

The Post-Colonial Nostos: Reception Of Homer's Odyssey In Derek Walcott's Omeros

Preoccupation with the Homeric *nostos* (homecoming) has persisted throughout Western literature. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus' *nostos* is defined by a return to Ithaca while overcoming obstacles along the way. He seeks to restore the Ithacan homeland to its former, pre-Trojan war state. Derek Walcott's *Omeros* utilises postmodernist techniques to reconfigure Homer for a post-colonial context. Through the use of postmodernist intertextuality and pastiche, Walcott ensures that his reception of the Homeric *nostos* recreate new meanings¹ instead of being entirely faithful to the *Odyssey*. Walcott's reception of *nostos* rejects Homeric restoration of the past and embraces St Lucia's multicultural present. He challenges the two-dimensional narrative ascribed to Caribbean identity: as wholly of African descent or inferior to Western colonial influences. Therefore he presents the reader with an adaptation of the Odyssean *nostos* which revolves around the healing of St Lucia's colonial wounds.

Homecoming In The Homeric Paradigm

Walcott first explores the Caribbean homecoming through an Odyssean allegory. He personifies the island of St Lucia through the character of Helen to expose the suffering inflicted by colonial violence. In *Omeros*, the expatriate Major Plunkett is a metonym for British colonial rule on the island. On the surface, Plunkett granting Helen a "history" out of "pity"² appears to be philanthropic. He provided Helen with employment and, even after she stole from him, deems that "Her village was Troy"³. Helen's social status is elevated through its Homeric association. Despite this, Plunkett's imposition of Homeric metaphors on Helen is strongly reminiscent of Said's theory of Western domestication of the exotic⁴. Plunkett's generosity becomes an act of colonial control since he constructs the wars to gain ownership of St Lucia as "Helen's wars"⁵. Walcott thus portrays Plunkett's view of St Lucia as a land wounded by colonial wars much like Troy was destroyed by the Trojan War. He additionally mirrors Plunkett's perception of Helen with Homer's Helen. In the *Odyssey*, Helen is viewed as a "shameless creature"⁶ whose adultery has caused Odysseus to be displaced from his home. She has inflicted shame upon herself. Plunkett similarly places responsibility for St Lucia's colonial wounds on Helen. Walcott

¹ Muzaffer Zafer Ayar, "How to cope with postmodern texts: Textual analysis of intertextuality, parody, and pastiche in reading postmodern texts." *JOURNAL OF MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM STUDIES (JOMOPS)* 3, no. 1 (2022): 184, <https://doi.org/10.47333/modernizm.2022.71>.

² Derek Walcott, *Omeros*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990; London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1998), 30. Citations refer to the Faber edition.

³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 31.

⁴ Edward W. Said, "ORIENTALISM." *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (1977): 172, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41397448>.

⁵ Walcott, *Omeros*, 30.

⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V Rieu (Penguin Books, 2003), 4. 145.

exposes how Plunkett's generosity towards Helen is built on the same principles as the British colonial institution which blames their violence on the colonised. Moreover, Walcott critiques Helen's wounded nature when she discloses that she is "pregnant" but she "don't know for who"⁷. He builds up his Homeric metaphor as his St Lucian Helen also has two men fighting over her: Achille and Hector. Her conflict between them becomes symbolic of the St Lucian past being torn between both British and French occupation. Walcott reveals the colonial shame of the island's history as Helen's disgrace exceeds her Homeric counterpart's. Although Homer's Helen was promiscuous, she never got pregnant with Paris and was never unsure of Hermione's parentage. Helen's pregnancy is therefore emblematic of how colonialism removes origin from the colonised, leading to suffering as her inhabitants believe that "She was not home"⁸. Walcott comments that the island's people have "lost faith in her"⁹ due to her unfaithful origins. At the same time, he challenges the notion that it is Helen's fault when Plunkett's colonial influence was what inflicted this wound of displacement on her. Walcott therefore establishes that a successful post-colonial *nostos* can only be achieved through resolving the suffering forced upon Helen.

