawrence goes on, Joyce appears as a literary ‘bricoleur,’ exposing the arbitrary nature of all styles, ‘trying out various stylistic possibilities from the flotsam and jetsam of linguistic resources,’ alternating between parody and cliché. The ultimate effect of this stylistic experiment, however, is also to revitalise some of those ‘old forms.’<sup>120</sup> Indeed, the scene feels like a textbook illustration of the ‘novelisation’ process outlined by Bakhtin. By dint of parody and stylisation, the ‘absolute past,’ which is supposed to be the stuff of epic mythologies, is ‘brought low, represented on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment.’<sup>121</sup> ‘Cyclops’ incorporates all cultural ingredients indiscriminately, with the effect that no single discourse escapes the process of trivialisation. The main

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<sup>117</sup>Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*. 1972. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 110.

<sup>118</sup>Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, p. 112.

<sup>119</sup>Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 73–77.

<sup>120</sup>Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, pp. 101–112.

<sup>121</sup>Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 21.

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casualty is the nationalist discourse of revivalism itself. As Gibson aptly remarks, Joyce ‘emphasizes the actual, compromised, adulterated character of a history and culture that the Revival had attempted to purify, but only at the cost of evasion and massive omission.’<sup>122</sup> The generalised confusion of all hierarchies and genres results in a ruthless act of levelling, which calls into question the validity of revivalist and nationalist historiographies. While both discourses were preoccupied with purity, Joyce stresses the process of relentless ‘interinvolvement’ which is at the heart of all discourses.<sup>123</sup> In so doing, he foregrounds heterogeneity and amalgamation both at the level of form and the level of content. Joyce revives the archaic element in medieval literature, outdoing the revivalists at their own game. For Gibson the chapter’s defining feature is its ‘anti-revivalist animus,’ criticising Ferguson, Standish O’Grady, Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Douglas Hyde. O’Grady and Lady Gregory were unapologetic in their historiographic method, aiming to create a history that fitted their agenda, expressing little concern for factuality and accuracy, preferring instead the heroic mode, the mythic, the exaggerated, emulating the bardic tradition. Gibson’s paradoxical claim is that ‘in his resistance to Anglo-Irish appropriation, Joyce also revitalizes or finds a modern equivalent for some of the properties of bardic narrative itself. In effect, he wrests a tradition back from the hands that have sought to seize it.’<sup>124</sup> Joyce outdoes the revivalists at their own game; while they purge the ancient texts of their supposedly unpalatable ingredients, Joyce’s heterogeneous, adulterated style is paradoxically truer to the old stories.

Critics diverge in their evaluations of the episode’s fallout. The Citizen may be defeated, but it is not at all clear what he is defeated by. Some critics have noted Bloom’s pacifist, humanist, liberal poise.<sup>125</sup> More recently, Vincent Cheng has proposed a postcolonial reading that celebrates Bloom’s advocacy of a non-conflictual, non-binary, hybridised ethos, as an antidote to the cyclopean brutality and xenophobia of the Citizen.<sup>126</sup> Treating Irish nationalism as a mirror image of English imperialism, both predicated on myths of racial purity, Cheng sees Bloom as a rebuke to those twin forms of xenophobic essentialism. He writes that ‘Bloom is able to hold simultaneous perspectives, to imagine being other, and thus to transcend the monologic narrowness

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<sup>122</sup>Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge*, p. 117.

<sup>123</sup>Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge*, p. 125.

<sup>124</sup>Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge*, pp. 107–119.

<sup>125</sup>See for instance H el ene Cixous, *L’Exil de James Joyce: ou L’art du remplacement*. Paris: Grasset, 1968, pp. 298–319; Parrinder, *James Joyce*, p. 172; Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, p. 116.

<sup>126</sup>Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, pp. 191–218.

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of a single, cycloptic perspective.’<sup>127</sup> However, I would argue that this reading deserves to be questioned. Reading this episode against the grain, Emer Nolan has stressed the uncanny similarity between the Citizen’s nationalist rhetoric and some of Joyce’s own political views, expressed for the most part in his non-fictional writings.<sup>128</sup> Yet, as Len Platt has observed, ‘Cyclops’ depicts cultural nationalism as ‘conservative and élitist, an irrelevancy to the politics of a modern Ireland,’ and merely ‘a surrogate for political independence and social change.’ In this episode, Platt concludes, Joyce deflates nationalist bombast in order to articulate ‘a specifically Joycean conception of Irish independence.’<sup>129</sup>

My contention is that the confrontation between Bloom and the Citizen ends in a defeat without a victory, leaving unresolved the definition of ‘a specifically Joycean conception of Irish independence.’ Bloom’s final escape is an apposite conclusion to his Odyssean deployment of sophisms and equivocations throughout the encounter.<sup>130</sup> Throughout, his retorts are blatantly aporetic: love he can only define as ‘the opposite of hatred,’ while his definition of a nation is a masterpiece of elusiveness. To the extent that no consistent counter-discourse prevails over the Citizen’s fetishised nostalgia, the issues raised remain worryingly unsolved. The confrontation leads not to triumph but to aporia, which is merely another way of saying that the text fails—or refuses—to articulate a politics that goes beyond the stage of an ambivalent utopianism, whether that of the Citizen, or that of Bloom. The matrix of a positive counter-discourse, I believe, can be found not in Bloom’s problematic definitions of ‘nation’ or ‘love,’ but in the hints of an alternative model of insularity. That model is at odds with the Citizen’s nationalist solipsism, which repudiates the world overseas; instead, what ‘Cyclops’ tentatively suggests is a vision of the infinite possibilities offered by a meta-archipelago, and the attendant prospect of creolisation. In this respect, the foreign languages, from medieval Welsh to Irish Gaelic and unnamed African languages, ‘freely translated,’ play

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<sup>127</sup>Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, p. 177.

<sup>128</sup>Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*, pp. 91–113.

<sup>129</sup>Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish*, p. 155.

<sup>130</sup>Marianna Gula has identified a melodramatic strain in the chapter, which replicates the framing of Irish history in terms of Manichean binaries of good versus evil: ‘The fact that most critics have discussed the episode in binary terms—the citizen versus Bloom, usually hissing the former and cheering the latter—demonstrates the seductive power of the melodramatic logic the chapter seemingly imposes.’ She stresses instead the ‘multivalence’ of the episode, and the critique of melodrama implicit in its spectacular ending, when Bloom ascends to the sky on a chariot. See Marianna Gula, “‘As Good as Any Bloody Play in the Queen’s Royal Theatre’: Performing the Nation in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*’. In: *Irish University Review* 36.2 (2006), pp. 257–279.

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a central part towards the formation of an archipelago of letters (*U*, 12.1519).

### 3.5.1 Zürich, 1919

The chapter begins in the first-person ('Cyclops' begins with an I), told by the unnamed narrator, who is also a debt-collector. The narrative is effectively entrusted to a character whose function is to redress the balance of payments, to retrieve misappropriated goods or deeds, and ultimately to assert the claims of rightful ownership. While debt entails a temporary imbalance in commercial relationships, it also illustrates the fundamental precariousness of property, and the elastic nature of the market. The creditor may part with a certain sum, in the expectation that it will be repaid eventually—with or without interests. The loan implies a measure of uncertainty, depending on the debtor's solvency (or honesty). The whole transaction, then, necessitates a degree of trust. In other words, credit requires credibility. Yet, debtors are always liable to default or vanish without paying, hence the need for debt-collectors. Significantly, the narrator specifies that he is a 'collector of bad and doubtful debts' (*U*, 12.24). The liabilities of the narrative appear all the more forcefully as the narrator almost had his eye pierced by the brush of an inadvertent sweep, a comic allusion to Odysseus's confrontation with the Cyclops Polyphemus in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*. The contingency of vision and focalisation, which are so essential to narrative agency, is dramatically underscored. As is immediately clear, the episode is set to expose the dis-credit that threatens both ownership and narrative.

The narrator begins his account with the story of a swindle involving the unlicensed selling of tea and sugar, at the expense of one Moses Herzog. The relation is somewhat convoluted, but comes to an abrupt conclusion in the shape of a legal settlement between the two parties in the case. The brutal shift in tone and register, from the narrator's demotic speech to rigid legal jargon, is only the first of many in the episode. The document struggles to bring about a stabilisation of the matter, and to assert the rights of property. After mentioning the names and addresses of the parties, as well as the precise quantities and prices of stolen tea and sugar, the text states that

the said nonperishable goods shall not be pawned or pledged or sold or otherwise alienated by the said purchaser but shall be and remain and be held to be the sole and exclusive property of the said vendor to be disposed of at his good will and pleasure until the said amount shall have been duly paid by the said purchaser to the said vendor in the manner herein

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set forth as this day hereby agreed between the said vendor his heirs, successors, trustees and assigns of the one part and the said purchaser, his heirs, successors, trustees and assigns of the other part. (12.44)

With the completion of the sale, the narrator's sprawling anecdote comes to a reassuring conclusion. Property is asserted as inviolable, and the settlement simultaneously buttresses the claims of inheritance and succession. Yet, while the anecdote reaches a clear-cut resolution, striving to put everything in its right place, the episode as a whole is about to shatter that semblance of order. Confusion, displacement, and misappropriation will be quick to resurface, nullifying the effort to fixate stable positions. Indeed, the seemingly impregnable formulations of the legal resolution leave certain issues open to question. The respective positions of 'heirs, successors, trustees and assigns' appear to be disturbingly interchangeable; the words, caught up in formulaic repetitions, border on equivocation. For a chapter so concerned with political speechifying, this is a rather inauspicious overture. Indeed, 'Cyclops' seems to interrogate not just the claims of (British) Empire or (Irish) Nation, but the very stuff of political discourse. I propose to read the metaphor of insularity as a critical site where the premises of political thinking are called into question, and potentially re-imagined in favour of an alternative, archipelagic vision.

While much of 'Cyclops' consists in hyperbolic celebrations of place and belonging, the writing consistently undermines the integrity of those fictions. The ambivalence of insularity, evoking at once isolation and connectivity, can be taken as the site where that tension is played out.<sup>131</sup> From the beginning, the chapter is saturated with the presence of colonialism, empire, and financial power struggles. The liminal swindle which opens the narrative revolves around tea and sugar, two of the most iconic colonial products, and an emphatically Jewish trader, a living rebuke to Mr Deasy's antisemitic claim that Ireland 'never let them in' (2.442). The hyper local (Moses Herzog's storehouse at '13 Saint Kevin's parade, Wood quay ward') therefore appears as a site of global circulation and exchange, where the presence of sugar testifies to the link between Ireland and that other plantation space, the Caribbean. This tension between the local—celebrated by revivalist propaganda—and the relentless assertion of *other* places that interact with it, more or less hauntingly, informs much of the chapter.

Joyce had been in Zurich for four years, following the outbreak of the First World War, when 'Cyclops' began to appear in the *Little Review* at the end of 1919. Michael

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<sup>131</sup>For a reflection on insularity as a political topos, see Elizabeth McMahon, *Islands, Identity, and the Literary Imagination*. 2016. London: Anthem Press, 2019, pp. 7–11.

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Groden has argued that the political turmoil raging across a war-ridden Europe at the time bore heavily upon the composition of the chapter, as Ireland was torn apart by the war of independence, and revolution raged in Germany, rippling out as far as Zurich in the shape of a general strike.<sup>132</sup> This background of war, revolutionary upheavals, and national liberation, can shed light on the politics of ‘Cyclops’ and the attendant reflection on the nation state. Incidentally, as the war erupted, Zurich was home to a host of other revolutionary exiles, among whom was Leon Trotsky.<sup>133</sup> Analysing the historical significance of the world war, Trotsky drew the conclusion that the conflict marked the bankruptcy of the nation state in the era of imperialism, ‘a revolt of the forces of production against the political form of nation and state.’ In the pamphlet known as ‘War and the International,’ he argued that the race for colonies and world domination, itself rooted in the capitalist drive for unlimited expansion, signalled ‘the collapse of the national state as an independent economic unit,’ and the advent of an incipient world economy, which only a world revolution could transform into a harmonious whole.<sup>134</sup> What is striking here is that the nation state is declared bankrupt not because it is grotesquely parochial and identitarian, but on account of the internal evolution of capitalism in its imperialist stage. This indictment of the nation state, then, needs to be sharply distinguished from the dismissal of nationalism by Vincent Cheng. As Neil Lazarus has demonstrated, the disavowal of anticolonial nationalism has been a staple of postcolonial critique, a stance predicated on the disillusionment caused by the demise of national liberation struggles in the aftermath of the second world war. From this perspective, nationalism appears as a ‘cramping, reductive, and authoritarian discourse.’<sup>135</sup> Although with his egregious xenophobia, nativist essentialism, and intolerance of any alternative viewpoint, the Citizen ticks all those boxes, the chapter as a whole can be seen to articulate a more nuanced view of the tension between the

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<sup>132</sup>Michael Groden, ‘Joyce at Work on “Cyclops”’: Toward a Biography of *Ulysses*. In: *James Joyce Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter 2007), pp. 217–245, pp. 227–232.

<sup>133</sup>I discuss this context in my Introduction, p. 10.

<sup>134</sup>Trotsky, *The Bolsheviki and World Peace*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>135</sup>Yet, as Lazarus argues, the thrust of anticolonial nationalism was revolutionary in spirit. Although, as a discourse, it was subsequently utilised to justify the confiscation of power by self-serving post-colonial elites, it also tapped a genuinely revolutionary feeling among wide masses of colonial subjects. See Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, pp. 64–70. On the genesis of postcolonial theory, and its gradual disavowal not just of anti-colonial nationalism but of emancipatory political praxis as such, see Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. London: Verso, 2013 and Vasant Kaiwar, *The Postcolonial Orient: The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincialising Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

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nation-state and the world-system.<sup>136</sup> The allusion to ‘foreign wars’ being the cause of rising markets (12.138) is a deft, though inconspicuous, reminder of the planetary interdependence which binds all corners of the world, and the fraught nature of those all-embracing relationships.

The episode, then, is concerned with throwing light on the incompleteness of the local, and on the spuriousness of any mythology where people *belong* to places, and places to people. While a supposedly authentic Ireland is being celebrated, the text abounds with reminders that Ireland is not just connected to a wider whole constituted by imperial hegemony and international trade routes, but is also the very product of such connections. ‘Our national epic’ may be in the process of being written at last, but in a way that ruthlessly explodes the boundaries of the national, and shows the stuff of epic to be radically enmeshed with what Édouard Glissant calls the Whole-World. It bears repeating that Glissant’s hyphenated compound is designed to embrace the ubiquitous relationality which brings all places into virtual contact, however violently. Thus, Glissant argues, we may grasp the world as a process always in the making, rather than an accomplished totality; as a chaotic array of relations, from which new cultures emerge unpredictably, rather than a juxtaposition of exclusive, essentialised substances.<sup>137</sup> This spells out a holistic apprehension of the modern world-system, which binds each part to the whole, and makes its presence felt in the remotest corners, as world relations of all kinds—economic, cultural—ripple out and resonate in endless interferences. Although the terminology differs, not to mention Glissant’s aversion to any form of thought that would claim to be systematic, this vision has much in common with Trotsky’s perspective on the tendential integration of the world economy, however uneven and brutal. Equally insightful is Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s argument that the Caribbean is ‘a cultural meta-archipelago without a center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly.’<sup>138</sup> This array of intuitions can be productively put to use in order to complicate our reading of ‘Cyclops.’ Read as a registration of the imperialist conflagration and the bankruptcy of the nation state,

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<sup>136</sup>Heather Laird has perceptively remarked that the Citizen appears to be a beneficiary of tenant evictions, in breach of the ‘unwritten agrarian code’ which condemned land-grabbing at the expense of impoverished smallholders. As such, the Citizen embodies the class conflicts within the nationalist camp. See Heather Laird, “[H]e daren’t show his nose with the Molly Maguires looking for him to let daylight through him for grabbing the holding of an evicted tenant”: *Ulysses*, the Cattle Economy, and the Unwritten Agrarian Code’. In: *James Joyce Quarterly* 59.2 (Winter 2022), pp. 115–133.

<sup>137</sup>Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, pp. 22–25.

<sup>138</sup>Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p. 9.

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the episode yields more than an ironic repudiation of nationalism by a postcolonial cosmopolitan *avant la lettre*.

### 3.5.2 James Clarence Mangan: Translation and the Nation

After the deceptive legal settlement which opens the chapter, the text embarks on a bombastic glorification of Ireland, beginning with ‘In Inisfail the fair there lies a land, the land of holy Michan’ (*U*, 12.68). From then on, the narrative periodically shifts between the voices of Thersites, with his distinctly plebeian tone, and of the anonymous revivalist persona. The opening formula, with the reference to Inisfail, is an echo of a poem by James Clarence Mangan, ‘Aldfrid’s Itinerary.’<sup>139</sup> The poem, which Mangan presents as a translation from ‘the Irish language,’ was allegedly written by king Aldfrid after his journey to Ireland. It depicts the isle as prosperous, endowed with material as well as spiritual riches, peopled with honourable soldiers and—ironically enough, given the context—‘historians recording truth.’ This subtext can be seen as one of the Citizen’s models, conjuring up a national golden age. Yet, it is impossible not to overhear the inadvertent pun in the very name *Inisfail*. The toponym is a traditional way of referring to Ireland; as Gifford notes:

*Inis* is Irish for island, and the *Fal* was the fetish stone, the stone of destiny at Tara; hence the name means Island of Destiny (Ireland) and is associated with the Golden Age presided over by the high kings of Tara.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, the name is suggestively ominous, as *failure* looms large on the insular (*inis*) project. However, the satirical exaggeration which stamps the whole passage is not the only means by which that failure is inscribed. The parodic celebration of Ireland, drawing on revivalist set pieces, quickly reveals how very worldly the island is. The territorial integrity of Ireland is called into question by a multitude of heterogeneous details. The tongue-in-cheek homage to Mangan, lionised by John Mitchel and D. J. O’Donoghue as Ireland’s ‘national bard, the upholder of Gaelic honour in the face of

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<sup>139</sup>The poem first appeared in James Hardiman, ed., *Irish Minstrelsy: or Bardic Remains of Ireland with English Poetical Translations*. Vol. 2. London: Joseph Robins, 1831, pp. 372–375. It was first translated in 1832 in J. O’Donovan, ‘King Aldfred’s Poem’. In: *The Dublin Penny Journal* 1.12 (1832), pp. 94–95. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/30002925>. Mangan produced ‘the first metrical translation’ in a 1846 volume, see James Clarence Mangan, ‘Prince Aldfrid’s Itinerary Through Ireland’. 1846. In: *Specimens of the Early Native Poetry of Ireland in English Metrical Translations*. Ed. by Henry R. Montgomery. Dublin: James McGlashan, 1892, pp. 112–115.

<sup>140</sup>Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 316.



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Saxon contamination,’ is a first hint that such tokens of Irishness ought to be handled with care.<sup>141</sup>

As David Wheatley argues, while Mangan was canonised as a conveniently national *poète maudit*, the international scope of his writing was virtually consigned to oblivion. His mournful allegories of Ireland, such as the celebrated ‘Dark Rosaleen,’ overshadowed other facets of his output.<sup>142</sup> Yet Mangan’s oeuvre was underpinned by an extravagant practice of translation. Although he was long remembered chiefly for his own poetry, and for his translations from the Gaelic, such as ‘Aldfrid’s Itinerary,’ the only volume he published in his lifetime was an *Anthologia Germanica*, a collection of poems translated from the German.<sup>143</sup> A prolific translator, he also wrote ‘Oriental’ translations from Persian, Turkish, and a variety of Eastern languages. He was also responsible for an aptly-named ‘Polyglott Anthology’. Yet, of the fourteen languages from which he translated, he was allegedly fluent in just eight, and many of his Oriental translations themselves relied on prior translations into German.<sup>144</sup> Notwithstanding the Irish strain in his writing, he can be seen as an early practitioner of *Weltliteratur*. As Coilin Parsons argues, Mangan’s translations and anthologies evince a keen sense of the writer’s critical cosmopolitanism, as it ‘captures the cacophonous sounds of an emerging literary attention to worldliness.’<sup>145</sup> That is why Wheatley reckons Mangan as a representative of the ‘centrifugal [...] strain in Irish writing,’ alert to the interplay of the foreign and the familiar, and intent on exploring the potentialities of ‘self-estrangement.’<sup>146</sup> Writing at the height of Young Ireland agitation in the 1840s, Mangan eschews the dominant Irish-English binarism, and articulates instead a polyglot, Babelian project.

To make matters worse, Mangan frequently offered translations based on sources that were either misattributed, wildly distorted, or even nonexistent. This is hardly congruent with the image of the national bard embodying the spirit of the *Volk*. For

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<sup>141</sup>David Wheatley, “‘Fully able / to write in any language – I’m a Babel’”: James Clarence Mangan and the Task of the Translator’. In: *Essays on James Clarence Mangan: The Man in the Cloak*. Ed. by Sinéad Sturgeon. Belfast: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 33–52, p. 35.

<sup>142</sup>A national favourite, ‘Dark Rosaleen’ was carried over to St Lucia by the Irish Brothers of the Presentation who mentored Derek Walcott in his boyhood, see Walcott, ‘Leaving School’, p. 31.

<sup>143</sup>James Clarence Mangan, *Anthologia Germanica: A Series of Translations*. 2 vols. Dublin: William Curry Junior and Company, 1845.

<sup>144</sup>David Lloyd, ‘James Clarence Mangan’s Oriental Translations and the Question of Origins’. In: *Comparative Literature* 38.1 (Winter 1986), pp. 20–35, p. 21.

<sup>145</sup>Cóilín Parsons, ‘Cosmopolitan Form: Mangan’s Anthologies and the Critique of *Weltliteratur*’. In: *Essays on James Clarence Mangan: The Man in the Cloak*. Ed. by Sinéad Sturgeon. Belfast: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 84–101, p. 85.

<sup>146</sup>Wheatley, “‘Fully able / to write in any language – I’m a Babel’”, pp. 44–45.

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nationalists, the very process of translation was problematic: how could the uniqueness of the ‘national spirit,’ enshrined in an equally unique language, be reconciled with the idea of translatability? What room was left for translation when nations were seen as incommensurable essences? Voicing the nationalist anxiety about language and translation, the Young Ireland leader Thomas Davis pleaded thus:

The language which grows up with a people, is conformed to their organs, descriptive of their climate, constitution, and manners, mingled inseparably with their history and their soil, fitted beyond any other language to express their prevalent thoughts in the most natural and efficient way.

To impose another language on such a people is to send their history adrift among the accidents of translation—’tis to tear their identity from all places—’tis to substitute arbitrary signs for picturesque and suggestive names—’tis to cut off the entail of feeling, and separate the people from their forefathers by a deep gulf—’tis to corrupt their very organs, and abridge their power of expression.<sup>147</sup>

Urging upper- and middle-classes Irishmen to learn Irish rather than French or Italian, Davis posits an organic connection between the national language and the body politic. Indeed, as Lawrence Venuti has remarked, ‘translation is a scandal to nationalist thinking,’ as it demonstrates the radical incompleteness of national culture while opening it up to foreign ‘contamination.’<sup>148</sup> Likewise, Emily Apter writes cogently:

Translation offers a particularly rich focus for discussions of creative property and the limits of ownership because it is a peculiar genre; one that, counter to Romantic values and myths of avant-garde originality, exalts the art of the copy, flaunts its derivativeness, and proudly bears the lead weight of predication on literary antecedent. In what is perhaps a unique case of art as authorized plagiarism or legal appropriationism, the translation is encouraged to pilfer the original with no risk of copyright infringement or allegations of forgery. It is granted this license because it implicitly claims to be of the original; that is to say, possessed of no autonomous textual identity. Translation thus challenges legalistic norms of ownable intellectual property.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup>Thomas Davis, ‘Our National Language’. 1843. In: *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922: A Sourcebook*. Ed. by Tony Crowley. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 160–162, p. 161.

<sup>148</sup>Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2013, p. 117.

<sup>149</sup>Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 387.

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Mangan's wide range of literary activities, from translation to plagiarism and forgery, appear as an antidote both to the chapter's insistence on legal property rights, and to the nationalist obsession with purity and originality.

In the case of 'Aldfrid's Itinerary,' furthermore, the translation displaces the original Gaelic in favour of the hegemonic English language. The act of cultural recovery is predicated on the primacy of English, and becomes an unwilling admission of its dominance. Mangan's translation is decidedly a double-edged sword. The predicament becomes yet more baffling when the translation appears to have no source text. As David Lloyd argues, Mangan's translations, often accompanied by self-defeating philological commentaries, expose the fallacy of origins, authority, and faithfulness, on which nationalist mythologies tend to rely.<sup>150</sup> Blurring the lines between translation and mystification—in a self-conscious replication of MacPherson's Ossianic imposture—Mangan confounds ontological hierarchies between primary and secondary texts, myths and hoaxes, authenticity and parody.

The significance of these allusions becomes even more striking when we read the episode as an elaboration on Joyce's earlier assessment of Mangan. An important figure among Joyce's literary influences, Mangan embodies the paradox of the (post)colonial artist, as formulated in two texts written in 1902 and 1907. The first is an article, 'James Clarence Mangan'; the second is a talk delivered in Trieste—much of it an expanded translation into Italian of the 1902 article.<sup>151</sup> In many respects, Joyce's appreciation of Mangan seems to foreshadow the drama rehearsed in 'Cyclops.' Ominously enough, Joyce calls Mangan 'a stranger in his country':

The lore of many lands goes with him always, eastern tales and the memory of curiously printed medieval books which have rapt him out of his time—gathered together day by day and embroidered as in a web. He has acquaintance with a score of languages, of which, upon occasion, he makes a liberal parade, and has read recklessly in many literatures, crossing how many seas, and even penetrating into Peristan, to which no road leads that the feet travel. (...) Mangan, it must be remembered, wrote with no native literary tradition to guide him [...]

East and West meet in that personality (...) images interweave there like soft, luminous scarves and words ring like brilliant mail, and whether the song is of Ireland or of Istambol [sic] it has the same refrain. (*OCPW*, 54-57)

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<sup>150</sup>Lloyd, 'James Clarence Mangan's Oriental Translations and the Question of Origins', pp. 30–32.

<sup>151</sup>Both are collected in *OCPW*.

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As well as being a worldly poet, literally enmeshed within the texture of ‘many lands,’ fluent in countless languages, and cognizant of diverse literary traditions, Mangan is oddly construed as the originator of a hitherto non-existent tradition. In his 1907 talk, Joyce further emphasises the indignity of Ireland vis-à-vis Mangan. He notes that Mangan has been attacked as ‘a man whose vices were exotic and who was little of a patriot’ (131); but to Joyce he ‘subsumes into himself the spirit of an age and country’ (134), ‘and is it not the deep sense of sorrow and bitterness which explains in Mangan these names and titles and this fury of translation in which he sought to lose himself?’ (135). In a compelling juxtaposition of opposites, Mangan’s practice of translation spells out the anxiety of self-loss and dissolution, but also the aspiration to shape an uncreated nation. Joyce goes on, ‘He is a romantic, a would-be herald, a prototype for a would-be nation’ (136). The Ireland for which Mangan stands is yet to come into being, the ‘uncreated conscience’ which Stephen sets out to forge ‘in the smithy of [his] soul’ at the end of *Portrait* (P, 224). What is asserted here is the radical futurity of the nation, in stark contrast with the reified nostalgia of a backward-looking revivalism. Born out of ‘no native tradition,’ the utopian nation-to-be is translated into existence by an estranged polyglot whose affiliations encompass the world at large. The similarity with Glissant’s notion of creolisation is uncanny. In a talk he gave on translation, Glissant goes so far as to suggest that translation invents a language, at once necessary, common to the various languages set in relation, but also utterly unpredictable. The process is not limited to translation, however. He contends that ‘We no longer write today in a monolingual manner; on the contrary, we write in the presence of all languages in the world.’<sup>152</sup>

To come back to Inisfail, then, the failure of insularity is inscribed not only in the toponym itself, but also in the very movement of the intertextual relationship. The quotation from Mangan can be read superficially as the revivalist narrator’s self-authorising tribute to an emblematic national poet; but the putative point of origin appears to be the epitome of un-originality, in the shape of a translation—and a dubious one at that—by a writer who was at least as cosmopolitan as he was Irish.<sup>153</sup> Instead of landing on firm—national—ground, the reference to Mangan exposes a slippery tangle

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<sup>152</sup>‘*Nous n’écrivons plus aujourd’hui de manière monolingue, mais au contraire en présence de toutes les langues du monde.*’ He goes on: ‘*Qu’est-ce à dire, sinon que la traduction invente un langage nécessaire, d’une langue à l’autre, commun aux deux, mais en quelque sorte imprévisible par rapport à chacune d’elles ?*’ Édouard Glissant, ‘Traduire : relire, relire’. In: *Onzièmes Assises de la Traduction* (Arles 1994). Arles: Actes Sud, 1995, pp. 25–29, pp. 25–26. My translation. I come back to translation in the next chapter, see p. 257.

<sup>153</sup>Parsons, ‘Cosmopolitan Form’.

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of ‘centrifugal’ energies that destabilise the very notion of locality. Even the citizen cannot resist the appeal of an archipelagic Ireland. Citing Juvenal and Tacitus, he evokes the Greek merchants sailing to the Carmen fair, a large fair in Ancient Ireland, accepting also the claims made by the historian P. W. Joyce that Phoenician sailors traded with Ireland.

### 3.5.3 Micro-Cosmopolitanism

This movement, I believe, can be read as the paradigmatic shift that signals the expansion from the insular to the archipelagic. This self-defeating movement is crucial in ‘Cyclops’ and, I believe, provides a much more fruitful critique of nationalist mythologies than the mere parody of their rhetorical excess, or the commonplace repudiation of nationalism in favour of a liberal cosmopolitanism. Translation appears, via Mangan, in the intertextual background of the episode, but also, literally, in the many instances of displacement that disturb and unsettle the trope of insularity. In other words, both the island and the discourse that seeks to enshrine its integrity are radically contaminated by alien presences, foreign texts, exotic commodities. Therefore, the fantasy of insularity as isolation collapses, and the focus shifts from the spurious centrality of the island to the polycentric topography of the meta-archipelago. Simultaneously, the imprint of translation is felt at the local level, producing what Michael Cronin calls ‘micro-cosmopolitanism,’ that is to say an approach that situates ‘diversity, difference, exchange at the micro-levels of society.’<sup>154</sup> In this perspective, the local and the global are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. Cronin insists of the relevance of translation as a ubiquitous process:

If [...] the local can no longer be construed as tightly defined communities all speaking the same language and sharing the same culture, then the impact of vernacular cosmopolitanism and internal transculturalism means that the most local of interactions now will almost invariably involve some degree of translation.<sup>155</sup>

The ubiquity of translation, however, does not necessarily entail peaceful coexistence and frictionless communication. As Tiphaine Samoyault has shown, a measure of conflictuality is inherent in all translation. Against the conventional ideals of informational

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<sup>154</sup>Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>155</sup>Cronin, *Translation and Identity*, p. 136.

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transparency and faithfulness, she calls for the concept of ‘*traduction agonique*.’<sup>156</sup> Samoyault posits that translation does not resolve the tension between two different languages; rather, it keeps them face to face in an unremitting confrontation. ‘Through translation,’ she writes, ‘one sets one’s language in motion with the language of others.’<sup>157</sup> Neither language suppresses or obliterates the other. Instead, both abide in a more or less precarious equilibrium. While this dynamic is inherently conflictual, ‘*agonique*,’ it also proffers an expanded understanding of relationality and difference-in-sameness. As Glissant insists, not only is Relation global, in that its space is worldly, but ‘its particular spaces are irrigated by the space of the world.’<sup>158</sup> My point is that translation is a crucial site from which to survey the intricacies of the meta-archipelago.

