S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

8:2 2022

Nutrix

Edited by Rosy Colombo

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

Founded by Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliazzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

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Published in December 2022
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ISSN 2421-4353

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SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
https://skenejournal.skeneproject.it
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Madeleine Scherer*

Memories of Antiquity in Derek Walcott's *Odyssey: A Stage Version*. A Case Study of Eurycleia

Abstract

Derek Walcott's *Odyssey. A Stage Version* is a work of reception that remembers ancient Greek mythology as much as or more than it rewrites ancient sources. Walcott's references to the classics are at times immediately recognisable, at other times hidden behind layers of cumulative association, creating a unique experience for different members of his audience. Within Walcott's interweaving of untranslated oral references to ancient Greek with Jazz, Shango invocations, and quotations from Horace, we witness the workings of remembrance; deliberate triggers to his audience's memory of a transcultural tapestry of characters, narratives, and images, often without contextualising or expanding on his various allusions. In an adaptation of this type, the way in which one of the most pivotal female characters of Graeco-Roman epic, the nurse Eurycleia, is rewritten into the late twentieth century evokes a complex mode of reader-reception. In Walcott's rewriting, Eurycleia is deliberately and overtly tied to Egypt, which was in Homer associated with mysticism and magic. This emphasises her power over both the narrative and the Ithacan household, while feeding into a larger web of references to African, Afrocentric and Caribbean literature and scholarship in Walcott's *Odyssey*, including Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Caribbean religious rituals. This style of reception establishes a storyworld in which ancient Greek *topoi* are integrated with ideas and narratives from world history whereby Walcott performs a move away from an elite form of adaptation that prioritises knowledge of Graeco-Roman languages and contexts towards one that works through a wide and shifting set of global memories.

Keywords: *Odyssey*; nurses; classical reception; memory; Derek Walcott

Prologue

In Derek Walcott's 1993 *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (OSV), Billy Blue, a bard and trickster figure, is introduced before the protagonist and focal point of the play, Odysseus.[1] For any critic or even a casual reader of the text, this im-

[1] Throughout his career, Walcott has adapted the works of other writers, including a variety of classical sources, in his 1990 *Omeros*, *The Sea at Dauphin* (1954), which he based on Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Joker of Seville* (1974) after *El Burlador de Sevilla* (by Tirso de Molina) (as discussed in Hamner, 2001). Simon Denith (1995, 95) has

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© SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies 8:2 (2022), 247-72
https://www.skenejournal.skeneproject.it

mediately signifies that this is not a straightforward adaptation of the play, and that with the addition of new names from different cultural spheres, the dynamics of the well-known ancient narrative may change.[2] Billy Blue introduces himself as a mixture of chorus and muse[3] while also evoking the qualities of the blind seer Teiresias: "I'm Blind Billy Blue, my main man's sea-smart Odysseus" (1), merging roles that in antiquity were separate.[4] In his introduction to the play, he invents an epithet, "sea-smart", that mirrors the ones that describe the heroes across Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and even includes an entire passage of untranslated Greek, taken straight from the beginning of the *Odyssey*: "Andra moi ennepe mousa polutropon hos mala polla" (1).[5] These inclusions trigger an audience's aural memory of a language and style that sounds archaic and foreign without their understanding being necessarily present.[6] Detailed knowledge of the 'original' *Odyssey* is reward-

suggested that Walcott is especially drawn to Homer precisely due to the distance of language and historical context between himself and the ancient poet(s).

[2] This is particularly interesting given that, as Rachel Friedman has pointed out, the OSV is the first time that Walcott locates the Greek materials as a central point of inspiration, unlike his earlier works in which they take on a more implicit resonance (Friedman 2015, 65).

[3] See also Friedman comparing him to both a bard and blues singer at the same time (2015, 65). Importantly, as she has argued, a blues singer reciting the first lines of the Odyssey performs the "kind of call and response across the ages that Walcott encourages in his theoretical discussion" (66). Therein, the blues singer is given the ability to offer both criticism and commentaries on the play itself, the "poet-outsider", standing both inside and outside the storyworld (68).

[4] Lorna Harwick has summarised Walcott's own views on Billy Blue as "the most emblematic figure we have in the twentieth century someone who contains a history of the race . . ., someone who sings ballads, the preserver of the cultural memory" (Hardwick 1997, 332).

[5] This passage is also discussed by Robert D. Hamner, with reference to Walcott deliberately gesturing towards a sense of "geographic displacement" (2001, 376). More untranslated Greek can be found in the epithets that are chanted by the Surf Voices later in the play, taken from the original *Odyssey*: "Polumechanos, polutlas, polumetis, Odysseus / Polumechanos, polutlas, polumetis, Odysseus" (1993, 110). The oarsmen who accompany Telemachos on his flight from the suitors also count each stroke in transliterated Greek: "Ayis! Do-o! Trayis! Tetra! Pente! Ex!" (Reed 2018, 197).