He investigates the healing of colonial wounds through a return to the pre-colonial African past. According to Ramazani, Achille plays the role of a "questing knight" who must "rejuvenate...the land, and its people"¹⁰ during his journey to Africa. In addition to this, Achille also takes on the role of Odysseus. He believes that his "inheritance" was "that elemental noise of...Ithaca's / or Africa's"¹¹. Walcott opens the possibility of Achille's homecoming as belonging in Africa through his Homeric framework. Helen's suffering due to a lack of origin could be equal to Odysseus' "tears...for his lost home"¹². Just as Odysseus' *nostos* is centred around a return to Ithaca from the Trojan war, Walcott suggests that Achille's journey to Africa could be a return to origin from St Lucia. This parallel to the Homeric paradigm of *nostos* can be further seen when Achille meets his African ancestor, Afolabe:

His father said:

"Afo-la-be,"

touching his own heart.

"In the place you have come from

what do they call you?"

⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 34.

⁸ Walcott, *Omeros*, 39.

⁹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 39.

¹⁰ Jahan Ramazani, "The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction." *PMLA* 112, no. 3 (1997): 410, <https://doi.org/10.2307/462949>.

¹¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 130.

¹² Homer, *The Odyssey*, 5. 153.

Time translates.

Tapping his chest

the son answers:

“Achille.” The tribe rustles, “Achille.”

Then, like cedars at the sun rise, the mutterings settle.

AFOLABE

Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten the one

that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago.

What does it mean?

ACHILLE

Well, I too have forgotten.

Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.¹³

Their exchange is evocative of the recognition scene between Odysseus and Telemachus, which further indicates the possibility of a *nostos*. Achille’s inability to “know” Afolabe resembles Telemachus’ initial lack of recognition towards Odysseus¹⁴. Walcott condemns the forced displacement caused by slavery through the frameworks of the Odyssey. While Telemachus’ lack of recognition is due to Odysseus’ absence, Achille’s admission that he has “forgotten” the origin of his own name and father emphasises the colonial violence of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This violence, not just physical but cultural, then leads to Helen’s wounded state. Walcott places the suffering of enslaved people, which has been historically dismissed and silenced, on par with the Odyssey’s celebrated position in the Western canon. As a result, Achille’s recognition scene with Afolabe initially appears to heal Helen’s wounds as he finally discovers his origin homeland. Despite this, Walcott exposes the futility of attempting to heal Helen through returning to an unobtainable pre-colonial world. Although the recognition scene with Telemachus and a successful *nostos* are seemingly synonymous, Katz argues that *nostos* in the Odyssey is predicated on acknowledging the hero’s return, when his identity is not in question¹⁵. The recognition between Odysseus and Telemachus is consequently not the constitutive feature of their relationship¹⁶.

¹³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 137.

¹⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 16. 193.

¹⁵ Marilyn A. Katz, "Homecoming and Hospitality: Recognition and the Construction of Identity in the Odyssey," in *Epic and epoch: essays on the interpretation and history of genre*, ed. Steven M. Oberhelman, Van Kelly, and Richard J. Golsan. (Texas Tech University Press, 1994), 52, https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=sjDfukTjqY4C&oi=fnd&pg=PA49&dq=homecoming+odyssey&ots=USn2dns2xU&sig=zYSXFhnsleLddjTNmBABMAxVXWY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹⁶ Katz, *Homecoming and Hospitality*, 54.

