ABSTRACT

"Still persuade us to rejoice": Witness, Place, and Gratitude in W.H. Auden and Derek Walcott's Poetry

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My dissertation considers W.H. Auden and Derek Walcott's stereoscopic poetic witness. It focuses on movement, place, and gratitude in the Atlantic world, as both authors recurrently travel beyond national boundaries. Both poets use a stereoscopic vision, a nuanced imaginative rendering of the anguish displacement and trauma engenders *and* the gratitude for a return to place that they seek through the gift of poetry. Their work therefore focuses on the tension between home, belonging, and exile. Auden witnesses the global upheaval of World War Two, the terror totalitarian regimes wreak, and the destruction science and technology might inflict in the wrong hands, as well as the ways that poetry, when properly limited, helps humans work toward a return to place, which once achieved, yields a sense of gratefulness. My two chapters on Auden consider his epistolary and mythic witness, through his use of the verse epistle form and myth to enact his poetic vision. Likewise, Walcott's witness laments and conveys anger at the cruel and callous treatment of the Caribbean by colonial and postcolonial authorities, while also using poetry to circumvent this destructive history and reimagine the Caribbean's place in the world through his poetry, which he perceives as a gift. My two

Walcott chapters focus on his twilight tension between cultures, in the epic poem *Omeros* and the book-length poem *Tiepolo's Hound.*

"Still persuade us to rejoice": Witness, Place, and Gratitude in W.H. Auden and Derek Walcott's Poetry

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Whether writing about or in Trinidad or St. Lucia, New York City or Boston, England or Austria, W.H. Auden and Derek Walcott enact a nuanced stereoscopic witness in their poetry. When a viewer looks at two photographs of the same object taken from slightly different angles, they create a sense of depth and solidity called stereoscopy. The human eyes operate in a similar way. I adopt this way in which the eyes function as a metaphor in my reading of Auden and Walcott's poetry. Rather than seeing and then communicating about the world in their poetry through one mode with a flattened, two-dimensional monovision, they espouse a stereoscopic vision that incorporates many different perspectives that render a nuanced understanding of lived experience. I therefore concentrate on two particular aspects of their witness: how their poetic vision relates to place and gratitude. Their witness frequently begins with seeing the displacement that occurs in the world around them, testifying to both individual and collective traumas in their poetry. Furthermore, they recurrently seek an eventual return to place in their work, particularly in their long narrative poems, which they often express through a profound sense of gratitude, though this return to place does not indicate that all displacement and trauma is healed. Moreover, Auden and Walcott's poetic vision operates within the tradition of poetry of witness, though they expand upon this tradition. I will therefore consider their witness as lament, praise, warning, or giving voice to ignored perspectives, as well as more broadly how these poets see and render their visions aesthetically.

The authors perform their roles as poets by witnessing history as it has been constructed and needs to be reconstructed, as well as by witnessing the troubling circumstances around them within political, scientific, technologic, and globalist spheres. They therefore depict their anxiety and outrage at these circumstances as a dislocation from place, home, and belonging through exile, as well as seeking a recovery of these things in their poetry. Moreover, identity, the individual, and community are intimately connected to and disconnected from place for these authors. As they consider the displacement in the world around them, their art conveys a sense of exile, journey, quest, and movement. Furthermore, the authors themselves often embody a similar sort of exile or movement. Additionally, their poetry does not merely focus on loss, but on gratefulness as well. Their art allows them to delight and wonder in truth, beauty, and goodness despite living in a world with great turmoil, as their ultimate expression of their roles as witness is one of gratitude for the gift of their art. Their witness, combined with their expression of gratitude for their art and their desire to give this art to readers as a gift, therefore compels them to continue to question, witness, and attempt to understand and develop the world around them.

I argue that in the tension between displacement and gratitude, these authors avoid a cynical solipsism by offering a third way within the context of Modernism and Postmodernism; they are witnesses against an exclusively pessimistic, despairing response to displacement that prevents a comprehension of the fundamental importance of gratitude on the one hand, and a beguiled, naive Edenic insensibility that is completely unaware and unconcerned with the profound displacement present in humanity on the other. Instructive without being didactic, Auden and Walcott seek to question,

understand, shape, and embody what it means to be a poetic witness. As poets, language is the means by which these authors provide their witness. They undertake innovative imaginative means to convey their witness, from adopting and adapting generic categories like epistolary verse, epic, lyric, myth, biography, to utilizing inventive themes like blending painting, politics, science, and ritual.

Furthermore, I reinforced my research of primary and secondary sources through archival scholarship. For instance, I visited the Auden archive at the New York Public Library twice during my dissertation research, where I met with Edward Mendelson, the executer of Auden's literary estate, to discuss my work. I also conducted research on Walcott in the Alma Jordan Library at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in Trinidad. Furthermore, I completed archival work on both authors at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin, and Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Also, visiting places that Auden lived in New York City and traveling to Trinidad and Walcott's home island of St. Lucia, which he writes about incessantly, helped inform my research in ways that are difficult to quantify. I particularly found this true while visiting Trinidad, where I met with Walcott's friend Albert Laveau, and St. Lucia, where I talked with Walcott on the phone several times and saw many of the places he renders so frequently in his work.

These authors are strongly linked through this theme of witness, particularly in their depiction of displacement, return to place, and gratitude. Auden witnesses the global upheaval of World War Two, the terror totalitarian regimes wreak, and the destruction science and technology might inflict in the wrong hands, as well as the ways that poetry, when properly limited, helps humans work toward a return to place, which once

achieved, yields a sense of gratefulness. Likewise, Walcott's witness laments and conveys anger at the cruel and callous treatment of the Caribbean by colonial and postcolonial powers, while also circumventing this destructive history and reimaging the Caribbean's place in the world through his poetry, which he perceives as a gift. Moreover, both Auden and Walcott are island poets who spend much of their lives in exile and in near perpetual movement, Auden in York, Birmingham, Oxford, Reykjavik, Berlin, New York City, Ann Arbor, Swarthmore, Ischia, and Kirchstetten, and Walcott in Mona, St. George's, Kingston, New York City, Port of Spain, and Boston. Furthermore, both poets owe deep debts to poetic tradition, evident in their impressive formal dexterity as they variously employ verse epistles, rhyme royal, elegy, sonnets, tercets, and couplets. Their engagement with tradition moreover might be discerned through the poetic figures they constantly discuss and allude to in their work, such as Homer, Virgil, Horace, Dante, Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, William Blake, Lord Byron, and W.B. Yeats. Yet their sensitivity to tradition never petrifies, as they continually seek to innovate and develop poetic conventions.

Auden's work also serves as a clear antecedent to Walcott, which Walcott bears witness to in a variety of ways. For instance, he articulates his gratitude for Auden's poetry in interviews and in his poem "Eulogy to W.H. Auden," as well as the astonishment Walcott experienced when first reading Auden's poetry. Walcott wrote the poem "Eulogy to W.H. Auden" at the bequest of Joseph Brodsky, which he speaks about as a great duty in an interview with William Baer: "I remember when Joseph asked me to write the poem, and I thought to myself, this is a tremendously painful responsibility because I—as an admirer of Joseph—needed to somehow translate his gratitude and love

of Auden into the poem" (196). Walcott succeeds in translating this gratitude, in part because of his own gratitude for Auden's poetry, as he mentions Auden's features with a tender, but honest tone: "that fissured face" and "Each granite feature, cracked and plain / as the ground in Giotto" (1, 13-14). He also lovingly echoes Auden's style, for example by making ecstatic pronouncements about love and poetry using repeated "O's": "O craft," "O Light," and "O Space" near the end of the poem (93, 95, 96). Calling him "Master," he also conveys his gratitude for the poet with lines that affirm that "voices will delight / in all that left the body of / the mortal Auden," mirroring Auden's elegy of Yeats, where, "The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living" (57, 13-15, 22-23). Walcott voices how confoundingly good Auden's poetry is, "It was such dispossession," that ended up being a gift of poetic instruction to Walcott, "that made possession joy, / when, strict as Psalm or Lesson, / I learnt your poetry" (81, 82-84). Walcott then concludes the poem, "and the mouths of all the rivers / are still," continuing that "the estuaries / shine with the wake that gives the / craftsman the gift of peace" (105-106, 106-108). In these lines Walcott expresses his gratefulness for Auden. He further communicates his gratitude, reflecting with William Baer his reaction to first encountering Auden's poetry: "I remember, during that period, reading Auden with a tremendous amount of elation, a lot of excitement, and discovery…The freshness of his poetry was tremendously exciting, and it induced you to model yourself on Auden" (197). Walcott also remarks on the connection between kindness and virtuosity that he observes in Auden, whom he believes, "contains within him a tremendous concern for others. All those *big* words. Auden could write them because he was a great poet," a poet whose language possesses profound sensibilities (206).

Though I consider scholarship on Walcott an important endeavor at any period of time, with Walcott's recent passing on March 17th, 2017 as I neared the end of my year and a half long dissertation project, I believe my research on one of the most significant poets writing in English during the 20th- and 21st-centuries all the more timely. These sentiments about Walcott's significance as a poet were shared by other scholars at the time of his death, as evidenced by the outpouring of gratitude for his work in recent obituaries. In her obituary in the *Guardian*, Anita Sethi reflects that: "While his early work was imitative of the English poets he admired – Shakespeare, Auden, MacNeice – Walcott gradually developed a distinctive style of his own" (Sethi). Moreover, she describes the significance of Walcott's work to the Caribbean as well as poetic tradition, as he "powerfully explored the cultural and linguistic complexities of the Caribbean, where each island has its own distinct melody and vocabulary, as well as those of his own life" (Sethi). Furthermore, in his *New York Times* obituary, William Grimes articulates the nuanced arc of Walcott's his poetic ambition and vision: "The lyric strain in Mr. Walcott's poetry never disappeared, but he increasingly took on complex narrative projects and expanded his vision of the Caribbean to accommodate an epic treatment of the themes that had always engaged him" (Grimes). Also, Stephanie Hanes and Matt Schudel assert in their *Boston Globe* obituary that Walcott "had few equals" and was friends with many of the 20th-century's greatest poets, like Robert Lowell, Joseph Brodsky, and Seamus Heaney (Hanes and Schudel). As this groundswell of lament for Walcott's death and praise for his work indicate, I believe the enduring nature of his work combined with his recent passing make my research more all the more apposite.

In my first chapter, I discuss how Auden's poetry serves as a stereoscopic witness to displacement and pursues a return to place in his epistolary verse, utilizing William Dowling's argument in *The Epistolary Moment* to frame my chapter. Auden's epistolary witness allows him to be in turns playful and earnest, instructive without being didactic, and conversational while yet discoursing on poetic tradition. Moreover, this witness permits him to both emphasize the great fragmentation, alienation, and isolation that global conflicts like World War Two and totalitarian regimes have inflicted in the world around him, as well as a vision of returning to a sense of place, belonging, and community. Auden achieves this return to place in part through the community of poetic tradition; in this chapter I emphasize how he forms a poetic community in his work with authors like Horace, Dante, Pope, and Byron. Moreover, I consider two long narrative poems, the underappreciated "Letter to Lord Byron" and the important *New Year Letter* because they demonstrate Auden's poetic dexterity and variety.

Auden therefore makes the tension between displacement and place evident in his generic choices, namely of travel books and verse epistles. His epistolary poetry particularly allows Auden to witness the world around him. It is at once public and private. It is, moreover, a type of Kierkegaardian indirect approach that prevents didacticism, but allows instruction, allowing him to be truthful *and* imaginative. Conscious of the looming threat of World War Two while also seeking to escape this menace, "Letter to Lord Byron" is a witty, labyrinthine romp written in rhyme royal to the deceased poet Lord Byron, rather than in Byron's preferred *ottava rima*, covering vast thematic territory in a conversational tone, from describing the ship's passage to Iceland, to an earnest musing on the role of the poet that anticipates a similar consideration in *New*

Year Letter. Despite Auden's comic, informal tone, an indirect witness to the displacement and anxiety between the wars lies just below the surface. Auden does not remain entirely displaced, though, as his epistolary discourse with the ghost of Byron demonstrates how the poet might form a community against and across time and place with other poets in the tradition.

Auden further conveys his stereoscopic witness in another verse epistle, *New Year Letter*, written in 1939. Limiting the role of the poet, he envisions an extended courtroom scene where his putting himself on trial, imagining a large gathering of fellow poets like Dante and William Blake placing him on trial for what he believes are his poetic crimes. Conceiving of the displaced world around him, Part Two of the poem depicts an infernal landscape fragmented by the fear, anxiety, and violence produced by World War Two, which was raging throughout the globe at the time Auden wrote the poem. After his trek through an infernal landscape and a protracted refutation of the devil's dualism in Part Two, Auden finally feels the freedom to begin moving toward an acknowledgement of gratitude for the gift of poetry. At the end of Part Two, the speaker summarizes the devil's tactics, that "he may never tell us lies, / Just half-truths we can synthesize" (220). Yet this understanding of the devil's strategies does not induce despair, but generates feelings of hope and gratefulness by asserting that "hidden in his hocus-pocus, / lies the gift of double focus" (220). Through the gift of poetic vision, the poet begins a purgatorial journey that enacts a return to place. Auden articulates the redemption he experiences in his friend Elizabeth Mayer's home through *agape* love, the Christian expression of giving and receiving unconditional love toward all humanity. Mayer's home therefore helps foster a sense of gratitude.

In Chapter Two I discuss the movement from displacement to a return to place in Auden's poetry through his mythic witness, as he frequently uses myth to demonstrate the distinction between life and art, a gap that simultaneously foregrounds how profoundly art can amplify and enlarge lived experience. Philosophers Richard Kearney and Paul Ricoeur's work on mimesis provide my theoretical frame for the chapter. Moreover, I examine the importance of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's thought in Auden's work, namely though the tension between possibility and necessity, which Kierkegaard discusses in *The Sickness Unto Death*. I furthermore advance a Kierkegaardian reading of "Ode to Terminus," particularly with Kierkegaard's essay "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" in mind. Furthermore, I use these frameworks to demonstrate Auden's stereoscopic witness to displacement, as well as a return to place in his poetry.

In this chapter, I also provide close readings of a combination of well-known and overlooked lyric poems by Auden. "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," perhaps his most important and famous lyric poem, is one poem I do not provide a close reading of because it falls outside of my mythic witness frame, though I mention it several times. In the poem, he defines his role as a poet by limiting poetry's scope, claiming that "poetry makes nothing happen," yet later in the stanza he transforms his definition, where poetry becomes: "A way of happening, a mouth" (41). Though seeming to contradict himself in these lines, he is intentionally placing distinct limits on the vocation of poetry. Auden believes that, having recognized the limited parameters of the poet's witness, the poet might then fulfill his or her central role by expressing a sense of gratitude. At the conclusion of the poem, Auden calls to Yeats, himself, and any poet who may continue to

create poetry in which he or she bears truthful witness to the world, “Follow, poet, follow right / To the bottom of the night,” continuing his appeal, “With your unconstraining voice / Still persuade us to rejoice (66-69). Auden’s entreaty is an initial affirmation of the poet’s vocation, which leads the reader to joyfulness and delight. Auden continues by placing the poet in a particular locale, “With the farming of a verse / Make a vineyard of the curse,” as well as “In the deserts of the heart / Let the healing fountain start” (70-71, 74-75). These particular places—a farm, a desert, a river—are all places that Auden might receive and give the gift of poetry, where he might experience restoration and human flourishing. These lines lead to the stunning final couplet, “In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise,” words that echo in the reader’s mind, demonstrating with finality that the gift of poetry might lead one to gratitude (76-77).

I begin this chapter by providing brief readings of “Musée des Beaux Arts” and “Under Which Lyre,” which demonstrate how Auden’s stereoscopic witness holds in tension both the displacement and trauma he sees, as well as the return to place he seeks in his poetry. “Musée des Beaux Arts,” the oft-anthologized ekphrastic poem published in 1938, considers the banality of human suffering through the lens of the myth of Icarus and his father Daedalus. Auden envisions these mythic figures rendered through paintings by Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Younger. The poet focuses on Icarus in Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, particularly on how the other figures in the poem ignore the shocking tragedy of “a boy falling out of the sky” (20). Auden utilizes this myth to demonstrate the ordinary nature of suffering that occurs daily. Yet he further witnesses to the possibility to intervene in the suffering in the world, whether to lament it or to actively pursue seek to prevent these traumatic tragedies. Furthermore, in “Under

Which Lyre," he uses a whole host of mythic characters for his poetic witness, such as Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, and Aphrodite, to witness to the displacement and return to place. He concentrates most centrally on Hermes and Apollo in the poem, where Hermes embodies the playful artist figure, while Apollo the prideful bureaucrat. Auden employs these characters in order to offer a comedic, yet earnest witness, hoping to move the university from disorder to order in the traumatic wake of World War Two.

"In Sickness and in Health," a love poem written for Chester Kallman in 1940, also begins in a state of displacement and moves to an awareness of gratitude. I focus on "In Sickness and in Health" because it is underappreciated in Auden scholarship. I argue it is one of his finest lyric poems that embodies the most significant themes of a major poet at the height of his powers. Moreover, I advance a reading unique to Auden scholarship, where I identify the poem as a "macro-sonnet." Containing fourteen stanzas rather than fourteen lines, the poem mirrors the Petrarchan sonnet structure, where the first eight stanzas resemble the octave that introduces a problem in the Italian sonnet form, the italicized ninth stanza acts as the turn, and the final six stanzas produce the sestet, providing the poem with a sense of resolution. In the poem, Auden maneuvers from disembodied "fingering lips" at the beginning of the poem, to the fully configured bodies in the lines: "Till the performance of those offices / Our bodies, Thine opaque enigmas, do, / Configure Thy transparent justice too" near the end of the poem (30, 86-88). The poet ends up conveying his gratitude for his body's return to an ordered sense of place by rejoicing in divine love, mirroring the Christian God's command to "Rejoice," which conveys the poet's deep sense of gratitude for a return to place (64).

I then provide a short reading of "The Shield of Achilles," which describes a bleak and violent world bereft of empathy, culture, beauty, and religion on the shield of Achilles's shield. The two mythic figures inhabit the poem: Thetis and Hephaestus. Thetis, the mother of Achilles, asks Hephaestus, the blacksmith of the gods, to fashion her son a shield for his battle during the Trojan War. In the poem, Thetis continually expects to see evidence on her son's of human flourishing shield through community, culture, and religion. Instead, she see's the displaced world Hephaestus wrought. Yet this artifice does not become solipsistically pessimistic, instead offering a cautionary vision of what could be by neglecting to live in the tension of necessity and possibility that provides both limits and imaginative potential.

"Ode to Terminus," the final poem I consider in this chapter, offers a mythic witness to displacement and trauma while seeking a return to place by invoking Terminus, the Roman god of boundary markers. Another poem underappreciated within Auden scholarship, my reading of this poem represents a further aspect of my chapter unique to research on Auden. I argue that Auden utilizes an additional Kierkegaardian distinction in this poem, distinguishing between a Genius, who exists in an immanent realm, and an Apostle, who inhabits a transcendent realm. Genius is created and developed within an individual, whereas an Apostle is called by God, in spite of any development of talent to do so. In the chapter, I consider the important influence Kierkegaard's essay "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" had on Auden. I link Kierkegaard's to Auden's essay "Genius and Apostle." I contend that Auden invokes Terminus in this poem to demonstrate human finitude and the need for a transcendent power outside of humanity. Auden's invocation of the limitations that

Terminus reveals an awareness of displacement where genius' maintain disordered desires by pursuing an apostolic role. Yet the poet's appeal to Terminus simultaneously allows Auden to seek a return to place by expressing his gratitude for the playfulness, beauty, and order that the mythic figure permits.

In Chapter Three, I shift my focus to Derek Walcott's poetry. There are hundreds of lyric poems I could have chosen from to consider my theme of stereoscopic witness in Walcott's poetry, for instance, in poems spanning his career like "As John to Patmos," "A Far Cry From Africa," "The Gulf," "The Schooner *Flight*," "The Arkansas Testament," and "White Egrets," as well as plays like *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. However, Walcott's long narrative poems, which he wrote with increasing frequency as he got older, demonstrate the great range of Walcott's dazzling poetic gift, as well as his exceptional discipline to develop his craft. Thus, my chapters on Walcott focus on two canonical poems, the first *Omeros*, the epic poem widely considered his crowning poetic achievement, and *Tiepolo's Hound*, a lauded yet still substantially underrepresented poem within Walcott scholarship. Additionally, my reading of "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia," an ekphrastic poem considering his St. Lucian friend Dunstan St. Omer's mural, represents a poem that has received some recognition yet remains undervalued within Walcott scholarship.

Walcott scholarship has discussed his postcolonial stance in a number of different ways. Bruce King, in his biography *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, states that *Omeros* is "postmodern in its fragmentation" while yet "post-colonial in declaring its independence of comparisons to another system of valuation" (518). Lara Cahill-Booth's casts of Walcott's work as "geomythography," where she maintains that the sea is a site

where he reshapes "the boundaries between myth and literature, written texts and embodied knowledge, and physical and cultural heritage" (348). I take a rather different approach here, however, concentrating first on Walcott's twilight poetic witness and his use of "O" images in *Omeros*, where the characters experience the loss of home and belonging, subsequently seeking a return to place from the displacement and trauma they encounter. I also focus on the misinterpretation of the Caribbean by European eyes, as well as a call to an accurate vision of the Caribbean. I acknowledge the tension in Walcott's articulation of his dual heritage, asserting that this tension often ends with a sense of gratitude for him. I maintain that only expressing the displacement of this dual heritage would be an acknowledgment of the colonial oppression of Caribbean nations, while failing to account for important reinscribing of the Caribbean that Walcott achieves.

In Chapter Three, I discuss Walcott's epic *Omeros*, published in 1990, where many characters experience a twilight tension, utilizing Caryl Phillip's concluding essay to *New World Order* "The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging" as a frame for the chapter. The twilight tension that Walcott uses resembles hybridity, the postcolonial term conveying a tension, a state between two different cultures. Meant as a challenge to racist colonial ideologies, hybridity can also evoke the colonial ideologies it resists, namely the contradictory need to both "'civilise' its 'others' and to fix them into perpetual 'otherness,'" as Ania Loomba remarks in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (145). I believe the twilight offers a more creative, evocative, and flexible image, one free from the accumulated meaning that marks hybridity. The twilight moreover imaginatively depicts the tension between displacement and trauma on the one hand and a sense of belonging, a

return to place, as well as gratitude for this return on the other. I, moreover, focus on Walcott's use of the "O" in the poem, a frequently used image that remains in the back of the reader's mind throughout the narrative. The "O" forms a resonant noise, signifying a groaning against the still oppressive weight of colonialism and, more important, a song of joy.

Colonial trauma and displacement abound in *Omeros*, particularly through the various wounds that the characters bear. Philoctete has a ghastly wound on his leg that he inherited from his ancestors who endured the Middle Passage from Africa. The Walcott narrator exhibits a self-inflicted wound from his pride, as he spends extensive amounts of time away from St. Lucia, which estranges him from St. Lucian people and place and his poetic gift. Achille experiences displacement after cutting down the gommier trees, which represent the pre-colonial gods on St. Lucia, for his canoe. He subsequently loses his lover, Helen, to his friend Hector. The British colonial characters also experience displacement and trauma as well. Maud Plunkett endures displacement from her wound, cancer, which leads to her death. And Major Plunkett has a head wound from his military service.

Yet the characters also experience healing, a return to home, and a recovery of belonging, expressing their cures in distinct tones of gratitude. Ma Kilman heals Philoctete's wound after she recovers her own sense of her ancestry. Furthermore, Philoctete and Achille demonstrate their healing and return to place by performing a pre-colonial, cross-dressing St. Lucian dance. Even a colonial figure like Major Plunkett returns to a sense of place, as he finally ceases attempting to objectify St. Lucia by inventing a history about the island, which leads him to experience a sense of belonging

in his adopted home. The Walcott narrator seeks wisdom and healing from his wounds by traveling abroad and into the past, and finally seek a return home. Through his honest consideration of his displacement, Walcott ultimately gets back into place, developing his poetic voice and establishing his connection to his Caribbean identity, all of which leads him to express gratitude for the gifts he has received.

In Chapter Four, I consider Walcott's stereoscopic witness in his poems "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia" and *Tiepolo's Hound*, particularly what the poet calls "the art of seeing" (7). I use the essays of Barbadian novelist George Lamming, particularly his chapter titled "A Way of Seeing," to explore Walcott's consideration of sight, as well as Caryl Phillips' essay "The Gift of Displacement." Walcott critiques the colonial and postcolonial trauma and displacement the Western world has wreaked on the Caribbean, yet his poetry elicits striking notes of gratitude for the strength and energy of art to correct this misguided vision. In particular, he identifies the epiphanic power of art to rectify the mistaken Western vision of the Caribbean.

Walcott achieves this vision in the ekphrastic poem "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia" from the volume *Sea Grapes,* published in 1976, a poem I believe deserves more recognition in scholarship. Walcott's poem seeks dialogue with his St. Lucian friend Dunstan St. Omer's mural in the Holy Family Catholic Church in Jacmel, St. Lucia. The poem concentrates on the great colonial and postcolonial traumas that have been inflicted on the region, particularly through the development of sugar mills and the banana crops. Yet he also demonstrates the great power of art to renew a sense of belonging to this region, thereby enacting a return to place, a power for which he articulates gratitude.

Walcott furthermore emphasizes the artist's way of seeing in his narrative poem *Tiepolo's Hound*. The poem traces the fictionalized lives of two artists, Camille Pissaro, the nineteenth century Impressionist painter, and another Derek Walcott narrator, a poet and a painter. In the poem, Walcott includes twenty-five of his own watercolor and oil paintings, which indirectly correspond to the narrative of the poem. The poem charts the course of these two figures, witnessing to their experiences of exile and profound displacement, while also demonstrating how the development of the way they see the world returns them to a sense of place. In particular, Walcott focuses on Pissarro's birth and childhood in the Caribbean island St. Thomas, asserting that though he became a renowned painter after moving to France by painting French landscapes, the Caribbean light and color remain with the painter, providing him with great aesthetic vision. Furthermore, the Walcott narrator experiences an epiphanic moment at the beginning of the poem when he sees a hound in a painting that portrays dazzling light, color, and clarity. At first he recalls seeing the hound in a painting by the 18th-century Venetian painter Giovanni Batista Tiepolo, but then believes it might have been in a painting by the 17th-century painter Paolo Veronese. Walcott then pursues the hound in an attempt to recapture this epiphanic moment, a quest that spans much of the poem. Unable to place the hound, he ultimately realizes that he must not pursue the hound in epic European paintings, but that he must locate it in his depiction of ordinary St. Lucian people and places in his own paintings and poetry. I focus on how Walcott's stereoscopic witness concentrates on sight, the blending and blurring the artistic world with reality, the use of brushstrokes, the portrayal of light and color, and the depiction of the ordinary.

The brief conclusion of my dissertation meditates on the ramifications of Auden and Walcott's stereoscopic witness. I focus on how they honestly depict humanity's profound displacement. I also consider how their witness works upon the reader indirectly, where the reader enjoys the work for its own sake, but the work also opens her up to truth, beauty, and goodness. My study of these authors also demonstrates the importance of the human desire to get back into place. When this desire is achieved, the reader experiences a sense of gratitude. The gratitude these poets discuss does not ignore the displacement in the world, but first recognizes it in order to enact a return to place. This gratitude becomes profound itself because, despite the discernible displacement in life, it opens the reader and the author to a chance to reconnect to place, to the goodness of life, to wonder and awe at the world, and to the need for community.

Though I have particular theoretical frameworks that scaffold each chapter, I recognize that I am writing amidst a broader theoretical background. It will therefore be beneficial to briefly consider the work that informs my project, some of which I recognize specifically in my chapters, though much of it is implicit. These theories help define several of the terms that I use, such as displacement, return to place, trauma, gratitude, and gift, as well as illuminate the wider scholarly dialogue and context within which I am writing. This framework helps shape the close readings of the poems that constitute the central components of my chapters.

Place theory forms an important part of my project, particularly displacement and seeking a return to place, both of which might take geographic, cultural, linguistic, historical, political, psychological, and emotional means. For instance, phenomenologist Edward Casey witnesses the ubiquity of displacement in the contemporary world and

charts a return to place in his book *Getting Back into Place*. He argues that: "Although we acknowledge the suffering occasioned by personal or collective displacement, we tend not to trace it back to the loss of a vital connection with place itself. But the disoriented and the dispossessed are bereft precisely of such connection" (*xiv*). Auden and Walcott's poetry recurrently witnesses this sense of displacement. Casey asserts that displacement disorients human identity as well as from geographical place, a double displacement that both Auden and Walcott express in their poetry. He continues, claiming that art can play a pivotal role in recognizing the resources available in a state of displacement: "the existence of pictorial and narrational journeys to and between places reminds us that we are not altogether without resources in our placelessness. When the resources of re-implacement and cohabitancy are drawn upon as well, we find ourselves back on the road to a resolute return to place" (310). Casey also contends that while dislocation from place enacts a change to identity, a return to a place of local understanding transforms this displacement: "The result is redemptive, not only of the place-of-origin as it finds new pictorial depths and of the artist who has effected the transformation but also of ourselves as the spectators of the art work. Thanks to the work and even short of actual travel, we get back into place" (310). Poetry, therefore, provides Auden and Walcott, as well as the reader, a worthy vessel to navigate a means to "get back into place."

In *Topophilia*, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan provides another important consideration of place. He discusses the link between humanity and place in part through a meditation on vision, where he asserts that: "Of mammals, only man and some primates enjoy color vision…Light visible to human eyes, however, occupies only a very narrow band in the whole electromagnetic spectrum. Ultraviolet rays are invisible to man, though ants and

the honey bees are sensitive to them" (6). Tuan implies here that although humans can see color, indeed a high order of development, humans cannot see the entire electromagnetic spectrum and therefore have much to learn from nature. To push this analogy further, humans also have much to learn from each other, from those that perceive things that we may not see, particularly poets. Poets often possess a vision on a different spectrum, or at least of a distinct register.

Furthermore, focusing not only on place but its connection to poetry as well, Neal Alexander and David Cooper recognize a gap in scholarly work between the two, which they address in their 2013 collection of essays titled *Poetry and Geography*. In their introduction, they articulate how poetry and place often occupy a site of tension: "Contemporary poetics of place, we might say, often equivocate between experiences of location and dislocation, convergence and dispersal, being and unselving" (5). Though both Auden and Walcott consider these tensions, Walcott's use of the twilight as an image of tension in *Omeros* particularly corresponds to Alexander and Cooper's categories. They also see the correspondence between poetry and geography as: "both a way of seeing and a way of doing, transforming its object in the act of apprehension and encounter but also registering the torsions of place in its own language and forms" (3). Alexander and Cooper's understanding of place accords with what Walcott articulates as "the art of seeing" in *Tiepolo's Hound*, where he attempts to reset the Western world's shortsighted perception of the Caribbean (7).

Maritime studies also help inform my research, particularly my work on Walcott's *Omeros*. In *The Sea: A Cultural History*, John Mack casts seas as "globalized transnational spaces" as opposed to merely nationalist spaces on the one hand, or empty

places on the other (20). Here, particularly in my chapter on *Omeros*, I consider the ocean as a connective tissue; both Mack and Walcott depict the ocean in a similar vein. Mack maintains that: "The history of any one sea or ocean quickly becomes the history of others," though he also states that: "Oceans do not necessarily function to promote uniformity. They are, rather, arenas of transnational interchange" (20, 21). Hester Blum, in her article "The Prospect of Oceanic Studies," also argues that maritime studies too often maintains a nationalistic focus: "As oceanic studies reveals, freedom from national belonging can make possible other ways of understanding affiliation, citizenship, mobility, rights, and sovereignty, all of which have been read in recent critical history as overdetermined by nationalism" (671). Like Mack, Blum contends instead that oceans are transnational places. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* Mary Louise Pratt designates the places where different cultures meet "'contact zones,' social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4). Rather than using terms like "border" or "boundary" that affirm national belonging and seek a protectionist mode from unfamiliar cultures, Pratt's "'contact zones'" problematize this distinction, depicting these regions as shared spaces. This demonstrates how maritime studies seeks to transcend nationalism by understanding how the maritime culture of the sea creates this multinational situation, a view of the sea that Walcott shares.

Trauma theory such as Judith Herman's seminal work *Trauma and Recovery* also acts as a significant underpinning for my project. Herman, a psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School, asserts that the "ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from

consciousness" (1). She therefore expresses the significance of witnessing traumatic experiences: "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (1). Herman not only discusses individual, but also collective traumatic experiences; Auden and Walcott frequently witness both individual and collective traumas in their work. Moreover, as a trauma survivor works through the recovery from her trauma, gratitude for life becomes possible: "The survivor who has accomplished her recovery faces life with few illusions but often with gratitude" (213). Herman also focuses on the importance of a community when it comes to witnessing trauma:

> Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community…The solidarity of a group provides the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (214)

The poet offers a linguistic communication to his or her reader; as a communal endeavor, therefore the poet forms a community where this witness might lead to recovery and a restored sense of belonging.

Cathy Caruth's work on the sites where literature, theory, and psychology coincide also helps frame my work in vital ways. For instance, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth argues in the space between "knowing and not knowing," a witness of and by the traumatic wound might occur: "it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us the reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (3, 4). Caruth's project ultimately seeks to understand "what it

means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (5). Her theorizing articulates how literature occupies a tension between "knowing and unknowing," simultaneously defying and demanding a witness to traumatic experience.

In the introduction to her anthology *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, poet Carolyn Forché seeks "to understand the impress of extremity upon the poetic imagination" (30). By "extremity," Forché means the many individual and collective instances of traumatic events in the twentieth century. She highlights the difficulty with witnessing the devastating traumas that have occurred in the last century, such as World Wars I and II, The Holocaust, war in the Middle East, the Civil Rights struggles in the United States, and Apartheid in Africa, arguing that: "It becomes easier to forget than to remember, and this forgetfulness becomes our defense against remembering" (32). She asserts that poetry of witness will not allow this forgetting, considering such a stance as isolative and damaging to individuals and the collective alike. Forché therefore offers different forms of poetic witness against terror, and a rejection of pain and trauma inflicted on individuals and people groups, rather than focusing on a pursuit of healing traumatic experience.

Furthermore, Cassie Premo Steele discusses the displacement that occurs with the witness of traumatic experience, though she emphasizes the healing that can happen through an emapthic witness in *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the Poetry of Witness*. She considers witnessing as a participation "in the experience of another, an experience so painful that it must be shared in order to be confronted," ultimately seeking a movement from "pain to possibility," believing that "poetry provides

distinctive access to pain" (2). Steele seeks to explore how the three authors she writes about "teach us how to witness to our own and bear witness to others' traumatic histories" (2). Steele also observes how poetic witness links people together, a trope that I trace in Walcott's poetry: "as we witness to the past and as we serve as witnesses for others, we may begin to see how the cords of one story link to the cords of another. This recognition of how our histories are woven together enables a reconnection between people in the present" (9). Ultimately, Steele believes that a poetic witness to trauma offers the possibility of healing: "As we witness to our past, we open the possibility of allowing ourselves to be healed from the past through a healing relationship with another in the present" (9). Poetic witness therefore works toward healing trauma.

The stereoscopic vision that I consider in my dissertation, in particular the twilight tension that Walcott frequently inhabits, owes much to postcolonial thought. I therefore utilize the postcolonial and transnational work by critics such as Homi Bhabha, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Jay in my chapters on Walcott, especially in my reading of *Omeros*. For years postcolonial critics have identified a position in between various cultures, reacting to both the profound dislocation as well as the creative powers this place holds. For instance, Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquan philosopher who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*, recommends that the Caribbean avoid the "mad, reckless pace of Europe" (253). Instead, he asserts that: "It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes" (255). Fanon's desire to start "a new history" clearly influences Walcott's amnesiac reaction toward history, an amnesia I discuss in my *Omeros* chapter. Also ardently against

mimicry, Fanon contends: "Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, even an ideal reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened" (255). Fanon attempts through his critique of mimicry to encourage Caribbean inhabitants to avoid reflecting the ruin he perceives Europeans pursuing. Walcott certainly agrees with this view, though as Paul Jay points out, he simultaneously rehabilitates mimicry, arguing that "being fated to unoriginality is simply the realization that all imaginative creation involves mimicry" (548).

Influenced by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said recounts in his essay "Between Worlds" an affinity with Joseph Conrad, acknowledging the "loss of home and language" he experiences in many respects, such as "a Palestinian going to school in Egypt, with an English first name, an American passport, and no certain identity" living in British colonial ruled Palestine (555, 556). Later in life, disoriented by a life-threatening medical diagnosis, he discusses composing a letter to his deceased mother in an attempt to impose a narrative on his life, articulating that: "I found myself reliving the narrative quandaries of my early years, my sense of doubt and of being out of place" (558). Said further finds himself in a twilight tension, where: "By the mid-seventies I was in the rich but unenviable position of speaking for two diametrically opposed constituencies, one Western, the other Arab" (561). Paul Gilroy moreover considers a similar tension in *The Black Atlantic*, invoking a DuBois-like double consciousness: "Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness" (1). He sees this maneuver as "stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling,

producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world" (3). Walcott writes within a postcolonial context that includes these theorists and many others. And though his work has many correspondences with other postcolonial critics, his poetry and prose offers a unique postcolonial perspective.

Finally, gratitude and gift theory provide a vital backdrop for my work. For instance, theorists often define gratitude as an emotion felt after receiving a gift from someone else. Psychologist Robert Emmons, in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, a selection of essays on gratitude by psychologists and philosophers, asserts that gratitude "shape[s] identity" and depicts it as "a fundamental attribute of human beings and a potential key to human flourishing" (13). The psychologist Robert Solomon, also in *The Psychology of Gratitude,* states that gratitude relates closely to justice and therefore describes it as the opposite of vengeance (x). He moreover claims that: "Gratitude is one of the most neglected emotions and one of the most underestimated of the virtues" (v). David Steindl-Rast, in his article "Gratitude as Thankfulness and as Gratefulness," also in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, argues that: "The terms *grateful* and *thankful* are interchangeable in most situations of everyday parlance," suggesting the flexibility with which gratitude might be described (286). I adopt this linguistic flexibility, using the terms gratitude, gratefulness, thanks, praise, and blessing synonymously. I also seek to identify moods and tones of gratitude in Auden and Walcott's work.

Gift theory has also been an important part of academic discourse for quite some time and has recently gained more critical attention, particularly with Lewis Hyde's *The Gift,* based on the gift theory of Marcel Mauss. Though I am focusing on gratitude, the emotional and mental response to a gift, considering Hyde's view of gratitude in light of

the gift given provides a helpful consideration of gratitude. In *The Gift,* Hyde perceives of art as a type of gift economy between audience, artist, and muse. Hyde asserts that a gift's transformation involves both something lost, as well as gaining a "new identity," where "the sign of this identity is generosity, gratefulness, or the act of gratitude" (193). This gratitude has a unifying effect for the artist, where: "The labor of gratitude accomplishes the transformation that a gift promises. And the end of gratitude is similarity with the gift or with its donor. The gifted become one with their gifts" (71). In the following chapters, I will discuss the "labor of gratitude" that Auden and Walcott undertake. The gratitude they convey appears as thanks, praise, and gratefulness for a gift, as well as an emotion, thought, and willful practice that forms identity. Their gratitude also forms a reaction that requires a sense of wonder and awe, and whose ultimate end leads to human flourishing, an end that I believe Auden and Walcott achieve through their stereoscopic witness, an enduring poetic gift that gives in great abundance to both the poets and to the reader.

CHAPTER TWO

From Displacement to Gratitude: W.H. Auden's Epistolary Witness

In a marked shift from the shocking, disorienting tone he employs in his early poetry, Auden evolves his poetic style in the mid-1930's, placing a greater emphasis on witnessing to the displacement in the world around him, while simultaneously attempting a return to place. Seeking a form flexible enough to achieve his various and elaborate aims while seeming to be dashed off effortlessly, he pulls no punches at the beginning of *Letter to Lord Byron* by proclaiming: "I want a form that's large enough to swim in" (84). The joke lands and the reader laughs at the poet's comic exaggeration. Yet he is also being entirely earnest in this line. Epistolary verse in particular turns out to be an amply pliable form for Auden. In poems like *Letter to Lord Byron* and *New Year Letter*, it allows him to speak in a familiar tone with a wide audience, variously adopt the register of a friend or confidant, the call and response of a catechism, to pursue the impulse to confess, to engage with poetic tradition, and perhaps most importantly, to achieve a dialectic between humor and seriousness. In a similar vein, Caroline Forché discusses the unique witness that verse epistles offer in *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, contending that: "The epistolary mode, while intimate and private, is also deeply public. It has always been the poetry of the middle style, of a conscientious communality, an attempt to speak for more than one and to engage all others" (34). Forché moreover argues that: "Postcards, letters, and reports on the news—all these are communal forms, ways of writing that stress the interpersonal aspects of poetry, the public side of literature. They underline the collective urgency that propels a literature of

the social" (36). This versatility that epistolary verse provides Auden allows him to both acknowledge the trauma of displacement and the isolation that results from this trauma, while also ultimately permitting him to move from this isolation and fragmentation toward community through a recovery of place.

Chronicling a corresponding move from isolation to community in eighteenth-century verse epistle in *The Epistolary Moment*, William Dowling maintains that: "The notion of community as a reality always silently assumed by discourse gives us the dynamics of audience through which the verse epistle will attempt to bring about a reconstitution of community in a world threatened by fragmentation and alienation" (11). Dowling asserts that this movement from isolation to community through epistolary verse occurs within a "double register," through the addressee of the poem, as well as the reading public (12). Speaking of Dryden and Pope's verse epistles, he describes "poetic discourse" as "public utterance," which he argues "is precisely what they mean to invoke by writing not merely epistles but verse epistles, poems in which the isolation symbolized by epistolary solitude is then opposed and redeemed by verse as an institutionalized mode of public utterance" (11). Auden similarly uses epistolary verse as a measure to recover community. Yet, it also impels him toward a return to place within which this community might be cultivated.

Auden perceives his poetic vocation as a public role, one that might help the community recover from the displacement the poet witness to in the world around him. Epistolary verse distinctively achieves this public aim. Though conceived and written in solitude, he believes that the poet is uniquely gifted to relate humanity's continuing narrative to those willing to listen. Dowling argues that the poet's articulation of human

experience "bestows on poetic discourse as such the full traditional weight or value of public utterance in a world in which community is yet a lived reality" (11). Auden operates within this poetic lineage, discussing at length the role of the poet and about his poetic forbears at length in both *Letter to Lord Byron* and *New Year Letter*.

Moreover, by employing epistolary verse, Auden functions within a particular poetic tradition that serves as a community. Epistolary verse provides Auden with a means to interact with members of this poetic tradition. Horace, Alexander Pope, and Lord Byron are particularly significant poetic figures for his epistolary verse, though Auden also summons many other poets in his epistolary work, from Dante, Shakespeare, and Dryden to Blake, Wordsworth, and Lawrence. Alan Jacobs compellingly argues for Horace and Pope's influence on Auden's verse epistles. Jacobs cites the Popean influence on both "Letter to Lord Byron" and *New Year Letter*, the latter of which he states "appears to be directly modeled on Pope's epistles" in "genre" as well as "its typographical conventions," for instance with Auden's capitalization of all letters in many proper names (36). There are many similarities between Auden and Pope's epistolary verse. H.H. Erskine-Hill, in his introduction to *Pope's Horatian Satires and Epistles* describes the elements of formal satire in the volume, which influence Auden's own epistolary verse:

> The poems in this volume are all examples of formal satire, that is to say, they are poems of medium length, without a plot, in which the satirist, speaking in his own person, ridicules folly, decries vice and recommends virtue. It is a flexible form (not inappropriate to the meaning of the original Latin word *satura*, a varied mixture or miscellany) and can contain personal reflection, philosophical meditation, anecdote, ridicule turned either to entertain or to attack. (5-6)

Auden is not as aggressively scathing in his use of the satirical mode as Pope is.[1] But Auden's Popean satire allows him to ridicule folly and recommend virtue. It moreover provides him "a flexible form" with which to roam wide swathes of thematic territory.

Auden makes specific references to both Horace and Pope as a means to realize a recovery from displacement, for example stating in a 1969 interview with Peter Quennell: "'As I get older and the times get gloomier and more difficult, it is to poets like Horace and Pope that I find myself more and more turning for the kind of refreshment I require'" (qtd. in Jacobs 38).[2] Auden, well aware of the gloom caused by displacement and trauma, perceives in Horace and Pope a means to attempt a return to place in the midst of this gloom. And he acknowledges poetic figures that helped shape his poetic vision without worrying unduly about a Bloomian anxiety of influence casting a shadow over his work. Jacobs furthermore convincingly argues that Horace is the more significant model for Auden's epistolary verse in a number of ways, notably that they both value place and express gratitude for feeling in place: "Celebratory and grateful poems dominate the later work of each poet; the emphasis on gratitude can be seen particularly clearly in Horace's poetry about his Sabine farm and Auden's about his house in Kirchstetten. Both poets lived alternately in the country and the city, and articulated their concern for the future of the city from a distant and leisured perspective" (40). And for both Horace and Auden, this return to place is connected to community. In his introduction to *The Epistles of Horace*, David Ferry emphasizes this aim toward community in Horace's epistles: "In the Epistles, Horace perfected the hexameter verse medium in which his voice performs, always as if conversationally, speaking in these letters with such directness, wit, and urgency, to young writers, to friends, to his patron, to the Emperor Augustus himself" (*x*).

Ferry's comments indicate a twofold correspondence between Horace and Auden's epistolary verse; first that the epistles are conversational, and secondly that they are written to a community in order to create or redevelop a community.

Auden's epistolary verse also allows a sensitivity to the order of things, one that assumes a moral vision that calls for what he considers the good life, a tone he admires in Horace. For instance, Horace writes in "The Art of Poetry":

> *This was the wisdom of song in days gone by:*
> *To know how to tell the difference between*
> *Public and private, the sacred and the profane;*
> *To curb licentiousness and put in place*
> *The rules of marriage; establish cities and*
> *On wooden tablets write down settled laws.*
> *Thus honor and glory as to divinities came*
> *To the earliest poets and to the songs they sang. (ii.3)*

Horace's poetic moral vision, what he calls "*the wisdom of song,*" witnesses to and helps discern the difference between the many and difficult dichotomies in life. Understandably, the contemporary reader might feel uneasy with this moral vision, believing that viewing poetry that possesses a moral vision inclines too closely to didacticism or even propaganda. Auden is certainly aware of this danger in his poetry. In order to prevent poetry from becoming propaganda, he advocates for limiting the power of the poetry. He argues that language fit into a poetic form is necessarily limited by the poetic conventions prescribed by this form, as well as by its meter and prosody. Yet this limitation allows for great freedom. It follows that, though Auden frequently urges for a limited view of the poet's role, poetry is precisely the place where a vision of the good life might best take hold in the imagination.

Horace offers Auden a different poetic vision to the Romantic elevation of poets to legislators of political and ethical realities, which might obscure the poet's witness of

displacement or his seeking a recovery from this displacement. Jacobs calls this a "Horatian alternative," stating that the "poet is neither a revolutionary nor a hero nor an autonomous artificer; but the poet may nevertheless serve the City as a *citizen*" (42, 47). Auden therefore seeks to reduce the scope of the poet's role, at least in the sense that the poet does not occupy a "revolutionary" or heroic capacity. This limitation enables Auden a fuller poetic vision of the role of the poet, one that is not misguided by political aims the poet cannot hope to achieve. Rather, as a witness the poet might provide a stereoscopic vision of reality. By properly understanding the poet's limited role, the poet is free to witness to and lament the trauma and displacement around he, while also attempting a return to imaginative place. And ultimately, the poet might express a distinct sense of gratitude for the gift of poetry and for the existence of the poem.

"Letter to Lord Byron"

The verse epistle *Letter to Lord Byron* is included in the travel book *Letters from Iceland*, which Auden wrote with his friend and fellow poet Louis MacNeice, which was written in 1936 and published in 1937. Humphrey Carpenter notes that Auden began planning a trip to Iceland after meeting with Michael Yates, a former Downs School student that was going to Iceland with three other students from Bryanston School, where he was attending in 1936, as well as a master (195). Auden sailed to Iceland in June of 1936 and before the rest of his party arrived, he explored the country through the help of Icelandic guides until Louis MacNeice met him in Reykjavik on August 9th. The two poets would meet up with the Bryanston party on August 17th.

Letters from Iceland, an epistolary volume as the title suggests, is a singular sort of travel book, as it is simultaneously an aesthetic work and functional guidebook for

English tourists heading to Iceland.[3] *Letters* is predominantly, though not exclusively, constituted of both verse and prose epistles. The book is written in "a 'holiday' spirit" as Auden notes in the Foreword to the second edition of the book written in 1965, though in the same breath Auden states that he and MacNeice "were all the time conscious of a threatening horizon" to their travels (8). Carpenter points out a striking example of this looming threat where Auden, traveling on his own, heard news on July 20th of the Spanish Civil War breaking out, to which he responded by writing "Journey to Iceland" (199). Auden includes "Journey to Iceland" in a prose letter from Auden to Christopher Isherwood, with whom he would write another travel book in 1938, this time about China, evoking the tension and anxiety he feels in the world around him: "Islands are places apart where Europe is absent. / Are they? The world still is, the present, the lie" (25-26). The poet communicates his internal conflict regarding his travel to Iceland in these lines, attempting to escape the sense of doom and dread he feels in Europe, while realizing the impossibility of doing so.[4] Yet the poet poses questions in the lines that follow that convey the impossibility of escaping the looming military conflict in Europe, as well as the personal angst it causes those living in Europe: "'When / Shall justice be done? O who is against me? / Why am I always so alone?'" (34-36)

Other unique, multi-modal aspects of *Letters from Iceland* focus on Auden's epistolary poetic witness, for instance a chapter titled "Sheaves from Sagaland," subtitled "An Anthology of Icelandic Travel addressed to John Betjeman, Esq." The chapter is structured by an easy to comprehend question and response format that is remarkably similar to a catechism and divided into sections that witness to the particularities of the Icelandic landscape, its inhabitants, and the tourists that visit the place. Moreover, the

poet addresses the chapter to John Betjeman, further establishing the epistolary nature of the volume. Another missive is the humorous, yet serious "Auden and MacNeice: Their Last Will and Testament," which is the penultimate poem of the volume and serves as their poetic last will and testament. In the poem they discuss humankind as "responsible for what he does, / Sole author of his terror and his content. / The duty his to learn, to make his choice," while concluding that humans have "the power / To shape, create and move, love and rejoice" (228). Their meditations on the nature of humanity somberly witness to the displacing threat of World War II, while still acknowledging a sense of hope that humanity might act to remedy this self-inflicted terror.[5] They moreover leave various objects, both belonging to them and not, to family, friends, and well known figures, often with great humor: "Item, we leave the phases of the moon / To Mr. Yeats to rock his bardic sleep" (234). They pass on various body parts and components of their personality as well: "Our feet to hikers when their own feet fail" and "[o]ur humour, all we think is funny, / To Dr. Leavis and almost every psycho-analyst" (248). This bequeathing helps them establish a humorous yet earnest witness to the poetic world as they see it.

In the most significant correspondence from *Letters*, the long verse epistle "Letter to Lord Byron," the poet adopts a distinctive epistolary form and tone. From the very first section, he compares the poem to ordinary letters that people send and receive:

> Every exciting letter has enclosures,
> And so shall this—a bunch of photographs,
> Some out of focus, some with wrong exposures,
> Press cuttings, gossip, maps, statistics, graphs;
> I don't intend to do the thing by halves.
> I'm going to be very up to date indeed.
> It is a collage that you're going to read. (84)

In the poem he deftly blends the generic forms of letter writing, travel book, and poetry. He seizes on an important way that much of English poetry operates, allowing image after image to wash over the reader like wave after succeeding wave. As a result, he creates a multi-modal work, a mixture of prose, poetry, philosophical and political musings, photographs, statistics, friendly letters, autobiography, humor, earnest fact, legend, and eyewitness reporting, whose contemporary equivalent is perhaps a Tumblr or Twitter.

"Letter to Lord Byron" yearns toward community. Jeffery Donaldson asserts that two hundred years after Dryden and Pope wrote their epistolary verse, Auden "emphasizes not the capacity of poetry to counteract solitude or reach out, but ways of continuing to live and write in that solitude, to find a way of getting on in the void," of the gulf between himself and his audience (43). I disagree because I believe this epistolary approach allows Auden to acknowledge the isolation caused by the displacement and trauma he experiences while simultaneously seeking to restore a sense of community by enacting a return to place. It is Auden's light spirit, his engagement with Byron, the wider poetic tradition, and his contemporary audience help him combat this isolation and at least attempt a return to place.

Dowling again provides a further helpful lens for considering what epistolary verse might accomplish, particularly a movement out of isolation and toward community. After citing Pope's displacement from London as he retired to Twickenham, Dowling further states that epistolary verse initiates "a grand movement out of solitude and back toward community" by means of language (10, 11). Auden of course does not share the exact anxieties that Pope did, but Modernist ones like totalitarian political ideologies and

the looming threat of World War II. Yet the verse epistle proves to be a sturdy vessel through which to communicate the anxieties of his own age. More importantly, verse epistle allows Auden a similar movement toward recovering community, which is intimately linked to place. While in exile and displaced, this permits him at least an ideal community in which to begin moving back toward a real community.

Epistolary verse permits Auden to speak in a familiar, conversational tone to a wide audience, a familiarity with the reader that allows him to pursue the formation of community by witnessing to significant political, aesthetic, and personal realities as one friend confiding in another. Though writing in rhyme royal, Auden's adopts a chatty tone with Byron that not only mirrors Byron's own conversational spirit in his *ottava rima* verse, but it permits a third party, the reader, to enter into this spirit of familiarity.[6] Byron's comic use of *ottava rima* differs rather conspicuously from W.B. Yeats' use of the form in the fashion of Torquato Tasso, which Helen Vendler characterizes as "stately and ceremonious in motion," though she acknowledges the comic uses of the form in English (36). Though Byron had read the comic *ottava rima* work of Casti in Italian, scholarship typically cites John Hookham Frere's *Whistlecraft* as the most immediate influence on Byron, a work that convinced him that *ottava rima* would allow him "a technique by which he could express himself in verse with the same freedom, wit, urbanity and ease as he did in his letters and conversation" (qtd. in McGann 277).[7] After this same conversational familiarity, Auden believes that his chatty, light, and often comic epistolary letter to Byron might open the reader to the serious matters that are so fundamental to the poem for him. He conveys this tension in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse* in 1938, which he also edited, maintaining that "[l]ight verse

can be serious," though since the Romantic era[8] "it has been only in trivial matters that poets have felt in sufficient intimacy with their audience to be able to forget themselves and their singing-robes" (*ix-x*).

Perhaps most importantly then, Auden's choice of epistolary verse and Byronic tone utilizes this tension between humor and earnestness to develop community and establish his stereoscopic poetic vision. Mendelson does acknowledge the importance of this tension in passing, noting that "the serious parts *are* the comic ones" (288). And I agree with Donaldson that "Letter to Lord Byron" is "Auden's finest extended example of light verse," though I believe Auden's humor and light mood achieves a great deal more than simply inducing laughter (35). Humor opens the reader to the indirect expression of the gravity of human existence, where a direct witness to these realities could prove too weighty.[9] In short, the dialectic between humor and earnestness permits Auden to instruct without being didactic. Auden expresses the problems a poet faces when focusing merely on one side or the other of this tension again in his introduction *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*: "For if it is true that the closer bound the artist is to his community the harder it is for him to see with a detached vision, it is also true that when he is too isolated, though the may see clearly enough what he does see, that dwindles in quantity and importance," arguing further that: "The problem for the modern poet, as for every one else today, is how to find or form a genuine community, in which each has his valued place and can feel at home" (*xvi, xix*). For Auden, in order to develop authentic community and return to place, the poet must inhabit this tension.

This tension is also the clearest Byronic influence on the poem. Byron achieves this type of tension masterfully in his *ottava rima* work, for instance in "Beppo," a

satirical romp where the digressions in the poem are just as important as the narrative, if not more so. Byron uses the landscape, which in "Beppo" is Venice, as a metaphor representing the complicated and labyrinthine nature of humanity. The poem begins during the Carnival, which Byron depicts as the debauched celebration that precedes the sobriety of Ash Wednesday. Byron's use of this *memento mori*, along with an emphasis on the body, gives the poem a necessary measure of gravity, preventing the poem from flitting off into insignificance due to its levity.

Auden achieves a similar balance between the earnest and the humorous in his poetic witness, though it is his use of humor that initially captures the reader's attention. In the opening lines of the poem, he expresses a sense of mock demur: "Excuse, my lord, the liberty I take / In thus addressing you" (81). Auden of course knows that Byron will not mind because he is dead and will not write him back. Auden simply wants to confess, to be funny, instruct, and expound upon his poetic theory. He admits: "There is one other author in my pack: / For some time I debated which to write to. Which would least likely send my letter back? / But I decided that I'd give a fright to / Jane Austen if I wrote when I'd no right to" (83). He then makes an odd comment for a poet: "Then she's a novelist. I don't know whether / You will agree, but novel writing is / A higher art than poetry altogether" (83). Perhaps this is a part of his comic scheme, where perhaps Austen and her fine sense of manners and sensibilities serves as a foil to Lord Byron, though he seems rather serious in these lines. In the end, he decides to send his letter to Lord Byron: "So it is you who is to get this letter. / The experiment may not be a success. / There're many others who could do it better, / But I shall not enjoy myself the less." (84) Auden emphasizes in these lines the experimental nature of this poem, indicating that he is

attempting to develop his poetic perceptions, while also reveling in the freedom of his poetic "experiment."

In the second stanza of the poem, Auden chatters away, musing that Byron would know how correspondents might send rather forward requests: "Sometimes containing frank demands for cash" and, even more presumptuous "sometimes, though I think this rather crude, / The correspondent's photo in the rude" (81). Auden also employs humorous Byronic throwaway lines: "Though it's in keeping with the best traditions / For Travel Books to wander from the point / (There is no other rhyme except anoint)" (86). Both Byron and Auden use this sort of throwaway line to inject levity into the poem, as well as create a labyrinthine wandering that permits the poem to take up any subject, muse about it, then move on to another. Auden also utilizes comic abrupt Byronic endings to sections of the poem, as he does at the end of the first section:

> So this, my opening chapter, has to stop
> With humbly begging everybody's pardon.
> From Faber first in case the book's a flop,
> Then from the critics lest they should be hard on
> The author when he leads them up the garden,
> Last from the general public he must beg
> Permission now and then to pull their leg. (86)

Auden is explicitly stating how he will be pulling the leg of his audience. And he elsewhere forces rhymes like Byron, for instance where he rhymes "sally" with "Ballet" in the second section of the poem (91). Furthermore, Auden farcically stumbles through some lines "*Gerettet* not *Gerichtet* be the Law, / Et cetera, et cetera. O curse, / That is the flattest line in English verse" (85). The poet's comic yoking German and English words together, the above which translates as "Saved not judged be the Law," and dashing off et ceteras that intentionally make "the flattest line in English verse" enables him to build

rapport with his audience and makes them receptive to the earnest themes that he will soon be considering. This rhetorical maneuver permeates the poem with levity, allowing Auden to laugh at himself. His humor, which in other contexts would presume too much familiarity, disarms the reader and ultimately allows him to be instructive without being didactic in his epistolary verse.