[6] For another instance of this, see the Martial Chorus's off-screen chant: "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" (60). Although a translation is provided a line earlier, the complex reception history of the line from Horace via Wilfred Owen would be missed by an audience unaware of the British poet's ironic inversion of the line. The line appears again later when the Philosopher translates it as "What to the eye is best, the greatest glory? Dulce et decorum est – to die for a lie with zest – Pro patria mori." (62). The deliberate mistranslation draws further attention to the decontextualised way in which ancient phrases are adapted in the OSV and elsewhere, hinting at Owen's ironic engagement with the line but not exploring this part of the reception history in more detail.

ed, but the play moves on before it can become a condition for an audience's understanding of the plot. In an adaptation of this type, which lives and dies on the interplay of half-remembered, half-forgotten references, the way in which Walcott has rewritten one of the most pivotal female characters of Graeco-Roman epic, the nurse Eurycleia, into the late twentieth century performs a complex synchronic mode of reader- and/or audience-reception.

In the OSV, as will be shown in the following analysis, Walcott accumulates memories of Eurycleia and nurse characters from across ancient Greek tragedy. He streamlines their most positively connoted features through a distinctly political lens, whereby he most notably uses his play's framing of Eurycleia as a wise and compassionate Egyptian as an implicit comment on the *Black Athena* Debate that dominated scholarly discourse in the 1990s and early 2000s. Through intermixing references to classical sources like the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* with nods to other works of literature, works of scholarship, or even different religious traditions, Walcott attempts to make his play accessible to different portions of the play's audience and readership; both those with a classical education and those with experience and expertise in different areas. In this way, Walcott reinforces the memory-driven style of reception that is typical of his oeuvre. He both advocates and enforces an egalitarian type of adaptation in which a classical education is not necessary to enjoy or understand an adaptation of classical materials, and in which it is not a requirement to have read Homer "all the way through".[7]

The further the prologue of the OSV progresses, the more obscure and specialised the allusions to antiquity become, raising questions about the play's target audience. Billy Blue references "[t]he shuttle of the sea [that] moves back and forth on this line" (1), linking the acts of weaving ("shuttle") and sailing ("shuttle of the sea"), both of which served as meta-textual metaphors for the writing of poetry in the *Odyssey* (Friedman 2015, 72). Unless scholars of the ancient texts were present amongst the audience of OSV, it is unlikely that the implications of this line would have been fully unpacked in the moment, especially with the play continuously moving along, leaving little time for analytic reflection. Further allusions compound on the very same page, with references to "rosy fingers at dawn" that evoke the rose-fingered dawn from the *Iliad,* and a "swallow arrowing seaward like a messenger", which references Athena taking on the shape of birds at several points in Homer's *Odyssey*.[8] These references are not limited to ancient materials, as Billy Blue

[7] Quoting Walcott's long poem *Omeros* in which the narrator confesses that he never read Homer's poems in their entirety (Walcott 2002, 283).

[8] Athena's appearances as birds in the *Odyssey* are discussed in Derek Collins, "Reading the Birds: Oionomanteia in Early Epic" (2002, 17-41). In *Omeros* the image of the swallow becomes emblematic of the theme of dislocation, travel and migration, as explored by scholars like Phillip Nanton (2018, 474), while the swift becomes a muse-

continues: "once Achilles was ashes, things sure fell apart", invoking Chinua Achebe's 1958 debut novel *Things Fall Apart* that details the deconstruction of the traditional way of life in Nigeria after the European invasion in the nineteenth century.[9] This reference signals towards the Afrocentric interests that can be noted throughout the rest of Walcott's OSV, and which will shortly be discussed in relation to the character of Eurycleia.[10] But whereas an audience less familiar with the classics may not have caught the meaning of the Greek earlier in the prologue, an audience unfamiliar with African and black writers may be similarly unaware of Achebe's work. Walcott here splits the kind of experience different sections of his audience would have so that not only those audience members who have a classical education would have the interpretative upper hand: his play is receptive also of twentieth century fascist rhetoric, Shango mysticism, and a wider literary canon that includes Wilfred Owen, thereby according transcultural knowledge equal value to specialist classical expertise. As the play's Philosopher – who also takes on the role of "Socrates Aristotle Lucretius" (63) – claims: "With History erased, there's just the present tense" (61),[11] whereby he echoes Walcott's

like character that has "raveled and unraveled" "cities with shadowy spires stitched on a screen" (Friedman 2015, 292). See also Walcott's "The Seasons of Phantasmal Peace" wherein he writes of "the nations of birds lifted together / the huge net of the shadows of this earth / in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues, / stitching and crossing it." (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 113). Further decontextualized references abound on the first few pages of the OSV, including those to other mythological characters such as Hecuba who does not appear anywhere else in the play, and may therein be meaningless to at least a portion of Walcott's audience: "Over the stones of her children, Hecuba wailing" (6).

[9] Scattered references to famous literary works are not limited to an Afrocentric tradition. For instance, a possible reference to Tennyson's wandering Odysseus towards the end of OSV: "Penelope: Will you miss the sea . . . Odysseus: Yes." (1993, 159). Others are discussed subsequently.