Odysseus is able to achieve his *nostos* because he and Telemachus are able to learn of each other's identity throughout the latter half of the *Odyssey*. Conversely, because of the loss of cultural identity caused by colonialism, Achille's *nostos* can never be found in Africa because he cannot completely recognise Afolabe. The structure of the poem disintegrating into script suggests a collapse of his identity entirely. Moreover, Walcott underlines Achille's origin as still being in question since his St Lucian inheritance is multicultural, including Western and indigenous Caribbean culture, not solely African. Walcott deconstructs Achille's *nostos* by presenting it as a *katabasis* instead. As Achille continues to remain in Africa, he is afflicted by a "dawn-sadness which ghosts have for their graves"¹⁷. He experiences "nausea"¹⁸ as he is "homesick for the history ahead"¹⁹. Walcott parallels Achille's journey with Odysseus' experience in the Underworld. Achille must process his grief for his African ancestor like Odysseus accepted his mother's death. When Odysseus tries to hold onto her, Anticleia reminds him of his homecoming to Penelope²⁰. Achille must likewise let go of Africa and accept St Lucia as his true home. Achille's failed *nostos* is a vehicle for Walcott to reprehend the colonial violence of slavery while acknowledging that a post-colonial *nostos* cannot be achieved through returning to the past. Helen's wounds must be healed elsewhere.

Homecoming in *Omeros* must therefore be reached by accepting St Lucia's multicultural inheritance. When Achille finally returns to the island, Walcott transforms "Helen" into "Penelope"²¹. Odysseus' reunification with Penelope is "like the moment when blissful land is seen by struggling sailors"²² thus demonstrating her significance to the Odyssean *nostos*. Achille's acceptance of St Lucia as his homeland similarly allows Helen to be liberated from Plunkett's colonial construct of the island and reach true homecoming. As Moffett points out, Helen embodies the fact that there is little to be gained by returning to the origin²³. Walcott heals the colonial wounds of an unfaithful origin inflicted upon St Lucia by rejecting its association with the Trojan War. Instead, he presents St Lucia as a new Ithaca within his Homeric paradigm. He challenges the British colonial view of the island as a place that has brought violence upon itself. The healing of Helen's wounds is only possible once Achille has let go of his dream of African origin. Walcott further disassociates Helen from the colonial narrative Plunkett prescribed to her when he asserts that his Helen and Homer's Helen "are different creatures / one

¹⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 141.

¹⁸ Walcott, *Omeros*, 141.

¹⁹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 140.

²⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 11. 205-23

²¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 153.

²² Homer, *The Odyssey*, 23. 234-5.

²³ Joe W. Moffett, "'MASTER, I WAS THE FRESHEST OF ALL YOUR READERS': DEREK WALCOTT'S OMEROS AND HOMER AS LITERARY ORIGIN." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 16, no. 1 (2005): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920590914359>.

marble, one ebony”²⁴. Walcott reclaims the Homeric paradigm of *nostos* from the West for his purpose of emancipating St Lucia from British colonial influence. His Helen is wholly St Lucian and is consequently able to escape from the disgrace inflicted upon her, unlike the Homeric Helen. Moreover, Walcott subverts Western domestication of the exotic St Lucia by incorporating the Homeric paradigm into St Lucian identity. He has domesticated the West alongside the island’s African heritage. He argues that the colonial wounds of the island can only be healed by accepting its multicultural inheritance. This acceptance then allows his post-colonial *nostos* to be achieved while existing within a Western Homeric paradigm.

Homecoming and Homer’s Place within Caribbean Literature

Omeros also embodies elements that constitute postmodern literature²⁵. Most notably, Walcott employs intertextuality and metaliterary techniques in order to explore what it means to be a Caribbean writer in relation to the Western literary canon. In the poem, the narrator-character, a semi-insertion of Walcott himself, claims that he was “the freshest of all [Homer’s] readers”²⁶. The narrator is so devoted to Homer that he calls him “Omeros” because “that’s what [they] call him in Greek”²⁷. While the narrator reveres Homer for his literary prowess, their relationship is reminiscent of a “master”²⁸ and his slave. Walcott suggests that the Western canon’s supremacy is built on the same colonial foundation as slavery. This dominance alludes to the fact that post-colonial writers are forced to mimic literature produced at the Western imperial centre in order to gain merit²⁹. Due to this, Walcott’s narrator is resigned to imitating Homer if he wants to give voice to the post-colonial experience. However, Omeros’ presence being “as wide as a bay”³⁰ juxtaposes the Caribbean narrator’s experience of “the curled brow of the surf...the *lauriers-cannelles*”³¹. Walcott therefore questions Homer’s power over post-colonial literature as Homeric frameworks can never accurately convey the Caribbean narrative. Walcott’s postmodernist approach to storytelling in Omeros is reliant on its intertextual relationship with Homer’s Odyssey. However, he also implies that this relationship is one enforced by the West upon post-colonial writers. His Homeric allusions in the poem references the

²⁴ Walcott, *Omeros*, 313.