Epistolary verse also provides Auden with a form where he might have an interlocutor with which to undertake a catechetical call and response, further establishing a movement toward community in the poem. On the surface, this discourse is comically subverted by nature of its being so one sided; Auden is, after all, the only voice the reader hears. The poet affirms this unbalanced exchange with Lord Byron by stating that he selected Byron as an interlocutor because he would be the "least likely [to] send my letter back," further explaining that "looking round for something light and easy / I pounced on you as a warm and *civilisé*" (83). These lines represent Auden's humorous and earnest tone in both the poem and the entire volume. He flippantly calls his poem "light and easy," forcing the end rhyme of "easy" and "*civilisé*." Yet his comic tone thinly veils his earnest desire to have an elevated, serious treatment of the state of the poetry and of the Western world in the face of impending global conflict. Auden comments on the connection between light verse, a poet's witness, and the commerce of his society in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*: "The more homogenous a society, the closer the artist is to the everyday life of his time, the easier it is for him to communicate what he perceives, but the harder for him to see honestly and truthfully," yet "[t]he more unstable a society, and the more detached from it the artist, the clearer he can see, but the harder it is for him to convey it to others. In the greatest periods of English Literature, as

in the Elizabethan period, the tension was at its strongest. (*x-xi*). Auden here expresses the tension between the instability within the Western world and his desire to remain detached, while yet engaged in order to envision and communicate "honestly and truthfully." A seriocomic poetic witness helps him achieve this tension in *Letter to Lord Byron*.

Epistolary verse also allows Auden to participate in an ecclesiastical function turned secular, that of confession between humans. In the fourth stanza the poet confesses:

> For since the British Isles went Protestant
> A church confession is too high for most.
> But still confession is a human want,
> So Englishmen must make theirs now by post
> And authors hear them over breakfast toast.
> For, failing them, there's nothing but the wall
> Of public lavatories on which to scrawl" (81).

As an incorrigible gossip, this is likely in part what Auden means when he discusses confession in the poem. He is also turning the Office of Confession on its head, as he is making something that is done in private with a priest public. Therefore, one function of epistolary verse for Auden is as a public declaration and witness to significant actions, fears, and realities occurring at this time.

Moreover, his use of epistolary verse allows him to engage with poetic tradition and thereby work within a poetic community by being guided by or responding against the poets that came before him. Dowling demonstrates this interaction between poet and audience, as well as between poets against and across time as he argues that "the notion of a primary speaker-audience ratio whose inversion and displacements then move a poetic mode toward formal exhaustion" and moreover that "*every poem addresses an*

internal or imaginary audience created by some prior poem or poem" (9). Auden is, however, immediately engaging with Byron, most obviously by directing the letter to Byron, though this engagement is also apparent by adopting the style of Byron's *ottava rima* verse, while markedly reacting against Byron by not actually using *ottava rima,* but rhyme royal.[10] He first acknowledges his conscious choice of form in a general sense by stating:

> I want a form that's large enough to swim in,
> And talk on any subject that I choose,
> From natural scenery to men and women,
> Myself, the arts, the European news (84).

Donaldson describes well the tension that Auden is after by stating that he selects "an open form that would leave room enough both to instruct and delight a lay readership hungry for news and entertainment" (38). He continues more specifically by disclosing why he is not using the form Byron made famous in English in "Beppo" and *Don Juan*: "Ottava Rima would, I know, be proper, / The proper instrument on which to pay / My compliments, but I should come a cropper" (85). In these lines, Auden comically acknowledges Byron's achievement in his *ottava rima* work, which he describes in greater detail in his essay "Don Juan": "the very qualities of English ottava-rima which force a serious poet to resort to banal rhymes and padding are a stimulus to the comic imagination, leading to the discovery of comic rhymes and providing opportunities for the interpolated comment and conversational aside" (398). Despite Byron's success and the comic uses of the form, Auden instead chooses rhyme-royal, Chaucer's form of choice. Rhyme royal permits Auden a nearness in tone to Byron, where he is able to be humorous, even irreverent, and earnest. Yet his choice in form also allows him to avoid a

Bloomian anxiety of influence while demonstrating his own poetic prowess by remaking Byron's work in the line of Chaucer.

Donaldson asserts that Auden attempts to work toward establishing an imaginative place for poets where he "is not alone, that he is at home in a particular milieu, has a particular place, however modest, in the social landscape or literary household" (51). This imaginative place might prompt the poet to acknowledge his isolation and desire a sense of community, though Donaldson does emphasize too strongly that Auden locates the poet "outside society itself and beyond the margins of its more purposeful employments" in "Letter to Lord Byron" (50). Moreover, I contend that Auden believes he is able to pursue and enact a sense of community in the poem. Donaldson also curiously conflates Auden's critique of Romantic isolation of the poet soon after with the poet's own position on the artist, thereby portraying Auden as an isolationist as well, which he does by citing the lines:

> How nice at first to watch the passers-by
> Out of the upper window, and to say
> 'How glad I am that though I have to die
> Like all those cattle, I'm less base than they!' (103)

He argues that this scene "serves as an elaborate evocation of the poet's place and in which Auden's poet seems to share a similar view from a small upper window," but Donaldson is confused here (49). "Auden's poet" is declaring Auden's critique of the isolation of the Romantic poet. Donaldson continues, contending that the poet is emphasizing "his elitist position in relation to the passerby of the masses" (51). Though Donaldson goes on to state that the poet "keeps his eye on the relation between the literary house and the world that surrounds it," a witness that Auden certainly undertakes, he takes no such "elitist position," but is at pains time and again in his career in poems

like “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” *New Year Letter*, and “Ode to Terminus” to refute that the poet occupies such a position (51).

Auden emphasizes his purpose for utilizing the mode of epistolary verse at the beginning of “Letter to Lord Byron,” particularly the displacing anxiety and trauma present in the modern world. In the poem’s third stanza, the speaker continues talking about the ways in which authors are solicited by letter writers. Auden, continuing to both comically implicate and excuse himself for trespassing on Lord Byron such, maintains that authors are sent “manuscripts—by every post” (81). His epistolary verse is of course only sent to Lord Byron by post fictitiously, but this permits him to both connect with poetic tradition and develop it in a modern sense. His poem is in line with the public poetic discourse of Byron and Pope, the latter of which he identifies as “shrill indignation” (81). But he hopes to demonstrate to the ghosts of both Byron and Pope the modern uses of epistolary verse, how it is conveyed, and disseminated, where they might:

> learn the use in culture’s propagation
> Of modern methods of communication;
> New roads, new rails, new contacts, as we know
> From documentaries by the G.P.O.” (81).

Auden had already been engaged in developing epistolary verse in a modern sense through his work on a number of films produced by the G.P.O. Film Unit, which was a division of the Post Office in the United Kingdom. In 1935, roughly a year before making his trek to Iceland, Auden wrote the verse commentary for the most prominent of these films, *Night Mail*, a documentary film on the above noted “modern methods of communication,” namely the Post Office’s distribution of letters throughout the country by train. Moreover, his verse commentary mirrors his witness to displacement and trauma in “Letter to Lord Byron,” and his attempt to seek a return to place in his poetry.

One distinct way that Auden witnesses to displacement and trauma in "Letter to Lord Byron" is through an awareness of his distance from his home in England. When expressing the aim of "Letter to Lord Byron" in his second letter to Erika Mann in *Letters*, he asserts his hope that the poem will have this distancing impact on the reader: "This letter in itself will have very little to do with Iceland, but will be rather a description of an effect of travelling in distant places which is to make one reflect on one's past and one's culture from the outside. But it will form a central thread on which I shall hang other letters to different people more directly about Iceland" (139). Yet, as noted earlier, Auden is attempting to escape, even for a brief period of time, from the impending gloom encroaching on Europe at the time, though he knows this effort will be in vain. He seems to figure that Iceland might allow him to recover a sense of place, after all Iceland is the "ancestral home of his family" as John Hildebidle points out (85). As important as this connection with his "ancestral home" may be for Auden, his attempt to escape the looming troubles in Europe only acts to further displace him from his home. Though he feels the excitement of this travel, his epistolary writing is mainly to an English audience, which works to heighten his sense of dislocation in the poem. Auden communicates the displacement a traveler feels near the beginning of the poem: "Now home is miles away, and miles away / No matter who, and I am quite alone," continuing that he "cannot understand what people say, / But like a dog must guess it by the tone" (82). Auden frequently discusses place at the beginning and end of each section. Then it is within the rest of each section that he depicts a more cultural, personal, and psychological displacement.

Though Auden experiences a different sort of displacement from England than Byron, he appears to feel a kinship with Byron in their mutual exilic dislocation from place. He depicts Byron's self-exile from the "North," which was "never was your cup of tea; / 'Moral' you thought it so you kept away" (87). Auden uses this correspondence to serve as a witness, ostensibly to Byron, though directly to his audience, which he announces in the succeeding lines: "what I'm sure you're wanting now from me / Is news about the England of the day" (87). Auden comically states his intention to pass over much of what has happened since Byron's day, speaking about this intervening century for half a stanza. He then abruptly moves on to the 1930's in which he is living, clearly indicating his desire to attest to his own era.

Auden first witnesses to his age by suggesting that humanity is "entering now the Eotechnic Phase," though he is mistaken and means the Neotechnic Phase.[11] He mentions important aspects of the Neotechnic Phase relating to electricity, namely "the Grid and all those new alloys" (88). He then affirms Lewis Mumford's notions by displacing the blame of the ills of his age on the frightening technology emerging, such as the development of nuclear weapons, and placing it squarely on the will of humans, individual and corporate, arguing that it is: "There on the old historic battlefield, / The cold ferocity of human wills, / The scars of struggle are as yet unhealed" (88). Here he contends that the human heart causes evil by the "cold ferocity of human wills," and not the technologies themselves.

Auden therefore states that he cannot defend England as a site of shining morality: "On economic, health, or moral grounds / It hasn't got the least excuse to show" (88). Yet, he does cite it as the place that he loves. And feeling at a distance from

England, he expresses a yearning that is tinged with sadness for the only home that he has known:

> But let me say before it has to go,
> It's the most lovely country that I know;
> Clearer than Scafell Pike, my heart has stamped on
> The view from Birmingham to Wolverhampton. (88)

Auden here names specific places within England that represent home to him. He moreover proceeds to discuss even more particular places in England that make up his ideal imaginative landscape, mentioning "a coal-field" as well as "[t]ramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery, / That was, and still is, my ideal scenery" (88, 89).

Auden then critiques those that view technology as evidence of progress on "economic, health, or moral grounds," who might welcome this progress blindly: "Hail to the New World! Hail to those who'll love / Its antiseptic objects, feel at home" (89). The poet conveys an undertone of self-mockery by feigning praise of sterile and synthetic technologies immediately after extoling the virtues of mining equipment, though he is explicit he does not do so on moral grounds. This seems to be indicative of the tension that Auden feels at this time and believes he must provide a witness to, particularly because of the conflict in Europe that seems inevitable. The poet's self-mockery also performs a limiting function, as he recognizes the human capability to commit the same things they might criticize.

At this point in the poem, Auden makes wide ranging and broad critiques of modernist life, from "the Shape of Things to Be" to "[t]he influence of Art on Industry," which anticipate a similar maneuver that he makes four years later in another verse epistle, *New Year Letter*, though he critiques dualism, not modernism in *New Year Letter* (89). He also uses similar language in the two poems. "Letter to Lord Byron" therefore

anticipates his later verse epistle *New Year Letter* in both theme and language. Mendelson acknowledges that Auden is setting up a vision that is not fully realized in "Letter to Lord Byron": "The *Letter* shows traces of the tripartite vision of history Auden had adopted the year before, but now only as a fantasy" (290). This comment indicates that the poet was searching for a more stable poetic, personal, and historical model. The Christianity that he expresses in *New Year Letter* ends up being this model. The line: "It may be D.H. Lawrence hocus-pocus, / But I prefer a room that's got a focus" is a prime example of this anticipation, as Auden takes the very distinct rhyme of "hocus-pocus" and "focus" and develops them in *New Year Letter* to demonstrate how the dualism of the devil is actually refashioned into something positive: "So, hidden in his hocus-pocus, / There lies the gift of double focus" (220).

His line about Lawrence's "hocus-pocus" gestures toward talking about the role of the poet, particularly related to the shock a poet's witness to displacement might produce. Auden uses the Kierkegaardian distinction of the genius, or the artist, and the apostle, which becomes clear in his essay on Lawrence. He begins the essay by defining the genius, though he uses the term "artist," as "the man who makes," whereas he defines the "apostle" as "the man with a message" (277). He maintains that most writers are artists, though he contends that Lawrence is an apostle, also citing William Blake as an example of a poet that is an apostle. He emphasizes the importance of the message to a poet-apostle: "Readers who find something of value in their message will attach unique importance of their writings because they cannot find it anywhere else. But this importance may be shortlived; once I have learned his message, I cease to be interested in a messenger" (278). Therefore, with the apostle, the significance lies with the message,

not the messenger. Auden maintains that for the poet, Lawrence argues that "one enemy was the conventional response, the laziness or fear which makes people prefer secondhand experience to the shock of looking and listening for themselves" (280). This "shock" and dislocation does not operate with an Eliot-like reorientation to some particular end, but instead art has no end goal for Lawrence. Auden contends that Lawrence makes the ultimate art for art's sake argument, where Auden characterizes art almost as a drug for Lawrence. Auden emphatically disagrees with what he calls "identifying art with life," stating that a poem or any object of art "is not cyclical but a motion in one direction towards a definite end" (283). Art and life are therefore related yet distinct spheres, where poetry is not necessary and is never something that simply exists, like life, but is only achieved through "much thought, labor and care" (284).

He believes that Lawrence attempts to articulate his honest poetic sensibilities, though he critiques Lawrence for shocking the reader out of place without paving a way for a reorientation toward place. Auden claims that Lawrence unintentionally produces an artificiality or stilted nature in his poetry: "An artist who ignores this difference between natural growth and human construction will produce the exact opposite of what he intends. He hopes to produce something which will seem as natural as a flower, but the qualities of the natural are exactly what his product will lack" (284). It is this artificial tone, as well as Lawrence's striving to blend art and life, that offends Auden's poetic sensibilities. Auden argues for a robust interaction with poetic tradition, both receiving and using, as well as responding to and reshaping this tradition. He asserts that: "Man is a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind; at every moment he adds to and thereby modifies everything that had previously happened to

him" (278). More particular to art and poetry, Auden claims that "a genuine work of art is one in which every generation finds something new. A genuine work of art remains an example of what being genuine means, so that it can stimulate later artists to be genuine in their turn" (281). Auden's cyclical language, where "genuine" art is more or less synonymous with art that will endure, conveys the significant dialogic nature of poetic tradition. He believes the poet is more interested in a dialogue, with tradition and with his readers, than in simply shocking his reader, though this does occur in poetry, or in a blending of art and life into something pure that cannot possibly be achieved in poetry. He therefore firmly argues in "Letter to Lord Byron" that poetry must have an end and not artificially attempt to blend art and life. Poetry shocks and displaces, but it must also seek a return to place, exemplified in the line "I prefer a room that's got a focus."

Auden quickly concludes these musings on the role of the poet in *Letter to Lord Byron*, which he will return to at greater length in the third section of the poem, and continues with a more explicit cultural witness to contemporary England. Auden makes this transition to more explicitly considering England as a place by stating "you want facts, not sighs" (89). He attests to fashion trends, modern education, sporting and outdoor activities, tourist habits, health, class structure, and capitalism (89-90). Auden then shifts from a modernist critique to a reflection on the human individual: "Now for the spirit of the people" (92). He begins this musing my discussing the human body: "We've still, its true, the same shape and appearance, / We haven't changed the way that kissing's done" (92). Though the body remains unchanged, Auden relays to Byron that some alteration occurred in the human spirit during World War II, where "he's another man in many ways" (92). Pointing to the cartoonist, who uses humor and caricature to

make earnest commentary about political and cultural life, Auden asks where the swagger of "the John Bull of the good old days" has gone (92). Indicating to Byron that the powerful political figure of the British Empire has perished, He states that he "has long been laid to rest, / His acres of self-confidence for sale; / He passed away at Ypres and Passchendaele" (92). Auden here names bloody sites of repeated World War I battles in Belgium, asserting that something changed within the hearts of British citizens during this war.

Sensitive to what is still collectively haunting the British cultural mind, Auden names this specter that causes displacement the "ogre" (93). This ogre represents another anticipation of the poem *New Year Letter*, where instead of an ogre, Auden critiques the dualism of the devil. The first voice that considers the ogre in "Letter to Lord Byron" is identified as a "little Mickey," presumably Walt Disney's cartoon character Mickey Mouse, as Disney is referenced at the beginning of this stanza (93). Auden characterizes this "little Mickey" as an impotent internal voice born out of fear, who seeks the comfort of "'my life'" and "'the home-fires'" (93). This fearful voice explains that it keeps these fires burning since: "'Heroes never do. / Heroes are sent by ogres to the grave. / I may not be courageous, but I save'" (93). This voice, perhaps a precursor to the more nuanced, more sustained voices Auden uses in poems like in "In Praise of Limestone," seeks comfort and will do anything to survive, even working in the service of the ogre, which it readily admits: "'I am the ogre's private secretary'" (93). But this voice has a short life in the poem, speaking for only two stanzas.

Auden has now set the table to discuss one of the central themes of the poem, the evil and corruption within all humanity that causes displacement and trauma, represented

by the ogre, and the "little Mickey" voice that represents the human will reacting to this evil and corruption. The images of the ogre and the voice certainly provide him with metaphors through which he might impart a witness to the impending war and destruction that he envisions and to express the anxiety that this engenders. Yet he suggests that these images speak of a more profound invasive evil imbedded in humankind. He is still working to find an appropriate language to discuss this evil, which he eventually finds in the dualism of the devil in *New Year Letter*. He is at pains to depict in "Letter to Lord Byron" the complex relation between the ogre and the voice, where the voice's response to the ogre is to preserve rather than destroy its existence in order to live in a state of sublime fear. He conveys the invasiveness and complexity of this evil in the second section of the poem: "To kill the ogre—that would take away / The fear in which his happy dreams began" (93). Though speaking broadly about the human condition, he is communicating more particularly to Byron and his reader a critique of contemporary British and European society, whom he believes wish to live in a dream world, deluding itself into thinking that appeasing the ogre as its "private secretary" will keep its evil at bay and keep the internal voice in comfort, allowing both to survive.

Auden continues to comment on this delusion, arguing that the ogre cannot be placated in this manner, nor does the internal voice desire this dream to die: "Those who would really kill his dream's contentment / He hates with real implacable resentment" (93). The voice reasons that freedom from the oppressive ogre that would lead to a precarious uncertainty that it does not want to face: "He dreads the ogre, but he dreads yet more / Those who conceivably might set him free, / Those the cartoonist has no time to draw" (93). The "cartoonist" does not draw those that would seek to set the voice free

because they cannot be caricatured, as they are perhaps ones that pursue this freedom in more subtle actions like love. The voice would rather dwell in the familiarity of submission to the ogre, where: "Without his bondage he'd be all at sea" (93).

Auden then provides a brief interlude, wondering what Byron might be like in the twentieth-century, musing first that he desired to be "the centre of attention/ /The gay Prince Charming of the fairy story, / Who tamed the Dragon by his intervention" (94). Auden notes, however, that there has been a significant shift in military combat: "In modern warfare, though it's just as gory, / There isn't any individual glory" (94). This sort of gentleman that Byron attempted to be, gaining glory in battle, is out of place in contemporary society: "The Prince must be anonymous, observant, / A kind of lab-boy, or a civil servant" (94).

Whether means the contemporary ogre, or the dragon that Byron fought, he contends both are the same manifestation of evil that changes its form throughout history. He implies that one must fight past the desire for sublime fear that the earlier noted internal voice calls for and fight:

> Against the ogre, dragon, what you will;
> His many shapes and names all turn us pale,
> For he's immortal, and to-day he still
> Swinges the horror of his scaly tail (95).

Auden gets as close in the poem to calling this ogre what he call the devil in *New Year Letter*, which he implies in "Letter to Lord Byron": "Milton beheld him on the English throne, / And Bunyan sitting in the Papal chair; / The hermits fought him in their caves alone" (95). Auden further observes the ogre in "the first [Roman] Empire," where he was "[d]angling his Pax Romana in the air," as well as in the "[b]anker or landlord, booking-clerk or Pope" (95). Auden continues: "Whenever he's lost faith in choice and

thought, / When a man sees the future without hope," it is in these places that the "dragon rises from his garden border / And promises to set up law and order" (95).

He concludes the section by maintaining that choice remains with the living: "Yet through the choice of what is to be done / Remains with the alive" Yet, he notes that the living still seek the wisdom and help of the dead, where "every man in every generation, / Tossing in his dilemma on his bed, / Cries to the shadows of the noble dead" (96). The poet is repeating this in a sense by seeking out Byron and turning toward poetic tradition. He concludes section two of the poem by observing that he is again sailing yet this is a point where Auden provides further witness: "We're out at sea now, and I wish we weren't; / The sea is rough" (96). He witnesses the uncertainty and anxiety of the times, which he fears will lead to further war and strife (96).

Auden begins the third section of the poem with an emphasis on the particular place that he is writing, which is similar in fashion to the other sections (96). He notes that last section of the poem was sent from the boat that he was taking to Iceland. He is, however, writing this section from solid ground, which he clearly glad for, where he has a warm bed to sleep in, friends that have joined him, and is enjoying a better climate, where he "feel[s] a great deal cheerier and fitter" (96). The friends that have joined him are Louis MacNeice and the Bryanston party. Auden states that they will soon be leaving the city, Reykjavik, for another place, "the desert" (96). It is therefore dislocated from home and into this desolate place that Auden and his party find themselves at the composition of this poem.

In the second stanza of this section, the poet continues his comic conversational tone, which helps him turn his attention to perhaps the most important them of this poem,

the role of the poet: "Now let me see, where was I? / We were talking of Social Questions / I think it's time now for a little shop" (96). This is an ironic statement, as he notes in his prose that poets cannot talk shop,[12] yet it appears he can do this with the deceased Byron precisely because he is deceased and because this really is a letter to his readers, not Byron. He continues his comic irony by taking on the role of critic, yet doing so in his own fashion to suit his own sensibilities, where he makes "no claim to certain diagnosis" (97). He is a critic that is "more intuitive than analytic," comically offering "thought in homoeopathic doses" and eschewing the rigid rationality of critics who take themselves too seriously (97). He therefore pledges not to "pretend to reasoning like Pritchard's / Or the logomachy of I.A. Richards (97). He then focuses on how critical scholarship has helped shape the legend of Byron:

> A poet, swimmer, peer, and man of action,
> —It beats Roy Campbell's record by a mile—
> You offer every possible attraction.
> By looking into your poetic style
> And love-life on the chance that both were vile,
> Several have earned a decent livelihood,
> Whose lives were uncreative but were good. (97)

In this stanza, Auden criticizes scholars that, though perhaps meaning well, do not using the full extent of their creative faculties. These lines also seem to offer a tacit acknowledgement that Byron's "poetic style / And love-life" were indeed vexed, but that, more importantly, Byron remains misunderstood because critics miss what is of primary importance in his work, namely his verse in *ottava rima*.

Auden emphasizes the important tension between witnessing displacement and trauma on the one hand, while also pursuing a return to place on the other in Byron's work. He therefore criticizes those that have misinterpreted Byron, including both George

and T.S. Eliot, instead arguing that: "A poet must be judged by his intention" (97). He points out that critics have taken Byron, as well as English poetry in general, too seriously, as he notes: "A serious thought you never said you aimed at" (97). While this is not entirely true, as much of Byron's earlier work is weighed down by its seriousness, and, as I have indicated, there is an important serious component of his later *ottava rima* work. Yet I believe that Auden's point is well taken, serving as a helpful corrective to critics and authors that have misinterpreted Byron. Auden indicates the significance of Byron's *ottava rima* work:

> I think a serious critic ought to mention
> That one verse style was really your invention,
> A style whose meaning does not need a spanner,
> You are the master of the airy manner. (97)

Auden is not arguing against important traditional forms, which he explicitly acknowledges as good: "By all means let us touch our humble caps to / *La poésie pure*, the epic narrative (98). Instead, he is appealing for a more robust and stereoscopic vision of poetic genre and form:

> But comedy shall get its round of claps, too.
> According to his powers, each may give;
> Only on varied diet can we live.
> The pious fable and the dirty story
> Share in the total literary glory. (97-98)

It is this "varied diet" that Auden wishes to live on, moving from one form to another, and from the comic and playful to the earnest, in his work as he sees fit .

Auden next considers specific poets within the literary canon, humorously considering what type of "singing robe" they might wear, from the elegant to his own humble garb: "From Shakespeare's gorgeous fur coat, Spenser's muff, / Or Dryden's lounge suit to my cotton frock" (98). In agreement with Byron, Auden launches a critique

of Romanticism that he would continue the rest of his career, though in a more measured tone, by "finding Wordsworth a most bleak old bore" (98). His central critique of Wordsworth seems to be his followers, whom he calls "pupil-teachers" and "mountain-snob[s]" (98, 99). Auden also critiques Wordsworth's poetry for being too focused on nature and not enough on humans, which violates Auden's poetic sensibilities by focusing too much on Art and not Life. He states as much, arguing that: "This interest in waterfalls and daisies, / Excessive love for the non-human faces" is too much for him (99). Auden does state that he is "very fond of mountains," as well as "green plains," and that he will "always quarrel / With those who think that rivers are immoral" (99). However, he clearly articulates that humanity is the most important concern of art: "To me Art's subject is the human clay, / And landscape but a background to a torso" (100). Though glib about place in this last line, his glibness serves to critique what he sees as the Romantic overemphasis of nature. Exaggerating his own stance on place therefore allows him to affirm humanity's position at the heart of his artistic sensibilities, with place playing a critical, though less significant role.

Auden reinforces his argument about the primacy of the human subject in his poetic witness at first with a joke, then by consulting artistic tradition. He contends that: "Art, if it doesn't start there, at least ends, / Whether aesthetics like the though or not, / In an attempt to entertain our friends" (100). In these lines, Auden is again utilizing humor as a means to convey a belief that he holds dear. Conceiving of art as merely a way to "entertain our friends" might seem to cheapen a craft that can be noble and good. Auden thus levels a critique of the Romantic view of art, where art is viewed with such weighty sublime solemnity that this view collapses under its own heaviness. The note of irony,

along with the poet's casual audacity to make such a statement, combine to create a comic line simultaneously conveys his earnest critique in a rather Byronic fashion. After several stanzas meditating on a short history of visual art from the 18th-century to the present, he identifies art with its audience, claiming that art must be created within a community: "The important point to notice, though, is this: / Each poet knew for whom he had to write, / Because their life was still the same as his" (101). He then describes art in parasitic terms: "As long as art remains a parasite / On any class of persons it's alright," where he is again using a negative term ironically, "parasite," in order to provide a limited and, in Auden's mind, proper view of art (101). He extends his point by maintaining that: "The only thing it must be is attendant, / The only thing it mustn't, independent" (101). For Auden, once art is limited, then it can possess its true power. Auden goes on to explicitly state that an poet should write within a community of friends where it is sensitive and "attendant" to life around the artist, rather than within a school or movement. He believes that it is within this distinctly human milieu that artists might flourish. He moreover here takes a more democratic view of art, rather than monarchical or despotic one.

Yet in the same breath he asserts that since artists are human and detest being "a skivvy," or a servant doing menial work, they attempt to avoid this more democratic view of art and attempt an autocratic style of creation, a Romantic view he attempts to disrupt (101). Auden closely associates this aesthetic despotism with place, where "everyone will do the best he can / To get a patch of ground which he can call / His own" (101). He contends that when an artist grasps for "a patch of ground" in this manner, which "[h]e doesn't really care how small, / So long as he can style himself the master," he or she can

never fully be in place (101). Normally in life, this movement toward place is typically a reasonable action, yet "[u]nluckily for art, it's a disaster" (101). He means this to be a displacing gesture, dislocating the poet from a romantic view of the artist. Though a displacing maneuver, his aesthetic limitation leads the poet back to a true sense of place, which continues to occur in his career in poems like *New Year Letter* and "In Memory of W.B. Yeats." Commenting more precisely on the current state of art, Auden admits that he has "simplified the facts to be emphatic" (103). He admits more particularly that he has intentionally skewed his letter by using "lighting that's contrasted and dramatic," which in essence is an alteration of the poetic vision as the readers receive it. As is typical of Auden, the poet's vision might be enlarged after being first properly limited, as he confesses that though "it's true Art feels a trifle sick, / You mustn't think the old girl's lost her kick" (103). And characteristic of his poetic voice in "Letter to Lord Byron," he ends that stanzas with comic verve and a forced end rhyme: "And those, besides, who feel most like a sewer / Belong to Painting not to Literature" (103).

Auden begins section four of the poem by again locating his journey in a particular place, as he is on his way back to England: "A ship again; this time the *Dettifoss*" (104). The *Dettifoss* is of particular interest because it appears to be a boat that was sunk by a U-Boat in 1945.[13] Auden is clear in expressing the displacement he feels at sea, exclaiming that "Grierson can buy it; all the sea I mean, / All this Atlantic that we've now to cross / Heading for England's pleasant pastures green" (104). Grierson is the previously mentioned John Grierson, the producer of the documentaries Auden was recently involved with through the G.P.O. Film Unit. It is moreover evident that Auden believes that he is working toward returning to a sense of place as the boat sails towards

"England's pleasant pastures green." By asserting his displacement and desire to return to place, Auden is not voicing a displeasure for Iceland, as he affirms this and the importance of community: "I've had the benefit of northern breezes, / The open road and good companionship" (104). He further emphasizes this in the next stanza: "All things considered, I consider Iceland, / Apart from Reykjavik, a very nice land" (104).

And though Auden initially seeks to travel to Iceland to escape the looming menace in Europe, as the poem progresses, he seems to view his trip to Iceland as a beneficial kind of displacement that permits reorientation to place. In the following stanzas, he conveys how he is witnessing to his cultural and personal histories, to the displacement therein, seeking to get back into place, which he regularly achieves within an imaginative landscape. Within the imaginative landscapes he envisions in "Letter to Lord Byron" and by witnessing to his cultural and personal history in the poem, he performs a mental and physical fieldwork:

> So ruminating in these last few weeks,
> I see the map of all my youth unroll,
> The mental mountains and the psychic creeks,
> The towns of which the master never speaks,
> The various parishes and what they voted for,
> The colonies, their size, and what they're noted for. (104-105)

This sort of cultural and personal fieldwork permits him to a return to place, a more nuanced understanding of self, and to consider the human condition with the reader.

He then begins providing a witness to his personal history by placing himself in the poem by means of a self-portrait. Hidlebidle argues that placing a poetic figure in his work is a frequent trope in his poetry, contending that when he does so "the figure often *becomes* a landscape" (85). This connection for Auden between poet and place is evident in his detailed self-portrait: "My passport says I'm five feet and eleven, / With hazel eyes

and fair (it's two-like) hair, / That I was born in York in 1907" (105). This description places Auden's body firmly in the poem, helping to further ground a poem that is so frequently lighthearted. He continues placing himself within the poem by depicting his ancestors: "My father's forbears were all Midland yeomen / Till royalties from coal mines did them good" (105). He does not leave out his mother's side of the family, who "had Norman blood" and hailed from "Somerset" (105). Auden also notes that: "My grandfathers on either side agree / In being clergymen of C. and E." (105). He states specifically of his parents: "A nurse, a rising medico, at Bart's / Both felt the pangs of Cupid's naughty darts" (105). He names the particular place of his childhood years: "Solihull," which is near Birmingham, and that: "Those at the gasworks were my favourite men" (106).

While discussing his personal history, he further explains why Iceland might be an ideal place for him to write "Letter to Lord Byron": "With northern myths my little brain was laden, / With deeds of Thor and Loki and such scenes; / My favourite tale was Anderson's *Ice Maiden*" (106). It is within this northern imaginative place, through Icelandic sagas, Norse mythology, and Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tales that Auden felt at home and in place. Yet, in the same stanza, Auden conveys why this trip to Iceland did not completely achieve what he hoped it would because his primary ideal imaginative place to this point in 1936 was still lead mines and the equipment that accompanied them:

> But better far than any kings or queens
> I liked to see and know about machines:
> And from my sixth until my sixteenth year
> I thought myself a mining engineer. (106)

Auden explains specifically that "lead" mines where the mines that he "always pictured," though he furthermore maintains that "copper mines might, faute de mieux, be sound"

(106). He is quick to demonstrate how this imaginative place continues to impact his life: "Today I like a weight upon my bed; / I always travel by the Underground" (106). His enthusiasm for mines even influences his poetic output: "For concentration I have always found / A small room best, the curtains drawn, the light on; / Then I can work from nine to tea-time, right on" (106). This is the imaginative landscape that Auden ultimately hopes to recover on his trip to Iceland. He does not realize this fully sense of place, for the displacing conflict of the Spanish Civil War occurs as he writes, and World War II looms on the horizon. Yet, the poem does allow Auden a place to poetically direct his desires for returning to place both personally and globally.

Auden expresses a further sense of displacement within his neglected generation during World War I. With the majority of the young English men off fighting in the trenches, his teachers were made up of those that remained: "The best were fighting, as the King expected, / The remnant either elderly grey creatures, / Or characters with most peculiar features" (107). Auden here conveys a particularly subtle sort of displacement. He and the other adolescent boys and girls of his generation remain in the places that they had always lived in as the men of age go off to Europe to fight in the war. Yet it is not only these men that leave their homes that feel a sense of displacement. Those that remain in place in England also experience displacement emotionally, mentally, or intellectually. Though these wounds would last, the war would eventually end, as he notes in the poem: "Butter and Father had come back again" (108). And life continues on as normal for adolescent boys in England: "Like other boys I lost my taste for sweets, / Discovered sunsets, passion, God, and Keats" (109). Perhaps this last interest, however, was more unique to a young boy like Auden, who was to become a gifted poet himself.

His thoughts on the impact of World War I therefore further demonstrate both his witness to the displacing and traumatic events that have occurred around him, while also maintaining a hope that there might be a return to place.

Auden comments on his poetic gift in the following stanzas, discussing "a single incident," when his poetic calling was consciously engendered, also demonstrating a shift in place from his desire to operate in the cavernous earth as a mining engineer to the metaphorical mines of human existence with language through his poetic calling:

> One afternoon in March at half past three
> When walking in a ploughed field with a friend;
> Kicking a little stone, he turned to me
> And said, 'Tell me, do you write poetry?'
> I never had, and said so, but I knew
> That very moment what I wished to do. (109-110)

Mendelson observes this momentous episode, emphasizing the casual nature with which Auden's friend asks the question: "in March 1922, a school friend, trying to fill an awkward silence on a country walk, asked if he wrote poetry. The conviction that he should do so took hold immediately" (27). Continuing to consider his poetic development in the poem, Auden notes the still warring tension between "Art" and "Life" in his work during his Oxford days, which earlier in the poem he stated how "Life" was the true subject of "Art" (110). He stresses this shift through several influential figures: Homer Lane, D.H. Lawrence, and André Gide. Each of this trio would soon lose influence after the Oxford years. Fuller reflects that Auden was influenced by "the theory of moral and spiritual origins of illness put forward by the psychologist Homer Lane," who "taught that the real desires of men are good and must not be repressed; that there is only one sin, and that is disobedience to the inner law of our own nature" (21). Carpenter moreover points out that "Lane argued from this [that human nature is innately good] that complete

freedom of behaviour—full self-expression—must lead inevitably to goodness, anything unethical quickly being eliminated after initial mistakes" (86).[14] Gide, whom Carpenter notes insisted "that humanity should act without the restraint of accepted morality," was an influence in similar ways that Lane was (87). He was tempted by this sophistry during these Oxford days, though the problems of human conflict on a global scale, like he would soon observe in the Spanish Civil War and World War II, proved these theories untenable for him. Yet he is explicit in the poem that these figures "taught me to express my deep abhorrence / If I caught anyone preferring Art / To Life and Love and being Pure-in-Heart," an emphasis on the ancillary/attendant/supporting nature of Art to Life that would be developed in poems like "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" in a few short years and persist in his work for the remainder of his career (111).

In the concluding stanzas of the poem, Auden retains his stereoscopic poetic witness, offering his thoughts on humanity, history, and the role of the poet. He maintains that through the cultural, personal, and poetic history he considers in this letter to Lord Byron, he has: "Come only to the rather tame conclusion / That no man by himself has life's solution" (112). Yet, this is simply a further example of Auden's comic self-mockery in the poem, as this conclusion is not tame at all. Speaking of his job as teacher, though Auden is surely suggesting the same is true for the poet, he asserts: "All the ideals in the world won't feed us / Although they give our crimes a certain air (112). These lines anticipate his famous line from "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," where he explicitly declares "poetry makes nothing happen" (36). Auden is adamant that the poet must limit his role to fully accomplish what is possible for a poet. He moreover cautions against writers who ignore this limitation in the subsequent lines of "Letter to Lord Byron":

So barons of the press who know their readers
Employ to write their more appalling leaders,
Instead of Satan's horned and hideous minions
Clever young men of liberal opinions. (112)

Auden's mention of Satan also makes the reader think again of *New Year Letter*. He moreover submits a view of history that "is really not unnerving— / That what is done is done, that no past dies," arguing that though humans cannot change history, history always impacts the living (112). He also further comments on the nature of history, stating that "what we see depends on who's observing," which he presumably means the victors are the ones writing history (112).

He ends the poem by conveying a tension between earnestness and comedy that is characteristic of his epistolary verse, vowing that he will "sign the usual pledges / To be a better poet, better man / I'll really do it this time if I can" (112). Though Auden's tone is frivolous in these lines, underneath their comic note is a serious desire to develop into a "better poet, better man." These words reinscribe Auden's purpose in "Letter to Lord Byron", which is to write a poem that is a work of art that is distinct from "Life," but also witnesses to it by being instructive without being didactic. Fittingly, the final lines of the poem are comic, as Auden jests that "I hope this reaches you in your abode, / This letter that's already far too long" and "I hope you don't think mail from strangers wrong. / As to its length, I tell myself you'll need it, / You've all eternity in which to read it (112).

New Year Letter

New Year Letter, written in 1940, is perhaps Auden's finest long poem, and as the title suggest, is a long verse epistle. The epistolary nature of *New Year Letter* functions similarly to that of "Letter to Lord Byron", which serves as a prototype for the poem,

where verse epistle endeavors to work from isolation to community, displacement to place through Auden's poetic witness by engaging with an addressee, an audience, and poetic tradition. Yet rather than write to a deceased member of the poetic tradition like he does in "Letter to Lord Byron," Auden writes this epistolary poem to his living friend Elizabeth Mayer, attempting to connect his imaginative and lived realities. Mayer is a fellow exile, is older than Auden, and is the wife of a Jewish psychiatrist in Amityville (Fuller 320). In the poem and in reality, she serves as a motherly figure, as well as a Marian and Beatricean character to Auden.[15] Fuller further claims: "For Auden she seemed a fit recipient of a poem which was to argue itself into a position of detachment and worship of 'the powers that we create with'" (320).

New Year Letter is also a public poetic witness that moves from displacement and trauma to return to place and healing. The poem begins with a negative stance, where he levies a sustained critique of dualist tendencies that he observes in Western society. The most positive alternative to this dualism that Auden offers in the poem is described as a gift, though only after he attests at great length to what the gift of poetry is not. He believes it necessary to consider the limits of poetry in order to accurately understand the displacement of the world around him. Yet the poem does end with a sense of gratitude that is connected with a return to a specific place, particularly to Mayer's home in New York City.

Another epistolary element that *New Year Letter* employs is the use of multiple methods of discourse, from the already cited epistolary modes that Dowling argues for: "personal reflection, philosophical meditation, [and] anecdote," as well as confession and communicating a moral vision without didacticism. Auden achieves this moral vision by

acknowledging the limits of the poet. Auden believes that limiting the authority of the poet frees him from falling into propaganda. He realizes this in the poem by adopting a Horatian mode of ridiculing folly and vice and encouraging virtue.

Auden began writing *New Year Letter* in January 1940, finishing the verse epistle in April of the same year.[16] The poem was first published in the U.S. in March 1941 in the volume *Double Man* and in May 1941 as *New Year Letter*. The title *Double Man* captures well both Auden's stereoscopic poetic witness and the dualistic vision he critiques through his witness. *Double Man* includes a verse prologue and epilogue, *New Year Letter*, notes that take up more space than the poem, and "The Quest," a sequence of twenty sonnets. Auden affixes extensive notes to his verse epistle that take up more page space then the poem itself, which includes verse and prose commentary by Auden, as well as quotations from a wide-ranging set of writers. Aside from their length, Fuller highlights the "odd relationship" between the poem and the notes, stating: "The reader turns to the back, as if to find the answer, but usually finds an extension to the problem" (320). Rather than providing answers to the issues that the poem considers, the notes instead offer further contemplation of these matters from a slightly different angle. Auden's notes possess a dialogic quality that adds to this epistolary function. He dialogues with himself in the text of the poem and in the extensive notes, which are often filled with his own poems responding in harmony or discord with the "actual" text of the poem, though also with other literary, scientific, theological voices. The notes therefore act like a four-part chorus, where soprano, alto, tenor, and bass work to achieve a beautiful harmony that witnesses to and articulates a diverse range of human experience.

The Prologue of *Double Man* emphasizes the significance of vision and place in *New Year Letter*. The forty-four line poem in unrhymed quatrains begins:

> O season of repetition and return,
> Of light and the primitive visions of light
> Opened in little ponds, disturbing
> The blind water that conducts excitement. (11)

Auden employs seasonal rhetoric of movement, recurrence, and dislocation from a specific a place, where vision and a doubling of that vision, "light and the primitive visions of light," are prominent. The reader envisions Narcissus staring at his image in the water. And this image in the water at first appears clear: "How lucid the image in your shining well / Of a limpid day" (11). But it soon becomes apparent that there is also obfuscation present in these images, that they might be distanced from the real thing, conjuring up an illusory dream world not rooted in reality: "O hour of images when we sniff the herb / Of childhood and forget who we are and dream / Like whistling boys of the vast spaces" (11). The poem anticipates the "double-focus" at the end of the second section of *New Year Letter*, casting a double vision out of varied tensions, such as both sides of a paradox, vision betraying and blinding itself, understanding and not understanding itself, disorder and order, displacement and place, wound and recovery, and that which is divided within humans and that which provides us with stereoscopic vision. Auden is ultimately concerned with one's sense of vision: discerning rightly, perceiving truth and not a lie, and seeing in a nuanced fashion stereoscopic vision. This is why Auden focuses on art and poetry; certainly because he is a poet, but moreover because art is so predicated on vision and perception.

Similarly concerned with the public perceiving of truth and lies, Cathy Caruth cites the work of Hannah Arendt, who was good friends with Auden, regarding the

danger of lying in the political realm in *Literature in the Ashes of History*. According to Caruth, Arendt argues that though public lies might initially be aimed at individuals for specific political means, it eventually fundamentally changes perception, "aimed not at particular facts but at the entire framework of factuality" (42). Changing individual facts into lies is problematic enough, but altering frameworks for perceiving the world has more far reaching consequences. Arendt considers how totalitarian regimes use this type of lying, which deprives the individual of freedom and in so doing dehumanizes them. Auden worries about this fundamental change to the fabric of "factuality," particularly lying as the denial of history and dehumanizing mechanism used by totalitarian regimes. He therefore stresses throughout his poetic oeuvre that the poet must bear witness to history truthfully.

The poem concludes with the speaker first stating that the dislocation that war causes might bring some sort of return to what was lost. The speaker asserts: "Only on battlefields, where the dying" might help "[r]epair the antique silence" so that "night [might] return to our cooling fibres" (12). This is an eerie image, mirroring Auden's own initial hopeful vision of what war might bring, followed by his subsequent change of heart:

> not even war can frighten us enough,
> That last attempt to eliminate the Strange
> By uniting us all in a terror
> Of something known, even that's a failure (12).

The speaker contends that even facing our mortality in war fails to frighten humanity enough to achieve meaningful change:

Our bones cannot help reassembling themselves
Into the philosophic city where dwells
  The knowledge they cannot get out of;
  And neither a Spring nor a war can ever

So condition his ears as to keep the song
That is not a sorrow from the Double Man.
  O what weeps is the love that hears, an
  Accident occurring in his substance. (12)

For Auden, humanity cannot rid itself of a knowledge of our doubleness. And Auden, who in 1939 had recently returned to the Anglican Church, will explore this doubleness in *New Year Letter* as a tension within humanity as both possessing the image of God and Original Sin. Christian doctrine on the image of God states that humanity has been created in the likeness of God. The doctrine of Original Sin explains that all humanity inherits an innately sinful nature through the consequences of the Fall of humanity's parents, Adam and Eve. The image of God and Original Sin coexist in humanity. The image of God becomes disfigured after the Fall, but is restored through the grace of God. Auden's stereoscopic witness in *New Year Letter* envisions both this disfigurement and restoration.

Like "Letter to Lord Byron," Auden begins *New Year Letter* candidly, first describing the anxiety of the times:

Under the familiar weight
Of winter, conscience and the State,
In loose formations of good cheer,
Love, language, loneliness and fear (199)

From the very first lines of the poem, he is conveying a distinct sense of tension, speaking of a "familiar weight." He communicates in this phrase his attentiveness to the burdens in the contemporary world that are common to humanity, a commonness which depicts the other half of the tension, a burden that contains a familiarity in the sense that

it is common to all of humanity. To translate Auden's aims into more banal language, he is declaring in this opening line his interest in the tension, conflict, and doubleness at the heart of the human condition, particularly through the coexistence of the image of God and Original Sin. In that vein, he begins this poem with a seasonal image, like the Prologue, in the dead of winter, the barren end of the seasonal cycle. The poem bears the burden of the "conscience and the State," of ethical and moral dilemmas and political structures ruled by fascists. The mood of the poem is composed of, at least in part, "loneliness and fear." As David Mason argues, for Auden "our isolation and suffering are undeniable. Terrible results may follow when we deny them. One of these is Fascism; another is the complacency within a democracy that follows Fascism to take root. When we deny responsibility we relinquish freedom" (124). Mason's comments emphasize the Auden's poetic witness to the trauma and displacement around him. Moreover, what "good cheer, / Love, language" the poem might contain are in "loose formations" that might easily be dispersed and disappear.

Yet, the poem does not commence by simply nurturing a fatalistic fear. It begins in a new year, filled with a measure of hope. The barrenness of "winter" will turn to spring. The "conscience" is not merely burdensome, but can be formed into a moral guide. When expectations are rightly tempered, governments might productive structures within human culture. And though "loneliness and fear" will always be present, so too will be "good cheer" and "[l]love." It is out of this tension, out of an understanding of the displacement in the modern world as well as of the hope of a return to place and a subsequent sense of gratitude that might be achieved, that the poet might offer his or her vision, witness of and to the world. It is also out of this tension that Auden decides to

write this verse epistle. Michael Murphy asserts that, like Pope in his epistolary verse: "Auden was quite obviously haunted by a fear akin to Pope's: that the poet should become merely a voice talking to itself in the dark" (109). It is this fear of isolation that drives Auden toward poetic community and a return to place.

The opening section continues to imbue the poem with a sense of tension between displacement and seeking a return to place, as the poet expresses various moods: "*Exalté, piano*, or in doubt" (199). "*Exalté*" and "*piano*" are French and Italian terms, respectively, that convey contrasting ends of the emotional spectrum, where "*Exalté*" conveys a sense of elation, while *piano*, which literally translates to "soft," indicates a gentler mood. And "in doubt" conveys a third muddled state. It is this variety of mood, as well as this muddled third state that the poet seems to be confessing to his audience, as well as witnessing in those around him in the face of global conflict. Auden also seems to be alluding to another well-known poem filled with anxiety, T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Auden's lines: "Along the streets the people flow, / Singing or sighing as they go" recall to mind "certain half-deserted streets" and the room where "women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (199, 3). Auden further demonstrates the dislocation and anxiety felt in this tension and the aim of the poem: "All our reflections turn about / A common meditative norm, / Retrenchment, Sacrifice, Reform" (199). His hope, therefore, is that his poem might provide a witness to the "common meditative norm" of reduction, sacrificing, and reformation. Deane describes this goal well when he asserts: "the raison d'être of the poem [for Auden] is to accomplish some sort of mental reorientation in the reader that will have ramifications in the world beyond poetry" (174). Though the process of

"reorientation" is displacing and disorienting in itself, it's terminus is a return to place and a sense of gratitude.

He recalls hearing the anxiety mounting even "[t]welve months ago in Brussels, I / Heard the same wishful-thinking sigh," where "taut with apprehensive dreads, / The sleepless guests of Europe lay / Wishing the centuries away" (199). This sort of wishing away of centuries of history and all of its ills and anxieties summons to mind the escape that Auden attempted during his trip to Iceland. He ultimately found this evasion of reality untenable, as the world still went on around him, as is evidenced by the Spanish Civil War breaking out while he was in Iceland. The escape that Auden is considering at the beginning of *New Year Letter* is an attempt to circumvent the displacement that is occurring in the world. Though Auden attempted this maneuver himself, as I have demonstrated in "Letter to Lord Byron," he quickly realized that this he could not maintain this position and witness to the world around him in a truthful and accurate manner.

In the end, "the low mutter of their vows" did not allow an escape from "the presence of The Thing," the haunting and unnamed war that breaks out, which Auden believes dislocates people geographically, emotionally, and spiritually (199). Despite the best efforts of what his tone indicates were well intentioned people and the avoidance of naming "The Thing" and its growing hate, war spread across the globe:

> All formulas were tried to still
> The scratching on the window-sill,
> All bolts of custom made secure
> Against the pressure on the door,
> But up the staircase of events
> Carrying his special instruments,
> To every bedside all the same
> The dreadful figure swiftly came. (199)

Auden here paints World War II as an inevitable conflict, where "[a]ll formulas" and "bolts of custom" were used to stop it, but some unnamed evil still came, which he later names as Satan, though to this point in the poem referred to as a "dreadful figure."

In spite of the anxiety that the beginning of this dreadful war brought, Auden finds hope that some positive force can combat this evil: "Yet Time can moderate his tone" (199). Auden emphasizes the importance of witnessing to the Nazi invasion of Poland at the beginning of the war: "The very morning that the war / Took action on the Polish floor," which began on September 1st, 1939 and prompted Auden to write the well anthologized poem that took its title from this date, which he also famously redacted (200). Yet he does not remain in this site of dislocation, recalling the recipient of his verse epistle and a particular place during this displacing moment, Elizabeth Mayer's home in Long Island, where, while listening to a *passacaglia*[17] by Buxtehude:

> One of his *passacaglias* made
> Our minds a *civitas* of sound
> Where nothing but assent was found,
> For art had set in order sense
> And feeling and intelligence,
> And from its ideal order grew
> Our local understanding too. (200)

The "*civitas*" is the social community of citizens in the late Roman Republic; therefore in this moment in Long Island music forms a distinct, yet mysterious community between the poet and Mayer. The "assent" that was found within this group describes an instance of reinplacement for Auden, which I will discuss at greater length in my third chapter when Auden returns to the subject in the third section of the poem. Auden anticipates here how this return to place allows art, when rightly ordered and limited itself, might flourish and "set in order sense, / And feeling and intelligence."

The dialectic between order and disorder is a central theme in *New Year Letter* that Auden recurrently pursues in his public witness. He therefore emphasizes the importance of order in these opening lines, yet he must also recognize the disorder that must be reordered before he can fully consider order. He continues engaging in this dialectic by asserting that: "To set in order—that's the task / Both Eros and Apollo ask" (200). According to Mendelson, Auden attributes the ordering that art might achieve "to both the conscious and unconscious wills an impulse toward order and a drive toward that wrestling bout that transforms daemon into angel" (106). Mendelson further contends that: "Art's wish to imitate life produces not an imitation but an 'abstract model of events' that, like all abstract models, cannot guide anyone who is trying to build a real future" (106). Mendelson's comments help highlight that central to this dialectic is Auden's belief that art has an intrinsic teleological drive toward order ("an impulse toward order"), yet art is not capable of providing a model for life because of his abstract nature. As I have demonstrated in "Letter to Lord Byron," Auden believed that Art is in a subordinate position to Life; however, he does maintain that they can be in harmony with one another: "For Art and Life agree in this / That each intends a synthesis" (200). He is arguing that this synthesis is the teleology of both Art and Life, where:

> That order which must be the end
> That all self-loving things intend
> Who struggle for their liberty,
> Who use, that is, their will to be. (200)

The poet is of course included in this category of "self-loving things." Indeed, the sign of the poet's craft, the poem, for which the poet struggles for its existence, its "will to be." These lines also call to mind the third stanza of "In Sickness and in Health," where the poet laments: "How warped the mirrors where our worlds are made; / What armies burn

up honour, and degrade / Our will-to-order into thermal waste" (318). Auden's discussion of order, freedom, and the will therefore demonstrates his belief that the poet must provide a public witness regarding role of the poet and of the world around them.

He does admit that though the intention of both Art and Life is to lead toward order, this order is not a function of the will, but is a state or condition of completion: "order never can be willed / But is the state of the fulfilled" (200). Auden argues that order cannot be willed because the human will is disordered or displaced:

> For will but wills its opposite
> And not the whole in which they fit,
> The symmetry disorders reach
> When both are equal each to each (200).

He proceeds to claim that: "Art in intention is mimesis / But, realised, the resemblance ceases; / Art is not life and cannot be / A midwife to society" (201). His assessment of Art in these lines recalls to mind his critique of Romanticism, particularly Percy Shelley's famous final line of *A Defence of Poetry*: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (535). Indeed, in his essay "Writing," Auden contends that this line "describes the secret police, not the poets" (27).

He therefore emphasizes that the poet must witness and teach, a distinctly epistolary aspect of the poem, though always doing so while respecting the will of the reader. He furthermore stresses that poetry loses its power once it assumes a stifling didactic stance:

> What they [humans] should do, or how or when
> Life-order comes to living men
> It [art] cannot say, for it presents
> Already lived experience
> Through a convention that creates
> Autonomous completed states. (201)

A central role of the poetry is to consider "lived experience." Even poetry with a prophetic tone that anticipates the future must draw on "lived experience" for its reckoning. Auden explicitly argues that Art does not order Life. Richard Kearney, in *On Stories*, elucidates the kind of mimesis expressed in *New Year Letter*: "Mimesis is 'invention' in the original sense of that term: *invenire* means both to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short, to re-create actual worlds as possible worlds" (132). Kearney's understanding of mimesis allows for a sense of discovery and creation to permeate a work, something that Auden would surely agree with, without forcing a godlike Romantic view of the artist that he was so clearly opposed to. This view of mimesis allows for imaginative possibility while maintaining a proper order between the artist and the world.

Auden, however, puzzlingly goes a step too far in his limitation of art in the poem, claiming that "art is a *fait accompli*," where in the name of telling the truth about art, he risks being spurious himself (201). This line is self-contradictory for Auden, and a position that is simply untenable for a poet. Poetry surely draws on and finds its existence through "lived experience." But calling poetry a *fait accompli* chokes the power of casting "actual worlds as possible worlds" that Kearney discusses and which I am convinced Auden actually believed in as well. Kearney further articulates how the correspondence between poetry and "lived experience," or art and life does not create a *fait accompli*: "This power of mimetic re-creation sustains a connection between fiction and life while also acknowledging their difference. Life can be properly understood only by being retold mimetically through stories. But the act of *mimesis* which enables us to

pass from life to life-story introduces a 'gap' (however minimal) between living and recounting" (132). It is this "'gap'" of poetic possibility that Auden so carefully protects by launching his critique of Romanticism, a possibility that he bears witness to throughout his work. Poetry therefore may make "nothing happen," as Auden famously states in his elegy "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," but it is not something that has already happened. Rather, poetry is: "A way of happening, a mouth" that must speak it into existence (41).

Describing a poem as a "way of happening" and "a mouth" perhaps perplexes the reader, but this imagery foregrounds witness as a fundamental element of a poet's role. A poet's witness becomes an abstracted "lived experience" that is spoken within a specific form. The poet places "lived experience" within a specific form, which he identifies as a metrical or "algebraic formula" (201). Within this form, human experience becomes: "An abstract model of events" (201). He contends that this form, which is a type of limitation, allows the poet to protect the reader's will to choose. He views this as a high good, where, though the poet cannot order life for the reader, he or she might provide a place for them to exercise their will to choose freely, where possibility might abound. And Auden believes that epistolary verse uniquely provides the reader a form within which he or she can freely choose the good.

Auden continues to establish the proper role of poetry, limited though witnessing to the diverse aspects of human experience, by launching into a courtroom scene where he is judged by his peers, described as "[g]reat masters" of poetic tradition "who have shown mankind / An order it has yet to find" (201). Addressing these poetic masters in the beginning of this verse epistle, Auden declares:

> All the more honour to you then
> If, weaker than some other men,
> You had the courage that survives
> Soiled, shabby, egotistic lives (201).

For the poet learns "to play / At living in another way" (201). When these poetic forbears were alive and writing, they sought "the wild furies of the past" that were "[t]rapped in a medium's artifice, / To charity, delight, increase" (201-202). Now, however, they have been subsumed into the poetic tradition, where their "changeless presences disarm / The sullen generations" (202). He indicates that these poetic masters still speak to the current generation of poets and readers, if they have ears to hear. Indeed, their art still speaks: "Your final transformations speak," where their art might allow the reader the space to make a choice that leads to transformation:

> Saying to dreaming "I am deed,"
> To striving "Courage. I succeed,"
> To mourning "I remain. Forgive,"
> And to becoming "I am. Live." (202)

Though someone bewildering voices[18], they seem to indication the possibility of a properly limited art to be a catalyst, at some level, of a transformation from potential to actual (from "dreaming" to "deed"), from struggle to success (from "striving" to "succeed[ing]"), from guilty and sorrowful to the free and forgiven (from "mourning" to "Forgive[n]"), and from the potential to being (from "becoming" to "I am. Live").

He conspicuously limits this judgment to the realm of the aesthetic, where these poetic judges "challenge, warn and witness" (202). It is this poetic witness that he takes pains to emulate from his poetic masters and what I argue he believes to be a central function of a poet. Indeed, he spends the rest of the first section of *New Year Letter* embarking upon an imaginative tribunal, where he is put on trial by his poetic peers. It is

only after this trial that Auden might more fully witness to the displacement in the world around him, which he believes to be embodied in the dualism present in the world, at which point he might seek a return to place.

Chief among the ranks of these poetic judges or witnesses are Dante: "That lean hard-bitten pioneer," "Self-educated" William Blake, and Arthur Rimbaud: "Who strangled an old rhetoric" (202, 203, 204). Through this aesthetic judgment, Auden continues to limit the focus of his poetic vision, stating that, "language may be useless" because "[n]o words men write can stop the war / Or measure up to the relief / Of its immeasurable grief" (206). These sentiments again remind the reader of what Auden says in his poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," written approximately a year before *New Year Letter*, where "poetry makes nothing happen" (36). And like "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," he qualifies this statement in *New Year Letter*, stating that "truth, like love and sleep, resents / Approaches that are too intense," where "often the searcher stood / Before the Oracle, it would / Ignore his grown-up earnestness" (206). The poet therefore risks losing an opportunity to tell the truth by taking the role of the poet too seriously. The poet must also avoid the "sin / Peculiar to his discipline," Auden glosses as "Isolation. The Ivory Tower" in the notes (204, 90). Carpenter astutely discusses how the poet considers this tension: "Yet, though he [the artist] is to avoid direct involvement in social issues, the artist is nevertheless called upon to 'set in order', to organize our perceptions of the world" (287). For Auden, the poet must avoid the solitary isolation Romantic poets praised, as well as acknowledging that they cannot effect real political change, while yet they might act as a witness that helps "to organize our perceptions of the world," which indirectly impacts the way humans act in the world.

But if the poet employs a different approach, a lateral method rather than a direct one, then the "[o]racle" might be illumined, "But not the child of his distress, / For through the Janus of a joke / The candid psychopompos spoke" (206). Through this limiting of poetry, Auden perceives a uniting of dualist thought:[19] "May such heart and intelligence / As huddle now in conference;" therefore, "[w]henever an impasse occurs / Use the Good Offices of verse" (206). His characterization of language as "useless" and as a mediator between the "heart and intelligence" is a "double statement," claims Mendelson, where: "The rest of the poem confounds this pious hope" (108). I disagree that the rest of the poem serves to counter this statement. Auden's "double statement" accords with his illustration of "double focus," which I will consider shortly (220). When properly limited, poetry might serve as a mediator between "heart and intelligence," a belief which he affirms in his essay "Postscript: Christianity and Art," stating: "If an artist can no longer put on sacred airs," by which he means the limiting of the poetic witness, "he has gained his personal artistic liberty instead" (460). He limits his poetic scope in *New Year Letter* in part by locating within a particular place, a "local understanding" as he calls it (200). Jacobs captures the significance of "local understanding" when he contends that, for Auden: "Art serves local understanding only because it is the only kind of understanding available" (53). Recognizing the impossibility of global understanding, "local understanding" frees Auden to understand the world around him.