[10] For the play's inspiration by specifically Caribbean traditions, see Friedman's reading of the play's dialogue style as reminiscent of Picong in Trinidadian Calypso performance (2015, 67).

[11] Characters taking on multiple roles occur frequently across the play; as Peter Hamner points out: "mermaids who teased Odysseus on his raft before he washed ashore in Phaeacia become flirtatious kitchen servants in Ithaca; Nausicaa reappears as Penelope's insolent maid Melantho; Polyphemos turns up again as the troublesome swineherd Arnaeus, to whom Odysseus gives the one-fingered 'Cyclops salute'" (2001, 387). Telemachos is also explicitly linked to Elpenor on p.45. This intermixing of roles is reminiscent of fellow Caribbean writer Wilson Harris's work in which the boundaries between characters are frequently blurred. In his 1993 novel *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*, for instance, his characters take on the roles both of one another and of historical characters, creating an ahistoric and synchronous tapestry wherein "original" and reception context blend into one (1993, 172) As Irene Martyniuk outlines, this role-sharing practice is Walcott's way of deconstructing the "typical European binaries" of heroes, mon-

writerly impetus to de-privilege a westernised classical tradition. Thus, Odysseus becomes a "homeless, wandering voice", as described by Eumaeus (151), and the quick-fire listing of references from different cultural contexts serves as an equaliser for the audience's level of understanding, de facto attempting to de-privilege the traditional cultural elite.[12]

This impetus creates an interesting interplay with the OSV's production history. The play was initially produced in 1992 with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon in the United Kingdom. Scholars like Ethan Reed and Kevin Wetmore Jr. have proposed that its production history in England problematises the OSV's identity as a "Caribbean play", with white English actor Ron Cook playing Odysseus, alongside a predominantly white cast (Reed 2018, 194; Wetmore 2003, 224). In fact, the play was commissioned by director Greg Doran, with Walcott relaying that "[i]t certainly wasn't m[y idea]. I wouldn't have done it" (Burnett quoted in Reed 2018, 195). He expands: "I didn't want to take on the idea of doing another – not a directly – Homeric thing like the book I'd just finished".[13] And as Irene Martyniuk has argued, the acceptance of the RSC commission "did not help [Walcott's] Caribbean image" and put him under a critical microscope for his use of intertextuality and the play's political implications (2005, 189). Thus, Walcott was forced to negotiate the politics of both the original poem and the ways in which his stage version would be interpreted, both by his primarily British audience in Stratford-upon-Avon as well as a wider, more international readership approaching the play after its initial performance. This explains, to a degree, his inclusion of a wide variety of different layers of interpretation available for consumption by different portions of his audience; ranging from incidental to accumulative, depending on how relevant any given allusion is to the overall mood and tone of a given scene.[14] Such a wide-ranging reception strategy works towards separating the OSV from

sters, colonizers and colonized: "All of the characters shift fluidly in and around such specific distinctions, instead occupying positions on both sides and in other, third spaces" (2005, 188).

[12] Here, the storyworld and narrative voice of the OSV parallels that of Walcott's 1990 *Omeros*, which offers, in Philip Nanton's words, "a mosaic of journeys undertaken by different characters – Achille to Africa, the poet to North America, the character Plunkett to Holland and the desert and the poet once again to Istanbul, Athens and London" (2018, 473).

[13] Walcott here refers to his completion of *Omeros* (Burnett 2000, 283).

[14] In this context it is worth considering the perspective, as explored by Lorna Hardwick, that Walcott regards his own background as a "liberating factor in the face of pressures to conform with the stereotypes of race, gender, and class engagement expected from black and/or female writers. He considers that his background enables him to resist incorporation into the political expectations of any one tradition" (Hardwick 2002, 333).

any specific cultural context and attempts to dissolve the layers of expectations different factions amidst his audience might have of a play written by a Caribbean author staged at the RSC. And, indeed, both Walcott and Doran have insisted that the OSV is neither "a black play [n]or a Caribbean play that would have been a cheap way out" (sic; Levy 2016, 1). In this context, Justine McConnell has likewise made the claim that Walcott is "unusual [amidst postcolonial responses to the *Odyssey*] in his abandonment of race as a criterion for oppression: it is humanity, or inhumanity, that interests him".[15] Instead, his work has always focused more on doubling and erasures, figures held in an ambiguous periphery who "could be Odysseus",[16] "names in the sand/ which the sea erased again".[17]

Perhaps rather tellingly, Walcott's 'Odyssey' starts with the "Sound of surf" (1), which invokes the role of the sea across both OSV and Walcott's masterpiece *Omeros* (1990), his modern "epic"[18] in which he adapts a variety of classic and traditional texts (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, Dante's *Inferno*, amongst others). In both texts, the sea takes on the role of cross-cultural communicator, carrying pieces of stories, images of characters, and fragmented voices from across time and space to the Caribbean islands, in which *Omeros* and OSV are (partially) set.[19] The ever-moving waves once more gesture towards the type of adaptation the readers or audience experience in Walcott's work, categorised less by a holistic or even deconstruc-

[15] McConnell (2012, 50)proposes that Walcott's response to Homer may be related to the demands of the postcolonial world of the late twentieth century, which includes a greater exploration of the commonalities between different groups of people as part of a kind of transcultural cosmopolitanism (53).