²⁵ Maira Asif, Hina Rafique, "Derek Walcott's Omeros as a Palimpsestuous Adaptation: A Postmodernist Reading." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2020): 44, [http://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2020\(1-II\)5](http://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2020(1-II)5).

²⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

²⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 14.

²⁸ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

²⁹ Bill Ascroft, Gareth Griffiths, Hellen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2003), 82.

³⁰ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

³¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

West's tendency to prescribe any narrative that exists outside of European norms as postmodern³². Walcott frames the very postmodernist genre he is writing in as something he is forced to obey in order to be heard. Omeros' postmodern intertextuality is consequently less of a voluntary literary pastiche but a category designed to subjugate the post-colonial writer. He further portrays Western Homeric influences as a prison when the narrator-character pleads "when would I not hear the Trojan War... When would it stop / the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros""³³. He is desperate to escape into the "light"³⁴ yet his position as a post-colonial writer has constrained him to Homer's "metaphor"³⁵ instead. The narrator is thus displaced from his literary origin as he is torn between Western Homeric influences and his personal Caribbean narrative. Like Helen, he is wounded from colonial imposition. Because of this, Walcott outlines how the post-colonial *nostos* is not simply to heal historical wounds but literary ones.

The narrator's journey to find a place for his literary work within both Western and Caribbean tradition then becomes a literary *nostos*. He first attempts to conform to mimicry of Western literature by "enter[ing] cities that open like *The World's Great Classics*"³⁶. He believes that the classics will carry him "over the bridge of self-contempt"³⁷ and heal the wound of literary displacement by granting him more legitimacy as a post-colonial writer. Walcott combines intertextuality with metafiction in order to explore the narrator's relationship with Homer. While Omeros' metaliterary nature is a distinctly postmodern characteristic, Walcott's insertion of the narrator is also strongly reminiscent of the role of the bard in the Odyssey. Early audiences of the Odyssey believed the bard characters were an autobiographical insertion of Homer³⁸. In addition, Beck argues that Odysseus functions as both a bard, the primary narrator, and as a character in the Odyssey³⁹. Walcott uses his self-inserted narrator in an equivalent fashion by placing him into Odysseus' role. The success of his literary *nostos*, like Odysseus⁴⁰, rests partially on his storytelling skills. The narrator-character assumes that these skills can be gained through imitation of Western literature. Walcott adds to the narrator's conviction by invoking the Odyssey in his journey. In London, Omeros holds a "turned-down *Odyssey*"⁴¹ while the

³² Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 170.

³³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 271.

³⁴ Walcott, *Omeros*, 271.

³⁵ Walcott, *Omeros*, 271.

³⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 187.

³⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 187.

³⁸ Barbara Graziosi, "Gods and Poets in the Odyssey," *Omnibus Magazine*, 2002, 5.

³⁹ Deborah Beck, "Odysseus: Narrator, Storyteller, Poet?," *Classical Philosophy* 100, no. 3 (2005): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1086/497858>.

⁴⁰ Sam Gartland, "Odysseus as Bard in the Odyssey," *Omnibus Magazine*, 2016, 3.

⁴¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 194.