### 3.5.4 Free Translations

Besides the references to Mangan, at least two other instances of translation feature in ‘Cyclops.’ The pairing of those two situations, where the validity of translation is seriously questioned, is instructive in itself. The first case is the translation of Garryowen’s Irish verse. Garryowen is the citizen’s dog, first designated as ‘that bloody mangy mongrel, Garryowen’ (*U*, 12.120). The mongrel contrasts with the cattle ‘of immaculate pedigree’ (12.107) mentioned earlier in the episode as part of the riches of the island, but is quite in keeping with the variegated nature of the chapter, and is certainly a more accurate representative of Inis-fail than are the spotless herds. Later on in the chapter, these unflattering epithets give way to a more dignified introduction, as well as an onomastic sleight of hand, whereby Garryowen becomes Owen Garry, ‘the famous old Irish wolfdog setter’ (12.715). The ease with which the dog’s status is altered is already a token of narrative unreliability; the verbal metamorphosis which turns the mangy dog of dubious pedigree into an emblem of national pride is farcical in itself. To make matters worse, the operation is marred on the lexical level, as the return of the repressed ‘mongrel’ is inscribed in the oxymoronic compound *wolf-dog*, which straddles the divide between species, wild and domesticated. Although the citizen is unequivocal in his reprobation of Mr Breen for being ‘a half and half’ (12.1052), his own dog could equally fall under the rubric. The inversion which allows ‘Garryowen,’ a drinking-cum-marching song associated with a locality near Limerick, to morph into Owen Garry, ‘a

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<sup>156</sup>Tiphaine Samoyault, *Traduction et violence*. Paris: Seuil, 2020, p. 11.

<sup>157</sup>‘*Par la traduction, on met en mouvement sa propre langue avec la langue des autres.*’ Samoyault, *Traduction et violence*, p. 180.

<sup>158</sup>Glissant, *Treatise on the Whole-World*, p. 132.

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semilegendary king of Leinster and a contemporary of Finn MacCool's,<sup>159</sup> is itself a kind of flawed trans-lation, a gross mishandling of the verbal medium. A mere shift in the sequence of morphemes proves how volatile and slippery the referential relationship can be. In a chapter which hinges on definitions—'But do you know what a nation means?', (12.1419)—the tendentious manipulations to which language can be subjected are emphasised relentlessly. This makes for a rather inauspicious introduction to the following translation 'by an eminent scholar whose name for the moment we are not at liberty to disclose':

The metrical system of the canine original, which recalls the intricate alliterative and isosyllabic rules of the Welsh *englyn*, is infinitely more complicated but we believe our readers will agree that the spirit has been well caught. Perhaps it should be added that the effect is greatly increased if Owen's verse be spoken somewhat slowly and indistinctly in a tone suggestive of suppressed rancour.

*The curse of my curses  
Seven days every day  
And seven dry Thursdays  
On you, Barney Kiernan,  
Has no sup of water  
To cool my courage,  
And my guts red roaring  
After Lowry's lights. (12.740)*

What we are given here is another parody of revivalist literature. The rendition, with the inevitable philological gloss, is indicative of the textual precariousness that attends any translation. The original is absent, obliterated. The final product is a subdued grumble, with hints of alliterative verse—a far cry from the complex rhythms of the original *englyn*. For all the assertion that 'the spirit has been well caught,' the rendition borders on the nonsensical ('Seven days every day'). Yet, the dog's familiarity with the Welsh literary tradition can also be read as an ironic comment on the national project, as it testifies to an expanded, potentially pan-Celtic horizon, wider than a purely insular project. Emer Nolan has noted the violence implicit in all translations occurring in 'Cyclops':

the violence signified by 'Cyclops' as a whole is not just the crude words and physical force of the citizen, but also the violent clashes it demonstrates

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<sup>159</sup>Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 338.

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between different languages. Far from different ways of signifying the world being grasped as mutually interchangeable and presented without distinction or hierarchy, [...] we find instead a dramatisation of their confrontation and irreconcilability. The parodies expose the limitations of the translations they perform.<sup>160</sup>

The other prominent inscription of translation in the episode occurs when the Citizen starts reading an article in the nationalist *United Irishman*, reporting the visit of a ‘Zulu chief’—actually a Nigerian sovereign—‘His Majesty the Alaki of Abeakuta,’ to England (12.1515). The issue of translation, already broached with Garryowen’s verse, surfaces again, but in a different context. As the African chief is greeted by an audience of capitalists in Manchester, once again we only have access to the translation of his speech, ‘freely translated by the British chaplain, the reverend Ananias Praisegod Barebones.’ The ‘dusky potentate,’ we are told,

tendered his best thanks to Massa Walkup and emphasised the cordial relations existing between Abeakuta and the British Empire, stating that he treasured as one of his dearest possessions an illuminated bible, the volume of the word of God and the secret of England’s greatness, graciously presented to him by the white chief woman, the great squaw Victoria, with a personal dedication from the august hand of the Royal Donor. The Alaki then drank a lovingcup of firstshot usquebaugh to the toast *Black and White* from the skull of his immediate predecessor in the dynasty Kakachakachak, surnamed Forty Warts, after which he visited the chief factory of Cottonopolis and signed his mark in the visitors’ book, subsequently executing an old Abeakutic wardance, in the course of which he swallowed several knives and forks, amid hilarious applause from the girl hands. (12.1518)

There are reasons to be wary of the ‘free’ translation effected by the British Church official, a character directly interested and complicit in the imperial enterprise. What is foregrounded here is the power conferred upon the translator by the mastery of foreign languages in an imperial context. The chaplain’s potentially unreliable translation mirrors the anonymous translation of Owen Garry’s verse, as both literally excise the texts and silence the voices they are supposed to stand for. The bible offered by Victoria to Abeakuta—presumably the Authorised Version—is itself an emblem of a hegemonic translation. As R. J. Sugirtharajah puts it, the King James Version ‘came to the colonies as the Englishman’s book [...] and eventually emerged as a key text of the empire,

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<sup>160</sup>Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism*, p. 106.



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playing a prominent role in colonial expansion.<sup>161</sup> The parallel between the dog and Abeakuta is reinforced, as both translational performances are followed by spectacular acts of ingestion: the dog drinks the water ‘and, gob, you could hear him lapping it up a mile off’ (404-405), while Abeakuta swallows knives and forks, cheered on by his audience. In both cases, the performers’ histrionics are given pride of place, while their speeches are effectively eclipsed. The symbolic ingestion of cutlery, a typical British export and an emblem of ‘civilisation,’ reads like a dysfunctional rehearsal of the cultural cannibalism envisioned by Bloom.<sup>162</sup> The episode’s perimeter is further broadened by the mention of Africa as a part of the British empire, a fact which recurs shortly after, when Queen Victoria is designated as the one ruling over ‘the pale, the dark, the ruddy and the ethiop’ (*U*, 12.298). More crucially, however, the acts of translation that purport to transcend the limitations of insularity appear as suspicious, deceptive, and potentially fraudulent. This may suggest that Inis-fail has yet to be displaced by a truly archipelagic alternative.

### 3.5.5 National Trees

To come back to the chapter’s opening, the invocation of Inisfail introduces a long description of the land. It abounds with common-places borrowed from the genre of the *locus amoenus*, couched in a language that is ludicrous and hyperbolic:

A pleasant land it is in sooth of murmuring waters, fishful streams where sport the gurnard, the plaice, the roach, the halibut, the gibbed haddock, the grilse, the dab, the brill, the flounder, the pollock, the mixed coarse fish generally and other denizens of the aqueous kingdom too numerous to be enumerated. (12.70)

Unsurprisingly, the episode that most directly confronts nationalist discourse is centrally concerned with place. As Terry Eagleton aptly puts it, “‘Land’ in Ireland is a political rallying cry as well as a badge of cultural belonging.”<sup>163</sup> He notes that culture was inevitably foisted on Irish nature writing, as the land was such a vexed political issue, especially in the nineteenth century. In reaction to a system of land tenure synonymous with dispossession, evictions, and rent increases, agrarian unrest was a constant feature

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<sup>161</sup>R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>162</sup>For a discussion of which, see Chapter 1.3.2, p. 101.

<sup>163</sup>Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 7.

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of Irish life, from the Whiteboyism of the eighteenth century to the Land War of the years 1879-1882, and cemented the social basis for the nationalist movement in the end of the century.<sup>164</sup> The land was an arena of fierce social struggles, especially after the Great Famine. Consequently, it was not so easy to idealise landscapes that had become synonymous with national trauma. As if to test Eagleton's diagnosis, the narrative proceeds to celebrate the insular landscape, in a manner apparently oblivious to the social processes embedded in it. With its heavy-handed aestheticisation of the landscape, the description evokes travellers' accounts of foreign lands, rather than the familiarity of the local. The prose flows in long periods, artfully stilted, rife with archaisms and awkward periphrases. Particularly significant are the trees included in the description:

In the mild breezes of the west and of the east the lofty trees wave in different directions their first class foliage, the wafty sycamore, the Lebanonian cedar, the exalted planetree, the eugenic eucalyptus and other ornaments of the arboreal world with which that region is thoroughly well supplied.  
(12.76)

It resounds with deliberate metrical cadences ('and chips of strawberries and sieves of gooseberries, pulpy and pelurious, and strawberries fit for princes and raspberries from their canes'), and the concern for euphony borders on the preposterous, with the 'eugenic eucalyptus.' Yet there is more to it than parody. The introduction of trees in the text anticipates the dramatisation of the so-called 'tree wedding' later on in the episode, to which I will return. It could also be argued that the performance of rhetorical excess is itself a symptom of the colonial condition.<sup>165</sup>

The ideological valences of trees cannot be overemphasised, as they are a central motif in nationalist imagery, and the forest is indeed 'a paradigmatic Irish cultural landscape.'<sup>166</sup> Rooted in the national soil, the trees can be made to stand for the land as well as its people. Embodying qualities of stability, longevity, and permanence, they have often been turned into synecdoches of local identity.<sup>167</sup> In the Irish context, the

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<sup>164</sup>See Philip Bull, 'Land and Politics, 1879-1903'. In: *The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923*. Ed. by D. G. Boyce. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 1-22.

<sup>165</sup>See Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, p. 310.

<sup>166</sup>Yi-Peng Lai, 'The Tree Wedding and the (Eco)Politics of Irish Forestry in "Cyclops": History, Language, and the Viconian Politics of the Forest'. In: *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce*. Ed. by Derek Gladwin Robert Brazeau. Cork: Cork University Press, 2014, pp. 91-112, p. 92.

<sup>167</sup>See my reading of the opening of *Omeros* in Chapter 2.2.2, p. 118.

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evocations are compounded by a colonial history of deforestation. As John Patrick Montaña has demonstrated in *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*, the rationale for the conquest and settlement of Ireland in the Renaissance was largely articulated in terms which saw the Irish as a wild, pastoral people, waiting to be civilised along English lines by the introduction of land tillage and cultivation. In Montaña's words,

the transformation of the landscape was [...] to serve as an instrument for introducing tillage, increasing revenue, and eliminating the swordsmen, wastes, and fastnesses that sustained the primitive, savage, and anarchic native society.<sup>168</sup>

Irish forests were construed as a disturbing symbol of Irish barbarity, in contrast to the well-tilled fields of English farmers, duly demarcated and legally owned. This rhetoric curiously echoes that of Odysseus about the land, precisely, of the Cyclopes, 'lawless brutes, who trust so to the everlasting gods / they never plant with their own hands or plow the soil.' The lack of agriculture is adduced as evidence of the Cyclopes' savagery, a fact aggravated by the absence of a body politic:

Unsown, unplowed, the earth teems with all they need,  
wheat, barley and vines, swelled by the rains of Zeus  
to yield a big full-bodied wine from clustered grapes.  
They have no meeting place for council, no laws either,  
no, up on the mountain peaks they live in arching caverns—  
each a law to himself, ruling his wives and children,  
not a care in the world for any neighbor.  
For the Cyclops have no ships with crimson prows,  
no shipwrights there to build them good trim craft  
that could sail them out to foreign ports of call  
as most men risk the seas to trade with other men.  
Such artisans would have made this island too  
a decent place to live in... No mean spot,  
it could bear you any crop you like in season [...]

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<sup>168</sup>Montaña explains that by 1500, 'there was a long-established tradition of describing the Irish as savage, a people whose habitat is the wild forest, whose style of life is undisciplined, unruly, governed by instinct, and little more than beast-like. Consequently, terms like savage, *silvestri Hibernie*, wild Irish, and *wildehirrisheman* are used interchangeably to characterize a wild people living in a wild, impenetrable, and disordered land.' John Patrick Montaña, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 84, 213–15.

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The land's clear for plowing. Harvest on harvest,  
a man could reap a healthy stand of grain—  
the subsoil's dark and rich.<sup>169</sup>

As James Fairhall has noted, Plantation Ireland became a prime source of timber for the metropolis, and the ever-growing needs of English naval construction played a large part in ridding the island of its forests over the centuries.<sup>170</sup> Deforestation went hand in hand with colonial conquest—a process also motivated by the need to deprive rebel bands of their preferred shelters.<sup>171</sup> Those themes were articulated to formulate a strand of elegiac nationalism, to the extent that ‘Ireland’s deforestation is a synecdoche for larger losses: not just trees but lives, language, and culture.’<sup>172</sup> In turn-of-the-century Ireland, reforestation was a much debated issue, advocated by such bodies as the Irish National Foresters. John Wyse Nolan, one of the pub patrons, is later characterised as ‘grand high chief ranger of the Irish National Foresters’ (12.1278), and appears in the Foresters’ uniform in ‘Circe’ (15.3305). Anna Pilz and Andrew Tierney explain that, beginning in the mid eighteenth century, woodland regeneration became fashionable among the gentry. Trees were planted on the demesnes of the Anglo-Irish landowning class, drawing criticism that the resulting landscapes ‘looked English,’ and were therefore un-Irish. Those reforestation efforts were circumscribed to landed estates, to such an extent that the presence of trees became a sign of landlordism: ‘trees had come to symbolize the Anglo-Irish elite itself.’ Deforestation picked up again in the 1880s, following the Land Acts which provided for the purchase of land by tenants, who proceeded to cut down what trees grew on their newly purchased lots. There was mounting interest for reforestation among late nineteenth century cultural nationalists, who revived the saying that ‘Ireland will never be conquered while the leaves are on the trees,’ harking back to the days of Elizabethan conquest, when native insurgents would shelter in the woods. ‘The literature of the Irish Revival reflects the contested nature

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<sup>169</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, IX, 118-49. See also the reading of this passage in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the episode is construed as a confrontation between the civilised Odysseus and the savage Polyphemus. Yet in the course of the confrontation, this opposition itself is called into question, as ‘the cunning by which the clever man assumes the form of stupidity reverts to stupidity as soon as he discards that form.’ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. 1947. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 50–54.

<sup>170</sup>James Fairhall, ‘Ecocriticism, Joyce, and the Politics of Trees in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*’. In: *Irish Studies Review* 20.4 (2012), pp. 367–387, pp. 370–373.

<sup>171</sup>Lai, ‘The Tree Wedding and the (Eco)Politics of Irish Forestry in “Cyclops”’, p. 93.

<sup>172</sup>Fairhall, ‘Ecocriticism, Joyce, and the Politics of Trees in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*’, p. 373.

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of Ireland's arboreal spaces; on the one hand, an apt symbol of national decline and regeneration, and, on the other, an emblem of landed wealth and colonial privilege.'<sup>173</sup> Incidentally, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, another body which advocated reafforestation in the 1900s, was founded by a Sir Horace Plunkett, maybe another inadvertent namesake for the retired veteran in *Omeros*.<sup>174</sup>

Here, the unsettling introduction of eugenics in the list of otherwise conventional adjectives, suggests associations between the trees and the community of national progenitors. While the pairing of adjective and noun may sound gratuitous, there is more to the 'eugenic eucalyptus' than meets the ear. In the nineteenth century, Gifford explains, eucalyptus was used to make a tincture that was used as a douche—whereby the association appears slightly more justified.<sup>175</sup> More to the point, though, the allusion to eugenics summons a dominant epistemological framework, the better to expose its limitations and ultimate irrelevance.

Indeed, eugenics gained prominence throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reflections and experiments aiming to improve procreation permeated much scientific discourse, and informed contemporary attitudes more broadly. As Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine point out, advocates of eugenics were often moved by projects of 'racial nationalism and indeed racial purity.' Exploiting scientific discoveries in the field of evolutionary biology and natural selection, proponents of eugenics such as Galton sought to 'improve the race' by a variety of means. Those included large-scale population engineering schemes, such as control of marriages and unions, the sterilisation of 'undesirables,' and incentives towards qualitative procreation. Eugenics stood at the intersection of science and politics. As an emerging discourse, it coincided with—and, perhaps, was made possible by—the rise of the modern nation-state and nationalist ideologies, concerned with the fitness of the people. As Bashford and Levine make clear, the drive to monitor and improve the national stock meant that 'eugenics could match and enshrine the aspirations of new nation-states anxious to establish their legitimacy.'<sup>176</sup> Drawing upon genealogy to retrace origins, but also to engineer the future of the nation, eugenics encapsulated the biological anxieties that beset the nationalist project, such as degeneration or contamination of the 'race.' To map and control lines

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<sup>173</sup>Anna Pilz and Andrew Tierney, 'Trees, Big House Culture, and the Irish Literary Revival'. In: *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 19.2 (Summer 2015), pp. 65–82, p. 82.

<sup>174</sup>Lai, 'The Tree Wedding and the (Eco)Politics of Irish Forestry in "Cyclops"', p. 94.

<sup>175</sup>Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 317.

<sup>176</sup>Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 6, 12.

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of descent, eugenicists relied heavily on pedigree charts, or genealogical *trees*. The enlistment of the ‘ornaments of the arboreal world’ in the political fray is therefore literal *and* metaphorical; the imagery replicates the episode’s pervasive discussion on the nation, which finds another symbol in the herds ‘of immaculate pedigree’ (12.107).

Ironically, however, the eucalyptus is surrounded by other trees whose lines of descent may not be quite spotless. Indeed, the eucalyptus is hardly a fitting representative of insular purity, as it originated in Australia, before being disseminated the world over. Similarly, the ‘Lebanonian cedar’ is conspicuously foreign. For all its harmless pastoralism, then, the eclogue contains disturbing intimations of artificiality. Far from being the preserved site of an immemorial, untouched nature, the forest appears as a man-made gallery of disparate species, a fabricated microcosm that has more to do with global connections than with authenticated national roots. It becomes a site of multi-directional flows, in a Glissantian move from ‘identity as a unique root’ to ‘identity as relation,’ enacting the clash between ‘the atavistic and the composite.’<sup>177</sup> The celebration of rootedness and belonging, which is so spectacularly ridiculed later in the episode, appears already mined with the undercurrents of a wider archipelago, traversed ‘in different directions’ by ‘the mild breezes of the west and of the east.’<sup>178</sup>

The trees are more than symbols, however. Recurring in the tree-wedding passage, they read like an intertextual offshoot derived from some of the most ancient Irish texts, the eighth century Brehon Laws. Those law tracts were probably enforced long before being committed to writing in pre-Christian Ireland, and have come down as one of the most extensive and well-preserved legal systems of that period. Needless to say, Revivalists were quick to seize on those documents as evidence of Ireland’s primeval state, rehearsing the lament for an island untainted by foreign influences. In 1913 John Costello, who was later to become Attorney General in the Free State, wrote on Brehon Law:

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<sup>177</sup>Glissant speaks of ‘*la querelle de l’atavique et du composite, de l’identité racine unique et de l’identité relation.*’ In Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*, p. 38

<sup>178</sup>Fairhall notes that ‘many of the trees and shrubs catalogued are notable for their sparseness or absence in the Ireland of 1904. For instance, olive trees, mahoganies, cedars, and mimosas do not naturally occur in Ireland and cannot be grown there. Other trees, such as firs, elms, ash trees, poplars, and elders, belong to over-harvested species that benefited from replanting by Protestant landowners and owners of ironworks in compliance with legislation (1698) aimed at making up for the damage sustained by forests in the Williamite wars of 1688-91. Some of the wedding plants are English rather than Irish, such as mistletoe, an exotic lacking any traditional meaning in Ireland; and some, such as the coupling of “ivytod” and “hollyberries” (*U*, 12.1293-4), with its allusion to the English folk carol “The Holly and the Ivy”, trail foreign cultural roots.’ Fairhall, ‘Ecocriticism, Joyce, and the Politics of Trees in the ‘Cyclops’ episode of *Ulysses*’, pp. 375–76.

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As a consequence of its geographical remoteness and insular isolation, Ireland was uninfluenced by any of the great movements in literature or thought which swept from time to time over the continent of Europe. Its literature is a natural growth, nourished solely by the Celtic genius. So, too, its laws are native, and, originating far back in the dim ages of the Celtic dawn, were handed down through the years—a purely indigenous growth self-centred and self-contained.<sup>179</sup>

In Costello's narrative, the laws grew organically in the native soil, metaphorising the fantasied communion of land, social institutions, and therefore people. This unwitting anticipation is yet another subtext, whose very premises are thrown off kilter. Dealing with the wide range of social activities available to a pastoral people, the Brehon Law tracts include detailed prescriptions regarding the care and maintenance of trees. In a striking instance of social animism, the so-called Old Irish tree-list contained in the *Bretha Comaithchesa* ranks the trees in a tight hierarchy, which mirrors the social strata of the age. The wood comprises nobles (*airig fedo*), commoners (*aithig fedo*), lower divisions (*fodla fedo*), and bushes (*losa fedo*). Specific fines, to be paid in cattle, are provided for in case of unlawful woodcutting, barking, or other offenses, depending on the status and economic value of the trees in question.<sup>180</sup>

Then follows a passage in the same bombastic style, marked by a seemingly uncontrollable profusion of compounds:

The figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower was that of a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed red-haired freely freckled shaggybearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfacedsinewyarmed hero. (12.151)

As in the designation of Garryowen as a 'wolfdog,' hybridity appears on the level of lexical structure, a literal refutation of his role as a symbol of national pride.

The hero's body is covered 'with a strong growth of tawny prickly hair in hue and toughness similar to the mountain gorse (*ulex Europeus*)' (382). It is doubly significant that the Latin name of the mountain gorse features in the description: the scientific reference feels quite at odds with the overall tone of the passage, further undermining the already fragile pastiche of ancient writing. The linguistic strangeness

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<sup>179</sup>John Costello, 'The Leading Principles of the Brehon Laws'. In: *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 2.8 (December 1913), pp. 415–440, p. 416.

<sup>180</sup>Fergus Kelly, 'Trees in Early Ireland'. In: *Irish Forestry* 56.1 (1999), pp. 39–57, p. 39.

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of *ulex Europeus* adds to the ever-expanding horizon, opening another breach in the texture of the passage, by conjuring the authoritative language *par excellence* that is Latin, while incidentally questioning the Irishness of the scene, as the mountain gorse is defined by its Europeanness. The Irish hero, then, is described in terms that undermine the whole topos he is supposed to embody. The site of the description appears as a nexus of worldly flows, while the language ostensibly points at the composite nature of the locality thus evoked.

The giant wears seastones graven with ‘the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity.’ As it soon appears, however, the catalogue of heroes and heroines is neither particularly Irish, nor particularly venerable. After enumerating predictable figures from the revivalist pantheon, such as ‘Cuchulin, Conn of hundred battles, Niall of nine hostages, Brian of Kincora,’ the list quickly grows more and more improbable:

Goliath, Horace Wheatley, Thomas Conneff, Peg Woffington, the Village Blacksmith, Captain Moonlight, Captain Boycott, Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, S. Fursa, S. Brendan, Marshal MacMahon, Charlemagne, Theobald Wolfe Tone, the Mother of the Maccabees, the Last of the Mohicans, the Rose of Castile, the Man for Galway, The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo, The Man in the Gap, The Woman Who Didn’t, Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon Bonaparte, John L. Sullivan, Cleopatra, Saviourneen Deelish, Julius Caesar, Paracelsus, sir Thomas Lipton, William Tell, Michelangelo Hayes, Muhammad, the Bride of Lammermoor, Peter the Hermit, Peter the Packer, Dark Rosaleen, Patrick W. Shakespeare, Brian Confucius, Murtagh Gutenberg, Patricio Velasquez, Captain Nemo, Tristan and Isolde, the first Prince of Wales, Thomas Cook and Son, the Bold Soldier Boy, Arrah na Pogue, Dick Turpin, Ludwig Beethoven, the Colleen Bawn, Waddler Healy, Angus the Culdee, Dolly Mount, Sidney Parade, Ben Howth, Valentine Greatrakes, Adam and Eve, Arthur Wellesleyt Boss Croker, Herodotus, Jack the Giantkiller, Gautama Buddha, Lady Godiva, The Lily of Killarney, Balor of the Evil Eye, the Queen of Sheba, Acky Nagle, Joe Nagle, Alessandro Volta, Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa, Don Philip O’Sullivan Beare. (12.172-199)

This is merely the first of many such catalogues which puncture the narrative throughout the episode, and undermine the seriousness of the pseudo-revivalist rhetoric. The ‘allincluding’ nature of the catalogue, comprising the relatively un-Irish figures of Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, and the Last of the Mohicans, is a rebuke to ethnocentric claims of national grandeur. Even the inventor of the printing-press



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is rechristened in a more suitably Gaelic way for the occasion, becoming ‘Murtagh Gutenberg.’

Later, the discussion embarks ‘on the revival of ancient Gaelic sports and the importance of physical culture, as understood in ancient Greece and ancient Rome and ancient Ireland, for the development of the race’ (12.899). As with eugenics, the fashionable concern over national fitness was a key ingredient in political schemes to spread physical education, whether on behalf of States or of nationalist organisation such as Michael Cusack’s Gaelic Athletic Association. Cusack, as is well known, was Joyce’s main inspiration for the character of the Citizen. The suggested equivalence between ‘ancient Greece and ancient Rome and ancient Ireland’ pertains to the legitimising discourse of nationalism, seeking authoritative precedents in allegedly illustrious civilisations.<sup>181</sup> The appeal to ‘our ancient panceltic forefathers’ (12.906) is yet another way to assert a sense of continuity. The focus is on ‘ressuscitating’ and ‘reviving’ ancient traditions, as in Thomas Davis’s poem ‘A Nation Once Again,’ alluded to in the course of the conversation, which draws a similar parallel between Ireland and ancient Greece and Rome. Bloom intervenes in the conversation with rather practical, rather than political preoccupations in mind. The narrator identified as Thersites relates:

And of course Bloom had to have his say too about if a fellow had a rower’s heart violent exercise was bad. I declare to my antimacassar if you took up a straw from the bloody floor and if you said to Bloom: *Look at, Bloom. Do you see that straw? That’s a straw.* Declare to my aunt he’d talk about it for an hour so he would and talk steady. (12.891)

Yet Bloom speaks comparatively little in the episode, at any rate compared with the loquaciousness of the Citizen, not to mention that of the narrative voices whose long-winded catalogues do seem to last ‘for an hour or so.’

The hyperbolic nature of those catalogues, constantly exceeding the bounds of Inisfail, resonates with Bloom’s expostulation on the national question:

- A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
- By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that’s so I’m a nation for I’m living in the same place for the past five years.

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<sup>181</sup>I discuss this theme in Chapter 1.1.2, p. 58.

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So of course everyone had a laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:

- Or also living in different places. (12.1419)

As Ned Lambert immediately points out, Bloom's first answer is logically awkward. His addendum, to the effect that a nation can also consist in people 'living in different places,' is perhaps no less confusing, but it also poses a radical challenge to parochial definitions of belonging. While Bloom's politics is a muddled affair, his aphorism, situated in the course of an episode which foregrounds translation, worldwide circulations, and the precariousness of boundaries, assumes prophetic overtones.<sup>182</sup>

Bloom's proposal for a diasporic nation encompassing people living in different places is construed as a sign of his Jewishness; the Citizen emphasises Bloom's foreign origins by recalling his father's Hungarian name: 'A wolf in sheep's clothing, says the citizen. That's what he is. Virag from Hungary ! Ahasuerus I call him. Cursed by God. [...] / - Saint Patrick would want to land again at Ballykinlar and convert us, says the citizen, after allowing things like that to contaminate our shores' (12.1667-72). His xenophobia aligns him with Deasy, the arch-Unionist, showing that both rely on the same xenophobic tropes of contamination. Ironically, Martin Cunningham answers the Citizen's abuse with a reminder that the Irish, like the Jews, have yet to attain their promised land: 'That's the new Messiah for Ireland ! says the citizen. Island of saints and sages ! / - Well, they're still waiting for their redeemer, says Martin. For that matter so are we' (12.1642). Indeed, while Bloom fails to articulate a convincing political position, his critique of nationalism can be successful.

The Citizen is outraged at reports of flogging on British navy ships, 'That's your glorious British navy, says the citizen, that bosses the earth. [...] That's the great empire they boast about of drudges and whipped serfs' (12.1346-50). Bloom asks what would be different if the Irish had an army of their own—the Citizen's dream: 'isn't discipline the same everywhere. I mean wouldn't it be the same here if you put force against force?' (12.1360). In his own subdued way, Bloom is essentially articulating a critique of bourgeois nationalism and state power, which would turn against the Irish 'drudges and whipped serfs' if it managed to build a homegrown state apparatus.

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<sup>182</sup>In 'The Schooner *Flight*', Shabine declares: 'I'm just a red nigger who love the sea, / [...] I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation' (*PDW*, 238), echoing both Leopold Bloom and Odysseus's quip that his name is 'Nobody,' which allows him to escape the Cyclops's island after piercing his eye, leaving an outwitted Polyphemus howling for help: 'Nobody's killing me now by fraud and not by force!', see Homer, *The Odyssey*, IX, 450-63.

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Bloom says he belongs to a race that is persecuted, and dismisses the suggestion to respond to violence by violence:

- But it's no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.

- What? says Alf.

- Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. (12.1481)

Yet the narrative proceeds to comment on Bloom's ineffectual sermon, with a new catalogue puncturing the narrative yet again:

Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14 A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M. B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Chi Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. (12.1493)

The conceit that collapses trees and bodies into a single national *corpus* of texts is sustained throughout the chapter, as the 'tree-wedding' scene makes clear.<sup>183</sup> The scene follows that of another public occasion of a different kind, the execution of an Irish rebel, a reminiscence of Robert Emmet's hanging, already remembered by Bloom at the end of 'Sirens' (11.1284).<sup>184</sup> The execution unfolds under the eyes of the foreign delegations of the Friends of the Emerald Isle, who 'cheered vociferously in a medley of cries, *hoch, banzai, eljen, zivio, chinchin, polla kronia, hiphip, vive, Allah*' (12.599). The bungled heteroglossia glimpsed in the wild cries of the 'monster audience' (12.650) foreshadows the 'monstrous births' discussed at the Maternity in 'Oxen of the Sun,' which also involve linguistic corruption and an awe-inspiring experience of polyglossia.<sup>185</sup>

The bride of the hanged is accosted by 'a handsome young Oxford graduate [...] presenting his visiting card, bankbook and genealogical tree' (12.658), 'the bearer, by the way, of one of the most timehonoured names in Albion's history' (12.665). She accepts his proposal on the spot

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<sup>183</sup>In addition to Fairhall's article and Lai's chapter, already quoted, I am indebted to Brigitte L. Sandquist, 'The Tree Wedding in 'Cyclops' and the Ramifications of Cata-Logic'. In: *James Joyce Quarterly* 33.2 (Winter 1996), pp. 195–209 and Pilz and Tierney, 'Trees, Big House Culture, and the Irish Literary Revival'.