Auden begins Part Two of the verse epistle by attempting to place the situation of the world around him in a particular imaginative landscape. Stephen Schuler astutely describes Part Three as "an intellectual climb up Mount Purgatory" (24). If Part Three

depicts the ascending of "Mount Purgatory," then the beginning of Part Two portrays a more infernal landscape. The poet envisions a motley collection of "strangers, enemies and friends," who are standing "puzzled underneath / The signpost on the barren heath" (207). The group attempts "to decipher what / Is written on it," but this modern adaptation of the sign at the entrance of Dante's Inferno is inscrutable, and they therefore "cannot, / Nor guess in what direction lies / The overhanging precipice" (207). And not only has the "signpost" become unreadable, the landscape has as well. He identifies a "barren heath / Where the rough mountain track divides / To silent valleys on all sides," locating the modern predicament in an alienated landscape that is sundered and mute (207). Yet within this gloomy "pitch-darkness can be heard / Occasionally a muttered word," a speech that includes the poet's voice. The implication here is not one of elevating the role of the poet to the sublime prophet, but to a role of poetic witness of the current situation the surrounding world faces (207). From this place on the cold, desolate mountainous moorland, Auden does envision a glimmer of hope amidst "the lost," where: "Far down below them whence they came," there, "Still flickers feebly a red flame, / A tiny glow in the great void / Where an existence was destroyed" (207). The poet is at once providing a witness to the modern predicament, which includes the fragmentation and anxieties of World War Two: "And now and then a nature turns / To look where her whole system burns," and creating a dream vision of what might happen if this predicament persists: "And with a last defiant groan / Shudders her future into stone" (207). Flourishing life has been displaced from this location. The words of the poet might serve to reawaken humanity to its predicament and turn away from this vision.

In order to avoid this horrific vision, Auden is clear that humans must learn to see themselves more accurately, learning "who and where and how we are" (207). Echoing this statement, his verse note states that humans must first understand their own mortality in order to achieve this sort of corrected sight: "Only now when he has come / In walking distance of his tomb" (93). Death is a disordered, displacing reality. Yet an honest understanding that humans are always within "walking distance" from their tombs permits a discovery of "who / He had always been to whom / He so often was untrue" (93). The poet's witness to this displacement begins to enact a move toward returning to place. Rather than dreaming up visions of a Ptolemaic universe orbiting around a selfish individual, he envisions a Copernican world that revolves around community. He locates humans where they are: "The children of a modest star, / Frail, backward, clinging to the granite / Skirts of a sensible old planet (207-208).

With this accurate vision, Auden asserts humans can see "the Prince of Lies," who is "the Spirit-that-denies" this sort of ordered vision (209). Turning toward a beloved and influential forbearer Goethe's work *Faust*, Auden express pity for:

> Poor cheated MEPHISTOPHELES,
> Who think you're doing as you please
> In telling us by doing ill
> To prove that we possess free will,
> Yet do not will the will you do,
> For the Determined uses you,
> Creation's errand-boy creator (209).

Auden is returning to Eden, to the Doctrine of the Fall, where Satan convinces Adam and Even to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, something that was forbidden by God, as a point of proof that they "possess free will." He thus makes the argument that this continues to be the Devil's maneuver to this day. Yet, as John Donne does in "Death, be

not proud," where there is an implicit connection between Death and Satan, Auden indicates that, like the rest of creation, the Devil's will is disordered, such that he "do[es] not will the will you do." Moreover, he emphasizes the Devil's feebleness by calling him "Creation's errand-boy creator."

Auden critiques the Devil's dualism for the remainder of Part Two. He jokes: "The Devil, as is not surprising, / —His business is self-advertising— / Is a first-rate psychologist" (212). More seriously, he asserts that "his neurotic longing mocks / Him with its self-made paradox, / To be both god and dualist" (213). As if also a false logician, Auden argues: "The False Association is / A favourite strategy of his" (215). The Devil does this as he first: "Induce[s] men to associate / Truth with a lie," after which he exhibits this lie, after which "they will, in Truth's name, / Treat babe and bath-water the same" (215). Auden's association of truth with what is a lie is laying the groundwork for what he will shortly call "double-focus" in the poem (220). It also sheds light on what Auden views as the dualist deception of the Devil, where humans on "[o]ur jolly picnic on the heath / Of the agreeable" basking in the agreement of "what we will not ask, / Bland, sunny and adjusted, by / The light of the accepted lie?" (217) This sort of dualistic light does not clarify, but accepts what is a lie because it is more pleasant or easier, yet it obscures humanity's vision.

He then conveys a different sort of light, one that illuminates a vision of humanity as "creative" and productive, one not guided by and toward a selfish individualism, but instead a cooperative community (217). He contends that humanity's "love of money" demonstrates that: "His love is not determined by / A personal or tribal tie / Or colour, neighbourhood, or creed" (217). Conceiving of these realities as important, but ultimately

secondary or external, he then asserts that humanity is primarily driven by "universal, mutual need" (217). Auden is making the argument that humanity's primary drive is toward community, where: "None shall receive unless they give; / All must co-operate to live" (217-218).

He claims that the Devil exploits these drives, knowing the warped ways in which humanity, Auden included, pursue or avoid this drive toward community. One way that he and many others of his generation hoped to achieve the ideal community was through political means:

> We hoped; we waited for the day
> The State would wither clean away,
> Expecting the Millennium
> That theory promised us would come:
> It didn't. (219)

Auden clearly recognizes the false idealism of hoping in "The State," which allowed too much power in the hands of individual leaders. He also identifies this misguided hope in poems like "Epitaph on a Tyrant," published in January of 1939, where though: "Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after," the tyrant's reactions bring pain and suffering to his people, not community: "And when he cried the little children died in the streets" (183). Indeed, Auden conveys how it does not take a genius to realize the selfishness alive in the hearts of all humanity, even the idealist: "Meanwhile at least the layman knows / That none are lost so soon as those / Who overlook their crooked nose" (219).

The Devil therefore exploits human selfishness, despite the presence of idealism:

> O how the devil who controls
> The moral asymmetric souls,
> The either-ors, the mongrel halves
> Who find truth in a mirror, laughs. (220)

Yet though the devil exploits these human tendencies, there is hope for humanity, as time and memory are still / Limiting factors on his will" (220). At the end of Part Two, the speaker summarizes the devil's tactics, that the devil "cannot always fool us thrice, For he may never tell us lies, / Just half-truths we can synthesize" (220). Auden's understanding of the devil's strategies therefore does not induce despair, but generates feelings of hope and gratefulness by asserting that "hidden in his hocus-pocus, / lies the gift of double focus" (220). Edward Mendelson proves helpful in understanding this gift, which is not only "'a dialectical ability to see both sides of a question' but 'a realm of free action in an eternally changing condition'" (qtd. in Schuler, 24). This gift, coming from the most unlikely of places, the devil, might transform the displacement felt by the poet in the world.

Auden's public poetic witness therefore offers a corresponding dialectic to that of "double focus." He elaborates on the latter in another way as he further considers the Devil's relation to poetry in his note on "double-focus": "The Devil, indeed, is the father of Poetry, for poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings, the poetic mood is never indicative" (116). Since "the poetic mood is never indicative," the poet therefore must develop a stereoscopic vision, one that perceives the trauma and displacement in the world, but also a path back to place, where the poet can express gratitude for the gift of poetry. Focusing solely on the cruel and inhuman acts of totalitarian regimes without recognizing the gratitude for life and poetry, or being ecstatically grateful for the gift of life and poetry without honestly and accurately witnessing to the trauma occurring in the world would provide a univalent, stunted, and fragmented vision. But concentrating on the various aspects of poetic witness,

displacement and trauma on the one hand, and return to place and healing on the other, allows the poet's vision to flourish by witnessing to many different angles of human experience rather than a narrowed perspective.

Auden demonstrates the first fruits from the "gift of double focus" in Part Three in a movement from displacement to feeling in place. Auden begins the section by addressing Elizabeth Mayer, his friend to whom the poem is dedicated, in the specific locale of her home: "Warm in your house, Elizabeth, / A week ago at the same hour / I felt the unexpected power" (220). In the poem, Mayer functions as a muse-like character that represents for Auden an image of grace and gratitude, similar to Dante's Beatrice. The speaker recounts this "unexpected power" as a transformative experience: "That drove our ragged egos in / From the dead-ends of greed and sin / To sit down at the wedding feast (221). Auden articulates the redemption he experiences in agape love, the Christian expression of giving and receiving unconditional love toward all humanity. He describes this moment as feeling in place, which: "Arranged us so that each and all, / The erotic and the logical," which for Auden indicates the emotional and sensual as well as the rational, that: "Each felt the *placement* to be such / That he was honoured overmuch" (221). The "gift of double focus," along with the "*placement*" found in Mayer's home, helps foster a sense of gratitude, one that leads to: "Our privileged community," forming a profound "real republic" (221).

Mendelson and Schuler are correct to assert that Part Three of the poem functions as an ascension of Purgatory, which is clear in lines like "that we may / Ascend the penitential way / That forces our wills to be free," yet Auden also locates this purgation within a particular place, the limestone landscape of his youth (224). And Auden conveys

his feeling of displacement from this landscape, which he is now only connected to by his language and his past: "England to me is my own tongue, / And what I did when I was young" (226). Auden stresses his displacement as he addresses his friend Elizabeth in the poem, declaring that they are "two aliens in New York" that "talk / of friends who suffer in the torn / Old Europe where we both were born" (226, 226). But after this meditation on displacement, Auden makes a move toward regaining a sense of place by recalling his imaginative limestone landscape, a vital part of his poetic faculties despite his distance from England. He renders this imaginative terrain with lines that carry such force that they shape an earthy image of gratitude for the reader: "Whenever I begin to think / About the human creature we / Must nurse to sense and decency," further asserting that an "English area comes to mind, I see the nature of my kind / As a locality I love" (227, 227). Auden precisely situates this "locality" within: "Those limestone moors that stretch from Brough / To Hexham and the Roman Wall, There is my symbol of us all" (227). Auden expresses gratitude for the English landscape because it provides him with a sense of home, of feeling in place. This limestone "locality" also allows him to form his poetic creation, for which his tone distinctly reaches a register of gratitude: "There, where the Eden leisures through / Its sandstone valley, is my view / Of green and civil life" (227). Auden reemphasizes his belief that art properly limited might act as a mediator where dualistic thought has divided what he earlier called "heart and intelligence" by claiming that within this imaginative landscape: "Thrust up between his mind and heart / Enormous cones of myth and art" (227). Auden's notion of properly limited art is not isolated to *New Year Letter*, but is evident elsewhere in his work, such as in his naming of the seventh section of *The Dyer's Hand* "The Shield of Perseus," where Perseus'

shield, which he used as a mirror to slay Medusa, operates as an analog for the mediation of properly limited art between "mind and heart." In light of this mediation, Auden begins to express gratitude for the gift of poetry.

For the remainder of the poem, Auden continues to express a purgatorial tension that strains between the geographical, mental, and spiritual displacement inherent in human experience, and a subsequent movement toward returning to place as well as the gratitude he feels for this development. The poet often expresses this tension in an apophatic tone. He makes this purgatorial register explicit as he continues his discussion of the particular northern English "locality" that he loves, maintaining that in this place he became aware of: "Self and Not-self, Death and Dread" (228). Yet this first notion of self awareness leads not only to his knowledge of death, but develops an empathy for "Others" as well as a desire to "civilize and to create" (228). His consciousness of other humans and his desire to form a community with them, as well as his interests in poetic creativity allows him to seek a place where this community might flourish. Yet he argues that too often "our political distress" causes humans to perceive their "liberty / Not as a gift from life with which / To serve, enlighten, and enrich," but instead each individual "worships in obscene delight / The Not, the Never, and the Night" (235). Auden again highlights the positive only by contrasting it with the negative. But he does end up emphasizing a positive potential place, conveying his desire to construct the "Just City now" (238).

Auden, however, first defines this pursuit of the "Just City" again in negative terms. He asserts that this community will only form with the recognition that: "Aloneness is man's real condition" (238). Therefore, an ordered understanding of

human individuality that bears in mind that each individual must ultimately choose for themselves to love others, as well as that they will alone be judged for their actions, might lead toward the community of the "Just City," which he again articulates in negative terms as the: "'The Nowhere-without-No' that is / The justice of societies" (239). After recognizing the individual human limitations, Auden then articulates the positive aspects of the "Just City," whose "form is truth, whose content love" (240). At the intersection of truth and love, Auden finds "homes of happiness and peace" and "a unity of praise" to construct the "Just City" (240). Again eliciting a sense of praise, he envisions great hope in this city. However, no city like this exists yet.

The poet therefore explains the limitations of his poetic voice, articulating why he so frequently adopts an apophatic tone in the poem. He imparts this by stating: "All that we can always say / Is: true democracy begins / With free confession of our sins" (241). Conscious of human aloneness and individuality, Auden contends that "all real unity commences / In consciousness of differences" (241). Though seemingly counterintuitive, by recognizing this human individuality, community and connection with others might begin: "We need to love all since we are / Each a unique particular / That is no giant, god, or dwarf, / But one odd human isomorph," "live since we are lived, the powers / That we create with are not ours" (241). Empowered by this attachment with others, the poet argues that community must be created by some outside spiritual force.

After an arduous journey up the purgatorial climb, Auden sings a grateful invocation to God at the mountain's apex. Auden's purgatorial tension in the poem therefore leads him to more cataphatic affirmations of this spiritual force, the Christian God he recently returned to in 1939. For instance, he begins to call out to God using

"O's," a distinct register of gratitude for Auden, making positive declarations of God's attributes through his creation: "O Unicorn among the cedars," "O Dove of science and of light," "O Ichthus playful in the deep / Sea-lodges," and "O sudden Wind that blows unbidden" (241-242). Further invoking God, he declares himself receptive to the gifts that might be given to him, crying: "O Voice / Within the labyrinth of choice / Only the passive listener hears," as well as: "O Clock and Keeper of the years, / O Source of equity and rest" and "It without image, paradigm / Of matter, motion, number, time" (242). The near breathless succession of exclamations affirming the multitudinous aspects of an infinite God conveys Auden's wonder at and gratitude for this purgatorial journey toward God. Gratefully chastened, he then beseeches God to: "Disturb out negligence and chill, / Convict our pride of its offence / In all things, even penitence" (242). Convicted of this pride, the difficult work of constructing the "Just City" might begin. Auden continues his entreaty, where through this receptivity to divine love, he might receive the gift that will move him back into place. He articulates this by imploring: "Instruct us in the civil art / Of making from the muddled heart / A desert and a city" (242). The poetic gift then might permit a situation "where / The thoughts that have to labour there / May find locality and peace" (242). The poet seeks this purgatorial tension in part because, by finding a "locality," he returns to a sense of place.

This "locality and peace" imbues the poem with a tone of gratitude, which Auden continues in the final section of the poem as Auden addresses his muse Elizabeth with gratitude: "Dear friend Elizabeth," where he beseeches her to "lead my youth / Where you already are and bless / Me with your learned peacefulness" (242). In *New Year Letter*, Auden has been at pains to regain a sense of place where he might express his

gratitude for the "calm *solificatio*," or enlightenment, that he witnesses: "A warmth throughout the universe," which "each for better or for worse / Must carry round with him through life, / A judge, a landscape, and a wife" (242-243). Expressing gratitude for this "warmth" and for the gift of poetry that his muse helps him receive despite his failures, Auden states that "always there are such as you / Forgiving, helping what we do," describing forgiveness as an important component of the gift Auden receives (242-243). The poem concludes with the vision that "every day in sleep and labour / Our life and death are with our neighbor," a predicament that ends, at least in the poem, in the warm radiance of "love," which "illuminates again / The city and the lion's den" (243). Fittingly, Auden closes the poem with a tension that emphasizes the choice always confronting each human individual. He expresses notes of gratitude for his poetic gift and for divine and neighborly love, which illumines the path to the "Just City," yet also acknowledges that the corrupt path to the "lion's den" always remains a possibility.

In *New Year Letter,* Auden continues utilizing the elements of epistolary verse that he employed in "Letter to Lord Byron." The poem serves as a public witness to and warning against displacement and trauma, as well as an attempt to move from displacement and trauma to return to place and healing. The poem is furthermore a private letter to his friend seeking to move from a place of isolation toward community. Auden also operates within the poetic tradition of Horace and Pope, ridiculing folly and vice while encouraging virtue. He does so through multiple modes of discourse, witnessing and articulating a diverse range of human experience, whether personal, philosophical, anecdotal, or religious. I will continue to demonstrate his poetic witness in the following chapter, which considers what I call his mythic witness. Auden's mythic

witness uses myth as a lens to consider the displacement and trauma in the world around him, as well as seeking a return to place through his poetic gift, for which he expresses gratitude.

CHAPTER THREE

Mythic Witness: W.H. Auden and Søren Kierkegaard on Possibility and Necessity

Auden further enacts his poetic witness through the use of myth, which enables him to revivify and better understand the displaced world around him. Myth offers him the occasion to limit the role of the artist, while yet opening the poet and the reader to realms of poetic possibility. He recurrently seeks to articulate this interplay between Art and Life, aesthetics and human experience, in his poetry and prose. Richard Kearney again provides an insightful meditation that corresponds and enlarges upon Auden's own consideration of this place of convergence between aesthetics and human experience:

> Life is lived, as Ricoeur reminds us, while stories are told. And there is a sense in which the untold life is perhaps less rich than a told one. Why? Because the recounted life prises open perspectives inaccessible to ordinary perception. It marks a poetic extrapolation of possible worlds which supplement and refashion our referential relations to the life-world existing prior to the act of recounting. Our exposure to new possibilities of being refigures our everyday being-in-the world. So that when we return from the story-world to the real world, our sensibility is enriched and amplified in important respects. In that sense we may say that *mimesis* involves both a free-play of fiction *and* a responsibility to real life. It does not force us to make a Yeatsian choice between 'perfection of the life or of the work'. (132-133)

Kearney's defense of the richness of the told life expands our "ordinary perception," permitting a robust imaginative life without allowing it to completely engulf our actual life. Aesthetics and human experience are complementary, where mimesis serves as an aperture though which the artist might see and witness to an expanded vision of reality.

Moreover, Kearney's citation of Ricoeur is apt, as Ricoeur helps to further elucidate the achievements of Auden's mythic witness. For Ricoeur, a distance always exists between literature or a work of and its author, audience, and "initial" context (38).

Ricoeur contends that this "distanciation" permits "an infinite range of interpretations," enacting a "recovery of the initial event of discourse [that] takes the form of a reconstruction starting from the structure and the inner organization of the specific modes of discourse" (38). This sort of reconstructive interpretation "is always an attempt to overcome a distance, it has to use distanciation as both the obstacle and the instrument in order to reenact the initial event of discourse in a new event of discourse that will claim to be both faithful and creative" (38). I argue that the displacement that Auden witnesses to creates a corresponding sort of "distanciation," where this very distancing furthermore enacts the possibility of a reconstructive act of return to place.

Ricoeur further argues for the sense of possibilities that poetry might engender, particularly through its use of myth. He asserts that: "Through fiction and poetry new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality…in this way everyday reality is metamorphosed by means of what we would call the imaginative variations that literature works on the real (43). Ricoeur distinguishes poetry from reality while yet emphasizing the significant impact that poetry has on reality. Ricoeur continues: "poetic language is that language that above all effects what Aristotle, in his consideration of tragedy, called the *mimesis* of reality. Tragedy, in effect, only imitates reality because it re-creates it by means of a *mythos*, a fable that reaches its deepest essence" (43). Ricoeur's understanding of mimesis corresponds with that of Kearney's, where mimesis allows for imaginative possibility while maintaining a proper order between the artist and the world. Moreover, Ricoeur asserts that myth plays a vital organizing role in this representation of reality. Myth in this sense acts as a liminal space,

casting light on reality through "imaginative variations" by providing a form or frame with which the reader might walk through.

Myth therefore provides a nuanced vision of both imagination and limitation. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard discusses this dialectical tension at length in his work, utilizing the terms possibility and necessity instead of imagination and limitation. More importantly, Kierkegaard's work on possibility and necessity exerted an abiding effect over Auden. This influence has long been established. Edward Mendelson, for instance, demonstrates this well by discussing the trajectory of Kierkegaard's influence on Auden, whom Auden turned to when he became dissatisfied with the thought Freud and Marx (129-141). Kierkegaard argues that a disordered view of this dialectical tension induces despair, whereas a more balanced vision leads to the development of the human self.

And for Auden, myth serves as a mirror, a reflection of the different components of the self and how dialectical tensions help illustrate the formation of the self. In his collection of essays, *The Dyer's Hand*, Auden titles one section of the collection "The Shield of Perseus." Perseus uses his shield as a mirror in order to see Medusa through it and thereby slay her. Auden therefore saw this mythological account as a metaphor for art's mediating effect on human existence. Consequently, art may provide an ordered reflection that should be embraced, or a disordered image that should be avoided. Though Auden's mythic mirrors may seem bleak at times, they are meant to provide the reader a hope of movement from displacement to a return to place as well as isolation to community. Edward Casey advances a similar perspective, observing that "the desolation occasioned by displacement may be superseded by an authentic consolation that no

longer leaves us isolated from others, from place, or from out own divided selves" (199). Auden's poetic witness to displacement and a return to place, specifically through his use of a mythic mirror, will therefore be the primary focus of this chapter, particularly in the lyric poems "Musée des Beaux Arts," "Under Which Lyre," "In Sickness and in Health," "The Shield of Achilles," and "Ode to Terminus." Kierkegaard's use of dialectical tensions will also feature prominently, namely possibility and necessity, as well as the distinctions between genius and the apostle, concentrating especially on *The Sickness Unto Death* and "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," furthermore exploring Auden's own use of possibility and necessity, as well as his distinguishing between the roles of the genius and the apostle.

Auden frequently returns to myth as a mirror to life in his work, providing a poetic witness to a disturbing kind of displacement, yet also indicating the need to seek a return from this dislocation. In "Musée des Beaux Arts," published in December 1938, he discusses the figure of Icarus. The use of the Icarus myth allows the poet an aesthetic witness that anticipates the traumatic suffering global conflict and totalitarianism will inflict on the world in World War II. The poem induces the reader to assume the role of the ploughman, a character unconcerned with the suffering of Icarus, or to become horrified by the lack of concern about and ordinariness of the traumatic suffering in the world. Both responses engender a sense of disorientation, intending to provoke repentance or a means of acting on behalf of those that suffer, both of which offer a return to place.

"Musée des Beaux Arts"

An ekphrastic poem, "Musée des Beaux Arts" contemplates the trauma and displacement depicted in Pieter Brueghel's *The Census at Bethlehem*, *The Massacre of the Innocents,* and *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, as well as Brueghel the Younger's *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap*. These paintings are exhibited at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels, which Auden visited. The poem focuses on human suffering and the banality of evil, which the poet immediately addresses in the opening lines:

> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters: how well they understood
> Its human position; how it takes place
> While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along (1-2).

The slow, plodding prosaic line that ends this first stanza embodies the banality of evil expressed in the poem, where the ordinary activities of individuals continues despite the suffering that occurs in the world. Initially, the poem seems to reinforce how evil deeds happen everyday, where little can be done by the individual to stop them. It is true, of course, that humans cannot hope to stop every single evil deed. Yet the poet attempts provokes the reader out of their indolence and into moral and ethical action against these ordinary evil deeds. Moreover, Auden's return to the Anglican Church in 1939 makes it probable that he would have thought this reaction to suffering both loving and neighborly in the Christian sense.

The poet demonstrates the displacing ordinariness of evil in the second stanza, first by alluding to *The Census at Bethlehem,* then *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap,* and finally *The Massacre of the Innocents*. Referring to *The Census at*

Bethlehem, the poet acknowledges that "the aged are reverently, passionately waiting / For the miraculous birth" (5-6). In these lines, the poet witnesses the "aged" and devout figures awaiting the Incarnation of Christ in the "miraculous birth." Yet in the same breath, he also observes that "there always must be / Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood," an allusion to *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap* (6-8). The poet recognizes that there are people who yearn for deliverance like the "aged," while the young remain unaware of or unconcerned with the quotidian traumatic suffering of the world. The "aged" have lived long lives filled with choice, which represent affirmative kinds of limitations, and therefore long for further possibility. Yet the young have vast realms of time and possibility before them, and in turn desire the limitation of choice, desiring the particularly and pleasure of present actions like skating, rather than waiting for some future event.[1] Furthermore, the poet envisions the banality of evil in *The Massacre of the Innocents*. In this painting, the poet recognizes that "the dreadful martyrdom must run its course," referring to the infants that King Herod ordered executed because he was threatened by the birth of Christ, foretold to become a king (10). Furthermore, as the massacre of the innocents occurs as a response to the Incarnation of Christ, "the dreadful martyrdom" might also be an allusion to the Crucifixion. Yet even during these traumatic religiously and politically motivated executions, the animal world proceeds without any awareness of its happening: "Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse / Scratches its innocent behind on a tree" (12-13). These lines further emphasize the ordinariness of human suffering, which occurs while life carries on.

Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and the Icarus myth are, however, the focal point of the poem. Auden's use of this myth not only permits him to contemplate the banality of evil, but to incorporate the world of myth into the poem, particularly Icarus and his master craftsman father, Daedalus. Daedalus created the labyrinth for King Minos to imprison the minotaur, but Daedalus and his son Icarus were in turn imprisoned in the labyrinth because Daedalus advised Ariadne to give Theseus a thread in order to find his way out of the labyrinth. Daedalus also crafted wings out of feathers and attached them with wax to his son's back so that he might escape, but Icarus' wings melt as he flies too close to the sun. Curiously absent from the poem, Daedalus' absence seems to allow the poet the space to speculate the place of the artist within the human community in light of the ordinariness of suffering.

The poet expresses this view of suffering in his long, unhurried lines, which communicate the languid indifference toward suffering conveyed in Brueghel's painting, where "everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster" (14-15). The painting foregrounds a man plowing a field, yet he turns away from Icarus' suffering to focus on his work. The poet speculates that he "may / Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry, / But for him it was not an important failure" (15-17). A human plummeting from the sky remains unimportant to him because he has a selfish, narrowed vision; his routine and work are more significant to him. Taking the trouble to regard the affairs of others around him might divert him from his work. The farmer only cares that the sun continues to shine as it has everyday, growing the plant's of the field, not that a fellow human has died, or that some amazing event has occurred: "a boy falling out of the sky" (20). The "expensive delicate ship" similarly ignores this death, instead continuing on with its

journey. The poet therefore utilizes the Icarus myth to consider the banality of evil and how ordinary people can become desensitized to the suffering of other humans. Daedalus' conspicuous absence from the painting and the poem perhaps indicates that he is offstage watching the events unfold, witnessing human inaction in the face of trauma and displacement. Alternatively, as a craftsman, he could be envisioning the power his creation holds to help or harm. Ultimately, the poet seems to further witness to the possibility that human inaction in the face of suffering need not be the case, that humans can ought to actively respond to the suffering of others. The reader therefore faces an ethical choice between perpetuating this reaction of ignoring the suffering of others, or acting to prevent suffering if possible, or if not, to lament it.

"Under Which Lyre"

Also adopting a mythic witness, "Under Which Lyre" considers the university setting in the wake of the trauma and displacement of World War II, ultimately employing myth to limit the role of the poet, while yet opening realms of poetic possibility that enlarge human experience. Published in 1946 for *Phi Beta Kappa* at Harvard University, "Under Which Lyre" is littered with mythic characters, like Ares, the Greek god of war, and Zeus, the supreme Greek god never far from violence. The poem begins by juxtaposing the virtuous pursuit of learning with the traumatic horrors of war by associating Ares with the young World War Two veterans returning to college campuses and Zeus with their college professors also returning from war, the latter of which held far less dangerous military roles than their younger counterparts. The student warriors possess "nerves that never flinched at slaughter / Are shot to pieces by the shorter / Poems of Donne," while the professors "back from secret missions / Resume

their proper eruditions, / Though some regret it" (16-18, 19-21). Ares and his adherents eventually become followers of "[p]recocious" Hermes and "[p]ompous" Apollo (34, 36).

These two camps, Hermes as the playful, disinterested artist figure, and Apollo as a prideful, unrivaled bureaucrat, depict the disordered world of the university for the poet. The playfulness of Hermes' sons, evident in the humor of the poem, possesses an affirmative limiting function, casting them as poets not legislators, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. Auden depicts Apollo's sons, on the other hand, as bureaucrats that run the government:

> The sons of Hermes love to play,
> And only do either best when they
> Are told they oughtn't;
> Apollo's children never shrink
> From boring jobs but have to think
> Their work important. (55-60)

The speaker privileges Hermes and his children for the rest of the poem, though he considers Apollo and his sons at greater length. He describes Apollo as a natural leader; Hermes would make a muddle of a government if he were leader: "He loves to rule, has always done it; / The earth would soon, did Hermes run it, / Be like the Balkans" (70-72). Moreover, Apollo would do well as a leader "if he would leave the self alone" (67). This haunting line demonstrates Apollo and his followers' distorted sense of their own selves, as well as the selves of those around them. Instead, Apollo envies Hermes:

> But jealous of our god of dreams,
> His common-sense in secret schemes
> To rule the heart;
> Unable to invent the lyre,
> Creates with simulated fire
> Official art. (73-78)

The poet distinguishes between competing modes of poetic creation, the ideal and organic art of Hermes on the one hand, and the sanctioned propaganda of Apollo. Auden then relates his satirical critique of the pragmatism of college administration more closely to the situation his audience, Harvard undergraduates, face: "And when he occupies a college, / Truth is replaced by Useful Knowledge" (79). Apollo usurps university authority with his practical education, yet the poet remains confident that "[h]e shall be defied" (127). Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, itself an impractical entity, comes to the scholars aid. With this aid, Hermes and his followers exercise a sort of guerilla warfare: "Our intellectual marines, / Landing in little magazines / Capture a trend" (136-138). The poem ends with the speaker comically imploring Hermes' adherents to obey the hilarious "Hermetic Decalogue," which proposes to flout the Apollos in power in universities (149). The poet's playfulness, similar to his use of humor in "Letter to Lord Byron" and *New Year Letter*, leads his audience to laughter, but also permits a serious critique of the university. Auden perceives the world of the university to be disordered in the traumatic and displacing aftermath of World War II, where his witness to that disorder might restore a measure of order.

Returning to his earlier work, by 1940, Auden had been witnessing the displacement and trauma of totalitarianism wreaking havoc in Europe for years, particularly through the displacement of the human self. He observes this displacement by critiquing a disordered focus on either possibility or necessity, rather than holding both in a dialectical tension. In the commencement address he gave to Smith College on June 17th, 1940, titled "Romantic or Free?", he describes the connection between possibility, which he frequently refers to as freedom, and necessity. He then attempts to

hold out a sense of hope for freedom at a time when traumatic global conflicts like World War Two question the possibility of freedom. Moreover, he cites art and myth as a way to promote freedom and necessity.

Auden's maintains a friendly yet instructive tone in the commencement address, at one point reminding his audience "I said this address would be a sermon," all the while emphasizing the important connection between possibility and necessity (71). In the address, the poet asserts that "freedom is a conception of conscious human beings. In a famous definition it has been called 'the consciousness of necessity.' And just as there are two aspects of freedom, there are two aspects of necessity, the casual and the logical" (64). In these lines, he argues for a distinction between freedom and necessity, while yet a maintaining a dialectical tension between the two. He continues discussing the significance of this tension, contending an inordinate focus on necessity might lead to totalitarianism: "Freedom *from,* the rejection of something, is absolutely conditional on freedom *to*, the acceptance of something. There is no escape from necessity. Someone has defined a dictatorship as a state where everything that is not forbidden is obligatory. In that case the human being has always lived under a dictatorship and always will" (64). He here emphasizes the interrelation between possibility and necessity by simultaneously considering "the acceptance" over "the rejection of something" on the one hand and the inherent limitations of finite human beings on the other.

Auden utilizes the tension between possibility and necessity as a response to the traumas of World War II and the violence perpetrated by the totalitarian regimes, the aggressors in the displacing global conflict, believing that myth plays an important role in this response. He contends that the terrors of the world are not caused by monsters, but by

humans: “We have no reason to mistrust our world, for it is not against us. Has it terrors, they are *our* terrors; has it abysses, those abysses belong to us; are dangers at hand, we must try to love them” (71). He moreover argues that myth might help humanity better understand the current precarious situation: “How should we be able to forget about those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myth is about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us” (71). Myth might therefore offer the courage and vision to turning from “dragons” into “princesses,” which he reiterates in the commencement’s closing words of instruction and benediction: “May all of your personal dragons turn into Prince Charmings, and may you live through this midnight of darkness and despair to see not a Golden Age—we must never demand that—but a United States which you have helped to bring a little nearer to that true democracy where freedom dwells because it must, necessity because it can” (71-72). Rather than platitudes, Auden offers these college graduates myth, as well as dwelling in the dialectical tension of possibility and necessity as a means to navigate the difficult waters of the traumatic and displacing global conflict occurring at the time of the address.

The Sickness Unto Death

Auden’s interest in possibility and necessity bears a striking resemblance to Kierkegaard’s work on this tension, who had a distinct influence on the poet’s thought, particularly in Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*. In *The Sickness Unto Death,* written in the spring of 1848 and published on July 30th, 1849, Søren Kierkegaard considers the achievement of self, the manifestation of a displacing despair if the self

lacks development, as well as possibility, at time also called freedom, and necessity at length. Despair is in fact the sickness unto death for Kierkegaard. Howard and Edna Hong, who translated, edited, and wrote the introduction to the most recently scholarly edition of *The Sickness Unto Death*, describe despair as an advanced stage of anxiety (*xi*). Kierkegaard characterizes despair as arising from a dialectical tension, namely when one aspect of that tension is emphasized at the expense of the other. He asserts in his *Journals and Papers* that he aims to disorient his readers away from a circumscribed view of the world and to move toward a fuller vision: "My task was to pose this riddle of awakening: a balanced esthetic [sic] and religious productivity, simultaneously" (qtd. in Hong and Hong *xx*). Indeed, by attempting to awaken or displace his reader, Kierkegaard's work takes on the decided tone of a witness. Moreover his balance of the aesthetic and religious resembles an effort at a stereoscopic vision of the human person.

Though scholarship has long demonstrated the influence of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard on Auden's thoughts,[2] I believe that more work needs to be done on Kierkegaardian thought in Auden's work. For instance, Joel Rasmussen considers "the manner in which Kierkegaard as a 'religious poet' distinguishes himself from the 'secular poet' of Romantic irony by fostering what he considers authentic Christian 'witness' in the world according to the 'Word' of the divine poet embodied by Christ" (150). Rasmussen continues, asserting that: "A category that became increasingly important for Kierkegaard in his later years was that of the *Sandhedsvidne*, or 'witness to the truth.' While potentially misleading, it is no exaggeration to say that fostering the growth of readers and of himself into a witness to the truth is the ideal telos or objective of

Kierkegaard's work as he comes to understand his authorship" (154). Auden adopts this same sort of "'witness to the truth'" in his poetry, one that scholarship has overlooked.

Moreover, scholarship has neglected to focus on the importance of Kierkegaard's conception of possibility and necessity on the poet's work. Kierkegaard in particular uses the pseudonymous author Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death* to demonstrate this dialectical tension and intentionally displace his reader. Anti-Climacus is connected to another pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author of *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Climacus sees himself as the adjudicator between modern philosophy and Christianity. He therefore has to be a disinterested third party, which he plays as a humorist.[3] Climacus therefore exists somewhere on the margins between Kierkegaard's religious and ethical stages. Anti-Climacus, however, does not represent the opposite of Climacus. Edna and Howard Hong make the compelling case that: "The prefix 'Anti' may be misleading, however. It does not mean 'against.' It is an old form of 'ante' (before), as in 'anticipate,' and 'before' also denote a relation of rank, an in 'before me' in the First Commandment" (*xxii*). Anti-Climacus epitomizes the ideal Christian and therefore comes before Climacus in rank. Even though Anti-Climacus' views align more or less with Kierkegaard's own, he uses this pseudonym to prevent the reader from thinking that Kierkegaard casts himself as the ideal Christian. The Hongs moreover argue that Kierkegaard's authorship pursues "'anthropological contemplation'" and cast *The Sickness Unto Death* as a "consummation" of this task, citing his *Journals* as evidence (*x*). In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard, therefore achieves the culmination of this anthropological endeavor because in it he contemplates the complexities of the human self.

In *The Sickness Unto Death,* he describes selfhood as a dynamic process, as something that one achieves. He contends that this process of the development of the self involves a variety of syntheses: "A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self…If, however, the relation relates to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self" (13). Ultimately, Kierkegaard argues that these syntheses are between God and human, hence tensions such as "the infinite and the finite." These syntheses or tensions become extraordinarily important for Auden, particularly "freedom," which Kierkegaard also calls possibility, and "necessity."

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, he affirms the significance of an awareness of both possibility and necessity in the selfhood's development. He associates possibility with freedom, potential, and the imagination. He links necessity with the finite and actual, affirmative limitations. Kierkegaard asserts that in terms of possibility, an individual cannot have too much awareness of his or her limitations. It does not logically follow that an individual would want to reduce possibility if it is emphasized too much, but rather to build up the other end of the spectrum, necessity. The same reasoning holds true if the self lacks possibility. He asserts that fostering an awareness of both possibility and necessity remains essential to developing selfhood:

> Just as finitude is the limiting aspect in relation to infinitude, so also necessity is the constraint in relation to possibility. Inasmuch as the self as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude is established, is potential, in order to become itself it reflects itself in the medium of imagination, and thereby the infinite possibility becomes manifest. The self is potentially just as possible as it is necessary, for it is indeed itself, but it has the task of becoming itself. Insofar as it is itself, it is the necessary, and insofar as it has the task of becoming itself, it is a possibility. (35)

The development of the self occurs through the synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of necessity and possibility. Necessity acts as the important limiting function, distinguishing the self as one thing and not another. Describing the lack of necessity, Kierkegaard states: "What is missing is essentially the power to obey, to submit to the necessity in one's life, to what may be called one's limitations. Therefore, the tragedy is not that such a self did not amount to something in the world; no, the tragedy is that he did not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is is a very definite something and thus the necessary" (36). Possibility, on the other hand, embodies the imaginative vision of what the self might grow toward, a vision of the infinite. Selfhood, therefore, encompasses both possibility and necessity, and maintaining a balanced sense of both becomes vital.

Kierkegaard furthermore asserts that when the self lacks either possibility or necessity, the self falls into despair. He suggests two kinds of despair, possibility's despair, which lacks necessity, and necessity's despair, which lacks possibility. With possibility's despair, Kierkegaard argues that the "self becomes an abstract possibility," at which point "possibility seems greater and greater to the self; more and more it becomes possible nothing becomes actual. Eventually everything seems possible, but this is exactly the point at which the abyss swallows up the self" (36). He also asserts that: "What the self now lacks is indeed actuality, and in ordinary language, too, we say that an individual has become unreal" (36). Kierkegaard concludes that this despair leads to a displacement of the self: "it [the self] flounders in possibility until exhausted but neither moves from the place where it is nor arrives anywhere, for necessity is literally that place; to become oneself is literally a movement in that place. To become is a movement away from that place, but to become oneself is a movement in that place" (36). Kierkegaard

here sheds light on Auden's consideration of displacement. The self that focuses inordinately on possibility, lost in realms of abstraction with no definite place to enact that possibility, impedes its maturation and thereby displaces itself from its proper place. Despair, therefore, becomes a form of displacement of the self.

Kierkegaard depicts necessity's despair as a stifling sort of constriction, arguing that "without possibility a person seems unable to breathe" (39). He also describes necessity's despair as "being dumb" and like expressing "pure consonants," compared to the image of possibility's despair as a child babbling vowels (37). Moreover, he characterizes this type of despair as deterministic and fatalistic: "The determinist, the fatalist, is in despair and as one in despair has lost his self, because for him everything has become necessity" (40). He again uses the language of constriction, stating that: "The self of the determinist cannot breathe, for it is impossible to breathe necessity exclusively, because that would utterly suffocate a person's self" (40). Therefore, like concentrating solely on possibility, an overemphasis on necessity leads to despair.

He then claims that in order to combat this disordered development of self, a person must believe in the infinite, which for Kierkegaard means the Christian God, a belief that leads to the possible. Kierkegaard calls this "the dialectic of believing," asserting that: "To understand that humanly it [the dialectic of belief] is his downfall and nevertheless to believe in possibility is to believe" (39). He maintains that believing in the infinite that exists outside of, but in relation to, the finite and definite self avoids both being lost in the abstraction of possibility's despair and the suffocating constriction of necessity's despair. Moreover, he points out the absurdity and contradiction of this "dialectic of believing," arguing that: "To understand that humanly it is his downfall and

nevertheless to believe in possibility is to believe" (39). This contradiction nonetheless might lead to resolution: "This [possibility] is the good health of faith that resolves contradiction. The contradiction here is that, humanly speaking, downfall [human finitude] is certain, but that there is possibility nonetheless" (40). The contradiction resolved through faith, Kierkegaard considers gaining this possibility as the miraculous.

"In Sickness and in Health"

In "In Sickness and in Health," a poem which contains clear traces of Kierkegaardian thought, myth allows the poet to avoid both forms of Kierkegaardian despair as he depicts a similar "dialectic of believing" in the "grace of the Absurd" (75). Auden demonstrates this dialectical tension strikingly in his use of form, utilizing an Italian sonnet framework to develop a unique, macro-sonnet of fourteen stanzas rather than fourteen lines, a significant discovery that has gone unnoticed within Auden scholarship. Moreover, form meets content in the poem as he also shows this tension thematically through love and the human body, a fitting emphasis for a love poem. In the poem, both love and the body progress from disorder to order. Auden achieves this through mythic characters that embody disordered love, where Love personified enters the poem and reorders the lovers. He critiques viewing love as an abstract ideal, which he believes a monolithic view of love that leads to a displacement of self and "metaphysical despair" (54). In the poem, he rejects a shortsighted Romantic perspective that believes in a sublimated ideal love, which he also expresses in the commencement address he gave at Smith College the same year the poem was written: "The term romantic I have chosen rather arbitrarily to describe all those who in one way or another reject the paradoxical, dialectic nature of freedom" (64).[4] This comment goes some way to explain his challenge

of Romantic notions throughout his career, which he thought were disingenuous and potentially damaging to the reader because they might lead to the idealism and abstractions of possibility's despair. Auden therefore frequently emphasizes that the poet must tell the truth, particularly in love poems, which Auden humorously contends in his 1938 poem "Oh tell me the truth about love." Ultimately, in "In Sickness and in Health," he levies a limiting critique of the Romantic sublimation of ideal love, while also crafting a fictive mythic world that allows for great possibility.

Scholarship has long recognized the importance that Auden placed on attempting to represent truth in his poetry, whether moral, political, or otherwise. He famously kept "September 1, 1939" out of his Collected Poems because he believed the line "We must love one another or die" to be duplicitous (88). Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb states this well when she asserts that for Auden "the function of art is to break all magical spells" (29). Gottlieb is undoubtedly thinking of his famous lines from his essay "Writing," stating that: "'Poetry is not magic. In so far as poetry, or any other of the arts, can be said to have an ulterior purpose, it is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate'" (27). The poet therefore must disenchant the reader from lies about poetry, love, and the world around them. He pursues his poetic disenchantment by conceiving of poetic landscapes where he hopes knowledge of human experience are authentically and imaginatively recognized through its possibility and necessity. He achieves this through poems like "In Praise of Limestone," where the limestone landscapes form an extended metaphor of both the physical body and the internal metaphysical realm of the human mind.

Scholars have also noted the Kierkegaardian echoes in the poem. For instance, Wetzsteon references Auden's use of the absurd in "In Sickness and in Health," as well as his emphasis on Don Juan in the poem, both of which bear a Kierkegaardian influence (89, 90).[5] She also compellingly establishes "In Sickness and in Health" as the turning point of Auden's view of marriage, though her chapter focuses on tracing the fluctuation of Kierkegaard's influence on Auden throughout many of his works.[6] And in the line "Beloved, we are always in the wrong," Alan Jacobs discerns "Kierkegaard's famous claim that in relation to God we are always in the wrong" from *Either/Or* (57, 78). However, scholarship has not elaborated on the significance of *The Sickness Unto Death* on "In Sickness and in Health," particularly through a consideration of the imaginative powers possible in this dialectic between possibility and necessity, or the sicknesses that might develop by neglecting this tension.

Auden achieves this tension between possibility and necessity deftly in the form of the poem. A macro-sonnet composed of fourteen stanzas, each stanza an octave with an ababccdd rhyme scheme, "In Sickness and in Health" brilliantly mirrors a fourteen line Italian sonnet. The poem utilizes the Italian sonnet framework, which proposes an argument by presenting a problem in the octave, introduces a shift in the poem between the eighth and ninth lines through the *volta*, and in the sestet offers a resolution to the problem conveyed in the octave.[7] That Auden revised the initially published poem of fifteen stanzas into the final published version with fourteen stanzas, which John Fuller notes occurs in 1966, twenty-six years after it was first published, indicates an explicit desire to form the poem into a macro-sonnet modeled after the Italian sonnet (393).[8] The central theme of the poem, love, as the poet attempts to join earthly and divine love,

further connects it to the Italian sonnet, which historically adopts love as its subject. Moreover, using the Italian sonnet form heightens Auden's rendering of possibility and necessity, offering him a frame within which to depict the potential disorder of privileging one impulse over the other, as well as pursuing a harmony between the two spheres. Michael Hurley and Michael O'Neill articulate that the sonnet achieves this tension exceptionally well: "no other genre presents with such clarity the artist's paradox that expressive freedom might be won through constraint" (95). Using the framework of the Italian sonnet therefore allows Auden to put forward an argument about human love that captures the significance of both possibility and necessity in a much more discursive manner than a fourteen line sonnet would, while retaining its suggestive structure.

Scholarship has not identified the poem's unique Italian sonnet framework, nor have I found a similar structure in the rest of Auden's poetry. Eavan Boland and Edward Hirsch observe Auden's his earlier experimentation with the sonnet form: "W.H. Auden expanded the sonnet in proportion 12:9 in the third section of his sonnet sequence "The Quest" (297). Mendelson calls the poem "a large-scale rhymed essay on the theology of marriage" (153). Stewart Cole contends that the "poem's opening stanzas comprise an extended apostrophe to the speaker's beloved" (389). And Fuller considers it as "written in large-gestured, somewhat Yeatsian octaves" (391). Yet critics have failed to discern the explicit Italian sonnet structure of the poem.

Scholars have, however, provided important dialogue about the general nature of the characters that inhabit Auden's poetic landscapes, notably the individual, as well as whole communities. Stephen Schuler comments on both by citing Auden's statement that a community is composed of "members united...by a common love of something other

than themselves" (qtd. in Schuler 156). However, there is a dearth of critical discourse on Auden's poetics of the human body within these landscapes. In the poem "In Sickness and in Health,", the poet maneuvers from a disembodied "crowd / Of poaching hands and mouths who out of fear / Have learned a safer life than we can bear," which do not possess a definite and intact body, to the fully configured bodies in the lines, "Till the performance of those offices / Our bodies, Thine opaque enigmas, do, / Configure Thy transparent justice too" (30-32, 86-88). In the poem, the poet seeks to unite the individual parts of the body through love and marriage. Additionally, the poet further achieves this unity through the mythic mirror of art, particularly through the mythic characters Tristan, Isolde, and Don Juan. He places these characters that have for centuries been depicted in Western visual art, music, and literature because they provide images of the limitations and potential displaced of human affections as they reside in the body. Yet these limitations and displacement prove necessary for Auden, for they not only provide an authentic expression of the pain that the human body suffers, but moreover the healing and recovery that can occur through a truthful knowledge of the possibilities and limits of the body.

In the poem, written for Chester Kallman and published in 1940, the speaker attempts to provide an accurate witness to the possibilities and limitations of romantic love by witnessing to disordered love as much as ordered love. Auden dedicated the poem years later to Maurice and Gwen Mandelbaum, from whom Auden rented a room while teaching at Swarthmore (Carpenter 263). Mendelson cites Maurice stating that "his wife apparently hoped that the dedication would magically ward off the impending failure of their marriage," a magical view of love that Auden clearly does not endorse

(155). He takes the title from the Anglican marriage order of service after having recently returned to the Anglican faith of his childhood at the time of writing the poem. Love and marriage are creative acts, particularly through the human body, though for Auden they perform wider creative functions in the poem as well. The poet also envisions romantic love as aesthetically mediated through myth that represents a dialectic of possibility and necessity.[9] The mythic characters he utilizes in the poem are Tristan and Isolde, and Don Juan, characters whose narratives he felt a great fondness for. The poet's mythic witness conceives of displacement through disordered love, as well as the suffering and sacrifice that order love requires. He also envisions a return to order through a recognition of divine love that reorients the romantic human love in the poem.

The poem begins with the conflation and displacement of different parts of the human body as they face a state of potential disorder:

> Dear, all benevolence of fingering lips
> That does not ask forgiveness is a noise
> At drunken feasts where Sorrow strips
> To serve some glittering generalities (1-4).

From the beginning of the poem, the poet asserts the disorder of selfish love and the necessity of suffering involved in romantic love. He cautions against merely feeling a self-centered "[s]orrow" as a disordered form of suffering for love. Without seeking the "forgiveness" of the partner, the lover's gesture remains a languishing "noise / At drunken feasts" serving "glittering generalities," thereby focusing on the abstract idea of love, not the particular body of another. This self-centered separation of individual from a community of lovers is further emphasized at the end of the stanza: "And all our senses roaring as the Black / Dog leaps upon the individual back" (7-8). The "Black / Dog" has long embodied an image of death within the British cultural consciousness, from Sir

Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* to Robert Louis Stevenson's pirate in *Treasure Island* to the 1971 song by Led Zeppelin. The poet therefore indicates the awareness of the ultimate disordering and threat of destruction to an individual's body and love: death. He also makes implicit in this image the necessity of the individual to seek some sort of community in order to identify and avoid this threat of destruction.

Ultimately a displacing agent, the "Black / Dog" possesses a "genius" for distorting the good. The landscape the "Black / Dog" enacts disorder in the landscape it dwells in, the human body, understanding "too well / What code of famine can administrate / Those inarticulate wastes where dwell / Our howling appetites" (9-12). The "Black / Dog" has therefore taken up residence in the human body, exploiting the psychical "howling appetites" all humans possess. One would think that the poet would seek to eliminate death from the lover's realm. However, he does not, instead paradoxically instructing his heart, and his lover, not to:

> Think lightly to contrive his overthrow;
> No, promise nothing, nothing, till you know
> The kingdom offered by the love-lorn eyes
> A land of condors, sick cattle, and dead flies. (13-16)

The poet understands too well the narcissistic tendencies of humanity. He urges a death to the individual self where in order to join with another in community, in this instance in marriage, where the two become one, one must sacrifice selfish concerns in order to perceive and heed the needs of the lover. Without this death of narcissistic individualism, imaginative and psychological displacement ensues, where "desolation" and "destruction" threaten "Love's imagination / And chase away the castles and the bears," with (17, 18, 19). Self-centered love here corrupts the personified "Love's imagination" that conceive the variety of romantic and erotic ideals of love. Through this narcissism,

the human imagination becomes disordered, desiring safety above the difficult sacrifices of the self that are necessary in loving another person.

The poet concludes the stanza by returning to a familiar image of the self, the mirror, commenting on the human tendency toward narcissistic individualism: "How warped the mirrors where our worlds are made" (21). Mirrors function as a metaphor for the self in Auden's work, a self-image distorted beyond repair, yet a mirror still worth gazing into. In his essay "Hic et Ille," he asserts: "Most, perhaps all, our mirrors are inaccurate and uncomplimentary, though to varying degrees and in various ways. Some magnify, some diminish, others return lugubrious, comic, derisive, or terrifying images," moreover mentioning: "We shall be judged, not by the kind of mirror found on us, but by the use we have made of it, by our riposte to our reflection" (93, 94). Auden proceeds to reflect on the human tendency toward narcissism, taking up the myth of the well of Narcissus as an imaginative example of this focusing on self rather than on others. Without other mirrors, the human self remains solipsistic and distorted. This distortion results in the displacement of the lovers' bodies in "In Sickness and in Health":

> We are the deaf immured within a loud
> And foreign language of revolt, a crowd
> Of poaching hands and mouths who out of fear
> Have learned a safer life than we can bear. (29-32)

A crowd for Auden does not constitute a community, but "loves neither itself nor anything other than itself'" ("The Virgin & The Dynamo" 63). This crowd in the poem signifies humanity's too often selfish loves, composed of displaced body parts, "poaching hands and mouths." Continuing to develop the argument of the Italian sonnet in the architecture of poem by focusing on the problem of human love in the first eight stanzas,

the poet conveys that in their fear lovers too often choose to remain solipsistic and displaced rather than seeking a community which would require sacrifice and suffering.

Two important mythic mirrors for Auden are Tristan and Isolde, as well as Don Juan, who are at differing extremities of displaced love. Gottlieb emphasizes the mythic nature of the characters, contending that Tristan and Isolde embody a "mythic representation of that 'sin of the high-minded, sublimation,'" a sin the poet mentions later in the poem (36). Moreover, these mythic characters provide the poem an aesthetic mirror, reflecting that though they seem to be perfect lovers wholly focused on love, they care merely for ideal love and neglect the actual body of their lover, where: "[n]ature by nature in unnature ends: / Echoing each other like two waterfalls" (33-34). Tristan and Isolde act as mirrors of ideal love to one another, which seems beautiful, as waterfalls are an example of great beauty, but for sentient beings like humans, this mirroring that displaces actual love for its ideal simply leads to a dehumanizing position as they become like the inanimate landscape. Tristan and Isolde's unyielding concentration on ideal love does not reconfigure the displaced "poaching hands and mouths" of human lovers:

> Tristan, Isolde, the great friends,
> Make passion out of passion's obstacles,
> Deliciously postponing their delight,
> Prolong frustration till it lasts all night (35-38)

Because they prolong their disembodied and displaced ideal love, they experience Kierkegaard's "possibility's despair." Their ideal love, which abstracts the self and the other, leads to a reduction of the actual self and the individual becoming unreal. Ultimately, this despair causes a displacement of the self. Auden describes their despair while discussing Richard Wagner's rendering of Tristan and Isolde in his essay "Balaam and His Ass," arguing that though Wagner likely intended their duet in the Second Act to

signify a sexual consummation, this does not actually occur in the opera (121). Auden comments on the significance of this lack of consummation, stating: "[w]ere they to yield [to one another sexually], they would know something about each other and their relation would change into a one-sided idolatry, a mutual affection, or a mutual indifference" (122). Rather than allowing their love to become physical, and therefore human, they "perish lest Brangaene's worldly cry / Should sober their cerebral ecstasy" (39-40). The lovers die in order that their love remain solely ideal and therefore displaced, not heeding the warning cries of imminent danger from Brangaene, Isolde's handmaid.

The poet then conjures "up their opposite, / Don Juan," who though their antithesis, remains in a corresponding displaced state (42). Don Juan is "so terrified of death he hears / Each moment recommending it / And knows no argument to counter theirs" (43-44). The converse of Tristan and Isolde, Don Juan does not enact his love ideally, but in a purely physically manner. Yet Don Juan's love also remains displaced and dehumanized. Frightened of the sacrifice and suffering that the death of his narcissism would require, he selects the seemingly less painful route, at least for him, of objectifying every woman that he seduces. He experiences "necessity's despair," which displaces the self by constriction and does not allow for possibility. He chooses a deterministic form of despair that leads to a suffocation of the self.

Though opposites, Auden contends that these mythic characters mirror one another, reflecting not the same behaviors but the same displaced desires. He further characterizes the displacing narcissistic love of Tristan and Isolde, as well as Don Juan by calling them "lovers of themselves" (51). Their selfish loves do not result in any creative act, but instead terminate in "metaphysical despair" and in "passionate negation," the

former phrase alluding to Kierkegaard's two forms of despair (54, 56). Fuller depicts these mythic characters as "false alternatives," further describing them as "lovers that seek to escape the demands of time and the body either by rejecting them or by destroying them, and in their double failure produce the sublimation of Eros into political violence" (392). Tristan, Isolde, and Don Juan therefore offer "false alternatives" to human romantic love, seeking either possibility or necessity at the cost of the opposite impulse to their own peril.

Auden affirms the displaced nature of these mythic characters in his essay "Balaam and His Ass":

> Like Don Giovanni, Tristan and Isolde are purely mythical figures in that we never meet them in historical existence: we meet promiscuous men like the Duke, but never a man who is absolutely indifferent to the physical qualities of the women he seduces; we meet romantically passionate engaged couples, but never a couple of whom we can say that their romantic passion will not and cannot change into married affection or decline into indifference. Just as we can say that Don Giovanni might have chosen to collect stamps instead of women, so we can say that Tristan and Isolde might have fallen in love with two other people; they are so indifferent to each other as persons with unique bodies and characters that they might just as well—and this is one significance of the love potion—have drawn each others's names out of a hat. (121)

By completely disregarding the "unique bodies and characters" of their lovers or potential lovers, these mythic characters remain in a state of displacement. Don Juan suffers from what Kierkegaard considers "necessity's despair." His determinism compels him to sleep with any woman, or every woman, becoming a necessity to him without the possibility of love or even sensuality, a point which Auden affirms in "Balaam and His Ass": "Don Giovanni's pleasure in seducing women is not sensual but arithmetical; his satisfaction lies in adding one more name to his list which is kept for him by Leporello" (119). On the other hand, Tristan and Isolde's suffer from possibility's despair. Their "romantic

idolatry," as Auden calls it, has nothing to do with the other person, only with achieving a pure possibility (121). He further argues that they do not yield to physical consummation "because their passion is not for each other but for something they hope to obtain by means of each other, Nirvana, the primordial unity that made the mistake of begetting multiplicity, 'der Finsternis die sich das Licht gebar,'" a line spoken by Mephistopheles as he first appears to Faust near the beginning of Goethe's drama *Faust* and translates as "the darkness which gave birth to light" (122). Yet, the reader need not remain in this state of displacement with Tristan, Isolde, and Don Juan. By contrasting these "purely mythical figures" to actual humans, Auden declares that these "false alternatives" might lead humans to a return to place.

Utilizing the narrative of these mythic characters as a mirror into which to gaze, Auden nimbly dramatizes human experience in order to avoid despair and pursue a resolution in the poem:

> Beloved, we are always in the wrong,
> Handling so clumsily our stupid lives,
> Suffering too little or too long,
> Too careful even in our selfish lives (57-60)

The poet clearly addresses his lover Chester Kallman here, which Cole compelling casts as an apostrophe (389).[10] But these lines also have a more universal tone, readily yet tenderly witnessing to the often errant actions and motivations of human behavior, especially relating to romantic love. The poet depicts humankind as selfishly gazing inward and neglecting to be concerned about others. The stanza focuses on suffering, both formally and thematically, as the tetrameter line "suffering too little or too long," shorn of one metrical foot, becomes prominent by virtue of being the lone indented line in the stanza. Thematically, the poet claims that by "[s]uffering too little" humans too

frequently engage in self-satisfying behavior, rather than compromise and sacrifice, which though perhaps inconvenient, allows romantic love and friendship to flourish. Conversely, humans suffer "too long" by hyperbolizing problems, as if individual tragedies and sufferings were the only such instances in human existence.

The poet moreover relates suffering to possibility and necessity. In his commencement speech at Smith College, he argues: "All freedom implies necessity, that is to say, suffering. The only suffering that can be avoided is the terror of running away from it" (70). He continues with humor, though also earnestness, by critiquing the U.S. for evading suffering: "If you will forgive my saying so, I think if America has a national vice it is thinking suffering vulgar and purely negative" (70). In "In Sickness and in Health," the poet interrogates this "purely negative" view of suffering by depicting mythic figures that embody solipsistic exaggerations and "[t]he decorative manias we obey," rather than experience suffering and sacrifice for the other out of love (61). Despite humanity's obedience to these "decorative manias" and the temporary energy that they might provide, they are ultimately not a creative force, but "[d]ie in grimaces round us every day" (62). The poet therefore advocates for a pronounced turn away from these "manias" toward "Love's peremptory word" (73). And this swift turn toward Love personified undoubtedly signifies the God of Auden's newly rediscovered Anglican Christian belief.