[16] From Walcott's poem "Sea Grapes" (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 111).

[17] From Walcott's poem "Names" (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 112).

[18] *Omeros* follows epic conventions in terms of its style and poetic form, and while Walcott has acknowledged the influence of Graeco-Roman epic on *Omeros*, he has since claimed that it is not an epic. See Barnard (2014, 10) for a discussion of this.

[19] For the OSV (1993,72), which locates the text in both the world of ancient myth and the Caribbean where plantains are a ubiquitous dish. This further establishes the simultaneous setting of the play as it bridges both historical and geographical contexts in a flurry of allusions and references. In this space, the sea becomes both eraser and communicator, as Walcott explores in his poem "Names": "Behind us all the sky folded / as history folds over a fishline, / and the foam foreclosed / with nothing in our hands // but this stick / to trace our names on the sand / which the sea erased again, to our indifference" (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 112). For further references to the Caribbean setting of the OSV, see also the chorus's chant of: "Calypso / Aeaea /Ai-ee-o / Bacchanal/ And carnival" (1993, 75). In this context, Odysseus's home in the OSV has been read by Zargarzadeh and Gabriel as a colony that has been taken over by "suitor settlers" (Zargarzadeh-Sharmani 2020, 124). They read Odysseus's confrontation of the suitors as an analogy of decolonisation which restores the hero's "pride, dignity and authority" (128).

tive engagement with a classical "original" than by a fragmented mosaic of transcultural referents more evocative of T.S. Eliot or Wilson Harris. This sound of the ocean is a frequently returned to motif throughout the play, closing out its enigmatic underworld scene that is located in an underground train station and is reached by a κατάβασις facilitated by both the gods of antiquity as well as Caribbean and African pantheons.[20] Lorna Hardwick has called the ancient echoes in Walcott's work "both compellingly present and puzzlingly distant" (2002, 329). Walcott's *Odyssey* is perhaps more politically and narratively focused than the mosaic collections of references found in Eliot or Harris, but it is no less transcultural or trans-historical.

But, like when first reading *The Waste Land* or one of Harris's famously esoteric texts, the audience is not expected to catch every reference or understand every allusion of the OSV, making Walcott's play more accessible and less elite than other texts that work through a similar mode of reception. Odysseus's first entrance follows Billy Blue's monologue at the beginning of the play, which mirrors the way in which the invocation of the muses in ancient epic introduces the narrative and its main heroes. But unlike the promise of unequivocal truth implied by these types of openings, Odysseus's entry mirrors the confusion many audience members may have felt at the plethora of references and allusions when he simply asks "What?" (2). As well as deconstructing the formal and culturally elite tone with which adaptations of ancient sources are often associated, this casual question meta-textually echoes the confusion some members of the audience may have experienced when watching an adaptation of the *Odyssey* that begins with a new character, includes untranslated Greek and references that, to some, may sound familiar but are likely to be too quick to unpack in the moment. Here, we are talking about the workings of memory, and the ways in which Walcott is deliberately trying to trigger memories of a transcultural tapestry of characters, narratives, and images by using a variety of different modes and methods. And in the following we will focus on the ways in which this style of adaptation has shaped the OSV's version of Eurycleia, Odysseus's nurse, "*dia gunaikôn* 'noblest of women' Eurykleia, the daughter of Ops, son

[20] The Celebrants chanting: "Shango / Zeus . . . Ogun / Erzulie . . . Erzulie / Athena / Maman d'l'Eau / River Daughter / Shango / Zeus / All who see us" (87-8); which Nanton refers to as "the gods of different pantheons to hold[ing] an intercultural party and mingle as they drink together" (2018, 473). The underworld in OSV features a number of references to different *katabatic* traditions, both to book 11 of the *Odyssey* (96) and the *Aeneid* as well as Dante's *Inferno* (92). The gates of ivory and horn through which Aeneas escapes the underworld is also referenced by Odysseus and Penelope at the end of the OSV (134). Walcott's underworld design as a train station is also reminiscent of Seamus Heaney's poem "The Underground" as has been discussed in Scherer's *Memories of the Classical Underworld* (De Gruyter 2021, 186ff.).

of Peisenor"(Karydas 1998, 147-8), who is remembered and re-remembered through a variety of lenses in Walcott's stage version.[21]