<sup>184</sup>Robert Emmet was the Republican leader of the 1803 uprising, after which he was captured and executed.

<sup>185</sup>See in the next chapter, p. 242.

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- As treeless as Portugal we'll be soon, says John Wyse, or Heligoland with its one tree if something is not done to reafforest the land. Larches, firs, all the trees of the conifer family are going fast. I was reading a report of lord Castletown's ...

- Save them, says the citizen, the giant ash of Galway and the chieftain elm of Kildare with a fortyfoot bole and an acre of foliage. Save the trees of Ireland for the future men of Ireland on the fair hills of Eire, O.<sup>186</sup>

- Europe has its eyes on you, says Lenehan.

The fashionable international world attended en masse this afternoon at the wedding of the chevalier Jean Wyse de Neaulan, grand high chief ranger of the Irish National Foresters, with Miss Fir Conifer of Pine Valley. Lady Sylvester Elmshade, Mrs Barbara Lovebirch, Mrs Poll Ash, Mrs Holly Hazeleyes, Miss Daphne Bays, Miss Dorothy Canebrake, Mrs dyde Twelvetrees, Mrs Rowan Greene, Mrs Helen Vinegadding, Miss Virginia Creeper, Miss Gladys Beech, Miss Olive Garth, Miss Blanche Maple, Mrs Maud Mahogany, Miss Myra Myrtle, Miss Priscilla Elderflower, Miss Bee Honeysuckle, Miss Grace Poplar, Miss O. Mimosa San, Miss Rachel Cedarfrond, the Misses Lilian and Viola Lilac, Miss Timidity Aspenall, Mrs Kitty Dewey-Mosse, Miss May Hawthorne, Mrs Gloriana Palme, Mrs Liana Forrest, Mrs Arabella Blackwood and Mrs Norma Holyoake of oakholme Regis graced the ceremony by their presence. The bride who was given away by her father, the M'Conifer of the Glands, looked exquisitely charming in a creation carried out in green mercerised silk, moulded on an underslip of gloaming grey, sashed with a yoke of broad emerald and finished with a triple flounce of darkerhued fringe, the scheme being relieved by bretelles and hip insertions of acorn bronze. (12.1258-84)

The Citizen's lament on the disappearance of Irish trees rehearses a familiar nationalist topos. While it is comically distorted in the narrative of the wedding, it recalls an argument made by Joyce in a 1907 article. In a piece titled 'Home Rule Comes of Age' Joyce responded to the passing of the third Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons, which he construed as a belated and inconsequential concession ('not a twentieth of the Home Rule proposal') to Irish nationalist claimson the part of the Westminster.<sup>187</sup> This bill, Joyce wrote, would not even begin to make up for 'England's debt to Ireland' on account of the iniquitous imperial taxation system (*OCPW*, 143). Further, he indicted England for the deforestation of Ireland's largest bog:

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<sup>186</sup>A reference to 'The Fair Hills of Eiré, O', a poem translated from the Irish by James Clarence Mangan, which celebrates the natural riches of the island while mourning its past glory.

<sup>187</sup>James Joyce, 'Home Rule Comes of Age'. 1907. In: *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*. Ed. by Kevin Barry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 142-144.

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the politicians and scientists who investigated the vast central bog of Ireland concluded that the two spectres that sit beside every Irish fireplace, consumption and insanity, are a refutation of all English claims, and that the moral debt of the English government for not having seen to the reforestation of this disease-ridden swamp for over an entire century amounts to over 500 million francs. (144)

This is one of the occasions when the Citizen actually voices some of Joyce's own criticisms. Brigitte Sandquist has noted that 'the Tree Wedding catalogue functions as a massive effort of verbal reforestation, rhetorically fulfilling the Citizen's verbal plea to save the forests. Yet, both the Tree Catalogue and the Citizen's words are just words.'<sup>188</sup>

Eventually, after the citizen attempts to smash Bloom's head with a biscuit tin, the episode ends with the following vision:

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling: *Elijah! Elijah!* And he answered with a main cry: *Abba! Adonai!* And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green Street like a shot off a shovel. (12.1910)

Bloom's spectacular ascent is an apposite conclusion to the episode. The scene unravels with a cheap inversion of a *deus ex machina* ending, whereby Bloom saves himself from the Citizen's attack only at the expense of narrative verisimilitude. His ascent puts paid to any pretence of realism, to which the novel might have reverted. The episode, consisting of so many voices, styles, and registers, was aptly inaugurated by a reflection on 'bad and doubtful debts,' showcasing the lack of credibility which increasingly attaches to the narrative of *Ulysses*, as the episodes grow more and more disparate.

In sum, 'Cyclops' is a demonstration of the one-sidedness of insular nationalism, subjected to a number of critical investigations. Bloom's subtle insight into the class-based nature of the Citizen's agenda is one such point. Yet, the most sustained critique of nationalism comes not from Bloom's Odyssean wordplay on 'nation' and 'love,' but

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<sup>188</sup>Sandquist, 'The Tree Wedding in 'Cyclops' and the Ramifications of Cata-Logic', p. 203.

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from the massive investment in translation which runs through the text, and which shows how even the local is ceaselessly ‘irrigated’ by the world-totality. The figure of James Clarence Mangan is central in this respect, gesturing towards an archipelago of letters by means of a detour through the archaic textual archive of the Irish past.

## Conclusion

In one sense, calling *Ulysses* and *Omeros* world-texts is but a way to register the breakdown of literary genre as such. As I have shown in this chapter, generations of readers have been baffled by the generic indeterminacy of *Ulysses*, and *Omeros* has been no less puzzling for critics in search of the right generic label. Joyce at once brings the novel to a state of perfection, fulfilling the realist ideal to an unprecedented degree in his ‘allincluding chronicle,’ and simultaneously kills off realism altogether by producing an incredibly unwieldy book defying the expectations associated with linear narrative. The catalogues and medley of styles in ‘Cyclops’ are evidence of the narratological struggle to include everything, from the most ancient registers of Irish literature to the society columns of modern newspapers. Walcott, likewise, plays with the epic expectations raised by the formal features of *Omeros*, but produces a distinctly un-epic tale. Yet my contention goes beyond this diagnosis; my claim is that the amalgamation of heterogeneous generic features by Joyce and Walcott is a function of uneven and combined development in literary terms. As such, it is the outcome of the strategies of literary expropriation discussed earlier, as well as of the commodity logic in the realm of cultural production. In that sense, the novelistic quality of *Omeros* lies in its amalgamation of distinct cultural forms and signatures and its ability to fuse them together in a way that registers ‘the palimpsestic, combinatory and contradictory “order” of peripheral experience.’<sup>189</sup>

In Fredric Jameson’s account, both modernism and mass culture emerge as by-products of capitalism and the tendential commodification of all aspects of social life, including cultural production. As the nineteenth century draws to a close, culture in the imperialist metropolises is no longer sustained by the homogeneous communal frameworks which once bound together the production and consumption of culture into a collective experience. As capitalism conquers all areas of life, cultural production falls within the ambit of the market; the collective immediacy hitherto binding producer

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<sup>189</sup>WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 72.

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and audience gives way to the impersonal circulation of cultural commodities. To put it schematically, *epos* is superseded by the anonymous realm of print capitalism, with its commercial publishing houses and newspapers. The atomisation of all preexisting 'organic' social groupings brings about a new differentiation, which counterposes modernism and mass culture, both 'equally dissociated from group praxis.'<sup>190</sup>

Yet the memory of an archaic, communal state of things lingers as a utopian fragment, a testimony to 'the ineradicable drive towards collectivity' which sustains even the most rarefied modernist experiments.<sup>191</sup> My suggestion is that the nostalgic reworking of rhythm into *Ulysses* and *Omeros* is utopian in just that way: on the one hand, the paradoxical insistence on outdated forms of performance or *epos* gestures towards pre-modern regimes of cultural production while, on the other, the new sense of commonality suggested by Joyce and Walcott cannot be disentangled from the sense of a world-totality in the making.

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<sup>190</sup>Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture'. In: *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979), pp. 130–148, p. 140.

<sup>191</sup>Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', p. 148.

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## Chapter 4

# Overcoming Babel: Creolisation as Utopia

In this final chapter, I turn to the site where utopianism is expressed most forcefully in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*: language itself. In my first chapter, I began by showing how literary tradition, the canon, and the idea of national literature were brought to boiling point and refashioned in unpredictable ways. Here, I look at the ways in which language itself becomes the object of utopian aspirations. My argument is that Joyce and Walcott expose the precariousness of language as a national construct. Although in widely different ways, both reflect on processes associated with language contact and evolution. In confronting the contingency and changeability of languages, they imagine ways to overcome the entanglement of a linguistically fragmented world-totality. The concept of creolisation is enlightening in this respect, emphasising the fluid nature of language; as such, it represents a potential means to anticipate the advent of a unified world-totality.

To begin with, this chapter addresses the backward-looking, or nostalgic, element in utopianism: this is manifested in revivalism, whether Irish or Afrocentric. I discuss the negative manifestations of utopianism in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*, which testify at once to the strength of the utopian impulse, and to its inadequate expression in terms borrowed solely from an alienated or fabricated past. Then, I focus on the ways in which these residual materials, however ineffectual in and of themselves, are creatively realigned and given new valences, whereby they gesture towards utopian futures.

To this end, I will focus on the trope of birth-giving, which features prominently in *Ulysses* and, to a lesser extent, in *Omeros*. I focus on ‘Oxen of the Sun,’ the chapter



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in *Ulysses* which famously recapitulates the gestation of English literature by narrating the labours of Mrs Purefoy in the Rotunda Maternity Ward. Joyce's ventriloquising *tour de force*, enlisting the grand literary styles of English, is a challenge not only to the notion of tradition, but to the English language itself, which comes out of this chapter shaken, decentered, creolised. I will argue that the polyglossia of this chapter dealing with birth-giving can be read as an implicit manifesto for a creolised renaissance. In *Omeros*, Helen's pregnancy and birth-giving rehearses similar concerns over rightful ownership—who is the father?—as a means to reimagine the coexistence of non-exclusive possibilities. Additionally, I pay special attention to the motif of stitching which runs through *Omeros*. 'Oxen' is a chapter which recapitulates the evolution of English literary styles and, crucially, looks to the future of the language in relation to empire and globalisation. Maud's quilt, on the other hand, is a central motif in *Omeros*; it can be read as an allegory of poetry which is part of a wider reflection on the relations between languages within a fractured world-totality. My argument is that in those passages or motifs, Joyce and Walcott can be seen grappling with the Babelian fragmentation of the world-totality, and gesturing towards a utopian reconciliation of all languages.

### **From Thomas More to Leopold Bloom: Bricolated Utopias**

In one of the many climactic passages that make up the 'Circe' episode, Leopold Bloom, dressed in a crimson velvet mantle, perched on a white stallion, delivers a prophetic speech to a large crowd of admirers. After promising his electors a tramline from the cattle-market to the river, he goes on to announce:

My beloved subjects, a new era is about to dawn. I, Bloom, tell you verily it is even now at hand. Yea, on the word of a Bloom, ye shall ere long enter into the golden city which is to be, the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future. (*U*, 15.1542)

The staging as well as the diction are farcical, quite in keeping with the hallucinatory pantomime that is 'Circe.'<sup>1</sup> However, although it may be tempting to treat Bloom's promised land as a ludicrous fantasy, I would argue that 'the new Bloomusalem in the

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the dramatic quality of 'Circe' and particularly its association with pantomime, see Cheryl Herr, "'One Good Turn Deserves Another': Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Joyce's "Circe" Episode'. In: *Journal of Modern Literature* 11.2 (July 1984), pp. 263–276.

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Nova Hibernia of the future' calls for a more serious engagement. Bloom's harangue prefigures the advent of a promised land, whose very name is congruent with Joyce's claim that *Ulysses* was 'an epic of two races (Israelite-Irish),' fusing Jerusalem with Hibernia.<sup>2</sup> As in John Taylor's speech in defence of the Irish language, recited by MacHugh in 'Aeolus,' the plight of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage is held up as a model for anticolonial identification in the Irish context (7.828-69). We are indeed reminded that Bloom's origin is 'the land of the Paraoh' (15.947), and his promised land draws on the discourse of national liberation, a suggestion borne out by his accolade to John Howard Parnell, celebrating their liberation into 'green Erin, the promised land of our common ancestors' (15.1517). Yet it remains unclear whose land this is to be, and Bloom's messianic vision is shot through with ominous, dystopian elements. Bloom's denunciation of social inequalities is cheered by an implausible crowd of political and clerical grandees, 'the chapter of the saints of finance in their plutocratic order of precedence' (15.1419), and the High Constable in person. Indeed, the construction of the golden city is no sooner undertaken than it goes catastrophically awry:

*(In the course of its extension several buildings and monuments are demolished. Government offices are temporarily transferred to railway sheds. Numerous houses are razed to the ground. The inhabitants are lodged in barrels and boxes, all marked in red with the letters: L. B. Several paupers fall from a ladder. A part of the walls of Dublin, crowded with loyal sightseers, collapses.)* (15.1546-55)

Notwithstanding this dismal unravelling, Bloom's sermon testifies to the presence of a strong utopian undercurrent at work in *Ulysses*. In 'Circe,' Bloom's vision is utopian in the most literal sense of the word, as it conjures up an inexistent, promised land, but it also rehearses burning political issues central to the novel as a whole. Dominic Manganiello has argued that Bloom's politics, for all its sometimes comic confusion, amalgamates elements derived from all kinds of revolutionary tendencies, from socialism to various anarchistic tendencies, to formulate 'a vision of a classless, humanitarian, pacifist and co-operative society, devoid of all forms of hatred and sentimentality.'<sup>3</sup> Bloom puts forward his manifesto in the following terms:

I stand for the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments.  
New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. Three acres

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<sup>2</sup>Gilbert, *Letters of James Joyce*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, pp. 112-114.

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and a cow for all children of nature. Saloon motor hearses. Compulsory manual labour for all. All parks open to the public day and night. Electric dishscrubbers. Tuberculosis, lunacy, war and mendicancy must now cease. General amnesty, weekly carnival with masked licence, bonuses for all, esperanto the universal language with universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical impostors. Free money, free rent, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state. (15.1685)

Also included are provisions for ‘mixed races and mixed marriage,’ a clear sign that Bloom’s esperantophone Erin aims beyond a nation defined in nativist or exclusionary terms.

Wolfgang Wicht has taken issue with this reading, pointing out the many defects which plague Bloom’s ideal city and systematically undercut the seriousness of its claims to social improvement. Wicht argues that Bloom’s utopian rhetoric in ‘Circe’ is precisely ‘a critique of existing representations of messianic ideas to which it perpetually refers,’ a registration of Joyce’s disillusionment after the Easter Rising which confirmed that the paralysis of Dublin was incurable, while exposing ‘the emptiness and futility of the grand narratives and the discourses of political and religious promise.’<sup>4</sup> It is indeed difficult to take Bloom’s schemes seriously.<sup>5</sup> It would be tedious to enumerate all the inconsistencies which plague Bloom’s political thought, an amalgam of misremembered slogans—‘Everyone according to his needs or everyone according to his deeds,’ he proclaims in ‘Eumaeus’ (16.247). That his utopianism manifests itself in such an aberrant way, however, does not invalidate it altogether. The very presence of Bloom’s messianic visions, however parodied and degraded, signals the importance of utopianism, although we may have to look away from this socialistic philistinism to detect its more meaningful manifestations.

In his study of Thomas More’s 1516 *Utopia*, Karl Kautsky points out that More’s politics was beset by virtually insuperable historical contradictions. While More is recognised as a precursor of modern socialism, Kautsky notes that he had to draw on resources which bore the stamp of a largely feudal society. For all its visionary radicalism, More’s *Utopia* was assembled out of the materials bequeathed by history. The legislation of *Utopia* includes such radical provisions as the abolition of private

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<sup>4</sup>Wicht, *Utopianism in James Joyce’s Ulysses*, pp. 43–53. The disavowal of ‘grand narratives’ is of course the grandest of all narratives. See Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

<sup>5</sup>Andrew Gibson has noted that ‘The “new Bloomusalem” ends up looking suspiciously like the Crystal Palace,’ and that Bloom is the living proof that ‘dreams of social and political transformation cannot escape the constraints they seek to transcend.’ See Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge*, p. 194.

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property, a six-hour working day for all—including women—, standards for the hygienic slaughtering of cattle, alongside the enslavement of criminals and the hiring of foreign soldiers to act as cannon fodder in war. The combination of the archaic and the visionary is a structural feature of More's makeshift text. The materials bequeathed by a rapidly disintegrating feudal society provided More with the stuff of his utopia; but, as Kautsky argues, More 'had to twist and turn them about in a truly fantastic manner to adapt them to his modern aims.'<sup>6</sup> The reliance on monastic discipline in the Utopia, for instance, is one such residual manifestation, as is the influence of early Christian communism. Witnessing the disintegration of feudalism and the onset of capitalist development in England, More produced a work which registered the uneven, conflictual nature of historical change. As Sarah Hogan has observed more recently, More's *Utopia* is both backward- and forward-looking, its visions informed by vestiges of feudal political philosophy together with radically modern ways of conceiving the world. It is structured by 'combinatory, collisional discourses of late medievalism, humanism, and New World writing,' registering the convulsive emergence of a new world-historical dispensation.<sup>7</sup>

Utopian writing flourished as a consequence of rapid social transformation. In a passage which would famously resurface in Marx's account of 'primitive accumulation,' More satirised the advance of capitalist farming in England, whereby common lands were enclosed to make way for pastures, to the effect that sheep '[devoured] human beings themselves.'<sup>8</sup> The large-scale expropriation of peasants beginning in the sixteenth century was instrumental in accelerating the transition to a market-driven agriculture, while at the same time turning the dispossessed rural population into a class of 'free', propertyless wage-workers, paving the way for England's capitalist development. More's depiction of the enclosure movement is quoted, twice, in Marx's historical overview at the end the first volume of *Capital*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the first part of More's *Utopia* is read as a record or diagnosis of a shifting social order. The momentous collision of

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<sup>6</sup>Karl Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia*. 1888. Trans. by H. J. Stenning. New York: International Publishers, 1927, pp. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup>Sarah Hogan, *Other Englands: Utopia, Capital, and Empire in an Age of Transition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, p. 30. See also Christopher Kendrick, 'More's *Utopia* and Uneven Development'. In: *boundary 2* 13.2/3 (Winter-Spring 1985), pp. 233–266; J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700*. 1981. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, and the chapter titled 'Morus: The Generic Window' in Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 22–41.

<sup>8</sup>More, *Utopia*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>Marx, *Capital*, pp. 880–899.

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discrepant modes of production at the time brought about a sense of catastrophe as well as of radical novelty and potential renewal. Early modern utopias also resonated with the echoes of colonial ventures; More's *Hythloday* is presented as a companion of the navigator Amerigo Vespucci, and his description of Utopia is indebted to the kind of travel writing so popular at the time.<sup>10</sup> 'While [Raphael] told us of many ill-considered usages in these newfound nations,' the narrator relates at the beginning of Book 1, 'he also described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races and kingdoms might take lessons in order to correct their errors,' a procedure borne out by the juxtaposition of the two books which make up *Utopia*, the first a satire of contemporary England, the second a description of the Utopian polity.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the encounter with a 'New World' could expand intellectual horizons in unprecedented ways, calling into question the foundations of all institutions, such as money, private property, or the family. In Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the serendipitous landing at Bensalem occurs on a trip from Peru to China and Japan across the South Sea, in an age when 'all nations have inter-knowledge one of another.'<sup>12</sup> Ironically, however, the islanders turn out to be even better travelled than their dumbfounded guests, keeping abreast of all the latest innovations in the arts and sciences across the globe thanks to a planetary network of undercover spies, maintaining a trade 'not for gold, silver, or jewels; nor for silks; nor for spices; nor any other commodity of matter,' but for sake of knowledge, a more precious good derived from 'the growth of all parts of the world.'<sup>13</sup>

Like More before them, Joyce and Walcott experienced times of historical convulsions. As Rosa Luxemburg argued in *The Accumulation of Capital*, colonialism replicated on a world scale the shattering of pre-capitalist social formations witnessed by More in England, whereby 'primitive' economic relations gave way to commodity

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<sup>10</sup>The perfection of More's Utopia was achieved by King Utopus through the conquest and improvement of the 'rude, uncouth inhabitants' of the country. Yet this rhetoric owes more to the legendary Greek lawgivers such as Solon or Lycurgus, much in vogue among the humanists, than to the so-called 'civilising mission' allegedly pursued by colonial empires at a later date. See More, *Utopia*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup>More, *Utopia*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>12</sup>Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*. 1626. In: *Three Early Modern Utopias*. Ed. by Susan Bruce. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 161.

<sup>13</sup>Bacon, *New Atlantis*, p. 168. On the connection between travel writing and early modern utopias more generally, see Chloë Houston, ed., *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period*. 2010. New York: Routledge, 2016.

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production.<sup>14</sup> The conflagrations of world war, social revolution, and national liberation struggles in the period 1914-1922, on the one hand, the prolonged agony of empire and the ongoing subjection of its peripheries in the late twentieth century, on the other, can be read as delayed after-effects, in however degraded a form, of the era of ‘great discoveries’ and enclosures which ushered in capitalist modernity. While More witnessed the birth pangs of a new world, Joyce and Walcott observe the symptoms of its unravelling. Thus, although *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are not utopias properly speaking, in the sense of the codified literary genre providing a blueprint for a better social order, both texts register momentous historical changes and catastrophes; this in turn renders them particularly receptive to the sense of history in the making, as a set of open ‘infinite possibilities,’ such as those envisaged by Stephen in ‘Nestor.’

Taking my cue from Fredric Jameson, I accept the distinction between the literary genre that sets out to delineate a utopian future or ‘elsewhere,’ on the one hand, and the presumption of ‘an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices.’<sup>15</sup> As this chapter will make clear, however, the distinction between the strictly defined genre and the more diffuse notion of a utopian impulse is by no means absolute; they feed into one another in multiple ways, with punctual outbreaks such as the celebration of ‘the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future’ (*U*, 15.1542).

As Jameson observes, there is a powerful dialectic at work between any utopia and the social conditions out of which it emerges. Utopias do not arise at random or at will; they flourish in specific situations, transitional periods when contradictions within the social sphere are thrown into relief. A world that seems utterly chaotic and futile, or else endowed with the appearance of eternal stability, may preclude any glimpse of change. Conversely, utopian possibilities may be perceived, however dimly, if the historical moment is experienced as a *situation*, a predicament containing within itself at least the hint of a solution. As a result, certain elements—such as private property in More—can be isolated and made to appear as fundamental flaws, problems whose resolution would in turn remedy all of society’s ills. Thus, utopianism is in essence critical. At its most explicit, it isolates any number of social defects or contradictions,

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<sup>14</sup>This is the argument made in Section III, ‘The Historical Conditions of Accumulation,’ in Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Theory of Imperialism*. 1913. In: *The Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg*. Ed. by Peter Hudis and Paul Le Blanc. Trans. by Nicholas Gray and George Shriver. Vol. 2. London: Verso, 2015.

<sup>15</sup>Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 3. I discuss the genealogy of this notion in my Introduction, p. 35.

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to which it claims to offer a solution; but more fundamentally, and regardless of its precise content, it is critical to the extent that it expresses a longing for an alternative state of being. The power of utopianism lies not so much in the more or less convincing articulation of a well-conceived plan, as in the ability ‘to hold open the act of negating the present’ and to bring to attention the latent and the possible.<sup>16</sup>

Part of my argument in this chapter is that Joyce and Walcott both chronicle moments of sharp conflict, epochal transitions which bring into contact heterogeneous social formations and temporalities. Like More, they have to ‘twist and turn [...] in a truly fantastic manner’ fragments and relics from a disintegrating age, or a distant past, as they grapple with the contradictions of their respective historical moments. As a result of combined and uneven development, their writing becomes ‘a registering apparatus for detecting the feeblest positive signals from the past and the future and for bricolating and combining them and thereby producing what looks like a representational picture.’<sup>17</sup> This should not be taken to imply that the texts are merely the passive records of a complex, heterogeneous social reality. The act of representation is very much a struggle with the social totality, of which the utopian impulse is a critical trace. In my reading, then, utopianism consists not so much in the depiction of an idealised, non-existent place—held up against a dismal reality the better to highlight the shortcomings of an existing order—as a projection, a totalising gesture, aiming to articulate in a meaningful way the prevailing unevenness of the present. Precisely because uneven development is perceived as a problem, the works which confront those tensions gesture towards some form of ultimate resolution. To the extent that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* register epochal contradictions, they do so not in a passive, but in a rebellious way. They do not merely reflect, but revolt against the contradictions from which they emerge, and to which they proffer a hypothetical ‘compensation.’<sup>18</sup>

## 4.1 Nostalgic Revivals Across the Atlantic

Joyce and Walcott were both active at times when a variety of cultural nationalist discourses were powerful influences in Ireland and the Caribbean. The Irish Revival and the fallout of the Afro-centric *négritude* movement had to be reckoned with; Joyce and Walcott both engaged with and challenged those movements. In Ireland, revivalists

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<sup>16</sup>Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup>Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup>Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 27.

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turned to the peasant folk and Celtic mythology as ‘repositories of a recoverable national spirit,’ in opposition to the hegemonic, London-centred metropolitan culture.<sup>19</sup> Thus, they aimed to elaborate ‘a discourse of cultural redemption that strove both to represent *and* to invent Irish culture.’<sup>20</sup>

While revivalism had been pioneered in Ireland by the scholarship of eighteenth century antiquarians, the catastrophic consequences of the Great Famine lent the project renewed urgency in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Seamus Deane observes, ‘the near-extinction of the peasantry and of their language enhanced the value of both as literary properties.’<sup>21</sup> Revivalism was notably embraced by Anglo-Irish intellectuals such as Yeats and Lady Gregory, belonging to a class whose political fortunes were on the wane, and whose cultural agenda can be read as a compensation for the decline of the old Ascendancy. For them, revivalism represented ‘an imaginary identification with a dispossessed people,’ and therefore the prospect of ‘a rooted identity and a vocational future.’<sup>22</sup> In translating or adapting the Celtic myths, tales, and ballads unearthed by Ferguson or Standish O’Grady, they staked their claims to become redeemers of a doomed national culture.

Synge’s account of his experience in the Isles of Aran, on the west coast of Ireland, is a case in point. In it, he reports every manifestation of what he considers purely Irish: the features of the women, the Gaelic spoken by the natives, the beliefs in fairies, the currachs built in prehistoric fashion, with their design unchanged ‘since

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<sup>19</sup>Norman Vance, *Irish Literature: A Social History*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999, p. 166.

<sup>20</sup>Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, p. 10. I am aware of the huge differences between the various figures associated with the Irish Revival, which necessarily complicate the discussion of this multi-faceted phenomenon. The *Handbook of the Irish Revival* edited by Declan Kiberd and P. J. Mathews features writings by the revolutionary socialist James Connolly alongside proponents of a much more exclusive form of nationalism, such as D. P. Moran. Besides, as John Hutchinson has noted, while political nationalism is distinct from cultural nationalism in terms of language and objectives, the two function in an ‘interactive cycle,’ influencing one another in profound ways. In what follows, I have in mind the literary manifestations of revivalism embodied most typically in Joyce’s time by Synge, Yeats, or Lady Gregory. See Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, p. 280 and Declan Kiberd and P. J. Mathews, eds., *Handbook of the Irish Revival: An Anthology of Irish Cultural and Political Writings 1891-1922*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015.

<sup>21</sup>Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature*. London: Hutchinson, 1986, p. 73. See also David Lloyd’s similar claim that Irish nationalism had to compensate for the lack of a unitary national tongue, since it emerged ‘at the moment of virtual eclipse of what would have been its “natural” language and primarily among a class which was already, necessarily, estranged from that language.’ David Lloyd, ‘Writing in the Shit: Nationalism and the Colonial Subject’. In: *The Irish Review (Cork)* 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 59–65, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup>Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, pp. 284–86.



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men first went to sea.’<sup>23</sup> Early on in his narrative, he decides to leave the island of Aranmor for Inishmaan, ‘where Gaelic is more generally used, and the life is perhaps the most primitive that is left in Europe.’ Synge’s expedition aims for the authentic and the primitive, qualities supposedly embodied by the uncorrupted country folk and the popular imagination, as opposed to the faceless, cosmopolitan crowds found in modern cities. In the preface to his collected plays, written in 1907, he presents his works as a truthful record of the ‘folk-imagination,’ comprising the sayings and beliefs documented among ‘herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, [...] beggar-women and ballad singers near Dublin,’ and snippets of conversations captured while eavesdropping on servant girls. In this collective enterprise, the revivalist writer becomes a scribe for the community, his personal input reduced to a bare minimum, the better to convey the unadulterated ‘genius’ of the common people. The exuberance of country life appears as an antidote to the drab conditions prevailing in modern cities, ‘places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.’<sup>24</sup> The city is an aggregate of anonymous individuals, leaving the writer estranged from any communal affiliation; by contrast, the tightly knit social life of the country and the village restores him to the lost dignity of the bard, at one with his audience.

In ‘The End of the World,’ Seamus Deane neatly recapitulates the dialectics of revivalism when he writes that ‘the immemorial was a code for the utopian.’<sup>25</sup> In this piece, Deane studies the political and cultural investment which took the Blasket islands as its object in the 1930s. Much as the Aran islands in the 1900s, the Gaelic-speaking inhabitants of the Blaskets were then taken to embody a counter-modernity which might serve as a blueprint for the new nation state. The writing of island memoirs by native dwellers, at a time when the way of life of the folk was perceived to be under threat, contributed to produce ‘a utopian political community by lamenting the disappearance of an historic one.’<sup>26</sup> Deane goes on to probe the difficulties inherent in the act of preserving in written form what was essentially an oral culture. The act of translation involved more than interlingual displacement; by subjecting the spoken material to another medium, the record underwent an even more radical betrayal, epitomising the

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<sup>23</sup>John Millington Synge, *The Aran Islands*. 1907. London: Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 10–12.

<sup>24</sup>John Millington Synge, *The Complete Plays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1960, pp. ii–iii.

<sup>25</sup>Seamus Deane, ‘The End of the World’. In: *Field Day Review* 8 (2012), pp. 206–241, p. 222.

<sup>26</sup>Deane, ‘The End of the World’, pp. 222–3.

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contest between nature and culture.<sup>27</sup> Translation appeared as a self-defeating process, dramatising the demise of the world it sought to capture.

Turning towards cultural origins or ancestors, whose legacy was thought to be still alive in the practices of the folk, was a strategic move on the part of intellectuals aiming for political and cultural change.<sup>28</sup> This was not limited to Ireland; after the First World War in the United States, the Harlem Renaissance relied on similar assumptions of cultural retrieval and popular identification. Artists from the African diaspora came to regard their shared origin as ‘a deep layer of the personality overlaid by the impositions of western norms, one that it required, for a proper integration of the self, to be reconnected with, in one way or the other.’<sup>29</sup> As Abiola Irele notes, the black intelligentsia which came to the fore in that era found inspiration in the lives and cultural practices of the folk; musical and oral traditions testified to the persistence of ‘a residual Africanity,’ embraced by the likes of Langston Hughes and W. E. B. Du Bois as a means to articulate the shared experience of the diaspora.<sup>30</sup> What then came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance was to have a profound influence, first on the Haitian Renaissance, and later on the writers associated with the *négritude* movement in the French Caribbean.<sup>31</sup>

In each case, revivalism was part of a wider cultural project testifying to the aspirations of a restive intellectual elite, struggling at once to challenge cultural models imposed by the colonial powers, and to articulate its own position in relation to ‘the people.’ To that extent, revivalism had deep roots in the Romantic protest against capitalist modernisation, drawing inspiration from pre-capitalist formations, and resulting in a wide political spectrum ranging from the most reactionary chauvinism to revolutionary inclinations. Terry Eagleton has stressed the conservative nature of the ‘archaic avant-garde’ which stood for revivalism in Ireland; by contrast, Joyce’s combination of the archaic and the modern was less exclusive and more open to alternative affiliations.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Deane, ‘The End of the World’, p. 225.