The ensuing lines emphasize the displaced chaos incarnate in romantic love between humans. Auden conveys a distinct sense of religious reference at the end of the stanza, as Mendelson rightly points out, referencing the creation of the heaven and earth out of chaos with the Hebrew phrase "tohu-bohu," a phrase from the book of Genesis

often translated as formless and void (154). Out of this formless chaos "comes a voice / which utters an absurd command—Rejoice," a reference to God's paradoxical command to Abraham, where out of his willingness to sacrifice his long promised son Isaac, God gives him descendants that number the stars in the sky. This line moreover alludes to the "absurd command" Christ obeys, where out of the Crucifixion comes the Resurrection. And Auden furthermore alludes to Kierkegaard's emphasis on this absurdity, which Kierkegaard considers most prominently in *Fear and Trembling* (63-64). The poet maintains that both Abraham and Christ's circumstances require suffering, yet these circumstances paradoxically become creative, commanding the speaker to rejoice.

The poet then utilizes the Italian sonnet framework to employ a *volta* in the next stanza, which continues this development from suffering to rejoicing out of chaos through its allusions to the book of Job from the Hebrew Scriptures. The poet particularly emphasizes Love's creative act out of this chaos, indirectly suggesting Job's suffering and recovery. After the lover articulates the problems confronting love in the first eight stanzas, namely the disordered human body and displaced love, a striking shift occurs. In the poem's ninth stanza, the direct voice of Love enters the poetic world. The poet uses this shift to disorient the disordered human loves and move them toward resolution. This resolution takes place in the final six stanzas, which attempts a return to place by reordering of the human body and romantic love.

In this ninth stanza, the speaker of the poem shifts to the personification of Love, who possesses a tone and diction fashioned after the creative authority of God in Job, addressing a questioner within human self. Gottlieb discusses the "paradigmatic reservoir of sublime imagery" that Auden draws on in this stanza (37). Moreover, Jacobs observes

that the stanza demonstrates "God's act of speaking to the suffering Job out of the whirlwind," though neither critic emphasizes the creative nature of Love (79). The poet makes this tone of creative authority evident in the three questions posed in the stanza:

> *What talent for the makeshift thought*
> *A living corpus out of odds and ends?*
> *What pedagogic patience taught*
> *Pre-occupied and savage elements*
> *To dance into a segregated charm?*
> *Who showed the whirlwind how to be an arm,*
> *And gardened from the wilderness of space*
> *The sensual properties of one dear face?* (65-72)

The poet here demonstrates the creative power of the personification of Love as thinking human bodies into existing and teaching these bodies that are selfishly "[p]re-occupied" the rhythm necessary to move toward order in a "*dance*" with their partners. He further emphasizes this creative power with the use of nature metaphors, where Love generates these bodies and gardens out of nothing, a distinct Jobian reference: "*from the wilderness of space / The sensual properties of one dear face."* The distinct order of this stanza provides a contrast with the displaced body and disordered love of the opening stanzas, where Love takes "*odds and ends"* and creates "*[a] living corpus*." The poet makes the Jobian language of this stanza particularly conspicuous in the line: "*Who showed the whirlwind how to be an arm."* In the book of Job, Job experiences displacing suffering, loss of family, wealth, and land. Much of the book consists of the counsel his friends offer him, none of which seems very helpful. Near the end of the book, Job questions why this displacing suffering occurs. In response, God answers out of a whirlwind with rhetoric that the speaker mirrors in the remainder of "In Sickness and in Health."

The Italian sonnet framework allows the poet to beautifully reflect this newly reoriented sense of order around the turn of the poem, where divine love reorders the

romantic love of the poet. Auden cleverly utilizes the term "Rejoice" as a linguistic mirror between the speaker and Love, using the word three times in three successive stanzas: as the last word by the speaker in stanza eight, the first word by Love in stanza nine, and the first word in stanza ten (65; 66; 73). The speaker's response acts as a movement toward Love and demonstrates how Auden's critique of selfish displaced love offers a feasible alternative, one that is outward focused, combining the sensual and the spiritual, the present and the future. This love seeks a harmonic dialogue while moving away from monologic disorder, a dialogue in concert not only with the human lover, but with divine love as well. Therefore, after the turn, the speaker alternates between addressing his lover and Love. Instead of the former binary structure, their speech has a more resilient triangular configuration. The poem appears to serve as the liturgical wedding service for the lovers before God, which Mendelson discusses that Auden believes this poem to signify the marriage between he and Kallman (154-156). And the speaker's frequent use of the subjunctive, "lest" being the chief example, exhibits the lover's desire to build their love, in the present certainly, but also in the future, on this sturdy triangular structure (77).

After Love's intervention, the poet pursues a recovery from the displaced love that was initially called disordered, alluding to Robert Herrick, a poet that emphasizes a contrasting vision of love. Auden urges his lover: "Rejoice, dear love, in Love's peremptory word; / All chance, all love, all logic, you and I / Exist by grace of the Absurd" (73-75). This line echoes Herrick's Carpe Diem verse "Corinna's Going A-Maying":

So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night (65-68).

Auden's mirroring of Herrick's diction is pronounced. However, the speaker in Herrick's poem concentrates exclusively on the present sensual satisfaction of romantic love, which will fancifully turn into a myth of ideal love. Herrick's speaker emphasizes the divine power of the bodily senses through the act of sexual intercourse similarly to that of Tristan and Isolde, or Don Juan, as he narcissistically treats his lover with an indifference to her unique body and personhood. Auden's speaker, on the other hand, utilizes myth as a mediator for human life and for a recovery from displaced love, allowing the speaker to more fully consider his lover as a human with a body, both of whom owe their existence to the "Absurd." The poet achieves this recovery, perhaps absurdly, by first alluding to Herrick's poem calling for his beloved to a selfish, sensual love that will be sublimated into a myth of ideal love, then contradicting this myth by seeking an other-centered love, forming a real community between the love and the beloved.

Auden binds the poem together, along with his critique of displaced love through the means of forgiveness, sacrifice, and a response to God, appropriately enough, with a ring.[11] After uttering that lovers owe their existence to the "grace of the Absurd," the speaker asserts in the same breath that "without conscious artifice we die" (76). Auden layers this phrase with profound meaning. Gottlieb provides a helpful comparison of this line as a revision of Auden's famously redacted line from "September 1 1939": "We must love one another or die" (88). She claims that "We must love one another or die" possesses a sense of "self-divination," where 'without conscious artifice we die' indicates a looking outside of oneself (39). Gottlieb further contends that this line makes "a

fundamental distinction between divine and human forms of creation" (39). Yet there remains a significant connection between the two.

Furthermore, this line in "In Sickness and in Health" serves as an unambiguous communication of Auden's belief about the role of myth within humanity. By "conscious artifice" means the creation of art, such this poem, and the aesthetic mediation that figures like Tristan, Isolde, and Don Juan can provide as mythic mirrors reflecting human experience, as well as the "artifice" of the wedding ring. Additionally, the ring serves as an external physical "artifice" that not only symbolizes the love between two lovers, but reminds them of the "Love" that created them "*out of odds and ends*" and taught them "[*t*]o *dance into a segregated charm*." Moreover, the poet describes the ring as "conscious" because it signifies a choice freely made to become united in marriage with one other lover. Auden therefore asserts that this sort of "conscious artifice" permits a life giving freedom to humanity. By understanding the limits of humanity, by not allowing the present bodily and earthly reality an inordinate authority, and by refusing to "manufacture in our flesh / The lie of our divinity afresh," lovers thereby gain the freedom to love in an orderly fashion through an embodied love that also relies on an external transcendence (77-78). The poet continues to establish the profound emblematic, yet material significance of the wedding ring by entreating his lover to heed the prudence of his logic, while simultaneously seeking the voice that uttered the "absurd command" to: "Describe round our chaotic malice now, / The arbitrary circle of a vow" (79-80). Therefore, in contrast with the selfish suffering in stanza eight, the poet suggests after the turn in the ninth stanza that other-centered sacrifice might lead to a recovery from displaced love and toward possibility through creativity.

In what was once stanza ten, but was later excised, the poet contends that the sturdy triangular structure between lovers and Love, as well as Love's necessity, moves the lovers toward a recovery from displaced love and forming a healthy community. And he asserts that art plays a role in this reorientation, where: "[t]he scarves, consoles, and fauteuils of the mind / May be composed into a picture still" (81-82). A console is an ornamental architectural bracket fixed to the exterior of a building. A "fauteuil" is a wooden chair with an exposed wooden frame. In these lines, Auden conveys that human psychological clothing and architecture might be known through art, as if into a painting. The poet then indicates that this interior structure can only be known "[n]ot by our choice but by our consent" (84). Though seemingly synonyms, the poet sees "choice" as indicating the creation of the circumstance surrounding an act, whereas "consent" is an agreement to some outside entity that produces a given situation, which the poet suggests is more consonant with human experience. Therefore, he implores his lover to heed the wisdom of consenting to an external force, Love:

> beloved, pray
> That Love, to Whom necessity is play,
> Do what we must yet cannot do alone
> And lay your solitude beside my own (86-88).

The poet again alludes to Kierkegaard's notion of necessity, where in one sense, "necessity is play" to Love because the Christian God has no affirmative limitations. In another sense, God, the infinite, became finite in the person of Christ, and perfectly fulfilled what a limited self might be. Moreover, Auden likely has Kierkegaard in mind when talking about the reality of human solitude. For instance, he argues in his commencement address to Smith College titled "Romantic or Free?": "There can be no democracy unless each of us accepts the fact that in the last analysis we live our lives

alone. Alone we choose, alone we are responsible. So many people try to forget their aloneness, and break their heads and hearts against it. To use a simile of Kierkegaard's, 'Only those who accept their aloneness can be substantives or verbs: those who reject it remain merely adjectives, conjunctions, adverbs'" (70-71). Kierkegaard's grammatical simile advocates that, rather than simply modifiers, individuals become active beings by accepting the choice and responsibility that belongs to the individual alone, an emphasis on aloneness that recalls Auden's *New Year Letter*.

By the reason of the Tristan and Isolde and Don Juan myths, despair leads to the displacement of the self and therefore a displaced, selfish love. But Auden finds possibility in these myths. These stories offer a reflection, a cautionary tale of what could happen. He pleads with Love that "reason may not force us to commit / That sin of the high-minded, sublimation, / Which damns the soul by praising it (89-91). The poet does not desire sublimated ideal love. No, he seeks actual love. After consenting to Love, the poet appeals to Love:

> Force our desire, O Essence of creation,
> To seek Thee always in Thy substance,
> Till the performance of those offices
> Our bodies, Thine opaque enigmas, do,
> Configure Thy transparent justice too. (92-96)

Utilizing the Italian sonnet framework to pursue resolution in final six stanzas, the poet makes a creative act by turning toward the "Essence of creation." By "substance," he means the philosophical term for the essential nature or being of something. Therefore, if the lovers seek the substance of the Christian God as Auden intends, the God of Love, Creator of all, and an ordered community of Being by His triune nature, the lovers might achieve true love, creativity, and community by reflecting the just and morally right, a

"transparent justice," by turning to Love, who fully personifies all these realities, despite the at times perplexing actions of the human body, which the poet humorously though tenderly calls "thine opaque enigmas."

Continuing to provide a resolution through the Italian sonnet structure, stanza thirteen returns to the beloved and the circular wedding ring that might allow a recovery of the displaced self. The poet implores his lover to marriage, which constantly calls one to limiting, sacrificial, yet creative acts so that their love may stay potent:

> That this round O of faithfulness we swear
> May never wither to an empty nought
> Nor petrify into a square,
> Mere habits of affection freeze our thought
> In their inert society. (105-109)

Though love may turn ineffectual through neglect, the poet indicates that the constant attention to the sacrifice necessary through "conscious artifice" can keep a love flourishing. The wedding ring, a "conscious artifice," serves as a creative symbol of the sacrifice of selfishness, of seeking a balance between possibility and necessity inherent in romantic love and the lover. The poet desires that this symbol keeps its balanced shape, where the love does not disappear nor become to rigid. In order to prevent this loss of love, he entreats Love to "permit / Temptations always to endanger it," believing that difficulty will lead the lovers to recognize their limitations while also seeking Love, thereby striking a balance between possibility and necessity (111-112).

The wedding ring corresponds to other creative symbols that Auden utilizes in the poem, the mythic mirrors Tristan, Isolde, and Don Juan in this poem, whose displaced selves offer an aesthetic reflection that might lead to a recovery of from this displacement. These mythic characters offer a warning to lovers: "Lest, blurring with old

moonlight of romance, / The landscape of our blemishes, we try / To set up shop on Goodwin Sands" (113-115). Though these mythic figures offer the antithesis of the kind of love he thinks human lovers ought to pursue, Auden clearly believes art plays a central role in the development of human life. In the concluding lines to his commencement speech to Smith College, he imbues it with a moral tone: "You, Class of 1940": "Never forget that by nature we are all bad. It is only by art that we become good" (69). Auden achieves precisely this moral vision in the poem.

Furthermore, rather than allow the displaced ideal love to shipwreck the lovers on "Goodwin Sands," a large sand bank off the coast of Kent that has shipwrecked many vessels, the speaker seeks instead to "love soberly," while yet remaining in the tension of uncertainty (108). The poem concludes with the poet addressing Love one last time:

> O Fate, O *Felix Osculum*, to us
> Remain nocturnal and mysterious:
> Preserve us from presumption and delay,
> And hold us to the ordinary way. (117-120)

Auden here achieves a remarkable Keatsian negative capability without attempting to force the Christian God out of the equation, by "loving soberly" and abiding in the mystery of God, while yet affirming and ascribing to the dogmas of the Christian Church. And in the final line, he calls he and his lover to "the ordinary way," as in the common way together. But "ordinary way" is also the way that is ordinal, or ordered. Auden therefore, fittingly enough, ends the poem by entreating Love to keep their love ordered and from displacement.

Throughout "In Sickness and in Health," Auden offers a poetic witness to the tension between possibility and necessity, a significant dialectic for him, particularly regarding matters of human love. Focusing on this Kierkegaardian tension allows the

poet to progress from disorder to order in the poem by adopting the formal structure of the Italian sonnet. With this framework, he creates a distinctive macro-sonnet that possesses the features of a sonnet while operating on a larger scale by posing a problem in the first eight stanzas, introducing a *volta* in the ninth stanza, and providing a resolution in the final six stanzas. Auden's thematic emphasis on love and the human body in the poem furthermore demonstrates the tension between possibility and necessity. This tension produces for him a stereoscopic vision of the world, where the limits of necessity allow him to recognize the all too often selfish desires of human love. Moreover, the enlivening freedom of possibility envisions a resolution to these narcissistic romantic desires for the poet, particularly as he weds human to divine love. Binding together possibility and necessity, form and content, "In Sickness and in Health" encapsulates Auden's moral vision of love, making it one of his most significant lyric poems.

"The Shield of Achilles"

Like "In Sickness and in Health," "The Shield of Achilles" allows myth and the fictive world of the poem it helps create to effectively and accurately limit the role of the artist, while yet opening realms the great freedoms of the imagination, a maneuver which enlarges human experience. Moreover, myth helps establish a witness to displaced reality in the poem, Auden creates a bleak world in the work. Though often gloomy, this witness ultimately provides a path of reorientation back toward place. The poet makes the significance of myth and place immediately recognizable in "The Shield of Achilles," as the title indicates that the mythical character Achilles plays a role in the poem, albeit an absent one. Furthermore, the poem appears in the eponymous volume *The Shield of*

Achilles, which contains many mythic references. For instance, in "Bucolics," the name of the first section of the volume as well as the series of poems that constitute the section, mythic figures abound, like Hermes, Zeus, and Clio, each appearing in poems named after the particular places they inhabit, such as mountains, islands, and rivers.

The second section of the volume, titled "In Sunshine and in Shade," not only witnesses to both myth and place, but further depicts Auden's continued vision by imagining the place between sunshine and shade. It also demonstrates the importance of the tension between possibility and necessity in his poetry, with the possibility of light and the limitations of night. In the poem "Fleet Visit," the poet writes of sailors that are caught in between land and sea, by fighting for their community, yet in reality having none. Furthermore, these sailors ultimately face an obliteration of self in the face of advancing technology and capitalism, where he depicts the dehumanization and displacement of sailors who inhabit an "unamerican place," who "are not here because / But only just-in-case," and are useless to their country outside of war because "[t]hey neither make nor sell" (8, 11-12, 17). Yet these dehumanized sailors are ironically contrasted with the expensive ships that house them, which are created "[t]o be pure abstract design," a juxtaposition that further depicts the sailors as humans turned abstract and machine-like (27). Another poem in this section, "The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning," discusses the poet as mythmaker as well as truth teller, citing Dante's rendering of Beatrice as a mythic character in his poetry. Auden humorously critiques poets who fabricate and deceive based on the prevailing political climate, yet he ultimately casts the poet as a mythmaker, which might tell a truth of its own, ending the poem with the question:

What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
Can trick his lying nature into saying
That love, or truth in any serious sense,
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence? (77-80)

The first poem in the section "In Sunshine and in Shade" is "The Shield of Achilles," though even before the poem begins the poet places mythic characters in the volume. In the epigraph to the section, the poet states:

Guard, Civility, with guns
Your modes and your declensions;
Any lout can spear with ease
Singular Archimedes

The poet makes this poetic exhortation to "*Civility*," the personification of the secular position of the poet as ordinary citizen, to defend the English language and poetry against those that would do damage to language, which can be done by "any lout" since all humans possess the capacity for language. The poet also invokes Archimedes, who was killed by a Roman soldier as Syracuse was being sacked because he refused to leave his handiwork, his mathematical diagrams, because he was a mathematician and inventor in Ancient Greece. Inventors and craftsmen frequently inhabit Auden's poetry, such as Daedelus in "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Hephaestus in "The Shield of Achilles." These figures allow him to speak to poets, and in this instance to exhort them to guard the English language, for the language and its craftsmen are constantly under attack.

Intelligible by the title "The Shield of Achilles," the object of concern in the poem becomes the shield crafted for Achilles, the Greek warrior and hero of *The Iliad*. Thetis and Hephaestus are the two characters in the poem. Thetis is a sea nymph, wife of Peleus, and Achilles' mother. Hephaestus is the Greek god of fire and blacksmiths. In some renderings of Greek myth, she once saved Hephaestus after he was cast out of Olympus

by his mother Hera, a fall which permanently injured his leg. A sense of displacement therefore pervades the myth. For instance, it was at her wedding that the seeds of discord that led to the Trojan War were sown, where Paris was charged with the unenviable task of selecting the fairest between Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena, and where Greek and Trojan alike experience the displacing and traumatic consequences of war. After Hector kills Patroclus in the Trojan war, Achilles' close friend whom Hector mistakes for Achilles since Patroclus dons Achilles armor, Achilles needs new armor to avenge his friend's death. Thetis later asks Hephaestus to create a shield for her son Achilles, which he readily completes. Like his adaptation of the Icarus myth in "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Archimedes in the epigraph to "In Sunshine and in Shade," Auden uses a master craftsman in "The Shield of Achilles," though Hephaestus plays a more explicit role than Daedalus or Archimedes. And like "Musée des Beaux Arts," the poet writes with the trauma of totalitarian regimes firmly in mind, Hitler's Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia.

The opening lines of the poem furthermore evoke a distinct sense of displacement and trauma. The poem begins with Thetis looking over Hephaestus' shoulder at the shield he crafts for Achilles with expectancy, hoping to find "vines and olive trees, / Marble well-governed cities, / And ships upon untamed seas" (2-4). The "vines and olive trees" represent not only food and drink, but cultivation and culture unique to a specific place, the Mediterranean. The "well-governed cities" and the "ships" indicate order and community. Instead of finding these characteristics of culture and human flourishing, Thetis becomes disoriented by what she perceives: "An artificial wilderness / And a sky like lead" (7-8). She discerns a displaced landscape, one distanced from the human and the natural world and therefore rendered inhuman and unnatural, a displaced and

traumatized landscape that persists throughout the poem. Mendelson astutely identifies a further displacement depicted on this shield, where language and names have become dislocated from meaning: "Thetis and Hephaestus have as yet no names—they are *she* and *he*—which means they are incapable of first-person responsibility. *She* neither acts nor speaks but only looks over *his* shoulder. The syntax of the poem makes *his* acts the impersonal work of his hands, not of himself" (176). The reader therefore encounters a poetic world in which humans, nature, and language are all fragmented and displaced.

The second stanza continues this depiction of displacement, particularly through a pronounced movement away from community. Hephaestus renders place uninhabitable on the shield, where instead of citizens gathering together to live and farm, Thetis encounters: "A plain without a feature, bare and brown, / No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood, / Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down" (9-11). He creates a placeless land that has been scorched of its identity and connection to humanity, where grass, crops, community, and culture are unable to flourish. For the poet, this dislocation mirrors the displacement the Nazi regime commits during World War Two and continues to be committed by Stalinist Russia after this global conflict:

> Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
> An unintelligible multitude,
> A million eyes, a million boots in line,
> Without expression, waiting for a sign. (12-15)

The poet's brilliant echoing maneuver recalls a similar achievement in "In Sickness and in Health," as well as his use of the Shield of Perseus in the structure of *The Dyer's Hand*, where the blank land reflects the empty, desolate, placeless world around it. In these lines, the poet offers a disturbing witness to the human capacity for brutality and displacement through the hands of totalitarian regimes. Rather than providing a whole or

healing vision of the human self, Thetis' gaze into this mirror causes a fragmentation of the self. Contrasting from Auden's poetic witness, which seeks to develop sensitive eyes that attempt to witness honestly to place, an incomprehensible "multitude" gathers, with its chilling and expressionless "million eyes" and "million boots in line," ready for the word to obey their order. These soldiers wait to unleash horrible devastation and dislocation from place and self, imbuing the poem with a sense of dread and impending trauma. Mendelson expresses well this impersonal nature of the "multitude" depicted on the shield: "Because his work is impersonal, faces, names, and speech cannot exist in the world he creates on the shield. All is unintelligible, chimerical, expressionless; numbers like a million that are beyond the human ability to count; fragments and fetishes of persons—eyes and boots—instead of persons themselves" (176). Mendelson's comments demonstrate a further connection to the disorganized body in "In Sickness and in Health," one that enacts the sort of distanciation that Ricoeur discusses, between part and whole, human, self, and other.

The poet's use of a disembodied voice makes the displacement reflected on the shield further evident at the beginning of the third stanza: "Out of the air a voice without a face / Proved by statistics that some cause was just / In tones as dry and level as the place" (16-18). The disembodiment of this "voice without a face," which suddenly appears out of thin air, demonstrates the potential effects of displacement, where the sundering of humanity from place might contribute to a rending of personhood within humanity, leaving both place and humans without their distinctive features. Cold and impersonal "statistics" are used to compel the crowd toward injustice while calling the action "just." Moreover, this totalitarian vision of this world reflected on the shield does

not allow room for democratic debate and dialogue, eliciting only angst and fear: “No one was cheered and nothing was discussed” (19). Furthermore, the totalitarian regime intimidates the crowd into groupthink and abstractions: “They marched away enduring a belief / Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief” (21-22). Neglecting to think of the necessity of their own human bodies, emotions, and selves, the multitude has lost their humanity. The totalitarian regime has shorn humanity of both possibility and necessity in the world Hephaestus crafts, engendering a double dose of despair.

Repeating the first line of the poem, Thetis “looked over his shoulder,” expecting again to see a vision of human flourishing, but again she only sees displacement and trauma (23). In this second vision, Thetis seeks the religious rituals that further designate human flourishing. She looks for “ritual pieties” and “sacrifice,” but finds none (24, 26). Instead, she gazes into the mirror of the shield, “the shining metal,” and finds absence: “Where the altar should have been, / She saw by his flickering forge-light / Quite another scene (28-30). The altar has been replaced by a mechanism of war, a forge. This lack of spiritual presence also betrays the lack of another component of human flourishing for the poet, gratitude; without this sort of religious ritual there can be no gratitude and no thanksgiving.

The following stanza continues to depict the displacement and trauma totalitarianism inflicts. Governmental figures implement their autocracy by fragmenting the place they rule: “Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot / Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)” (31-32). The “[b]arbed wire” fence not only indicates the segregation that this autocratic regime imposes, but also the violence with which they achieve this dislocation. Auden moreover employs the word “arbitrary” as a suggestive,

charged image, which not only indicates a prison and place of execution chosen at random, but also to reflect the regime's unrestrained use of authority. The governmental figures, presumably mid-level management, lounging and lethargic, crack jokes, though their joking assumes a tinny, humorless tone in this displaced environment, where the poet's use of parentheses presents their joking as an aloof indifference toward the suffering of others. Moreover, this displaced world assumes an infernal character, as the earlier mentioned "cloud of dust," along with the heat of the day causing the sentries to sweat, conveys an image outer circle of hell in Dante's *Inferno* (20).

The governmental officials and military soldiers continue carrying out a reign of fear in the fifth stanza, where a crowd of people gathers to watch the regime's traumatic exploits:

> A crowd of ordinary decent folk
> Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
> As three pale figures were led forth and bound
> To three posts driven upright in the ground. (34-37)

The fearful mood of the poem seems to indicate that the totalitarian regime forces the crowd of ordinary people to witness the unfolding trauma, yet they also participate in this trauma as spectators of cruelty as they do not protest, recalling the banality of suffering demonstrated by the ploughman and the sailors in "Musée des Beaux Arts." Placelessness and the dehumanizing effects of totalitarianism have rendered the crowd doubly displaced, excluded from explicit action in the executions, yet complicit in the crimes committed on the shield through their unwillingness to speak up on behalf of those being executed. Moreover, the poet makes a pronounced allusion to Christ's Crucifixion with the "three pale figures" that are being led to their execution, casting a vision of the suffering of Christ and the two thieves on crosses.

The corporeal and metaphysical meet in the allusion to Christ at this point in the poem, in Christian theology the Incarnation of God. Yet a sense of displacement endures in the poem. The poet acknowledges that: "The mass and majesty of this world, all / That carries weight and always weighs the same, / Lay in the hands of others" (38-40). The shield depicts a static parody of the "mass and majesty" of its world compared to the dynamic real world, where objects' physical and spiritual weight never varies, remaining inert and unable to develop. In one sense, the poet uses "mass and majesty" to indicate the substance and beauty of this world. In another sense, the phrase alludes to the celebration of the Eucharist in the Christian Mass, the fundamental expression of the Incarnation of Christ, and the "majesty" of the glory of this Incarnation. Yet the mirror world of the shield depicts a lack of "mass and majesty," where humanity and place remains stagnant, and religion absent or inaccessible, "in the hands of others."

Though the crowd's witness and apathy toward the traumatic suffering inflicted by the autocratic powers implicates their guilt, the poet indicates that they are also displaced victims, as "they were small / And could not hope for help and no help came: / What their foes liked to do was done" (40-42). The smallness of the crowd demonstrates their restriction of being, where their totalitarian rulers treat them not as humans but as statistics abstracted and manipulated in order to accomplish the will of the State. The poet characterizes this loss of self as a living death: "their shame / Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride / And died as men before their bodies died" (42-44). The displacement they experience through disembodiment, loss of self, and any measure of possibility or necessity leads to despair and a meaningless existence.

Thetis gazes over Hephaestus' shoulder once more in the following stanza; once more she glimpses a displaced traumatic vision without the hope of possibility or necessity. She anticipates seeing "athletes at their games" with her third glance, as well as "dance" and "music" (46, 47, 48). But instead of these exemplars of culture and human flourishing, she discerns only "a weed-choked field" (52). This uncultivated space conveys a deepening sense of placelessness that only gets worse. In the following stanza, the specific human action on this field reveals the most graphically violent action in the poem. The stanza depicts an abandoned child in a place that has become a negative space: "A ragged urchin, aimless and alone, / Loitered about that vacancy" (53-54). The reader feels empathy toward this sad boy, wondering where his parents might be. Perhaps they have been killed by the totalitarian regime in power. This much remains uncertain in the poem. It is clear, however, that the boy has become a product of this regime, exhibiting a measure of violence as "a bird / Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone" (54-55). Even more heartbreaking, he adopts the attitude toward human suffering reflected around him:

> That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
> Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
> Of any world where promises were kept,
> Or one could weep because another wept. (56-59)

The familiarity of violence in this world, where rape and murder have become a matter of course for the boy, disheartens the reader, creating a sense of displacement in her. The boy has not been taught the weight of entering into a pledge with a fellow human, growing so tragically dislocated from both humanity and place that he has not been taught the empathic capabilities to weep for his fellow humans that experience suffering. Furthermore, this world where promises are not kept and no one mourns with those that

suffer recalls the poem "Their Lonely Betters," written two years earlier, which ends: "We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep, / Words are for those with promises to keep" (15-16). In "Their Lonely Betters," he claims that making promises and grieving with those that suffer are two foundational aspects of humanity, serving as a witness to both what has happened, and what might happen if humans do not seek a return to place, healing, and empathic connection to other humans. Neither occurs in the shield that Hephaestus forges, further communicating the despair of this world because of its lack of either possibility or necessity.

Auden reinforces the sense of displacement and trauma reflected in Achilles' shield in the final stanza of the poem. The poet portrays Hephaestus as frigid toward his creation; the only description of him in the poem casts him as "thin-lipped" and he limps away from Thetis without uttering a word (60-61). Thetis does not speak either, but rather voices an unintelligible sob: "Thetis of the shining breasts / Cried out in dismay / At what the god had wrought" (62-64). She weeps because she knows her son's doomed fate to this world of unfeeling and unflinching war: "the strong / Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles / Who would not live long" (65-67). The poem ends on a dismal note, cautioning the reader to the human capacity for evil through the shield's mirror world, where only despair, displacement, and trauma seem imaginable, rather than possibility and necessity.

Yet, by depicting this world as a reflection in a mythic shield, the poet utilizes this bleak world to counsel the reader away from creating a displaced and traumatic reality lacking either possibility or necessity. The poet's mimetic use of myth recalls Kearney's emphasis of the "free-play of fiction *and* a responsibility to real life," where myth allows the possibility of a fictional world while preserving a sense of necessity by remaining

grounded in reality. Kearney further considers this mimetic interplay by again citing Ricoeur, illustrating "what Ricoeur calls the circle of triple *mimesis*: (1) the *prefiguring* of our life-world as it seeks to be told; (2) the *configuring* of the text in the act of telling; and (3) the *refiguring* of our existence as we return from narrative text to action" (133). Auden utilizes myth to achieve this mimetic figuring in "The Shield of Achilles," establishing a poetic witness that encourages a recovery of place.

"Ode to Terminus"

Auden achieves precisely this sort of dialectical mimetic possibility in the face of displacement and trauma through myth in the poem "Ode to Terminus." In the poem, the poet offers a Kierkegaardian critique of artists and scientists by invoking Terminus, the Roman god of boundary markers. In light of the displacement and trauma in the world, his invocation serves as a witness to human finitude and need for a transcendent power outside of humanity. The poet's mythic witness of Terminus therefore leads to imaginative possibility and finite necessity by discerning fiction from reality. Yet rather then focusing on the tensions of possibility and necessity, the poet's mythic witness focuses on the proper role of the poet, particularly as a genius and not an apostle, terms that I argue Auden adopts from Kierkegaard's essay "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle."

Though scholarship has neglected the important influence Kierkegaard's essay "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" had on Auden, he refers to this essay on many occasions. For instance, in his prose, Auden wrote an introduction to and selected the excerpts included in an anthology of Kierkegaard's works, titled *The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard*. In the introduction, which was published in 1952, he considers

Kierkegaard as "a genius not as an apostle" (*xxx*). Moreover, Auden continued his meditations on "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" in his essay titled, appropriately enough, "Genius and Apostle." Most importantly, the impact Kierkegaard's essay has on Auden's poetry is evident in the poem "Ode to Terminus," a poem that demonstrates Auden's stereoscopic witness to displacement and trauma, as well as attempting to seek a return to place.

Kierkegaard's thoughts on authority in "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" are in general a critique of Hegelian thought that claims the content of faith may be certified by reason. Specifically, he considers the situation of the Danish Lutheran pastor Adolf Peter Adler, who maintained that he had a revelation directly from Christ and lost his job as a pastor as a result. Stephen Evans notes that Kierkegaard, believing Adler's case to embody "the chief problem of the modern age, namely its abandonment of religious authority," wrote at least three versions of a book on this situation, *The Book on Adler* (143). Yet he did not publish the book because he was afraid how it would negatively affect Adler's life (143). Kierkegaard did, however, publish revised portions of the book that did not include Adler's name. As Howard and Edna Hong point out, part of the third version of the book was published as *Two Ethical-Religious Essays* in 1849, which included the essay "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" (*vii-viii*)

In "Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle," as the title suggests, Kierkegaard distinguishes between a genius, which exists in an immanent realm, and an apostle, which inhabits a transcendent realm. Genius occurs within an individual based on giftedness and cultivation of these gifts, whereas God calls an Apostle in spite of any

development of talent to do so. In the essay, Kierkegaard makes this distinction evident: "A genius may be a century ahead of his time, and therefore appear to be a paradox, but ultimately the race will assimilate what was once a paradox in such a way that it is no longer paradoxical" (92). He continues: "It is otherwise with an Apostle. The word itself indicates the difference. An Apostle is not born; an Apostle is a man called and appointed by God, receiving a mission from him" (92).[12] Kierkegaard makes this distinction in order to establish the source of authority and therefore the end of both roles. He asserts that an Apostle possesses divine authority, while a genius boasts none, rather being judged aesthetically and philosophically. He contends that: "Genius is appreciated purely aesthetically, according to the measure of its content, and its specific weight; an Apostle is what he is through having divine authority" (93). Kierkegaard further elucidates his claim by asserting that "neither the poet nor the thinker has authority, even within his own sphere of relativity; their statements are judged on purely aesthetic and philosophic grounds according to the value of the form and content" (94-95).

As previously noted, Kierkegaard's influence on Auden's prose can be observed in a number of ways. Beyond the above mentioned edition of Kierkegaard's writings that was edited and introduced by Auden, are reviews such as "A Preface to Kierkegaard," where Auden reviews the translation of *Either/Or* by Walter Lowrie and David and Lillian Swenson, as well as a review of a biography of Gerard Manley Hopkins, titled "A Knight of the Infinite."[13] Furthermore, Auden's essay "Genius and Apostle" echoes Kierkegaard's distinction on authority and employs it in interpreting Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. In the essay, Auden maintains that:

> An apostle…is called to preach to others a divine message which is new to them, so that he cannot expect others to come looking for him nor expect to have any official spiritual status. While oracle and shaman are, so to speak, radio sets through which at certain moments a god may speak, an apostle is an ordinary human messenger like a man who delivers mail; he cannot wait for certain divinely inspired moments to deliver his message and, if his audience should ask him to show his credentials, he has none. (442-443)

Auden here distinguishes between the dehumanized "oracle and shaman" that simply broadcast a god's wishes like a "radio," and the Apostle, whose vocation could be completed by any human being, like that of a mailman, echoing Kierkegaard's identifying of an Apostle as a messenger. Auden continues by describing a genius by asserting that "a man is called to it by a natural gift with which he is already endowed" (443). Utilizing the example of a person deciding to become a sculptor, he continues:

> It makes no difference to his decision whether he is a Christian who believes that this talent is a gift of God or an atheist who attributes it to blind Nature or Chance for, even if he is a believer, he knows that he is called by his gift, not by God directly. Since the gift is *his*, to say 'I must become a sculptor' and 'I want to become one' means the same thing: it is impossible to imagine anyone's saying, 'A sculptor is the last thing on earth I want to be, but I feel it is my duty to become one.' (443)

An artist would never speak these latter words. However, it would be unsurprised to hear these words from an apostle or a prophet.

Auden institutes a similar critique of genius' that inappropriately assume the role of apostles in the poem "Ode to Terminus," particularly scientists, though this criticism is meant for artists as well, an authority that could have troubling ramifications in the nuclear age. Auden seems concerned that this misplaced authority could promote the consolidation of totalitarian power, particularly through scientists' development of nuclear weapons and artists' shaping of the moral vision of a culture, potentially leading to vast displacement and societal trauma. As an artist, Auden therefore attempts to shape

the moral vision of his culture by attempting to limit the role of genius' like the scientist and the poet before this displacement and trauma occurs. "Ode to Terminus" was written near the end of Auden's career in 1968, just five years before his death. He does not invoke Terminus because of any divine authority that he possesses, but because of his aesthetic authority as a genius, which allows his invocation of Terminus to maintain vivid imaginative possibilities.

Though he was an ardent supporter of science and the son of a physician, the poet critiques the role of divine authority that some scientists have assumed, the role of the apostle rather than the genius because he fears the trauma scientists might inflict if they appropriate the religious role of the apostle in the atomic age. Auden challenges the proclamations of these "High Priests of telescopes and cyclotrons" at the opening of the poem, who believe they possess the creative power to translate "into the vulgar anthropomorphic / tongue" inanimate objects into living beings (1, 8-9). In this vein, the first eleven stanzas of the poem form three labyrinthine sentences that roam wide thematic territory, from "algebra" and "Political History," to the constantly expanding universe and the nature of interpretation (6, 13). Through this wandering the poem fails to find meaning at the High Priests' guidance, until it moves toward the definite human senses.

By cautioning against the High Priests' "pronouncements about happenings / on scales too gigantic or dwarfish / to be noticed by our native senses," the poet asserts that these priests are imbuing that which occurs at the subatomic level with some sort of spiritual currency. Indeed, the senses are a significant trope in "Ode to Terminus," one that the poet employs to consider the role of authority. The "High Priests" use

"telescopes," which are used to magnify the vast yet distant, the heavens, and in essence bring them down to Earth in order to be viewed by the human eye. Moreover, these "High Priests" use "cyclotrons," particle accelerators that allow humans to view charged particles at the atomic and subatomic level, a magnification of a different sort that perceives the miniscule within all elements.

Auden's skepticism of scientists in this poem does not indicate a blind dismissal of science in any way. Auden also directs his skepticism toward poets who adopt priestly roles rather than artistic ones. Two examples of this include Auden's use of the line "We must love one another or die" in the poem "September 1, 1939," which he subsequently kept out of his *Collected Poems* despite its wild popularity simply because he thought the line to be a lie and beyond the bounds of his authority. Furthermore, he critiques his fellow poet Percy Shelley in the essay "Writing," who in the famous final line of his *A Defence of Poetry* asserts: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (535). Auden contends that this line "describes the secret police, not the poets" (27).

The poet continues to caution scientists against an apostolic authority that pronounces "discoveries which, couched in the elegant / euphemisms of algebra, look innocent," but cause displacement and trauma when translated into "the anthropomorphic / tongue," a translation which forcefully and disingenuously attempts to transform the indefinite into the definite. Yet there is no definite scale that the "native" human senses can place upon these objects, which are on theoretical scales. These anthropomorphic metaphors are no help to common humanity, whom the poet refers to as "gardeners or house-wives," as the metaphors thrust upon the vast and the minuscule a personality they do not possess. The anthropomorphizing of these astronomical and subatomic elements is

demonstrated further in the lines: "if galaxies / bolt like panicking mobs, if mesons / riot like fish in a feeding-frenzy," where these elements are remodeled too much in the fashion of humans, and indeed end up sounding like a banal "Political History" (10-12). Instead, the poet remains concerned with a more definite, familiar region, that of "our Middle- / Earth," an endearing term for the Earth, one that he also uses in the 1969 poem "A New Year Greeting" to refer to the human body. Moreover, the poet's fascinating use of enjambment of the word "Middle- / Earth" spans two stanzas, as if attempting to bridge the to this point indistinct thought of the poem into a more cohesive and definite whole.

Though the poet maintains that when scientists assume a religious apostolic role, their role and vision becomes distorted, he also witnesses to what happens when humans accept their role as genius'. As Fuller notes, genius' "'manage' what his ordinary senses reveal to him," rather than getting lost by imbuing the astronomical or subatomic with a religious sense (522). In this vein, the poet then describes the distinct form of the earth and the sun, where the "Sun-Father" conspicuously embodies the sun that by human visual senses appears to move "by day from orient to occident," where the "Sun-Father" moreover represents the Triune Christian God, who through "his light" benevolently gazes on humanity as he "is felt as a friendly / presence not a photonic bombardment" (25, 26, 27-28). Within this light

> all visibles do have a definite
> outline they stick to, and are undoubtedly
> at rest or in motion, where lovers
> recognize each other by their surface (29-32)

The poet asserts that only in the loving light of God that humans may recognize themselves and one another. Moreover, in this light humans might see their own finitude,

instead of being fooled into a sense of self-divinity by adopting the role of apostle or an existential insignificance by the divinized world of astronomical or subatomic elements. The poet further argues that living in this light "saves our sanity," since we "know all too well how the most erudite / mind behaves in the dark without a / surround it is called on to interpret" (37-40). The poet asserts that without this light, the moral vision of humanity would be dimmed. Humans would succumb to their fears, creating monstrous shapes in the dark. This light "saves our sanity" in part because by recognizing the limits of our human bodies directs us outside of ourselves, toward other humans, and toward the friendly light of the "Sun-Father."

Yet the poet asserts that the "High Priests" fail to discern the friendly light of God and the finitude of their own human capabilities with their ironically self-restricted vision. They miss out on the order this recognition of limits provides, as well as the stereoscopic nature of metaphor. By "discarding rhythm, punctuation, metaphor," the discourse of these High Priests "sinks into a driveling monologue / too literal to see a joke or / distinguish a penis from a pencil" (41, 42-44). The High Priests run the risk of descending "into a driveling monologue" by assuming a divine authority without a knowledge of human limits, to which the poet indicates has frequently led to the violence of mythic figures like "Venus and Mars" and the totalitarian atrocities that have occurred in "Political History" of our recent past (43).

The poet rejects the displaced power of the god of love and war that inflict trauma, who possess "powers too natural / to temper our outlandish extravagance" (45-46). Their authority too closely resembles human nature and its propensity toward violence. Instead, the mythic figure he invokes is Terminus, the "God of walls, doors and

reticence" in order to achieve a definite return to place by "teach[ing] us how to alter our gestures" (47, 46). More disinterested than the gods who personify love and hate, Terminus embodies a mythic image for Auden that permits humans to acknowledge their own limited nature, and perhaps paradoxically, allows them fuller sense of freedom. This shift in tone may also be deciphered by the connection between the form and content of the poem. Through the first eleven stanzas of the poem, there are just three sentences. From this moment forward, however, there are four sentences in the final five stanzas. This demonstrates how, beginning with the invocation of Terminus, the stanzas become more self-contained as the poet attempts to envision a world that listens, becomes changed by what Terminus represents, and endeavors to combat displacement and trauma by seeking a return to place.

Auden acknowledges this return to place and his gratitude to Terminus by declaring that "blessed is the City that thanks you / for giving us games and grammar and metres" (49-50). The "City," among other things, functions for Auden as an image for the primary location where humanity interacts with one another. This place receives Terminus' blessing through his gifts of limitation. These gifts are all ones that require rules that limit and therefore structure the worlds in which they exist. Moreover, they allow the poet a serious playfulness, order, and beauty, all of which may have profound effects upon humanity. Moreover, humans may form communities, a further profound effect within these limited worlds, thus acknowledging their dependence upon someone outside of themselves. The poet further emphasizes this in the lines:

> By whose grace [that is, Terminus'], also, every gathering
> of two or three in confident amity
> repeats the pentacostal marvel,
> as each in each finds his right translator. (51-54)

Within these communities, humans may constantly reenter and re-experience the mystery of Pentecost, that decisive moment when humans, recognizing their own limited nature, intersect with the Divine, with God. For the poet, without this acknowledgement of human limitations, any chance of sustained interaction with God becomes forfeit. Therefore, scientists who act as "High Priests" but are not actual priests mislead others and, paradoxically, though claiming divine authority, miss out on an interaction with the divine.

The poet concludes the poem by reminding genius' that they are all storytellers in some fashion, and in so doing, believing that they might achieve a sense of reorientation to place by returning to their properly limited roles. With the proper recognition of human limitations through the image of Terminus, the "High Priests of telescopes and cyclotrons" are stripped of their priesthood and vision of themselves as apostles:

> You still might save us, who by now have
> learned this: that scientists, to be truthful,
>
> must remind us to take all they say as a
> tall story, that abhorred in the Heav'ns are all
> self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an
> audience, utter some resonant lie. (57-60)

In these final lines, the poet depicts scientists that wrongly assume an apostolic authority as "self-proclaimed poets." Instead, he insists they should consider themselves as possessing the same role as a poet, a genius judged aesthetically or ethically, but not ascending to a priestly role. The poet calls for a recognition that all genius', even scientists, weave narratives to articulate their research. He acknowledges the universal goodness and necessity of storytelling and myth from all genius' to their audiences, as well as the significance of telling the truth rather than uttering "some resonant lie." The

poet's witness indicates that adopting a divine role and telling lies might lead to great displacement and trauma, while telling the truth and telling narratives within the role of a genius might lead to a return to place. And the poet achieves this witness through the invocation of the mythic character Terminus.

Auden frequently utilizes mythic figures in his poetry like Terminus, as well as Icarus, Apollo, Hermes, Don Juan, Tristan and Isolde, Hephaestus, and Thetis, among others, because these myths help both reader and poet to better understand the reality in which they live and to revivify a world haunted by displacement and trauma. This poetic witness moreover establishes a stereoscopic understanding of possibility and necessity, as well as the proper roles of the genius and the apostle, both of which demonstrate the poet's interest in the work of Søren Kierkegaard. The imaginative world that the poet witnesses to through myth therefore knows its boundaries and becomes richer for this knowledge. Kearney again elucidates the kind of mimetic mythic witness that Auden's poetry accomplishes: "Mimesis is 'invention' in the original sense of that term: *invenire* means both to discover *and* to create, that is, to disclose what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short, to re-create actual worlds as possible worlds" (132). Auden's mythic witness performs this double vision. His recreation of "actual worlds as possible worlds" that maintain a balance between possibility and necessity through his mimetic mythic witness allows a greater understanding of the world around him, of the displacement and trauma on the one hand, but also pursuing a return to place and gratitude on the other.

CHAPTER FOUR

Derek Walcott's Twilight Witness: Between Belonging and Exile

Like W.H. Auden, Derek Walcott utilizes myth in his stereoscopic poetic witness, most strikingly observed in his epic poem *Omeros*. This use of myth links Auden and Walcott, mooring them to poetic tradition while yet allowing them the freedom to innovate on this tradition. As I argued in my introduction, there are many other parallels between the two poets. For instance, Auden serves as an important antecedent for Walcott without triggering a Bloomian anxiety of influence, which Walcott articulates in an interview with William Baer when discussing his first encounter with Auden's poetry: "I remember, during that period, reading Auden with a tremendous amount of elation, a lot of excitement, and discovery…The freshness of his poetry was tremendously exciting, and it induced you to model yourself on Auden" (197). Moreover, I believe they both adopt a stereoscopic poetic witness, recurrently depicting displacement, return to place, and gratitude. Furthermore, within their poetic witness, Auden and Walcott both frequently focus on the tension between home, belonging, and exile.

Caryl Phillips also considers home, belonging, and exile in the final essay of his collection *New World Order* titled "Conclusion: The 'High Anxiety' of Belonging." In the essay, Phillips articulates a particularity of belonging, asserting that individuals respond differently when faced with their own history, cultural, personal, collective, or otherwise. More specifically, he examines the tension of belonging unique to the Caribbean and its inhabitants: "The half-crumbling sugar mills which litter the landscape of the Caribbean islands are an eloquent and painful reminder of Caribbean history. But

what to do with them?" (307) Answering this question with a series of further questions, Phillips asks: "Pull them down and make room for a condominium development? Leave them in their state of dereliction? Or rebuild them and charge tourists ten dollars to walk around them, and then offer these same people the opportunity to buy some molasses, or some sugar, or some local rum? What to do with our buildings?" (307) Phillips locates his answer in a tension between remembering and forgetting aspects of home: "The answer is often to be found nestling nearly between two questions. To what extent do I belong to this place? How much do I want to forget? On coming face to face with our history the vexing questions of belonging and forgetting rise quickly to the surface. And near-cousin to the words 'belonging' and 'forgetting' is the single word, 'home.'" (307). Continuing to examine "this conundrum of 'home,'" Phillips expresses a sense of belonging in this tension, recognizing others feel this sense of alienation from home, citing Joseph Conrad and George Orwell as two literary examples of authors that have experienced a similar anxiety of belonging. He further connects his alienation to his race, though he acknowledges others experience corresponding anxiety because of class, gender, or religion.[1] He maintains the unavoidability of experiencing "rejection and distrust" in this alienation. He also contends that many choose exile in the face of this anxiety, but he makes a more positive choice: "I have chosen to create for myself an imaginary 'home' to live alongside the one that I am incapable of fully trusting. My increasingly precious, imaginary, Atlantic world" (308). Though precarious, this spurs Phillips to write, developing an imaginative place in the midst of this high anxiety of belonging.

Derek Walcott's work also recurrently focuses on the nature of home, belonging, and exile, forming a tension common to the Caribbean experience. For example, in an interview with Edward Hirsch with *The Paris Review* in 1985, the poet articulates the tension between home and exile remains deep-rooted in the Caribbean experience due to historical and geographical circumstances: "I've never felt that I belong anywhere else but in St. Lucia. The geographical and spiritual fixity is there. However, there's a reality here as well. This afternoon I asked myself if I would stay here for the rest of my life if I had the chance of leaving. The answer really is, I suppose, no" (115). In these words, the poet affirms his rootedness in his home island, yet also an acknowledges his willingness to choose self-exile for a better life elsewhere, an exile that he did end up choosing, as he variously lived in Jamaica, Grenada, New York City, Trinidad, and Boston.

The Twilight and the "O"

My chapter considers the tensions of home and exile, belonging and alienation, remembering and forgetting wounds, and displacement and seeking a return to place. I focus in particular on two images in Walcott's prose and the epic poem *Omeros*: the twilight and the "O." These two images, repeatedly used in the poet's work, embody the above tensions in compelling fashion. The twilight, the period of time when day melts into night, provides the poet a flexible image between the harsh, blinding light of the sun and the obscuring lack of light at night. The poet believes that the twilight both reveals beauty and represents light at its truest. The twilight therefore allows a clear and lucid vision of the world around the viewer. The dawn provides a similar resonant tension for Walcott. Though obviously different times of the day, they provide the poet with corresponding suggestive tensions. Because of this correspondence, I will consider both

the sunrise and the sunset as twilight tensions. For example, Walcott speaks of the dawn, a further time between night and day, as his favorite time to write in his interview with Hirsch. He contends that "dawn, that hour, that whole time of day, is wonderful in the Caribbean. I love the cool darkness and the joy and splendor of the sunrise coming up" (101). He goes on to characterize his work in the twilight as "a very ritualistic thing. I'd even go further and say it's a religious thing. It has its instruments and its surroundings. And you can feel your own spirit waking" (101). His tone of gratitude palpable, Walcott expresses his gratefulness for the spiritual awakening that the twilight allows his poetic gift.

As a poet attentive to literary tradition while simultaneously developing formal innovations, form represents one twilight space for Walcott in *Omeros.* For example, he occasionally slips into *terza rima* in the poem, such as in chapter five, section three. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza in this section is *aba*, setting up the expectation for end rhyme of the second stanza to be *bcb*. The second stanza begins with a *b* rhyme, but subverts reader's expectations for the second and third lines of the stanza. Yet the poet does not completely leave off hinting at using *terza rima*, as the last word of the first line in the third stanza, "dune," carries over the rhyme from the second line in the second stanza, "noon" (23).[2] This brief use and abrupt abandonment of *terza rima* provides the poem a fuller connection to Dante's use of the stanza form in his *Divine Comedy*, while yet allowing Walcott to innovate as he wishes.

Walcott scholarship identifies significant tensions within the poet's work, such as hybridity and mimicry, yet no scholar discusses the twilight tensions in his poetry. For example, Jahan Ramazani persuasively argues in "The Wound of History: Walcott's

Omeros and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction" that the affliction caused by the wounds experienced by many characters in *Omeros* forms a "site of interethnic connection," where the wounds work to vivify "the black Caribbean inheritance of colonial injury and at the same time deconstructing the uniqueness of suffering" (405). Ramazani continues, stating that: "Hybrid, polyvalent, and unpredictable in its knitting together of different histories of affliction, Walcott's radiant metaphor of the wound helps dramatize poetry's promise in postcolonial writing" (405-406). Ramazani's remarks help establish the "promise" of the wound as a "radiant metaphor." Yet the wound is not the only glimmering metaphor that Walcott uses to enact the potential within postcolonial endeavors. He utilizes unique sites of tension like the twilight, straining between home and exile, ultimately leading to a sense of gratitude for the gift of poetry and place.

In a similar vein, the circular shape of the "O" provides Walcott a malleable image in *Omeros* that represents a return home from a voyage as well as a pursuit of healing, though in other instances it typifies an empty zero or simply a wound, while a half-circle or arc often symbolize incompleteness or a still diseased wound.[3] The "O" also signifies the cyclical, circular nature of lived experience. For instance, life goes on at the end of the poem, acknowledging that trauma and displacement will always exist. But this should not cause despair. Recovery from these traumas remains a cyclical, circular motion. Like the sea that goes on at the end of the poem, the poet summons his readers to continually seek recovery from displacement. He articulates the ongoing nature of this recovery as a cyclical, circular process that the reader must repeatedly choose to enact.[4] The "O" additionally signifies a spectrality, discerned through the interactions that both the poet and Achille experience with the shades of their fathers in the poem.

For a people wounded into creation and one nation, the "O" also represents an opening of oneself to the witness of displacement and exiled, paradoxically the first step in recovering a sense of home and belonging for Walcott. As Cassie Premo Steele argues in *We Heal From Memory*, when "we witness to the past and as we serve as witnesses for others, we may begin to see how the cords of one story link to the cords of another. This recognition of how our histories are woven together enables a reconnection between people in the present" (9). In *Omeros,* every character encounters and becomes linked by this tension between exile and home, whether colonial and postcolonial figures like Major Plunkett, his wife Maud, and Catherine Weldon, St. Lucian characters such as Achille, Philoctete, Ma Kilman, Hector, and Omeros, or the Walcott narrator,[5] a St. Lucian character, yet one that stands apart from the other figures in the poem. Not simply an author creating his narrative, Walcott inserts himself into his poem as someone who, like the other characters, experiences exile and displacement and also seeks a return to place. But, as the only figure that knows all the characters, he incarnates a significant link between the characters, completing the circle of all of their narrative arcs.

Moreover, I believe the lack of scholarship on the "O" in *Omeros* represents a significant gap. Though scholars have not considered the significance of the "O" in *Omeros* Robert Hamner discusses the circular trajectory of the characters and the structure of the poem: "Structurally, *Omeros* converts linear narrative development into incremental loops of self-reflexive exposition. No matter how far the leading characters may wander literally or imaginatively, their lives continually revolve around each other; and much as they learn, they inevitably return to their point of origin" (35). Paul Breslin also considers the circular nature of the poem in his essay "Derek Walcott's 'Reversible

World': Centers, Peripheries, and the Scale of Nature," contending that: "The circular passage from old to new worlds and back again, always repeatable, eventually casts doubt on the notion that one endpoint of the journey is origin, the other destiny" (20). Breslin's comments indicate how *Omeros* enacts a stereoscopic conception of time and space, rather than a flat one, particularly through the circular orbit of the poem. However, scholars have considered the "O" in *Omeros*, which serves as an image with a multiplicity of meanings.

Ultimately, I believe that the twilight and the "O" uniquely allow Walcott to enact a stereoscopic witness, acknowledging the traumas and displacements inflicted on the Caribbean on the one hand, while also seeking a recovery of place, primarily through his understanding of the gift of poetry, which he ultimately expresses as gratitude for both place and poetry. I will first examine these tensions through a brief consideration of his essays, particularly "What the Twilight Says," "The Muse of History," and "The Antilles: Epic Fragments of Memory," though later in the chapter I will also discuss "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" as well as these other essays. The majority of my chapter will, however, chiefly focus on this twilight tension in Walcott's epic poem *Omeros*.

In "What the Twilight Says," Walcott frequently depicts the twilight as a place where the poet might affect a linguistic and ancestral link to disparate cultures. For instance, he asserts that "that mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word 'Ashanti' as with the word 'Warwickshire,' both separately intimating my grandfathers' roots, both baptizing this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian" (9).[6] Walcott's steady, rhythmic emphasis on "faith" and "baptizing"

indicate a poetic energy that the twilight tension releases. Words like "'Ashanti,'" a pre-colonial kingdom in West Africa extending from the Ivory Coast to Benin, and "'Warwickshire,'" the county in England that his father is named after, demonstrate the varied ancestral and cultural power that the Caribbean poet might summon. Walcott further affirms the linguistic and ancestral power of the twilight as he contends that the poet should not be entirely radical or traditional, but "dedicated to purifying the language of the tribe" (8-9). He argues that, unfortunately, the poet who attempts this purification "is jumped on by both sides for pretentiousness or playing white. He is the mulatto of style. The traitor. The assimilator. Yes. But one did not say to his Muse, 'What kind of language is this that you've given me?"…but one went about his father's business. Both fathers'" (8-9). With European grandfathers and St. Lucian grandmothers, Walcott inhabits a twilight ancestral space, a position he believes the entire region in habits. Understanding one father therefore remains an incomplete endeavor, half of a whole circle. The twilight offers the poet a resonant place linking various cultures, which he views as an accurate understanding of the Caribbean. Moreover, with the rise of the globalized world, this twilight place has now become a common element of lived experience the world over.

Walcott furthermore explores the twilight as a place that counteracts the impulse toward nostalgia. In his essay "The Muse of History," he describes the poetry of the New World, articulating: "like its fruits, its savour is a mixture of the acid and the sweet, the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience. In such poetry there is a bitter memory and it is the bitterness that dries last on the tongue. It is the acidulous that supplies its energy" (41). The twilight position he occupies therefore depicts the "acid,"

the realities of colonial brutality and postcolonial greed, as well as the "sweet," the beauty and belonging of the Caribbean. Moreover, with the poetic gift in mind, he comments on those that live outside this light, contending that: "They believe in the responsibility of tradition, but what they are in awe of is not tradition, which is alert, alive, simultaneous, but history, and the same is true of the new magnifiers of Africa" (42-43). Walcott therefore believes that without awe and gratitude for the gift of tradition, poetry withers into a vapid interest European or African history, rather than a work of art possessing beauty and truth.

In the essay, Walcott moreover reflects on the language that he has received from his ancestors, an inheritance he conceives of as a gift. Upon realizing that if he won a scholarship to attend college in England, he would not have become a poet, Walcott states that: "The language that I used did not bother me. I had given it, and it was irretrievably given; I could no more give it back than they could claim it" (63). He demonstrates the impossibility of returning his linguistic inheritance, given to him through his twilight ancestors and thereby given by him to others through his art, even if he desired to do so.

Further expressing the twilight nature of his poetic gift, situated in a tension between home and exile, belonging and alienation, and displacement and return to place, he addresses his European and African ancestors in the closing lines of the essay. Acknowledging that though it is his not his duty to answer for the sins of his ancestors, he adopts a twilight stance by both rebuking and thanking them for the muse-like role the played in the creation of his poetry:

> to you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers, I, like the more honest of my race, give a strange thanks. I give the strange and bitter and yet enobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit steamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift. (64)

Walcott's stunning lines provide a stereoscopic glimpse of the twilight position his ancestors conveyed upon him. He recognizes the "strange and bitter" elements of his cultural inheritance and displacement. He articulates this pronounced bitterness with understandable pain and anger. Yet he simultaneously expresses gratitude for the "soldering of two great worlds," Europe and Africa, to develop a third, St. Lucia. Though bitterly painful, he also sees this as a gift, placed in an Eden of his own where he might enact his Adamic gift in awe and gratitude.