Enter Eurycleia

In the OSV, Eurycleia appears as early as scene 2, marking her as an important character that contributes to shaping the remainder of the narrative; the "house's foundation", as she is later referred to by Penelope (18). Eurycleia has noticeable authority and presence on stage as a character of advanced age and experience, as suggested by her referring to both Telemachus and Odysseus as "boys" (9).[22] She is present throughout the Ithaca plot in the second scene, making her the character who is onstage the longest – longer than Billy Blue, bard, narrator, and muse, and even Odysseus, the protagonist – and she refers to the ongoing events as a "family crisis" that involves her as much as the royal family (16). Her authority and presence in the OSV adapt, and in some way extend, her influential position in Homer's *Odyssey*. In Homer, Eurycleia also raised both Odysseus and Telemachos, and Telemachos comes to her, not his mother Penelope, with his plans to pursue rumours of his father in Jones (2004, 2.348 and ff.).[23] This mirrors the authority and importance held by the figure of the nurse across the ancient Greek tradition, whereby she is able to give meaningful advice that shapes the development of the narrative. This is extensively discussed in Karydas's seminal work on the nurse in ancient Greek texts, *Eurykleia and Her Successors*. Therein, Karydas outlines the authority of characters like Kilissa in

[21] Interestingly, Walcott's adaptation of Eurycleia does not engage with common perceptions of nursing during the writing of the play. In the 1990s, as a response to a nursing shortage in the late 1980s, a number of surveys were conducted on the ways in which nurses felt in their professions, whereby the most common issues listed were lack of support, difficulties in measuring accomplishments, lack of control, feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness, helplessness, frustration, feeling trapped, and poor wages. For relevant research on this see VanYperen, Buunk and Schaufeli (1992, 173-89); Mondez (1990); Jecker and Self (1991, 285-306); Erlen and Frost (1991, 397-407). As outlined below, this forms a significant contrast to the depiction of Eurycleia in the OSV and indicates that Walcott's reception focuses mostly on interplays with the ancient Greek tradition as well as contemporary debates in Afrocentrism, most notably the *Black Athena* debate.

[22] In the OSV the Scylla and Charybdis episode is collaboratively retold by Eurycleia and Billy Blue as a nursery rhyme, further reinforcing both her maternal role and her authority over the story and its progression (1993, 105-6).

[23] This is also discussed in Jensen Minna (2014, 92). This plotline is simultaneously, however, a reminder of Eurycleia's *lack* of power; as Jones explores, "Eurykleia is also a slave, and so under Telemachos' authority. His mother would be able to exert considerable emotional pressure to prevent his departure (373-6)" (2004, 25).

Aeschylus's *Libation-Bearers* (64 and ff.) who disobeys her mistress Klytaimnestra; the Nurse in Sophocles's *Women of Trachis* who advises Deianeira (82 and ff); Hermione's Nurse in Euripides's *Andromache* who gives advice to and voices disapproval regarding her mistress's actions (85 and ff.); and the Nurse in Euripides's Hippolysus who is responsible for much of the play's action until her mistress Phaedra's suicide (115 and ff.).

The role of the nurse is comparable to the male "*paidagogos*" in that it involves the education as well as the upbringing of children (1998, 2). By occupying this position Eurycleia is present for most of the crucial moments in her master's life and his *oikos*'s history.[24] Eurycleia's epithets in Homer further link her with a range of important and powerful characters in the epic; she shares the epithet κεδνὰ ἰδυῖα, "knowing caring feelings", "with affectionate feelings", and "devoted" with Penelope, and πυκιμηδής, "with dense thoughts", and "shrewd in counsel" with Odysseus (1998, 11-3). It is particularly her intelligence that is emphasized throughout her epithets; including νόου πολυϊδρείῃσιν . . . "with a mind which knows many things", "of many skills of the mind", μήδεα "thoughts", the fore-mentioned πυκιμηδής, "with dense thoughts", and πυκινὰ μήδεα ἔχουσα "having dense thoughts" (17).[25] Her sharp mind therein allows her to face Odysseus in an agonistic speech during the recognition scene in 19, a verbal contest in which her answers to her master correspond to his own.[26]

In addition to her intelligence, her power in the *Odyssey* is also constituted through her difference from other women in the ancient epics. Eurycleia is an old woman and therein not coded as beautiful, which as an attribute in Homeric literature often accompanies the vilification (or threatened vilification) of women.[27] Moreover, Laertes did not take her to bed as would have been typical for a servant in her position, setting her apart from other slave women.[28] "*Trophoi*", older women like Eurycleia who have cared for a

[24] See Karydas's discussion of Eurycleia's presence during Odysseus's boar hunt that marks his adolescence (1998, 17).

[25] For further exploration, as well as a more exhaustive list of the epithets associated with Eurycleia, see table II in Karydas (1998, 57).

[26] As Karydas explains: "Her rhetorical question in xix 492 is a response to Odysseus' rhetorical question in xix 482; xix 493-494, where she confirms her *menos*, is an answer to his request for silence in xix 482-486; xix 495 is her determined reaction to his announcement in xix 487; xix 496 is a repetition of xix 488; and xix 497-498 is her suggestion as an answer to his menace of xix 489-490" (1998, 31). See also Eurycleia's argument with Penelope towards the end of the epic, as discussed in Karydas (1998, 48).

[27] For a discussion of this see Hawley (1998, 40). It is worth mentioning, however, that in Homer the epithets most commonly associated with old age, *geras*, include "baneful" (*lygron*), "hated" (*stygeron*), "destructive" (*oloon*), "hard to bear" (*chalepon*), and "even-handed" (*homoiion*) (Jensen 2014, 87).