<sup>28</sup>Hutchinson notes that cultural nationalism and political nationalism, although distinct, were furthered by similar constituencies, ‘the educated strata in the urban centres of Ireland and the Irish diaspora in Britain and America.’ Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, p. 251.

<sup>29</sup>F. Abiola Irele, ‘The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement’. In: *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*. Ed. by F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 759–784, p. 762.

<sup>30</sup>Irele, ‘The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement’, p. 767.

<sup>31</sup>See the chapter titled ‘From Harlem to Haiti: Langston Hughes, Jacques Roumain and the avant-gardes’ in Anita Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 93–129.

<sup>32</sup>Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, pp. 315–319.

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The celebration of the past was often at risk of turning it into an ineffectual fetish; indeed, as Declan Kiberd has observed, the question facing Ireland—as well as much of the decolonising world—was ‘how to build a future on the past without returning to it?’<sup>33</sup>

David Lloyd has argued that capitalist modernity is particularly vulnerable to the challenges emanating from peripheral locations. The persistence of ‘premodern’ practices or vestiges, which resist the allegedly inexorable onward march of History, provides an immanent critique of ‘progress.’ Degraded, but by no means annihilated, these ‘residual elements of the past [...] persist into the present with some real differential significance’ which renders them able ‘to conserve, even in that damage, the outlines of utopian desires that might challenge the dogmas of modernity.’<sup>34</sup> Thus, he continues,

the damaged remnants of the past are not fixed and frozen survivals of backward practices, but formations that find ways to live on in transformation, counterpointing modernity critically by representing, however weakly or even self-destructively, alternative ways of living.<sup>35</sup>

Like Seamus Deane, Lloyd thus proposes that the antiquated may be retrieved and redirected towards radically new, utopian ends. This interplay of the archaic and the radically novel underpins the revivalist project which, like modernism, oscillates between reactionary and revolutionary formulations.<sup>36</sup> The aim of revivalism is never simply a return to pre-modern times, so much as ‘a detour through the past to a utopian future,’ whose parameters can be defined in multiple ways.<sup>37</sup> These are valuable comments on the strategic value of revivalism, which does not necessarily amount to xenophobic antagonism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 292.

<sup>34</sup>David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity*. Dublin: Field Day, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Lloyd, *Irish Times*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Emer Nolan argues convincingly that ‘Joyce’s forward-looking modernism [...] can never entirely be divorced from the supposedly regressive, nostalgic impulses that gave rise to other forms of revivalist writing.’ Nolan, ‘Modernism and the Irish Revival’, p. 166.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Löwy, ‘The Current of Critical Irrealism: “A moonlit enchanted night”’. In: *Adventures in Realism*. Ed. by Matthew Beaumont. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 193–206, p. 197.

<sup>38</sup>See for instance the case of James Connolly and the motif of Gaelic communism, in David Lloyd, ‘Rethinking National Marxism: James Connolly and “Celtic Communism”’. In: *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 5.3 (2003), pp. 345–370.

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## 4.2 Anti-Revivals

### 4.2.1 Joyce's 'Immense Woven Fabric'

Nonetheless, Joyce was notably averse to the nativist strain which pervaded the dominant forms of nationalist discourses at the turn of the century. He objected to Arthur Griffith's newspaper *Sinn Féin* on the grounds that 'it [was] educating the people of Ireland on the old pap of racial hatred.'<sup>39</sup> This tension can be glimpsed in Joyce's story 'The Dead.' In the course of the dinner hosted by the Morkans, Miss Ivors, a Gaelic enthusiast, castigates Gabriel Conroy for spending his holidays in Europe rather than in Ireland: 'and haven't you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish? [...] And haven't you your own land to visit [...] that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?' she asks him (*D*, 189-90). It is known that Joyce was wary of the nationalists' emphasis on the Gaelic language: 'If the Irish programme did not insist on the Irish language I suppose I could call myself a nationalist,' he wrote to his brother in a letter dated 6 November 1906.<sup>40</sup> The rapid depopulation of the countryside brought about by the Famine, through deaths and emigration, greatly accelerated the decline in Gaelic speakers in the second half of the century. The Gaelic League, founded by Douglas Hyde in 1893, aimed to revive a language which, for many, had become foreign.<sup>41</sup> As Synge observed while on the Aran Islands, the inhabitants were accustomed to welcoming visitors and students like him, whose interest in all things Gaelic led the local population to believe that 'linguistic studies, particularly Gaelic studies, are the chief occupation of the outside world.'<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Gabriel does not share in Miss Ivors's enthusiasm and simply retorts that Irish is not his language, unsettling the identification of nation and language which underpins her jibe. In contrast to the revivalist fixation on the west as a site of authenticity and ontological purity,

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<sup>39</sup>To which he added that 'if the Irish question exists, it exists for the Irish proletariat chiefly.' Letter dated 25 September 1906, Ellmann, *Letters of James Joyce*, p. 167.

<sup>40</sup>Ellmann, *Letters of James Joyce*, p. 187.

<sup>41</sup>Indeed, the promotion of Gaelic to the status of national language in the Free State, making it a compulsory subject at school and a requirement for employment in the civil service, did not halt its decline. See Crowley, *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>42</sup>Synge, *The Aran Islands*, p. 15. Synge was critical of the Gaelic League's campaign. In an article suggestively titled 'Can We Go Back Into Our Mother's Womb?', he deprecated the 'incoherent twaddle' revived by the Gaelic League, which had little in common with the fast disappearing dialects still spoken in the Gaeltacht. See John Millington Synge, 'Can We Go Back Into Our Mother's Womb?' 1907. In: *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922: A Sourcebook*. Ed. by Tony Crowley. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 212-213.

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Joyce's Ireland was 'a nowhere, a territory not yet represented, a place caught between geography and history, between eloquence and aphasia, crippling inertia and a new-found energy.'<sup>43</sup>

In 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,' Joyce borrows from revivalist discourses on the past grandeur of Ireland, but ultimately moves beyond the nostalgic assertion of cultural superiority and the search for pure origins. Thus, he lays great emphasis on Ireland's role as an intellectual hub in medieval Europe; he celebrates its ability to draw crowds of students and to send its famous 'Celtic apostles' to many continental seats of learning, showing that the island was not isolated but boasted far-flung ramifications. He also cites the achievements of more recent Irish writers, affirming that Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* '[shares] first place with Rabelais in world literature' (*OCPW*, 123). He even claims for Irishmen the titles of 'the three greatest translators in English literature' (123).<sup>44</sup> The slippage between 'world' literature and 'English' literature is noteworthy, the transcultural exchanges happening in Ireland having repercussions in the metropolitan literature as well. Articulating his vision of a pluralist Ireland, Joyce states that:

Our civilization is an immense woven fabric in which very different elements are mixed [...] In such a fabric, it is pointless searching for a thread that has remained pure, virgin, and uninfluenced by other threads nearby. (*OCPW*, 118)

From this, he draws the following conclusion:

nationality (if this is not really a useful fiction like many others which the scalpels of the present-day scientists have put paid to) must find its basic reason for being in something that surpasses, that transcends and that informs changeable entities such as blood or human speech. (118)

Thus, while Joyce inscribes his defence of Irish culture and history in a paradigm which echoes revivalist claims, he distances himself from its dominant formulations to the extent that for him, as Seamus Deane has noted, 'the idea of representing an already existing national character was replaced by that of forging the national identity through the act of writing.'<sup>45</sup> The image of the fabric has the ability to combine the multiplicity

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<sup>43</sup>Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 95.

<sup>44</sup>These are Edward FitzGerald, Richard Burton, and Henry Francis Cary, the translators of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, *A Thousand and One Nights*, and the *Divine Comedy*, respectively.

<sup>45</sup>Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 57.

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of all the threads running through it, with the unity of the object where no thread can be taken in isolation; the fabric becomes a synecdoche for the processes of intertwinement and relationality which designate not just Ireland, but the world-totality in the making.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Walcott's New World Amnesia

Like Joyce, Walcott was critical of the revivalism which pervaded Afrocentric discourses in the Caribbean. He distanced himself from the exclusive emphasis on the history of the African diaspora, especially the experience of slavery. While appreciative of the Negritude movement, he stated that the recovery of African roots was not a satisfactory solution given the multiple origins of Caribbean people and the historical as well as geographical distance which separated them from Africa. In a 1964 article title 'The Necessity of Negritude' he wrote:

for us, whose tribal memories have died, and who have begun again in a New World, Negritude offers an assertion of pride, but not of our complete identity, since that is mixed and shared by other races, whose writers are East Indian, white, mixed, whose best painters are Chinese, and in whom the process of racial assimilation goes on with every other marriage.<sup>47</sup>

Instead of nostalgia, he advocates a strategic amnesia, synonymous with reconciliation and the assimilation of all components of the Caribbean mix. His critique of Afrocentric nationalism is expressed in his 1970 essay 'What the Twilight Says,' a piece written in order to clarify the aims of his drama in relation to the local conditions of St Lucia and the multiplicity of literary influences.<sup>48</sup> In this essay, he relates the struggle to create a West Indian theatre, and asserts the need to move beyond nostalgia and recrimination. He critiques the 'pastoralists of the African revival' then prevailing in West Indian art and asserts a paradoxical model of Caribbeanness which he identifies as 'this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian' (WTS, 8-9). He castigates the folk-worshipping revivalists for indulging in 'a schizophrenic daydream of an Eden

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<sup>46</sup>Jean-Michel Rabaté has written that *Finnegans Wake* is 'not so much written polyphony as woven, braided, loomed with voices, accents, rhythms, verbal intensities.' Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Joyce Upon the Void: The Genesis of Doubt*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991, p. 122.

<sup>47</sup>Derek Walcott, 'The Necessity of Negritude'. 1964. In: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Robert D. Hamner. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, pp. 20–23, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup>King, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 248–49.

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that existed before [the West Indian mind's] exile' (18), without realising that they are merely fabricating an idealised, normative image of the people:

And now the intellectuals, courting and fearing the mass, found values in it that they had formerly despised. They apotheosized the folk form, insisting that calypos were poems. Their programme, for all its pretext to change, was a manual for stasis, because they wanted politically to educate the peasant yet leave him intellectually unsoiled; they baffled him with schisms and the complexities of Power while insisting that he needed neither language nor logic, telling him that what he yearned for was materialistic, imitative, and corrupt, while all his exhorters made sure that their wives were white, their children brown, their jobs inviolate (31).

As a member of the brown middle class, Walcott felt alienated by the Black Power uprisings which shook the archipelago in the 1970s, and which were inspired by strong Afrocentric feelings. Marches and riots erupted in Trinidad in 1970, led by black nationalists sometimes hostile to other components of the population. Light-skinned people were sometimes turned away, leaving Walcott 'angry, fearful, and depressed' at his own prospects in the region.<sup>49</sup> In his 1974 essay 'The Muse of History,' Walcott articulates a personal manifesto, where the argument revolves around his relationship with history, tradition, and language. The piece opens with a Joycean epigraph, borrowing Stephen's well-known pronouncement that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake (*WTS*, 36).<sup>50</sup> For Walcott, history is indeed the 'Medusa of the New World' (36), which has doomed many of its artists to the impotence of revenge, remorse, or nostalgia. His argument is sustained by the opposition between tradition, 'which is alert, alive, simultaneous,' and 'history,' which becomes a tool in the hands of 'the new magnifiers of Africa' (42) already encountered in 'What the Twilight Says.' He then castigates the 'epic poets' who 'create an artificial past, a defunct cosmology without the tribal faith,' bent on 'masochistic recollection,' fascinated by 'all the paraphernalia of degradation and cruelty which we exhibit as history' (44). In *Another Life*, he had already indicted 'Those who peel, from their own leprous flesh, their names / who chafe and nurture the scars of rusted chains [...] / whose god is history' (*AL*, 127-128). Walcott instead celebrates the 'elation' felt by poets such as Aimé Césaire, Saint John Perse, or Pablo Neruda—a crucially international and multiracial cast—as they embraced 'this

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<sup>49</sup>King, *Derek Walcott*, pp. 254–55.

<sup>50</sup>On Walcott's identification with Joyce, see the chapter entitled 'After a Sundering: Derek Walcott' in Michael Malouf's *Transatlantic Solidarities*, pp. 124–172.

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elemental privilege of naming the New World which annihilates history' (WTS, 40).

The figure of the barber in *Omeros*, encountered in Chapter 13, illustrates some of the issues appertaining to revivalism in the Caribbean. He is introduced by the narrator's father, immediately before the famous passage where the coalwomen become emblems of the poetic craft. The narrator's father remembers the barber, plying his trade in a salon decorated with a photograph of Marcus Garvey 'with the braided tricorne and gold-fringed epaulettes' (13.1). Garvey was the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a pan-African movement advocating a 'Back to Africa' policy in the inter-war period, aiming to repatriate the diaspora to their continent of origin. C. L. R James called him a 'reactionary' and a 'race fanatic,' while acknowledging his unsurpassed role in the 'most remarkable political mass movement that America has ever seen.' In James's account, Garvey was a catalyst for the political awakening and radicalisation of the most downtrodden black masses on the American continent, including the Caribbean. With his propaganda based on 'the past achievements of blacks, their present misery, their future greatness,' Garvey offered a radical negation of the dehumanising treatment reserved to Afro-descendants both in the United States and the colonial outposts in the archipelago.<sup>51</sup> To the barber in *Omeros*, Garvey is indeed a 'Messiah.' The corollary to this Afrocentric focus is that in the barber's eyes, 'The rock he lived on was nothing. Not a nation / or a people,' a view which replicates the colonial mindset, unable to assess the value of West Indian reality on its own terms. Instead, the barber longs nostalgically for a fabricated 'paradise [...] a phantom Africa,' a backward-looking impulse evidenced by the 'rusted mirrors in which we would look back / on the world's events.' Yet this character is also notable for other aspects which run counter to the racial exclusiveness of Garveyism, and which turn the 'rusted mirrors' into ambivalent symbols of West Indian art. 'On their varnished rack, / *The World's Great Classics* read backwards in his mirrors,' the father remembers (13.1), an image which suggests a wide range of intertextual procedures drawing on transformative readings of the classical canon, a practice evident in the design of *Omeros* itself.

Interestingly, Walcott has referred to figures of the Irish revival in order to explain his own predicament as a West Indian artist and his 'quarrel with history.'<sup>52</sup> In a 1975

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<sup>51</sup>C. L. R. James, 'Marcus Garvey'. 1940. In: *C. L. R. James on the 'Negro Question'*. Ed. by Scott McLemee. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996, pp. 114–115.

<sup>52</sup>I borrow this phrase from Edward Baugh's landmark article, first published in 1977, which includes a valuable discussion of Walcott. See Edward Baugh, 'The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel with History'. 1977. In: *Small Axe* 16.2 (July 2012), pp. 60–74.



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interview, Walcott cites Joyce as an early influence and relates to Synge:

As a young writer coming out of the Caribbean, all those models which are obvious, self-evident models didn't bother me because what I had was the same thing Synge had: a totally new language, a totally new set of rhythms, a totally new people in a sense.<sup>53</sup>

Walcott's 1954 play *The Sea at Dauphin* was indeed a transposition of Synge's 1904 *Riders to the Sea*. Both are notable for their use of the vernacular, whether Synge's Hiberno-English or Walcott's mixture of a pan-Caribbean English *patois* and French creole.<sup>54</sup> But Walcott immediately contrasts his attraction to Synge with another Irish revivalist, Yeats: 'In the case of Yeats, that is a literary thing in a sense, forcing the material on to the contemporary stage. It is a nostalgic revival.'<sup>55</sup> Thus, he articulates an opposition between the elation of the radically new and the 'nostalgic' longing for antiquated forms to be revived.<sup>56</sup> Seamus Heaney too has noted the affinity between Walcott and Synge; he writes about Walcott's poem 'The Schooner *Flight*':

[Walcott] has done for the Caribbean what Synge did for Ireland, found a language woven out of dialect and literature, neither folksy nor condescending, a singular idiom evolved out of one man's inherited divisions and obsessions, an idiom which allows an older life to exult in itself and yet at the same time keeps the cool of 'the new'.<sup>57</sup>

Walcott's alignment with Synge allows him at once to claim a kinship with Irish artists on the grounds of a shared experience of colonialism, and to distance himself from the more strident and exclusive forms of revivalism. While Douglas Hyde, for instance, advocated a return to specifically Irish customs and the Gaelic language in order to 'de-anglicise' Ireland, Walcott would have little truck with the myth of an authentic culture waiting to be resurrected. Hyde lamented the lost grandeur of Ireland, once 'one of the most classically learned and cultured nations in Europe,' now on the way to

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<sup>53</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup>Walcott, *The Sea at Dauphin*; John Millington Synge, *Riders to the Sea*. 1904. In: *The Complete Plays*. New York: Vintage Books, 1960.

<sup>55</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup>Declan Kiberd writes that Synge's play *Deirdre of the Sorrows* can be read as a protest 'against those other, more nostalgic reinterpreters of the legend who recruit a past for the war against the future, rather than using it in that extirpation of the present which alone makes the future possible.' Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 303.

<sup>57</sup>Heaney, 'The Murmur of Malvern', p. 5.

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becoming ‘a nation of imitators, the Japanese of Western Europe [sic], lost to the power of native initiative and alive only to second-hand assimilation.’<sup>58</sup> Walcott’s 1974 ‘The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?’ reads like a response to Hyde. In that piece, Walcott reflects on the predicament of ‘Third World’ cultures, supposedly compelled to imitate or reject models provided by the dominant super-powers. In fact, Walcott argues, West Indian artists must accept the fact of American hegemony, partly because the reality of geopolitical power is ultimately irrelevant when it comes to cultural achievement, but also because the Caribbean is part and parcel of the pan-American experience. Further, Walcott suggests, ‘in the Caribbean history is irrelevant [...]. What has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity, as invention.’<sup>59</sup> Walcott famously turns on its head Naipaul’s indictment of West Indians as ‘mimic men,’ ‘fated to unoriginality,’ able to create nothing properly theirs. To counter this charge, Walcott cites the typically derivative cultural form that is Carnival, which, out of imitation, has evolved into something unique and indeed original; he answers that ‘nothing will always be created in the West Indies, for quite a long time, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before.’<sup>60</sup>

This emphasis on the sheer originality of the West Indian experience recurs in Walcott’s discussion of Irish revivalism. He contrasts the West Indian and Irish predicaments: while Irish writers had ‘a metaphor called Ireland’ to work from, the West Indian writer has no comparable mythical substratum to rely on:

The only historical legends that one individual writer would have are ethnic legends of sorts. Each one of them is separate because the Indian would have Indian, the African would have Africa. But the point is that all of these have been erased from the memory or experience of the writer. So, what has not yet been created or is actually being created by its absence, by the chaos, by the necessity for it to be created—is a West Indies, a West Indian literature. Now that is being made out of the very knowledge that there is not one.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Douglas Hyde, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland’. 1892. In: *Handbook of the Irish Revival*. Ed. by Declan Kiberd and P. J. Mathews. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015, pp. 42–46.

<sup>59</sup>Derek Walcott, ‘The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?’ 1974. In: *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Ed. by Robert D. Hamner. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997, pp. 51–57, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup>Walcott, ‘The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?’, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 28.

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That statement echoes a similar assertion in his 1977 interview with Hirsch: ‘Where there’s a revival, there must have been a thing before. My work wasn’t a revival; it was total originality.’<sup>62</sup> Thus, Walcott repurposes the discourse of Irish revivalism towards a poetics of erasure and oblivion. Instead of turning to the mythic origin of Africa, Walcott privileges the myth of a New World where the artist, unburdened with the nightmare of history, appears as a new, amnesiac Adam, like the figure of Crusoe, ‘the first inhabitant of a second paradise.’<sup>63</sup> This ‘Adamic imagination’ in Walcott is ‘a kind of exorcism, a revisiting of the past so as to liberate it from the cold grasp of both impotent imagination and historical determinism.’<sup>64</sup>

In sum, both Joyce and Walcott distance themselves from the dominant forms of revivalism then current in Ireland and the Caribbean. The nostalgic emphasis on a single cultural origin appears irrelevant, given the intricate histories of migration and cross-cultural exchanges which went into the making of Ireland as well as the Caribbean. Utopianism, then, will not be deployed in the past; rather, as I argue in what follows, it is projected in terms derived from the imaginary of language evolution, which point towards the process of creolisation.

### 4.3 Beyond the Monolingual Paradigm

In his ‘Prehistory of the Novelistic Discourse,’ Bakhtin observes that the Greek novel was for the most part the product of ‘Hellenized barbarians,’ hailing from the peripheries of the Empire.<sup>65</sup> This point is part of Bakhtin’s wider argument on the importance of *polyglossia* for the rise of the European novel, from ancient Greece to early modern Europe. Whether in Greece or Rome, he argues, polyglossia was the norm, as the language(s) of empire coexisted in various ways with a host of vernaculars and dialects:

Where languages and cultures interanimated each other, language became something entirely different, its very nature changed: in place of a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language, there appeared the open

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<sup>62</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 60.

<sup>63</sup>Walcott, ‘The Figure of Crusoe’, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup>George B. Handley, *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2007, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup>Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 64.

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Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other.<sup>66</sup>

The linguistic awareness which accompanies situations of polyglossia has the effect of relativising the centrality of any given language. This de-centring of linguistic authority, in Bakhtin's account, is typical of the parodic, dialogical strategy of the novel. In his account, this form emerges as a counter-hegemonic discourse, a testimony to the barbarians' ability to appropriate the language and culture of their colonial masters and to fashion distinctly new formations. Yet polyglossia is only one aspect of the matter, since even within a single language, an intense struggle is constantly being fought out between the archaic and the new, between various strata, sociolects and idioms pertaining to a variety of competing constituencies, which ultimately exposes the inconsistency and disunity of language itself.

Multilingualism is indeed a crucial aspect of the Relation shaping the world-totality. In terms similar to Bakhtin's, although in relation to the contemporary world-totality, Édouard Glissant has stressed the impact of multilingualism on writing, regardless of the language(s) actually spoken by writers:

Writing in the presence of all the world's languages does not mean knowing all the world's languages. It means that in the current context of literatures and of the relation between poetics and the chaos-world, I can no longer write in a monolingual way. Rather, I take my own language and I shake it up and shift it around, not into syntheses, but into linguistic openings that enable me to conceive of the relations between languages today on the surface of the planet—relations of dominance, of complicity, absorption, oppression, erosion, contact, etc.—as a huge drama, a huge tragedy from which my own language cannot remain exempt and safe. And as a result I cannot write my language in a monolingual manner; I write it in the presence of this tragedy, this drama.<sup>67</sup>

My contention is that Joyce and Walcott's utopianism is centrally determined by the awareness of a polyglot world, one in which languages can no longer conceive of themselves 'in a monolingual way.' Yasemin Yildiz has noted that the 'monolingual paradigm' is in fact a relatively recent construct, dependent on the emergence of the modern nation state in Europe, and the attendant notion of a single 'mother tongue,'

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<sup>66</sup>The phrases 'interanimated' and 'mutually animating each other' translate Bakhtin's neologism *vzaimoosveshchenie*, which literally means 'mutual illumination'. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 65

<sup>67</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*. 1995. Trans. by Celia Britton. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020, pp. 23–24.

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at once common to all members of the polity, and strictly demarcated from all other languages.<sup>68</sup> This monolingual paradigm is by no means natural, nor does it correspond to the experience of most people today, whether they live in emigration, in multilingual states, or in countries where heteroglossia is the norm on account of migration, conquest, or any other geopolitical factors. The linguistic landscapes of Joyce's Ireland and Walcott's Caribbean were complex fabrics indeed. Besides the problematic status of Gaelic discussed above, Ireland was also home to other dialects such as Ulster Scots, or the Hiberno-English memorialised in Synge's plays; for those reasons, Seamus Deane argues, the language question was central in Irish culture, since 'it is difficult not to be self-conscious about a language which has become simultaneously native and foreign.'<sup>69</sup> Deane's comment applies to the status of English in Ireland, but is equally relevant to other contexts, in a world where imperial languages, by definition, are deterritorialised and reterritorialised in unpredictable ways.<sup>70</sup>

In the Caribbean, the standard languages of Spain, England, France, or the Netherlands underwent major changes, sometimes giving rise to creoles, as in Walcott's St Lucia, with which they coexisted more or less peacefully.<sup>71</sup> In terms which echo Seamus Deane's observation, Rei Terada has noted that creoles 'trouble the opposition between "native" and "foreign", demonstrating how much variance a "single" language actually contains and how thoroughly languages overlap.'<sup>72</sup> Indeed, although Walcott wrote essentially in English, he declared in a 1975 interview that he had 'a dual linguistic personality,' and that '[his] real language, and tonally [his] basic language, [was] patois.'<sup>73</sup> Two years later, he stated in another interview that this diglossia enabled him to 'master the original language, or the language of the master himself, and yet have it fertilized by the language of dialect.'<sup>74</sup> These formulations echo at once Bakhtin's 'mutual illumination' between languages and Glissant's notion that polyglossia as a cultural fact makes it impossible to write 'in a monolingual way.'

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<sup>68</sup>Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012, pp. 6–10.

<sup>69</sup>Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup>Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. 1975. Trans. by Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 16–19.

<sup>71</sup>In St Lucia, the French creole vernacular was tolerated by the British authorities, which was not the case in the French-held islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, where the policy of 'assimilation' involved a degree of linguistic compulsion. See King, *Derek Walcott*, 443-4 and 555-6.

<sup>72</sup>Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry*, p. 83.

<sup>73</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 29.

<sup>74</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 45.

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Indeed, in Ireland as well as in the West Indies, English drifted from the standard metropolitan form under the influence of other dialects. Over time, the global spread of the English language has spawned a multitude of ‘englishes’ departing from the standardised form.<sup>75</sup> In a study on Irish literature published in 1916, the nationalist and Easter Rising leader Thomas MacDonagh stated that ‘the English language in Ireland has an individuality of its own, and the rhythm of Irish speech a distinct character.’ Reflecting on the differential evolution of languages derived from a common root, MacDonagh suggested that the English brought to Ireland by the first English settlers was the language of Shakespeare, a variety which subsequently disappeared from English soil, but lived on in the colony:

The transplanted slip of a language does not develop as the parent tree. By comparison it rather ceases to develop. The descendants of the earliest English colonists here were found, by a new Englishman of Elizabeth’s time, using ‘the dregs of the old ancient Chaucer English.’ So in our day we find in the mouths of the people what such a progressive might call the dregs of the old ancient Shakespeare English. And this was the English that had to be knit into a different complication from the modern complication of the central English language.<sup>76</sup>

Walcott has made virtually identical claims about the English spoken in the Caribbean. In a 1983 interview, he remembers the shock of hearing Shakespeare’s use of Yorkshire dialect *Henry V*: ‘it sounded like pure Barbadian speech,’ he says. ‘If you hear a guy from Barbados, or Jamaica, speaking English, and you listen to that speech,’ he continues, ‘you hear seventeenth-century constructions.’<sup>77</sup> The internal differentiation of the English language is one registration of the world-totality in linguistic terms, which is predicated on the fragmentation of the world into separate language blocs which, more often than not, do not coincide with national borders.

From the outset of Joyce’s *Portrait*, this issue is raised in the mind of the young Stephen. Early in life, he becomes aware of the philosophical problems raised by the existence of multiple languages. Poring over his geography textbook, he engages in a baffling thought experiment, wondering if there exists anything bigger than the universe:

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<sup>75</sup>Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 7–8. See also Edgar W. Schneider, *Postcolonial English: Varieties Around the World*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

<sup>76</sup>Thomas MacDonagh, ‘Literature in Ireland’. 1916. In: *The Politics of Language in Ireland, 1366-1922: A Sourcebook*. Ed. by Tony Crowley. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 219–221.

<sup>77</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 89.

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It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could think only of God. God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said *Dieu* then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God. (*P*, 13-14)

The conviction that his word for 'God' is somehow the best, or most accurate, is unsettled by his intuition of other possible denominations, such as the French '*Dieu*.' The variety of languages casts a shadow on the usual assumption that words correspond to things in some unproblematic way. While the encounter with the dean of studies is arguably the most often quoted passage in relation to Stephen's linguistic self-awareness, prompting him to reflect on his estrangement from the English language as a colonial subject, *Portrait* is pervaded with a diffuse sense of the problematic diversity of languages.<sup>78</sup> For instance, in the course of Stephen's meditations at Dollymount, he gazes at the drifting clouds, 'a host of nomads on the march, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound,' a thought immediately followed by the reflection that 'the Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races' (*P*, 146). The political fragmentation evoked by the fortifications which keep the 'entrenched and marshalled races' separate, and potentially hostile to one another, is matched by the Babelian multitude of 'strange tongues' spread out across the continent.

To the extent that Joyce and Walcott engage with the curse of Babel, they can be seen to prolong a tradition of 'language utopias' reaching back to the seventeenth century, a trend which, like utopian writing, owed a lot to the shock of the 'great discoveries.' The creation of 'philosophical languages' flourished in the seventeenth century, pioneered by Francis Bacon, followed by Comenius, John Wilkins, and a long

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<sup>78</sup>The dean of studies is surprised to hear Stephen use the word 'tundish,' presuming (wrongly) that it must be a Gaelicism for the word 'funnel.' Stephen then famously reflects that 'the language we are speaking is his before it is mine. [...] His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech' (*P*, 165-66). In one of the last entries in Stephen's diary he exclaims: 'I looked it up and find it is English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us' (222-23).

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list of others.<sup>79</sup> The growing awareness of a polyglot world prompted experiments to create or retrieve a language able to overcome the curse of Babel, providing an ideal, unmediated access to nature. The dream to resurrect a pre-lapsarian, Adamic language, was to a large extent a consequence of the expanded horizon which brought Europe into contact with an unprecedented variety of linguistic material. John Wilkins, for instance, aimed to create a universally translatable language, no longer formed of words but of ‘characters’ purged from all semantic ambiguity. Each character should correspond unequivocally to an element in the world, duly classified in a comprehensive taxonomy of everything. The perfect language would be free from polysemy and metaphoric uses. Thus, by eradicating the source of misunderstandings between nations, it would put an end to wars. Sandrine Sorlin aptly captures the congruence of geography, politics, and language utopias, when she writes that Wilkins’s project was meant both ‘to draw an immutable map of the world and to put an end to the ambiguity of language.’<sup>80</sup>

In Joyce’s own time, Esperanto was a reiteration of that project. Esperanto was created as an international language by one Dr Zamenhof in 1887. Dr Zamenhof’s invented language owed much to the intricate national and linguistic fabric that was his native Bialystok, then situated in Polish Lithuania, a part of the Tsarist Empire, ‘a crucible of races and languages continually shaken by nationalistic ferment and lasting waves of anti-Semitism.’<sup>81</sup> Bloom’s Jewishness and his belief in universal brotherhood align him closely with the actual Zamenhof, and partly account for his preaching of esperanto in ‘Circe.’ Esperanto, however, was by no means the only international language devised at the time.<sup>82</sup> A few decades later, Eugene Jolas, the founder of the journal *transitions* in which *Finnegans Wake* began to appear in the 1920s, would add his own contribution to the long catalogue of fabricated languages. Jolas was born in America, but his mother came from Lorraine, a contact zone between French and German languages, where local dialects were spoken. Jolas was stationed in the

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<sup>79</sup>On so-called philosophical languages, see Andrew Large, *The Artificial Language Movement*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, pp. 19–43, and Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*. 1993. Trans. by James Fentress. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 229–27 and 293–316.