In "The Antillies: Fragments of Epic Memory," Walcott's Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1992, the poet further links his feelings of gratitude for this poetic gift to the images the twilight and the "O," as he exultantly celebrates the awe he experiences because of his gift. In his speech, he articulates that "the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History" (79). Moreover, in the twilight place that the poet occupies, he believes: "There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise" (79). This time between night and day creates an Adamic space for the poet, where names resonate with meaning that radiates out from the word. For example, "the noun, the 'Antilles' ripples like brightening water, and the sounds of leaves, palm fronds, and birds are the sounds of fresh dialect, the native tongue" (79) This circle rippling out from each word acts as a "benediction that is

celebrated, [developing] a fresh language and a fresh people, and this is the frightening duty owed" (79). Walcott utilizes the twilight and the "O" to envision the Adamic role of the poet, to name and rename, ultimately experiencing a profound sense of gratitude for his poetic gift.

Omeros

Omeros begins in a twilight tension, with Philoctete recounting the strain between two cultures for the Afro-Caribbean slave, between Africa and St. Lucia, as he depicts the dawn of contemporary St. Lucian life. The poet utilizes the word sunrise three times in the first three pages, for instance in the opening line of the poem: "'This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes'" (3). Cutting down the *gommier* trees further reinforces this twilight moment, as Philoctete asserts that this acts to sever ties with the old gods in order to refashion them into new modes of existence, where St. Lucian fishermen use the *gommier* trees to make fishing vessels. The island decrees that this must happen, as gusts of wind carry the news of the fishermen's intentions to cut down the *gommier* trees, the leaves of the *laurier-cannelles* uttering that this sacrifice must occur. In this place where everything depends upon the sea for life, and where even the land imitates the sea, sounding "'like the sea that feed us / fisherman all our life,'" the ferns deliver the verdict for the *gommier* trees: "the ferns nodded 'Yes, / the trees have to die,'" affirming that the they must be sacrificed so that the St. Lucian fishermen can fish in the ocean (3).[7]

Philoctete continues to perform this dawning of St. Lucian culture, speaking of the act of cutting down the *gommier* trees as a wound, using the language of trauma. He narrates the episode, depicting the felling of the trees as the first wound: "'I lift the axe

and pray for strength in my hands / to wound the first cedar'" (3). Philoctete then reveals a second wound to the tourists, showing them a "scar made by a rusted anchor" for extra money (4). Walcott connects Philoctete's wound, caused by a "rusted anchor," an image of slavery, to the Middle Passage and the enslavement of St. Lucians' African ancestors, as well as the current poverty of postcolonial St. Lucia, forced to depend on tourism, which the poet frequently criticizes. Philoctete refrains from explaining his wound's cure in part as a form of resistance to this economic imperialism, but also because an explanation of this cure becomes apparent as the epic narrative unfolds.

Instead, Philoctete leaves it to the place, St. Lucia, to tell the story of the island in twilight moments, since his healed wound has returned him to a sense of place. The poet articulates that Philoctete "has left it to a garrulous waterfall / to pour out his secret," as well as laurels, doves, mountains, the ocean, an egret, a dragonfly, and eels, all of which are particular to St. Lucia (4). Yet the journey back to place and a sense of belonging remains a long, arduous odyssey that encompasses most of the poem. The traumas of colonialism have sundered the indigenous Aruacs from the land, African slaves from their home, and ironically, even British citizens like the Plunketts from their island. And though "smoke forgets the earth from which it ascends," the poet asserts that a twilight awareness reawakens this sense of belonging, where "the sunrise brightens the river's memory" (4). This twilight moment allows the place and its inhabitants remember their origins.

The wounding of the trees at the beginning of the poem therefore complicates the notion of home and belonging. Chopping down these trees not only signifies St. Lucian Afro-Caribbeans' rending their direct ties to Africa, since St. Lucia is now their home, as

well as the destruction of the indigenous Aruacs by European colonists, "till a new race / unknown to the lizard stood measuring the trees" (5). And this wounding continues, as postcolonial consumerist tourism appropriates St. Lucian land for resorts that become a "no place," employing advances in technology, represented by chainsaws, to further displace the inhabitants of St. Lucia from their home and continue to "wound" the trees (5). This carnage occurs during the twilight, as: "Sunrise / trickled down its valleys, blood splashed on the cedars, / and the grove flooded with the light of sacrifice" (5). The twilight therefore makes manifest the displacement the Caribbean experiences and the need for a return to place. Walcott articulates this need in "The Antilles: Epic Fragments of Memory," specifying: "That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase" (82). Within a circular, cyclical historical amnesia and cultural memory, the poet seeks a linguistic reconstruction of the gods.

The second section of chapter one shifts to the protagonist of the poem, Achille, where the poet frequently uses "O" images to convey the colonial wound and the self-healing power of the island and the ocean surrounding it. Achille, a fisherman from the village of Gros Islet, gazes up at the gaping "hole the laurel had left. / He saw the hole silently healing with the foam / of a cloud like a breaker" (6). The felling of the *gommier* trees creates a circular hole in the canopy of trees that Achille looks upon. The very shape of this wound to the land forms an "O" in the poem, as do the wounds to other characters like Philoctete, Achille, and Major Plunkett. And the circling and healing of the O-shaped wound by a cloud resembling the ocean foreshadows the healing that eventually occurs in the narrative.

The poet then depicts a second O-shaped image that recurs throughout the poem, the swift. He describes a swift, an African bird, as "a small thing, far from its home, / confused by the waves of blue hills" (6). Swifts are incredibly fast. They commonly cruise at seventy miles per hour and have been clocked at speeds exceeding one hundred miles per hour. Swifts are also migratory birds that do not roost on the ground due to fear of predators. Swifts can therefore spend nearly a year in continuous flight.[8] The swift acts as an image of belonging, exile, and pilgrimage, circling the poem cyclically on their journeys, ultimately returning to home. The swift serves to connect Achille to his ancestors in Africa, yet also to demonstrate his displacement from his ancestral home.

As the scene continues, Achille participates in the killing of the old gods by cutting down the trees in order to build fishing canoes. The poet utilizes language that represents the European colonial violence of the Middle Passage and the slave trade. For instance, Achille's felling of the trees further dramatizes the European colonization of language, where the *bois-campêche*, *gommiers*, and *laurier-cannelle*, the St. Lucian patois names for various trees and plants, all betray the lasting effects of French colonial naming, resulting in the displacement of the Aruacs, their language, and their name of the island, their home, as well as the slaves taken from Africa. This act of cutting down the *gommier* trees moreover mirrors the process of colonization, where "the Aruacs' patois crackled" and "their language was lost," further demonstrating the impossibility of a return to these ancestral names (6).

Though this scene depicts St. Lucians as disconnected from their African roots, it also conveys a rootedness in the Caribbean, particularly in the ocean. The harvested trees soon have a "thirst / for the sea," where the feel "not death inside them, but use— / to

roof the sea, to be hulls" (7). Achille and other St. Lucian fisherman then chisel the trees down to canoes. A priest blesses the boats with "the swift's sign," the second time in the section that the sign of the cross is compared to a swift, where later: "After Mass one sunrise the canoes entered the troughs / of the surplice shallows, and then nodding prows / agreed with the waves to forget their lives as trees; / one would serve Hector and another, Achilles" (8). Making the sign of the swift over the canoe connect the vessel to the circular journey of the Middle Passage. Furthermore, the priest's blessing of a vessel that traverses the sea, as well as the poet's description of the sea's shallows as resembling a "surplice," the white liturgical vestment worn by priests over their cassock during Mass, imbues the ocean with a spiritual power. The spiritual energy of the waves allows the canoes to forget their former lives as trees and choose a life dedicated to the ocean. Walcott brilliantly uses this image to mirror the agency offered St. Lucians if they so choose, where an amnesia of their desire to return to Africa, which cannot happen despite being their rightful ancestral home, and instead devote themselves to return to place, the sea. The boats also eventually help Achille achieve an imaginative reversal of the Middle Passage in the poem, which prevents him from lionizing his African ancestry, while also embracing his Caribbean heritage.

Though possessing a transcendent power in the poem, the ocean also offers ordinary provisions, a tension that further fashions it as a twilight place. The third section of chapter three depicts the ocean's involvement in every facet of life for fishermen from Gros Islet like Achille, where as the sea salt rusts the door shut, the breeze that blows at dawn "salted him," punning on the word "assaulted," and street lights appear as "sodium bars" (8). In this twilight, sea, land, and the island's inhabitants work in harmony. After

the fisherman pass around a bottle of absinthe, as if enacting an important ritual, the section ends with Achille cast in the twilight: "This was the light that Achille was happiest in. / When, before their hands gripped the gunwales, they stood for the sea-width to enter them, feeling their day begin" (9). From the beginning of the poem, before he seeks to heal his wounds, the poet describes the gratitude that Achille feels when working in the twilight and one the ocean.

Following Achille cast in his happiest light, the twilight tension in chapter two becomes more pronounced by not only depicting his gratitude for the ocean, fishing, and St. Lucia, but also Philoctete's displacement from his craft as a fisherman. Philoctete's dislocation from his livelihood as a fisherman on the ocean recalls Edward Casey's assertion that: "The phenomenon of displacement derives in large measure from a failure to link up with places, beginning with local places and including more capacious places such as those occupied by entire cities and regions, cultures and societies, and ultimately the natural world" (*xiv*). Dislocated from place, Philoctete's wound causes his absence from his fellow fisherman during this twilight time before launching into the sea. The poet describes the ancestral origin of his wound, asserting that: "The sore on his shin / still unhealed, like a radiant anemone. It had come / from a scraping, rusted anchor. The pronged iron / peeled the skin in a backwash" (9-10). The anchor evokes traumatic images of the Middle Passage, of ships sailing from Africa to the Caribbean carrying humans as cargo. Though all of the characters in the poem experience the pain of this wound in a variety of ways, Philoctete remains the only character that exhibits the wound so explicitly. He attempts to heal the wound at the beginning of the poem, "sprinkling it with a salt hiss," but simply pouring the sea on which his ancestors endured such a

ghastly passage does not heal him. Healing from trauma and displacement of such magnitude requires a community of St. Lucians rooted in their island and their culture. Meanwhile, shamed by his wound, he abandons the fishing voyage, escaping "to crawl up the early street to Ma Kilman's shop" in order to drink his pain away (10).

The "O" reemerges in chapter two as the poet invokes his epic muses that inhabit twilight spaces. The poet introduces Seven Seas, a blind St. Lucian character who sees with "a sixth sense," an allusion to the blind bard of previous epic poems such as Homer and John Milton (12). Seven Seas, also called Omeros, acts as the first muse the poet invokes as he sits in his kitchen with his fingers drumming the table "recounting the past / of another sea, measured by the stroking oars" (12). Envisioning Seven Seas, the poet implores him: "O open this day with the conch's moan, Omeros, / as you did in my boyhood, when I was a noun / gently exhaled from the palate of the sunrise" (12). By crying out to Omeros and using the "O" as a vocal sound, the poet imagines the dawn as a site of linguistic creation, seeking a return to this place of fundamental innocence before experiencing life's wounds. And the poet insists that he can only achieve this return with Omeros' assistance: "Only in you [Omeros], across centuries / of the sea's parchment atlas, can I catch the noise / of the surf lines," which wander "like the shambling fleece / of the lighthouse's flock, that Cyclops whose blind eye / shut from the sunlight" (13). Across time and place, and despite the round "O" of the lighthouse's "blind eye," the poet seeks a second sight within the twilight, believing that Omeros will provide him with an imaginative vision that will bring a return to place.

The poet also communicates in these lines that the sea contains a knowledge that European colonial history and cartography knows nothing of, whether looking back

across the waters of memory to his African ancestors, or gazing forward across the ocean that his European ancestors sailed with his African forebears to reach the Caribbean, unwittingly forming a new culture. The ocean therefore serves as a twilight image that acts as connective tissue between these cultures. And the poet invokes Omeros because of his sensitivity to reading the ocean through his second sight, allowing the poet to envision the mythic formation of the Caribbean as we know it today. He achieves this through an impressive epic allusion to the Cyclops in *The Odyssey*, where the lighthouse on Vigie Point, near St. Mary's College, the secondary school Walcott attended, is portrayed as Polyphemus, the Cyclops Odysseus tricks as he tends his flock of sheep on the island of the Cyclops.

At its heart, *Omeros* is an epic poem chronicling the emergence of a new culture out of twilight tensions, like an archipelago broken off from a larger continent to form its own people. Walcott uses precisely this image in "The Antilles: Epic Fragments of Memory," asserting that: "Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off form the original continent" (69). Moreover, Walcott chronicles this cultural genesis in *Omeros* as Achille and his fellow fishermen's canoes are converted into slave "galleys / over which a frigate sawed its scythed wings slowly," and the colonial Cyclops as "blind lighthouse" shapes the "serrated islands" by scattering grey almond seeds (13). Though slavers sought economic gain for the British Empire without concern for the human cargo they were trafficking, the African slave became a Caribbean citizen over centuries, demonstrating a further, unintended development engendered by colonial displacement. Thus "a black fisherman" emerges out of the colonial and postcolonial worlds, hoisting

"his flour-sack / sail on its bamboo spar, and scanned the opening line / of our epic horizon" (13). In these lines, the poet articulates why he chooses a poor fisherman from a tiny village to be the protagonist of his epic poem, since ordinary Achille takes the materials around him, constructs a boat, and for his livelihood travels on the sea that is dear to him. Achille embodies the epic nature of the ordinary St. Lucian for Walcott because he experiences contact with the vast expanses of ocean beyond the horizon. Having a fisherman as his epic protagonist enables the poet to see St. Lucia and the Caribbean in the right light as a "full" place, despite the displacement and trauma the region has faced. He further achieves this by punning on poetic meter in the above lines, as he both "scanned the opening line" and "look[ed] back / to rocks that see their own feet when light nets the waves," alluding to a metrical foot in the latter lines (13). In this light, presumably the twilight that the poet and Achille love, he sees the "ebony captains" representing a black Caribbean (13).

As this new culture emerges, European, Asian, and Caribbean worlds and epic works merge. Out of his vision of the Caribbean rising out of the sea, the poet hears Antigone's voice humming "'Omeros,'" which is the last word of the end of section two of chapter two (13). Antigone, another muse figure, moreover utters Omeros' name in the first word of the next section, serving to pull the poet into his imaginative vision. Stroking the bust of the Greek epic poet Homer, Antigone, who is Greek, announces in the opening line of the section: "'O-meros,' she laughed. "'That's what we call him in Greek'" (14). Antigone recontextualizes the epic poet in a new time, rechristening Homer as Omeros. Pensive, the poet eventually agrees, arguing that: "'Homer and Virg are New England farmers'" (14). Walcott's christening his Caribbean bard as Omeros, who also

serves as a muse to the poet, establishes a new poetry to chronicle the Caribbean people, a people with ancestral and literary connections to many other cultures.

Speaking the name Omeros also further invokes the poet's muse by using the twilight image "O." He gives an etymology and pronunciation guide of sorts, demonstrating how the name embodies language, ocean, island, and its inhabitants: "*O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was / both mother and sea in our Antillean patois, / *os*, a grey bone," as well as the "white surf as it crashes / and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore" (14). The sound of the "*O*" invokes the circular and cyclical sounds of the waves crashing on the shores of the island. Furthermore, in Caribbean vernacular, "*mer,*" from the French *mére*, meaning mother, and *mer*, signifying sea, casts the sea as sustaining mother. Adding a human element to this incantation, "*os*" plays off of the Latinate root for bone, fusing human existence and the ocean. The narrator then reinforces the intimate connection between the character in the poem, a symbol for St. Lucians, and the island and ocean: "Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes / that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed" (14). Renaming Homer as Omeros also achieves what Ramazani, following Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, defines in *A Transnational Poetics* as "cultural decolonization," which he contends recreates "the land through the act of renaming it and thus imaginatively and linguistically repossessing it" by reimagining and reintegrating "a mythical and historical past for the indigenous community, repopulating that past with a different cast of heroes, heroines, and perhaps even villains" (154, 155). Walcott achieves this "cultural decolonization" through his linguistic reimagining in *Omeros.*

Chapter three introduces a further twilight character, Ma Kilman. She owns the No Pain Café, the "oldest bar in the village" (17). Later in the narrative, the poet describes her as a "*gardeuse*, Sybil, obeah-woman," but she also takes "Holy Communion / with Maud sometimes, but here was an old African / doubt that paused before taking the wafer's white leaf" (58). Omeros is one character that frequents Ma Kilman's rum shop: "he would sing and the scraps blew on the wind / when her beads rubbed their rosary" (17). Associated with the sacred, the poet also links Omeros to the sea by explaining his various names: "Old St. Omere. / He claimed he'd sailed around the world. 'Monsieur Seven Seas' / they christened him" (17-18). Demonstrating his nature as a twilight character, Ma Kilman does not understand his "muttering the dark language of the blind," as they "were Greek to her. Or old African babble" (18). His language is reminiscent of Walcott's ancestry, hovering between Europe and Africa.

Philoctete also frequents Ma Kilman's No Pain Café, though he does so to numb the pain of his wound. After her interaction with Omeros, Ma Kilman sees Philoctete limping down the street to the No Pain Café, where she prepares "the usual medicine for him, a flask of white / acajou, and a jar of yellow Vaseline, / a small enamel basin of ice" (18). Acajou, French for "mahogany," indicates the color of the rum produced in the Caribbean, as well as Philoctete's drink of choice. Unable to fish with Achille, Hector, and the rest of the fishermen, Philoctete remains in Ma Kilman's café all day, where he not only seeks to numb his pain by drinking rum, but also "anoint the mouth of the sore on his shin," where his wound forms a circular mouth crying out his ancestral traumas (18).

The poet even more explicitly connects Philoctete's wound to the colonial traumas of the Middle Passage in the ensuing lines. In patois subsequently translated into English, Philoctete exclaims to Ma Kilman that "'I am blest / wif this wound,'" one that "'will never heal'" (18-19). Philoctete's sarcasm reveals the understandable pain and difficulty this wound causes him. The poet further describes the wound that itches and "tingles like the tendrils of the anemone, / and the puffed blister of Portuguese man-o'war" (19). Moreover, the poet identifies the cause of Philoctete's wound: "He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?" (19) Philoctete moreover believes that "the cross he carried was not only the anchor's / but that of his race" (19). The colonial trauma of slavery also impacts other St. Lucian characters. For example, as an obeah woman, Ma Kilman intuits that there must be a natural remedy for Philoctete's wound, but she has been so dissevered from the cures of her African ancestors that she cannot recall the cure. Though she does not experience a physical wound like Philoctete, she bears a cognitive wound, unable to remember the remedies that her ancestors found through their connection to place in the island herbs.

North of Ma Kilman's café in Gros Islet, also the home of Achille and Hector, stands the remains of an old sugar mill, a relic of colonial slavery and agent of colonial displacement. Philoctete walks by these colonial remnants, seeing a windmill and "huge rusted cauldrons, vats for boiling the sugar, / and blackened pillars. These are the only ruins / left here by history, if history is what they are" (20). One of these cauldrons, now a ruin, will eventually end up as a part of his cure later in the poem. Limping in his yam garden, which alludes to his African ancestry, Philoctete becomes incensed about his colonial wound, hacking at the yams with a blade, all the while cursing the plant: "'You

all see what it's like without roots in this world'" (21). This scene powerfully conveys the rootlessness still felt by Caribbean inhabitants, where Philoctete embodies a collective Caribbean experience by articulating how he feels shorn from his African ancestral home.

Walcott further demonstrates his poetic dexterity as he introduces the Plunketts with brilliant British lines in chapter five. Word, image, and tone elegantly mirror one another as the reader meets Major Plunkett, as he: "gently settled his Guinness, wiped / the rime of gold foam freckling his pensioned moustache / with a surf-curling tongue" (24). If the poet left the description of Major Plunkett to these lines, they would provide a stunning yet caricatured portrait of him. But rather than being rendered a flat colonial character, the Major plays a significant role in conveying both displacement and a return to place in the poem. And even these lyrical lines confirm the poet's portrayal of Plunkett as a twilight character, with "the rime of gold foam freckling his pensioned moustache" imparting his connection to the British Empire, a military man drinking a Guinness thousands of miles from the U.K., as well as his rootedness in the Caribbean, his adopted home, as his "surf-curling tongue" laps up the beguiling foam on his moustache. Walcott achieves this mirroring of word, image, and tone with Major Plunkett's wife, Maud, as she sits next to him and "sipped / quietly, wifely, an ale" (24). The short line and its delicate metrical feet seemingly characterize her as the stereotypical quiet, submissive wife of her generation, yet her character is not as flat as this introduction might seem to indicate. From Glen-da-Lough in County Wicklow, Ireland, the poet casts Maud as a displaced character exiled from her home that poignantly interrogates her sense of belonging in the narrative. Though her Irish ancestors did not experience the traumas of the Middle Passage and slavery, they faced centuries of brutal treatment at the hands of

the British. Moreover, the poet styles the Plunketts' love as genuine from the beginning of the poem: "Their silence / was a mutual communion. They'd been out here / since the war and his wound" (24-25). Though they often seem out of place in St. Lucia, their love becomes one of the factors that places them in the narrative.

The poet further depicts Major Plunkett as a twilight character, who maintains a good-natured though wrong-headed desire to write a history of St. Lucia, his home for many years. His head wound bears some resemblance the St. Lucian characters' wounds since it comes from the same source: the British colonial regime. Yet it remains starkly different because his own people, the colonial aggressors, inflicted his wound, did not endure the Middle Passage, and were not forced into slavery. The Major's wound, both psychological and physical, therefore dramatizes how colonialism traumatizes the colonizer as well as the colonized. The Major served in the British military with Field Marshall Montgomery in World War II. He has lived long enough in St. Lucia to view the British tourists with disdain: "the tourists were corpses in the desert / from the Afrika Korps" (25). Alluding to St. Lucia passing back and forth between British and French hands, he observes behind the bar the "regimental brandies stiffened on the shelves / near Napoleonic cognacs. All history / in a dusty Beefeater's gin" (25). Witnessing and feeling disgusted by the displacement and trauma inflicted on St. Lucia by the military of the Empire that employed him, he laments: "We helped ourselves / to these green islands like olives from a saucer, / munched on the pith, then spat their sucked stones on a plate" (25). Plunkett moreover reveals his wound for this first time in the poem, as he wonders "in whose honour did his head-wound graduate?" (25) After expressing his disgust for causing this displacement and trauma, he soon articulates that "Helen needed a history, /

that was the pity that Plunkett felt towards her. / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war" (30). Plunkett not only means Helen the character, but St. Lucia as well, "the Helen of the West Indies." This plan conveys his rootedness in the island, yet as a former British soldier attempting to write the narrative of a former British colony, Plunkett's history is doomed to repeat the colonizing stance he seeks to critique. Yet his failed history ends up developing his character as an individual.

Major Plunkett is not the only character that objectifies Helen; Achille and Hector quarrel over her as if she were a possession. After a fight between Helen and Achille escalates and becomes physical, their battle for Helen begins as she drives off with Hector in the Comet, his transport van, at which point Achille returns to the sea. Smarting from this fight and realizing that Helen and Hector seem to have already started a romantic relationship, the poet reveals Achille's wound: "his wound was Philoctete's shin" (40). As Achille and Hector are embroiled in their fight over Helen, Philoctete attempts to mediate the quarrel, further establishing himself as a twilight character: "Philoctete tried to make peace between them," telling them "that they had a common bond / between them: the sea" (47). The poet also casts the sea as a twilight space that maintains the strongest bond between Achille and Hector. However, neither Philoctete's twilight mediation nor the shared bond they have through the ocean reunites the two St. Lucian men: "neither listened. Like Hector. Like Achilles" (47). Like the Homeric characters that they are named after, neither fisherman agrees to set aside their feud.

In chapter eight, the poet employs an "O" image with great frequency in the Fort Rodney museum, located on Pigeon Island near Gros Islet, conveying the ripples of history. Attempting to discern the origin of a pyrite-encrusted wine bottle, the poet asserts

that one legend claims it came from a ship in the Battle of the Saints, the 1782 nautical battle that took place off the coast of Dominica, two islands north of St. Lucia, between British forces led by Admiral George Rodney and the French fleet under Comte de Grasse. The British won the battle and "the myth widened its rings every century" (43). As the rings of this myth ripple over the centuries, the legend claims that the sunken French flagship the *Ville de Paris* and its treasure was protected by "an octopus-cyclops, its one eye like the moon," the eye of the octopus and the round moon offering the wreck a ring of protection (43). With this myth on his mind, as well as the money with which he might win Helen back, Achille decides to dive in the area in order to find sunken treasure.

Achille's dive transforms into a twilight maneuver as he descends into a Dantean Underworld in the depths of the sea. While under water, Achille sees "coral palaces" and "pope-headed turtles," an infernal seascape not "meant for the living, he thought. / The dead didn't need money, like him, but perhaps / they hated surrendering things their hands had brought" (45). He moreover encounters the corpses of his ancestors that perished during the Middle Passage and were cast overboard, bringing to mind J.M.W. Turner's painting *The Slave Ship*, which depicts slaves being thrown into the sea from a slave ship: "The shreds of the ocean's floor passed him from corpses / that had perished in the crossing, their hair like weeds, / their bones were long coral fingers" (45). Moreover, the poet encapsulates the slaves' perceptions and life stories within the image of the "O," where "bubbles of eyes / watched him, a brain-coral gurgled their words, / and every bubble englobed a biography" (45-46). Yet unlike epic poems like *The Odyssey, The Aeneid,* and *The Divine Comedy,* the poet does not circulate these various biographies. Instead, his journey to the Underworld reminds him of his wound. Seeking

his fortune underwater, Achille realizes here that "no coins were enough to repay its deep evil," meaning he must seek other means of healing the wounds inflicted upon his ancestors during the Middle Passage (46). Furthermore, his loss of Helen creates another wound, as "an anchor still forked his brow whenever he frowned, / for she was a spectre now" (46). Remaining connected to the ocean allows Achille a measure of rootedness to place, yet losing Helen detaches him from his sense of belonging to the island.

Different than most British that come to the island because they have formed a sense of belonging to their adopted home, the Plunketts seek to know and understand St. Lucia, rather than what they might take from the island. After a fight and reconciliation in chapter ten, they travel around the "shining island, up mornes with red smudges / of fresh immortelles with old things to discover" (57). They encounter the beautiful St. Lucian landscape as they travel south, scaling Morne Fortune, a hill just south of Castries, descending into the Cul-de-Sac valley "and the soaked indigo / serration of peaks," traveling further south to "Roseau's / old sugar-factory roof" as the sunlight redefines it, following the sea winds that urge "them with light tongues downward to Anse La Raye" along the coast, and on to Canaries (58). And as evidenced by the sugar mill, frequent potholes, and the poverty-stricken half clothed boys that run by trying to sell them bananas, they see the wounds colonial England inflicted on the island. But they also locate a home on St. Lucia, planning to be "rooted in the island for the rest of their lives" (59). Their rootedness moreover makes them rounder, fuller characters.

Moreover, witnessing the wounded landscape during their drive provides an opportunity of healing. They travel to the volcano and sulfur springs at Soufrière, billed to tourists as the world's only drive-in volcano, an ethereal landscape reminiscent of

Achille's trek to the Underworld. Plunkett recognizes the volcano as "the gate of sulphur through which he must pass, / singeing his memory" but healing his wound (59). The poet describes the volcano itself as a constantly self-healing and perpetuating wound: "The wound closed in smoke, then wind would reopen it" (59). Following "a resinous / woodsman," the Plunketts walk through the forest as he points out the vast valleys and "a white, amnesiac Atlantic" (61). A significant first step toward healing, this setting recalls essays like "The Antilles: Epic Fragments of Memory," where Walcott frequently contends that memory ends in "amnesia and fog," as colonial: "History [becomes] a forgotten, insomniac night" (79). The St. Lucia woodsman then departs from them with "a patois blessing with old African signs" (61). This interaction causes Major Plunkett to reflect that "England seemed to him merely the place of his birth. / How odd to prefer… these loud-mouthed forests on their illiterate heights, / these springs speaking a dialect that cooled his mind," rather than England's "pastoral sites— / reasonable leaves shading reasonable earth" and its "pastures with castles" (61). He further muses it peculiar: "To prefer the hush / of a hazed Atlantic worried by the salt wind!" (61). His reflections affirm once again for the Major that he feels more at home in St. Lucia than in the country of his birth. As "harbour after crescent harbour closed his wound," he experiences belonging and healing in the island (61).

In chapter twelve of the poem, the Walcott narrator marks yet another character's visit to a Dantean Underworld, where he encounters the shade of his father, Warwick, who confronts him with his ancestral wounds; yet his father also discusses poetry as an inheritance, a familial and linguistic gift that possesses the creative power to heal these wounds. This encounter represents the first time the Walcott narrator intrudes upon the

narrative of his poem, indicating that witnessing to his ancestral wounds through his poetic gift might lead to a sense of belonging in the poem. The poet deftly alludes to a possible return home at the beginning of this section, as the chapter's opening line describes Walcott's childhood home: "Our house with its bougainvillea trellises, / the front porch gone, was a printery" (67). Located in Castries, the capital city of St. Lucia, Walcott's childhood home was restored and converted in 2016 into a museum that holds paintings, drafts of poems, and letters by Walcott, demonstrating in a tangible way how his poetic gift helps to heal and flourish his beloved island, St. Lucia.

Inserting himself into the narrative demonstrates how Walcott often feels distanced from other St. Lucians, yet he remains an important link between them and characters like Major Plunkett. Ramazani comments on this tension in *A Transnational Poetics*, articulating that "many postcolonial poets, like poets of the Harlem Renaissance, aspire intensely to reconnect with and help shape their often fluid national or regional communities of origin," yet they "are often set apart by their education, literary inheritances, language, class status, and geographic mobility, as well as their cultural function as intermediaries between First and Third worlds" (139). The Walcott narrator embodies this tension many Caribbean poets experience between feeling a simultaneous sense of belonging and displacement to their home.

As a twilight character, the narrator articulates his inheritance of a twilight vision from his father's shade through the gift of poetry. The narrator expresses how his father, a poet, painter, and actor who died before Walcott was born, spoke to him through his work: "He had done a self-portrait, it was accurate" (68). Yet he also appears before his very eyes, proclaiming the displacement from and sense of belonging to his literary

forbears. Upon meeting one another, the shade of Walcott's father muses: "'Now that you are twice my age, which is the boy's, / which the father's?'" (68) Walcott replies: "'Sir'—I swallowed—'they are one voice" (68). Walcott's equating of his voice with his father's is the first indication he receives the gift of poetry from his father. The shade of his father continues by explaining just what sort of gift Walcott receives, as the shade describes his heritage: "I was raised in this obscure Caribbean port," as well as his own naming, "my bastard father christened me for his shire: / Warwick. The Bard's county. But never felt part / of the foreign machinery known as Literature" (68). His father's shade has now clearly connected Walcott to the central figure of English literature, Shakespeare. Yet Walcott's father also demonstrates the displacement within Walcott's lineage, as Walcott's grandfather is called a "bastard" and his father, though named for the "Bard's county," never inhabited Warwick. The shade continues linking Walcott to Shakespeare, but in a more particular fashion: "I preferred verse to fame, but I wrote with the / heart of an amateur. It's that Will you inherit" (68). The shade therefore affirms Walcott's simultaneous association with and displacement from his inheritance. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, considers how a postcolonial poet might be both aligned and in conflict with tradition: "The 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority'" (3). By affiliating himself with tradition to both perpetuate and contradict it, Walcott inhabits this type of twilight place.

Walcott's interaction with his father's shade therefore not only demonstrates his reception of this twilight inheritance, but his development of his poetic gift and its lasting legacy in St. Lucia. After walking by the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Castries near Walcott's childhood home and hearing the toll of the Angelus bell, the narrator and the shade of his father walk into what was once called Columbus Square, but was rechristened Derek Walcott Square to celebrate the poet's 1992 Nobel Prize: "Then we came to a green square cut in smaller squares" (70). Read with this renaming in mind, the poem further demonstrates palpably how Walcott's poetic gift has helped to heal the island by providing a place that recognizes and praises the arts. Though this tangible healing was not realized by the time the poem was written, the narrator still envisions the healing potential of poetry, which he depicts through the shade of his father: "and it seemed, from his steps, that water sprang in plumes / from the curled, iron-green fountain at its centre," casting this park as "a paradise I had to believe to enter. / But I did not ask him about the other life" (70). Walcott utilizes the image of water springing from his father's footsteps as he walks through the fountain to convey the sense of growth and life that art might yield. Accepting his poetic gift from his father then promises access to this fountain, an image of the waters of poetic inspiration. He must first imagine this poetic paradise, though, before entering it.

In the chapter that follows, the poet discusses a place he did enter as a child, the barbershop, considering its shaping influence over his poetic vocation as well as his sense of belonging in the Caribbean. Not simply a place for a haircut, the barbershop plays a significant role in Caribbean culture. A barbershop provides its patrons an intergenerational social setting as well as a place to exercise their voice, gossip, discuss

current affairs, and tell jokes. Moreover, a barber listens to his or her patrons, fostering a personal relationship with them. In short, the barbershop develops community. It is therefore unsurprising that the poet portrays the barbershop as a site where language, culture, and community converge. At the barbershop he used to go to, the shade recalls gazing into "rusted mirrors in which we would look back / on the world's events. There, toga'd in a pinned sheet, / the curled hairs fell like commas" (71). He moreover observes that the barbershop kept copies of "*The World's Great Classics*," which he "was known / for quoting from them as he was for his scissors" (71). Walcott again receives the gift of language from his father, as the shade states "I bequeath you that clean sheet and an empty throne," indicating Walcott's linguistic heritage of a blank page with which to write on and "an empty throne" to poetically ascend (71).

The shade painstakingly entreats his son to a twilight St. Lucia rather than an illusory return to a home in Africa, particularly though his poetic gift, a gift that might witness to both wound and recovery. The shade continues instructing his son as they head to the harbor and the sea: "Measure days you have left. Do just that labour / which marries your heart to your right hand," where he prevails upon Walcott to "simplify / your life to one emblem, a sail leaving harbour / and a sail coming in (72). Beginning with the pun on poetic meter, "Measure," the shade enjoins his son to align his "heart" with his writing, the work of his "right hand." The shade unambiguously calls his son to fulfill his potential as a poet, thereby giving Walcott the gift of a vocation. He also connects his son's gift to St. Lucia through the image of a boat, which is wedded to life on the island, sailing in and out of the St. Lucian harbor. Yet this appeal also indicates the level of displacement Walcott currently experiences at this point in the poem.

The shade then calls his son's attention to the arduous labor St. Lucian woman once undertook by hefting coal from Castries to ships in the harbor, whose dedicated effort, rhythm, and beauty he compares to the poet's gift. The shade describes seeing "women climb / like ants up a white flower-pot, baskets of coal / balanced on their torchoned heads" (73). Moreover, the women balanced these coal baskets on their heads "with a strength that never altered its rhythm," witnessing a beauty and poetry in these women (73). Revealing that the dead cannot answer his questions, nor should these answers be his primary aim, the shade further emphasizes that the poet must remain in a state of tension: "whether night is palpable between dawn and dusk / is not for the living; so you mind your business, / which is life and work" (75). The shade again directs his son to continue with his craft and with life. And though this twilight space holds uncertainty, it remains a creative place that guides him toward a better understanding of his home and of belonging, particularly through his dedication to his craft.

Yet because of this twilight uncertainty, the shade cautions his son against a vision frozen in the past by mouthing an incomplete and untenable "O" that signifies nothing. He argues that uttering: "O Thou, my Zero, is an impossible prayer, / utter extinction is still a doubtful conceit. / Though we pray to nothing, nothing cannot be there" (75). Praying to and concentrating solely on the terrible suffering his slave ancestors endured does not configure the completeness of a circle, but instead its negative, a zero that flounders as "an impossible prayer" and "utter extinction." Yet, recalling to mind Walcott's essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?," he claims that there might be a more affirmative maneuver to be made in this tension, where he asserts that "cultures can only be created out of this knowledge of nothing, and in deeper than

the superficial, existential sense, we in the Caribbean know all about nothing. We know that we owe Europe either revenge or nothing, and it is better to have nothing than revenge. We owe the past revenge or nothing, and revenge is uncreative" (12). Paradoxically then, through this "knowledge of nothing," Walcott seeks more creative, affirmative endeavors, while avoiding the restrictiveness of vengeance.

The shade then communicates to his son that his prayer might still form a complete circle, not simply an empty zero, as the shade of Walcott's father counsels him to focus on the present, on his craft, in the stunning lines: "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," where "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" (75). Moreover, the shade asserts that language might also "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" (75). Through his poetry, which he considers simultaneously a gift and a prayer,[9] Walcott seeks a sense of belonging in his home by understanding the past while living fully in the present, pursuing the complete "O" of *Omeros*, and avoiding the nothingness of the incomplete "Zero." The shade encourages his son to recall these women, his forebears, who heft coal baskets as a part of the brutal subjection to slavery, in order to enact a recovery of his St. Lucian heritage through their "ancestral rhyme." This recollection also demonstrates a desire to reconcile the fragmented "O," where the "parentheses of palms" and the embrace of "language's / desire to enclose the loved world in its arms" both suggest a movement toward recovering a sense of belonging by forming images that

configure whole circles. This movement begins with the understanding that his wound, like Philoctete's, is engendered by his ancestors' subjection to slavery,

After discussing the hard physical labor his ancestors undertook carrying heavy baskets of coal to ships in the harbor, the shade entreats his son to embark upon a corresponding cultural labor that nimbly incorporates the poetic gift that he reaffirms in his son, the work of the women hefting coal baskets, and the sense of belonging to St. Lucia that they all experience. He frankly instructs his son: "They walk, you write" (75). The shade further summons Walcott to "'your duty / from the time you watched them from your grandmother's house / as a child wounded by their power and beauty," which "is the chance you now have, to give those feet a voice,'" brilliantly punning on the "feet" of the coal laborers, which also indicates the metrical unit (75, 76). By pronouncing the poet's gift, the shade seeks to animate his son's work through his ancestral past, beseeching him to climb "'in there footsteps, that slow, ancestral beat / of those used to climbing roads,'" stating more specifically that "'your own work owes them / because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhymes'" (75). The shade asserts that Walcott contains the St. Lucian ancestral rhythm within him; he already belongs to his home despite his feelings of pain, grief, and displacement. Witnessing to this displacement, though it will not completely eliminate this feeling, will reconnect him to his sense of place in his island home.

As so often happens in *Omeros*, the poet depicts a circular reversal that contrasts yet correlates one character's narrative with another, a mirroring that respects the individuality of each character while also connecting them as they search for a sense of belonging. In chapter seventeen, such a reversal occurs with Major Plunkett. Rather than

seeking his father's shade in the Underworld, he pursues his fictional "son," Midshipman Plunkett, through historical research. And bringing the Major's research and narrative full circle, Achille's father Afolabe appears aboard Midshipman Plunkett's ship, *The Marlborough*.[10]

The poet depicts Major Plunkett's research as a fraught endeavor that troubles him because he realizes the stakes for his home country of England, and for his own sense of belonging. Debating about history in his head and reacting against the Aruac Indian name for St. Lucia, Iounalo, which means "where the iguana is found," he asserts that: "History was fact, / History was a cannon, not a lizard" (92). He believes that recorded detail and military might create history, not the naming of an island by its earliest known inhabitants. In this moment of exasperation, he loses sight of the fact that one group establishes this sort of historical fact, often through deadly armed combat that leaves other people groups injured and frequently displaced. Getting himself so worked up, he rattles off a series of questions about the reason for fighting the Battle of the Saints, in which his ancestor and countrymen died, wondering how such a battle could be fought to defend the indigenous people: "For this a redoubt / was built? And his countrymen died? For a lizard / with an Aruac name?" (92). He also worries about the revision of history, lamenting that: "It will be rewritten / by black pamphleteers, History will be revised" (92). Not seeing the irony of his own revisionist history, his research becomes his mistress, where "the island was Helen" and he feels that "the harder he worked, the more he betrayed his wife" (103). This humiliates him, along with seeing Helen in the yellow dress she stole from Maud. But it also fills "him with historic regret," which further spurs him to give the island a son (103).

Though misguided, Major Plunkett's research indirectly relocates him in his adopted St. Lucian home. For example, when he drives "down the cool aisle of casuarinas / like poplars, was soothed by the breakwater. In a while / he was himself again" (92-93). As the island soothes Plunkett, the beauty of the character Helen, his housemaid, captivates him. Tempted to take her as a lover, he refrains. He instead chooses a different path than his colonial homeland, finally looking beyond the colonial version of history: "As the fever of History began to pass / like the vision of the island's luminous saint, / he saw, through the Cyclops eye of the glass" the battle as he imagined it (102). Seeing beyond the limited vision of history, he decides not to colonize Helen and take her as his lover, which increases his connection to the island and adds compelling nuance to this British character. And in the twilight of the Empire, a leveling begins between the Major and the St. Lucian characters, at least in the Major's eyes. Life seems to continues as normal for him, with cricket matches and military parades, yet "in the bugle of twilight also, something unexpected" happened in the "dusk that had no historical regret / for the fishermen beating mackerel into their seine" (119, 120). In this twilight moment for Major Plunkett, he envisions the fading of British Empire and the ascension of the independent St. Lucia nation, solidifying his feeling about "this town he had come to love," his adopted home in Gros Islet (120).

Though characters like Hector choose to sever themselves from the ocean, Achille remains buoyantly connected to the sea, which both roots him in his cultural past and to his present home, St. Lucia. Achille's devotion to the sea allows him to embark on an imaginative vision of self-knowledge, where he comes into contact with his African heritage in order to understand himself as a St. Lucian. This journey prevents Achille

from perceiving either Africa or St. Lucia romantic ideal, an understanding of belonging that Walcott frequently critiques, whether of the colonial and postcolonial vision of the Caribbean as an Edenic paradise, or a similar Caribbean perception of a return to Africa as an Edenic homecoming. For instance, in his interview with Hirsch, Walcott argues that: "There is a duty in every son to become his own man. The son severs himself from the father. The Caribbean very often refuses to cut that umbilical cord to confront its own stature. So a lot of people exploit an idea of Africa out of both the wrong kind of pride and the wrong kind of heroic idealism" (114). Walcott refuses either idealistic perspective as an othering impulse, instead desiring to witness to the Caribbean as he sees them.

At home in St. Lucia but also displaced, Achille begins his circular return journey home in chapter twenty-four at the close of Book Two. In his boat on the ocean, he sees a sea-swift flying "as if the humming / horizon-bow had made Africa the target / of its tiny arrow" (125). Whenever a swift enters the narrative, fantastic events occur. Achille begins this imaginary episode by experiencing a sense of belonging as he works as a fisherman in the ocean: "Achille felt the rim / of the brimming morning being brought like a gift" (126). He perceives his job as a fisherman as a gift, where he experiences the sea as "home. / This was his garden" (126). He moreover expresses his gratitude for the sea, where "his heart trembled with enormous tenderness for the purple-blue water" (126). Yet Achille still questions his sense of belonging, even where he feels most at home, the ocean. Catching sight of the swift, which makes "a semicircular turn," as if to indicate the incomplete nature of Achille's journey thus far, he perceives that the swift "was guiding and not following them," feeling that "her one, arrowing aim / was his

happiness and that was blessing enough (126). Over the next four chapters, the bird draws him into an imaginative twilight vision of his ancestral home in Africa. Like the twilight place that Achille seeks during this reversal of the Middle Passage, Bhabha discusses a corresponding place of tension in *The Location of Culture*, where these "'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (2). Like Walcott, Achille visits his father's shade on his journey, seeking a sense of belonging, not in a return to Africa, but in a return to place in St. Lucia, as he collaborates and contests his African ancestry in this "'in-between'" imaginative place.

With his sense of belonging in doubt, Achille seeks an imaginative exile that mirrors the psychological, emotional, and cultural displacement he experiences. As the "horned island sank," the Pitons slowly melting away, Achille's journey begins by reversing the voyage across the Atlantic that his African ancestors were forced to endure (127). He witnesses and laments the tragic end of so many of his ancestors, who would either die crossing the Atlantic or be forced into slavery in the Caribbean: "the nameless bones of all his brothers / drowned in the crossing, plus a Midshipman Plunkett. / He stood like a mast amidships, remembering them, in the lace wreaths of the Caribbean anthem" (128). Intriguingly, the inclusion of the Major's ancestor further implicates him in the colonial trauma inflicted by his ancestors, yet it also makes his cured wound by adopting St. Lucia as his home all the more remarkable.

Witnessing the trauma of the Middle Passage unfold in his vision leads Achille to search for a better understanding of himself and his sense of belonging. Splashing water on the sail in order to keep it from splitting at the seams, Achille sees: "Out of the depths

of his ritual / baptism something was rising, some white memory / of a midshipman" (129). Suffering from heat stroke, he does not simply see Plunkett's relative, but scores of his own drowned during the Middle Passage: "in the stasis of his sunstroke looked as each swell / disgorged them, in tens, in hundreds, and his soul / sickened and was ill" by the same "tribal / sorrow that Philoctete could not down in alcohol" (129). These lines identify the colonial wound that afflicts each character in the poem. They express a unity between Achille, the poet, and the poet's that have gone before him, such as Homer, articulating that "our only inheritance that elemental noise / of the windward, unbroken breakers, Ithaca's / or Africa's, all joining the ocean's voice" (130). As occurs with the poet and Major Plunkett, Achille then sees an ancestral shade appear, as he discerns "the ghost / of his father's face shoot up at the end of the line" (130). Though painful, Achille's imaginative exile and envisioning his father's shade moves him toward self-consciousness.

Walcott saturates Achille's imaginative exile with twilight imagery, for instance through the sea swift. Described as a twilight character bridging disparate worlds, the swift "touched both worlds with her rainbow…this dart of the meridian" (130). Not only traversing between Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe, the swift's circular, cyclical journey spans time as well as place: "She could loop the stars with a fishline, she tired / porpoises, she circled epochs with her outstretched span" (131). And perhaps most significant to the poem's narrative, the swift was present at the cutting down of the *gommier* trees: "She was the swift that he had seen in the cedars / in the foam of the clouds, when she had shot across / the blue ridges of the waves, to a god's orders" (131). Called by the gods to lead Achille across the Atlantic, the swift guides him on his journey

that causes him to feel "he was headed home" as he imaginatively travels to Africa (131). God affirms this spiritual calling as Achille encounters the shores of an unrecognizable place: Africa. Voyaging inland along a river, the landscape remains inscrutable until a light breaks both without and from within Achille: "And God said to Achille, 'Look, I giving you permission / to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot, / the swift whose wings is the sign of my crucifixion'" (134). Achille's spiritual journey therefore offers him the opportunity to return to his ancestral home.

Throughout his vision, Achille expresses a dual sense of belonging. For instance, as Achille's African ancestors help him ashore from his canoe, the Walcott narrator breaks into the poem: "Half of me was with him. One half with the midshipman / by a Dutch canal. But now, neither was happier / or unhappier than the other" (135). The narrator also professes his African and European ancestry in these lines, and in so doing expresses his sense of belonging to both continents. This sense of belonging to a range of cultures is at the heart of *Omeros* and of Walcott's entire poetic oeuvre because he sees it as consonant with the Caribbean experience, recalling the false choice that he examines in the poem "A Far Cry from Africa," questioning "how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" (29-30). Furthermore, after Achille steps on shore, he encounters his father's shade, where: "He sought his own features in those of their life-giver, / and saw two worlds mirrored there" (136). Not only does Achille see himself in his father's shade, but the African and European worlds are "mirrored" between father and son.

In this twilight meeting filled with circular imagery, Achille interrogates his understanding of his ancestral home through language and naming. With the fishermen of

the tribe, Achille "sat in a circle" and he and his father introduce themselves to one another by pronouncing their names (137). Afolabe then asks his son what his name means, further stating that he forgets the name he gave him, as does Achille, who utters: "Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know. / The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave / us; trees, men we yearn for a sound that is missing" (137). In one sense, Achille's forgetting demonstrates the profound linguistic displacement many Caribbean inhabitants endure, shorn from their ancestral home. Yet, as Martin McKinsey contends in his article "Missing Sounds and Mutable Meanings: Names in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*," Walcott ultimately "defines this gap between name and being…as a space of potential," moreover noting that "we become our names neither by assuming new ones," nor by mimicry, but "through the writing of his West Indian narrative" (900). Achille's initial sense of dislocation therefore allows Walcott as a site for potential, which becomes evident when Achille returns to a sense of place in St. Lucia later in the narrative.

Achille's conversation with his father continues, focusing on the particular identity and sense of belonging that accompanies a name. Achille explains that: "In the world I came from / we accept the sounds we were given. Men, trees, water," where names have simply become signifiers sundered of any intimate knowledge of the noun referred to (138). Afolabe responds by further identifying this linguistic shift from the particular to the general, asking that if he stated "the name of that man, that tree, and this father," then "would every sound be a shadow that crossed your ear, / without the shape of a man or a tree?" (138) This linguistic displacement greatly grieves Afolabe's tribe. Uncertain how to answer the shade's question, Achille recognizes his name as a gift, yet

remains unwilling to understand it, calling his name "the gift / of this sound whose meaning I still do not care to know" (138). Perhaps he remains too dislocated for the moment. Afolabe replies that if Achille does not want to know the meaning of his name, "then I am not Afolabe, your father," furthermore stating that "I am not here / or a shadow. And you, nameless son, are only the ghost / of a name" (138, 139). Afolabe's response brings Achille to tears, emphasizing his displacement from Africa.

Experiencing further displacement from his ancestral home by witnessing Africans selling fellow Africans into slavery, this tribal war signifies an example of incomplete circles, or arcs, that occur in *Omeros,* particularly in the first half of the poem. One principal instance occurs when Achille attempts to stop tribes from selling other tribes into slavery. Achille achieves this aim as he disrupts the unity of the African tribal council by "cut[ting] off their circle," a move that also formally cuts off the rhythm of the line with its caesura (147). He then kills an archer with his oar-turned-blade, believing he "can deliver all of them by hiding in a half-circle, then I could change their whole future, even the course of the river / would flow backwards" (148). Achille deludes himself, where this "half-circle," perhaps also alluding to the similarly shaped "bow" the archer holds, forms an image of Achille's misguided wrath, an ultimately incomplete and deficient response, even to a deed as cruel and monstrous as selling or buying humans. In his wrath, Achille exposes his weakness, like Homer's Achilles: "Then a cord / of thorned vine looped his tendon, encircling the heel / with its own piercing chain. He fell hard" (148). Though Achille becomes enslaved by his wrath for the slavery of his ancestors, he soon seeks to complete the circle of his journey by returning home to the Caribbean.

Achille's experiences at the point between cultures and place during his vision also serve to further establish the poet's role of witnessing this twilight tension. The poet achieves this most prominently during Achille's vision through the griot, the West African poet and storyteller whose art resembles the oral storytelling of ancient Greek bards. At the beginning of chapter twenty-eight, the poet remarks: "Now he heard the griot muttering his prophetic song / of sorrow that would be the past" (148). Achille's realization conveys that the poet must dutifully inhabit this tension between past and future and, to use an Audeneque term, truthfully witness what he or she sees. Fittingly, Audenesque phrases occur in this chapter. For instance, the poet describes the "crooked fingers" of African trees reclaiming the those that perished in the Middle Passage crossing, a phrase reminiscent of Auden's line in "As I walked out one evening": "'You shall love your crooked neighbour / With your crooked heart'" (51-52). Auden uses the word "crooked" frequently in his poetry to convey the wickedness that often motivates the human heart. In the poem, he also articulates that the poet must provide a witness to this crookedness in order that readers might face their own crookedness, a witness that Walcott adopts and Achille embodies as the latter stares into the river that mirrors his displacement. A second Audenesque phrase appears as the poet witnesses to the remarkable lives the slaves he sees: "But they crossed, they survived," (149). This recalls Auden's emphasis in the second section of his elegy "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" that poetry "survives," a poem that articulates the poet's role as one of witness (36). The griot envisions Africans sold as slaves and shipped across the Atlantic, imagining these slaves as having "seeds in our stomachs" that represent the life that grows within them and passed on to their ancestors (149).

Witnessing to the afterlife of slavery, the poet testifies how the slaves were taken from Africa to the Caribbean and the U.S., displaced like uprooted trees. Walcott uses this image to circle back to the beginning of the poem, providing a poetic parallel to the trees that were cut down in poem's opening lines to make the fishing canoes. They became "firewood, dismembered / branches, not men," and where "each carried / the nameless freight of himself to the other world" (150). Stripped of identity through slavery, these Africans were transported to a new place, where: "after wreaths of seaweed, after the bitter nouns / of strange berries, coral sores, after the familiar irons / singing round their ankles, after the circling sounds" and "dry sand their soles knew. Sand they could recognize" (151). These slaves never again found their home in Africa, "but on a palm shore" in the Caribbean (151). Though from various tribes, "they felt the sea-wind tying them into one nation / of eyes and shadows and groans, in the one pain / that is inconsolable, the los of one's shore" (151). Through their displacement and the unifying effect of the ocean, they became a people possessing a sense of belonging to one another in the Caribbean.

The narrator reenters the narrative in chapter thirty-two, where he and his mother experience loss and displacement as she loses her memory and he slowly loses his mother. In a particularly poignant scene, he must remind her that he is her son, though they experience a tender moment of "blessed / lucidity" when his mother eventually recalls that: "'You are my son.' 'Warwick's son,' she said. / 'Nature's gentleman'" (166). After her recollection, she becomes "haloed," the third circular halo in this section: "His vine-leaves haloed her now," transferring his father's poetic laurels to his mother and conferring a sainthood on her (166).

The poet poignantly expresses the displacement he experiences from his mother's dementia and eventual death, as well as his dislocation from St. Lucia in both form and content. For instance, he conveys this disorientation through the distinct shift in section two of chapter thirty-four from tercets to couplets. This marks the only time the poem alters its *terza rima*, as the poem stutters and stammers under the weight of his disorientation. The jarring interruption the couplets create, along with Walcott's move away from St. Lucia to Massachusetts, strikes a dissonant chord, but intentionally so. This shift acts to dislocate the reader out of place corresponding, at least to a certain degree, with the displaced characters in the poem. The remainder of the book reinforces this displacement in the lives of the Sioux, Choctaw, Creek, and Catherine Weldon.

Walcott's focus on displacement in the poem outside of St. Lucia, particularly his inclusion of Native Americans in the poem, has met with criticism within scholarship. For instance, Paul Breslin in *Nobody's Nations: Reading Derek Walcott* critiques the poem's move to the U.S. in what he considers the incongruous portrayal of the Native Americans' oppression alongside the oppression incurred upon those that come to St. Lucia through the Middle Passage, stating that it "seems connected to the Caribbean only as a parallel example of imperial violence against native peoples" (262). Breslin questions the soundness of juxtaposing Walcott's own wandering in the U.S. and the racism he experiences with imperial violence perpetrated against the Native Americans: "It is in the juxtapositions of his own difficulties with cataclysmic historical events that the poem most painfully overreaches itself" (262). I disagree that being seen "only as a parallel example of imperial violence against native peoples" is problematic. Rather, I believe that it works within the context of the poem. Local understanding from a variety

of places transforms the displacement many of the characters feel into the gratitude and a return home. Showing this "parallel example of imperial violence" particularizes the wounds caused by imperialism by allowing twilight figures like Walcott and Weldon to enter the poem. Individual displacement is easier to grasp than the widespread displacement and subjugation of an entire people. For instance, his pain in Boston highlights his twilight tension between home and exile: "I had nowhere to go but home. Yet I was lost" (172). Like other characters, he feels displaced. And there remains a familiarity in his sorrow, acting to connect the reader's pain with that of the characters'.

Frozen by the cold Northeast temperatures, displaced his distance from his home in St. Lucia and by the loss of his parents, the poet dramatizes his dislocation while visiting a museum in chapter thirty-two.[11] Though in the museum he encounters how museums can stifle the power of art, he also experiences an epiphanic moment, expressing this sudden revelation in the twilight through the image of the "O." As Walcott laments art's collusion with history, he ends up catching sight of a life-giving work of art that brings about an epiphany, Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream*: "I caught the light on green water as salt and clear / as the island's. Then I saw him. Achille!" (183). The poet then depicts his encounter with Achille in the following ekphrastic lines, recurrently using the image of the "O." The painting depicts a black man reclining in the aft of a boat whose mast has been knocked down. Tempestuous waves surround the boat, as do numerous shakes. Moreover, a dim frigate can be discerned in the background. He sees Achille "circled by chain-sawing sharks" (183). The poet moreover envisions Achille as having "turned his head towards Africa," alluding to Achille's imaginative journey to Africa (183). The poet's ekphrasis allows further allusion to *The Odyssey*, as

discussing the painting permits him to consider "another Homer's hand" (184). Furthermore, the "O" reappears in these lines, referring to the ocean, as well as the circular connections between the Walcott narrator and his characters: "Achille rests on one elbow always circle / his craft and mine" (184). The poet also associates his craft of poetry with Achille's as a fisherman, both reliant on the ocean.

Yet, as he leaves the museum, the poet's ekphrastic epiphany turns into an ironic witness of the residue of racism hardened into stone like a statue, which he depicts during the dusk. As he exists the museum, he describes how he "stood in the dusk between the Greek columns of the museum" (184). In this twilight space, he stares at "Saint Gaudens's / frieze of black soldiers darkening on the Common, / and felt myself melting in their dusk" (184). In the twilight, the poet gazes on the *Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-Forth Regiment*, the all-black regiment that served the Union in the Civil War. This monument, portrayed in an ekphrastic poem "For the Union Dead" by Walcott's friend and mentor Robert Lowell, serves as a monumental vision of fighting against racial injustice. Yet as he leaves the museum, cabs refuse to stop for him, which the poet suggests is racially motivated.

Walcott then encounters his father's shade on a New England beach near the end of Book Four, who again offers specific advise to his son about his poetic gift. Though urging the poet's return to his home, the shade counsels his son to take this voyage so that he might better understand his European literary ancestry, but will also cause further disorientation and displacement before he circles back and returns home. Book Four ends as the poet cycles through familiar images from the poem. For instance, the shade again adopts the imagery of the barbershop to advise his son to ascend to his poetic throne:

"Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere, / cherish our island for its green simplicities, / enthrone yourself, if your sheet is a barber-chair" (187). Comparing this barber "sheet" to "'a sail leaving harbour and a sail coming in,'" a central image in the poem depicting exile and return, the shade also describes how: "'The sea-swift vanishes in rain, and yet in its travelling all that the sea-swift does / it does in a circular pattern. Remember that, son'" (187, 187-188). Another recurrent image, the swift further signifies the "circular pattern" of exile and return that characterizes Walcott's Odyssean path, implying that the poet must first journey away from St. Lucia, but also return to complete the circular journey. This tender moment between father and son also develops the connection between the flourishing of Walcott's poetic gift and a return to his home in St. Lucia.

At this point in the poem, another circle emerges: the meridian. The poet traverses this circle with the first words of Book Five: "I crossed my meridian" (189). After imaginatively exploring his African ancestors, he leaves St. Lucia for Europe, effectively crossing one side of his ancestry to the other, now considering his European roots by traveling through the great cities of the continent. The second section of this chapter reinforces this circular image, as it begins: "Across the meridian, I try seeing the other side," that is, the other side of his lineage (191). This passage recalls Walcott's emphasis in "What the Twilight Says" on understanding both of his fathers, African and European, as the Walcott narrator endeavors to complete the understanding of ancestry. It is therefore not surprising that this book abounds with circular imagery, "from the O's of a Roman aqueduct," to "the circle of Charing Cross" in London and the "meridian of Greenwich" (192, 193, 196).