narrator encounters Joyce's "one-eyed Ulysses"⁴² in Ireland. There is irony in Walcott's allusions to the Odyssey as many of the places Odysseus visited were depicted as barbaric. Walcott's "one-eyed Ulysses" is a clear reference to the "uncivilised and unprincipled"⁴³ Cyclops who "filled his great belly with...human meat"⁴⁴. The Odyssey echoes Said's theory of Orientalism: Odysseus labelled any land beyond Greece as a land of barbarism⁴⁵. The Odyssey's depiction of barbarism is also reflected in the West's perception of its colonies, including St Lucia. Walcott subverts the colonial definition of civilisation by prescribing this barbarism to the West. Where Odysseus confronts obstacles like cannibalistic Cyclops, Walcott's narrator visits the "terrors and terraces"⁴⁶ of Europe and the "ankle-irons"⁴⁷ of the Thames. Walcott therefore rejects a literary *nostos* within the Western Homeric framework by exposing its violent reality for the post-colonial writer. He emphasises that healing can only be achieved through accepting St Lucia's literary heritage when the narrator is afflicted with homesickness. He "thought of Helen / as [his] island lost in the haze" and feared that he "would never see her again"⁴⁸. Walcott highlights how the real cause of the narrator's suffering was displacement from his identity as a St Lucian writer. Homer's dominance over him has only exacerbated his wound. Therefore Walcott outlines the post-colonial literary *nostos* as a journey towards accepting one's identity as a St Lucian writer who is removed from the Western canon.

As a result, Walcott's literary *nostos* is achieved through completely decentralising Homer. Walcott criticises the canonicity afforded to him⁴⁹. The narrator-character bitterly rebukes "that other Europe...of *The World's Great Classics*"⁵⁰. He begins to realise that the "power"⁵¹ of the West's classics is a tool of colonial oppression against "the slave from the outer region / of their fraying empires"⁵². Walcott exposes how the European colonial institution has "pardoned itself"⁵³ by maintaining the illusion of Western cultural superiority over its colonies. He criticises the fact that the Western literary canon's status derives from silencing the voice of those removed from the imperial centre⁵⁴. Due to this, the narrator's literary *nostos* must be achieved by accepting his place as a Caribbean writer instead of solely following in Homer's shadow. Walcott suggests that the wounds caused by literary

⁴² Walcott, *Omeros*, 201.

⁴³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9. 215-6.

⁴⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 9. 295-6.

⁴⁵ Said, "ORIENTALISM," pg. 167.

⁴⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 191.

⁴⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 195.

⁴⁸ Walcott, *Omeros*, 222.

⁴⁹ Lorna Hardwick, *Reception studies: New Surveys in the Classics No.33* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 89-90.

⁵⁰ Walcott, *Omeros*, 205.

⁵¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 205.

⁵² Walcott, *Omeros*, 205.

⁵³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 205.

⁵⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 82.

displacement can only be healed through this acceptance. He not only diminishes Homer's position as a literary "master" but he abandons his earlier Homeric paradigm. There is hope for Caribbean literature beyond imitation of the West as the narrator tentatively asks, "Why not see Helen / as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow"⁵⁵. Walcott and his narrator frees St Lucia from the lens of Homer's Western narrative. Instead, he embraces his identity as a Caribbean writer. He begins to view Homer as an inspiration like any other rather than an oppressive literary master he must create a faithful pastiche for. Consequently, the post-colonial literary *nostos* is successful through healing the wound of literary displacement.

Homecoming and Reconciliation

By healing colonial wounds, Walcott's post-colonial *nostos* results in various forms of reconciliation. Now that both Helen and the narrator are liberated from the Western colonial influences of Homer, Walcott reconciles the narrator with his characters. He acknowledges that "there are two journeys / in every odyssey"⁵⁶. He argues one "foam[s] with paper" while "an actual craft carries the other to cities where other people speak / a different language"⁵⁷. For a true resolve to colonial suffering, both the narrator's literary and Achille's historical *nostos* must be united and a new balance between them established. Walcott once again alludes to the Odyssean homecoming. When Odysseus has finally reunited with Penelope in their marriage-bed, he recounts to her "all the discomfiture he had inflicted on others and all the miseries which he himself had undergone"⁵⁸. His storytelling recalls his role as a bard for the Phaeacians with one noticeable difference: he recounts all of his adventures to her including his experience on Scherie⁵⁹. Odysseus' completed tale of his fantastical journey signals an end to his physical and literary *nostos*. Likewise, Omeros' metaliterary nature allows Walcott to reach a resolution to the post-colonial *nostos*. The inserted version of the narrator alerts the reader to the fact that they are reading a story and dismantles the typical suspension of disbelief. Walcott emphasises the importance of the narrator's inherent relationship with his characters in order to convey that their *nostos* are interconnected. Because of this, Achille's return from Africa is accompanied by the narrator "homing with him" and with "Homeros"⁶⁰. Through their connection, Omeros is transformed into "Homeros", signalling a merging of the Western Homer and the Greek Omeros. Walcott's merging of the two to form his own version of "Homeros" follows the Caribbean storytelling tradition of

⁵⁵ Walcott, *Omeros*, 271.