[28] As discussed in Jones (2004, 17-18) with reference to *Odyssey* 1.428-35.

master since infancy, generally tend to be represented in a more individualised manner than the rest of the servants (Jensen 2014, 90).[29] Their old age carries connotations of wisdom and authority, whereby Eurycleia's association with the *trophoi* figure compounds with the power, intelligence and influence that already characterise her. The nurse's powerful position in the *Odyssey* has even led to suggestions of her being the leader of a "*khoros*" of the young female housemaids, which separates her, once more, from a more homogenous group of servants.[30]

Her exceptional position, as compared to the other characters, is to an extent recreated in the OSV. Unlike many of the white cast of the stage production, Eurycleia's actress, Antigua-born Claire Benedict, uses a Caribbean vernacular, giving the character a unique voice amidst the cast and simultaneously distancing the play from the commonly perceived formality of ancient Greek and many of its translations. The oral invocation of Caribbean spaces expands on the audience's impression that this is a play that is both modern and transcultural. The soundscape of the Caribbean vernacular within the storyworld recreated out of the ancient Greek epic, similar to the jazz-like intermixing of voices and styles in poems like Eliot's *Waste Land*, creates the feeling of different voices coming together in Walcott's adaptation.[31] Nonetheless, Eurycleia's speech arguably retains some minor interplay with the intricacies of ancient Greek. While Eurycleia refers to Odysseus as "Hodysseus" (8), the breathing marks on Ὀδυσσεύς in the original indicates that no "h" would be added to the pronunciation.[32] This distinction would only be noticeable to a certain portion of the audience. As a typical Caribbean pronunciation of the name, it would go unquestioned by many, while others may assume that this is simply the way in which Odysseus's name would have been pronounced in antiquity. To deconstructive

[29] Karydas defines the *trophos* as an "essential member in the household of noble and wealthy Greek families since the earliest attestations. She is an old and trustful servant regarded as part of the family" (1998, 2).

[30] Karydas specifically references Eurycleia giving orders to the maids at Odyssey 20.147-156 (1998, 2.8). She also discusses how Odysseus calling Eurycleia "old woman" more frequently than "nurse", "*maia*", is a way of confirming her authority (43), and argues elsewhere that "[w]hen it comes to skills of the role of a nurse, she is referred to as nurse; when it comes to skills that require more judgement, intelligence, and wisdom, she is referred to as 'old woman'" (58).

[31] This includes different languages, such as the Russian spoken by the Cyclops. This is done in a tongue in cheek way that makes use of the spoken word nature of theatre: "Not yet? Nyet" (64).

[32] Hamner discusses this as typical for Caribbean pronunciations, deepening the interweaving of classical and modern postcolonial context that Walcott seeks to establish in the OSV (2001, 377). We can observe a similar shift in the expected pronunciation of Greek names in *Omeros*, which is discussed in Melas (2005, 158).

interplays such as this, Walcott adds decontextualised lines of ancient Greek, isolated epithets, sounds of jazz, modern slang, and phrases that imply deliberate anachronisms to the original context.[33] Walcott's *Odyssey* sounds both like and vastly different to the ancient "original", confirming the poet's intention to address audiences with varying levels of expertise on the classics.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Eurycleia is perhaps most famous for the scene in which she recognises the beggar to be Odysseus when washing his feet and spotting his scar, fitting into a long tradition of scenes in ancient Greek narratives wherein female characters recognise and verify the identity of men.[34] From this moment onwards, not only has Eurycleia been remembered as an important character in Odysseus's household – but also as a character associated with the processes of remembrance itself. In *Poetics* 16, for instance, Aristotle discusses the recognition scene as a kind of recognition through signs, *dia tôn sêmeiôn* . . . (1454b21–4). In such cases recognition is said to proceed through memory, *dia mnêmês* (1454b37) and to result from reasoning, *ek syllogismou* (1455a4) (Fortenbaugh 2020, 246-7). Eurycleia fits into a long line of Homeric characters prompted to remember the past, including Nestor's recollection of his way back from Troy, Menelaus' recounting of his adventures, Helen's untrustworthy memories of her time at Troy, Hector remembering his wife's past, and Demodocus recounting the events at Troy.[35] She also, once again, exerts power (or the threat of power) over the narrative, holding Odysseus's successful *nostos* in suspense as her recognition might thwart his plans of deceiving the suitors.[36] Indeed, much like Odysseus, Eurycleia demonstrates cunning in her ability to keep her master's secret, further underlining her importance for the household at Ithaca.[37]

Interestingly, as Aristotle already noted, the recognition in Eurycleia's recognition scene in the *Odyssey* is negotiated via the presence of "*sema* / *semata*" (sign / signs). Jeffrey Beneker discusses the presence of *semata* in mythology and legends as a "common element", as incidences that that

[33] For some examples: "Odysseus Sorry I'm late. (*Silence*) O lucky dead, who can't tell friends from enemies!" (3); "You should put something on. This is very awkward" (Nausicaa to Odysseus, 47); "Listen, buzz off!" (First Sailor, 60); "For God's sake, it's his burial mound. Let him rest" (Menelaus, 4). Some of these moments that are characterised by anachronistic styles also include self-conscious references to the characters' reception histories: "Menelaus [to Helen] Sorry, dear. / Helen Men. They'll blame me for everything now" (31).