Walcott also discusses meridians in his essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" He argues that: "Once the meridian of European civilization has been crossed, according to the theory, we have entered a mirror where there can only be simulations of self-discovery" (6-7). Firmly critical of this stance, Walcott contends that: "Somehow, the cord is cut by that meridian. Yet a return is also impossible, for we cannot return to what we have never been. The truth in all this is, of course, the amnesia of the American, particularly of the African. Most of our definitions of American culture are fragmentary, based on the gleam of racial memory which pierces this amnesia" (7). Mimicry therefore can enact a false severing by "the meridian of European civilization," or what Bhabha calls the "*almost the same, but not quite*" (122). Walcott's view of mimicry instead makes a circular image of this arc, where Walcott acknowledges the degradations of mimicry, while yet asserting that all art is mimicry. The Walcott narrator's crossing of this meridian in *Omeros* therefore performs a real "self-discovery" that is perceived through the "gleam of racial memory," which is a twilight space generating a recovery of his Caribbean identity rather than a mere simulation.

Paul Jay affirms Walcott's revision of mimicry in his essay "Fated to Unoriginality: The Politics of Mimicry in Derek Walcott's *Omeros,*" focusing on Walcott's reconciliation of his diverse cultural roots by using colonial wounds to interrogate the epic tradition. Jay discusses Walcott's utilization of the epic genre as problematic on the one hand, with its connection to "imperialist and racist tradition" and that: "Such a project seems fated to unoriginality" for Walcott (546). Yet, in his deft reading of Walcott's essay, Jay establishes how Walcott argues that "mimicry gets rehabilitated" and that, for Walcott, "being fated to unoriginality is simply the realization

that all imaginative creation involves mimicry" (548). Unoriginal because of its similarity to all artistic creation, Walcott's rehabilitation of mimicry therefore acknowledges the artist's exile while simultaneously seeking a return home.

He begins his European ancestral literary pilgrimage in Lisbon, often comparing Europe to the Caribbean, as well as highlighting the circular aspect of the journey. In Lisbon he makes the Homeric connection that the Portuguese capital was "founded by Ulysses," referring to the legend that Odysseus found Lisbon on his way to Troy (189). Here places merge in his mind, where this place "was no longer Lisbon but Port of Spain" (189, 190). Moreover, as he travels to Genoa, the poet reads the "O" in the landscape as a grief-stricken groan: "the past dryly grieves, / from the O's of a Roman aqueduct," where the "twilight ripens" (192). In this twilight space, displacing trauma rings the poet's experience.

The next arc of the poet's travels take him to London, the center of his literary heritage. In London, the poet sees Omeros entering "the circle of Charing Cross" in the London Underground, alluding to Charon, the mythological figure that ferries Dante and Virgil across the River Styx (193). Fittingly, he reads *The Odyssey*, though he not only focuses on the written, but the oral aspects of the epic: "Omeros was naming the ships / whose oars spidered soundlessly over the sun-webbed calm / behind his own lashes" (194). Moreover, Omeros displays his fluency in the language of the Empire: as he "mutters its fluent alphabet, the peaked A of a spire, / the half-vowels of bridges, down to the crumpled Z / of his overcoat" (195). Despite his articulation of the Empire, and of countless others from other lands under British rule, London in particular and the British Empire in general remained for years the center around which the outlying provinces

orbited. But Walcott witnesses to the weakening of the Empire's gravitational pull. For example, in a mock catechetical call and response, he asks questions that the British would have asked the nations they colonized: "Who decrees a great epoch? The meridian Greenwich" (196). The reappearance of this circular meridian demonstrates the ripples that issued from places like Greenwich, Big Ben, St. Paul's, and the National Gallery across the Empire. But now the former British colonies have moved beyond the orbit of the Empire.

The poet then travels to Dublin, another colonized territory, and employs explicit Joycean references and the image of the "O" to further demonstrate the question of belonging at the center of the twilight tension. Bruce King, in his biography titled *Derek Walcott: A Life*, asserts that Joyce "is the model" for the final third of the poem "because he is an Irish reality and an Irish internationalist (beyond nationalism), who created his race from daily life without mythic inflation" (517).[12] In Dublin, the poet looks at the "tonsured hill" in Dublin, as well as an "old well" that possesses "encircling power" (198). The poet recognizes a sense of exile and displacement in Dublin that corresponds to St. Lucia, feeling: "The weight of the place" and "its ancient name" echo "the old shame / of disenfranchisement" (199). He also makes pronounced allusions to James Joyce, articulating that "I leant on the mossed embankment just as if he / bloomed there every dusk with eye-patch and tilted hat, / rakish cane on one shoulder" (200). Punning on Leopold Bloom's name, he discerns Joyce in the dusk, with his characteristic hat, cane, and patch over his eye.

Walcott then journeys to Greece, frequently likening it to his island home, bringing his references to *The Odyssey* full circle by envisioning the exilic lament of

Odysseus' crew. Observing Odysseus and his crew on the deck of their ship, the crew argues with Odysseus over their interminable voyage: "'you dream of Ithaca, / you pray to your gods. May they be as far apart / from your wandering as ours in Africa" (203). Feeling their displacement from their home acutely, they then exclaim: "'Island after island passing. Still we ain't home'" (203). Though feeling a sense of belonging to the literary ancestors he encounters on his pilgrimage, the poet also experiences a state of exile that corresponds to Odysseus' crew as he travels so far from his island home.

Nearing the end of his journey, the poet contemplates the role of the poet in Audenesque fashion. In the "honeyed twilight," the poet sees art as subordinate to the history that he encounters in Europe (205). Recalling Auden's consideration of the banality of suffering in "Musée des Beaux Arts," and "with art next door to the ovens" of concentration camps in his mind, the poet cannot agree with the "mausoleum museums" that evacuate life and meaning from art by "repeating that power / and art were the same" (205). Walcott's assertion that poetry and political power are not consonant summons to mind Auden's famous limitation of the power of art in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," where "poetry makes nothing happen" (36). Preferring art's power to amplify lived experience rather than used as a tool to control other humans, the poet critiques the self-congratulatory European art that too easily forgives itself of its colonial and postcolonial atrocities, contending: "Tell that to a slave from the outer regions / of their fraying empires, what power lay in the world / of forgiving fountains with naiads and lions" (205). As Walcott articulates in *Omeros* and his other works, however, he believes that art depicting the ordinary lives of St. Lucians, rather than distant gods and animals, contains a power that might lead to forgiveness.

Having crossed his meridian, the poet reverses his geographic and psychological crossing and returns to his adopted home in Boston, using exilic language to convey his continued feeling of displacement. He begins the second section of chapter forty-one with one of the more famous lines from *Omeros*: "I re-entered my reversible world" (207). Back in Boston, he cites the connection between humans and their birthplace: "Men take their colours / as the trees do from the native soil of their birth" (208). He moreover laments that though perhaps now in a globalized world frequent movement away from "the native soil" seems normal, after these "trees" move from their "native soil," "a desert place widens in the heart" (208). Alluding to the ecstatic final lines of Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats": "In the deserts of the heart, / Let the healing fountain heart," Walcott reverses Auden's image, warning how displacement without a return home perpetuates "deserts of the heart" (62-63).

In Book Six, the twilight tension intensifies as the poem shifts back to the Caribbean, as the poet refuses to adopt a Eurocentric history, instead incorporating elements of both Europe and Africa. Taking place during January, the poet invokes Janus, the two-faced Greek god that protects the doorways and gates by looking forward and backward: "Ah, twin-headed January, seeing either tense: / a past, they assured us, born in degradation," as well as "a present that lifted us up with the wind's / noise in the breadfruit leaves with such an elation / that it contradicts what is past!" (223-224). The poet will not abide with this European triumphalism. Instead, the poet shifts to a more peaceable image of tension with the Atlantic Ocean, its waves crashing on Caribbean and African shore alike.

Returned to his home in St. Lucia, the poet discusses the death of Hector, expressing a grief for this loss of life in his newly adopted craft, "The Comet," as well as his abandonment of his cultural craft as a fisherman. Hector crashes his transport van as he hurtles across the island, "his arc was over, for the course / of every comet is such. The fated crescent / was printed on the road by the scorching tires" (226). As the "O" symbolizes a sense of completion and life, the end of his "arc" signifies that his circle was cut short. Hector's death intersects with Walcott's return to St. Lucia, where he not only mourns the death of the fisherman, but also grieves the cultural life of this traditional craft so vital to an island intimately connected to the sea. He then links his poetic vocation to the fisherman's: "My craft required the same / crouching care, the same crabbed, natural devotion / of the hand" that had "planed an elegant canoe; its time was gone / with the spirit in the wood" (227). Not only does he identify a similar skill and artistry in fishing, carpentry, and poetry, but closely associates each craft with the traditional life of St. Lucians.

The poet then questions his poetic gift, wondering if it displaces him from his home and distances him from his fellow St. Lucians, rather than providing a witness for them that might illuminate their lives and develop the island culturally. Feeling guilty for his success, he asks himself: "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," to aestheticize them for his own fame (227). He continues his line of questioning: "Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?" (228). Walcott questions whether or not his love of tradition, which includes his affection for English literature passed on to him from his European ancestors, supersedes his sense of home and belonging to his Caribbean home, thereby distancing

him from his fellow St. Lucians. He further indicts himself for the "hypocrisy / of loving them [St. Lucians] from hotels," lamenting that "Art is History's nostalgia," a "nostalgia" that increases the "gap between the driver / and me increased" (228). I disagree with Walcott's self-criticism. It recalls Seamus Heaney's belief that he aestheticizes his cousin Colum McCartney's death in section VIII of "Station Island" or in "Punishment" when he accuses himself of being "the artful voyeur" of the ritually sacrificed humans that he depicts in his bog poems (32). But both poets' self-criticisms seem too harsh. Walcott provides a witness to the traumas inflicted on his people, simply as a reality, the poetic narrative of the island and what happened there, hopefully helping to prevent it from happening again. Moreover, his witness helps to heal colonial traumas and develop the Caribbean culturally. Also, he creates a beautiful poem by fulfilling his poetic gift, working to return his people and himself to a sense of home, belonging, and place.

One reason Walcott seems to question his artistic motives includes his desire to refrain from objectifying ordinary St. Lucians like Europeans and U.S. Americans have through political and economic policies. He expresses his anxiety that he commits the same ills that unthinking postcolonial tourists, unconcerned about St. Lucia as a people or place, commodifying "the gold sea / flat as a credit card" (229). To these tourists, St. Lucian beaches look "just like everywhere else, / Greece or Hawaii" (229). He seeks to avoid committing this type of damaging objectification that plunders the uniqueness of St. Lucia.

At this point in the poem, Walcott begins to employ more distinct notes of gratitude, for the connection between St. Lucia and its ordinary simplicities, as well as several characters' wounds healed on the island. For instance, in the stunningly beautiful

lines, the poet observes: "The rites of the island were simplified by its elements, / which changed places. The grooved sea was Achille's garden" and "the ridged plot of rattling plantains carried their sense / of the sea" (234). Moreover, characters like Ma Kilman begin pursuing lasting cures for their wounds and the traumas of other characters. She commences seeking her remedy in: "Islands of bay leaves in the medicinal bath / of a cauldron, a sibylline cure" (235). Ma Kilman, a further twilight character, possesses syncretistic religious beliefs as both a practicing Catholic and obeah woman. Edward Baugh, in *Derek Walcott,* considers her twilight journey "a metamorphic progression that involves the African-European interface in Caribbean culture" (193). As she returns from Mass to the No Pain Café, she utters "a soft Catholic / curse, then crossed herself" after pinching her finger in the door (236). Furthermore, as she takes Eucharist at Mass, "the wafer dissolved her with tenderness, / the way a raindrop melts on the tongue of a breeze. / In the church's cool cave the sweat dried from her eyes" (236). Yet after praying the Rosary, "she began her own litany / of berries, Hail Mary marigolds" and other plants that she uses to cure various ailments. This prompts her to seek the cure for Philoctete's wound by searching for a forgotten plant whose power "[is] rooted in bitterness" (237). Recovering this plant in turn heals Ma Kilman of her lost St. Lucian folk knowledge.

Ma Kilman's use of this St. Lucian herb to cure Philoctete's wound not only connects the remedy with the island, enacting a return to place, but a swift transports the seeds of the plant from Africa to St. Lucia, a cycle that the poet dramatizes through recurrent "O" imagery. The poet notes this transportation, expressing that: "A swift had carried the strong seed in its stomach / centuries ago from its antipodal shore" (238). Moreover, the poet further casts the swift's attempt to cure the wounds born out of the

African diaspora by completing the isolated arcs of the one-way journey during the Middle Passage: "She aimed to carry the cure / that precedes every wound," where "the reversible Bight / of Benin was her bow, her target the ringed haze / of circling horizon" (239). In these lines, he cleverly puns on the name of the bay bordered by Benin, Togo, and Nigeria. The Bight serves as a "bow" that launches the bird, a "reversible" line it crosses to travel back and forth across the Atlantic, "reversible" because it works to heal the wounds of the Middle Passage and it can be traversed in both directions, working much like the Walcott narrator and Achille. And employing a further "O" image, the swift uses the "circling horizon" to mark its trajectory toward its final end, the Caribbean. In a twilight moment, the swift recognizes that it has reached its circled target: "Then, one dawn the day-star / rose slowly from the wrong place" (239). The swift's carrying of the seed becomes a sacrificial gift, where: "In a year she was bleached bone" (239). Yet out of this sacrifice comes life: "the vine grew its own wings, out of the ocean / it climbed like the ants, the ancestors of Achille, / the women carrying coals" (239). Moreover, an apt image for the poet, he hopes a similar growth will issue forth in St. Lucia out his poetic gift.

Walcott therefore constructs a hybrid space within this tension for his narrator, but also for other characters like Ma Kilman, a practicing Catholic that pursues a cure for herself and Philoctete by enacting a recovery of cultural place though a reclamation of African and Caribbean gods. The poet notes Ma Kilman's turn toward alternative sources of healing, where she teaches that the "sutured wound that Philoctete / was given by the sea, but how the sea could heal / the wound also" (242). Ma Kilman believes that the African deities rushed across the sea with the slave ships during the Middle Passage, yet

remain hidden until sought out. These gods clearly provide energy for Ma Kilman based on their connection to her displaced African roots: "All the unburied gods, for three deep centuries dead, / but from whose lineage, as if her veins were their roots" (242). She hears and sees these deities, and "thrashed herself for the sin / of doubting their names before the cure could begin" (243). Repenting of this "sin," she therefore turns toward the gods of her ancestors in order to pursue a cure for her wound as well as Philoctete's: "She rubbed dirt in her hair, she prayed / in the language of ants and her grandmother, to life / the sore from its roots in Philoctete's rotting shin" (244). Chanting these ancient prayers, she mouths audible "O's" that "reeled backwards / to its beginning, from the black original cave, / of the sibyl's mouth," crossing both time and space (245). Her recovery of this cultural space moreover sends out concentric ripples that impact other characters: "Philoctete shook himself up from the bed of his grave, / and felt the pain draining, as surf-flowers through sand" (245). Shackled by colonial wounds, Ma Kilman and Philoctete begin to experience a cure by recovering a lost cultural sphere of knowledge.

Shifting the narrative back toward himself, the poet identifies this moment as a turning point in the poem, seeing his ancestors in Ma Kilman and Philoctete, as well as the tension between colonial wounds and Caribbean cures. Bearing in mind the weight they carry, he exclaims: "See her there, my mother, my grandmother, my great-great- / grandmother. See the black ants of their sons, / their coal-carrying mothers" (245). Yet he also sees these characters experience healing from the pain and trauma caused by colonial wounds: "Feel the shame, the self-hate / draining from all our bodies in the exhausted sleeping / of a rumshop closed Sunday" (245). Moreover, the narrator expresses his most explicit connection with his fellow twilight character, Philoctete, maintaining that: "There

was no difference between me and Philoctete" (245). Making this link with Philoctete manifest signifies that the poet not only experiences a similar colonial wound, but also announces his intention to pursue a corresponding St. Lucian cure, a significant maneuver as he seeks to return to place and a sense of belonging from his displacement.

Moreover, Philoctete's healing and Ma Kilman's cure serve as a fundamental event in the poem, enacting a reversal of the "O" as a wound, transforming it into an image of wholeness, which allows a nuanced vision of home and belonging. This event causes a ripple effect that propels other figures toward a physical remedy and a recovery of place. For instance, Ma Kilman prepares the cure for his wound in "one of those cauldrons from the old sugar-mill," a mill associated with slavery, which sits "agape in its crusted, agonized O: the scream / of centuries" (246). Fittingly, Ma Kilman refashions a cauldron from the sugar-mill that functioned by means of slave labor, the circular opening still screaming the horrors of slavery, redeeming this "O" in the narrative. Once a tool used in slave labor, the cauldron now serves as a point of transformation and recovery, a threshold into healing for Philoctete. As Philoctete enters the cauldron, the poet describes him as a child, as if his entrance into the healing vessel returns him to a more innocent time: "Trembling, he entered / his bath like a boy" (247). Entering into this ritual through the ringed mouth of the cauldron achieves a redemptive irony for both characters, where a tool of slavery ends up becoming a tool for the healing of slavery's wounds.

As Philoctete's cure materializes, a change occurs where language and a renewed sense of belonging work reciprocally to reshape the poem's characters and achieve a return to place. Using the language of place, the poet indicates that this cure leads to a

return to place: “The lime leaves leeched to his wet / knuckled spine like islands that cling to the basin / of the rusted Caribbean” (247). After Philoctete struggles and writhes in the cauldron, the cure finally takes effect: “he could feel the putrescent shin / drain in the seethe like sucked marrow, he felt it drag / the slime from his shame,” which leaves the poet to wonder: What else did it cure?” (247) Not simply a physical cure, this healing ritual offers a return to home and a sense of belonging for Philoctete, as the “yoke of the wrong name lifted from his shoulders” (247). The poet’s linguistic dexterity also reflects Philoctete’s ancestral healing, particularly with words like “coffles,” a line of slaves shackled together, and “shallop,” a type of ship (247). Both words indicate his shackles and his freedom from the horrors of the Middle Passage in the lines: “The white foam unlocked his coffles, his ribbed shallop / broke from its anchor” (247). The sea therefore fosters this healing, acting as baptismal waters that also “steered his brow into the right current…to that other world,” as the poet uses “brow” to pun on the word “prow” to show Philoctete’s healing as a reversal of the Middle Passage (248). This return to the sea, even if only an imaginative return for the moment, demonstrates the monumental shift the cure produces: “his flexed palm enclosed an oar with the ident- / ical closure of a mouth around its own name” (248). Philoctete’s rebirth engenders in him a desire pursue a linguistic recovery: “he’d weep in the window for their tribal shame. / A shame for the loss of words,” but know, he stood naked where “the yard was Eden. And its light the first day’s” (248). Called “Adam” in these lines, Philoctete’s healing renames him, demonstrating the Adamic linguistic possibilities to St. Lucians.

At the same time that Philoctete experiences healing from his ancestral wound and a renewed sense of belonging, the poet undergoes a similar purgation process. In

chapter forty-nine, the poet articulates that his wound ostensibly occurs because of the loss he experiences in romantic relationships. As he begins to feel healed from lost love, he expresses that: "I felt the wrong love leaving me" and "I felt her voice draining / from mine" (249). Yet this romantic wound also symbolizes ancestral wounds he discusses with his father's shade earlier in the poem, as well as the selfish love he previously laments.

Walcott's curative process begins by healing his imagination, as he envisions a return to place, responding with notes of gratitude. His "wrong love," he conceives of a Dantean visit to "the bubbling pits of / the Malebolge," the volcano at Soufrière in southwestern St. Lucia (249). This vision prompts him to reflect that: "The process, the proof of a self-healing island / whose every cove was a wound, from the sibyl's art / renewed my rain-washed eyes," a baptismal renewal that causes him to reflect: "I felt an elation / opening and closing the valves of my paneled hear" (249). Founded in an ancestral cure intimately related to place, Ma Kilman's art and Philoctete's healing guide the poet to initiate his own restoration, one whose "elation" elicits a sense of gratitude in his heart. He further couches his gratefulness in epic terms, alluding to an Odyssean freedom where: "My braceleted Circe / was gone" (250). And he not only expresses his freedom from these chains, but also that "the Caribbean ringed me with infinite mercy / as it did the island," as the poet feels "ringed" by another "O," the encircling ocean (250).

The Plunketts are further cast as twilight characters that increasingly feel a sense of belonging in St. Lucia. In chapters fifty and fifty-one, Walcott charts the displacement the Plunketts' feel from the U.K. as they visit the island and Maud's impending illness, which it seems only she knew was happening. Then, chapter fifty-two abruptly begins

with: “The morning Maud died,” killed by another empire than the British Empire, the “empire of cancer” (260). Maud’s death leaves Major Plunkett completely undone. Maud’s death and the Major’s loss lead the poet to feel a deeper sense of belonging to them as he sees his ancestors in the Plunketts: “There was Plunkett in my father, much as there was / my mother in Maud” (263). He moreover sees “in that khaki Ulysses,” indicating Major Plunkett, “a changing shadow of Telemachus / in me, in his absent war, and an empire’s guilt / stitched in the one pattern of Maud’s fabulous quilt” (263). King astutely notes that as “Plunkett is like Odysseus in seeking a home and lost son, Maude is Penelope embroidering a tapestry” (517). Therefore, through their shared ancestry, Walcott envisions himself the son of Major Plunkett. And in Maud’s quilt adorned with sea swifts an expression of ancestral guilt and a sign of desired reconciliation.

In a striking twilight moment, the Walcott narrator attends Maud’s funeral in chapter fifty-three, marking the only time many of the central characters interact with one another in the same place during the poem. Looking around at the characters he has written in his poem, he notes: “I recognized Achille. He stood next to Philoctete / in a rusted black suit, his eyes anchored to the pew,” the rusted anchor of a wound still hounding Achille (265). He wonders why he, Achille, and Philoctete would attend a service for a postcolonial figure at a church they do not believe in, answering his own question: “I knew I was here / because the Major had trained us all as cadets” (265). In this twilight moment where the lives of author and character blur, the poet asserts that he, Achille, and Hector all went to school together and learned drill from the Major. And though Major Plunkett serves as an archetypal postcolonial figure that embodies the British Empire by ordering its colonial citizens to conform to the Empire’s expectations,

in this instance to attend the Major's wife's funeral, there also seems an underlying relationship between the characters that shatters the colonizer and colonized binary. Maud's funeral provides a glimpse of Walcott's understanding of the Caribbean, a gathering of people from various social and cultural circumstances living together outside of the colonial hierarchy.

The characters' shared loss and unsettling of colonial binaries also offers the poet a site for creation, a place where he witnesses these different worlds collide. For instance, the poet articulates this space for creativity as he reflects on his shared aesthetic interests with Maud: "What I shared with his wife we shared as gardeners" (265). Connecting poetry and place, Walcott describes with imaginative dexterity the kind of witness he hopes for Maud, whose life rooted in St. Lucia: "I had wanted large green words to lie waxen on / the page's skin" making "clear concentric rings" outward, influencing the world around him (266). Acknowledging the peculiarity of writing himself into his own poem, he affirms his own twilight identity: "I was both there and not there. I was attending / the funeral of a character I'd created" (266). As a creator that places and a displaced character, the poet's twilight vision allows him to see Maud in a different light, whose image becomes: "my mother's, / whose death would be real, real as our knowing" (266). Walcott recovers a better knowledge of his mother through his grief over the loss of his character, Maud. In his epistemic sorrow, he instructs Maud and his mother, one real, both characters in his poem, and both deceased, to: "Join, interchangeable phantoms, expected pain / moves me towards ghosts, through this page's scrim, / and the ghosts I will make of you with my scratching pen" (266). Allowing for the difference between the

work and the life, while yet emphasizing their powerful correlations, the poet's grief creates a twilight place where knowledge produces understanding and empathy.

After Maud's funeral, grief leads many of the characters to renegotiate their sense of home and belonging in St. Lucia, with varying results. Helen, for example, seeks to reestablish her home with Achille, whispering in his ear as she leaves the funeral: "'I coming home.'" (267). After a tumultuous relationship, this reconciliation seems to take without major hardship. Major Plunkett's renegotiation of place is more complicated. The day after the funeral, the poet sees him at the bank, their interaction exhibiting strain, where military man Plunkett treats the narrator as a colonial soldier meant to stand to attention "as if it were Inspection" (269). They both realize this occurrence, with Plunkett "caught out in the class-war," which causes Plunkett to soften his stance and angers the poet, saying to himself "I'm tired of their fucking guilt" and "our fucking envy" (269, 270). As a result, both characters experience the colonial wound anew; however, the poet contends that this interaction demonstrates "the wound of language I'd no wish to remove" (270). Though expressing justified anger at the Major's condescension, Walcott recognizes their connectedness through the explicitly stated linguistic wounds, but also the cures language provides.

Though taking different routes, the poet acknowledges that he and Plunkett ultimately pursue a similar end, as they both seek to praise St. Lucia in their writing. Plunkett's meticulous design of history "to make her [Helen] the pride of the Battle of the Saints, / her yellow dress on its flagship" further angers the poet, whose "inspiration was impulse" and who writes this poem as a hymn to St. Lucia rather than a history (270). Yet, he realizes that Plunkett's aim "was an ideal / not different from mine" (270). He

explains that Plunkett, "in his innocence," seeks 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" (270). Though employing vastly different strategies, both attempt to pen "praise of her and the island" (271). Therefore, as long as the writer sees St. Lucia accurately, rather than projecting his or her own desires onto the island, the poet maintains that "there was no real need for the historian's / remorse, nor for literature's" (271). Instead, he wonders: "Why not see Helen / as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow," depicting her occluded sanctities in ordinary moments of lived experience rather than converting history into metaphor or metaphor into History (271). Moreover, accusing himself, he asserts: "What I had read and rewritten till literature / was guilty as History," questioning "when would I enter that light beyond metaphor?" (271). He ultimately finds this in the ordinary, occluded sanctities, while still alluding to a Dantean "cool wood off the road," where an ordinary man and woman conduct their ordinary lives on an ordinary Saturday (272).

Walcott's witness then focuses on Philoctete once again, who achieves a remarkable return to place and expresses a profound sense of gratitude for his healed wound. In fact, as "happiness spread through" him, he observes "everything in place" in his life (272). No longer displaced from his fishing community because of his wound, his healing has returned him to a sense of place. Moreover, Philoctete detects the "smell of forgiveness drifting from each house" and "a peace that drifted out to the empty beach" (273). His ancestral wound healed, he heads toward the ocean, a further indication of his return to place. With "his heart bubbling," he exclaims "'Ah, Philosophe!' / he said to

himself from the depth of gratitude" (273). Free from the shackles of his wound, his sense of gratitude for his return to place overflows from his heart.

Following Philoctete's grateful declaration, he and Achille perform an exuberant dance that reinstitutes their folk memory and publically enacts their gratitude for the healing they experience, which signifies a profound reconciliation with their home and their ancestry. Baugh rightly articulates that the "passion with which Achille and Philoctete dance is driven by and exorcizes the tribal memory of pain" (195). Rather than dressing as a fisherman, he costumes himself as "a muscular woman" adorned with "brass bells / round his ankles, not chains from the Bight of Benin / but those fastened by himself" (273). His topsy-turvy, cross-dressing ensemble outwardly reveals the internal freedom he recently achieved through his imaginative reversal of the Middle Passage. His outfit also serves as a twilight image, representing ancestors' displacement from their home in Africa, yet also the creation of their lives as St. Lucians: "Today he was African, his own epitaph, / his own resurrection" (273). Wearing Helen's yellow dress, he "whirl[s] with spinning Philoctete, the cancer's / anemone gone from his shin" (274). Achille moreover explains that he and Philoctete danced like this "every Boxing Day, and not because of Christmas, / but for something older; something that he had seen / in Africa" (275). Though not African, Achille performs his African ancestral roots in this dance. Their recovery of ancestral memory roots them further into place in St. Lucia. Revealing the power of their dance, Philoctete sits down and weeps after they finish, his energy completely spent.

Walcott begins Book Seven, the final book of the poem, by praising the twilight and the ocean. Adapting his sight to the twilight allows the poet to see the ocean in its

right light, particularly the sea's connection to virtually every aspect of St. Lucian life. In short, the poet uses language that adopts a distinct but implicit tone of gratitude for returning to place, a theme that he circles back to recurrently throughout the narrative. Beginning in the twilight, the book opens with the phrase: "One sunrise," which also recalls the first lines of the poem (279).[13] The book also starts as it will end, with the ocean: "in the clear grooves of the January sea" (279). Staring out on the horizon of the sea, the poet spots what first seems like a coconut, then a canoe and a plaster bust. These latter two objects recall the canoe that Achilles uses for his imaginative voyage to Africa and the bust of Omeros, the poet's muse, both of which foreshadow the healing journey Walcott will soon endeavor. While gazing out on the sea, he simultaneously hears the moaning sound of "a blowing conch" from the village, perceiving: "The old age / of the wrinkled sea was in that moan, and I knew / that the floating head had drifted here" (280). Walcott's awareness of the cadence of this place is clear, but in order to realize a concrete return to place, he must not simply be mindful of the place around him, he must respond to it.

Encountering a twilight choice, the poet responds by speaking with the ocean and his muse, Omeros, a dialogue that dramatizes Walcott's return to place and a sense of belonging to St. Lucia. With the sky and sea grown silent, the poet feels compelled to offer his reply to the place that constantly speaks to him: "I heard my own voice / correcting his name, as the surf hissed: 'Omeros'" (280). The instant the poet utters Omeros' name in response to the hissing waves, Omeros strides out of the surf: "the marble head arose, / fringed with its surf curls and beard" (280). The Walcott narrator then encounters a further twilight choice in a Danetean dark wood. After Omeros arises

out of the water: “suddenly, the weather / darkened, and it darkened the forked, slow-wading wood / until it was black” (280). Moreover, the shallows of the sea “changed into another dialect” and he envisions Omeros in the water, his colonial wound revealed as “the white foam manacling his heels” (280). Faced with another fork in the road, Walcott must choose whether or not to respond to the place once again. Omeros beckons him twice, and finally he responds by walking down to the beach from his hotel and following Omeros.

Walcott’s decision to follow Omeros mirrors the healing journeys of characters like Achille, Philoctete, Ma Kilman, and Major Plunkett, where a twilight choice leads to a curative return to place and restoration of belonging to his island home. Shadowing Omeros on the path that Philoctete trod, they enter a cove that brings the poet great joy and leads him to praise: “If this was where it ended, the end was easy— / to give back the borrowed breath the joy that it gave, / with the sea exulting, the wind so wild with love” (281). The poet further casts this odyssey as a twilight moment, envisioning how a swift jerks its head toward the horizon of “Greece or Africa,” symbolizing Walcott’s dual cultural heritage (282). By choosing to follow Omeros, he sees with a twilight vision against and across his ancestry, which allows him to see St. Lucia in the right light: “I could see through my own palm with every crease / and every line transparent since I was seeing / the light of St. Lucia at last through her own eyes” (282). Perceiving his home island in the right light allows him to see both “her blindness” as well as “her inward vision as revealing / as his, because a closing darkness brightens love” (282). Moreover, his renewed sight induces healing, as he “felt every wound pass, I saw the healing / thorns of dry cactus drop to the dirt” (282). In this twilight moment, where “darkness

brightens love," the poet's choice not only reconnects him to his home island, but as the image of the cactus shorn of its painful thorns demonstrates, allows him to witness the healing of St. Lucia as well.

After Walcott admits to never reading all of *The Odyssey*, Omeros instructs him to again read the ocean instead, declaring that his attentiveness to his home will lead to his joy and gratitude. Then, as they both stare into the sea, the poet asserts that he was the most sensitive of Omeros' readers because he read the ocean: "'I have always heard / your voice in that sea, master," where as a child "'your name was as wide as a bay, as I walked along / the curled brow of the surf'" (283). Before continuing their journey and embarking on a Dantean journey to the shades, Walcott says to Omeros that as a boy "the word 'Homer' meant joy, / joy in battle, in work, in death" (283). Again professing how his gratitude for his home through his reading the island, he declares keen perception of the "'surf's benedictions,'" which "rose in the cedars, / in the *laurier-cannelles*, pages of rustling trees. / Master, I was the freshest of all your readers'" (283). Grateful for these "benedictions," Walcott descends with Omeros down the hill they have climbed like Dante and Virgil.

Crossing another meridian, Omeros and Walcott travel to the Underworld, where the poet undertakes another voyage to the Underworld, this time leading the poet to praise. In a further Dantean allusion, they clamber aboard a canoe with Charon, the Greek mythological character who ferries Dante and Virgil across the rivers Styx and Acheron. They first sail for the poet's home, but soon leave, which causes him great sorrow: "And my cheeks were salt with tears, but those of a boy, / and he saw how deeply I had loved the island" (286). After seeing "how deeply I had loved the island," Omeros calls for

them to "both praise it now," but Walcott can only praise the island after his guide (286). After hearing "his own / Greek calypso" from Omeros, the poet speaks as if involuntarily, hearing "my own thin voice riding on his praise / the way a swift follows a crest, leaving its shore" (286). The poet sings the praises of his beloved island, chanting: "*It was a place of light*" (286). He furthermore continues his hymn to the island, singing of how: "*The white egret makes rings*" and "*a volcano, stinking with sulphur, / has made it a healing place*" (286-287). Walcott's song of praise overflows with gratitude for his home.

Continuing their infernal journey, Omeros then lectures the poet for not rooting his poetic gift in St. Lucia enough, but instead choosing exile over his home. By traveling across the world, but neglecting his home, Omeros insists that the poet has "learnt no more than if you stood on that beach / watching the unthreading foam you watched as a youth" (291). In a meta-literary moment, he chastises Walcott for writing himself into his poem and dispatching this narrator to undertake the difficult twilight labor rather than simply engaging in this work himself: "Mark you, *he* does not go; he sends his narrator" (291). Implicating himself allows Walcott to avoid making the triumphant and arrogant remark that he alone possesses the answer for St. Lucia; however, this seems too harsh of a self-critique by Walcott, as his poem achieves type of cultural labor Omeros considers in these lines.

Furthermore, Omeros does not simply admonish Walcott, but also invites him to both receive and give his poetic craft with gratitude, repeatedly using circular images to portray his poetic gift. Acknowledging the poet's dedication to the literary craft, his home, and the ancestral speech of St. Lucia, Omeros affirms that "you hear the salt speech / that your father once heard; one island, and one truth" (291). Asserting that "the

right journey / is motionless," Omeros maintains that the poet must heed the ancestral sounds remain home in order to fully embrace his poetic gift (291). Recurrently using circular imagery to convey his point, he gives the poet the gift of gratitude: "'love moves round the heart— / with encircling salt, and the slowly travelling hand / knows it returns to the port for which it must start," and continuing, "this is what this island has meant to you, / why my bust spoke, why the sea-swift was sent to you: / to circle yourself and your island with this art'" (291). Omeros beseeches Walcott to open himself to the waters surrounding the island, which will root him in his island and foster a sense of gratitude for his home and his poetic gift. The poet will then circle the island with his poetry of gratitude.

The poem abruptly shifts back to their sights in the Underworld, ultimately leading to the poet's renunciation of his poetic pride. After seeing Hector in this infernal landscape, they see the dwelling place of the poets, who were "condemned in their pit to weep at their own pages" (293). Walcott articulates that this "was where I had come from. Pride in my craft. / Elevating myself. I slid, and kept falling / towards the shit they stewed in," until Omeros lifts him out of the muck and mire. In Audenesque fashion, Walcott contends that he too often utters "half-lies," recalling the "half-truths" that the devil tells in *New Year Letter* (293, 220). The poet laments that he would do differently "if another chance were given it at language," to which Omeros replies: "'You tried to render / their lives as you could, but that is never enough'" (294). With these haunting lines, Walcott's vision ends. Yet rather than pervading the poem with a sense of gloom, this "nightmare" redirects Walcott's own poetic vision, providing him the language of gratitude (294).

Cured of his wound, a pride caused by colonial traumas that exiled him from his people and his home, Walcott uses the language of gift and gratitude to witness his return to place in the remaining pages of the poem. He demonstrates this by recognizing that he shares "the same privilege / of an archipelago's dawn, a fresh language salty" with both his people and St. Lucia (295). He realizes in this moment that his poetic gift unites him to his people and home through a sense of common belonging: "The sea was my privilege. / And a fresh people" (295). Witnessing the island and people around him, he adopts the language of gratitude to convey his joy in this moment: "In that blessèd space / it was so quiet that I could hear the splutter / Philoctete made with his ablutions, and that deep 'Ah!' / for the New Year's benediction" (295). Healed of his isolating pride, Walcott articulates that he and Philoctete "shared the one wound, the same cure," thereby expressing a profound gratitude for the sense of belonging he feels toward his fellow St. Lucians (295).

Walcott most distinctly voices his gratitude for his encircling art. His cure not only returns him to his home and unites him to his people, but it explicitly flourishes his poetic gift: "The morning's gift / was enough, but holier than that was the crab's lift- / pincer with its pen like the sea-dipping swift" (295). Most significantly, the poet receives the gift of creation; his return to place allows him to look back toward poetic tradition, but also to create an epic for his people and home. He articulates that the encircling sea remembers no myths, but "was an epic where every line was erased / yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf," allowing him to tell the old myths anew in a St. Lucian context (296).

Beyond history and memory, the ocean constantly recreates, providing Walcott with an image of how the poet refashions imaginative worlds from the spheres around him or her. In this manner, the sea rings St. Lucia and the Caribbean, healing colonial wounds by recreating the story of the islands, rather than solely focusing on these traumas. The poet asserts that reading the sea does not depict "our defeat or / our victory; it drenched every survivor / with blessing" (296). Again using the language of gratitude in the face of such traumatic and displacing colonial and postcolonial wounds, Walcott's singular reading of the Caribbean and the role of the poet does not falter into a reductionistic monovision; his stereoscopic sight witnesses both suffering and joy in the region, allowing the place for the poet to reenvision home and belonging in the Caribbean. He further contends that the ocean "never altered its metre / to suit the age, a wide page without metaphors. / Our last resort as much as yours, Omeros" (296). Punning on the word "resort" to indicate what has confronted the Caribbean people, colonial subjugation and postcolonial economic greed, but also that the ocean allows the Caribbean narrative to be told free from the cultural and linguistic infirmities that the dominant cultures use to infect the Caribbean.

The remaining pages of the poem revel in gratitude for the Caribbean narrative, praising the region for its ability to heal itself by cultivating its culture across generations despite experiencing great trauma. For instance, the poet asks: "Why waste lines on Achille, a shade on the sea-floor?" (296) He answers his own question swiftly, stating: "Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture / is branching form the white ribs of each ancestor" (296). Like this coral, "a simply decent / race" develops, separating itself "from its various pasts, from howling sand / to a track in a forest, torn from the farthest

places / of their nameless world" (296, 297). Stephanie Pocock Boeninger compellingly argues that by placing this coral Underworld "in the dead black body" of Achille's imagined corpse, "Walcott does not dismiss the past and its tragedies" (471). On the contrary, she maintains that this "creates a space where the past no longer requires memorialization because it has become an organic part of the present and future" (471-472). Moreover, in this element, the ocean, the poet witnesses the fish and plankton "burst into phosphorus, / meadows of stuttering praise," an image for the rich and vivid cultural development in the Caribbean (297). Again adopting the coral as a metaphor for Caribbean culture, the poet articulates that both experience growth because of the great fracturing and death. Like this living organism, the Caribbean culture "grew a good people" (297). As he witnesses this cultural development despite difficult circumstances, Walcott moreover expresses his gratitude for his poetic gift in a distinctly Audenesque tone: "O Sun, the one eye of heaven, O Force, O Light, / my heart kneels to you, my shadow has never changed / since the salt fresh mornings of encircling delight," ultimately proclaiming "I praise you not for my eyes. That other sight" (298). Praising the gods of poetry and place, the poet articulates his enduring gratitude for his poetic witness.

Major Plunkett seeks to heal his wound near the end of the poem by going to Ma Kilman's rum shop so that she use her obeah powers to channel Maud, an act that affirms St. Lucia as his adopted home in the narrative and heals his wound. Ma Kilman sees Maud walking the lake in Glen-da-Lough, her home in Ireland. The Major asks Ma Kilman where she sees Maud: "'Heaven?' He smiled. 'Yes. If heaven is a green place'" (307). This moment profoundly links Major Plunkett to Ma Kilman, to the St. Lucian people, and the island: "her shut eyes watered while his own were open. / That moment

bound him for good to another race" (307). Seeing Maud during his ordinary daily activities after this, Major Plunkett experiences a return to place: "His wound healed slowly" (309). His wound healed, "he forgot the war's [of] / history" and feels grateful for his home in St. Lucia (309).

As the poem nears its close, Walcott continues to focus on the twilight circularity of the narrative. Talking of the island as Helen, he recognizes more fully than he has before that: "You were never in Troy," but "between two Helens," not European, not African, but St. Lucian (313). Understanding this twilight position of the Caribbean, the poet sees his own home in the right light. Moreover, he further emphasizes the cyclical, circular ongoingness of Caribbean culture by depicting Ma Kilman's niece moving from the country to live with her, relating that she looks "like a new Helen" (316). Like the pieces of coral that break off from the center feeds the new life that grows in its absence, the new generations of St. Lucians will learn from older generations as well as develop the culture of the island in novel ways, a formation of cultural common to human experience. Moreover, Philoctete's final appearance in the narrative also demonstrates the circular nature of the poem, where tourists in Gros Islet clamber to record a St. Lucia "with photogenic poverty, with atmosphere," the same two-dimensional place that every tourist seeks to photograph (311). The tourists also take a "snapshot of Philoctete showing you his shin, / not saying how it was healed," mirroring the opening lines of the poem (311). Bookending the poem with Philoctete recounting his wound to tourists exhibits the scope and cyclical nature of the poet's twilight witness.

Near the end of the narrative, Walcott gazes back over his poem, articulating how he sought a circular twilight witness of the tension between displacement and seeking a

return to place, as well as woundeness and healing, ultimately experiencing a profound gratitude for his home, sense of belonging, and poetic gift. He identifies this twilight witness, stating:

> 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; except that its meridian
> was not North and South but East and West. One, the New
>
> World, made exactly like the Old, halves of one brain,
> or the beat of both hands rowing that bear the two
> vessels of the heart with balance, weight, and design.
>
> Her wing-beat carries these islands to Africa,
> she sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle's line,
> the rift in the soul (319).

Rather than coercing the poem toward history rather than art, and thereby mimicking the violent force of colonial powers, the poet pursues a path of freedom in the poem by following the inspiration of the swift. This bird embodies belonging, exile, and pilgrimage, serving as a fitting image for the sons and daughters of the African diaspora. Moreover, this poem serves as a meeting of the two halves of the world, the old and the new, bringing people together from all over the world in the Caribbean.

Walcott emphasizes his song as one possessing clear strains of gratitude for St. Lucia and the gift of poetry. Expressing his gratefulness for the island, he asserts that "the place held all I needed of paradise" (320). He moreover proclaims that: "I sang of quiet Achille, Afolabe's son, / who never ascended in an elevator, / who had no passport, since the horizon needs none," and who moreover "never begged nor borrowed, was nobody's waiter, / whose end, when it comes, will be a death by water" (320). The poet further

articulates that "I sang the only slaughter / that brought him delight, and that from necessity— / of fish, sang the channels of his back in the sun" (320). Reiterating the life of his protagonist, Achille, a further instance of the ongoing circularity of the poem, Walcott expresses his delight and joy in creating such an ordinary, twilight St. Lucian character. Moreover, the poet casts his poem as a song written in register conveying love and gratitude for his island: "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea," further asserting his desire to "let the deep hymn / of the Caribbean continue my epilogue; / may waves remove their shawls as my mourners walk home / to their rusted villages" (320, 321). Walcott's hymn serves as a powerful twilight witness of this healing return home. Moreover, he compares his wound and gift to Philoctete and Achille: "Like Philoctete's wound, this language carries its cure, / its radiant affliction; reluctantly now, / like Achille's, my craft slips the chain of its anchor (323). For this healing and for his craft, Walcott expresses a profound sense of gratitude.

The poem fittingly ends with Achille on the ocean at twilight. Witnessing Achille fish one last time, the poet describes him as "triumphant Achilles" (324). "Achilles," not Achille in this line, the poet occasionally slips into using the name of Achille's Greek literary forbear. This provides a twilight portrayal of Achille, of both his African forefathers and European literary ancestors, as he goes about his ordinary life as a St. Lucian fisherman. He continues depicting Achille and the sea around him with earthy, sensual language, noting the "silver" and "vermillion scales / of snappers faded like sunset," as Achille guts fish and flings the entrails on shore (324). Moreover, his fellow St. Lucian fishermen "helped him haul *In God We Troust* back in place" (324). The narrative therefore ends with Achille feeling at home and in place in St. Lucia, intimately

connected to the ocean, as he “sniffed his name in one armpit” and “liked the odours / of the sea in him” (325). The poem also ends at twilight, as: “Night was fanning its coalpot / from one catching star” (325). Ending spectacularly in this cyclical, circular place between cultures, between day and night, Achille leaves the beach content and grateful for his home as “the sea was still going on” (325). The reader likewise inhabits this cyclical, circular place, feeling gratitude for a gift seemingly as continual as the sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Art of Seeing in Derek Walcott's Poetry and Painting

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Barbadian author George Lamming attempts to understand why the Caribbean writer migrates from the Caribbean to England, from home to the center of colonial oppression, utilizing the language of the colonial oppressor. He repeatedly suggests that his prose offers "a report on one man's way of seeing," providing a Caribbean witness to the recurrent exile and migration of the Caribbean writer (13). He seizes on the oft-used dialectic of Caliban and Prospero,[1] casting the Caribbean author as Caliban, who "is Man and other than Man. Caliban is his [Prospero's] convert, colonised by language, and excluded by language. It is precisely this gift of language, this attempt at transformation which has brought about the pleasure and paradox of Caliban's exile" (15). Yet Lamming also sees himself as a descendant of Prospero, "using his legacy of language—not to curse our meeting—but to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open" (15). St. Lucian writer Derek Walcott also envisions himself as a descendant of both Caliban and Prospero, viewing language as a colonial tool while also using language not to mimic or pursue vengeance on his colonial oppressor, but "to push it further," as a gift that makes history, as told by and benefitting the colonizer alone, irrelevant, while developing the Caribbean in general and St. Lucia in particular as a place.

Lamming's most concentrated discussion of a writer's vision appears, fittingly enough, in a chapter titled "A Way of Seeing." He argues: "I do believe that what a person thinks is very much determined by the way that person sees. This book is really no more than a report on one man's way of seeing, using certain facts of experience as evidence and a guide" (56). Straightforward without being simplistic, his emphasis on vision focuses on accurately seeing the world around him, that fundamental aspect of writing. Lamming makes the significance of vision apparent as he discusses the difference between seeing "color" and racial discrimination as simply a problem to be solved and the larger circumstance of seeing the world at a societal and systemic level, characterizing discrimination not as a "specific 'problem' for which we have the following logical 'solutions,'" but as "an atmosphere and a background against which my life and yours are being lived" (76). He recognizes that the colonial perspective does not see in this way. He therefore advocates for change: "Our duty is to find ways of changing the root and perspective of that background, of dismantling the accumulated myth, both cultural and political, which an inherited and uncritical way of seeing has now reinforced" (76). And Lamming believes that the Caribbean author in particular might be a witness, an agent of change: "it is my right, while things remain as they are—to speak; and it is my responsibility as a writer who is also a colonial to report honestly my feelings about matters which deeply concern us both"—meaning both colonizer and colonized (82-83).

Walcott also achieves a poetic witness through an explicit concentration on seeing. He particularly focuses on how both the poet and the painter envision the world around them, how in a sense of delight and astonishment they encounter an epiphanic

moment of artistic impulse, and subsequently how they render the world into their work. Moreover, these lines between the world and the work blur for the poet. Additionally, his vision of the world around him recurrently depicts a progression from displacement and trauma to a return to place and a feeling of gratitude for the gift of poetry and of life. Walcott portrays this type of seeing strikingly in the book-length poem *Tiepolo's Hound*, where he doggedly pursues "the art of seeing," the way that an artist sees the world, where the artist witnesses to both the traumas and displacement on the one hand, and the gifts of life on the other, often expressed as gratitude for the gift of poetry (7). Neal Alexander and David Cooper envision a similar connection between sight, place, and poetry in their introduction to *Poetry and Geography* as they consider the interplay between poetry and place: "It is both a way of seeing and a way of doing, transforming its object in the act of apprehension and encounter but also registering the torsions of place in its own language and forms" (3). Similarly, Walcott ultimately seeks a transformation from displacement by enacting the gifts of poetry in his work through his way of seeing in order to develop the Caribbean and achieve a return to place.

The hound, or hounds rather, as there are many different hounds in the narrative, operates as the resonant, suggestive central image of the poem, functioning variously as the poet's inspiration to write and paint, an image of light providing clarity for the artist's witness, an emblem of both dislocation and relocation of place, and the gift of art itself. Through his pursuit of the hound, the poet witnesses to his phenomenological experience of artistic creation. The poet's witness consists of experiencing how art yields contact with some sphere beyond words, then an attempt to express this ineffable register to the reader. He inevitably fails in this endeavor, but he recognizes there is great achievement

even in this venture, analogous to what T.S. Eliot calls the "raid on the inarticulate" from his poem "East Coker" in *Four Quartets* (190). Moreover, the image of the hound and his pursuit of it allows Walcott to express that art can witness to the displacements of the world, such as the destructive colonial and postcolonial practices of the British Empire in the Caribbean, though also the disorientation a failed artist experiences, whether through systemic circumstances or because people are unconcerned with and unable to see the goodness of art. Yet this is half of the witness the hound allows Walcott. The image also helps to establish a return to place. This occurs through a witness of the colonial and postcolonial injustices he sees around him, the residue of which persists. Perhaps most significantly, his pursuit of the hound engenders a witness to what Walcott describes as the "occluded sanctities" in the world around the artist (82). For a St. Lucian artist in a too frequently neglected place like the Caribbean mostly known for the goods taken from it, for slavery, or the tourist industry, this means witnessing the beauty in the ordinary Caribbean life in this place and its people.

Walcott moreover connects his poetic witness, his way of seeing, to the ways that other people see. In "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1992, Walcott expressly argues that much of the Western world misunderstands the Caribbean because of a failure of vision. He critiques the European vision of the Caribbean as failing to see the Caribbean correctly, whether by seeing the region with an "elegiac pathos," depicting its exoticism, or tourist exploitation, where the European vision "relates to a misunderstanding of the light and the people whom the light falls" (76). He maintains that the Caribbean poet therefore must focus his or her vision on the ordinary people and places in the Caribbean: "That is what I have read around me

from boyhood, from the beginnings of poetry, the grace of effort. In the hard mahogany of woodcutters: faces, resinous men, charcoal burners" (81). Also citing St. Lucian fisherman, Walcott lists these ordinary Caribbean citizens because he sees them as "fragments of Africa originally but shaped and hardened and rooted now in the island's life, illiterate in the way leaves are illiterate; they do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature" (81). These lines do not indicate that the poet exploits these people for his poetic purposes, but that they *are* the Caribbean. Therefore, to provide a witness of the Caribbean to the world, he must see and read these people and tell the world about them.

Though the world sees the Caribbean in the wrong light, as its playground or a beach on which to relax and get a tan, Walcott argues the poet must provide an accurate vision of the Caribbean to the world; not through nostalgia, but by accurately perceiving the wounds of trauma and displacement as well as seeking a return to place and recognizing the gift of poetry with gratitude. He further affirms the importance of seeing this people and place accurately, arguing that: "before only a few valleys are left, pockets of an older life, before development turns every artist into an anthropologist or folklorist" (82). He reiterates that "there are still cherishable places" in the Caribbean, further asserting that he does not mean making these places "nostalgic sites but occluded sanctities as common and simple as their sunlight" (82). Without this witness, the poet believes that these "occluded sanctities" will vanish. Convinced that the poet must provide this witness, he also expresses the gratitude for his role of Caribbean poetic witness, concluding the speech: "and now as grateful a joy and a blessed fear as when a boy opened an exercise book and, within the discipline of its margins, framed stanzas that

might contain the light of the hills on an island blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance" (84). He expresses here the sense of gratitude in the ordinary that he experiences through poetry.

Envisioning poetry as a gift, Walcott witnesses to the difficult realities that Caribbean people encounter, while also perceiving the Caribbean poet's right and responsibility to witness to the beauty around him or her. In Edward Hirsch's interview with the poet in *The Paris Review* in 1985, he explains his poetic gift as a witness: "I never thought of my gift—I have to say 'my gift' because I believe it is a gift—as anything that I did completely on my own. I have felt from my boyhood that I had one function and that was somehow to articulate, not my own experience, but what I saw around me" (105). He further articulates his use of sight as a poet to see the ordinary beauty of St. Lucia, the place and the people, around him:

> From the time I was a child I knew it was beautiful. If you go to a peak anywhere in St. Lucia, you feel a simultaneous newness and sense of timelessness at the same time—the presence of where you are. It's a primal thing and it has always been that way. At the same time I knew that the poor people around me were not beautiful in the romantic sense of being colorful people to paint or to write about. I lived, I have seen them, and I have seen things that I don't need to go far to see. I felt that that was what I would write about. That's what I felt my job was. (105)

Citing Joyce and Yeats as examples who share similar literary vision, he maintains that: "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" (105). Grateful for the gift of poetry, he emphasizes the significance of vision, particularly the importance of seeing the beauty of the people and place of his home in St. Lucia accurately.

Walcott, however, also considers the role of the poet as a gift imbued with spiritual significance. He discusses this role in explicitly religious terms, asserting in his

interview with Hirsch that "I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer. I have grown up believing it is a vocation, a religious vocation" (99). Walcott furthermore describes his poetic vocation in terms of an epiphanic moment that he believes the artist achieves:

> What I described in *Another Life*—about being on the hill and feeling the sort of dissolution that happened—is a frequent experience in a younger writer. I felt this sweetness of melancholy, of a sense of mortality, or rather of immortality, a sense of gratitude both for what you feel is a gift and for the beauty of the earth, the beauty of life around us. When that's forceful in a young writer, it can make you cry. It's just clear tears; it's not grimacing or being contorted, it's just a flow that happens. The body feels it is melting into what it has seen. This continues in the poet. It may be repressed in some way, but I think we continue in all our lives to have that sense of melting, of the "I" not being important. That is the ecstasy. (99-100)

Walcott not only attempts to convey these epiphanic moments in *Another Life*, but throughout his later poetry. He moreover speaks of this ecstatic poetic experience by expressing a distinct sense of gratitude, articulating these moments as "a benediction, a transference. It's gratitude, really. The more of that a poet keeps, the more genuine his nature. I've always felt that sense of gratitude. I've never felt equal to it in terms of my writing, but I've never felt that I was ever less than that" (99-100). Though never feeling equal to feeling grateful for the gift of poetry, Walcott frequently attempts to convey his gratitude for his poetic vocation.

I will therefore focus this chapter on Walcott's depiction of epiphanic moments, particularly with a brief consideration of the ekphrastic poem "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia" from *Sea Grapes* and in his long poem *Tiepolo's Hound,* which I believe embody his attentive witness to Caribbean "occluded sanctities" that portray displacement and trauma as well as gratitude. He often refers to these moments as ones that blend and blur together, or where art might act as a mirror that

augments lived experience. This chapter will emphasize the artist's way of seeing through such examples as the blending and blurring the artistic world with reality, the use of a brushstroke, the portrayal of light and color, and the depiction of the ordinary. I will particularly concentrate on the relationship between Walcott's poetry and his paintings in both poems. Though I wrote close readings of Books Two and Three of *Tiepolo's Hound*, I have only included brief sketches of those books in this chapter due to limited space. Furthermore, when considering *Tiepolo's Hound*, this chapter will also explore how Camille Pissarro and other Impressionist painters pursue a similar way of seeing the world, whether geographically or aesthetically. Ultimately, the poet's vision of epiphanic moments, finding the ordinary in the spiritual, and the connection of poetry and painting, construct a stereoscopic vision of the world, allowing him to witness to colonial trauma and individual displacement and failure, as well as great moments of gratitude and joy. The stereoscopic vision he employs in the poem corresponds to light and space installation artist James Turrell's phenomenological work where he describes the viewers experience as "seeing yourself see" (Turrell). Moreover, Walcott does not simply make a linear progression in the poem as he pursues the hound; his witness attempts to both reflect lived experience and the artist's understanding of the world by holding in tension displacement and gratitude and therefore repeatedly alternating between the two spheres.

"For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia"

An ekphrastic poem in dialogue with St. Lucian artist Dunstan St. Omer's altarpiece mural for the Holy Family Catholic Church in Jacmel, St. Lucia, "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia" vibrantly depicts the Holy Family as well as a whole host of well-known local St. Lucian figures, portraying both sacred

and ordinary aspects of lived experience in the work. Moreover, "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia," along with poems like "The Gulf," was one of Walcott's first poems to be anthologized, as Bruce King notes in his biography of Walcott (426). First appearing in third edition of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* in 1983, the poem was therefore among his first works to introduced to a wide audience. Unfortunately, Norton no longer includes the poem in the anthology. However, this demonstrates the poem's important early reception.

Walcott and St. Omer were lifelong friends who met in primary school at St. Mary's College in 1941. At St. Mary's they were mentored by the artists Harold Simmons, whom Bruce King calls "the only professional painter in St. Lucia" at the time and "a local Gauguin who moved local painting into the modern period" (27). Simmons also taught St. Omer and Walcott the significance of the local, as he "painted peasants rather than imitations of European landscape scenes, he used vivid tropical colours," and he portrayed black bodies as beautiful (27). Discussing his childhood friendship with St. Omer at a press conference for the publication of *Tiepolo's Hound* in Milan, Walcott divulges that: "The man I painted with all my life was Dunstan St. Omer, who was a very vigorous painter" (201). St. Omer completed a number of consequential works in St. Lucia in addition to the altarpiece at the Holy Family Church, such as the series of paintings that depict black saints in the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Castries in preparation of Pope John Paul II's visit in 1985 and his design of the St. Lucian flag.

Distinct in its vision of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, St. Omer's mural in Jacmel depicts the Holy Family as markedly Afro-Caribbean, representing a significant

innovation in his work, something that the painter discusses in an interview with Caroline Popovic: "'One of the most important breakthroughs I made was that if Christ cannot be black, he is no use to us. A white Christ was always used to dominate blacks, and in Jacmel, I painted my first black Christ'" (qtd. in Popovic). Moreover, in his biography of Walcott, Bruce King calls the mural "one of the great works of Caribbean art," and having seen the painting in person, this is a sentiment I emphatically agree with (312). King further articulates that: "For the first time local Catholics could come to church and see people like themselves in the religious art and symbolism" (312). St. Omer's use of recognizable figures in the mural therefore anchors his work in the ordinary local life of those living in the parish. His depiction of the sacred and the ordinary alongside one another, where his work mirrors St. Lucian life around him, further links him to Walcott.

Published in the 1976 volume *Sea Grapes* and the fifth part of a five part poem "Sante Lucie," "For the Altar-piece of the Roseau Valley Church, Saint Lucia" emphasizes the centrality of the surrounding land in St. Omer's altarpiece. In the opening lines, Walcott regards the church as "the pivot of this valley, / round which whatever is rooted loosely turns" (1-2). The poet not only establishes the church as fundamentally important to the Roseau Valley in these lines, but also the rootedness of this local place. He then specifies that local figures and places are drawn to this heart of the community: "men, women, ditches, the revolving fields / of bananas, the secondary roads, / draws all to it, to the altar" (3-5). In Audenesque fashion, the poet envisions this painting as a mirror of St. Lucian experience. He states this position directly in the ensuing lines, asserting that the painting functions "like a dull mirror, life / repeated there" (7-8). The poet furthermore connects this ordinary life with the spiritual, associating "the common

life outside" with "the other life it holds / a good man made it" (9, 10-11). This dangling final clause pronounces both the good this combination of ordinary and sacred might engender, as well as the virtue of St. Omer, the creator of this work.