<sup>80</sup>Sandrine Sorlin, ‘La langue philosophique de John Wilkins (1614-1672) : langage universel ou utopie linguistique ?’ In: *Études Épistémè* 12 (2007). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.923>, §25. My translation.

<sup>81</sup>Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 324–26.

<sup>82</sup>For a substantial sample of similar endeavours, see the chapter on ‘Utopia in Action: The Ascent of International Auxiliary Languages’ in Marina Yaguello, *Imaginary Languages: Myths, Utopias, Fantasies, Illusions, and Linguistic Fictions*. 2006. Trans. by Erik Butler. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022.



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south of the United States for the duration of the First World War; there, he came into contact with a wide variety of accents, dialects and idiolects, spoken by soldiers hailing from all corners of the country and beyond. This led him to elaborate a theory of the ‘Atlantic’ or ‘crucible language,’ ‘the embryonic language of the future [...] the inter-racial synthesis that is going on in the United States.’<sup>83</sup> Jolas wrote multilingual poems, exploiting to the full the resources afforded by code-switching between languages, forging a utopian language unmoored from state or place.<sup>84</sup> Charles Kay Ogden’s Basic English was a more pragmatic variant, its rationale laid out in a manifesto suggestively titled *Debabelization*. Basic English consisted in just 850 words, and was designed to become a universal language without adding to the flurry of linguistic experiments then in vogue.<sup>85</sup> Joyce was highly sensitive to these experiments. Stefan Zweig noticed in his 1928 ‘Observations Concerning *Ulysses*’ that

in [Joyce’s] orchestra the vowel and consonant instruments of all languages are mingled, all technical terms of all sciences, all jargons and dialects; out of English Joyce derives a pan-European Esperanto.<sup>86</sup>

Zweig would later recollect meeting Joyce and discussing the politics of language:

he harshly rejected all association with England. He was Irish. True, he wrote in the English language but did not think in English and didn’t want to think in English. ‘I ’d like a language,’ he said, ‘which is above all languages, a language to which all will do service. I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition.’<sup>87</sup>

The polyglot extravagance of *Finnegans Wake* can then be read as an outrageous registration of ‘a linguistically unstable situation, not just in Ireland but in a newly cosmopolitanized world in which it is less and less obvious that there is a master or a mother tongue.’<sup>88</sup> With the *Wake*, Joyce added his own flamboyant contribution

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<sup>83</sup>Quoted in Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 113.

<sup>84</sup>Apter, *The Translation Zone*, pp. 112–119. See also Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Joyce and Jolas: Late Modernism and Early Babelism’. In: *Journal of Modern Literature* 22.2 (Winter 1998), pp. 245–252.

<sup>85</sup>Charles Kay Ogden, *Debabelization: With a Survey of Contemporary Opinion on the Problem of a Universal Language*. London: Routledge, 1931 Ogden famously translated a fragment of *Finnegans Wake* into Basic English in 1932, much to Joyce’s delight.

<sup>86</sup>Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, p. 446.

<sup>87</sup>Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*. 1943. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964, p. 275.

<sup>88</sup>Eagleton, *The English Novel*, p. 288.

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to this edifice, in the shape of a ‘Nichtian glossery which purveys aprioric roots for aposteriorious tongues’ (*FW*, 83).<sup>89</sup> Yet translinguistic experimentation can be traced further back, to the earliest stages of Joyce’s output. While in ‘Ithaca,’ Bloom considers ‘the infinite possibilities hitherto unexploited of the modern art of advertisement if condensed in trilateral monoideal symbols, vertically of maximum visibility (divined), horizontally of maximum legibility (deciphered) and of magnetising efficacy to arrest involuntary attention, to interest, to convince, to decide’ (*U*, 17.580), in *Stephen Hero* already, Stephen converses with his friend Cranly in dog Latin, ‘a language the base of which was Latin and the superstructure of which was composed of Irish, French and German’ (*SH*, 106), a miniature anticipation of the more spectacular undertakings to come.

For Walcott, on the other hand, the multilingual make-up of the Caribbean, especially the situation of diglossia in St Lucia, resulted in an effort to adapt the English language to Creole rhythms and cadences. In a 1983 interview, Walcott explained that the linguistic complications of the island did not constitute a problem, and that English was never felt as an oppressive language:

I do not consider English to be the language of my masters. I consider language to be my birthright. I happen to have been born in an English and Creole place, and love both languages. It is the passion, futility and industry of critics to perpetuate this ambiguity. It is their profession. It is mine to do what other poets before me did, Dante, Chaucer, Villon, Burns, which is to fuse the noble and the common language, the streets and the law courts, in a tone that is true to my own voice, in which both accents are heard naturally.<sup>90</sup>

The figures of Dante, Chaucer, Villon or Burns are significant: they are all recognised as progenitors of illustrious national literatures, but also as crucial actors in the standardisation of national languages themselves.<sup>91</sup> Qualifying somewhat the view that language

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<sup>89</sup>In 1939, as *Finnegans Wake* was being published, the Polish-born writer Jean Malaquais published, *Les Javanais*, a novel written in French about a mining town in Provence, where a motley crowd of ‘men from nowhere,’ Italians, Poles, Ukrainians, Turks, and North Africans speak an indescribable variety of pidginised French. See Jean Malaquais, *Les Javanais*. 1939. Paris: Phébus, 1995.

<sup>90</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 82.

<sup>91</sup>On the retrospective use of Chaucer in narratives of language standardisation, see for instance Tony Crowley, *Standard English and the Politics of Language*. 1989. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 98 and Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, pp. 228–31. For the case of Robert Burns, see Liam McIlvanney, ‘Hugh Blair, Robert Burns, and the Invention of Scottish Literature’. In: *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29.2 (2005), pp. 25–46.

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was never an issue for Walcott while growing up in the Caribbean, he has also stated that ‘we learn English in school almost as a foreign language, and perhaps that makes us value English the more.’<sup>92</sup> The main point, however, is that the natural coexistence of ‘both accents,’ English and Creole, in Walcott’s voice, is another instance of Glissant’s polyglot writing, even though Creole is rarely used in Walcott’s poetry. By virtue of the transcultural make-up of the Caribbean, the archipelago becomes an ‘intricately swivelled Babel’ (*AL*, 143). The poets cited by Walcott also wrote in an environment where the ‘monolingual paradigm’ had not yet become dominant; language contact, or the ability to draw on various dialects and sociolects (‘the noble and the common language’), turns out to be an enabling condition.

## 4.4 Utopian Rebirths

I now wish to elaborate on the importance of orality, already discussed in the previous chapter. My contention is that the realm of speech, in contrast to script or print, is offered as a prospective solution to the problems posed by history. The utopian impulse, having foundered in its overt manifestations, is displaced from the thematic to the formal level: there, it eschews the pitfalls of concrete political *praxis*, and deploys the non-place of orality as a site of utopian fulfillment. The spoken word, the voice, and the rhythms which accompany them, appear as potential antidotes to the intractable predicaments of History encountered in *Ulysses* and *Omeros*. I propose to substantiate this argument with a reading of the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode in *Ulysses*. It may seem paradoxical to invoke this eminently literary chapter in a discussion of orality; yet I want to stress the overarching dynamic of ‘Oxen,’ which gestures towards the ultimate overcoming of all literary styles, and even of national language as such. The thrust of the episode, I believe, consists in dismantling the paradigm of national literature, in favour of a utopian, if unsettling, plurality of dialects circulating across the confines of print and orality.

### 4.4.1 ‘Monstrous Births’: National Language and Miscegenation

The episode is set in the Rotunda Maternity hospital in Holles Street, and consists largely—but not exclusively—in a succession of literary English styles. The imitations

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<sup>92</sup>Baer, *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 19.

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range from medieval Anglo-Saxon, through Bunyan and Milton, to Carlyle, Ruskin, Pater and Newman, which justifies the narrator's claim that

The high hall of Horne's house had never beheld an assembly so representative and so varied nor had the old rafters of that establishment ever listened to a language so encyclopaedic. (14.1201)

As Mrs Purefoy is struggling to give birth upstairs, we attend the riotous conversations of the medical students downstairs, soon joined by Leopold Bloom. The episode is placed under the symbol of fecundity and gestation, and the parade of English styles is supposed to follow the stages of embryonic development in the womb.<sup>93</sup> Before addressing the ending of the episode more at length, however, I would like to point out that 'Oxen' is not written entirely in varieties of English. The chapter actually opens with a multilingual invocation, imitating the practice of an ancient Roman priestly congregation: 'Deshil Holles eamus. Deshil Holles eamus. Deshil Holles eamus' (14.1), which blends Gaelic (*deasil* meaning 'turning to the right, clockwise') and Latin (*eamus* meaning 'let us go').<sup>94</sup> Thereafter, the first slice of narrative is not written in Old English—the alliterative paragraph beginning with 'Before born babe bliss had. Within womb won he worship' (14.60) does not occur until after two pages—but in an extremely Latinate form of English:

Universally that person's acumen is esteemed very little perceptive concerning whatsoever matters are being held as most profitably by mortals with sapience endowed to be studied who is ignorant of that which the most in doctrine erudite and certainly by reason of that in them high mind's ornament deserving of veneration constantly maintain when by general consent they affirm that other circumstances being equal by no exterior splendour is the prosperity of a nation more efficaciously asserted than by the measure of how far forward may have progressed the tribute of its solicitude for that proliferent continuance which of evils the original if it be absent when fortunately present constitutes the certain sign of omnipollent nature's incorrupted benefaction. (14.7-17)

The rigours of the syntax, the length of the unpunctuated sentence, and the overabundance of rare, Latinate roots all contribute to our impression that this is *not* actually

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<sup>93</sup>For a comprehensive recapitulation of the episode, see J. S. Atherton, 'The Oxen of the Sun'. 1974. In: *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays*. Ed. by Clive Hart and David Hayman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, pp. 313–339.

<sup>94</sup>Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 408.

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English. We can only assume that this passage has been translated, quite literally, from Latin. The sentence itself offers a case of ‘proliferent continuance,’ as each clause is interrupted by a parenthesis or digression, compelling us to retrace our steps so as not to lose track of the meaning. The anxiety betrayed by the insistence on ‘incorrupted benefaction’ is ironically appropriate in the light of the language being used. While the episode ostensibly depicts the gestation of English literature, its starting point is indeed corrupt in many respects: its first words imitate an *oral* invocation, mixing a variety of languages, before subjecting modern English to an exacting syntax and an alien vocabulary. Where—or when—does ‘English literature’ start? Although the design of the episode seemed to call for a definitive answer, the search for an authoritative origin is confounded. When viewed in this light, it becomes impossible to read the chapter only as an extended pastiche of the English literary pantheon. Rather, it begins with an act of displacement, by showing that English literature not only has its roots in a medley of foreign speeches, but is itself a secondary, translated language. Preceding gestation is an act of radical miscegenation, which shows the national literature emerging from a polyglot ecosystem, of which its subsequent development bears the marks.

Thus, we are reminded of the complex linguistic environment which preceded the advent of national literatures. As Sheldon Pollock has observed in the context of South Asia, vernacular languages used for literary purposes are historical, not natural, formations, often emerging for complex political reasons against a cosmopolitan background.<sup>95</sup> In the early second millennium, vernacular literatures in local languages such as Kannada or Telugu came into existence as a result of conscious choices, in an effort to emulate and appropriate elements from the hitherto hegemonic, transregional Sanskrit canon. A similar process was at work, more or less simultaneously, in western Europe. Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (likely composed around 1305) is arguably the most famous ‘vernacular manifesto’ produced in that era, inaugurating the conscious effort to produce a literature written in ‘*vulgare*’ rather than ‘*gramatica*’ (that is to say standard Latin).<sup>96</sup> Alexander Beecroft remarks that Dante was in fact rehearsing arguments already put forward by lesser-known predecessors, such as the Catalan poet Ramon Vidal who, a century prior, had vindicated writing in ‘*Lemosin*.’ Earlier still, in the ninth century, the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred had initiated the first State-sponsored programme

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<sup>95</sup>Sheldon Pollock, ‘The Cosmopolitan Vernacular’. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (February 1998), pp. 6–37.

<sup>96</sup>For this discussion, I am indebted to the account of vernacular literatures in Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, pp. 145–194.

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of translation from Latin into a vernacular language, Old English. In South Asia as in western Europe, vernacular literatures came into existence against the background of a translocal, cosmopolitan language—Sanskrit or Latin.<sup>97</sup>

Therefore, by underscoring the translational origin of English literature, Joyce's account is ironically accurate. Further, the self-conscious emphasis on translation as the source of a new literature in a vernacular language has ancient precedents. The beginning of epic literature in Latin is usually taken to coincide with the translation of the *Odyssey* by Livius Andronicus in the third century BC. Although his *Odusia* survives only in fragments, and his immediate predecessors disparaged him as a primitive poet, Livius Andronicus is now recognised as a sophisticated writer, whose translation was alert to the complexities of transcultural exchange. This is manifest in the first line of his *Odusia*: 'Virum mihi, Camena, insece versutum.' The line is notable not only for resorting to a local water goddess (Camena) rather than the Greek 'muse,' or to the Latin, saturnian metre, but also for its rendition of the Greek *polutropos* ('of many turns'). The word *versutum* is indeed an appropriate equivalent to the Greek adjective, but it also alludes to the very process of translation (*vertere*), showcasing the act of appropriation which underlies the affirmation of a vernacular literature.<sup>98</sup> The reflection on the corrupt, or impure, emergence of vernacular literature casts its shadow on the more properly 'national' development which begins with Old English, and ends with the pastiche of Thomas Carlyle (14.1391-1439).

The very end of the episode (14.1440-1591) is no less significant in this respect. In an oft-quoted letter to Frank Budgen (dated 13 March 1920), Joyce lays down the guiding principles of the chapter and enumerates many of the sources for his stylistic imitations:

Scene: Lying-in-hospital. Technique: a ninepart episode without divisions introduced by a Sallustian-Tacitean prelude (the unfertilized ovum), then by way of earliest English alliterative and monosyllabic and Anglo-Saxon

before listing the targets of his pastiches. The episode, Joyce continues, 'ends in a frightful jumble of pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and

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<sup>97</sup>For a comparative account of vernacularisation in South Asia and western Europe, see Sheldon Pollock, 'Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History'. In: *Cosmopolitanism*. Ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge et al. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 15–53.

<sup>98</sup>See Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, pp. 179–183 and Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 58–61.

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broken doggerel.<sup>99</sup> This is where Joyce parts company with George Saintsbury's *A History of English Prose Rhythm*, his main source of raw material.<sup>100</sup> This final passage is notoriously difficult, owing to the wide range of linguistic material, to say nothing of the pronounced inebriation of most characters.<sup>101</sup> Joyce's sources for this 'frightful jumble' include glossaries of Suffolk dialect and New England nautical jargon, a play entitled *Change* written by the Welsh dramatist John Oswald Francis, American short stories set in the Wild West or among Chinese immigrants, and—emblematically—a German dictionary of London slang and cant.<sup>102</sup> Joyce also resorts to snippets of foreign languages, Latin, French, or Scots from Robert Burns's ballads:

Aweel, ye maun e'en gang yer gates. Checkmate. King to tower. Kind Kristyann wil yu help yung man hoose frend tuk bungellow kee tu find plais whear tu lay crown of his hed 2 night. Crickey, I'm about sprung. Tarnally dog gone my shins if this beent the bestest puttiest longbreak yet. Item, curate, couple of cookies for this child. Cot's plood and prandypalls, none! Not a pite of sheeses? Thrust syphilis down to hell and with him those other licensed spirits. Time, gents! Who wander through the world. Health all! *À la vôtre!* (14.1539-1545)

As if to echo the primordial invocation of 'Deshil Holles eamus,' the episode ultimately reverts to the realm of orality. In a cyclical motion, we move back from print to speech. Instead of ending with a celebration of contemporary prose styles, 'Oxen' upsets the expected progression and gestures beyond national literature itself, towards an unsettling mixture of non-standard dialects, existing outside the printed page. The last stage in the embryonic growth of language is centrifugal, displacing the canonical, literary acrolects—the most prestigious forms of a given language—in favour of peripheral speech-forms, or basilects, from the lower end of the spectrum and the margins of Empire. To be sure, there are literary precedents for exploiting regional and social dialects; to cite one typical instance, Shakespeare's *Henry V* draws on Scots, Welsh, and Irish, as mimetic props to enhance the local colour of Captains Jamy, Fluellen,

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<sup>99</sup>Gilbert, *Letters of James Joyce*, p. 139.

<sup>100</sup>Saintsbury, *A History of English Prose Rhythm*.

<sup>101</sup>For a useful, if tentative commentary on the end of the episode, see John Noel Turner, 'A Commentary on the Closing of "Oxen of the Sun"'. In: *James Joyce Quarterly* 35.1 (Fall 1997), pp. 83–111.

<sup>102</sup>I am indebted to the meticulous account of Joyce's sources in Sarah Davison, 'Oxtail Soup: Dialects of English in the Tailpiece of the "Oxen of the Sun" episode of *Ulysses*'. In: *Genetic Joyce Studies* (Spring 2014), pp. 1–27.

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and Macmorris.<sup>103</sup> Yet, Joyce departs from that practice; in ‘Oxen,’ nonstandard, peripheral Englishes are no longer aberrant or exotic deviations from a recognised norm. The episode posits a radical *continuity* between the prestigious styles of English prose and the ultimate ‘frightful’ linguistic chaos. The episode, then, suggests that national literature is not the end of the story. Rather, it appears as a transitional stage towards some ulterior dispensation, one in which neither nation-state nor national language provide the most relevant frameworks anymore.<sup>104</sup>

The very end of ‘Oxen’ consists mainly in the fiery sermon delivered by the street preacher John Alexander Christ Dowie, already encountered at the beginning of ‘Lestrygonians’ (8.13). In keeping with the linguistic apocalypse just unravelling, Dowie exhorts the passers-by, ‘you dog-gone, bullnecked, beetlebrowed, hogjowled, peanutbrained, weaseleyed fourflushers’ (14.1581-3), against the second coming of Elijah. Mirroring the mock-invocation of ‘Deshil Holles eamus,’ Dowie’s sermon reasserts a form of orality which, once again, explodes national boundaries: ‘Alexander J Christ Dowie, that’s my name, that’s yanked to glory most half this planet from Frisco beach to Vladivostok’ (14.1584-5). ‘Oxen’ can then be read as a registration of the rise and fall of English—its language as well as its literature—emerging first as a peripheral formation derived, or translated, from cosmopolitan Latin, which it then displaces in the process of vernacularisation, only to fall victim to the same logic, whereby its own hegemonic, translocal reach ultimately fosters the growth of competing local variants. As Hugh Kenner suggests in ‘The Three Provinces,’ the interwar period was a time when the English language ceased to belong to one nation alone, and lost its supremacy under the pressure of the American and Irish dialects which contributed to the rise of international modernism. Kenner draws a parallel between the provincialisation of English by those two other dialects and the fate of Latin once French and Spanish began to separate from it, while it morphed into the Italian language.<sup>105</sup> I am inclined to read ‘Oxen’ as an instance of ‘the revolt in the peripheries of the Anglophone literary world against long-established English metropolitan literary dominance,’ which for Joe

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<sup>103</sup>William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. c. 1599. Ed. by Andrew Gurr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. For a richly informed discussion of this issue, see Irma Taavitsainen et al., eds., *Writing in Nonstandard English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999.

<sup>104</sup>Mufwene insists that the metropolitan languages spoken by the early settlers in plantation colonies were typically nonstandard, regional dialects, owing to their mostly lower-class provenance, a factor which played a determining part in the evolution of creoles. See Mufwene, *The Ecology of Language Evolution*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>105</sup>Hugh Kenner, *A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, pp. 13–18.



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Cleary is characteristic of the modernist moment.<sup>106</sup> In this episode, we encounter on a micro-level the logic whose expansion will develop into *Finnegans Wake*, an undertaking which, in the words of Jean-Michel Rabaté, evokes ‘a collective utopia blending language and politics, a radical utopia with avant-gardist and anarchistic overtones’<sup>107</sup>. The main quality of Joyce’s utopia, Rabaté suggests, is ‘hospitality,’ a virtue embodied notably in Leopold Bloom, but also in Joyce’s politics of language as a whole. Discussing Joyce’s specifically Irish-tinted universalism, Rabaté notes that the *Wake* is ‘an epic of all races’ whose determinants—linguistic, topographic, and mythological—remain predominantly Irish. By this means, Joyce manages ‘to bypass a universalist discourse, and founds his own discourse of tolerance on the singularity of one nation—after, that is, its idiom has been broadened so as to accept the whole “earopen.”’<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.4.2 The Cattle Raid at Horne’s House

Pursuing this line of inquiry, I would like to venture the hypothesis that one unacknowledged subtext echoes throughout ‘Oxen,’ in addition to the identified masters of English prose pastiched by Joyce. In his programmatic letter to Budgen, Joyce mentioned that ‘the double thudding Anglo-Saxon motive recurs from time to time [...] to give the sense of the hoofs of oxen.’<sup>109</sup> In an episode which so comprehensively ransacks the English literary tradition, while exposing it to the contamination of alien oral sources, it is tempting to interpret the thudding hoofs of oxen as another intertextual presence in the chapter, that of the medieval Irish cattle raiding epic known as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. While the story of the *Táin* is believed to have acquired a relatively coherent shape in the eighth century, no manuscript survives prior to the late eleventh century, a period where the very notions of original, authority and authorship were still extremely fluid. As Donna Wong observes, the *Táin* existed ‘in numerous variants, oral and written, which continually interacted and generated new ones,’ to the effect that ‘every version had an equal claim to authority.’<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, the episodes come across as

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<sup>106</sup>Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, p. 2. See also Cleary’s reading of ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ in Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*, pp. 152–195.

<sup>107</sup>Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup>Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*, p. 105.

<sup>109</sup>Letter dated 13 March 1920, in Gilbert, *Letters of James Joyce*, p. 139.

<sup>110</sup>Donna Wong, ‘Literature and the Oral Tradition’. In: *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: To 1890*. Ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 633–676, p. 639.

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disjointed, and repetitious—the battles adhere invariably to the same pattern, with the characters glimpsed from afar on their chariots, their clothing and hairstyles described to an exuberant degree of detail, before they engage in ferocious fighting, with no lack of blood and entrails spilling out. Not only that, but the *Táin* is a ‘prosimetric’ text, alternating between prose and verse, depending on the function of the passage in the economy of the work. Prose is mostly used to relate the actions of the plot, while verse is used for the more lyrical moments of introspection, mourning, and the like, on top of which come passages in *roscada*, a constant puzzle for translators on account of their archaic diction and obscurity. Finally, bilingualism and code-switching were frequent in medieval Ireland, allowing writers and scribes to alternate between Latin and Gaelic, a mixture which became embedded in the texts over time.<sup>111</sup> In the words of Thomas Kinsella, who produced a translation of the *Táin* in 1969, this text sometimes appears as ‘little more than the mangled remains of miscellaneous scribal activities.’<sup>112</sup> The vagaries of oral transmission and the hazards of textualisation have made the *Táin* ‘a crazy quilt of episodes,’ an unsettling experience for modern readers accustomed to realist conventions, but a familiar one for Joyceans.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the bewildering nature of the *Táin* has led Ciaran Carson, whose own translation was published in 2007, to point out the similarity between this ‘multi-layered, polyphonic tale’ and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, both centrally concerned with the whole gamut of bodily functions—with an emphasis on female sexuality and desire—, neither unduly preoccupied about narrative consistency.<sup>114</sup>

In the so-called ‘Pillow Talk’ episode, which opens both Kinsella’s and Carson’s renditions, the royal couple Medb and Ailill have an argument about which of them has the greatest fortune.<sup>115</sup> Since none will submit to the other’s arguments, they decide to compare the extent of their respective possessions:

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<sup>111</sup>Maire Ni Mhaonaigh, ‘The Literature of Medieval Ireland, 800-1200: From the Vikings to the Normans’. In: *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature: To 1890*. Ed. by Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 32–73, p. 32.

<sup>112</sup>Thomas Kinsella, *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cúailnge*. 1969. Oxford University Press, 2002, p. xi.

<sup>113</sup>Wong, ‘Literature and the Oral Tradition’, p. 639.

<sup>114</sup>Ciaran Carson, *The Táin: A New Translation of the Táin Bó Cúailnge*. London: Penguin, 2008, p. xxi.

<sup>115</sup>This episode, like all sexually suggestive or excessively violent passages, was left out of Lady Gregory’s translation, a major source of inspiration for Yeats. See Lady Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster Arranged and Put into English by Lady Gregory*. 1902. London: John Murray, 1926.

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Then the lowliest of their possessions were brought out, to see who had more property and jewels and precious things: their buckets and tubs and iron pots, jugs and wash-pails and vessels with handles. Then their fingerrings, bracelets, thumb-rings and gold treasures were brought out, and their cloth of purple, blue, black, green and yellow, plain grey and many-coloured, yellow-brown, checked and striped. Their herds of sheep were taken in off the fields and meadows and plains. They were measured and matched, and found to be the same in numbers and size. Even the great ram leading Medb's sheep, the worth of one bondmaid by himself, had a ram to match him leading Ailill's sheep.<sup>116</sup>

The preposterous catalogue of belongings will indeed seem familiar to anyone who has read Joyce's 'Cyclops' or 'Ithaca,' chapters where Joyce revels in verbal accumulation of all kinds.<sup>117</sup> The contest between Medb and Ailill extends to a host of animals, from pigs to boars, which they both happen to possess in exactly the same numbers. The enumeration ends when Medb appears to be short of a single bull, whereupon she demands that one be found in order to match Ailill's, thus setting off the search for the Brown Bull of Cúailnge, the expedition which gives the epic its name (also known as 'the cattle raid at Cooley'). Medb's will to acquire the bull, by cunning or by force, will culminate in a bloody clash with Cúchulainn, the hero of Ulster. The conversion of the price of Medb's ram into one bondmaid reminds us of the centrality of cattle as an early form of currency among pastoral people.<sup>118</sup> In a heroic society such as Homeric Greece or early medieval Ireland, cattle raiding was a common practice, a major source of wealth as well as of heroic poetry. In such societies, 'women and

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<sup>116</sup>Kinsella, *The Táin*, p. 54.

<sup>117</sup>See for instance the items on Bloom's kitchen shelf: 'a chipped eggcup containing pepper, a drum of table salt, four conglomerated black olives in oleaginous paper, an empty pot of Plumtree's potted meat, an oval wicker basket bedded with fibre and containing one Jersey pear, a halfempty bottle of William Gilbey and Co's white invalid port, half disrobed of its swathe of coralpink tissue paper, a packet of Epps's soluble cocoa, five ounces of Anne Lynch's choice tea at 2./- per lb in a crinkled leadpaper bag, a cylindrical canister containing the best crystallised lump sugar, two onions, one, the larger, Spanish, entire, the other, smaller, Irish, bisected with augmented surface and more redolent, a jar of Irish Model Dairy's cream [...]' (*U*, 17.302).

<sup>118</sup>In the Brehon Law tract known as Book of Status (*Críth gablach*), people were classified depending on the number of cows and calves they owned, indicating the centrality of cattle in early Irish society. The practice of using cattle as a currency continued long into the Middle ages; see Fergus Kelly, 'Cattle in Ancient Ireland: Early Irish Legal Aspects'. In: *Cattle in Ancient and Modern Ireland: Farming Practices, Environment and Economy*. Ed. by Michael O'Connell et al. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 44–50. For further information on the pre-monetary economy of the Celts the chapter on 'Institutions and Ways of Life' in Nora Chadwick and Barry Cunliffe, *The Celts*. 1971. London: Penguin, 1997. On the genesis of the money form in relation to cattle, see also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. 1939. Trans. by Martin Nicolaus. London: Penguin, 1993, pp. 165–66.

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animals are the twin types of “possession” whose protection is of paramount importance to the man of honor.’<sup>119</sup> In the *Odyssey*, Eumaeus, Odysseus’s swineherd, engages in a similar enumeration of his master’s cattle assets in Book 14; the slaughtering of the oxen of the Sun by Odysseus’s stranded shipmates in Book 12 is so egregious that the Sun god threatens to leave the world of the living in the dark and shed its light on the world of the dead instead.<sup>120</sup> In this episode Joyce conducts a modernist cattle raid of sorts, plundering the herds of the English literary tradition in a sweeping expropriative gesture; further, that tradition is decentred by the insistence on non-English, pre-literate forms of expression which disturb the integrity of the literary corpus itself. The ‘frightful jumble’ which concludes the episode suggests that the national literature and the national language are engulfed by the process of creolisation. Ironically, in turning to the cattle raiding epic that is the *Táin*, Joyce replicates an alternative form of Gaelic revival, a far cry from Lady Gregory’s sanitised version of her source material, whereby the archaic past becomes repurposed towards a creolisation in the future sense.<sup>121</sup>

Lest this account sound unduly triumphant, it is worth noting some of the more worrying aspects of the chapter’s ending. The preacher Dowie was a notorious character on account of his scandalous behaviour and financial swindles. Further, the sheer obscurity of the passage, aggravated by the general intoxication of the characters, adds to the impression of a literary pandemonium. Notwithstanding the introduction of foreign tongues and dialects, besides, English remains the dominant reference throughout. Yet these aspects, chaotic and troubling as they seem, are part and parcel of the process of creolisation, insofar as the material precondition of this process so far has entailed exploitative relations and disreputable ventures, rather than lofty ideals. Upon hearing the news that ‘an heir had been born’ at last, putting an end to the labours of Mrs Purefoy, the medical students gathered downstairs ‘broke out at once into a strife of tongues’ (14.951). The expression is an apt summary of the episode as a whole. The conversation then embarks on obstetrics, and a review of ‘the recorded instances of multigeminal, twikindled and monstrous births conceived during the catamenic period or of consanguineous parents’ (14.973), a theme which invites us to read the conclusive

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<sup>119</sup>Peter Walcot, ‘Cattle-Raiding, Heroic Tradition, and Ritual: The Greek Evidence’. In: *History of Religions* 18.4 (May 1979), pp. 326–351, p. 328.

<sup>120</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, XIV, 110–26 and XII, 365–412.

<sup>121</sup>For evidence of Joyce’s familiarity with the *Táin*, including through translations into French or German, see Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*, pp. 299–301; with a focus on *Finnegans Wake*, see Faith Steinberg, ‘The Prankquean, She Rain Rain, Rain’. In: *James Joyce Quarterly* 39.4 (Summer 2002), pp. 829–836.

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jumble as one such ‘monstrous [birth].’

For all these qualifications, I maintain that the gesture towards the overcoming of national literature and national language alike is at heart utopian. In its attempt to overcome the normative dispensation of nation-state and national literature, the episode draws on the resources of peripheral languages and speech-forms. The dynamic of the episode evinces a sense of *possibility*, and challenges the illusion that any language is a natural given. Instead, like Stephen, we are made to ponder the ‘Godpossibled souls that we nightly impossibilise, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost, Very God, Lord and Giver of Life’ (14.225-7). The meditation on the cycle of life which subtends ‘Oxen’ is no less relevant to the phenomenon of language evolution:

And as the ends and ultimates of all things accord in some mean and measure with their inceptions and originals, that same multiplicit concordance which leads forth growth from birth accomplishing by a retrogressive metamorphosis that minishing and ablation towards the final which is agreeable unto nature so it is with our subsolar being. (14.387)

Here, English too undergoes a ‘retrogressive metamorphosis’ which mirrors its inception. The overarching trajectory of the episode seems designed to historicise what we think of as English literature: it appears to have come into existence out of pre-existing languages and texts, themselves descended from an experience of orality. ‘Oxen of the Sun’ casts national literature as a transitional formation, one that had a multiplicity of unrecognised beginnings and, what is more disquieting, that is bound to disintegrate into a ‘frightful jumble.’ Besides signalling the breakdown of an Anglocentric world literary system, I would argue that ‘Oxen of the Sun’ dramatises the process of creolisation which, for Édouard Glissant, dismantles the supremacy of monolingual absolutism in an increasingly relational world.<sup>122</sup> Any language appears contingent, relative, one possibility among many. The impetus of the chapter is utopian also in the sense that language is potentially deterritorialised, its boundaries questioned.