⁵⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 291.

⁵⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 291.

⁵⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 23. 305-7.

⁵⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 23. 336-41.

⁶⁰ Walcott, *Omeros*, 159.

internalising and nativising Western influences⁶¹ instead of following a Western Homeric master. Walcott's pun on "Homer" also further indicates a *nostos* achieved through embracing the creole nature of Caribbean literature to create a distinctly St Lucian identity. He breaks down the barrier between Homer and the Caribbean; his metaliterary techniques similarly break down the barrier between the narrator and his characters. The narrator's traditional control over his characters is disassembled to heal the divide of narrative barriers. Walcott's post-colonial *nostos* therefore involves reconciliation between the narrator, the characters and their combined relationship with Homer.

Walcott additionally reconciles the divide between St Lucia's colonial history and the narrative of Homer's *Odyssey*. He melds the experience of the Middle Passage with Odysseus' wanderings by turning the enslaved Africans into Odysseus' crew. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus chooses to sacrifice his crew to Scylla without their knowledge⁶², thus treating them as commodities in a way that is comparable to an enslaver. Walcott subverts this treatment by depicting the enslaved Africans as righteously vengeful. They mock Odysseus: "you dream of Ithaca...May they be as far apart / from your wandering as ours in Africa"⁶³. As Hall argues, Walcott has "reclaimed the story of Odysseus for the entire diasporic black community wrenched from Africa"⁶⁴. Because Walcott has nativised Homer into the Caribbean, he is able to freely adapt his Homeric allusion to give back the enslaved their voice. Their revenge against Odysseus, who becomes an allegory for the coloniser, claims back their agency through an Odyssean metaphor. Walcott therefore derides the European colonial institution in its own language. His reconciliation of colonial history with the Homeric narrative, which has been used to silence the colonised, grants them agency. Walcott's Caribbean appropriation of Homer is subsequently utilised to heal the wounds of colonialism. He additionally indicates this reconciliation with Homer when the narrator fears that "the gods and demi-gods aren't much use"⁶⁵ for the colonial experience. Omeros' advice to "Forget the gods...and read the rest"⁶⁶ demonstrates the adaptability of the Odyssean *nostos* into the post-colonial one. Walcott's decentralisation of Homer opens up more means for the post-colonial *nostos* to succeed and release St Lucia from its wounds of historical colonial violence.

⁶¹ Hanétha Vété-Congolo, "Caribbean Storytales: a Methodology for Resistance." *Anthurium A Caribbean Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (2007): 1, <https://anthurium.miami.edu/articles/93/files/submission/proof/93-1-177-1-10-20180919.pdf>.

⁶² Homer, *The Odyssey*, 12. 223-59.

⁶³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 203.

⁶⁴ Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses*. (London: I.B Tauris, 2008), 170.

⁶⁵ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

⁶⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 283.