[34] Laura McClure's article (2015, 219-36) significantly focuses on Electra's recognition of Orestes, utilising both physical and material markers of identity.

[35] Many of these are already discussed in Rusu (2018, 281).

[36] As discussed with reference to Auerbach's reading of the scene ("Odysseus' Scar") in Scodel (2021, 55ff.).

[37] For a wider discussion of the use of secrecy amidst female characters in antiquity (including Medea, Phaedra and Eurydice), see Montiglio (2002).

"function as signs" (Beneker 2016, 34); items of places that "carry significance in their own right . . . because they trigger recollections of past experiences" (37). In this case, the scar on Odysseus's leg functions as a symbol for his shared past with Eurycleia, which is unearthed through her narration.[38] Both on the level of text and the mode of reception, this episode gestures towards the process of remembering; the physical memorial gesturing towards both memories and the ways in which memories work associatively through memory triggers.[39] Meta-textually, the scar has taken on the status of an archetype or a trope, even before Erich Auerbach's famous reading of the scene in his seminal *Mimesis* (Resvick 2019), and Eurycleia's own name, "the one with the wide fame" further anticipates this long-reaching reception history (Karydas 1998, 11).[40] Walcott's adaptation of this scene in the OSV recontextualises this mnemonic gesture within his own mosaic style of reception, itself so inextricable from remembrance. Rather than an oral poem remembered by way of its continuous performance, the OSV deliberately triggers a variety of transcultural memory contexts by way of decontextualised, brief and accumulating reference points. Within this style of reception, Eurycleia's recognition of Odysseus becomes a meta-textual window of reflection to the audience, a singular sign stirring their own memories of the *Odyssey* and signalling towards the style of reception the audience members are currently immersed in.[41]

Walcott works accumulatively in OSV. By stacking multiple references to both ancient Greek as well as transcultural contexts, he underlines the asso-

[38] And it needs to be – as Melissa Mueller recognises; "the scar itself cannot speak. It needs a narrator, someone who also remembers Odysseus in connection with these key rites of passage" (2016, 2). Haun Saussy has described Odysseus's scar as an "*epigraphê,* a scratch, a mark, a letter" (1996, 302).

[39] In fact, according to Mueller, this fits into a tradition of moments of touch triggering moments of flashbacks, *analepsis*, and recognition, *anagnorisis*: "prompted by touch, the recognition is verbally related by the bard, the missing links of analepsis supplied through a narrative digression (in the case of the Nurse's recollection) or told proleptically (in the case of the history of Odysseus's bow) as a biographical detail whose relevance becomes clear only later. Touch, then, pulls the narrative back into the past" (2016, 8-9). For the role of specifically women in such systems of memory and recognition, McClure (2015, 235), who identifies the ways in which women "maintain [and transmit] the knowledge of the past indispensable to the recovery and preservation of male identity within the *oikos* and important to the city as well".

[40] Euryleia has even been argued to obtain her own form of "*kleos"* (ibid.), usually reserved for the men in the Graeco-Roman heroic tradition.

[41] Of course, Homer's *Odyssey* likewise adapts a plethora of cultural traditions in ancient Greece, whereby individual performances of the poem may well have differed depending on where and by whom it was being performed. For a concise summary of this see Moran (2022, 33-4). What we see in Walcott is not necessarily a new style of adaptation, but a twentieth-century, postcolonial variant of it.

ciations he intends to invoke, where a single reference might not enough to convey his message to his audience. In this way, he highlights a number of qualities that characterised Eurycleia in Homer's *Odyssey* – her intelligence, authority, kindness, and uniqueness – within the storyworld of his stage version. At the same time, the references write back deconstructively to the context and connotations of the Homeric narrative. One of the clearest examples of this is Walcott's adaptation of Eurycleia's cry over the slain suitors after Odysseus has taken his revenge. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Eurycleia cries with joy upon seeing the dead bodies, but is rebuked for this by Odysseus who claims it is "unholy to boast over corpses".[42] In this context, Jensen describes the nurse as a "scary, grim woman filled with hatred", her cry as a "triumphant howl, *ololyge*", and notes that "[a]t no point is it suggested that she might feel pity for . . . the suitors (21.380-7, 22.390-434, 480-501)", demonstrating her exultation over their death "in a far more blatant fashion than what any of her masters expresses".[43] Odysseus's rebuke of his nurse has been divisive amidst critics of the poem, but as Alexander C. Loney argues, probably the most popular perspective on his words has been that they express prudent restraint,[44] whereby Eurycleia delights in an explicitly evil act (Loney 2015, 67). In the OSV, however, Eurycleia's cries over the slain are framed as justified. When she enters after the battle with the suitors, Eumaus remarks to her that "[a] black howl of triumph for the slain is custom" (150). This reads like a direct response to the restraint Odysseus advises in the *Odyssey*, reframing Eurycleia's response to the slaughter as appropriate and customary rather than as exceptional. Later on, the same page, Billy Blue, narrator of the epic, also encourages the nurse to "[c]ry! Woman, your breath will unfurl their souls", after which the stage directions describe "*Rising wind, darkness.* EURYCLEA *cowls herself, whirls, a long howl*". While the encroaching darkness carries implications of moral ambiguity, this may well refer to the violent acts themselves rather than Eurycleia's reaction to them. Likewise, the wording seems to indicate that as Eurycleia's breath unfurls, it produces a kind of release for the suitor's souls, perhaps invoking Hermes's role in guiding them to the underworld in *Odyssey* 24. Eurycleia's exclamation carries the connotations of a necessary, customary release following extreme violence.[45] This moment must also be read in the context of her try-