#### **4.4.3 Writing in the Contact Zone: Joyce in Trieste**

On a factual level, it is tempting to perceive a connection between the linguistic exuberance in the final passage and Joyce’s experience of polyglossia during his stay in Trieste, between 1905 and 1915. John McCourt has amply demonstrated the extent to

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<sup>122</sup>Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation: Poétique III*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990, pp. 27–31.

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which Joyce's Triestine years informed his literary activity and awareness of linguistic issues.<sup>123</sup> The Trieste that Joyce knew was at its zenith in the pre-war years; it was the third city in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, after Vienna and Prague, and its main port. By its position on the Adriatic sea, it provided the Empire with a vital maritime access to the Mediterranean, making it a bustling commercial city. Its population was in majority Italian, with a strong minority of Slavs—Slovenes and Croats, encouraged to settle there by the imperial authorities in order to undercut Italian irredentism. By virtue of its location at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and eastern Europe, Trieste also hosted sizeable Arab, Hungarian, Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities. Accordingly, the linguistic make-up of the city was variegated. Joyce tried to alleviate his financial struggles by teaching English at a Berlitz School, where his employer, Almidano Artifoni, had founded a newspaper called *Il Poliglotta*, which welcomed articles in Italian, English, German, French, and Spanish. Marino de Szombathely was a Hungarian Triestine who was working on an Italian translation of the *Odyssey* in the years when Joyce was working on *Ulysses*.<sup>124</sup> This may account for the fact that Bloom's family originally come from the town of Szombathely.

Discussions on nationalism and related themes were an important part of the public sphere; Trieste was home to a variety of socialist groupings, which attempted to put forward working-class solidarity above national affiliations, but also to a powerful Zionist movement, in addition to the already mentioned Italian irredentist agitation.<sup>125</sup> It was in Trieste that Joyce wrote 'Ireland, Isle of Saints and Sages,' a lecture which he delivered at the irredentist Università Popolare, and which he concludes with the reflection that the Irish civilisation is 'an immense woven fabric' in which no thread has remained pure (*OCPW*, 118).

In addition to the languages spoken by each community, the city was home to a local Italian dialect known as *Triestino*, which served as a *lingua franca* between the various communities, and duly incorporated elements from all the languages spoken there. It was pronounced in an infinite variety of ways depending on the speakers' accents. In a letter to his father dated 10 November 1904, Joyce wrote of his arrival in Trieste, where he was struck by the presence of warships in the harbour, and the variety of languages spoken there: 'the Italian they speak [...] is very corrupt,' said the man who was to write

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<sup>123</sup>McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*.

<sup>124</sup>His translation began to appear in 1918. See McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, p. 96.

<sup>125</sup>For an account of Joyce's interest in socialism in Trieste, see Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, pp. 43–66.

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*Finnegans Wake*.<sup>126</sup> Joyce became remarkably proficient in *Triestino*, and the whole Joyce family adopted it as a household language, even after moving to Zürich and Paris. *Triestino*, therefore, offered Joyce the concrete manifestation of a language belonging to no one in particular, ‘an inclusive force which, in each of its varieties, embraced different civilizations and became a living encyclopaedia of the cultures, nations and languages that had been assimilated in the city.’<sup>127</sup> It was also in Trieste, where Joyce sustained himself by teaching English, that he asked his brother: ‘Would you be surprised if I wrote a very good English grammar some day?’<sup>128</sup> ‘Oxen’ appears to be the fulfillment of this project.

#### 4.4.4 Helen’s Maternity: From ‘Ances-tree’ to ‘Broken Root’

In *Omeros* too, the motif of birth-giving occasions a reflection on the advent of a creolising world-totality. Although the most sustained engagement with multilingualism occurs in relation to Maud’s quilt, Helen’s pregnancy introduces elements which point towards a post-monolingual dispensation. It must be remembered that genealogy is an overriding concern throughout the poem. On one level, Plunkett’s desperate search to write the island’s history is presented as a compensation for his inability to beget an heir. In Chapter 16, we find him paying for the services of a genealogical researcher:

Plunkett’s ances-tree (his pun) fountained in blossoms  
and pods from a genealogical willow  
above his blotter’s green field. One pod was the Somme’s.

It burst with his father’s lungs. Then a pale yellow  
asterisk for a great-uncle marked Bloemfontein.<sup>129</sup>  
At the War Office he’d paid some waxworks fellow

to draw flowers for battles, buds for a campaign.  
[...] when the willow faded

into a dubious cloud, he smiled. (*O*, 16.1)

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<sup>126</sup>Ellmann, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, p. 42.

<sup>127</sup>McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>128</sup>In a letter dated 15 March 1905, Ellmann, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, p. 58.

<sup>129</sup>In ‘Circe,’ Bloom makes the fantastic claim that he fought at Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State during the Boer War (*U*, 15.796).

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Plunkett agonises over the fact that his pedigree chart ends with ‘No heir: the end of the line. / No more Plunketts’ (16.1). Plunkett is deprived of an heir, a lack which he tries to make up for by finding a retrospective descendant in the historical archive of St Lucia, a delusional enterprise which eventually succeeds in Chapter 17. In the archive registering the deaths in the Battle of the Saintes, he finds ‘a namesake and a son’ (17.3), a midshipman named Plunkett, who died at the age of nineteen.

By contrast to Plunkett’s obsession with roots and genealogy, Helen’s pregnancy inaugurates an alternative mode of filiation. ‘I pregnant, / but I don’t know for who’ (*O*, 6.1), she tells a friend. Helen, who embodies the island of St Lucia throughout the poem, becomes a locus of uncertainty. Her pregnancy frustrates the search for a single father, or origin, and thereby subverts the order of patriarchal transmission, an operation with profound political repercussions. In opposition to Plunkett’s quest for his ‘ancestry,’ Helen’s pregnancy replicates the predicament of the West Indian poet, which is to face ‘the archipelago like a broken root’ (*AL*, 54).

Indeed, ascertaining the legitimacy of fatherhood is shown to be an inherently dubious affair. The patriarchal family and the institution of marriage are based precisely on the will to monitor female sexuality in order to guarantee the transmission of inheritance. David Lloyd has observed that patriarchy and nationalist mythologies were wary of ‘the spectre of adultery,’ a threat which has the potential to throw into disarray the transmission of property rights within the family unit, but also the construction of the national community:

Adulteration as a stylistic principle institutes a multiplication of possibility in place of an order of probability and as such appears as the exact aesthetic correlative of adultery in the social sphere. For if adultery is forbidden under patriarchal law, it is precisely because of the potential multiplication of possibilities for identity that it implies as against the paternal fiction, which is based on no more than legal verisimilitude. If the spectre of adultery must be exorcized by nationalism, it is in turn because adulteration undermines the stable formation of legitimate and authentic identities.<sup>130</sup>

It is impossible to know for sure who is the father of Helen’s child, a fact which stresses the centrality of adulteration as a cultural fact in Walcott’s Caribbean. Hector’s death and Helen’s reunion with Achille mean that he will raise the child, but the mystery of

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<sup>130</sup>David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993, p. 109.



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origins is never elucidated, and indeed becomes irrelevant as we approach the delivery of the child:

The sail of her bellying stomach seemed to him  
to bear not only the curved child sailing in her  
but Hector's mound, and her hoarse, labouring rhythm

was a delivering wave. There, in miniature,  
the world was globed like a fruit, since its texture is  
both acid and sweet like a golden *pomme-Cythère*,

the apple of Venus, and the *Ville de Paris*  
that he had dived for once, in search of a treasure  
that was kneeling right there, that had always been his (*O*, 55.2).

The microcosmic simile of the world in Helen's 'bellying stomach' reinforces the allegoric valence of the scene, a move predicated on the acceptance of limitless possibilities rather than the backward-looking search for univocal roots and genealogies.

Fatherhood is exposed in *Ulysses* as a 'legal fiction' (*U*, 9.844), in a way that anticipates Plunkett's characterisation of history as 'factual fiction' (*O*, 18.1). The uncertainty which surrounds the identity of Helen's baby thematises the poetics of adulteration which informs the text as a whole. While fatherhood is always suspicious, *Omeros* shifts the focus toward the proliferation of possibilities and the infinite creolisation of identities. In 'The Antilles,' Walcott describes the sight of Port-of-Spain and its people in terms which foreground and celebrate their lack of history and lineage on account of mongrelisation, drawing as well on the theme of babel, not as a curse to be overcome but as a source of creative wealth:

And there they are, all in a single Caribbean city, Port of Spain, the sum  
of history, Trollope's 'non-people.' A downtown babel of shop signs and  
streets, mongrelized, polyglot, a ferment without a history, like heaven.  
(*WTS*, 71)

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#### 4.4.5 Mapping a Language Utopia: Maud's Quilt and the Task of the Translator

I want to conclude this chapter with a reading of the site where utopianism is most clearly inscribed in *Omeros*: Maud's quilt. My argument is that Maud's quilt is a virtual text, which is held up as a model by the poet-narrator, as well as a utopian map of the Caribbean within a reconciled world-totality. In what follows, I attempt to articulate those two aspects: the textual parallel between Maud's embroidery and Walcott's poetic craft, on the one hand, and the allegorical valence of Maud's totalising gesture. Finally, while these parallels are more or less overtly thematised in the poem, I will argue that the unmentioned, yet crucial term in this conceit is that of translation, a process which inaugurates a utopian relation to language.

Before turning to Maud's quilt, however, it is worth noting that translation appears early on in the poem, and that it introduces the theme of orality. In Chapter 3, the dialogue between Hector and Achille is rendered in French Creole, and each line is followed by a translation into English:

*'Touchez-i, encore: N'ai fendre choux-ous-ou, salope!'*  
*'Touch it again, and I'll split your arse, you bitch!'*  
*'Moi j'a dire—'ous pas prêter un rien. 'Ous ni shallope,*  
  
*'ous ni seine, 'ous croire 'ous ni choeur campêche?'*  
*'I told you, borrow nothing of mine. You have a canoe,*  
*and a net. Who you think you are? Logwood Heart? '(3.1)*

But then the dialogue switches to English (a switch indicated, stage-direction-like, with 'Then in English'). Yet code-switching continues at the level of the narrative voice: 'he saw him carrying the cutlass, *un homme / fou*, a madman eaten with envy'. The third section of the chapter reverts to code-switching as Philoctete discusses his wound with Ma Kilman, alternating at first between English and Creole, before reverting to English. Yet another heteroglossic pun occurs, as Philoctete translates '*Moin blessé*' (I am wounded) as 'I am blest / wif this wound,' on account of the phonological similarity between the two, otherwise unrelated words. The exchange ends with Philoctete saying '*Merci*,' which can be understood here in both sense of 'thank you' and 'mercy,' a prayer for a cure.

These two instances of code-switching bracket the introduction of the Homeric figure of 'Old St. Omere,' 'the blind singer' also known as Seven Seas, in the middle

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section of the chapter. His appearance is thus framed by two passages which draw our attention to the heterogeneity of the linguistic medium in St Lucia, and which are perhaps designed to remind us that the predominantly English poem we are reading is only a one-sided rendition of the story, which is in two languages at least by the Creole islanders. Fittingly, then, Old St. Omere is characterised by his unsettling use of language. ‘Muttering the dark language of the blind,’ his rambling words remain opaque to Ma Kilman: ‘his words were not clear. / They were Greek to her. Or old African babble’ (3.2), yet another tongue-in-cheek allusion to the Tower of Babel.

To begin with, it bears repeating that Maud comes from Ireland, the only European destination visited by the narrator in Book Five that is not an imperial metropolis, and therefore a source of identification for the postcolonial writer.<sup>131</sup> Throughout the poem, Maud is rarely depicted with any other occupation than her embroidery.<sup>132</sup> Maud’s ‘immense quilt’ is alluded to at various points in the poem (16.2), running like a seam throughout the text, and providing the narrator with grounds for identification. That Maud’s quilt should be read as a text in its own right is suggested early on, in chapter five, when the Plunketts are first introduced. At that point, the narrator informs us that Plunkett received a wound during the North African campaign in World War Two; incidentally, the narrator draws our attention to his own craft in a way that anticipates Maud’s embroidery, when he writes: ‘This wound I have *stitched* into Plunkett’s character’ (5.2, my emphasis), using the verb which later comes to be associated with Maud. It is true that the poet-narrator identifies most explicitly with Dennis, rather than Maud, Plunkett, as both undertake to write in honour of St Lucia and its people. Maud’s stitching, on the other hand, serves as a backdrop to their delusional endeavours, and ultimately provides an alternative way of representing the island. Thus, whereas Plunkett and the narrator finally realise the futility of their respective literary enterprises, Maud’s stitching reaches a spectacular, epiphanic conclusion at the end of the poem.

In the *Odyssey*, Penelope unweaves by night the shroud she has been weaving in the day, as a means to deceive the suitors who urge her to marry one of them.<sup>133</sup> Here, by contrast, it is the male characters who end up unravelling their own ‘webbed connection,’ another textile metaphor which refers to Plunkett’s ‘net of myths, knotted

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<sup>131</sup>See my reading of the ‘Irish chapter’ and Joyce’s presence, pp. 79.

<sup>132</sup>The main exception is gardening, as in chapters ten and twenty-three. This causes the narrator to reflect, when he attends her funeral: ‘What I shared with [her] we shared as gardeners’ (*O*, 53.2). Gardening provides yet another source of identification between Maud and the poetic persona.

<sup>133</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, II, 101-122 and XXIV, 152-161.

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entanglements / of figures and dates' (18.1), but applies equally to the narrator's obsession with Homeric precedent. Thus, when we observe the Plunkett couple in chapter eleven, the contrast is evident. Plunkett is about to get lost in historical speculation, as he decides 'that what the place needed / was its true place in history' (11.1)—a redundant formulation ('the place' needs its 'place') which is ominously circuitous; simultaneously, however, Maud is stitching, 'her needles swift as his pen,' a simile which furthers the parallel between the textile and the textual (11.2). In her endeavour, she is aided by the birds of the island (as the polysemous 'swift' already intimated in the preceding quote); she remembers her arrival on St Lucia, 'when martins at dusk with their crisscrossing stitches / would sew the silk sky' (11.3). Those are in turn depicted on 'her tapestry of birds' (10.1), a congruence suggesting her adaptation and harmonious relation to the locale. The passage where she appears sewing in chapter sixteen is worth quoting at some length:

Maud with her needle, embroidering a silhouette

from Bond's *Ornithology*, their quiet mirrored  
in an antique frame. Needlepoint constellations  
on a clear night had prompted this intricate thing,

this immense quilt, which, with her typical patience,  
she'd started years ago, making its blind birds sing,  
beaks parted like nibs from their brown branch and cover

on the silken shroud. Mockingbirds, finches, and wrens,  
nightjars and kingfishers, hawks, hummingbirds, plover,  
ospreys and falcons, with beaks like his scratching pen's,

terns, royal and bridled, wild ducks, migrating teal,  
pipers (their fledgling beaks), wild waterfowl, widgeon,  
*Cypseloides Niger, l'hirondelle des Antilles*

(their name for the sea-swift). They flew from their region,  
their bright spurs braceleted with Greek or Latin tags,  
to pin themselves to the silk, and, crying their names,

pecked at her fingers. They fluttered like little flags

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from the branched island, budding in accurate flames. (*O*, 16.2)

The quilt is repeatedly associated with poetic skill, not just because the beaks of the birds replicate Plunkett's 'scratching pen's,' but also because the birds are 'blind' yet sing, like Homer and Seven Seas. To that extent, they appear to combine script and speech, two separate realms which Walcott himself seeks to fuse.<sup>134</sup> The birds are classified by their official, 'Greek or Latin' names, a further wink at the classical references underlying the passage. Yet, perhaps the most significant fact about the birds is the prevalence of compounds by which they are designated (mocking-birds, night-jars, king-fishers, humming-birds, water-fowl, sea-swift), which befits the description of the quilt as an 'intricate thing,' stitching together migratory birds from various provenances.<sup>135</sup> Repeated allusions emphasise the link between the birds of the region and Maud's quilt. For instance, when Achille addresses the swift that guides him to Africa and back, '[h]e said the name / that he knew her by—*l'hirondelle des Antilles*, / the tag on Maud's quilt' (24.1). The mention of the bird's French (creole) name underscores Maud's attentiveness to local detail, since she does not speak the language herself, and indeed stands at a remove from the creole-speaking population, as the parenthetical '(their name for the sea-swift)' makes plain.<sup>136</sup>

The association of Maud's quilt with poetic craft and story-telling is reinforced when it is characterised as a 'fabulous quilt' (52.3), an adjective which evokes the realm of fables, and speech as such.<sup>137</sup> This echoes Walcott's assimilation of 'tribal, elemental poetry' to the act of weaving in 'The Muse of History,' where 'the new poet enters a flux and withdraws, as the weaver continues the pattern' (*WTS*, 47), an image which underscores the incompleteness of any single poetic utterance and points towards the transpersonal circulation of a communal flux.

After Maud's death, Plunkett tries to communicate with her spirit, with the help of Ma Kilman, the *obeah* woman also referred to as a 'sibyl.'<sup>138</sup> On his way out of her

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<sup>134</sup>I discuss this issues on p. 162.

<sup>135</sup>Maria McGarrity notes that all the birds in this catalogue can indeed be sighted in St Lucia, except for the 'wild waterfowl,' a generic designation which most likely refers to species endemic to Maud's native Ireland. See McGarrity, *Allusions in Omeros*, pp. 77–9.

<sup>136</sup>The birds 'crying their names' and pecking at Maud's fingers also recall Giotto's depiction of St Francis's sermon to the birds; this would reinforce the suggestion of a supernatural language, able to overcome even the frontier between human and non-human. See Giotto di Bondone, *St Francis Preaching to the Birds*. Louvre Museum. URL: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010064459>. c. 1300.

<sup>137</sup>Fable derives from the Latin *fabula*, or story, a cognate of the verb *fari*, to speak.

<sup>138</sup>Ma Kilman is already presented in those terms in chapters seventeen and eighteen, when she cures Philoctete's wound thanks to local herbs.

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house, Maud appears to him in a vision, and ‘innumerable flocks / of birds’ fill the sky, as if they had been set free from the quilt:

and he knew her transparent hands

had unstitched them as he watched them flying over  
the grooved roofs till they were simply the shadow of...  
of a cloud on the hills. (*O*, 61.2)

This hallucinatory vision recalls Penelope’s unweaving of her own web, as the birds seem to take flight from the quilt. Yet the evocation anticipates the ultimate ascent of the birds in the following chapter, a vision which weaves together, finally, the separate threads of language and textile, in a vision imbued with distinct utopian overtones:

The sanderlings lift with their cries.

And those birds Maud Plunkett stitched into her green silk  
with sibylline steadiness were what islands bred:  
brown dove, black grackle, herons like ewers of milk,

pinned to a habitat many had adopted.

The lakes of the world have their own diaspora  
of birds every winter, but these would not return.

The African swallow, the finch from India  
now spoke the white language of a tea-sipping tern,  
with the Chinese nightingales on a shantung screen,

while the Persian falcon, whose cry leaves a scar  
on the sky till it closes, saw the sand turn green,  
the dunes to sea, understudying the man-o’-war,

talking the marine dialect of the Caribbean  
with nightjars, finches, and swallows, each origin  
enriching the islands to which their cries were sewn. (*O*, 62.2)

The dominant theme is language and its relation to place; or rather, what is addressed here is in fact the multiplicity of languages brought to the Caribbean, and their contingent, precarious relation to any given locale. The birds are not native to St Lucia,

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an island they have migrated to and eventually ‘adopted.’ They belong not to one, but to a multitude of diasporas, from virtually all corners of the earth (Africa, India, China, Persia). Accordingly, they constitute a polyglot flock, in the midst of which the ‘white language of a tea-sipping tern’ is no more privileged than any other. The quilt, however, does not merely suggest that any number of languages can coexist peacefully; the last evocation is that of ‘the marine dialect of the Caribbean,’ a deterritorialised, fluid language circulating through the archipelago.

This passage amounts to a poetic fulfillment of the programme laid out by Walcott in ‘The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory.’ Drawing on a metaphor evoking the craft of pottery, Walcott affirms the restorative dimension of West Indian art, its commitment to overcome the historical fragmentation imposed on the archipelago by the nightmare of history:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. 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. (*WTS*, 69)

In Maud’s quilt indeed, the falcon’s cry ‘leaves a scar,’ like the one visible on the reassembled vase, a sign that the unity achieved in the quilt is not primordial, but a process in the making, the price of Maud’s painstaking efforts. The condition of the West Indian people, Walcott goes on, is also that of the poet, who has to name as if for the first time a new world—‘making his tools like Crusoe,’ working with ‘fragments,’ ‘echoes’ and ‘shards’ of a lost vocabulary (70).

At this stage, I want to invoke Walter Benjamin’s reflections in ‘The Task of the Translator’, because his views on translation resonate strikingly both with the linguistic allegory that is Maud’s quilt and Walcott’s commitment to a totalising reconciliation through art.<sup>139</sup> Benjamin’s essay, published in 1923, is often noted for its utter useless-

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<sup>139</sup>Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’. 1923. In: *Selected Writings: 1913-1926*. Ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. by Harry Zohn. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 253–263.

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ness as far as practitioners of translation are concerned. In it, Benjamin gives neither advice nor guidelines for translators. Rather, he explores the underlying philosophical issues raised by translation, and thinks through the predicament induced by the existence of multiple languages. Benjamin begins by dismissing translations that aim merely to convey information. Those can only be ‘inferior translations,’ which he defines as ‘the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content.’ The main function of translation for Benjamin lies elsewhere; rather than communication, it has to do with what he calls ‘pure language.’ This ‘pure language’ is the utopian horizon of all translations, insofar as it consists in the totality of all that is meant, or intended, by all languages. Benjamin’s thoughts are of course heavily influenced by a mystical tradition of gnostic thought, whose traces are also to be found in Stéphane Mallarmé’s reflections on poetry’s ability to rise above the shortcomings of each particular language.<sup>140</sup> For Benjamin, this amounts to admitting ‘that all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages,’ a problem whose final solution ‘remains out of the reach of mankind.’ Although translation ‘cannot claim permanence for its products, its goal is undeniably a final, conclusive, decisive stage of all linguistic creation,’ what Benjamin also refers to as ‘the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages.’<sup>141</sup> Pure language is to emerge out of the tension between the diversity of languages—foreign to, and exclusive of one another—and their promised reconciliation, towards which translation is constantly working.<sup>142</sup> To illustrate his point, Benjamin draws on an image which would strike any Walcott reader as uncannily familiar:

Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a

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<sup>140</sup>See the chapter ‘Language and Gnosis’ in George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. 1975. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, especially pp. 66-68.

<sup>141</sup>Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 257.

<sup>142</sup>Chantal Wright, who has retranslated Benjamin’s essay along with Antoine Berman’s fascinating commentary on it, remarks that pure language is not only ‘out of reach of mankind,’ as in the version quoted here, but simultaneously ‘promised,’ an ambivalence contained in the German verb ‘*versagen*,’ which evokes at once ‘refusal’ and ‘promise,’ an ambivalence elided by Harry Zohn’s unequivocal translation. See Antoine Berman, *The Age of Translation: A Commentary on Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’*. 2008. Trans. by Chantal Wright. London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 136–37.



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greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.<sup>143</sup>

In translation, Antoine Berman adroitly comments, ‘we find fragments of non-fragmentary language.’<sup>144</sup> The imagery of fragmentation and healing, no less than the tone (‘lovingly and in detail’) seem to anticipate Walcott’s allegory in ‘The Antilles’ where memory in the archipelago is like a broken vase which it is the poet’s task to reassemble with ‘care and pain.’ In Benjamin’s account, the standard by which to judge a translation is ‘the greatest longing for linguistic complementation,’<sup>145</sup> a longing which is evident in the allegory of creolisation that is Maud’s quilt, and which points simultaneously towards the overcoming of national language and the possibility of a linguistic realm beyond either print or speech.

A similar epiphany occurs at the end of Walcott’s 1982 collection *The Fortunate Traveller*. The closing poem, ‘The Season of Phantasmal Peace’ stages a flock of birds whose flight is described in terms which anticipate Maud’s quilt:

Then all the nations of birds lifted together  
the huge net of the shadows of this earth  
in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,  
stitching and crossing it. [...]  
the net rising soundless at night, the birds’ cries soundless, until  
there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or weather,  
only this passage of phantasmal light  
that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever. (*PDW*, 327)

Birds are again mobilised within a metaphorical network concerned with the multiplicity of languages, and the possibility to reach a state of absolute perfection, suggested by the evocations of timelessness and the preternatural, ‘phantasmal light’ which irradiates so thoroughly that all shadows dissolve.<sup>146</sup> The birds’ cries and flight are emphatically ‘soundless,’ notwithstanding the insistence on their ‘multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues.’ The paradox of a soundless symphony of languages, interwoven (‘stitching and crossing it’), and cohering in a vision of blissful elation, once again points us

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<sup>143</sup> Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 260.

<sup>144</sup> Berman, *The Age of Translation*, p. 138.

<sup>145</sup> Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 260.

<sup>146</sup> Paula Burnett has ably written on the redemptive quality of this poem, especially in contrast to the one that immediately precedes it in the collection, ‘The Fortunate Traveller,’ a vindictive piece which conjures apocalyptic visions of a predatory world-system. See Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, pp. 204–206.

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towards Benjamin's pure language, the desirable yet impossible transcendence of linguistic fragmentation. The epiphanic transfiguration of the world is achieved by the birds only for a fleeting moment: 'and this season lasted one moment, like the pause / between dusk and darkness, between fury and peace, / but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long' (328). Another likely intertext for the poem can be found in one of the epiphanies in Joyce's *Portrait*. After Stephen's meditation on the nomadic clouds drifting over a Europe 'of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races,'<sup>147</sup> he is entranced by a sense of liberation, as though he were ascending to the skies, weightless and ecstatic:

His heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward. [...] His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit. An ecstasy of flight made radiant his eyes and wild his breath and tremulous and wild and radiant his windswept limbs. (*P*, 148)

The poem, however, insists on the distance which separates the birds from 'the wingless ones' below (327), exiled in an unredeemed world marked by suffering and inequality. Benjamin argues that

it is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of the pure language, he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language.<sup>148</sup>

From this perspective, 'The Season of Phantasmal Peace', like Maud's quilt, can be read as a utopian translation, an attempt to rescue the pure language from its Babelian exile, in a gesture which at once embraces and overcomes the fragmentation of a divided world. Both conjure up a powerful utopian vision, projecting the image of a world reconciled by means of language, like a broken vase reassembled with 'care and pain.' The epiphanic flight of the birds is to be contrasted with the 'Icarian future' (*O*, 22.2) epitomised by Hector's Comet, which is enlisted in the shambolic political campaign of Maljo in Chapter 20.

The metaphorical network which associates Maud's stitching at once with birds and with the poet's craft is pursued to the very end of the poem. When the narrator

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<sup>147</sup>I discuss this passage on p. 238.

<sup>148</sup>Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', p. 261.

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encounters the ghost of his father for the second time, in Marblehead, Massachusetts, the parallel is stated explicitly:

Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere,  
cherish our island for its green simplicities,

[...] The sea-swift vanishes in rain,

and yet in its travelling all that the sea-swift does  
it does in a circular pattern (36.3).

The necessary conclusion to the poem's wanderings is the completion of the circle which leads back to St Lucia. Yet the place is no longer what it was at the beginning of the poem:

I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;  
her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking  
basins of a globe in which one half fits the next

into an equator, both shores neatly clicking  
into a globe (*O*, 63.3)

The global ramifications explored in the course of the book have enriched the locale, which now appears inextricable from a meta-archipelago in continual expansion.<sup>149</sup> The poetic value of this meta-archipelago lies in its generative power and its ability to overcome its own limitedness by proliferating beyond itself, like the 'self-healing coral' which symbolises 'a quiet culture / [...] branching from the white ribs of each ancestor' (59.2).

## Conclusion

As my readings in this chapter indicate, Joyce and Walcott's utopianism is not articulated in political terms. The language of politics is deliberately eschewed, parodied, or deflated; political praxis does not appear as a viable pursuit either in *Ulysses* or in *Omeros*. While it is true that utopian schemes are discernible in places, echoing the kind of social engineering inaugurated by More, utopia will not do as a generic *deus ex*

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<sup>149</sup>I introduce this passage in my Introduction, see p. 14.

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*machina* to solve the problems of genre raised in the previous chapter. What I mean by invoking ‘utopia’ here is not to force *Ulysses* and *Omeros* awkwardly into a preexisting generic niche. Rather, I have shown that while politics as such is written off, the utopian longings with which it is synonymous resurface in other places.

Joyce’s raid on English literary styles in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ turns out to be more radical than any accumulation of pastiche could be. By historicising the English language itself, advertising its corrupt, impure nature, and forecasting its ultimate breakdown under the strain of new dialect formation and compromise languages, Joyce gestures towards a language utopia which would at once supersede the monolingual paradigm of national languages, and transcend the shortcomings of fabricated universal languages such as Esperanto. The interplay of vernacular and cosmopolitan dialects reveals that ‘if the vernacular localizes the cosmopolitan as part of its own self-constitution, it is often unwittingly relocalizing what the cosmopolitan borrowed from it in the first place.’<sup>150</sup> Besides, if the forceful assertion of specifically oral forms does suggest that *Ulysses* is ‘a prolonged farewell to written literature and a rejection of its attempts to colonize speech and thought’<sup>151</sup> it also throws into relief the existence of transitional stages between speech and print, which suggest the possibility to reconfigure the parameters of literature and orality.

Walcott’s utopian weaving in *Omeros* fulfils a similar function by blurring the boundaries between languages, and between speech and print. With Maud’s quilt, the sham independence of individual languages is replaced by the vision of a unitary, ‘pure language,’ in which all would be subsumed. Thus, each language appears merely as an aspect, a point of transition towards a linguistic totality, which would transcend the limitedness of its fragmentary parts. In other words, Maud’s quilt can be read as an impossible map of the process of creolisation itself.

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<sup>150</sup>Pollock, ‘Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History’, p. 39.

<sup>151</sup>Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, p. 355.

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## Conclusion

This dissertation arose out of an engagement with two texts which seem to me emblematic of the challenges posed by the notion of world-literature. My contention has been that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* can be read as utopian world-texts, because they register the ways in which the attempt to map a unified world-totality clashes with the material parameters of capitalist globalisation. The drive towards planetary integration, the multiplication of relations, and the generalised intercourse between places and peoples find themselves at variance with national frameworks, and with the social formations out of which they sprang, which in many respects they have rendered obsolete. Given the contradictory nature of the modern world-system, the univocal celebration of globalisation turns out to be as problematic as its wholesale repudiation in the name of alternative modes of belonging based on locality. These overarching issues are refracted in Joyce's and Walcott's writings in terms that are specific to their own historical coordinates. Although they rarely engage frontally with those issues, both evince deep concerns over the world-totality and the problems raised by its literary refractions. Rather than formulating those issues in overtly political terms, however, *Ulysses* and *Omeros* articulate a 'poetics of relation' with a focus on literary transactions and linguistic change.