This reconciliation of history and Homer allows Walcott to unite St Lucia's colonial past with its multicultural present. Walcott converts the Odyssean motif of the swallow into the "sea-swift"⁶⁷ in order to represent the unity of cultures on St Lucia. In the *Odyssey*, the swallow is indicative of Odysseus' *nostos*, as evident when Odysseus' bow "sang...with a sound like a swallow's note"⁶⁸. Odysseus uses his bow to kill the Suitors and attain his *nostos*⁶⁹. Losada additionally proposes that the simile of the swallow's call heralds Odysseus' return to Ithaca as the swallow is known for its migratory pattern in the ancient world⁷⁰. Walcott's swift is likewise symbolic of homecoming. Swifts are close to swallows in appearance due to convergent evolution but are not related species. He deliberately underlines the similarities between his homecoming and Homer's while asserting that Homer is not superior over the Caribbean narrator. He therefore nativises the swallow into his narrative. The Homeric parallels to the colonial experience becomes coincidental instead of a Western imposition. As such, a "swift... centuries ago from its antipodal shore...aimed to carry the cure / that precedes every wound"⁷¹. The swift's journey is allegorical for the Middle Passage and the forced displacement of slavery. However, the Middle Passage also led to the "cure" for colonial wounds. The cure planted by the swift will one day sprout into St Lucia's multicultural present which the narrator and the characters inhabit. Walcott unites the Western and African culture which influenced St Lucia to create a whole Caribbean identity. He further presents this unity through Maud's symbolic "quilt"⁷² which has "not only the African swift but all the horned island's / birds"⁷³. Maud is Major Plunkett's wife and is emblematic of European imperial presence on the island. Maud weaving the quilt is evocative of Penelope's loom trick. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope tricks the Suitors into delaying their marriage to her by pretending to weave a funeral shroud for Laertes⁷⁴, which allows Odysseus to complete his *nostos*. Just like Penelope's shroud results in a successful *nostos*, Maud's quilt symbolises a post-colonial *nostos* achieved through reconciliation of the past and the present. The quilt embraces both African and Western influences on the island but these exist alongside St Lucia's native birds instead of taking precedence over them. The fact that Maud's unitive quilt is draped over the "bier"⁷⁵ at her funeral, which the narrator and the characters attend⁷⁶, demonstrates the end of imperial power. Maud as Penelope has to die in order for Helen to transform into Penelope, as discussed above. Due to this, the

⁶⁷ Walcott, *Omeros*, 22.

⁶⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 21. 411.

⁶⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 22. 1-22.

⁷⁰ Luis A. Losada, "Odyssey 21. 411: The Swallow's Call." *Classical Philology* 80, no. 1 (1985): 34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/269767>.

⁷¹ Walcott, *Omeros*, 238-9.

⁷² Walcott, *Omeros*, 269.

⁷³ Walcott, *Omeros*, 267.

⁷⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, 2. 90-110.

⁷⁵ Walcott, *Omeros*, 267.

⁷⁶ Walcott, *Omeros*, 264-7.

empire's demise can only be achieved through complete reconciliation between the colonial past and the present. St Lucia's Western and African heritage, literary and cultural, are united over Maud's death. Therefore, Walcott reconciles St Lucia's multicultural inheritance with the poem's Homeric influences to reach a successful post-colonial *nostos* which heals the wounds of colonialism.

Conclusion

Derek Walcott's reception of the Odyssean *nostos* is defined by acceptance of both identity and homeland. By embracing St Lucia's multicultural nature, a wholly Caribbean identity, which is not merely derivative of Africa or Western colonialism, is established. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' *nostos* involves travelling to barbaric lands before reuniting with Penelope and Telemachus on Ithaca. Conversely, Walcott reconfigures the *nostos* in order to decentralise Homer from the West and adapt him for a post-colonial narrative. In *Omeros*, Achille sought to heal Helen's colonial wounds by returning to a pre-colonial Africa. Walcott utilises his failed *nostos* to reveal the danger of longing for the past because it will only exacerbate colonial displacement. The post-colonial *nostos* must be achieved by returning to Helen, who becomes a true home. Likewise, Walcott also explores a literary *nostos* for post-colonial writers through intertextuality and metafiction. Walcott's narrator discovers how conformity to a faithful pastiche of Homer betrays his Caribbean narrative. His true *nostos* must be accomplished through accepting his identity as a St Lucian writer and diminishing Homer's subjugating influence. Acceptance of St Lucia allows the narrator and all characters to unite at Maud's funeral, which is symbolic of liberation from colonial wounds. Walcott's healing *nostos* therefore leads to reconciliation of Western and African influences while deconstructing the barriers responsible for colonial suffering.

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