The first section roots the poem in the Roseau Valley, as well as Afro-Caribbean culture. The poet achieves this by describing several figures in the mural, isolating them in the second stanza of the section: "Two earth-brown labourers / dance the botay, the drum sounds under / the earth, the heavy foot" (12-14). This observation situates the low-income laborers in a particular place through their work, ethnicity, bodies; the mural markedly expresses their occupations, blackness, and Afro-Caribbean culture, such as their use of drums and their dancing botay, a Caribbean couples dance. The third stanza exultantly declares: "This is a rich valley, / It is fat with things," a statement remarking on the fruitfulness of the place, which was once filled with sugar cane for colonial sugar mills, but now contains acre upon acre of banana plantations. Yet this line remains sufficiently ambiguous to allow space for a witness to the trauma inflicted on this valley through colonial and corporate greed. Because it is not stated explicitly, this trauma echoes conspicuously in the reader's ear. And form and content meet in this line, where the poet mirrors the divisiveness of the trauma this greed creates in his use of line breaks. Broken over two lines, the first clause makes up the last half of line fourteen and the second clause the first half of line fifteen.

The following stanza continues to demonstrate the richness and buoyancy of this place that centers around the church. The poet notes the Roseau Valley's "roads radiate like aisles from the altar towards / those acres of bananas," and fan out from the banana plantations to a valley flush with "leaf-crowded mountains / rain-bellied clouds / in haze,

in iron heat" (16-17, 18-20). In these pregnant lines, Walcott depicts the St. Lucian valley as a place charged with life and vitality, envisioning a little ecosystem. The poet's description of this radiating power mirrors the energy that hurtles from the infant Christ holding the Eucharist at the center of the mural. Walcott's symbolism echoes what occurs in the Eucharist before this altarpiece, where through the Mass God recurrently enters the world. The simile in line sixteen moreover compares the Roseau Valley to the church, where its roads traffic this power, radiating with energy like the "aisles" of the church. This power extends to the particular places surrounding the church in the valley, where acre after acre of banana plantations extend throughout Jacmel and the entire valley. The green mountains are another breathtaking aspect of the valley. The relentless rain the island receives produces the valley's fertility. The "rain-bellied clouds / in haze" also communicate the spiritual nature of the mountains, where they are shrouded in mystery and beauty by the hazy, billowing rain clouds. Yet the clouds are also immanent, as the contrast between cloud and mountain end up making it seem as if the viewer might reach out and grasp the whisps of clouds. The stanza furthermore conveys the fruitfulness of the valley, where the tropical heat demonstrates the sun needed to grow the bananas that provide sustenance and economic gain for valley's inhabitants. Yet, as the stanza proceeds, the lines become shorter and shorter. Moreover, the phrase "iron heat" in the stanzas last line also depicts harshness of the place, conveying that the valley is no Eden, conjuring the iron shackles of slavery and the more recent postcolonial economic fetters of the corporations that own the banana plantations.

The poet further portrays the exploitation of the "fat" of the land in the final stanza of the section. The "iron heat" in the previous stanza fragments the line so that this

final stanza begins in the middle of the line. This medial caesura allows the poet to fully represent the ills of colonial slavery and postcolonial capitalism, rendering the Roseau Valley as "a cursed valley," a jarring shift from the poet's depiction of the "rich valley" in the previous stanza (20). The poet repeats the word "ask" four times in the stanza to emphasize this trauma, beseeching the reader to ask after the witnesses from the surrounding valley, the beasts of burden "broken" by their labor, and children distended, women "dried," and men "gap-toothed" due to malnourishment (21-22). In a brilliant maneuver, the poet blends the surrounding valley and people previously mentioned with the church and the mural itself, imploring the reader to "ask the parish priest, who, in the altar-piece / carries a replica of the church, / ask the two who could be Eve and Adam dancing" (23-25). In these lines, he demonstrates how the painting reflects the fullest expression of the ideals of the church to the parishioners, not as resources to be exploited, but as ordinary humans engaging in the common but beautiful activities of their lives. The stanza ends by returning to the two laborers dancing the botay "who could be Eve and Adam dancing," but instead depict real St. Lucians in an actual place, rather then an occupied paradise to be exploited. (25).

In the second section of the poem, Walcott evokes the era of another painter, Giotto, envisioning what St. Omer's signature might have looked like had he been a *trecento* artist: "ST OMER ME FECIT AETAT whatever his own age now, / GLORIA DEI and to God's mother also" (30-31). The Latin phrases, translated as "St. Omer: I made it" and "Glory to God," respectively, indicate the artist, the human hand that made the mural, as well as the spiritual entity inspiring the work, which indicates St. Omer's Catholic belief in the Christian God and the Virgin Mary.[2] Yet the poet moves on from

an explicit connection to the spiritual and earthly life of the Catholic Church, focusing on how the mural mirrors these energies of the island, rendering the mural as "signed with music" that "turns the whole island," likely a Shakespearean reference alluding to the music that Caliban and Ferdinand hear in *The Tempest* (32-33). Moreover, in this section the poet further expands the imaginative world of the painting, the valley, and the people by indicating a transcendent aesthetic force consonant with John Keats' vision in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," where the figures on the urn play music: "Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd, / Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone" (13-14). He achieves this by witnessing to the spiritual force he believes propels the island, asserting that the viewer must discern this power outside of the regular worship of the church: "You have to imagine it empty on a Sunday afternoon / between adorations" (34-35). Walcott envisions a sacredness beyond the celebration of the Mass and the adoration of the Eucharist, lamenting that the imaginative world St. Omer constructs too often goes unseen: "Nobody can see it and it is there, / Nobody adores the two who could be Eve and Adam dancing" (36-37). Emphasizing the sight of the viewer and reader, the poet mirrors the mural, witnessing to both the earthly and transcendent world around it, acting "like a dull mirror" to the life surrounding it. Walcott makes an Adamic turn, a common maneuver in his poetry, returning to the laborers dancing the botay dancers. The poet further mirrors this portrait of a rural St. Lucian Adam and Eve with the second Adam and Eve, mentioned in the first stanza of section two and depicted at the center of the mural, Jesus Christ and his mother, Mary. The poet compares the dancers to the first Adam and Eve, wondering why they are not adored like the second Adam and Eve.

The poet then shifts his attention to "the real Adam and Eve," the actual inhabitants of the valley, at a more precise time, "Sunday at three o'clock," presumably emphasizing the reality the poet envisions. He focuses on the bodily nature of the laborers, specifying that they have had sex and repeating three times that their lovemaking has caused them to "sweat" (40, 41, 42). The couples' sharing sweat joins them together, "his sweat on her still breasts, / her sweat on his paneled torso" (41-42). Moreover, their sweat contains spiritual connotations, as the poet describes initially describes it as "re-christening sweat," baptizing them into this new Adamic life (40). This recalls his discussion of Adamic language in "The Muse of History," where he claims that all great poets of the "New World" reject history that promotes "a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters" (37). Instead, they maintain a "vision of man in the New World [that] is Adamic," creative, and new, while adapting liberally from the past (37). He uses an Adamic aesthetic language to portray "the real Adam and Eve," rendering Eve's breasts as "still," and Adam's torso as "paneled," recalling the reader to the mural, a still life with the Holy Family painted in Cubist panels.

In the following stanza, Walcott continues to root the images of the poem in St. Lucia. He dexterously uses the image of this first St. Lucian couple to conceive of the work St. Lucian laborers have performed, hefting bananas from the surrounding plantations that still exist today and killing snakes in the tropical wilderness. The poet's vision here testifies to the laborers connection with place, demonstrating that the island really belongs to them, not colonizers, political, economic, or otherwise. The image of the snake further emphasizes this sense of belonging, where the snake killing serves as an

image of St. Lucian agency as the island returns to St. Lucians, rather than in the hands of outside imperial and economic powers. This image continues at this imagined mid-afternoon Sunday "when the snake pours itself / into a chalice of leaves" (49-50). The "chalice," evoking the cup of wine served at Eucharist, establishes a sort of local St. Lucian religious ritual, though the "snake" poured into the "chalice of leaves" indicates a residue of the displacement inflicted by outside political powers.

With this mix of displacement and cultural development, Walcott witnesses the "occluded sanctities" around him rather than seeking "nostalgic sites." The end of colonialism in the Roseau Valley is summed up in a one line stanza, the eighth stanza in a fifteen stanza section, making it the exact center of the section, as the "sugar factory is empty" (51). Breezing quickly beyond this statement, the poet attempts to envision the valley as having moved beyond restrictive postcolonial economics where: "Nobody picks bananas, / no trucks raising dust on their way to Vieuxfort" (52-53). He moreover sees a time with "no helicopter spraying / the mosquito's banjo, yes, / and the gnat's violin, okay" (54-56). His vision anticipates a world where St. Lucians might be able to farm, fish, and work on their own. But this image swiftly collapses, beginning with the poet's internal dialogue of "yes" and "okay." The collapse continues in the very next line, admitting the vision does not create "absolute Adamic silence" and that "the valley of Roseau is not the Garden of Eden, / and those who inhabit it, are not in heaven" (57-59). The poet's capitulation accurately admits that his vision of recovery does not make St. Lucia a perfect place, but it at least returns the island to St. Lucians. For Walcott, the artist achieves an "Adamic silence" through his art, and it cannot be broken because it comes from a transcendent source: "from the depth of the world, / from whatever one

man believes he knows of God / and the suffering of his kind" (65-67). The artist serves as witness to this glimpse of reality "from the depth of the world," a witness that might illustrate to others how lamentable and displaced things are, but also how things might be reconciled and how art might achieve a return to place. The poet finishes the section by affirming that this kind of power emanates from St. Omer's mural: "it comes from the wall of the altar-piece / ST OMER AD GLORIAM DEI FECIT / in whatever year of his suffering" (69-70). The Latin here translates as "St. Omer made this for the Glory of God," again emphasizing the glory and suffering that art holds in tension.

In the final section of the poem, Walcott's witness focuses on the aesthetic and spiritual power of St. Omer's artistic vision in the mural in Jacmel. Like the reciting of a litany, the poet repeats the phrase "after" in the first four stanzas of the section. This repetition indicates how St. Omer has remained constant to his artistic vision, in spite of internal or external troubles. He contends that neither excessively drinking "so many bottles of white rum," nor "the deaths / of as many names as you want" have impeded his artistic vision (71, 74-75). The poet catalogs the names of loved ones that have died, "Iona, Julian, Ti-Nomme, Cacao," particularizing St. Omer's sorrow as St. Lucian (76). He also roots the death of these friends in this local parish by using a simile that compares them to the demise of the colonial economy: "like the death of the cane-crop in Roseau Valley, Saint Lucia" (77). Furthermore, the poet remarks that the painter's gift survived the hardship, toil, and poverty that artists endure in colonial and postcolonial St. Lucia, even "after the flight of so many little fishes / from the brush that is the finger of St. Francis" (72-73). Walcott also asserts that St. Omer's art survived his faith, alternately burning bright and dwindling, through praying "five thousand novenas / and the idea of

the Virgin / coming and going like a little lamp" (78, 79-80). In Audenesque fashion, recalling in particular the second section of "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," St. Omer's gift survived it all.

As the poem concludes, the poet witnesses to St. Omer's artistic power, casting it as intimately connected to the Roseau Valley and the Holy Family Church. He achieves this witness by describing St. Omer's artistic energy with a traditional St. Lucian image: "your faith like a canoe at evening coming in," which recalls Achille's canoe at the beginning and end of *Omeros* (82). And the poet asserts that the fruit of keeping this witness to the Roseau Valley in Jacmel, that "from time to time, on Sundays / between adorations," St. Omer's mural allows the wonder and awe of some strange and mysterious spiritual power to break through (87-88). Through this way of seeing, through sight, the viewer:

> might see,
> if one were there, and not there,
> looking in at the windows
>
> the real faces of angels (88-91).

Walcott ends the poem by emphasizing the aesthetic imagination, a vision beyond mere eyesight that art can uniquely induce. This imaginative vision does not require that the viewer even be in front of St. Omer's mural, but simply can see through memory. Furthermore, the poet imbues the poem with a sense of the sacred in the penultimate line of the poem by "looking in at the window," borrowing the spiritual vision of Christian icons, which are frequently called windows into heaven. In the final worlds of the poem, Walcott returns to the visages of the St. Lucians in the painting, as well as the black faces of the Holy Family, which he articulates as "the real faces of angels."

Tiepolo's Hound

Walcott's book-length narrative poem *Tiepolo's Hound* provides a further expansive witness to Caribbean "occluded sanctities," which the poet achieves through depicting the sacred in the ordinary and blurring the lines between painting and poetry. Moreover, the poem frequently alternates between his stereoscopic witness to displacement and trauma on the one hand, and gratitude for the gift of art on the other. Published in 2001, *Tiepolo's Hound* represents a sweeping vision of the role of the artist, particularly focusing on the artist's witness of the Caribbean islands and the people inhabiting these places. And Walcott recurrently blends the role of the poet and the painter into that of an aesthetic priest. Furthermore, since he envisions the artist as providing a witness for the reader and viewer, sight therefore becomes a significant theme in the poem.

A long narrative poem in alternately rhyming couplets, *Tiepolo's Hound* represents a shift from his other long narrative poems, both formally and thematically. The poem varies from his künstleroman *Another Life*, a long narrative poem published in 1973 about his development as an artist in the vein of James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*.[3] The two poems do, however, share a focus on the artist, particularly between the painters considered in *Tiepolo's Hound* and the painter Gregorias in *Another Life*, based on Walcott's friend the St. Lucian painter Dunstan St. Omer. Moreover, *Tiepolo's Hound* does not assume the same gravity and ambition of *Omeros,* the poet's 1990 epic poem; nor does *Tiepolo's Hound* employ tercets as he did in *Omeros*, though in both poems St. Lucia and its inhabitants sustain a narrative trajectory that begins with displacement and seeks a return to place.

Walcott's use of form and narrative together with his repeated depiction of moments of epiphanic blurring provide the poem with both fluid flexibility and solid structure. The poem has an intricate framework, containing four books that consist of a range of four to seven chapters, which in turn have four sections, each with a varying number of lines. Commenting on the solidity this structure provides, Bruce King asserts that: "The elaborate numbering acts like a frame and grid, providing structural support to the otherwise impressionistic poetry with its shifting time, place, and focus" (629). He moreover characterizes the *ab ab* rhyme scheme of the couplets as Impressionistic quatrains, as the poem "imitates the art of Pissarro and his time in providing a frame (made of fours) within which there is a large portrait of apparently spontaneous impressions of life" (629). In *Derek Walcott,* Edward Baugh also considers the form and flexibility of the poem through the poet's quatrain-like use of couplets, where: "balance between pattern and flexibility depends partly on the discreet blending of couplet and quatrain" (210). Discussing the poem's repeated use of enjambment, Paul Breslin makes similar remarks about the poem's form in *Nobody's Nation*: "The verse movement, its restlessness accentuated by Walcott's frequent enjambment, undermines the orderly look of the couplets on the page" (284-285). Breslin also comments on the couplets' resemblance to quatrains as he illustrates the combination of form and flexibility in the poem: "The poem's form, too, serves its evocation of an unfinisheable struggle toward mastery. It is written in loose pentameter couplets, rhymed across their boundaries *ab ab*, as if each couplet were half of a quatrain. It is Gray's Elegiac Stanza broken in half, and the breakage matters more than one might expect" (284). Breslin demonstrates how form and content meet in remarkable fashion in the poem, where the "breakage" of the

quatrains mirror Pissarro and Walcott's failures in the narrative of the poem, while allowing the poem a solid shape to convey its great power.

Much of the narrative focuses on the imagined life of Camille Pissarro, the Danish and French Impressionist painter that was born in St. Thomas, a Caribbean island approximately four hundred miles northwest of Walcott's home in St. Lucia. The poet envisions Pissarro's triumphs, failures, and traumas in his work and his life, ultimately tracing the Caribbean influence in Pissarro's work as he moves to France at the age of twenty-five, particularly in his use of light and color. He moreover imagines the cultural impact Pissarro might have had if he remained in the Caribbean, simultaneously lamenting his move as a loss for the Caribbean while yet claiming the painter is one of the Caribbean's own. This seeming chronological and geographic contradiction does not upset the poetic world Walcott creates in *Tiepolo's Hound*, where everything works to blend and blur together as the brushstrokes of an Impressionist painting. Considering the blending of genres that occurs in the poem, Baugh argues: "This work fashions a biography with a difference, one which is in dialogue with autobiography, while the whole is a commodious, multi-faceted novel of sorts" (209). He moreover notes that the poem elegantly blurs the aesthetic spheres of poetry and painting: "One can hardly imagine anything in poetry that more closely, more sustainedly approaches the cohering of the two disciplines" than *Tiepolo's Hound* (211).

Tiepolo's Hound furthermore focuses on the light in a work of art, as Paola Loreto persuasively argues in *The Crowning of a Poet's Quest*. Her reading of the poem identifies the clear Joycean tones in the poem, which in turn hearken back to Thomas Aquinas and Dante. She relates Joyce's use of epiphany to Walcott's emphasis on light,

articulating that: "Epiphany is what Stephen Dedalus calls *claritas,* and clarity is the third quality of beauty in Thomas Aquinas' aesthetic. As such, it also underlies Dante's Scholastic cosmology in the *Divine Comedy* (101). Loreto argues that the epiphanies in *Tiepolo's Hound*, which she further defines by citing Joyce's *Stephen Hero* "'sudden spiritual manifestation(s),'" occur through the poet's use of light (qtd. in Loreto 102). She ultimately argues that light is the controlling metaphor of the poem: "At the end of *Tiepolo* it is impossible to read the word 'light' without apprehending, simultaneously, the ideas of sight, and life, and love—all monosyllables and all echoing with the same sounds: adjacent forms of one continuous substance" (109). I agree with Loreto on the overwhelming importance of light in the poem, though with so many significant themes in the poem, considering it a controlling image seems too monolithic a claim. Instead, I argue that the artist's task is to use a stereoscopic vision in this light to witness the displacements in the world, but also to seek a return to place. Through this witness, the poet honestly recognizes the failures of his gift, yet also expresses gratitude for its goodness.

In *Tiepolo's Hound*, the poet both criticizes Pissarro for leaving the archipelago and praises his Caribbean roots, furthermore functioning simultaneously as poet and painter, as Walcott includes twenty-five of his own paintings in the poem.[4] The paintings form an integral part of the work, interacting with the poem in significant aesthetic and thematic ways; yet they do not seem to have been painted specifically for the poem, as all were completed between 1982 and 1999, before the poem was written. Moreover, as he has done in other long narrative poems, such as *Another Life* and *Omeros*, Walcott inserts himself as a narrator figure in his own poem. In *Tiepolo's Hound*, the Walcott narrator

operates as both poet and failed painter, experiencing losses and traumas as well as a return to place that corresponds to these narrators. Ultimately, Walcott's blending of time, place, and aesthetic medium provides a stereoscopic witness, which the poet identifies as the "art of seeing," of the traumas inflicted by colonial European power and the displacement of community and self this causes on the one hand, but also envisioning the role of the artist to seek a return to place by witnessing the spiritual in the ordinary through the gift poetry and painting, for which the poet expresses a profound sense of gratitude.[5]

Tiepolo's Hound begins with the sense of dissolution and ecstasy that Walcott describes in the above-cited interview with Hirsch, suggesting an epiphanic moment where the poet melts into what he sees. Walcott often refers to these moments as blending or blurring in the poem. He believes that poetry and painting capture these moments in ways that ordinary experience cannot; yet he also maintains that each medium conveys a different layer of this difficult to communicate endeavor.[6] The different mediums therefore work together to construct a stereoscopic vision of the epiphanic moment. In the poem's opening lines, he envisions Camille Pissarro in Charlotte Amelie, the capital of St. Thomas, where the "small island shops" become "quiet as drawings" and hovering above the blue harbor the "gulls tick the lined waves," appearing "like commas / in a shop ledger" (3). The poet's simile compares the Charlotte Amelie shops with drawings and the seagulls suspended above the sea like diacritical marks in a shopkeepers account book. This linguistic maneuver works to blend and connect these objects over time and space, as well as across mediums.

Moreover, the poet begins with a distinctly Caribbean vision, as he imagines a young Pissarro in his birthplace in the opening section of the poem. The poet renders a circular vision of poetry, where the Caribbean light pens the island itself: "Sea-light on the cod barrels writes: *St. Thomas*" (3). The poet not only witnesses the circular creation and beauty of this oceanic Caribbean light, but simultaneously witnesses the bitter colonial history of the region as "the salt breeze brings the sound of Mission slaves / chanting deliverance from all their sins / in tidal couplets of lament and answer" (3). Like the slave women hefting coal baskets on their heads near the St. Lucian harbor in *Omeros* that the Walcott narrator witnesses with the shade of his father, the poet sees the oppressive weight of slavery in this narrative.

And like this scene from *Omeros*, the poet perceives this colonial trauma and a Caribbean response to this trauma as inextricably linked to language. As previously noted in "The Muse of History," Walcott views English, the colonial language, as possessing bitter connotations on the one hand, while also considering it a gift he has been given. And this gift opens an entire range of possibilities for him, including a sense of belonging to English literary tradition. It is fitting then that the sound of slave songs in the linguistic winds of the Caribbean past chant their notes in "tidal couplets." His choice of couplets provides the poem a flexible form, at once linking it to English literary tradition and the oceanic rhythms of the Caribbean. Discussing discusses his choice of couplets for *Tiepolo's Hound* in reading after the poem's release at the University of Milan on May 15th, 2000, Walcott contends: "In this one, what I felt was an image of continuity. It was the image of furrows that you might see on a hillside and that is there in Pissarro's paintings around Pontoise. You see a hillside, and the hillside has furrows of planting, so

it's like that, the lines are like that. So those couplets made a space like planting. Another space in couplets that was there" (128-129). The poem's alternately rhyming couplets therefore produce a continuity between the Caribbean and Europe, he and Pissarro, the poem's other characters, poetry and painting, and language and place.[7] And this "space" that Walcott repeatedly emphasizes at the Milan reading suggests that couplets create a place to cultivate the epiphanic moment.

From the beginning of the poem, the Caribbean light, his Caribbean heritage, and the attendant colonial wounds accompany Pissarro, taking the form of a "mongrel" hound. In the first section of chapter one, a young Pissarro walks with his family, as his uncle monitors the family mercantile interests in the Charlotte Amelie harbor, while a "mongrel follows them" (4). After this, as his family heads to synagogue, out of place amidst the pealing Christian church bells, with the painter's "starched Sephardic family" further "followed from a nervous distance by the hound" (4). As noted in the previous chapter, Walcott identifies himself as "mongrel as I am" through his twilight witness, by which he means that he refuses mimicry, vengeance, and history to forge a new identity from what he has been given by his European and African ancestors, or as I also mentioned, he rehabilitates mimicry, as Paul Jay argues.[8] Walcott repeatedly casts the Caribbean as a place where many cultures meet, using the term "mongel" in a positive manner as a manifestation of this remarkable cultural and racial diversity. And in the poem, this hound symbolizes the blurring of color and light in the epiphanic moment, as well as the blending of cultures that in the Caribbean that Walcott affirms.

The opening section of chapter one ends with a prominent example of epiphany, where past and present blur together, particularly Pissarro's life in St. Thomas and the present moment of the poet writing the poem. As the Pissarro family attends synagogue:

> Their street of letters fades, this page of print
> in the bleached light of last century recalls
>
> with the sharp memory of a mezzotint:
> days of cane carts, the palms' high parasols. (4)

The poet renders the street as a page in a book with letters to be read in the present. Moreover, the street becomes an aesthetic object, as he uses specific visual art terminology, which he does throughout the poem, comparing memory to mezzotint, an engraving technique. These lines therefore serve as an elegant metaphor for memory that connects Pissarro's Caribbean past to the poet's own, while also working to blur human experience with art.

The second section of chapter one further frames the art of seeing, as the perspective shifts to the Walcott narrator in Port of Spain, Trinidad. The section begins with the narrator gazing though his window as if he where looking at the frame of a painting:

> My wooden window frames the Sunday street
> which a black dog crosses into Woodford Square.
>
> From a stone church, tribal voices repeat
> the tidal couplets of lament and prayer. (4-5)

Framing these lines of the poem through a painting means that the narrator's vision becomes doubly mediated by art. It also conveys that even in the most ordinary acts of life, such as looking out of a window, he has developed the art of seeing so completely that art and human experience are virtually indistinguishable for him. As the narrator

peers out of his window, he sees one of the many hounds in the poem entering Woodford Square, a park in downtown Port of Spain. The "stone church" where he hears Trinidadian voices singing is Trinity Cathedral, located across the street from Woodford Square. Walcott uses Trinity Cathedral to imagine the synagogue that existed in Port of Spain during Pissarro's lifetime, and in effect blurs both time and place. Extending the epiphanic moment of these opening lines, the people in the Cathedral mirror the Mission slaves' singing in St. Thomas, as they "repeat / the tidal couplets of lament and prayer." The poet's repetition of this line further connects him to Pissarro, as well as the individual Caribbean islands to each other.

The poet continues his description of Port of Spain, aestheticizing the city by depicting it like a painting. Walcott achieves this by emphasizing the extremes of the Trinidadian landscape that he implies also must have existed in St. Thomas when Pissarro lived there. He amplifies the scenes of Port of Spain that he sees through his window by stating that: "Stiller the palms on Sunday, fiercer the grass, / blacker the shade under the boiling trees, / sharper the shadows" (5). He further renders the place as: "A silent city, blest with emptiness / like an engraving. Ornate fretwork eaves, / and the heat rising from the pitch in wires" (5). Aestheticizing the calm of the city, along with its architecture and heat, Port of Spain becomes a work of art, an etching.

Moreover, Walcott emphasizes specific places in Port of Spain to convey a sense of continuity between his present Caribbean and the archipelago in which Pissarro grew up. For instance, the poet observes the tropical backdrop of Queen's Park Savannah in downtown Port of Spain: "heat rising from the pitch in wires," the large, green, fan-like "breadfruit leaves," and the "croton-coloured crowds" (5-6). Both breadfruit and crotons

are plants originally indigenous to the Pacific, but spread to other tropical regions through European sea voyages. Particularly distinctive, the red, green, yellow, and purple croton plants thrive in the Caribbean climate. Moreover, the poet deliberately contrasts the Queen's Park Savannah with the Tuileries in Paris to cast Port of Spain as a distinctly Caribbean city, rather than a European one. He identifies the "brush-point cypresses" in the Rock Gardens, located in the nearby Botanic Gardens, and "the President's Palace" next to the Botanic Gardens (5-6). The poet then associates these places—once his home—with Pissarro's hometown: "just as it was / in Charlotte Amalie" (6). The repetition of "just as it was" as an identical rhyme indicates the similarity of Pissarro's Caribbean and Walcott's in the poet's mind. The poet also mentions Michel-Jean Cazabon, the 19th-century artist born of French Martiniquan parentage in Trinidad, who painted many Trinidadian landscapes, such as *View of Trinity Church from Laventille Hill, Port of Spain, Trinidad*, but also scenes of Charlotte Amalie. Cazabon, like Walcott and Pissarro, liked to paint the ordinary because he sensed something sacred there, further connecting the poet and the Impressionist painter.

Continuing to focus on particular Trinidadian places, the poet returns his vision to the Savannah, concentrating on the great cultural multiplicity in Trinidad. He first observes "the great Savannah cedars, the silent lanes at sunrise," as well as: "the sun-sleeved Savannah / under the elegance of grass-muffled hooves, / the cantering snort, the necks reined in" (6). The poet then evokes Trinidad's cultural diversity in Trinidad, where place, culture, and art meet. He mentions "the Five Islands" of the western coast of Trinidad near Port of Spain and are merely seven miles from Venezuela, highlighting the Spanish influence on the country, as well as the "white line of chalk birds draws on an

Asia / of white-lime walls," alluding to the South Asian influence of the city (7). Trinidad's Indian population swelled when many arrived as indentured laborers after slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834. According to the Central Statistical Office, the governmental entity that conducted the 2011 census for Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidadians of Indian descent now constitute roughly 35% of the population, just ahead of Trinidadians with African heritage at 34% (Central Statistical Office Population Report). The poet also references the Afro-Caribbean roots of Trinidad in these lines, where "blackbirds bring Guinea to thorns of acacia" (7). Envisioning cultural harmony in this place of great diversity allows Walcott to further blend place and art at the end of the section, seeing the "saffron of Tiepolo sunsets" in Port of Spain "blazing from the ridges of Maracas— / the croton hues of the Impressionists" (7). Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary Trinidadian landscape, the poet sees the colors of Tiepolo's sunsets in the mountains in Maracas in northern Trinidad, and the varied colors of Impressionist painters like Pissarro in the croton plants.

The poet's account of the city beautifully corresponds with the first of Walcott's paintings included in the poem, *Savannah, Early Morning,* which was painted around 1982. The Queen's Park Savannah is located in downtown Port of Spain, roughly ten blocks north of Woodford Square. A large park over two miles in diameter, the Savannah held horse races until the 1990's and still has several cricket, football, and rugby pitches. Walcott's painting depicts this horse racing heritage with horses in the foreground of the painting, which would have still been present in the park when the painter completed the work. Perhaps more significant, Walcott's use of color in the painting expresses his way of seeing Trinidad. For instance, rather than paint the sky grey or simply blue, the latter

of which the viewer would expect, he paints the sky mostly lavender. His use of warm colors like lavender, instead of colder colors like grey, accurately portray the Caribbean light and heat. More importantly, Walcott's use of warm colors reveals a sense of intimacy with the painting's subject matter. By conveying the warmth and intimacy of this moment, he demonstrates a familiarity and affection for this place, the Savannah, and for Trinidad. Walcott lived in Trinidad for many years while he formed the Trinidad Theatre Workshop and has great fondness for the island. The warm greens that Walcott uses in the painting exhibit a similar sense of intimacy. For example, the tree in the foreground of the painting progresses from a bottle green to a lush hunter green, the latter color in particular communicates the attachment he feels to Trinidad. Furthermore, he even renders the thin slivers of mountains in the background with warm colors. Rather than simply use browns and greys, he paints them mostly lavender, with some green and brown as well, adding to the rich warmth of the work.

The small scope and size of the painting furthermore expresses Walcott's aims with his visual art. He conspicuously does not include a painting of the country portraying the beautiful panoramic beach views of Maracas Bay, which he just mentioned in the poem, or the breathtaking scarlet ibises streaking the sky near Port of Spain in the Caroni National Swamp. Instead, he chooses a much more ordinary scene: several Trinidadians on horses in a small corner of the Savannah in Port of Spain. Moreover, the size of the painting illustrates his aspirations as a painter. The author of many book-length poems, like the *künstlerroman Another Life*, the epic poem *Omeros*, and *Tiepolo's Hound* itself, Walcott's paintings do not possess epic ambitions. In his interview with Hirsch, he recognizes his artistic ambition, maintaining "I'm content to be a moderately

good watercolorist. But I'm not content to be a moderately good poet" (102). His paintings are small in size. The modest dimensions of the Savannah painting, only 6 ¼" x 10 ¼", demonstrates his desire to depict the quiet sacredness of the ordinary life that he sees around him, rather than flamboyant panache of the Trinidadian Carnival.

The epiphanic moment where Walcott first witnesses a hound in the narrative of the poem occurs in a Tiepolo or Veronese painting at an art museum. Here too, Walcott blurs different experiences, as he begins the third section of chapter one by expressing his astonishment at a still life by Cézanne in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, exclaiming "how clean his brushers were!" (7)[9] Cézanne here teaches him through his rendering of light, where "light was my first lesson" (7). As earlier noted, Loreto rightly acknowledges the significance of light in *Tiepolo's Hound,* arguing that the poem "is saturated with light" and that it "is the central metaphor of the poem" (91).[10] After viewing the light in Cézanne's work, the narrator turns a corner and sees the hound in a Veronese painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the narrator blend place as well as medium, as "the Modern" and the "Metropolitan's / marble authority" are linked by stairs that take on a poetic quality: "I remember the stairs in couplets" (7). This blurring indicates the occurrence of an epiphanic moment. So disoriented by "a slash of pink on the inner thigh / of a white hound" in "*The Feast of Levi*," he gets the name of the painting wrong; the painting he sees by Paolo Veronese is titled *The Feast in the House of Levi* (7). Moreover, the *Gallerie dell'Accademia* in Venice holds the painting, not the Met. Veronese painted the massive work, measuring approximately eighteen feet by forty-two feet, for the Basilica di San Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. Despite the epic scope and content of the painting, which depicts a great feast with Christ at its center eating and

drinking with tax collectors and sinners that draws on chapter five of the Gospel of Luke, the narrator focuses on the dog at the foot of Jesus' table. For the light on the thigh of this dog he exclaims: "I felt my heart halt" (7). Astonished by the brushstroke of light on the hound represents the fundamental epiphanic moment of the poem, providing the clarity of vision that Walcott sees in painters like Veronese, Tiepolo, Cézanne, and Pissarro.

The light on the inner thigh of the hound might seem a rather pedestrian part of the painting to focus on; yet Walcott concentrates on the hound precisely because it captures the beauty of the ordinary. He apophatically chronicles what should catch his eye in the painting but does not: the roar of the feasters conversing, the opulent clothing of the tax collectors, and the sumptuous feast itself. Yet the ordinary light he sees from the dog engenders a sense of wonder in him: "So a miracle leaves / its frame, and one epiphanic detail / illuminates an entire epoch" (8). He describes this emblematic image with a sense of sacredness and awe, comparing it to "a medal by Holbein, a Vermeer earring, every scale / of a walking mackerel by Bosch" (8). In this hound, the narrator finds "my awe of the ordinary" (8). Caught up in this epiphanic moment, the poet recalls that: "Everything blurs. Even its painter. Veronese / or Tiepolo in a turmoil of gesturing flesh, / draper, columns, arches, a crowded terrace" (8). Though disorienting and even at times confounding, the poet's memory of the painters, the function of time and place in the poem, and the simultaneity of the ordinary and the sacred convey a consistency with lived experience. Therefore, the blurring that occurs in his poetic witness allows him a stereoscopic vision of the world around him. King articulates well this stereoscopic witness in his comments on the origins of his paintings, as well as his drama and poetry, where "the epiphany, the image, the impression, the scene, is more important than the

narrative or argument. That is why he makes poems of sequences. A Walcott poem is discovered while writing, and is filled with contradictions, different voices, tones, perspectives. It has no designs on you, except perhaps to celebrate, to celebrate the West Indies, to celebrate life" (630). Walcott's multi-modal "art of seeing" therefore provides an aesthetic witness that is not didactic, yet corresponds to human experience.

As in *Omeros*, Walcott's father exerts an important influence over the poem; in *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott blends past and present, father and son, artist with fellow artist, and word and image through the aesthetic heritage of his father. Through his father's work as a painter, he feels connected to the tradition of English painters in section two of chapter two: "From my father's cabinet I trace his predecessors / in a small blue book: *The English Topographical Draughtsman*" (11). Listing a litany of names in this book: "Girtin, Sandby, and Cotman, Peter De Wint," he communicates for the first time that this book is an important object throughout the poem (11). Looking at his father's work: "a copy of Millet's *The Gleaners,* Turner's / *The Fighting Téméraire*, the gathering blow / of a storm with tossing gulls," considers his skill "more than mimicry, a gift" (11). The narrator continues to refute that his father's copying Millet and Turner's work exhibits a betrayal of the Caribbean or his African ancestry, or a "mimicry of apprenticeship," though this defense seems unnecessary taking an apprenticeship model of art in mind (13). Having adopted this view of openness to received tradition, while yet making his own innovations, Pissarro's landscape re-enters the poem and merges with the Saint Lucian landscape seen by Walcott's father and Walcott himself, as well as the epiphanic landscape that Tiepolo's hound inhabits: "over Pontoise, over the flecked Morne or grey hill / above Pontoise, or the stroke in a hound's thigh" (13). Art, whether "the stroke" or

"the syllable, planted in the furrows / of page and canvas" makes visible an invisible reality, "carrying the echoes / of another light" (13).

Walcott further blends place in the poem, particularly the European landscapes depicted by European painters with the St. Lucian terrain. The narrator recalls seeing 19th-century English painter Henry Moore's *A Silvery Day near the Needles*, identifying the seascape, sky, and coastline that the painting portrays with his island home and the ocean surrounding it. And he continues to express a similar blending with between St. Lucia and the places other painters depict in the ensuring lines: "RENOIR, DÜRER, several Renaissance masters / were our mobile museum, the back yards of home / were the squares of Italy, its piazzas our thick pastures" (13-14). This capitalization of proper names recalls Pope's similar practice in his couplets, as well as Auden's in *New Year Letter*. Furthermore, the narrator asserts that "we could see the / Madonna's blue mantle in the sea around Canaries" (14). The interplay and interchangeability of the St. Lucian homes with Italian landscapes he sees in these paintings demonstrates the similitude with which the narrator considers these places. The poet's witness effectively elevates St. Lucia as a place equal to, if not greater than, places of colonial empire. The narrator's recalls seeing these European paintings as a child, inducing a "secular ecstasy" for the young artist and his friends (14). Extending this spiritual metaphor, he envisioning himself within "the apostolic succession of the / reproductions," where "Botticelli's Venus" and "Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*" offer "details revealing / themselves to rapturous examination (14). A further example of Walcott's vision of painting and poetry as a religious vocation, placing himself within the tradition of European art also works to return St. Lucia to a sense of place that European colonialism robbed it of. [11]

The narrator continues to use explicitly religious language to describe the role of the painter, emphasizing the epiphanic moments where various spheres of existence blur together. For instance, he states that: "No metamorphosis / was required by the faiths that made all one," culminating in "the communion of paints," a pun on the Christian communion of saints, which designates the spiritual union between the living and the dead (15). Walcott's ardent belief in the "communion of paints," in the spiritual bond between living and dead painters, is a vital component of the art of seeing that becomes most clearly visible during these epiphanic moments. This bond also demonstrates how painting allows both painter and viewer to not only to see the different perspectives of other fellow living humans, but widens the scope of vision by also incorporating those perspectives against and across time. These moments of painting are described ecstatically by the narrator: "my joy would shout / to the stained air, my body's weight through it / lighter than a spinner leaf" as he concentrates on the colors of St. Lucia in his paintings, which become his "palette's province, / an irrepressible April with its orange, yellow, tan, rust, red, and vermillion note" (15). Walcott's witness, the artist therefore converts the aesthetic into spiritual, attempting to unite where there has been great division and displacement.

Yet Walcott moreover witnesses to the displacement and trauma present in copying the Impressionists, rather than simply looking past it. Viewing "Rubens's black faces / devoutly drawn," the narrator articulates that "we caught in old prints their sadness, an acceptance / of vacancy in bent cotton figures / through monochrome markets" (16). On the one hand, the "black faces" in Rubens' work, displaced from their African ancestral home by colonial greed, provide a measure of pride for the Afro-

Caribbean artists because they are not accustomed to seeing "black faces" depicted in works of visual art. Yet the portrayal of blackness exhibits great sorrow in these faces wounded by colonial trauma. Additionally, the young St. Lucian painters the poet describes looking at these painters observe how blackness is often rendered flat by painters of this era. They do not see the Caribbean in the right light. He even witnesses this narrowed vision in Pissarro: "The St. Thomas drawings have it, the taint / of complicit time, the torpor of ex-slaves / and benign planters" (16). The poet perhaps has Pissarro's *Two Women Chatting by the Sea, St. Thomas* in mind, which was painted in 1856. The painting beautifully depicts the St. Lucian light, but it also flatly portrays two St. Lucian women hefting baskets during a time of colonial tyranny. The poet assert that the painter highlights the women's "torpor" by depicting them as "benign," where their "suffering [is] made quaint / as a Danish harbour with its wooden waves" (16). Though Walcott seems to admire Pissarro's Caribbean paintings, he also laments their dehumanizing flat depiction of the women and the painter's failure to object to colonial trauma and displacement.

Walcott's response to what he sees around him in the Caribbean is nuanced; rather than seeking vengeance for this objectifying of black bodies and a lack of Caribbean representation, Walcott laments this trauma while also pursuing a creative solution for the Caribbean. These paintings therefore prompt he and St. Lucian artists like St. Omer to look upon St. Lucia as a place that could be painted like the French landscapes they saw. The poet dramatizes this stereoscopic awareness in the poem, wondering "what of the world, burning outside the library, / the harbour's cobalt, every hot iron roof, / and its mongrel streets?" (16) The narrator mentions the library, meaning

the Central Library in downtown Castries City, across from the Derek Walcott Square and a block away from the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, not far from the blue Castries harbor. He asks why St. Lucia would not be painted like the French countryside. By identifying the streets of Castries as "mongrel streets," he suggests the colonial complicity that has made them such, while simultaneously triumphing this "mongrel" nature of St. Lucia.[12] The poet sees much of North America as "mongrels," stating in an interview with Rebekah Presson in 1992 that: "The whole idea of America, and the whole idea of everything on this side of the world, barring the Native American Indian, is imported; we're all imported, black, Spanish…that's the experience of being American—that transference of whatever color, or name, or place" (193). The poet views the imported nature of America's inhabitants as an established fact, a view I agree with. Difficulty arises, however, with the response to colonialism. In the interview with Presson, contends that: "The difficult part is the realization that one is part of the whole idea of colonization. Because the easiest thing to do about colonialism is to refer to history in terms of guilt or punishment or revenge, or whatever. Whereas the rare thing is the resolution of being where one is and doing something positive about that reality" (193). In his stereoscopic poetic witness, Walcott lament the colonial and postcolonial displacement and trauma as well as seeking a return to place through art, ultimately expressing gratitude for the gift of poetry, which represents his "positive" response to this reality.

In the poem, the narrator then cites a painter who did paint the Caribbean accurately, the French Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin, who in 1887 spent roughly six months in Martinique, the island directly to the north of St. Lucia. The poet praises him

as “the light of redemption” and “our creole painter of *anses*, *mornes*, and *savannes*, / of olive hills, immortelles. He made us seek / what we knew and loved” (16).[13] He consecrates Gauguin with both ecclesiastical and local language because he painted Caribbean people as humans, without the sort of vacancy of previous European artists, such as Rubens and even Pissarro, for his witness of “the burnished skins / of pawpaws and women” (16-17). His religious tone becomes more prominent and effusive as he calls Gauguin: “Our martyr” that “died for our sins,” and “Saint Paul” who “saw the colour of his Muse / as a glowing ingot, her breasts were bronze / under the palm of a breadfruit’s fleur-de-lys” (16). These lines demonstration how art and religion, Europe and the Caribbean merge for Walcott.

He continues to adopt religious language to describe art, proceeding to blend Gauguin with Vincent van Gogh. Mentioning “Saint Paul, Saint Vincent,” the two French painters are an appropriate pairing because of their similarities in painting style and their friendship with one another (17). The poet also puns on the 17th-century French Catholic saint, St. Vincent de Paul, who was abducted by pirates in Castres, a city near the Mediterranean in southern France and the namesake of Walcott’s hometown Castries City in St. Lucia. The poet continues using religious language to depict the two painters:

> pouring linseed oil
> and turpentine in cruses with scared hands.
>
> Precious, expensive in its metal cruse,
> and poured like secular, sacramental wine,
>
> I still smell linseed oil in the wild views
> of villages and the tang of turpentine. (17).

In these lines, Walcott blends the spiritual and sensual. He envisions the ritual of their canvases baptized in linseed oil and turpentine by their wounded hands before beginning

to paint, an allusion to Christ's baptism and his wounded hands, one spiritual and the other a physical reality. In the following couplet, he returns to the image, this time describing it as a secular Eucharist, a simile which induces a moment of synesthesia, where the scent of linseed oil evokes a village scene, presumably of Walcott's St. Lucia or of the Martiniquan landscapes Gauguin paints, as well as the taste of the turpentine. Buoyed by these painters, particularly Gauguin his artistic witness of how the Caribbean might be rendered in art in a resonant manner and thereby treated as any place in Europe might, not simply a resource to be used.

Walcott further works to blur painting and poetry by juxtaposing his characterization of Gauguin with two of his own paintings of the artist: *Gauguin's Studio,* painted in 1986 and *Gauguin in Martinique,* painted in 1991*,* following pages sixteen and twenty, respectively. *Gauguin's Studio*, a collage of portraits, contains several renderings of Gauguin in the middle of the painting, a still life in the foreground, a depiction of several women, both Martiniquan and European, most of them nudes, a painter's hand in the right corner, and a background of both Martiniquan mountains and what appears a Monet-like French lily pond and garden. Blending image after image, Walcott's collage distinctly portrays the blurring process that the poet recounts in *Tiepolo's Hound*. In *Gauguin in Martinique*, the poet renders Gauguin at his canvas and easel, with a Martiniquan woman touching his shoulder, and a further Martiniquan figure in the background outside the window, as well as a Martiniquan landscape. The eyes of Gauguin and the Martiniquan woman are prominent in the painting, as Gauguin enacts the art of seeing by gazing at his canvas and painting the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the woman expressively looks at the viewer, as Walcott exhibits a Caribbean person painting

without the vacancy Walcott describes in earlier European art. Completed in 1986 and 1991, both paintings additionally demonstrate how long Walcott had this vision of Gauguin and his connection to the Caribbean.

Gauguin's work leads the narrator to St. Lucia, singing a hymn to his home that further casts his artistic vocation in a spiritual light, using a painterly idiom to chronicle the St. Lucian landscape. He recounts the churches dotting the villages as "turgid" European structures towering over the galvanized steel of the rustic and rural village buildings (17). In contrast to these overwrought edifices, he catalogs the beautiful places of St. Lucia, listing their names as a chant:

> Rounding a mountain
>
> road they [the village churches] held their station by a sea
> of processional crests, saying their Rosaries
>
> to the brown lace altars of Micoud and Dennery,
> then, to leeward, softly, at Anse La Raye, Canaries,
>
> Soufrière, Choiseul, Laborie, Veiux Fort (18).

For Walcott, these place names embody a full sense of place in their own right, yet they also still hold a connection to France, yielding "echoes drawn from the map of France, / its dukedoms pronounced in the verdant patois / of bamboo letters, a palm's simbilance (18). The connection weds language and place, where French place names are pronounced in the green vernacular of St. Lucia, as the letters of the language become bamboo and the sound of enunciating the words resembles the hissing sound a palm tree makes as its fronds rustle in the wind. Though fraught with colonial trauma and displacement, this connection allows a "verdant patois" that Walcott sees as positive. This catalog moreover serves to connect the poet to Pissarro, where these names

linguistically map his France onto St. Lucia: "There is a D'Ennery in the private maps / Pissarro did of his province, its apostrophe / poised like a gull over these furrowing whitecaps" (18).

In the stunning final twelve couplets to this section, Walcott blends nature and the human-made, the spiritual and the physical, past and present, as well as painting and poetry with place. Along the east coast of St. Lucia in Dennery, he looks toward the sea and sees that the "sunsets / were rose as cathedral ceilings with saffron / canyons of cumuli," illustrating the beauty and spiritual power of the sunsets along the sea, asserting his preference for the heavens rather than a cathedral (18). And as Walcott often does, he compares one geographic place to another. In this instance, the ethereal clouds are lent more solidity as he casts them canyons. Time and place also merge, where he sees the clouds as navigational charts used in colonial battles, perhaps thinking of the Battle of the Saints fought near Martinique and researched by Major Plunkett in *Omeros*: "The chronology of clouds / contained the curled charts of navigation, / battles with smoke and pennants" (18-19). The sunset scene moreover evokes J.M.W. Turner's *The Fighting Téméraire*, a painting blending the light of the sunset and a ship burning in battle that he mentions in Books One and Three. Further blending painting and the natural beauty of the sunset, Walcott depicts the "shrouds / of settling canvas" of the "vermilion and orange" twilight sky, offering an image filled with ambiguity that signifies both the canvas of a ship and the material on which an artist paints. He then returns to one of the poem's central painters, Tiepolo, as "the sky overhead / ripened to a Tiepolo ceiling," comparing the vivid use of color in Tiepolo's paintings to a sunset (19). The poet then ecstatically blends place and painting, where: "All was paint / and the light in paint, in the

dusty olive / of Cézanne's trees, from Impressionist prints" and "from brush and palette knife" (19). Seeing his landscape like an Impressionist painting, Walcott understands his own island better through the work of the painters he loves: "our landscapes emerging in French though we speak / English as we work. My pen replaced a brush" (19). Dramatizing his transition from primarily focusing on painting to poetry in his youth, the poet attempts to evoke the ineffable light in art that might be accessed through the depicting ordinary places, people, and objects, revealing their sacred reality.

The narrative shifts back to Pissarro more explicitly in section four of chapter three, evoking significant twilight moments. In particular, the poet imagines Pissarro's past. He pictures Pissarro in his family home as his "gaze" turns to the bookshelves loaded with family photos of ancestors that immigrated to St. Thomas, who return his "gaze" in a touching manner, "their soft eyes warm him" as they also "whisper dates and names" to him (21). A fictional letter from Pissarro's grandfather Joseph chronicles the family's move from France to St. Thomas, citing the stark contrast between the two places: "At first, the change / of light, the glare, the slaves, the burning sea / after a city built from fog seemed strange" (22). Joseph Pissarro notes that the family became accustomed to the island, though, asserting that "this place is good, away from the world's noise," while also imploring his grandson that "the old world must never be forgotten" (22). Though he advocates that his grandson live between these two worlds, he privileges the "old world," praising Camille's Uncle Isaac on the one hand for linking the new and the old world, yet he also criticizes him for marrying two women from Dominica, stating: "there is a lesson in there you should learn, / the spirit is weak, but the

flesh is weaker" (22). Like Walcott, this depiction of Pissarro's ancestry further roots him in both the Caribbean and Europe.

Being rooted in two cultures, Pissarro inevitably experiences both displacement and reimplacement in the narrative. Walcott describes Pissarro's significant displacement in St. Thomas, where he feels "estranged" from his parents and "discontent" with his work as a merchant and attending synagogue (22, 23). Painting, however, allows him a freedom from this displacement. Experiencing religious doubt, he contends that the painter "only went / to keep up appearances" and that "the ceremonial lie / darkened his doubt" (23). In the face of this doubt, Pissarro finds that: "Paint / meant deliverance from dawn's crucifixion" (23). And Walcott emphasizes that painting not only offered Pissarro an interpersonal peace, but that the Caribbean offered him a return to geographical place, which might have recreated and developed the place had he remained: "Here was a new world: in faith, in form, in feature, / in blaze and shadow, in tints beneath black skin" (23). The "faith" and the "form" indicate how Pissarro could have translated his Jewish faith into the aesthetic religion of painting through the vibrant and breathtaking "feature," "blaze," and "shadow" of St. Thomas. He might have painted uniquely Caribbean scenes, therefore developing the region's place in the world, by portraying "the wet light moving down the ebony fissure / of a fisherman's shoulders" and "a black dog panting for entrails near a pirogue / on sand so white it blinded, a sea so blue / it stained your hand" (23). But this was not to be. Instead, he pursues a European hound. The poet bemoans that this aesthetic faith did not materialize, lamenting the possible formation of place, where "not epilogue but prologue / a new world offered him, but his impatience grew" (23). Instead

of painting the black Caribbean fisherman or the Caribbean's brilliant land and sea, Pissarro to moves Europe.

Walcott deftly dramatizes Pissarro's choice between remaining in St. Thomas, which for the poet means building the island and the archipelago into a real place, and exile in France. Pissarro chooses exile in the end because it offers a more historically robust artistic community and seemingly more opportunities for growth as a painter. The poet wonders aloud about this choice: "Was this true, his shadow moving over the barrels / of codfish, is the hope of his exile betrayal?" (24) Questions like this allow what Baugh calls the "self-awareness of the poem as fictive construct, as something purposively shaped, the idea that what might otherwise be seen as a mere departure from fact is actually true to an imaginative imperative" (209-210). Instead of merely rehashing the facts of Pissarro's exile, the Walcott narrator's questions point toward an imaginative reality at the heart of the poem. Furthermore, rather than a judgment of Pissarro, the poet's question acknowledges the difficulty of the decision to leave the Caribbean, having chosen to live in Trinidad and Boston himself. He views this self-exile as "love faced with necessity," recognizing it as a practical matter, "the same crisis / every island artist, despite the wide benediction / of light, must face in these barren paradises / where after a while love becomes an affliction?" (24) Walcott envisions Pissarro experiencing the same exilic dilemmas that he experiences.

Seemingly caught between cultures, many Caribbean artists have discussed the choice between exile and career growth, or remaining in the Caribbean and encountering fewer opportunities to develop their art. Lamming expresses this in his *The Pleasures of Exile*, as noted at the beginning of this chapter. Caryl Phillips, an author from St. Kitts

who grew up in the U.K. and now lives in the U.S., casts this geographic movement by the Caribbean artist as beneficial. In his essay "The Gift of Displacement," Phillips sees the migration of the Caribbean artist as unique, where:

> the Caribbean artist is better prepared for migration than most. Wherever one happens to be in the Caribbean, at least two or more continents and cultures have already provided the bedrock upon which one's identity has been forged. It is a birthright that embraces Europe, Africa and Asia. The journey from Jamaica to Lagos, or from Aruba to Amsterdam, or form Port of Spain to Bombay, can be surprisingly short, both historically and culturally. (131)

Therefore, Phillips attempts to lessen the sting of the word "migration," breathing more positive life into term: "Migration is not a word to be feared, for Caribbean people are forever moving between versions of 'home', spurred on by the restless confluence of blood in their veins, an impure mixture that suggests transcendence and connectivity. This migratory condition, and the subsequent sense of displacement, can be a gift to the creative mind," where it "affords Caribbean writers and thinkers the opportunity to generate narrative energy out of these tensions and oppositions, and it also enables Caribbean writers and thinkers to easily slip the restrictive noose of race" (151). Phillips concludes the essay by citing C.L.R. James, the well-known Trinidadian historian: "'it is when you are outside, but can take part as a member, that you see differently from the ways they see, and you are able to write independently'" (151). Focused on the author's way of seeing his or her culture while simultaneously being in and out of that culture, Phillips could just as easily be quoting Walcott.

Canoe Under Trees (1998), the painting on the page facing the poet's consideration of Pissarro's exilic decision, testifies to the generous warmth of the Caribbean, a place unburdened by many of the hectic anxieties of urban centers. The fisherman's boat at the center of the painting casts the St. Lucian fisherman as the

embodiment of the Caribbean person that works within the "wide benediction of light," reaping the benefits of the wide ocean blue that Pissarro chooses to leave. And unlike Veronese's *Feast in the House of Levi*, nearly twenty feet by forty-two feet in size, or Walcott's own long poems that are often hundreds of pages long, the painting is not a sweeping epic work. Instead, he paints a work small in size, twelve inches by sixteen inches and scope, depicting a fraction of the island: a fishing boat, a little strip of sand, a modest bank of trees that does, not even painting the entire bank, and just to the right of the boat, a brief glimpse of the ocean. Through this narrowed vision, he celebrates the ordinary. He indicates his abiding affection for this place with his use of color. Contrasted with the cold greys and blues that he uses later in the poem in his painting *St. Malo*, portraying the northwestern coastal French city, he paints the Caribbean light and color as warm, lively, and inviting. For instance, he renders the shade on the sand as lavender rather than grey or black, imbuing the painting with a distinct sense of warmth. The red, lavender, and brown tree trunks, rather than simply brown, as well as the lavender and blue sea, rather than exclusively blue, portray the place as inviting. Furthermore, his use of yellow in the trees provides a sense of lightness to the painting. Walcott's painting, therefore, parallels his depiction of the Caribbean in the poem as quietly generous in its gifts to the artist.

Despite this Caribbean generosity and beauty, the painter heeds the call of the center of the art world in France. Walcott imagines the people of St. Thomas and the very place itself attempting to call him to stay before he departs: "'halt, one foot on the gangplank! Turn, become us, / master and patriarch, let bearded spray confirm it, / your birthright; be in obscure St. Thomas / our Giotto, our Jerome, our rock-hidden hermit!'"

(28). Dramatizing what might have been had Pissarro stayed, the Pissarro of the poem does not heed these voices. Instead, the poet presents Pissarro as tired of the everlasting summer, of the constant sunshine that seems like heaven but through some eyes becomes monotonous. Therefore, Pissarro and his teacher and friend Fritz Melbye leave St. Thomas, to which the poet more baldly asks the question: "What would have been his future had he stayed? / He was Art's subject as much as any empire's" (29). They traverse the "reversing road of the diaspora," his desire and expectation that "France will translate him, he will find his voice / in its hoarse lindens, a boulevard's sentence, / couplets of silvery aspens whispering 'Pontoise,'" hoping that "its roads opening like an inheritance" (30). This translation does come true, but only after many years of disappointment.

Book Two begins in Paris, depicting Pissarro's struggles as an artist in France by highlighting his feelings of alienation and displacement from his home in the Caribbean. Two paintings in particular embody this mood of alienation: *English Garden, Stratford-on-Avon* (1991) and *St. Malo* (1993). In *English Garden, Stratford-on-Avon,* gone are the yellows from the tropical patch of trees in *Canoe Under Trees*. There are lavender flowers at the feet of a sculpture, though foliage around the flowers largely obscures the color. A lifeless grey and white statue of a Greek or Roman god, whose identity and gender are unrecognizable, totters in the foreground. As the unpainted white areas in a watercolor serve as the negative space, the white statue and furniture portray a sense of absence in the painting. Additionally, a table and trees chairs on the right side of the painting occupy roughly a sixth of the total space of the canvas, but they remain empty, giving the work a ghostly feel. *Canoe Under Trees* was similarly unpopulated by human

figures, yet the different use of light, color, shadow, and subject matter yield a very different result. Ultimately, this painting visually reinforces the displacement that the poet depicts Pissarro experiencing after moving from St. Thomas.

St. Malo also represents Pissarro's shift from St. Thomas to France. The painting portrays the northwestern French coastal city St. Malo. Walcott renders the vast sky, comprising two thirds of the canvas, as dull, grey, and cold. The people populating the painting wear black, grey, or brown and are fully covered up to fight the frosty weather. The streets are painted a drab grey. And buildings are all painted in neutral colors. The painting conveys a stark contrast to the warm and vibrant feeling that issues from Walcott's Caribbean paintings.

Furthermore, in chapter seven, the poet charts the art world's shift from concentrating on sacred subject matter to the ordinary. The art world, however, does not endorse this shift, keeping painters that develop the Impressionist style on the periphery, which serves to further Walcott's appreciation for these artists. In chapter eight, the poet's perspective blends like the Impressionist brushstrokes, where the oceanscapes of St. Thomas, St. Lucia, and Greece all blur together. Moreover, witnessing to the art historical moment in which Pissarro lived, the poet demonstrates how he achieves ephiphanic episodes from ordinary scenes. For instance, he reflects on the movement toward painting *en plein air*, or in the open air with natural light, the prevalence of Enlightenment thinking and with it the death of the old myths, and the post-Industrial revolution context of the mid-to late 19th-century. The poet also names Charles-François Daubigny and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, of the Barbizon school,[14] who painted landscapes *en plein air* and of ordinary farm workers.

Walcott further dramatizes the tension Pissarro experiences in France, between feeling at home and displaced, gratitude and sadness, particularly through the scenes that the artist painted in Louveciennes, a small town outside of Paris, and Pontoise. In fact, the poet focuses on this oscillation between these extremes throughout the rest of Book Two. Instead of partaking in the official art of France, the Impressionists banded together to transform the art world by their singular artistic witness. Walcott also continues to blend Pissarro's landscapes with other aspects of the art of seeing, such as light, the spiritual, and gratitude, expressing the flexibility of Pissarro's aesthetic vision, how he not only blending painting with place and light with a spiritual gratitude in his Impressionist works, but in his Neo-Impressionist work as well. In particular, the poet considers the approximately three years the painter spent creating pointillist works after he met Georges Seurat and Paul Signac in 1885. Pointillism, often mentioned when considering Neo-Impressionism because it was the dominant technique at the beginning of the movement, was a movement founded by Seuret that sought to reorient the intuitive aesthetic impulses of Impressionist artists by transforming their impasto brushstrokes with dots that yield a sense of order and stability.