The national liberation struggle in Ireland erupted at a time when colonial empires seemed on the point of unravelling. The bloody settling of accounts between imperial powers in 1914-18 brought in its train anticolonial upheavals across the British empire, in tandem with social unrest at home. The sense of impending catastrophe can be gauged from a declaration of the chief of the Imperial General Staff, who wrote in June 1920 that he feared 'the loss of Ireland to begin with; the loss of empire in the second place; and

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the loss of England itself to finish with.’<sup>1</sup> As this admission suggests, what was at stake was not ‘merely’ the loss of colonies abroad, replaced by independent nation states, but a comprehensive overhaul of the existing order on a much larger scale. The nation state appeared no more secure in the metropolis than it did in the colonial outposts.

Anticolonial forces were themselves divided. The revolutionary period from 1916 to 1923 in Ireland was shot through with the tensions outlined above. While the nationalist leadership of Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army aimed to consolidate a homegrown state apparatus designed to preserve the social order, the aspirations of workers, agricultural labourers, and smallholders often clashed with that conservative agenda, and impelled them to overstep the bounds of property rights in town and country.<sup>2</sup> As land seizures, strikes, workplace occupations, and even self-styled soviets multiplied in the immediate post-war years, those initiatives were met with hostility by the Free State. Reality seemed to conform to James Connolly’s dystopian vision of an independent Ireland under bourgeois rule, against which he had warned the readers of the *Workers’ Republic* as early as 1899. In an article titled ‘Let Us Free Ireland!’ Connolly ridiculed the pompous rhetoric and social conservatism of nationalists, whose agenda was designed to lure in the labouring classes, while ensuring the continuation of exploitation under another flag.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of 1921, the Jamaican poet Claude McKay, then a communist, attended a Sinn Féin demonstration in London. In an article titled ‘How Black Sees Green and Red’ published in the *Liberator*, he recounts the occasion and affirms both his solidarity with the Irish people fighting colonialism and his defiance of the Sinn Féin leadership; ‘It is comforting to think that bourgeois nationalists

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People’s History of the British Empire*. 2006. London: Bookmarks Publications, 2010, p. 108. See in particular the chapter ‘The post-war crisis, 1916-1926,’ dealing with the anticolonial uprisings in Ireland, Egypt, India, the Middle East, and the 1925 Chinese revolution, pp. 108-129.

<sup>2</sup>Drawing on the works of Fergus Campbell, Conor Kostick, Terence Dooley, and Emmet O’Connor, among others, Olivier Coquelin has recently made a powerful case for the centrality of class conflicts within the Irish revolution, and the suppression of popular unrest by the newly formed state apparatus. See Olivier Coquelin, ‘Class Struggle in the 1916-23 Irish Revolution: A Reappraisal’. In: *Études irlandaises* 42.2 (2017), pp. 23–36; Olivier Coquelin, ‘Utopian Impulse in the Irish Revolution: A Case Study of the 1918-23 Irish Soviets’. URL: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02386311> (visited on 23/08/2022). In Press; Olivier Coquelin, ‘Politics in the Irish Free State: The Legacy of a Conservative Revolution’. In: *The European Legacy* 10.1 (2005), pp. 29–39.

<sup>3</sup>‘We will protect all classes,’ Connolly’s bourgeois nationalist promises, in an effort to appeal to labourers and poor peasants, ‘and if you won’t pay your rent you will be evicted same as now. But the evicting party, under command of the sheriff, will wear green uniforms and the Harp without the Crown, and the warrant turning you out on the roadside will be stamped with the arms of the Irish Republic. Now, isn’t that worth fighting for?’ Reprinted in James Connolly, *Selected Writings*. 1973. Ed. by Peter Berresford Ellis. London: Pluto Press, 1997, pp. 136–137.

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and patriots of whatever race or nation are all alike in outlook,' he writes, drawing on his own experience of black nationalism in the United States, 'they chafe under the foreign bit because it prevents them from using to the full their native talent for exploiting their own people.'<sup>4</sup> As Connolly clearly anticipated, 'the nation' encompassed various, and indeed conflicting, interests. This he translated into a renewed 'patriotism,' severing its affiliations with the national bourgeoisie, and reaching out instead to the labouring classes of all belligerent countries.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the liberation of Ireland did not entail the liberation of all the Irish, not to mention the partition of the island. The British empire emerged somewhat diminished, but the nation state and the social formation it stood for were given a new lease on life, both at home and abroad.

In the wake of World War Two, the British empire underwent a further reconfiguration, in a period sometimes referred to as 'the federal moment.' The historian Michael Collins—no relation to the Irish nationalist leader—has assessed the motives which underpinned the turn towards federation as an alternative mode of sovereignty in the 1950s. Federation was an ambivalent political entity, he notes, 'a move towards decolonisation as well as a means of securing imperial control' in regions as diverse as Central Africa (1953-63), East Africa (1948-61), Malay (1948-63), the West Indies (1958-62), and the Federation of South Arabia (1962-67).<sup>6</sup> The advocates of federation presumed to change the legal form of the relationship between metropolis and colony, handing over extended prerogatives to a local political elite, while amalgamating various territorial entities into larger units, as a means to contain nationalist agitation, on the one hand, and Soviet influence, on the other. In the Cold War era, as the world was increasingly dominated by the two super-powers that were the United States and the Soviet Union, federation provided a weakened British empire with the political formula that was to preserve its economic interests and influence, while preparing a smooth transition towards legal independence. The design of the West Indian Federation was initially greeted with enthusiasm by Walcott, who wrote the play *Drums and Colours* for its inaugural ceremony. Yet the federation came to a dismal end only four years later, succumbing to the rivalries between its various components. The—moderately—utopian attempt to overcome the fragmentation of the archipelago into separate national

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<sup>4</sup>Claude McKay, 'How Black Sees Green and Red'. In: *The Liberator* 4.6 (June 1921), pp. 17-21. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/culture/pubs/liberator/1921/06/v04n06-w39-jun-1921-liberator.pdf>, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>See 'A Continental Revolution' (1914) in Connolly, *Selected Writings*, pp. 239-42.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Collins, 'Decolonisation and the "Federal Moment"'. In: *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 24.1 (2013), pp. 21-40, p. 22.

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entities foundered, and left each island ‘free’ to negotiate the transition from British to American hegemony.

The moment was captured in Caryl Phillips’s *A State of Independence*, where the Prime Minister of an unnamed Caribbean island on the eve of independence declares ‘We living State-side now. We living under the eagle.’<sup>7</sup> Bertram, the bemused protagonist, back in his native island after twenty years’ absence, is distraught at the leader’s cynicism and the dismal state of the place. The political personnel who are supposed to embody the accession to independence turn out merely to embrace a new form of allegiance to a new patron, symbolised by the eagle on dollar bills. The novel ends with an ambivalent epiphany:

And then he glanced upward. He saw a man who, at this time of the morning and considering what was happening in Baytown seemed unreal. The man was threading wires from telegraph pole to telegraph pole, as though trying to stitch together the island’s villages with one huge loop. That evening the people would receive their first cable television pictures, live and direct from the United States. Bertram waved courteously to the man and turned away.<sup>8</sup>

The imagery of embroidery and stitching is ambivalent, evoking the dual aspects of Relation within the capitalist world-system, where connectivity is inextricable from power relations.<sup>9</sup>

It has been my contention that the utopian stirrings discernible in Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Walcott’s *Omeros* can be traced to the epochal shifts undergone by nation-based world-system throughout the twentieth century, the repercussions of which affect the notions of national literature and tradition, and open up spaces where a poetics of Relation begins to take shape. I have tried to show how Joyce’s and Walcott’s (half)cracked mirrors reflect the fractures as well as the underlying unity of the world-totality, and chronicle

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<sup>7</sup>The island remains unnamed throughout the novel, but the final inscription indicates that it was written in Caryl Phillips’s St Kitts. Phillips, *A State of Independence*, p. 112.

<sup>8</sup>Phillips, *A State of Independence*, p. 158.

<sup>9</sup>In Caryl Phillips’s own comments on that final scene, he points out the correlation between nominal ‘independence’ and the persistence of geopolitical subordination: ‘It is saying basically that there is no independence. [...] The whole notion of independence for a place as small as St. Kitts or for islands generally as small as these in the Caribbean is a non-starter. You have to be dependent on somebody, given the world economy. So it’s just a matter of what comes with your dependency, and what comes with the dependency with the new Caribbean is a sort of cultural imperialism which is, perhaps, inevitable.’ C. Rosalind Bell, ‘Worlds Within: An Interview With Caryl Phillips’. In: *Callaloo* 14.3 (Summer 1991), pp. 578–606, p. 600.



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the laborious process of its inception. Insofar as they expose the radical incompleteness and inter-involvement of phenomena, they invite us to reckon the transitional nature of national formations as well as cultural forms and languages. The corollary of this awareness is the sense of a world-totality where, as in Joyce's 'immense woven fabric' or in Maud's quilt, no thread has remained pure.

If the *Tout-Monde* is 'the place of a processive reality,' and totality itself 'the process, uninterrupted,' that uninterrupted process can be glimpsed in many, sometimes contradictory, ways.<sup>10</sup> And if, as Fredric Jameson argues, 'the social totality is always unrepresentable,' it remains true that 'it can sometimes be mapped and allow a small-scale model to be constructed on which the fundamental tendencies and the lines of flight can more clearly be read.'<sup>11</sup> Édouard Glissant defines utopia precisely as 'what is lacking.' This lack or incompleteness is also, he argues, 'what allows us to go on accumulating until we reach the whole quantity of elements that make up the Whole-World.'<sup>12</sup> Like Shabine in 'The Schooner *Flight*,' utopianism names a restless longing for 'a target whose aim we'll never know.' Shabine, who earlier declared that he was either 'nobody' or 'a nation,' eventually expands his horizon to encompass a cosmic archipelago:

I have only one theme:

The bowsprit, the arrow, the longing, the lunging heart—  
the flight to a target whose aim we'll never know,  
vain search for one island that heals with its harbor  
and a guiltless horizon, where the almond's shadow  
doesn't injure the sand. There are so many islands!  
As many islands as the stars at night  
on that branched tree from which meteors are shaken  
like falling fruit around the schooner *Flight*.  
But things must fall, and so it always was,  
on one hand Venus, on the other Mars;  
fall, and are one, just as this earth is one  
island in archipelagoes of stars. (*PDW*, 251-52)

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<sup>10</sup>'Le Tout-Monde est ainsi le lieu d'une réalité processive [...] La totalité est le processus, ininterrompu.' Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin*, pp. 138–140. My translation.

<sup>11</sup>Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Édouard Glissant and Lise Gauvin, 'Rethinking Utopia'. 2005. In: *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*. Trans. by Celia Britton. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020, pp. 109–115, p. 111.

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Shabine's expanding focus, from the sailing ship and the human body to 'one island,' then to many, and finally to the 'archipelagoes of stars' where the earth itself appears to be but a fragment, encapsulates the multiscalar dialectic between unity and multiplicity which makes possible the apprehension of a world-totality 'at once multiple and one, and inextricable.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, at the outset of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, we observe the young Stephen pondering the intricate relations between the local and the universal, inscribed on the flyleaf of his geography textbook:

Stephen Dedalus  
Class of Elements  
Clongowes Wood College  
Sallins  
County Kildare  
Ireland  
Europe  
The World  
The Universe (*P*, 13)

Stephen reads the page twice: first, from top to bottom, then backwards, from the universe to himself. This twofold movement suggests the mutual intricacy between all levels of the list, a complex totality which foregrounds 'the first formal esthetic relation of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part' (*P*, 181).

In this work, I have argued that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are utopian world-texts, insofar as they engage with this uninterrupted, unrepresentable process. This is manifested, as I suggest in my first chapter, in the intertextual experiment which invites us to consider of literary tradition as a fluid, open-ended continuum which has the capacity to accommodate all kinds of interventions, in the manner of a polyrhythm. The registration of uneven and combined development at the level of poetic language, explored in Chapter 2, is evidence that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* encode the clash of discrepant modes of production, as imperialism engulfs the semi-peripheries and imposes the logic of commodity circulation onto all aspects of social life. This seismic shift reverberates at the level of literary genre, paradoxically, by working epic orality back into the written text and foregrounding the transgeneric category of rhythm, as I discuss in the following chapter. Finally, I have shown that the utopian longing for world-reconciliation in *Ulysses* and *Omeros* finds its fullest expression in the anticipation of a language able

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<sup>13</sup>Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin*, p. 15.

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to transcend the limitedness and incompleteness of a world-totality still grappling with national fragmentation.

Throughout, I have shown that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* challenge apparently stable categories—the canon, literary genres, national languages—by short-circuiting literature as a whole, to engage with archaic forms of orality. Underpinning this gesture is a radical investment in the notion of rhythm, which bespeaks the fluidity of *epos* or composition-in-performance, as opposed to the constraints of textuality. I have also suggested that rhythm may in turn lead back to the written word by excavating the latter's genealogy in the realm of speech. I have traced this movement as it comes full circle, back from the oral to the textual, by reading *Ulysses* and *Omeros* in the light of the emphatically *literary* genre that is utopia. It is worth repeating, however that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* are not literary utopias in any strict sense of the word. They certainly do not urge their readers to political action, nor do they offer a comprehensive depiction of an alternative society held up against the shortcomings of the present, as in the 'critical utopias' of the 1970s. Indeed, where politics as such surfaces in the texts, it appears to be comically ineffectual or painfully irrelevant. That politics should be so squarely dismissed can be explained by historical factors. Joyce and Walcott lived through highly contentious times, when politics aroused great expectations; yet the outcome of the struggle for Irish independence and the sorry end of the West Indies Federation put paid to the then dominant forms of political utopianism. This does not mean that the search for alternative dispensations disappeared altogether; rather, it found expression in literary reflections informed by the enduring contradictions within the world-totality.

If the utopian text is 'a registering apparatus for detecting the feeblest positive signals from the past and the future and for bricolating and combining them and thereby producing what looks like a representational picture,'<sup>14</sup> in this dissertation, I have argued that Joyce's and Walcott's utopianism is relocated, or translated, from the field of politics to that of representational issues, revolving around the challenge posed by an apparently untotalisable, unimaginable world-totality, which compels us to envision the intricacy of multiplicity within unity, and to think in terms of process, intertwinement, and Relation, rather than with fossilised fragments torn from the flux of evolution.

Ernst Bloch makes a distinction between two types of utopias. 'Abstract' utopias, on the one hand, appear as ineffectual compensations for an apparently overwhelming, unchangeable reality. On the other hand, 'concrete' utopias emerge at 'the point of

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<sup>14</sup>Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 29.

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contact between dreams and life,' keep the utopian capacity 'on its feet,' and thus actively anticipate some achievable, 'real-possible' form of improvement.<sup>15</sup> *Ulysses* and *Omeros* fit neither category; rather, they seem to me to occupy an interstitial space between the two, where the 'abstract' is never quite rejected, and the 'concrete' never fully embraced. To the extent that *Ulysses* and *Omeros* invite us to anticipate the fulfilment of the world's 'boundless effort [...] to become realized in its totality'<sup>16</sup> I maintain that they can be read as utopian world-texts, taking as their final object the overcoming of linguistic fragmentation and of the divide between print and orality, which ultimately locates utopianism within rhythm itself.

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<sup>15</sup>Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 145–6.

<sup>16</sup>Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 172.

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## Summary in French

## Résumé en français

Cette thèse a pour but de cerner les enjeux propres à la notion de littérature-monde, ou *world-literature*, à travers deux œuvres qui en redéfinissent les contours. Mon propos consiste à affirmer qu'*Ulysses*, le roman de James Joyce, et *Omeros*, le long poème de Derek Walcott, peuvent être lus comme des « textes-monde utopiques », car ils encodent le heurt entre, d'une part, l'avènement d'une « totalité-monde » unifiée et, d'autre part, les paramètres matériels de la mondialisation capitaliste.<sup>1</sup>

La multiplication des échanges entre les lieux et les peuples, caractéristique de la mondialisation capitaliste, se trouve en contradiction avec les cadres nationaux et les formations sociales dont cette mise en relation est pourtant issue, et qu'elle a rendus obsolètes à bien des égards. Compte tenu de la nature contradictoire du système-monde moderne, la célébration univoque de la mondialisation s'avère aussi problématique que sa répudiation totale au nom de modes d'appartenance alternatifs basés sur la localité. Ces questions primordiales sont réfractées dans les écrits de Joyce et de Walcott en des termes qui sont spécifiques à leurs situations historiques respectives. Bien qu'ils ne n'affrontent que rarement ces questions de manière, tous deux manifestent une préoccupation déterminante quant à la « mondialité » chère à Glissant, et aux problèmes soulevés par ses réfractions littéraires. Cependant, plutôt que de formuler ces questions en termes ouvertement politiques, *Ulysses* et *Omeros* articulent une « poétique de la relation » dont le théâtre serait avant tout l'ensemble des transactions littéraires et le contact entre les langues.<sup>2</sup>

Dans cette thèse, je m'attache à étudier les manières dont *Ulysses* et *Omeros* sont aux

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<sup>1</sup>J'emprunte la notion de « totalité-monde » à Édouard Glissant, chez qui elle est synonyme de « Tout-Monde ». Voir Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde*.

<sup>2</sup>Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*.

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prises avec une totalité-monde apparemment inextricable, et tendent vers la résolution de ses contradictions internes. En d'autres termes, je soutiens qu'*Ulysses* et *Omeros* peuvent être lus comme des textes-monde utopiques. Bien que Joyce et Walcott écrivent depuis des lieux hautement spécifiques, il s'agit de montrer qu'*Ulysses* et *Omeros* sont effectivement des textes-mondes dans la mesure où ils donnent à voir ce qu'Édouard Glissant appelle « l'effort illimité du monde : se réaliser dans sa totalité ». <sup>3</sup> Ce qui est en jeu n'est pas tant le succès ou l'échec ultime de cet effort. En effet, il se peut que la totalité du monde soit structurellement insaisissable. L'aspect essentiel est le processus, la tension qui soutiennent les textes de Joyce et Walcott, et les visions utopiques entr'aperçues au cours de cet engagement avec la totalité-monde.

## ***Ulysses* et *Omeros*, textes-mondes**

Il y a de nombreuses raisons de lire conjointement *Ulysses* et *Omeros*, comme je le soutiens au cours de cette thèse. Bien que les trajectoires et les pratiques de Joyce et de Walcott diffèrent considérablement, il existe des parallèles frappants entre eux. Tous deux sont issus de périphéries marginalisées, d'îles colonisées par la même puissance impériale, et tous deux ont fini par acquérir une renommée internationale, leurs chefs-d'œuvre étant inscrits dans le canon de la littérature « anglaise », sous les rubriques moderniste et postcoloniale, respectivement.

*Ulysses* et *Omeros* sont tous deux des textes protéiformes, interrogeant les frontières des genres ; le premier est un bien étrange roman, le second à peine un poème, et ni l'un ni l'autre ne sont rigoureusement parlant des épopées. La raison la plus évidente de les lire conjointement est que les deux œuvres se mesurent à l'épopée homérique, dont la présence est inscrite dans leurs titres respectifs. Homère sert d'ancêtre commun à *Ulysses* et à *Omeros*. J'aborde les implications de cet relation intertextuelle dans mon premier chapitre. En outre, je démontre que ces deux œuvres réfractent une expérience de la Relation planétaire, au sens défini par Édouard Glissant. <sup>4</sup> À bien des égards, elles interrogent la notion problématique littérature-monde, ou *world-literature*. En adoptant le terme *world literature*, je reprends la définition élaborée par le *Warwick Research Collective* qui désigne ainsi la littérature du système-monde capitaliste moderne. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup>Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*.

<sup>5</sup>WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 8.

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Cette expérience de la Relation planétaire se manifeste d'abord à un niveau thématique, sous la forme de déplacements physiques, de voyages et de migrations. Dans *Ulysses*, le dublinois Leopold Bloom est le descendant d'une famille de Juifs hongrois, dont les migrations successives entre « Dublin, Londres, Florence, Milan, Vienne, Budapest, Szombathely » sont évoquées dans le chapitre « Ithaque » (*U*, 17.1907). Plus généralement, Dublin apparaît comme un lieu relié au monde, notamment par le biais de l'empire britannique. Dans *Omeros*, la migration est encore plus structurante. Le texte voyage sans cesse de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique, suivant les routes du commerce triangulaire, ou le déplacement forcé des Amérindiens aux États-Unis. Le narrateur, dont les allers-retours entre les continents constituent la trame du texte, semble suivre les migrations d'une « hirondelle des Antilles », dont les vols réversibles finissent par relier les deux hémisphères. Le vol de l'hirondelle est une métaphore de la guérison : l'oiseau a transporté dans ses entrailles la graine qui guérit Philoctète de sa maladie à la fin du poème. Mais c'est aussi un motif de réconciliation des plaies de l'histoire à une échelle bien plus large. L'hirondelle est associée à plusieurs reprises à des images évoquant un horizon circulaire ou un globe (*O*, 47.3), qui traduisent l'aspiration du poème à retrouver une certaine forme de plénitude. Pourtant, les motifs associés à la migration et au déplacement ne sont que les exemples les plus évidents de la confrontation avec la totalité-monde qui se joue dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros*, et que j'explore à un niveau plus fondamental.

Bien entendu, il ne s'agit pas simplement de cataloguer les indices thématiques du processus de la mondialisation ou les déplacements géographiques dans les deux textes, bien que la matière en soit abondante. Je m'attarde plutôt à étudier les manifestations formelles, ou génériques, des processus évoqués par Glissant, tant il est vrai que « les formes sont des précipités des relations sociales ». <sup>6</sup> Autrement dit, on peut établir un lien entre les contradictions du système-monde capitaliste et les faits culturels que sont *Ulysses* et *Omeros*.

Mon intention est précisément d'articuler le lien entre la forme littéraire, d'une part, et la « totalité non totalisable » qu'est le système-monde, d'autre part. <sup>7</sup> J'ajoute que cette distinction entre « forme » et « contenu », ou « thème », est une opération commode, mais artificielle ; cette façon de poser le problème traite comme distincts deux aspects qui sont en réalité fonctions l'un de l'autre. Néanmoins, je m'appuie sur la notion

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<sup>6</sup>Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 66.

<sup>7</sup>J'emprunte cette notion de « totalité non totalisable » à Fredric Jameson, mise au point dans sa préface à Jameson and Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization*, p. xii.

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de rythme, dans la mesure où elle permet d'articuler d'une part la forme littéraire et, de l'autre, cette totalité-monde potentiellement insaisissable. Avant d'exposer plus en détail les raisons de cette démarche, il est nécessaire de définir ce que j'entends par « totalité » ; cette notion, en effet, est liée à ma compréhension du rythme.

Ma proposition est que le rythme peut être utilisé pour appréhender les contradictions sociales qui se déploient dans la totalité-monde, et pour les relier au domaine des formes littéraires. À cet égard, le point de vue de la (semi-)périphérie peut fournir des indications précieuses sur le fonctionnement du complexe qu'est le système-monde capitaliste. M'appuyant sur la terminologie du *Warwick Research Collective*, je considère *Ulysses* et *Omeros* comme des textes semi-périphériques.<sup>8</sup> La notion de semi-périphérie est une notion relative, plutôt qu'une désignation strictement géographique. Dans le cadre de cette thèse, cette notion nous permet de comprendre le positionnement oblique de Joyce et Walcott dans le système-monde littéraire. En vertu de leur caractère semi-périphérique, en tant que sites « où des formes sociales et symboliques historiquement non-homogènes, souvent originaires de lieux très disparates, coexistent dans un espace circonscrit », *Ulysses* et *Omeros* peuvent saisir les lignes de fuite et les contradictions internes du système-monde. À ce titre, ces deux textes peuvent être appréhendés comme des « points de transition vers la totalité ».<sup>9</sup>

## **De la *Weltliteratur* à la *world-literature***

Au cours de cette thèse, je fais appel à la notion de *world-literature*. Il s'agit ainsi de réarticuler de manière critique le projet totalisant de la *Weltliteratur*. Ce faisant, il n'est pas question de négliger les inégalités qui traversent le champ de cette littérature-monde. En effet, on peut légitimement se demander si la vision de Goethe de la *Weltliteratur* n'était pas autre chose qu'un fantasme. Le monde des lettres n'existe pas dans un vide éthéré ; il n'est guère plus idyllique que le monde bien réel de la concurrence économique et des luttes de pouvoir géopolitiques. Bien que la notion, à l'origine, ait

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<sup>8</sup>Pour Benita Parry, les périphéries comprennent « toutes les sociétés qui ont été intégrées de gré ou de force dans le système-monde capitaliste », Parry, 'Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms'. Le *Warwick Research Collective* définit quant à lui les semi-périphéries comme des « zones transistors » qui fonctionnent de manière « non seulement hégémonique, en transmettant de la valeur vers les régions centrales, mais aussi contre-hégémonique, en faisant circuler de nouvelles formes de solidarité et de conscience internationale à travers le paysage mondial du développement inégal et combiné », WReC, 'WReC's Reply', p. 549.

<sup>9</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 170.

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manifesté un refus salutaire toute forme de frontières et une aspiration à se débarrasser de toute forme d'esprit de clocher, le monde globalisé actuel est loin de l'idéal des Lumières prôné par Goethe.

Outre les reconfigurations incessantes de la division internationale du travail, les développements des technologies de l'information et des moyens de communication ont largement contribué à l'intégration planétaire de l'économie, reliant les pays et les nations en un même ensemble, tandis que les conflits nationaux, différends frontaliers, guerres commerciales ou d'interventions militaires rappellent la nature conflictuelle de cette intégration. De nombreux critiques se sont penchés sur les contradictions et les inégalités qui assaillent l'espace de la *world-literature* à tous les niveaux, de la production à la publication et à la reconnaissance institutionnelle, en notant que l'éthique universaliste de la discipline repose souvent sur des préjugés ethnocentriques, et que la pression homogénéisante des forces du marché risque de transformer le champ de cette littérature en une monoculture standardisée.<sup>10</sup>

Malgré sa tendance à négliger la nature inégale du système mondial, le projet totalisant qui sous-tendait la *Weltliteratur* reste valable. La notion de « développement inégal et combiné » apporte une rectification indispensable aux défauts conceptuels de la *Weltliteratur*. Au cours des dernières années, la notion de « développement inégal et combiné » a été mise en avant notamment par le *Warwick Research Collective*, dont le volume *Combined and Uneven Development* constitue une référence en la matière.<sup>11</sup> Cette notion dérive de la compréhension que l'accumulation capitaliste est tendanciellement planétaire, et qu'elle structure le monde en conséquence, même si ce n'est pas de manière uniforme. Je prétends que, à condition d'être attentif à la nature contradictoire et inégale du système-monde, la promesse non tenue de la littérature mondiale peut encore servir, à tout le moins, d'horizon heuristique.

Dans cette thèse, je soutiens qu'*Ulysses* de Joyce et *Omeros* de Walcott, non seulement donnent à voir les enchevêtrements du système-monde capitaliste, mais œuvrent à leur dépassement. En d'autres termes, je propose de lire *Ulysses* et *Omeros* comme des formations utopiques qui négocient les tensions qui sous-tendent ce système-monde, et proposent une forme de résolution, ou compensation, à ses contradictions non résolues. D'où mon intention de les lire comme des « textes-monde utopiques ».

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<sup>10</sup>On peut citer à ce propos Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*; Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*; Apter, *Against World Literature*; Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*; Mufti, *Forget English!*; Cleary, *Modernism, Empire, World Literature*.

<sup>11</sup>WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*.

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## Le développement inégal et combiné

La notion de « développement inégal et combiné » est traditionnellement associée à l'analyse faite par Léon Trotsky du développement capitaliste dans la semi-colonie qu'était la Russie tsariste. Pourtant, dès la préface de la première édition du *Capital*, Marx soulignait qu'en Allemagne, « nous souffrons non seulement du développement de la production capitaliste, mais aussi de l'inachèvement de ce développement ». Alors que l'Angleterre est l'endroit où les relations capitalistes se sont épanouies le plus complètement, leur développement en Allemagne est entravé par la persistance d'un ancien régime économique et politique, « toute une série de maux hérités, résultant de la survie passive de modes de production archaïques et dépassés, avec leur cortège de relations sociales et politiques anachroniques ».<sup>12</sup> Le développement inégal et combiné, « l'amalgame de formes archaïques et plus contemporaines », est donc un aspect structurel du système-monde moderne, étant entendu que les périphéries existent à l'intérieur des centres tout autant qu'à l'extérieur, ce qui permet une approche dynamique et multiscalaire, plutôt qu'une série d'oppositions binaires. Si l'on tient compte de « l'amalgame de formes archaïques avec des formes plus contemporaines » qui sous-tend la modernisation capitaliste dans les périphéries, il est possible d'être plus sensibles à aux disjonctions internes du système-monde dans son ensemble. Ce système apparaît dès lors comme profondément asymétrique, en proie à des temporalités concurrentes. L'amalgame de formations hétérogènes est donc une conséquence du développement inégal du capitalisme à travers le monde.

L'histoire des Caraïbes est une illustration frappante du phénomène à travers lequel une région est historiquement constituée comme une périphérie. L'intégration de l'archipel caribéen dans le système mondial aux seizième et dix-septième siècles a suivi une trajectoire dictée par les puissances coloniales européennes. La traite des esclaves et l'économie de plantation étaient en effet un amalgame de l'archaïque (le travail servile) et du nouveau (une agriculture capitaliste orientée vers l'exportation). Cet amalgame a été la condition matérielle pour que s'épanouissent en Europe des relations capitalistes modernes. Simultanément, l'archipel est devenu un satellite dépendant des puissances métropolitaines, son destin étant désormais dicté par ces lointains sièges du pouvoir. La « large page sans métaphores » dans *Omeros* (*O*, 59.1) est une image de la mer, mais aussi de l'entreprise poétique qu'est *Omeros*, un poème aux prises avec le fardeau des

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<sup>12</sup>Marx, *Capital*, p. 91.

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précédents littéraires, qui tente d'exprimer le caractère unique des Caraïbes. Tout au long de l'ouvrage, Walcott oscille entre le neuf et l'ancien. Il répète le dilemme du « Nouveau Monde » contre l'Ancien, la tentation de l'imitation homérique contre la singularité des Caraïbes, la recherche de racines généalogiques contre l'exaltation de l'auto-genèse artistique.

Il s'agit en somme de faire le lien entre les situations apparemment dissemblables de l'Irlande de Joyce (1922) et des Caraïbes de Walcott (1990), en les considérant comme les manifestations d'un seul et même processus, la logique du capital lui-même. Si les formes littéraires sont effectivement « des précipités des relations sociales », <sup>13</sup> alors il est possible de lire les coordonnées semi-périphériques de l'Irlande de Joyce et des Caraïbes de Walcott dans la texture d'*Ulysses* et d'*Omeros*. Ces deux œuvres sont des textes-monde utopiques parce qu'elles sont façonnées par la réalité fracturée du système mondial dans un contexte de développement inégal et combiné.

## Circulations du rythme

Cette thèse s'appuie sur la notion de rythme, qui fait écho à celle de totalité-monde. Le rythme, en effet, ne peut être conçu que comme quelque chose qui se déroule dans ou à travers le temps. La notion de rythme suggère « un mouvement ou une disposition spatiale qui présente un certain degré de régularité sans être mécanique ». <sup>14</sup> Le mouvement présuppose en effet le passage du temps. De plus, il est difficile de concevoir le rythme comme autre chose qu'un ensemble de relations entre des événements discontinus. Il est notable que la notion de rythme repose sur notre capacité à percevoir des itérations discrètes comme appartenant en quelque sorte à un ensemble ou une succession unique. Friedrich Schelling suggère que le rythme est « la subdivision périodique de l'homogénéité, par laquelle l'uniformité de cette dernière est combinée avec la variété et, par conséquent, l'unité avec la multiplicité. » <sup>15</sup> Le rythme repose donc sur une tension entre l'unité et la variété, entre le flux homogène du temps et les diverses divisions et subdivisions en lesquelles il peut être découpé. Le niveau le plus élémentaire du rythme, selon Schelling, est la pure régularité, ou isochronie, par opposition au désordre absolu. Si je produis une série de battements à intervalles

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<sup>13</sup>Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 66.

<sup>14</sup>Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 1195.

<sup>15</sup>Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, p. 110.

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irréguliers, l'impression résultante est celle du désordre ; en revanche, si je bats la mesure à intervalles réguliers, un sentiment général de continuité l'emporte sur le disparate et le chaotique. Pourtant, la simple répétition de battements identiques est monotone. Une forme supérieure de rythme est obtenue, écrit Schelling, lorsque les battements réguliers sont réalisés avec différents degrés d'intensité ou de volume ; ainsi, la multiplicité, ou diversité, est réintroduite dans la succession homogène des battements, qui se produisent maintenant à intervalles égaux sans être identiques. Le rythme apparaît alors comme un terrain de jeu dialectique, où le chaos est converti en ordre par la vertu d'un modèle régulier, qui risque à son tour de devenir une séquence inerte et mécanique, danger qui est surmonté par un autre acte de subdivision, par lequel un rythme uniforme se décompose en itérations hétérogènes et différenciées.

Les notions de mouvement et de changement, la dialectique de l'unité et de la multiplicité, nous invitent à considérer le rythme comme une notion dynamique, auto-contradictoire, ce qui fait écho avec les observations précédentes sur la totalité-monde. Cette dimension héraclitéenne nous renvoie à la pensée d'Édouard Glissant, dont l'inspiration présocratique est évidente dans son travail sur la notion de totalité. Ainsi commence à se dégager une certaine cohérence, entre, d'une part le Tout-Monde d'Édouard Glissant, et d'autre part, le complexe auto-contradictoire et différencié qu'est le rythme lui-même. En somme, la notion de rythme nous fournit un vocabulaire qui peut rendre compte de la dynamique de la totalité-monde, puisque les deux sont des processus, où de multiples niveaux de réplication, de subdivision et de différenciation coexistent dans un cadre unitaire, dont les combinaisons donnent lieu à des polyrythmes.

M'appuyant sur ces concepts, je définis le rythme comme l'interaction dialectique entre les parties et la totalité, entre le disparate et le tout, qui se joue dans les textes de Joyce et de Walcott. En tant que tel, le rythme est à l'image du projet utopique d'*Ulysses* et d'*Omeros*, dans la mesure où tous deux cherchent à saisir et à résoudre les tensions constitutives de la totalité-monde.

## Utopisme

Dans *The Spirit of Utopia*, Ernst Bloch soutient que si tous les produits culturels, de l'Acropole à la cathédrale de Strasbourg, remplissent un certain nombre de fonctions idéologiques dérivée de la société de classe dont ils sont issus, cette fonction idéologique – collusion avec la classe dominante, mystification des exploités – n'épuise pas



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leur signification. Un « surplus culturel » perdure, au-delà de la fonction strictement idéologique de ces monuments, dont la valeur est encore reconnue longtemps après la disparition de la société esclavagiste de la Grèce antique ou du féodalisme européen. Ce surplus, selon Bloch, est précisément la « fonction utopique », qui est le pôle opposé de la fonction idéologique, dans la mesure où elle vise elle aussi à « l'harmonisation prématurée des contradictions sociales ».<sup>16</sup>

De nombreuses définitions, tantôt concurrentes, tantôt complémentaires, tentent de rendre compte de l'utopie, aussi bien en termes de forme que de contenu ou de fonction. Si un consensus relatif existe sur la paternité du mot, attribué à Thomas More en raison de son *Utopie* publiée en 1516, la notion elle-même peut renvoyer soit à un genre littéraire, soit à une variété d'élaborations politiques et artistiques, ainsi qu'à une foule de pratiques culturelles. Malgré la difficulté à circonscrire le concept, les travaux critiques sur l'écriture utopique ont connu un regain d'intérêt ces dernières années, en particulier depuis le renouveau de la littérature utopique dans les années 1970, dont témoigne la création de la *Society of Utopian Studies* en 1975.

Ma compréhension de l'utopie dépasse celle d'un genre littéraire, auquel *Ulysses* et *Omeros* n'appartiennent manifestement pas. Elle n'est pas non plus synonyme d'un engagement partisan plus ou moins clairement défini. Il serait plus juste de parler d'« utopisme », une notion assez diffuse définie par Lyman Tower Sargent comme « rêve social », par opposition au genre littéraire de l'utopie en tant que tel, c'est-à-dire « une société inexistante décrite de manière très détaillée et normalement située dans un endroit précis ». Au sein de cette catégorie, Sargent précise que le sous-groupe de l'« eutopie » (ou « utopie positive ») est censé être perçu par le lecteur comme « considérablement meilleur que la société dans laquelle il vit ».<sup>17</sup> Je ne propose donc pas de lire *Ulysses* et *Omeros* comme des utopies, ou eutopies, dans ce sens. Je suis plutôt enclin à explorer l'idée de Bloch et de Jameson d'une « fonction » ou d'une « impulsion » utopique opérant dans ces textes, indépendamment des opinions politiques déclarées de leurs auteurs. À cet égard, la notion d'« utopisme » de Sargent semble tout aussi pertinente. En effet, la confrontation avec la totalité-monde, qui me paraît centrale dans les textes de Joyce et de Walcott, est elle-même un geste utopique, dans la mesure où elle anticipe « l'harmonisation prématurée des contradictions sociales » dans la totalité-monde.<sup>18</sup> En d'autres termes, ces textes oscillent entre les valeurs opposées du

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<sup>16</sup>Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, pp. 153–58.

<sup>17</sup>Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 156.

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Tout-Monde, qui se réduisent à la tension entre Mondialité et Mondialisation qui sous-tend l'œuvre d'Édouard Glissant. Tandis que la Mondialisation évoque le caractère brutal et inique du système-monde, la Mondialité désigne l'horizon d'une mondialité unifiée en devenir, « à la fois unique et multiple, et inextricable ». <sup>19</sup> Pour le dire comme Fredric Jameson, « l'utopie n'est pas ce qui peut être positivement imaginé et proposé, mais plutôt ce qui n'est pas imaginable et non concevable ». Il ne s'agit pas, poursuit Jameson, d'une représentation mais « d'une opération destinée à révéler les limites de notre propre imagination de l'avenir, les lignes au-delà desquelles nous ne semblons pas capables d'aller en imaginant des changements dans notre société et notre monde ». <sup>20</sup>

Mon propos ne consiste donc pas à identifier les vues politiques de Joyce ou Walcott, mais à déceler les manifestations d'un utopisme qui a pour objet la totalité-monde elle-même.

Au début d'*Another Life*, le poème autobiographique de Walcott publié en 1974, on voit un jeune homme occupé à dessiner un paysage, alors que le soleil se couche et que la lune se lève sur la baie devant sa fenêtre. Le texte semble hésiter sans cesse entre les pronoms et les points de vue, mais étant donné la nature autobiographique du poème, on peut supposer qu'il s'agit de Walcott lui-même. Sur la cheminée se trouve

une Vénus de plâtre, que  
son désir avait changée en marbre, miroir  
à demi brisé de serviteurs noirs<sup>21</sup> (*AL*, 5).

une image qui, comme l'ensemble du passage, est marquée par le contraste entre le blanc et le noir, l'ombre et la lumière. Le dessinateur apparaît comme pris dans cette tension, aspirant à transfigurer une réalité perçue comme réduite, où même le blanc du plâtre n'est qu'un piètre substitut de second ordre au marbre de la sculpture originale. Cette scène, inaugurant l'un des poèmes majeurs de Walcott, se lit à la fois comme une allégorie et un programme. Le « miroir à moitié fêlé / non argenté des serviteurs noirs » prend une valeur symbolique : le miroir, qui métaphorise traditionnellement la fonction mimétique de l'art, est doublement endommagé, suggérant que le serviteur-artiste noir produira des images qui ne seront jamais de simples reflets de la réalité. Dans un miroir brisé, les reflets sont fragmentés, démultipliés, kaléidoscopiques. De plus, ce miroir

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<sup>19</sup>Glissant, *La cohée du Lamentin*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 413.

<sup>21</sup>'plaster-of-Paris Venus, which / his yearning had made marble, half-cracked / unsilvering mirror of black servants'

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endommagé entre les mains d'un artiste colonisé est lui-même un reflet, puisqu'il a un précédent littéraire : au début d'*Ulysses*, alors qu'il discute de questions artistiques avec Buck Mulligan, Stephen déclare que l'art irlandais « le miroir fêlé d'un serviteur » (U, 1.146), une phrase répétée presque mot pour mot dans le poème de Walcott.

Dans les deux cas, il est suggéré que la mimésis, ou plus généralement la représentation, est devenue dysfonctionnelle, un diagnostic qu'il est difficile de ne pas attribuer à la relation coloniale elle-même, une lecture confirmée par l'insistance sur les figures de serviteurs dans les deux passages. Il me semble que ces deux allégories jumelles résument bien la préoccupation qui sous-tend cette thèse. Les miroirs (à moitié) brisés de Joyce et de Walcott peuvent, à première vue, sembler peu utiles pour représenter la totalité-monde, ne produisant que des images fragmentaires et disjointes, incapables de se réunir pour former en une image cohérente. Pourtant, étant donné la réalité fracturée du système-monde un miroir brisé n'est peut-être pas entièrement inutile pour en appréhender aussi bien les failles que l'unité sous-jacente. En travaillant avec des miroirs brisés, Joyce et Walcott semblent suggérer que l'acte de représentation est en grande partie une lutte avec la totalité sociale, dont l'impulsion utopique est une trace critique. En ce sens, l'utopisme n'est pas tant un lieu qu'une projection, un geste totalisant qui vise à rendre compte du caractère hétérogène, inégal, et inextricable du Tout-Monde. Dans la mesure où *Ulysses* et *Omeros* encodent les contradictions qui sont la matière de l'histoire, ils s'y mesurent sans s'y soumettre passivement. Ces textes ne se contentent pas de refléter, mais se révoltent contre les contradictions d'où ils émergent, et auxquelles ils offrent la possibilité d'une compensation utopique.

## Chapitre 1 : Pré-textes homériques

Dans ce premier chapitre, j'aborde les implications de l'intertexte homérique dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros*. Pour commencer, je m'attache aux dynamiques de pouvoir à l'œuvre dans la relation intertextuelle entre les épopées d'Homère et leurs itérations plus récentes sous la plume de Joyce et de Walcott. Cette relation, selon moi, est basée sur le décentrement de l'« original » homérique, un acte qui soulève des problèmes fondamentales liées à la valeur, l'originalité, et la propriété littéraire. J'explore les relations complexes entre les œuvres de Joyce et de Walcott, et les textes canoniques qu'elles cannibalisent tout en s'en démarquant. Ce qui est en jeu se résume pas à une question d'allusions et de références ; il s'agit d'une réflexion sur l'inachèvement radical

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de la littérature nationale. Les œuvres de Joyce et de Walcott démontrent le pouvoir qu'ont les réécritures périphériques de transformer une tradition littéraire canonique en un pré-texte. En ce sens, elles articulent une politique traductive de la littérature. En s'appuyant sur une gamme de concepts dérivés de l'étude de la réception des classiques (*classical reception studies*), de la traduction et de l'étude des contacts linguistiques, j'explore les les façons dont *Ulysses* et *Omeros* défient les notions d'auctorialité, de valeur culturelle, et de propriété littéraire. Joyce et Walcott sapent les prétentions à l'originalité et la monumentalisation du canon, et montrent que la tradition littéraire est un processus continu de circulation, où leurs propres interventions se combinent et se croisent comme les couches distinctes d'un polyrythme.

La simple juxtaposition des titres *Ulysses* et *Omeros* ne peut manquer de suggérer un parallèle : le roman de Joyce porte le nom du héros de l'Odyssée, un texte dont le compositeur putatif, Homère, donne à son tour son nom au poème de Walcott, bien que l'Iliade soit une référence plus évidente pour une histoire dont les personnages principaux s'appellent Hector, Achille et Hélène. Les deux œuvres pointent dans une même direction : le troisième terme implicite dans l'association d'*Ulysses* et d'*Omeros* est l'épopée homérique. L'inscription de cette présence dans les titres mêmes des textes signifie qu'une « ombre homérique » (*O*, 54.2) est projetée à la fois sur le roman et sur le poème. Dès le début, nous sommes conscients de la présence obsédante d'une figure qui est devenue synonyme de tradition littéraire. En s'inspirant des travaux portant sur la réception des classiques (*classical reception studies*) ce chapitre explore les tensions qui traversent la relation intertextuelle entre *Ulysses* et *Omeros*, d'une part, et les épopées d'Homère, d'autre part, avant d'aborder le lien entre Walcott et Joyce, *Omeros* et *Ulysses*.

Je commence par aborder le genre épique et le canon classique en tant que formations culturelles hégémoniques, avant d'examiner les façons dont *Ulysses* et *Omeros* interrogent les régimes d'autorité, de propriété culturelle et de littérature nationale. Ce faisant, ils soulignent la fragilité de la propriété littéraire et ouvrent un espace pour ce qu'Emily Apter a appelé « la dé-propriété radicale ».<sup>22</sup> Finalement, je suggère que les épopées d'Homère fonctionnent comme des pré-textes plutôt que des sous-textes, qu'elles ne sont pas tant réécrites que rayées de la carte.

Il apparaît que l'épopée est inscrite dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros* comme un genre connotant l'empire, bien qu'elle contienne déjà les éléments de sa propre mise en question,

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<sup>22</sup>Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 399.

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qui permettent à Joyce et à Walcott de la réaffecter à d'autres fins. En mettant en scène une confrontation intertextuelle avec Homère, ils exposent les failles des conceptions hégémoniques de la tradition culturelle. En outre, la prééminence de la traduction et de la dé-traduction dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros* souligne la précarité de la propriété littéraire en remettant radicalement en question la validité de tous les titres de propriété. À ce titre, précisément, Joyce et Walcott peuvent être considérés comme des traducteurs du texte homérique. Les titres traduits, ou dé-traduits, d'*Ulysses* et d'*Omeros* font allusion à un régime de circulation généralisée, qui met en relief la parenté et l'interdépendance des œuvres culturelles entre elles. Contre le régime confiscatoire qui a usurpé Homère et ses récits, Joyce et Walcott remettent en cause la notion même de littérature nationale. Ils redéfinissent les épopées d'Homère selon leurs propres termes, en montrant que la tradition est un processus continu où toutes les œuvres circulent continuellement, d'une manière qui s'apparente à la métempsychose, à la parallaxe ou au cannibalisme. Il s'agit de comprendre la tradition littéraire mondiale comme une zone de contact transhistorique, un site de créolisation où les langues et les formes littéraires se heurtent, se mélangent et génèrent de nouveaux dialectes imprévisibles. La tradition, en d'autres termes, circule. *Ulysses* et *Omeros* interrompent et modifient la tradition à laquelle ils s'intègrent, de la même manière que des rythmes séparés s'enchevêtrent pour produire des polyrythmes.

## **Chapitre 2 : Métamorphoses et circulation des marchandises**

Dans le deuxième chapitre, je montre comment *Ulysses* et *Omeros* réfléchissent sur leur propre statut en tant que produits culturels. Joyce et Walcott mettent en lumière l'inégalité du marché littéraire, un domaine où les semi-périphéries sont circonscrites et tenues en respect par des formes hégémoniques de représentation. Tous deux mettent en scène le combat qui vise à acquérir une certaine forme d'agentivité et à transformer le passé traumatique de la dépossession coloniale en une véritable « histoire ». Cependant, les lois de la circulation des marchandises qui s'exercent sur la production littéraire semblent contaminer l'économie des textes eux-mêmes. Dans ce chapitre, je montre que la circulation dysfonctionnelle des tropes et des métaphores dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros* peut être lue comme un commentaire sur le cauchemar d'une histoire dont le principal

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déterminant est le processus de marchandisation. En soumettant le langage poétique aux mêmes lois que l'échange de marchandises, Joyce et Walcott nous alertent sur la dimension dystopique d'une totalité-monde, dont la l'unification a été jusqu'à présent accomplie sous le signe du capital.

Si Homère n'est pas aussi central que le suggèrent les titres d'*Ulysses* et d'*Omeros*, il est soumis à une variété d'opérations de transformation, de la traduction à l'expropriation et à la parallaxe, qui l'évincent virtuellement des textes ou, à tout le moins, le rendent méconnaissable. Bien qu'il soit annoncé comme un sous-texte, son nom s'avère être un prétexte pour une confrontation avec la tradition littéraire en tant que telle. Dans ce chapitre, il s'agit de mettre en lumière les nombreuses transactions, tant poétiques que financières, qui se produisent à travers *Ulysses* et *Omeros*. Je m'attache particulièrement à dégager les affinités entre une variété de tropes littéraires d'une part, et la logique de la circulation des marchandises d'autre part.

Comme l'échange de marchandises, les figures de style impliquent des opérations de substitution ou de métamorphose, à travers lesquelles un terme est échangé contre un autre. Paul Ricœur nous rappelle que la théorie aristotélicienne de la métaphorerepose sur trois opérations : « l'idée d'un *écart* par rapport à l'usage ordinaire ; l'idée d'un *emprunt* à un domaine original ; et l'idée d'une *substitution* à un mot ordinaire absent mais disponible ». <sup>23</sup> Ces substitutions ne se produisent pas de manière isolée ; elles constituent une chaîne de transactions et de circulations qui traverse le texte dans son ensemble. Étant donné que Joyce et Walcott ont en partage une expérience du colonialisme britannique, *Ulysses* et *Omeros* font preuve d'une sensibilité accrue aux processus de marchandisation et d'aliénation, qui sont occupent tant de place dans l'expérience coloniale. Je soutiens que ces préoccupations se manifestent avec le plus d'acuité dans la syntaxe de la métaphore et des tropes connexes impliquant la substitution et la métamorphose.

Dans ce chapitre, je commence donc par aborder la marchandisation de la production culturelle elle-même, telle qu'elle est mise en scène dès le début d'*Ulysses* et *Omeros*, d'une manière qui souligne la relation inégale entre le centre et la semi-périphérie au sein du système-monde. Je montre ensuite que la logique de la circulation des marchandises menace de contaminer les paysages de Sainte-Lucie et de Dublin, mais aussi l'économie poétique des textes, comme dans un cauchemar où toutes choses deviennent interchangeable à l'infini.

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<sup>23</sup>Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 21.

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Pourtant, certaines formes de résistance restent possibles, aussi insignifiantes qu'elles puissent paraître. En raison de la nature inégale et conflictuelle du passage à la production de marchandises, des résidus et des vestiges subsistent dans les textes, soulignant l'inachèvement de la modernisation capitaliste, ouvrant des brèches à travers lesquelles des avens alternatifs peuvent être entrevus. Si le langage poétique et la création artistique sont victimes des lois aveugles de la circulation des marchandises, ils fonctionnent également à la manière des « enclaves artisanales » de Fredric Jameson, entourées par la marée montante de la modernisation capitaliste, mais offrant « la vision utopique d'une production plus humaine en général ».<sup>24</sup> Ainsi, ils fonctionnent comme des formes résistantes, vestiges d'une époque où les mots et les choses n'étaient pas interchangeables à l'infini.

### **Chapitre 3 : *Epos* et Textes en quête de genre**

Ce chapitre est consacré à la persistance de formes archaïques, réutilisées et recyclées au niveau du genre littéraire. *Ulysses* et *Omeros* ont tous deux soulevé des questions sur le genre littéraire, une préoccupation qui transparait dans les réactions critiques à ces deux textes. Les catégories de l'épopée, du roman et du poème ne semblent plus exclusives, mais se mêlent et se chevauchent à tel point que les définitions modernes du genre sont remises en question. Dans ce chapitre, je soutiens que l'interaction entre une multiplicité de genres peut être interprétée comme une manifestation du développement inégal et combiné, une situation marquée par la coexistence de matériaux distincts, voire disparates, dont l'assemblage nous oblige à réfléchir à l'implication de formations culturelles parfois traitées comme exclusives les unes des autres. En outre, je suggère que ce défi lancé à la taxonomie des genres peut être interprété comme une tentative d'outrepasser les limites de la littérature imprimée, en revenant à des formes archaïques d'oralité épique, ou en tendant au dépassement du fossé entre l'imprimé et la parole elle-même. Quoi qu'il en soit, dans la mesure où le rythme apparait comme une catégorie transgénérique, comblant le fossé entre la prose et la poésie, voire entre oralité et culture écrite, le rythme peut être considéré comme un instrument essentiel pour repenser les genres et la littérature même.

Dans ce chapitre, j'aborde la question du genre et de la forme. Bien que le genre et la forme fassent référence à des catégories distinctes, ils se superposent dans une

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<sup>24</sup>Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 307.

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large mesure. Le genre est défini comme « un type ou une catégorie récurrente de texte, définie par des critères structurels, thématiques et de contenu ». <sup>25</sup> Un genre consiste donc en un ensemble relativement stable de caractéristiques reconnaissables, qui ne se rapportent pas toutes à la forme en tant que telle. Les définitions conventionnelles du genre épique par exemple, incluent des critères thématiques, tels que le récit des « actes héroïques [...] qui ont des conséquences pour la communauté à laquelle le héros appartient ». <sup>26</sup>

*Ulysses* et *Omeros* mettent en crise les catégories génériques ; ils adoptent une position ironique vis-à-vis des frontières du roman, de la poésie, de l'épopée et du récit lui-même, qui menace de faire exploser ces catégories. Cependant, en semblant rompre avec les catégories génériques traditionnelles, Joyce et Walcott mettent en œuvre un programme qui remonte à l'émergence du romantisme et dont l'esthétique à la fois totalisante et anti-autoritaire a fourni la matière des avant-gardes modernistes. <sup>27</sup> Aujourd'hui, la prétendue dissolution du genre est un récit aussi familier que discutable ; mon propos n'est pas simplement d'affirmer qu'*Ulysses* et *Omeros* témoignent de la désintégration des catégories génériques – ce qu'ils font toutefois, assurément. Je soutiens en outre que le large éventail de stratégies méta-génériques déployées par Joyce et Walcott a pour résultat ultime de réintroduire l'oralité dans la texture de l'œuvre écrite, ce en quoi le pré-texte homérique, dans son association avec le domaine oral de l'*epos*, joue un rôle majeur.

En outre, je tente de relier l'hybridité générique des textes de Joyce et de Walcott au contexte du développement inégal et combiné. Pour ce faire, j'examine la manière dont le rythme est déployé comme une image centrale dans *Omeros*, avant de me tourner vers l'épisode d'*Ulysses* connu sous le nom de « Cyclope ». Comme le suggère Franco Moretti dans sa discussion sur la diffusion et la circulation des génériques, « la morphologie des textes hybrides est un point d'observation inestimable de la spirale sans fin d'hégémonie et de résistance créée par la littérature mondiale ». <sup>28</sup> C'est particulièrement vrai pour *Ulysses* et *Omeros* : la complexité générique de ces deux œuvres, qui s'appuie sur une gamme vertigineuse de formes préexistantes, est un indice de la nature conflictuelle et inégale de la littérature mondiale au niveau de la forme.

En un sens, qualifier *Ulysses* et *Omeros* de « textes-monde » est une façon de

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<sup>25</sup>Duff, *Modern Genre Theory*, p. xiii.

<sup>26</sup>Greene, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 439.

<sup>27</sup>À ce sujet, voir notamment Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*.

<sup>28</sup>Moretti, 'Evolution, World-Systems, *Weltliteratur*', p. 406.



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capturer l'éclatement du genre littéraire en tant que tel. Cependant, mon argument va au-delà de ce diagnostic ; je prétends que l'amalgame de caractéristiques génériques hétérogènes par Joyce et Walcott est une fonction du développement inégal et combiné en termes littéraires. En tant que tel, cet amalgame est le résultat des stratégies d'expropriation littéraire évoquées précédemment, ainsi que de la logique de la marchandise dans le domaine de la production culturelle. En ce sens, la qualité romanesque d'*Omeros*, et les aspects anti-romanesques d'*Ulysses*, résident dans leur amalgame de formes et de signatures culturelles distinctes et dans leur capacité à les fusionner d'une manière qui encode le caractère kaléidoscopique propre à la semi-périphérie.

Mon propos est donc que le travail nostalgique sur le rythme épique, ou *epos*, dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros*, est utopique de cette façon : d'une part, l'insistance paradoxale sur des formes archaïques de performance ou d'*epos* renvoie à des régimes pré-modernes de production culturelle et, d'autre part, l'horizon d'une communauté orale ressuscitée ne peut être dissocié d'une totalité-monde en devenir.

## Chapitre 4 : Entre créolisation et utopies langagières

Pour finir, je montre que la langue elle-même apparaît chez Joyce et Walcott investie du pouvoir utopique d'harmoniser la totalité-monde par-delà ses fractures internes. Pour Joyce, la polyglossie du monde exerce une forte pression sur le devenir de la langue anglaise et, à son tour, expose sa nature composite, révélant qu'elle est un amalgame hétérogène d'autres langues. Bien que Walcott ne soumette pas la langue anglaise au même type de procédures expérimentales, il s'intéresse néanmoins au support linguistique dans une région marquée non seulement par la polyglossie, mais aussi par le processus de créolisation. Le jeu entre l'unité et la multiplicité des langues devient un moyen de réfléchir sur la nature auto-contradictoire de la totalité-monde. Dans ce dernier chapitre, je propose donc qu'*Ulysses* et *Omeros* représentent le contact linguistique comme un processus utopique, dans lequel les langues semblent être fluides, entrelacées, prises dans un processus incessant de devenir autre.

Dans ce dernier chapitre, je me tourne vers le lieu où l'utopisme s'exprime avec le plus de force dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros* : la langue elle-même. Je me penche sur les façons dont la langue elle-même devient l'objet d'aspirations utopiques. Mon argument est que Joyce et Walcott exposent la précarité de la langue en tant que construction nationale.

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Bien que de manières très différentes, tous deux réfléchissent aux processus associés au contact et à l'évolution des langues. En affrontant la contingence et le caractère changeant des langues, ils suggèrent des moyens de surmonter l'enchevêtrement d'une totalité-monde linguistiquement fragmentée. Le concept de créolisation est éclairant à cet égard, car il souligne la nature fluide de la langue ; en tant que tel, il représente un moyen potentiel d'anticiper l'avènement d'une totalité-monde unifiée.

Pour commencer, ce chapitre aborde les aspects nostalgiques de l'utopisme : ceux-ci se manifestent dans le revivalisme, qu'il soit irlandais ou afrocentrique. Je discute des manifestations négatives de l'utopisme dans *Ulysses* et *Omeros*, qui témoignent à la fois de la force de l'impulsion utopique, et de son expression inadéquate en termes empruntés uniquement à un passé aliéné ou fabriqué. Ensuite, je me concentre sur les façons dont ces matériaux résiduels, bien qu'inefficaces en eux-mêmes, sont réalignés de manière créative, réinvestis, ce en quoi ils font signe vers des horizons utopiques.

À cette fin, je me concentre sur le motif de l'accouchement, qui figure en bonne place dans *Ulysses* et, dans une moindre mesure, dans *Omeros*. Je me concentre sur « *Oxen of the Sun* », le chapitre d'*Ulysses* qui récapitule de manière célèbre la gestation de la littérature anglaise dans la maternité de Holles Street. Le tour de force de Joyce, qui se fait pour l'occasion ventriloque, fait appel aux grands styles littéraires anglais, et lance un défi non seulement à la notion de tradition, mais aussi à la langue anglaise elle-même, qui sort de ce chapitre secouée, décentrée, créolisée. Je soutiens que la polyglossie de ce chapitre traitant de l'accouchement peut être lue comme un manifeste implicite pour une renaissance créolisée. Dans *Omeros*, la grossesse et l'accouchement d'Helen témoignent des préoccupations similaires sur la propriété légitime – qui est le père ? En outre, j'accorde une attention particulière au motif de la couture qui traverse *Omeros*. Le chapitre « *Oxen* » récapitule l'évolution des styles littéraires anglais et, surtout, se penche sur l'avenir de la langue en relation avec l'empire et la mondialisation. La broderie de Maud, quant à elle, est un motif central d'*Omeros*, qui peut être lu comme une allégorie de la poésie, dans le cadre d'une réflexion plus large sur les relations entre les langues dans totalité-monde fracturée. Mon propos est que dans ces passages ou motifs, Joyce et Walcott sont aux prises avec la fragmentation babélique du Tout-Monde, et font signe vers une réconciliation utopique de toutes les langues.

# Textes-mondes utopiques : Circulations du rythme épique dans *Ulysses* de James Joyce et *Omeros* de Derek Walcott

## Résumé

À travers une lecture d'*Ulysses* (1922) de James Joyce et d'*Omeros* (1990) de Derek Walcott, cette thèse interroge la notion de texte-monde utopique (*utopian world-text*). En s'appuyant sur les outils conceptuels développés par Fredric Jameson et Édouard Glissant, tout en empruntant à la discipline des *utopian studies*, il s'agit d'étudier la manière dont Joyce et Walcott donnent à voir une "totalité-monde" à la fois une et inégale, travaillée par des forces qui poussent à son intégration, mais aussi par la persistance de fractures qui en empêchent l'avènement. À cet égard, l'expérience du colonialisme et, plus largement, du développement inégal et combiné, est déterminante. Ainsi, ce travail s'attache à montrer que Joyce et Walcott déploient des stratégies poétiques et rythmiques qui visent à anticiper la résolution des contradictions du système-monde. Ces stratégies vont de la réécriture du texte homérique, qui sert de point de départ aux deux oeuvres en question, à la mise en cause des notions de littérature et de langue nationales elles-mêmes. Ainsi, Joyce et Walcott dessinent l'horizon d'un espace utopique, au-delà des contradictions de la mondialisation actuelle, ce qu'Édouard Glissant appelle aussi "mondialité".

**Mots-clés :** James Joyce ; Derek Walcott ; *Ulysses* ; *Omeros* ; Utopie ; Modernisme ; Rythme ; *World-Literature* ; Irlande ; Caraïbe ; *World-System* ; Épopée

## Utopian World-Texts: Circulations of Epic Rhythm in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

### Summary

Through a reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), my purpose is to explore the notion of utopian world-text. Using the conceptual tools elaborated by Fredric Jameson and Édouard Glissant, while drawing on the field of utopian studies, I assess the ways in which Joyce and Walcott engage with a world-totality which is at the same time 'one, and unequal', subjected to the unifying drive towards world integration, but where fractures persist and prevent the fulfilment of a truly unified dispensation. In this respect, the experience of colonialism and of uneven and combined development is a decisive factor. Thus, this work shows that Joyce and Walcott deploy poetic and rhythmic strategies aiming to anticipate the resolution of the contradictions within the world-system. Those range from the rewriting of the Homeric epic, which is the starting point for both works in question, to the radical questioning of national languages and literatures as such. Thus, Joyce and Walcott sketch out the horizon of a utopian space, beyond the contradictions of contemporary globalisation, which Édouard Glissant has called '*mondialité*'.

**Keywords :** James Joyce; Derek Walcott; *Ulysses*; *Omeros*; Utopia; Modernism; Rhythm; World-Literature; Ireland; Caribbean; World-System; Epic

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