As Book Two ends, the Walcott narrator abruptly reenters the poem, emphasizing that his account of Pissarro's life is not biographical, at least in the strict sense, but a demonstration of his own artistic vision, and perhaps an imaginative invitation to Pissarro to rejoin his Caribbean roots. As the Walcott narrator conspicuously returns to the poetic world, he expresses his apathy toward accurately representing the facts of history, but rather demonstrates his interest in the force behind history. Instead, he works to return to a reimagined St. Lucia and the Caribbean. He acknowledges the painter's choice of exile

in France in order to realize his aesthetic vision at the center of the art world, rather than toiling at the margins, a choice that Walcott understands well. And as creator of this poetic world, Walcott makes this blurring of chronological time possible in an attempt to move past the traumatic wounds of colonialism, which keeps the marginalized at the fringes, as well as the wounds of ambition, both of which displace. Rather than perpetuate the recurrent discourse of postcolonial dominance, or the Caribbean as an isolated and estranged voice in the world, Walcott shifts the conversation. He blends and blurs time in an attempt to move beyond history written by those in power, with its static and oppressive categorizing of people. Casting history as an abstract construct preserving the traumas and displacement of the past, he seeks instead a poetic world controlled by something more palpable, sensual, and ordinary, yet mysterious: the weather. For Walcott, this allows him to reimagine and reenvision a whole people, the Caribbean, by forgetting history and remembering the present moment. He seeks to return his island to a place in the world by reimagining his affinity for his home, where sand becomes city and the Caribbean flora singes with vibrancy. But Walcott again leaves room for Pissarro to imaginatively and retroactively rejoin his Caribbean home, as the poet ends Book Two with a twilight moment, blurring his Caribbean landscape, Pissarro's Charlotte Amalie, and even the Seine.

Book Three opens with the traumas of war and the further displacement for Pissarro, yet also a sense of reconciliation of the sufferings and joys of life. The Franco-Prussian War begins in 1870, leading Pissarro and his family to flee to London, as he only held Danish nationality and could not join the French military. Though experiencing trauma and displacement, Pissarro's exile in London also led to greater artistic

community through yet another pairing of painters, this time with Claude Monet. Upon the returning to France, Pissarro and his family witness the great traumas of the Franco-Prussian War. They most immediately experience the dispossession of their belongings. Pissarro actually knew about this while still in London. Writing to friends back in France about the condition of there home in the midst of the war, they received bad news, as the Prussian army had used their home as a stable. Moreover, though friends saved a number of Pissarro's paintings, Kathleen Adler contends that he subsequently estimated that "only 40 pictures of the 1,500 he had left at Louveciennes had survived the Prussian occupation" (49).

In Book Three, Pissarro also experiences a personal trauma when his daughter Jeanne-Rachel dies of scarlet fever in 1874 at the age of 9. Pissarro grapples with the meaninglessness of sorrow and trauma, not tempted toward nihilism, but genuine in his melancholy regarding the incomprehensible nature of human suffering. Yet even in his unspeakable sorrow, the painter acknowledges the necessity of witness, this time to the life of his daughter, now dead. His witness evokes a strange mixture of sorrow and joy peculiar to traumatic loss. For example, a mysterious epiphanic moment occurs in this witness to the ordinary grief place embodied in the landscape that works to return the painter to a sense of place. Though he wrestles with the meaninglessness of his daughter's early death on the one hand, he simultaneously locates a comprehensible response to this traumatic loss through his art by witnessing the place around him utter her name. The death of his daughter is therefore totalizing, where he sees her everywhere, even in the landscapes he paints. Yet because he paints the landscapes that utter her name, his aesthetic witness acknowledges her existence.

While roughly the first half of the poem has demonstrated great displacement and trauma with only glimpses of a return to place in Pissarro's world, chapter fourteen begins a movement toward a greater emphasis on a return to place and a sense of gratitude for his work. And while the first half of the poem concentrates predominantly on Pissarro, the second half focuses increasingly on the Walcott narrator. Chapter fourteen commences with a further explicit intrusion into poem by the Walcott narrator, with the first six couplets in italics and the narrator commenting on the progress of the poem thus far. The poet makes a similar maneuver roughly half way through *Omeros* in Book Four, where he moves from tercets to couplets for one section of chapter thirty-three to signify the displacement he feels after his mother's death. In the italicized intrusion in section fourteen of *Tiepolo's Hound,* the poet pursues a similar creative end, where the artist works to create or recreate the Antilles, which becomes a bridge between divergent places.

Moreover, in Book Three the ocean frequently acts as a connective tissue between time, place, and people, as it does in much of Walcott's poetry. He also recurrently uses the resonant word "*craft*" to indicate both a boat and his poetry, expressing that he fashions his poetry after a ship sailing the ocean that connects time, place, and people (87). In the remaining sections, he deftly and imaginatively sails between two hemispheres, two vastly different places: Europe and the Caribbean. Yet despite their difference, the poet sees these places as inextricably linked by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. For Walcott, poetry and other art such as painting navigate these waters to remember what has happened between these places, and most importantly, to provide a way forward, a place for cultural creation and development, particularly for oppressed

places like the Caribbean. Yet by concentrating on a cure from traumatic and displacing colonial wounds, Walcott does not argue that these old troubles and torments are simply forgotten. On the contrary, the scars remain and must serve as a witness to the past. But they do not completely dictate the present.

In section sixteen, Walcott explicitly turns his gaze back to St. Lucia, and even more locally, Gros Islet, pursuing a return to place from this colonial displacement, which also allows a sense of gratitude. He identifies this return to place with Pissarro, the next several paintings, and the poem itself. Walcott prepares for this return to place by rendering his art with the spiritual character of religious rituals, an approach that first reveals his failures as a painter. He begins by readying his paints and canvas through the "unblest rituals of preparation" (97). The poet also discusses painting as a ritual in a press conference for *Tiepolo's Hound* in Milan, calling it "a votive act beyond yourself. And certainly in the ritual of putting your paints out, selecting the brushes, pouring the oil out, setting up the canvas, that's very much like, to me, the equivalent of preparing a Mass in a sense. I'm not a Catholic, but it's the same layout, it's got the incantatory quality in it. It's got the preparation" (201). He believes this aesthetic ritual might allow him contact with the sacred. Yet, the painter still feels the dread of not being able to repeat the work he has in the past.

Book Four of the poem begins in Venice with the poet once more seeking the sacred in the ordinary in his pursuit of the hound he thought he saw in a Tiepolo or Veronese painting. He travels to Venice in order to seek the hound, perhaps in the *Gallerie dell'Accademia,* which houses *The Feast in the House of Levi*. Yet he also attempts an imaginative search that no research can uncover. Chasing after this epiphanic

vision of the hound in Venice moreover restores his hope in a Caribbean beyond imperial rule based in place, namely the Caribbean archipelago and the ocean. The poet's witnesses in Venice the historical rule of doges during the height of the city's colonial power. For instance, he observes seagulls on the pilings of the docks of the canals, which he imagines as the winged lions on the flags of Venetian galleons that represent the decline of the once powerful imperial Republic, "proving that empires vanish / while water has no tense and cannot run backwards" (116). The water in the Venetian Lagoon, eventually connecting to the Caribbean through the Atlantic Ocean and the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas, therefore forms a place beyond history in Walcott's imaginative world, rather than striving after the faded historical European glory. Working like a connective tissue, the sea helps to elicit the epiphanic moment the poet seeks.

The poet encounters the hound in Venice, fittingly enough, in an aging Venetian church, a sacred setting that begins to engender a sense of gratitude in the poet. He comments that he "discover[s] in some flaking church, / with peering pilgrims scuffling inside / water-webbed walls, the creature of my search"—the spectral hound (116). In this epiphanic moment, painters like Francesco Guardi, an 18th-century Venetian painter and contemporary of Tiepolo, and Veronese pass before Walcott's eyes. In a vivid imaginative chase, he follows their trail in search of the hound. He experiences an out of body experience, arriving "after / my body, as from a boat" (116). In this aesthetic world, he observes that "my gestures occupied a painted space / in the carved orb that Saint Mark's lion grips" (116). The lion of St. Mark does not actually grip an orb, but a Bible, since the lion represents, unsurprisingly, St. Mark. But this reinforces the spiritual nature of the poet's vision. From this point on in the section, he begins to express a skeptical

sense of gratitude for once again being on the trail of the hound, where this Venetian voyage allows "an astonished groan / at irresistible light, at water writing / reflections, signatures, no more denying / my joy" (117). Yet since he has not found the hound, his gratitude comes in waves.

Walcott places the painting *Gros Islet Church II* in the midst of this pursuit of the hound, a work that corresponds with his aesthetic pursuit of the spiritual in the ordinary in the hound. Furthermore, the painting is in dialogue with the work *Gros Islet Church I*, which appears some twenty pages earlier. Walcott last lived in Gros Islet, so it is unsurprising that he speaks fondly of the small village in his work. For instance, many of the central characters in *Omeros* are from the former fishing village, such as Achille, Hector, and Helen. Home to the Friday Night Jump Up, a street party that also appears in *Omeros* featuring St. Lucian music, dancing, and food, the small community surrounds the Catholic Church St. Joseph the Worker, the church depicted in the two paintings in *Tiepolo's Hound*. On the page facing *Gros Islet Church I,* a moment where explicitly turns the action of the narrative to St. Lucia and considers the rituals as well as the failures of Pissarro and the Walcott narrator, the poet distinctly emphasizes significance of the artist locating the spiritual in the ordinary in art. More specifically, he remarks that to "heighten the commonplace into the sacredness" might allow him to witness "light that can gladden / the mind like the flash of a hound's thigh in Veronese" (98). His witness of the ordinary produces an aesthetic spiritual feeling that delights; he expresses a profound gratitude both for the gift of art and existence, which he most fully experiences in light of the displacing failures he endures. *Gros Islet Church II* operates similarly. On the pages adjacent to this painting, he hunts the hound in Venice: "With every sunrise / he was

stunned by a beauty he had seen before / so far beyond nature in her artifice"(118). These lines follow a period of frustration and failure in his search for the hound. Yet Venice herself feeds the hound as well as the poet and painter's artistic impulse: "stretching her hand to feed an arching hound" (118). The beauty and art of the city dazes him, disorienting Walcott into a sense of gratitude.[15]

In these two paintings themselves, Walcott witnesses the sacred in the ordinary. For instance, in *Gros Islet Church I*, completed in 1998, the painting conveys a clear sense of fondness and gratitude for the place. The painting depicts St. Joseph's at midday, with an expansive sky populated by clouds. He once more employs warm colors in the painting, utilizing yellow, green, and purple for the tropical green vegetation surrounding the church. Crotons, a distinctively tropical plant, are discernable in the front yard of the church. The red roofs of the church and a house provide a further sense of warmth in the work. Moreover, the painter again makes extensive use of lavender in his work. For example, he paints the sky blue with a touch of lavender, the shadows in the clouds are lavender, and the thin road in the foreground is also various shades of light and dark lavender. The lavender, however, appears most prominently in the church, the object at the center of the painting, towering over the rest of the buildings. In fact, the color seems to be radiating from the church toward every other object in the work, as the white façade of the church absorbing the light as lavender. The sky, encompassing nearly half of the canvas, moreover seems to provide a heavenly artistic offering through the parting clouds. Rather than an ecclesiastical sacredness, however, this lavender light and the sweeping sky convey an aesthetic sacredness in the ordinary that is rooted in place, St. Lucia. The painter renders the commonplace in the foreground of this scene by depicting

a woman walking on the lavender road in front of the church, a little girl playing on a what looks like a broken table in the field in front of the church, and a goat grazing with its kid near a rooster doing the same. The small scope of the 18" by 24" painting further emphasizes the ordinary nature of this St. Lucian scene. Depicting the ordinary as imbued with the sacred in this particular St. Lucian place therefore further demonstrates Walcott's aesthetic witness filled with gratitude for his Caribbean home, as well as exhibiting how his vision of place induces his artistic creation.

Gros Islet Church II, painted in 1999, similarly considers the sacred in the ordinary, though it does so in the waning sunlight rather than the midday sun. There are several distinct differences in this second painting of the St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Gros Islet. The most immediately notable difference with the two paintings is the perspective. Rather than squarely facing the front of the church, the painter looks at the east side of the building, while also glimpsing a portion of the front of the church. Moreover, the painter renders the clearly changing light in the work, representing the most significant variation from the previous St. Joseph's painting. Whereas the first painting occurs in midday with clear light and blue skies, in *Gros Islet Church II* the dusky clouds are permeated with yellows and greens, with touches of lavender and brown. This marks a significant departure for Walcott as a painter, as he rarely paints sunsets, but rather less phenomenally beautiful times of day. Fittingly then, though he depicts diminishing light in this painting, he does not render the sunset brilliant with reds, oranges, blues, and pinks resplendently erupting. Furthermore, the artist does not paint the fronds of the palm trees, which dominate the sky, hunter green, as in his other paintings, but with yellows and browns in addition to greens. The painter therefore avoids

making the lurid sunset paintings that countless tourists buy at the Castries Market while in the harbor from their cruise ship. Instead, in this light he concentrates on the beauty of the ordinary. He achieves this by painting in the foreground a man walking on the far left of the work, an unsightly rusting oil drum sitting nearby, cinderblocks scattered in various places, and indiscernible disused machine littering the field in the foreground. Moreover, the foreground also has warm browns, greys, and lavenders. Therefore, like *Gros Islet Church I*, the painting envisions the spiritual in the ordinary, conveying for the artist the artistic inspiration he draws from everyday life in St. Lucia, as well as the gratitude he feels for this particular place.

Walcott finds the intersection between poetry and painting as a particularly powerful place where the epiphanic moments he so earnestly seeks in *Tieopolo's Hound* occur. He does so by adopting an Audenesque understanding of the mediums he chooses. Though he does not possess the same giftedness and aspiration in his painting, Walcott recognizes his ambition and skill at his craft as a poet, his primary artistic role. This is one reason he elects to focus on brilliant sunsets in his poetry, but not in his paintings. For instance, after *Gros Islet Church II* he completes an ekphrastic reading of Tiepolo's *Rinaldo Taking Leave of Armida,* a painting based on Torquato Tasso's Christian epic, *Gerusalemme Liberata.* The painting depicts the Christian warrior Rinaldo leaving his pagan lover Armida as the sun vividly sets. After gazing at the "ageing light" of the painting, he maintains that "as my own hand grows older; / they are eternally fixed, age after age, / and it is I who fade, dimming beholder" (119). This ekphrastic example leads him to reflect on the permanence of art and the ephemeral nature of human existence, and

further join with Tieoplo, as the painter's Venice was in decline during his lifetime, corresponding to the poverty of the poet's St. Lucia.

Impelled by his perception of art as timeless in the face of human mortality, the poet resumes his pursuit of the hound, seeking contact with the enduring character of art. He does so with positively spiritual language, as he imagines "martyrs ascending" and "clouds in radiant conversion," claiming that: "Should the hound come / nibbling my hand's wafer, it would be blest" (119). His Eucharistic language indicates the sacredness of his artistic vision. It moreover reinforces his belief that this aesthetic transformation will occur regardless of whether or not he actually finds who painted the hound, as he bluntly asks the question: "What if at the maze's end I did not encounter / the hound"? (120) The poet's journey through the labyrinthine Venetian streets has not been in vain. He articulates that: "At least I could recount the / flame that had led me, a tongue in the dark" which has allowed him to witness the displacing realities around him, as well as see the gift of his craft (120). This "flame" has kindled his artistic impulse, inspiring him to write incandescent verse that both haunts and delights.

In fact, he articulates that this tension between failing and achieving his pursuit of the hound as an epiphanic artistic impulse both motivates him to continue his quest and to produce such extraordinary poetry. He continues to interrogate himself over his search: "was I scared to death to find this bone-white dog?" (121) Questions like this over his hunting for the hound reveal the displacing elusiveness of his search, which Breslin identifies in the title of the poem, but can be seen throughout the work: "the curious displacement of the title reveals the poem's concern with the elusive: the vanishing flash of inspiration that haunts poets and painters; the uncertain location of 'home'; the

disparity between a life's meaning and its narrative form; the deceptions of memory" (280). However, the poet genuinely sees something real in his search. He remarks that though "more affliction / than quest now, I would end my search, / if faith were just the fiction of a fiction," as he therefore remains: "Devoted as a candle to its church" (121). As he persists pursuing the hound, he emphasizes "the whiteness of the hound" (121). The poet presumably intends a clear reference to Ahab's interminable hunt for the white whale Moby Dick in Herman Melville's sweeping novel *Moby Dick,* an apt allusion as both *Tiepolo's Hound* and Melville's novel share a similarly ambitious scope of a narrative of the pursuit of a sacred spectral figure. Yet he continues mentioning the hound's whiteness seven times in twenty-two lines. This contrasts with the blackness of the hound earlier in the poem. The hound, both black and white, seems to represent the seeker himself, whose ancestors hail from the Caribbean and Europe, and who considers himself in the tradition of both regions.

Walcott's focus on epiphanically blurring himself, the narrator, with other twilight painters seeking the hound that embodies the artist's impulse to create, particularly occurs in relation to place. For instance, as he discusses Veronese's life in Venice, he declares: "The visitor to Venice becomes a student of water / and its biography," which could also be a description of Walcott and St. Lucia (122). The poet again casts water as a connective tissue between the Caribbean and Europe. Attentive to this place, the Venetian waters whisper Veronese's name and his being charged by the Inquisition for *Feast in the House of Levi's* irreverence. Seeking the hound in this place, he now more fully realizes the significance of his search: "any one of the / two names might have done it; who painted it best / was not at issue" (123). The poet further recognizes the

irrelevance of whether it was Veronese or Tiepolo who painted the hound; rather, the aesthetic insight the hound represents fundamentally important.

The poet's realization triggers a significant shift in his witness, opening his eyes to more profound vision of the world around him in the poem. He acknowledges this movement in Part Two of Section 20: "I ravaged a volume on Tiepolo later. / I was searching for myself now" (124). And he finds himself in Tiepolo's paintings. In *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, painted in 1747, he identifies himself as "that grey Moor clutching a wolfhound" (124). He completes a similar ekphrastic reading of Tiepolo's 1744 painting *The Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra*, empathizing with another figure from Africa attended by a dog. Though the poet remains somewhat exasperated at not determining who painted the hound—"The dog, the dog, where was the fucking dog?"—he quickly moves beyond this line of thought, considering Veronese's influence on Tiepolo, as well as the religious nature of their work. And though both artists paint for the Catholic Church and depict religious scenes like the Madonna and child, they stir the poet with their aesthetic style, not their religious subject matter. He articulates that they paint "with fury that is motionless but moves," identifying an ineffable sacredness to their work. Walcott's poetic register reaches a fever pitch, using Audenesque "O" exclamations that are reminiscent of songs of praise and lament: "O turbulence, astounding in its stasis; / O bright and paradisal wind" (125). In these ecstatic contradictions, the poet appears disoriented while simultaneously locating himself, where the paintings allow him to see "a saffron glow, not from our mortal sun," but from a "shadowless ecstasy / ordained" (125). Once he has this vision, "joy carries it away / to weightless grace, the way a pilgrim walks / on cloud-paths to the Holy Family"

(125). The disorienting aesthetic ecstasy that results also reorients the poet and sustains him with joy. The poet achieves this joy by recognizing his multicultural ancestry in his painting and poetry. Moreover, his metaphoric perception of himself as a pilgrim not only indicates the spiritual nature of his artistic experience, but it leads him back to place, to the Caribbean. And he does not simply wish to achieve this return to place himself, but to reorient all Caribbean people back to place. The realization that "a beast / that was my fear, my self, my craft, / not the white elegant wolfhound at the feast," prompts this return to place (127). The poet articulates this return through his attempt "to elevate my race from its foul lair / by prayer, by poetry, by couplets repeated / over its carcase, I was both slain and slayer" (128).

The poet's "formal research" of Tiepolo's work in many different churches in Venice further blends the characters' worlds across time and space in the imaginative world of the poem. For instance, the poet articulates that "faith raises the / scaffold of Giambattista Tiepolo in an island church" (130). The Walcott narrator could mean a church in Venice, though Venice is no island. It seems, rather, that he blends Venice and the Caribbean in these lines. Alongside an emphasis on place, the poet also casts this art as a spiritual endeavor requiring "faith." And the poet continues to reiterate the significance of the blending of time and place, as well as the sacred nature of art in the couplets that follow. King articulates how Walcott's use of couplets allow him to achieve this sacred ascension, asserting that: "The couplets are a staircase through the scenes exhibited in his poem and towards the art works which accompany the poem in the book. The poem and book are his museum, his church, his monument in contrast to those of the Old World and the North" (631). Envisioning Tiepolo being raised up on his scaffold to

paint a church ceiling in the Caribbean, as if on an altar, sacrificed, and ascending to the heavens by the faith of those that see his work, "his figure receding in the lifted devotion / of fisherman who cross themselves with salted eyes" (130). The "devotion / of fishermen" recalls St. Lucian fishermen Achille and Hector from *Omeros*, as well as the fisherman in his boat in St. Omer's brilliant mural at the Holy Family Catholic Church in St. Lucia. Furthermore, Tiepolo ascends this scaffold "above the muttering ocean of vespers to chart the geography of paradise," where every "rusting village acknowledged her dominion, / Star of the Sea, from its dark, echoing nave" (130). Again, place blends as Venice and St. Lucia coalesce, with the poet in Venice always envisioning his home island, mapping his "geography of paradise." He envisions of the galvanized steel homes in the fishing villages dotting St. Lucia, where the inhabitants of this majority Catholic country venerate the Virgin Mary, the "Star of the Sea." Through this blending of place in the poem, Walcott witnesses to the artist and his aesthetic veneration.

In this stance of veneration, the poet pursues the hound as an image of the epiphany, delight, and gratitude that art can elicit. The poet characterizes his delight in seeing Tiepolo and Veronese's work as "innocent" and "monadic as our climate in its sublime / indifference to seasonal modulations, / to schools, to epochs" (132). The delight he experience through his vision of the hound, though residing in his memory, was not bound by it. Therefore, he exclaims that "art was not an index of elations; / it ignored error, it trusted its own eyes" (132). The poet again concentrates on vision, in this instance demonstrating that seeing a poem is not primarily an academic effort, but one that requires the eyes to see and a heart guided by both knowledge and artistic intuition. This full range of vision becomes necessary because the "hound's thigh blurred the

smoky dyes around it, / it mixed the schools of distinct centuries" (133). This blurring between artists, paintings, and schools leads the poet to believe that it does not matter who painted the hound, "rather the consequence / of my astonishment, which has blent this fiction / to what is true without a change of tense (133). Walcott's witness to this sense of "astonishment" in reaction to a work, a receptivity to art that causes disparate narratives to connect becomes one of his chief endeavors in this poem.

Yet the poet continues to question his vision of the hound in between the moments of epiphany. His search, though leading to gratitude, does not cure his feeling displaced. He wakes up one morning terrified "that all I had written of the hound was false" (134). He worries that poetic ambition and the desire to experience these epiphanic moments have beguiled him, where his memory has subdued his imagination, constructing events that did not occur. He wonders how he could be in two different places at once: "first, in a Venice I had never seen, / despite its sharpness of prong bearded faces, / then at the Metropolitan? What did the dog mean?" (135) The poet doubts the efficacy of the epiphanic aesthetic blending he has witnessed to throughout the narrative to this point. And he questions his faith in the feeling of astonishment and delight that the image of the hound induces. This leads him to abandon his vision of Pissarro experiencing pain because of his exile from the Caribbean. Instead, Pissarro achieves a return to place in France. But this does not sever the link between to the two artist, as: "Our characters are blent / not by talent but by climate and calling" (135). As fellow artists who articulate the Caribbean light in their work, yet draw upon European tradition, both witness to the vision that this blending might create.

In this place of tension between his ephiphanic astonishment at the light on the thigh of the hound, and the realization that he will not recover this experience in European art alone, nor in recasting Pissarro as a Caribbean painter, the poet discovers where the hound has led him: home. His imaginative wanderings have been critical to his development in the poem. His labyrinthine pursuit of the hound across time and place allows him to see it as an image of his poetic and artistic gift for which he feels gratitude and astonishment. And his vision provides him an avenue to witness to others about his aesthetic gift. His realization, though unfolding gradually in the narrative of the poem, more fully takes hold as he returns to a particular place, here a St. Lucian beach under the shade of the acacia trees, where he sees a "parody of Tiepolo's hound" (138). Shaking "with local terror," he identifies this dog with the hound his has been seeking. He moreover calls the dog "the mongrel's heir, not in a great / fresco, but bastardy, abandonment, and hope / and love enough perhaps to help it live" (138). This Caribbean dog he sees represents the complex Caribbean situation for Walcott: displaced from the center of any political, economic, or cultural world powers, while yet connected to European, African, and Caribbean traditions through its dislocated ancestry and exile, while yet living in hope and love because of its rootedness in place and community. Walcott's desire to seek Tiepolo's hound leads to witness this Caribbean dog, which he considers to be much a greater than witness. He articulates this in the ensuing lines, as well as the rest of the poem: "we set it down in the village to survive / like all my ancestry. The hound was here" (139). Walcott's stereoscopic witness therefore preserves this hound, an image for Caribbean art. The use of the term "survive" might seem like an odd one, but recalls Auden's emphasis on poetry as a gift that survives. Auden's

depiction of survival extraordinarily positive, as for instance it survives the great traumas of the 20th-century, where "[a]ll the dogs of Europe bark," yet it still might "[t]each the free man how to praise" (47, 65). Likewise affirmative, Walcott depicts of the hound, an image for the artistic impulse, as facing great displacement, yet surviving because of its rootedness in the Caribbean.

The poet's preservation of this local Caribbean hound leads to a further vision, where his world blends once again with Pissarro's. In St. Thomas, he sees the same "customary pastorals of the Antilles" that Pissarro saw (140). As he walks along, he hears and sees Pissarro and his teacher and friend Fritz Melbye: "I heard their charcoals scratch the page / and their light laughter" (140). Suddenly after this moment, Walcott becomes the subject of the artists' sketches: "I felt a line enclose my lineaments / and those of other shapes around me too" (140). His stance freezes and "I shrank into the posture they had chosen," moreover "keeping my position as a model does" (141). And not only does he become their model, but also the St. Thomian slave figure painted by the artists. The Walcott narrator-become-St. Thomian-slave pleads with Pissarro to stay in St. Thomas, reiterating what the poet has been saying for much of the poem: "'do not leave us here, / for cities where our voices have not words'" (141). The poet becomes himself once more, lamenting to Pissarro that: "'You could have been our pioneer'" (142). Pissarro then responds to the poet: "'My history veins backwards / to the black soil of my birthplace'" (142). This vision seems to appear so that the poet can have one last contemplation of what could have been if Pissarro had stayed in St. Thomas. He bemoans: "Think of what he would have made" had he stayed in the Caribbean:

> of [the] flame trees in the fields of Santa Cruz;
> others took root and stood the difference,

and some even achieved a gratitude
beyond their dislocation, saw what was given

and seized it with possessed delight, made good
from an infernal, disease-riddled heaven,

and let the ship go, trailing its red banner
out of their harbour, like *The Téméraire*.

St. Thomas stays unpainted, every savannah
trails its flame tree that fades. This is not fair. (143)

Though unfair, this last lament allows the poet to come to terms with Pissarro's move. Moreover, it gives him the space to articulate how Caribbean artists have been able to look beyond their displaced predicament and achieve a sense of gratitude for the gift of art.

The poet reflects this further inequality dealt to the Caribbean, the loss of a great painter, through violent imagery, though he simultaneously witnesses how Caribbean art has moved beyond these injustices. Reminiscent of the poet's declaration in *Omeros* that "I re-entered my reversible world," which signals the transformation of his displacement centered on his craft, Walcott witnesses how: "Seasons and paintings cross, reversible, / Hobbema's, the shade-crossed casuarina walk, / the surf foams in apple orchards, cedars talk / poplar, and autumn claims the hills of April" (207, 145). Violence and the legacy of slavery do not disappear in this "reversible" world, though beauty and place might transcend them: "Grenade sugar-apples, cannonball calabash, / the first breeze and the cool of coming rain / from moaning ground doves, the burnt smell of bush, / the flecks of sea beyond a sugar mill's ruin" (145). Though "sugar-apples" are exploding like grenades and the calabash trees become like cannonballs, the beauty of the Caribbean and the sea around it glimmer with hope in light of the ruins of a sugar mill, an image for collapse of

the slave trade. Moreover, the section ends with a note of gratitude: "These couplets climb the pillared sanctum / of invitation to Salon, Academy, / its lectern for the elect. I thank them / for helping me to cross a treacherous sea / to find a marble hound" (145-146). Like Auden in *New Year Letter*, though greatly condensed in these lines, literary tradition surrounds and helps Walcott, to which he responds with distinct notes of gratitude.

The poet's witness through his search for a hound, if not *the* hound itself, becomes stereoscopic as he blurs different times and places together until the images in his poem have depth and solidity. For instance, shortly after thanking the literary tradition for his pursuit of the hound, he cycles through image after image of past artists and friends, as well as European and Caribbean places, creating "maps made in the heart, its cherished places" (147). This blending produces gratitude and a geography of the heart that enables the poet to locate the "occluded sanctities" that he seeks to depict throughout his work. In particular, he portrays his astonishment through a consideration of the light of these "cherished places": "The light had substance; a still life that could / share with the ham and bread the taste of colour" (147). Through his blending of time and place, the poet conveys the substance of light and color. The pursuit of the hound has led to moments like this, where the poet renders the insubstantial and ethereal into solid objects. Making the light more tangible provides the poet with a concrete image, a maneuver similar to what light and space artists like James Turrell achieve. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Turrell articulates that he wants his viewers to see themselves seeing; his interest lies with the perception of seeing. Walcott's pursuit in *Tiepolo's Hound* is analogous to Turrell's. Characterizing the light, which is necessary for sight, as

physical, the poet stresses the importance of light and vision for artists, as they seek to see and represent the world around them, where the light achieves various ends like basic illumination of a scene, evoking a variation of moods, or accentuating a particular perspective. Furthermore, the poet concretizes light to reorient the viewer's vision. Recalling his description of the European and U.S. American vision of the Caribbean as a misunderstanding of the light of the archipelago, the poet seeks to make this misperception substantial so that the reader or viewer might correct their vision of the Caribbean. Additionally, making the light substantial allows the poet to transform the ordinary into the spiritual. The poet adopts a priest-like role, using a Eucharistic image to convert light into bread so substantial that the reader or viewer might taste the color.

Seeing the hound again, this time in Madrid, the poet elucidates how witnessing to this image of light illuminates the world around it. He claims that within tradition, an exchange occurs between the artist and the reader or viewer, which he describes as: "A light exchanged, its history a surrender / to what was undeniable in place and name" (148). Walcott here asserts that art is irrevocably rooted in place, and that the ineffable light within a work can illuminate new worlds for the reader or viewer. Furthermore, what the poet sees in art and the hound is achieved in life sometimes, particularly here in Spain: "Under the sky's rotunda I had found…wandering like a hound…that left me emptiness as an inheritance" (148-149).[16] And by "emptiness," the poet does not mean a negative space, but the substantiality of light. In the blending and blurring that occurs in this aesthetic light, past and future dissolve, leaving the viewer or reader to be astonished and grateful for the boundless present of the work, in which the poet contends: "I had no

shadow, no before or after" (149). Walcott believes that within these aesthetic epiphanies, the artist's witness might reorient the reader or viewer and alter their vision.

With this transformed vision, Walcott depicts the significance of a return to place from the displacement his has experienced and portrayed in the narrative. Returning to the book of paintings that he inherits from his father, he emphasizes the consequential link between place and art: "Real counties opened from that small blue book / I cherished: *The English Topographical Draughtsmen*" (149). Though artistic renderings of actual places, these paintings make these distant locations real for the poet. Yet he simultaneously expresses the displacement he and his father have felt through colonial and postcolonial tyranny: "now I would look / at what my father never saw, craftsmen / made real by names and counties," where "England became its art, no different [than the Caribbean, France, Spain, etc.], / except for the hound. I was the one pursuing" (149, 150). In these lines, which are spoken by the narrator as he occupies his role as Professor of Poetry at the University of Sussex, the poet also declares that he has moved beyond this displacement by seeing what his father never saw, England. This maneuver allows him to recover a sense of his European heritage, in both a lineal and artistic sense.

Moreover, this leads the poet to a return to his home: St. Lucia. After an extended time away from the island in the narrative of the poem, the poet flies into Hewanorra International Airport, the major airport in the very southeastern tip of the island in Vieux-Fort.[17] As he walks out of the plane, he states that he: "looked beyond the tarmac. A bright field. / Late horizontal afternoon. Light, south / of the island. My grief unhealed / by the sacral egrets at a river's mouth" (151). Though his grief has not been healed, his does not mean this in a pessimistic manner. Instead, he possesses an air of expectation:

"Then I knew where it was: / the blithely running sea around Vieux-Fort" (151). Like Achille in *Omeros*, who has left the sea and his trade as a fisherman, only to recover a connection to the ocean and thereby achieving a sense of healing by the end of the poem, the poet casts his sight to the sea around his home island. This vision evokes childhood memories of painting with St. Omer, where he remembers "when we first painted and our shadows tracked us / up stone-loose paths towards the Atlantic's patience" (151). But the poet also seems to include Pissarro in this reverie as well, expressing his desire for a return home, though oddly in St. Thomas: "homesick for my acre, / for the green crests of Charlotte Amalie, / the yellow synagogue so far from Braganza" (152). Blending with Pissarro, the Walcott narrator communicates his affinity with the impressionist painter in his yearning for a return to place.

The poet's blending his perspective with Pissarro allows him to demonstrate how the artist sees the world, adopting various lenses to construct his stereoscopic witness. For example, Walcott laments that he has not described the places that Pissarro lived more frequently, yet he contextualizes why he has not: "but I kept seeing / things through his eyes" (154). He has not tried to portray the places Pissarro lived at great length in the poem because he does not want to confuse his poem with biography. He instead desires convey Pissarro's experience through his own sight. Fittingly, then, Walcott includes his self-portrait on the adjacent page to the above lines. The painting, titled *Self-Portrait* and painted in 1998, depicts Walcott looking into a mirror and painting himself. The canvas he paints the self-portrait on is on the left side of the painting. In the work, he conveys his emphasis that art should allow you to see yourself seeing; the viewer does not look at the actual object being painted, but a representation.[18] It therefore further concentrates

Walcott's belief in the significance of seeing in the poem. Moreover, his focus on seeing ultimately demonstrates how the Caribbean might be seen in the correct light. European history and geography as created by white men tend to have a skewed vision of the Caribbean. Gazing at a map, he sees "a dot named by its cartographer— / the name longer than the dot," as if the naming by the European colonizer is more important than the place itself with all its people (154).

Eyesight, however, can fade, a point that Walcott notes near the end of the poem by considering Pissarro's loss of sight as he aged: "Affliction: inflammation of the eyes / that often stops him painting" (155). The poet laments this circumstance in a beautiful reversal of John Donne's famous line from "Meditation 17" in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*: "man is a small island who contains cisterns of sorrow" (155). Yet being an island is not a negative situation for Walcott. And despite his problems with his vision, the poet credits Pissarro with a different kind of vision through the beauty of the ordinary:

> In his life's dusk, though hand and eye grow weary,
> his concentration strengthens in its skill,
>
> some critics think his work is ordinary,
> but the ordinary is the miracle.
>
> Ordinary love and ordinary death,
> ordinary suffering, ordinary birth,
>
> the ordinary couplets of our breath,
> ordinary heaven, ordinary earth. (155)

Repetitively chanting a hymn to the ordinary, Walcott praises that "the ordinary is the miracle" in Pissarro's work. And despite Pissarro's vision problems, the poet asserts that: "My Paris comes out of his canvases / not from a map, and perhaps, even better / than

Paris itself," arguing further that "they fill these verses / with their own light, their walks, their weather / that will outlast me as they outlast him" (156). Pissarro's work shines through Walcott's own, where the poet's verses not only provide a vision of what he depicts, but the light from Pissarro's as well. The poet moreover contextualizes Pissarro's exile, first charting the displacement inherent in the colonial Caribbean: "Our tribes were shaken like seeds from a sieve. / Our dialects, rooted, forced their own utterance," yet he laments that "so many fled, so many lost / to the magnetic spires of cities, not the cedars, / as if a black pup turned into the ghost / of the white hound" (157). Understanding the pull to the cultural centers of the world, he concludes that searches like his inevitably lead back to "where we began: to islands, not the busy / but unchanged patronage of the empire's centre" (157). Acknowledging that the impressionist painter was similarly led away from St. Thomas to work in France, the center of the art world, he claims that "Pissarro must have heard the noise / of loss-lamenting slaves, and if he did, / they tremble in the poplars of Pontoise, / the trembling, elegiac tongues he painted," a comment that leaves room for the ordinary and the Caribbean in Pissarro's imagination, even while remaining in France (157-158).

Walcott therefore seeks to hold true to the vision of the ordinary he praises in works like Pissarro's, and instructs artists to do the same. His instructions to himself are similar to Auden's singing summons in the third section of "In Memory of W.B. Yeats." He first entreats himself and presumably other artists to faithfully witness what is around them: "Paint a true street in Anse La Raye, Choiseul, / the roasting asphalt, the bleached galvanise roofs / grooved like these lines, paint the dark heat as well" (156). He then directs himself to paint the place, Saint Lucia, and its people; he particularly specifies a

boy riding a horse on Cas-en-bas beach, the colorful reef in the sea, the Cathedral in Castries, the fishermens' canoes, a couple heading into the forest for a romantic tryst. He then expresses the significance of gratitude in this call: "mix the light's colour with that pliant knife / that is your plasterer's trowel" and "do this in deep gratitude for your life, / just as its hallelujahs praise their giver" (157). Mixing the paint and witnessing the ordinary therefore achieve a return to place for Walcott, which ends in gratitude for life and the gift of poetry.

Ultimately, the poet acknowledges that the displacement, failure, astonishment, and gratitude he experiences in the poem occur simultaneously in lived experience. Despite this simultaneity, or perhaps because of it, Walcott continues with his work. He again instructs himself aloud: "Swivel the easel down, drill it in sand, / then tighten the canvas against the vaps of wind, / straddle the stool, reach for the brush with one hand, / then pour the oil in trembling sacrament" (158). Continuing with his work, he admits that it fails at some level. Yet he also recognizes what his work achieves: "There is another book that is the shadow / of my hand on this sunlit page, the one / I have tried hard to write, but let this do; / let gratitude redeem what lies undone" (158). The poet has tried to write accurately and beautifully, but he believes it has fallen short. Yet all art does. It fails to fully express the ineffable, though by gesturing toward what is beyond words, the reader or viewer might either become aware of this reality for the first time or better understand it. Therefore, the poet is content to let his expression of gratitude beauty reshape the world around him through his witness.

The poet considers one last epiphanic moment of blending near the end of the poem, where his own gaze becomes joined with Pissarro's. The poet begins by stating

that: “He enters the window frame. His gaze is yours” (159). In this moment, Pissarro enters the frame of the painting, within the poet’s art. The impressionist painter’s seeing is transferred to us, the reader. The artist makes this doubling possible, as the poet uses an Audenesque image of describing art as a mirror, where “we stand doubled in each other’s eyes” (159). The poet adopts this vision through aesthetic tradition, attempting work that depicts “landscapes with no tenses, views that know / that now, as always, light is all we have” (161). As light guides human sight, the poet’s vision might remain true. Walcott then entreats the three painters he has summoned most frequently in the poem, Tiepolo, Veronese, and Pissarro, beseeching them to “help me to begin / when I set out again, at sixty-nine, / for the sacred villages. Dole out, in each tin, / clear linseed and redemptive turpentine (161). The poet implores his artistic and spiritual fathers for guidance, even at sixty-nine, to aid him in creating art that redeems with its clarity, light, color, and vision.

Walcott ends the poem with a distinct tone of forgiveness and gratitude. He first forgives Pissarro for leaving the Caribbean. He does this by asking: “What was his sin? / Where there’s no trust there is no treachery” (162). As Pissarro’s double and a fellow exile, forgiving the impressionist painter allows the poet to forgive himself. Speaking of St. Lucia and his work that constructs imagined Caribbean worlds, he affirms that: “This is my peace, my salt, exulting acre: / there is no more Exodus, this is my Zion” (162). Walcott has finally achieved a return to place. He experiences no further exile or diaspora. Appropriately enough, the painting adjacent this page, titled *Breakers, Becune Point* and painted in 1995, was painted very close to Walcott’s final home in Gros Islet, signifying that the poet truly has come home.

Walcott expresses his gratitude for a return to place as he portrays St. Lucia at the poem's close. He marks the end of his pilgrimage by witnessing a hound in Trinidad, where the poem began:

> A dog barks in an unchanged neighbourhood,
> Petit Valley marks the pilgrimage I have made,
>
> its clouds spread in a linen gratitude
> of fruit in a bowl, a pomme-arac's lilac shade,
>
> and what lights the mind around sunlit corners
> of Chumamonka Avenue's scorching asphalt
>
> is a remembered happiness, now one as
> grateful for the pardon of a deep fault (162).

The two places the poet names, "Petit Valley" and "Chumamonka Avenue" are just north of Port of Spain and are near where he lived in Diego Martin. Walcott voices a double gratefulness in these lines; he expresses gratitude for his pilgrimage in pursuit of the hound, and, seemingly, for being forgiven for his failures in this poem. He moreover succinctly communicates his gratitude for the particularities of his Caribbean experience: "For leaves and horses, thanks" (163).

The poem ends at home with a St. Lucian twilight, as the poet gazes up at the stars. Looking toward the heavens from a particular earthly place, St. Lucia, the poet sees the extraordinary and describes it with an impressionistic vision:

> Then all the sorrows that lay heavily on us,
> the repeated failures, the botched trepidations
>
> will pass like the lights on bridges at village corners
> where shadows crouch under pierced constellations
>
> whose name they have never learnt, as a sickle glow
> rises over bamboos that repeat the round

> of the charted stars, the Archer, aiming his bow,
> the Bear, and the studded collar of Tiepolo's hound. (163-164)

The poem ends with his envisioning the hound he so ardently pursued as the constellation Canis Major, with Sirius nearby. An imaginatively brilliant ending, the reader concludes the poem by gazing up at the heavens, emphasizing the importance of sight. The poet also does this in order to convey both the spiritual and physical aims of the poem, as well as of human experience. As the poem ends, the reader's anxieties are eased, even if only temporarily for the night. This is what the twilight can do to us. As for Walcott, he again finds the hound in these final lines, easing his own anxieties.

CHAPTER SIX

Coda

W.H. Auden and Derek Walcott's poetry remains as important as it did the day it was written, if not more so, as I believe I have demonstrated in my dissertation. Their poetry offers a rich stereoscopic witness, depicting the world around them with profound nuance, depth, and solidity, rather than a flat, solipsistic, and oversimplified imaginative vision. Their simultaneity of vision achieves this by witnessing the displacements and traumas in the world in tension with their seeking a return to place through their poetic gift, for which experience profound gratitude. Furthermore, Auden and Walcott are not simply connected thematically, but through poetic tradition, as both poets frequently adopt and innovate on the work of poets that precede them within tradition, as well as by employing a dazzling variety of formal techniques also used throughout tradition. Furthermore, these poets are linked through the impact of Auden's work on Walcott's poetry.

The power of Auden and Walcott's poetry lies in the creative means by which they implement their vision in their work. For instance, Auden's use of verse epistles as well as myth allows him great flexibility to be playful and humorous in one line and earnest and sober in the next. His thematic and poetic variety permits him to write beautiful poetry on enduringly significant themes while being instructive without slipping into didacticism. Walcott's poetry witnesses to home, belonging, and exile as well as demonstrates the art of seeing, enabling him to navigate the fraught waters of colonial and postcolonial life in the Caribbean. Sailing through these individual, cultural, and

geographic tensions, Walcott creates a profound imaginative vision that critiques extremes while embracing an art that bridges these tension. Moreover, constructing a theoretical frame with which to better understand Auden and Walcott's work has proved invaluable. This framework illuminated various themes in their work, such as place, phenomenology, geography, the ocean, trauma, postcolonialism, gratitude, and gifts.

Because of the enduring nature of their poetry, there are of course many different ways to understand and express Auden and Walcott's poetic vision. Casting their poetry as a stereoscopic witness that recounts and reimagines the world from various aspects, however, accentuates the power of their poetry to move readers toward a greater understanding of themselves, those around them, their homes, and other places around the world. It also, perhaps most importantly, moves them through their beauty. Auden and Walcott moreover demonstrate the vitality of their poetry through its consonance with lived experience. This recalls Richard Kearney's comments in chapter two, where Kearney identifies a distinct difference between art and human experience. Yet he simultaneously articulates that by recognizing art as a fiction, we might better understand the great ways that it might shape our lives and amplify our existence.

Furthermore, because of the buoyancy of their poetry, these poets should continue to be read and reread. This became clear with Auden's work in the days after the September 11th terrorist attacks, when his poems "Musée des Beaux Arts" and "September 1 1939" were cited in newspapers across the country. Why did the happen? I believe that precisely because Auden so acutely recognized the fiction of his work, he was therefore able to distill great power in his poetry. Moreover, Walcott's death three weeks prior to the writing of this sentence makes his poetry all the more timely. Though

he recurrently seeks to depict the Caribbean in its true light, his work transcends geography, speaking to people in every corner of the world. Like the ocean that continually crashes against the shore, and like the Caribbean subjects that he repeatedly returns to, I believe that the exuberance and energy of Walcott's poetry, particularly when he considers the twilight tensions I discuss in my work, will continue to cultivate a deeper understanding of lived experience as time passes.

I firmly believe that both Auden and Walcott's poetry allows a sense of empathy to flourish in the reader by articulating the experiences of being human as well as how we might treat our fellow humans lovingly. Their poetry also develops sense of awe and wonder at the fragility and elation of life. Their works witness to the reader that we should seek truth, beauty, and goodness, and that, ultimately, we feel gratitude for the gifts of art and life. The enduring quality of their poetry goes on like the sea at the end of *Omeros*, as abiding as the ocean. And these poets witness to the displacements and traumas within human experience, yet in the words of Auden from the end of "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," they convey the simultaneity of being, where despite the displacements and traumas within human experience, "the prison of his [humanity's] days," the poets might: "Still persuade us to rejoice" and "teach the free man how to praise" (64, 64, 65).

Chapter Two

[1] Jacobs makes a similar argument, maintaining that "Auden's satire is far more gentle and self-deprecatory than Pope ever sought to be" (38).

[2] Jacobs further links Horace, Pope, and Auden by claiming that the "elusive and ambiguous" nature of Auden's relationship to Pope might be borne out of Pope's own "elusive and ambiguous" relationship to Horace, where, though Auden is explicit in his praise of Pope, and Pope is explicit in his praise of Horace, both also distance themselves from their poetic predecessors (39).

[3] Carpenter notes that Auden realized he was not "the sort of person by whom most travel books are written" (198). Carpenter does, however, observe what kind of travel book he did not want to write: "He also thought that most travel books were boring because they simply repeated the same pattern of events—journeys, meals, accommodation, dangers, and so on—or took refuge from this in trying to be essays on life, the kind of thing which he said he was 'neither clever nor sensitive enough to manage'" (198).

[4] Carpenter makes a similar point in his biography of Auden (199).

[5] The poets also witness to the dislocating terror and anxiety that Nazi Germany was imposing on Europe at the time and their limitations in being able to resolve this displacement, while also explicitly not despairing of these European political circumstances. In his poetic will, Auden mentions his wife Erika Mann, the daughter of Thomas Mann, who chose self-exile in the face of the displacing threats from the Nazi regime. They married in 1935 so that she could achieve British citizenship and escape German threats because of her anti-Nazi sentiments.

[6] Auden himself describes the verse epistle as chatty as he elaborates on the specific inspiration for the idea to write Lord Byron a letter witnessing to the world around him in another epistle in *Letters*, from Auden to his wife Erika Mann Auden, recounting how he was riding in a bus in the northeast of Iceland on his way to Egilsstaðir when "I suddenly thought I might write him [Byron] a chatty letter in light verse about anything I could think of, Europe, literature, myself" (139).

[7] Auden also commented on the primacy of Frere's influence on Byron in his essay "Don Juan": "He knew Italian well, he had read Casti's *Novelle Galanti* and loved them, but he did not realize the poetic possibilities of the mock-heroic ottava-rima until he read Frere's *The Monks and the Giants*" (394).

[8] Auden is not including Byron here, as later in the introduction he calls Byron "the first writer of Light Verse in the modern sense. His success lasts as long as he takes nothing very seriously; the moment he tries to be profound and 'poetic' he fails" (*xvii*).

[9] This resembles Kierkegaard's indirect communication, which would greatly impact Auden's thought, though Auden had of course not read Kierkegaard at this time.

[10] Auden is considers many authors in *Letter to Lord Byron*, such as Edmond Spenser, William Shakespeare, John Dryden, William Wordsworth, George Eliot, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and I.A. Richards. John Hidlebidle also cites Edward Lear "as one of the artistic 'models'" for *Letter to Lord Byron*, which may indeed be true, though I do not believe Lear's poetry is one of the primary models for the poem (83).

[11]Auden is using the terminology of Lewis Mumford, who considered the Eotechnic phase to be from 1000-1800 and Neotechnic phase from 1900-1930's. The Neotechnic phase includes scientific men that operate on the atomic level, where moral and political decisions that shape us, not technology.

[12] See Auden's essay "Writing" in *The Dyer's Hand* (13-14).

[13] It is also the name of a waterfall in Iceland.

[14] Carpenter also notes where this sort of thinking allegedly lead Lane, as he "was alleged to have had sexual relations with a woman patient," a serious breach for a psychologist (21).

[15] Fuller argues that "Mayer was a mother-figure" for Auden, though I have not seen scholarship contend that she was a Marian figure (320).

[16] See John Fuller's magisterial *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (320).

[17] A *passacaglia* is a musical form that originated in 17th-century Spain and is often slow and serious.

[18] These will not be the last bewildering voices in Auden's poetry. For example, see the topographical voices in "In Praise of Limestone."

[19] Auden's association of jokes and humor with verse is not limited to *New Year Letter*, but seems a consistent theme for him. See poems such as the eleventh stanza of "Ode to Terminus," as well as essays like "Postscript: The Frivolous and the Earnest" to witness this theme (430). Auden seems to believe that poetry, though very important, should be limited and not taken more seriously than it should be, like one's duty toward God, for instance.

Chapter Three

[1] Moreover, the reader might envision the young and the old as divisions of the self in psychoanalytic terms. The old operate as the superego, demonstrating a conscience that

acknowledges the importance of those around them, while the young function as the raw id, concerned only with selfish passions.

[2] See, for instance, Mendelson's *Later Auden*, John Fuller's *W.H. Auden: A Commentary*, Humphrey Carpenter's *W.H. Auden*, and Rachel Wetzsteon's *Influential Ghosts*.

[3] I am indebted to Stephen Evans for my understanding of Johannes Climacus. His course on Kierkegaard proved invaluable to me.

[4] Auden comments further on this view, describing romanticism as possessing a restricted vision: "The cause of romanticism, as of all evil things, is either laziness or impatience." The lazy romantic is "in favor of light capital punishment," while [t]he impatient romantic sees more clearly, but what he sees is only one side of the paradox; the other he ignores or denies" (64).

[5] Wetzsteon also points out direct references to Kierkegaard in three of Auden's long poems: *New Year Letter*, *For the Time Being,* which she contends is "far more deeply steeped in Kierkegaard's thought" than the other poems, and *The Sea and the Mirror* (91-94, 94, 98-99).

[6] Wetzsteon asserts that Kierkegaard's influence on Auden waned as his career continued, but he ultimately thought of Kierkegaard as a benevolent figure, even if he disagreed with him on a number of matters (108).

[7] The sonnet of course has a long history and poets have frequently experimented with the form. See Eavan Boland and Edward Hirsch's succinct and enlightening discussion of sonnet variations in "The Sonnet Goes to Different Lengths" in their text *The Making of a Sonnet*. Moreover, see *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet,* which traces the sonnet's development insightfully and at length.

[8] See Auden's *Selected Poems* for the initial version of the poem and his *Collected Poems* for the final version.

[9] There are also other tensions in the poem which correspond to other similar tensions in Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* that I refer to in this chapter, namely order and disorder, the finite and infinite, and art and life; however, for the sake of clarity and because I think that possibility and necessity is the most significant tension across the poems I consider in this chapter, I focus mainly on possibility and necessity.

[10] Cole asserts that this apostrophe demonstrates the shift in Auden's career from an emphasis on Eros to Agape: "one of Auden's key engagements with the volitional ambiguities that had haunted his treatment of love until this point, effectively mandating the de-personification of love, and demanding on moral grounds that Eros (a pagan god) give way to Agape (the name of an early Christian feasting rite). When Love becomes

love in this fashion, the will is reclaimed from selfish possessiveness, and its embracing impulses broadened to include the whole of creation" (388).

[11] See Arthur Kirsch's *Auden and Christianity* for an interesting reflection on the connotations a ring had for Auden (11).

[12] It is perhaps helpful to consider the Greek root for apostle, *apostolos*, which means messenger.

[13] This essay refers to the knight of infinite resignation, a character in *Fear and Trembling*. The essay also considers Kierkegaard's three ethical spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious.

Chapter Four

[1] This recalls Edward Said's articulation of feeling a similar affinity with Joseph Conrad in his essay "Between Worlds," where he acknowledges the "loss of home and language" he experiences in many respects, such as "a Palestinian going to school in Egypt, with an English first name, an American passport, and no certain identity" living in British colonial ruled Palestine (555, 556).

[2] In *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, Bruce King observes Walcott's "Many unusual rhymes, half-rhymes, visual rhymes, even comic rhymes, to keep the form alive and in motion" (516).

[3] This image of an "O" is also prominent in poets that influenced Walcott, such as W.H. Auden. For example, in the poem "In Sickness and in Health," Auden desires, "That this round O of faithfulness we swear / May never wither to an empty nought / Nor petrify into a square" (97-99).

[4] I believe this explains one reason why Walcott writes on the same topics yet from different angles over and over throughout his career.

[5] The narrator *is* the poet in many instances in the poem, sharing obvious biographical circumstances. But of course the narrator is a character created by the poet and demonstrably *not* the poet. Walcott invites this tension, a twilight tension, which allows for nuance and complexity in his narrator character and self. Acknowledging this tension, I will therefore refer to the narrator as the Walcott narrator, the poet, and Walcott interchangeably, though I generally use the later two names.

[6] Walcott's comment here mirrors a 1992 interview with Rebekah Presson where he argues: "The whole idea of America, and the whole idea of everything on this side of the world, barring the Native American Indian, is imported; we're all imported" (193).

[7] Gaston Bachelard also discusses the sacredness of trees, conveying in *The Poetics of Space* that the forest contains an inner peace that corresponds to the inner immensity of the imagination. He argues that: "Before the gods existed, the woods were sacred, and the gods came to dwell in these sacred woods" (186). The sacrifice of the *gommier* trees at the beginning of *Omeros* therefore becomes a sacred sacrifice.

[8] See, for instance, *Wildlife of the Caribbean* by Herbert A. Raffaele and James W. Wiley for more on the swift.

[9] Indeed, Walcott sees poetry and prayer as interconnection, which he discusses with Edward Hirsch in an interview in *The Paris Review*, "I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer. I have grown up believing it is a vocation, a religious vocation" (99).

[10] The historical impossibility of Afolabe being aboard *The Marlborough* during the Battle of the Saints, which occurred in 1782, is unimportant to the narrative. Rather than pursue historical accuracy here, Walcott's seeks a poetic imagining that connects the various arcs of the narrative to form an "O."

[11] Walcott seems to have conflated locations for this section of the poem. As he ends this section, he depicts himself walking out of the museum and out onto the Boston Common. Yet no Boston museum holds the painting he discusses in this section, Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream*, though the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City holds an oil rendering of the painting and the Art Institute of Chicago has a watercolor depiction of the painting.

[12] King also contends that the "last third of *Omeros* is deconstructive, anti-myth, anti-metaphor" (517).

[13]The full opening line reads: "One sunrise I walked out onto the balcony / of my white hotel" (279). The poet likely means the Choc Bay Villas, where he frequently stayed to write and paint. In fact, one of his paintings, *Boy on a Wall, Rat Island* (1989), is painted from a villa balcony, with a boy sitting on the hotel's distinctive white wall, staring out at Rat Island.

Chapter Five

[1] He argues that where the colonizing English author wants "to assume Prospero's privilege of magic" *and* "as Caliban while he argues that he is not the Caliban whom Prospero had in mind" (11).

[2] Both translations from Latin to English are mine.

[3] In a meeting with students from the University of Milan, Walcott claims: "So I learned very early to submerge myself, to work my way through whatever I could,

particularly in terms of verse, and in terms of Joyce. Joyce I think of primarily as a poet. I wasn't interested so much in the fiction of Joyce as in the great language of Joyce" (122).

[4] Interestingly, observing the evolution of the book, King claims that the book which "started as an idea that Sigrid would write an introduction to a book of Walcott's paintings had somehow evolved into a long poem which would be accompanied by the paintings" (627).

[5] Commenting on *Tiepolo's Hound,* King asserts that Walcott's poetry is like "one of those long Wallace Stevens poems in which various ways of looking at life are examine and contrasted. It might be thought a series of Impressionist paintings done in different lights at various times and places" (628). This is the sort of Impressionistic stereoscopic witness that I believe the poem provides.

[6] Walcott discusses the relationship between poetry and painting in a press conference for *Tiepolo's Hound* in Milan in 2001, admitting that the poet cannot actually portray light in a poem as it is used in a painting, though they can convey "the light is inside you, and you want to get that light inside you—then it can illuminate, it can have that quality of light and dark" (200). Walcott goes to great lengths to convey this type of "light inside" in *Tiepolo's Hound*, blending poetry and painting in an interdisciplinary fashion that provide a stereoscopic way of seeing the world around him.

[7] Walcott mentions in another reading at the University of Milan the following year that writing in couplets also provided him with a discipline to be more productive with his work: "So that this keeps, stops, keeps, stops. Why do that? For me, unless you have something that is terribly disciplined, you're not going to work. I think that discipline creates the industry, and the more discipline, the more industrious one becomes" (206).

[8] As I also argued in the last chapter, Walcott states that the poet who attempts to purify the language of his people "is jumped on by both sides for pretentiousness or playing white. He is the mulatto of style. The traitor. The assimilator. Yes. But one did not say to his Muse, 'What kind of language is this that you've given me?"…but one went about his father's business. Both fathers,'" further demonstrating the significance Walcott places on multifaceted heritage.

[9] When asked by Hirsch which painter most influenced him during his childhood, Walcott articulates: "The painter I really thought I could learn from was Cézanne—some sort of resemblance to oranges and greens and browns of the dry season in St. Lucia…It's as if he knew the St. Lucian landscape—you could see his painting happening there" (99). He also states: "I think it gave me a lot of strength to think of Cézanne when I was painting" (99).

[10] Walcott also articulates the significance of light in art in a reading for *Tiepolo's Hound,* something that Loreto cites in her work: "All works of art represent light,

including architecture, which shapes light. The same thing I think is true of verse: that the sensation that must convey the creation of any work of art is the sensation of light" (135).

[11] Walcott's placing himself in the "apostolic succession" of European art recalls his previously cited words about poetry as a religious calling from his interview with Hirsch: "I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer. I have grown up believing it is a vocation, a religious vocation" (99).

[12] As I commented on in the last chapter, Walcott reenvisions the word "mongrel" in his essay "What the Twilight Says," recasting it as an affirmative term conveying the multicultural character of the Caribbean.

[13] Translating these French creole words, "*anses*, *mornes*, and *savannes*" mean coves, mountains, and savannahs, respectively.

[14] The Barbizon school was a group of painters that gathered in the French city Barbizon during the mid 19th-century, hoping to move the art world toward realism in the face of Romanticism, the prevailing movement of the time. The school was in its decline when Pissarro moved to Paris.

[15] There is also a significant moment of blending and connecting to two central painters of this poem: Tiepolo and Veronese: Blending: "Separated by two centuries, my two Venetians," highlighting Veronese's affability with angels" and Tiepolo's "clear eye" (118).

[16] This bond that Walcott encounters with his friends in Spain sounds remarkably similar to what Auden experiences in "A Summer Night," where he feels: "Equal with colleagues in a ring" (13).

[17] In the poem he notes that he had been: "Four months from home" (151).

[18] Walcott seems to be alluding here to René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*. Painted between 1928 and 1929, *The Treachery of Images* depicts a pipe and the sentence "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*," which translates as "This is not a pipe," by which Magritte means that art does not paint the object itself, but simply a representation of the object.

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