[42] Fortenbaugh (2020, 247) referencing *Odyssey* 20.407ff.

[43] Jensen also makes the argument that Eurycleia may be seen as a double for Penelope, who stays innocent as she is asleep elsewhere, while Eurycleia takes on a more active, insidious function in the narrative, as she gets more directly involved in the suitors' and maids' slaughter (2014, 93-5).

[44] This is discussed in detail in Loney (2015, 52).

[45] Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors in the OSV has also been read as resonating with the experience of war veterans (McConnell 2012, 43).

ing to protect Melantho just moments after her cry over the suitors' bodies. The stage direction reads "(Euryclea *protects* Melantho)", and she asks her to "[s]ay you sorry, lickle mouse. Beg. Apologise" in an attempt to appease Odysseus's rage (155). In the OSV, then, Eurycleia is deliberately framed as a character who does not delight in violence and who is trying to prevent its spread. This indicates that rather than straightforwardly including those moments in Homer's *Odyssey* when her character was depicted as more morally ambiguous, Walcott deconstructs that ambiguity in favour of stressing Eurycleia's unequivocally positive qualities – her protective, nurturing nature, her role as guide, and her ability to argue with her master. Turning her into such a positive character who accumulates the best features from her trope's reception history, allows Eurycleia to take on a symbolic function, both within the OSV itself and within wider debates within classical, Afrocentric and black scholarship.

A particularly significant change Walcott makes in his adaptation of Eurycleia's character is in changing her birthplace to Egypt – Penelope assures the reader, for instance, that "no faith is surer than this old Egyptian's" (135). The reasons for this change are manifold, and have to a degree been discussed in articles like Peter Hamner's "Creolizing Homer for the Stage". He reminds us of Walcott's long-ranging interest in Egypt, which manifested already in the character of Ma Kilman, the healer woman in *Omeros*, whose practices are explicitly coded as African tribal. In his discussion of Eurycleia in the OSV, Hamner stresses the "essential African component of her re-vision", whereby she is able to impart a conflation of Greek and African influences onto her two charges Telemachos and Odysseus, emphasising the interwoven history between the two spheres in antiquity (Hamner 2001, 377).[46] Both Ethan Reed and Justine McConnell have briefly alluded to the idea that Walcott's Egyptian Eurycleia teaches, "in the spirit of Black Athena, that 'Is Egypt who cradle Greece till Greece mature'" (Reed 2018, 197).[47]

"Black Athena" refers to Martin Bernals' publication of *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, released in three volumes in 1987, 1991, and 2006 (Bernal 1987). Publication of the first volume caused a stir in the academic community at the time, wherein prominent scholars from a variety of disciplines publicly debated the validity of Bernal's claims. The primary argument of Bernal's *Black Athena* pertains to the impact of cultural spheres like Egypt on ancient Greece, which Bernal describes as the "Afroasiatic elements of Greek civilization" which are "analogous to those between Vietnam, Korea, or Japan to China" (Bernal 1989, 23). In particular, the book stresses the Levantine and North African contributions to Greek

[46] See also Burian 1999, 72, which is referenced by Hamner.

[47] Quoting OSV (9). See also McConnell, "Violence and Madness" (48).

culture (Field 2017). Alongside Edward Said's *Orientalism*, *Black Athena* has been named a "decisive starting point to reassess the Western philosophical tradition" (Peters 2014).

Many of the contemporary discussions of Bernal's work produced responses to specific as well as wider-ranging claims made in the books, from specific linguistic etymologies discussed in *Black Athena* to the question of when the prime period of contact between Egypt and the Aegean would have taken place.[48] The language that has characterised the responses to Bernal's work has, undoubtedly, contributed to the virality *Black Athena* attained both at its time of publication and in later discourses. Responses, such as those formulated by Paul O. Kristeller, have called *Black Athena* a work "full of gross errors of fact and interpretation", and "political prejudices", and have claimed that the work has "not received the sharp criticism which it deserves, obviously for political reasons" (Kristeller 1995, 125). And in his review of Martin Bernal and David Chioni Moore's *Black Athena Writes Back. Martin Bernal Responds to His Critics*, for instance, Paul Cartledge has claimed that "[i]t is rather remarkable that a reputable university press should have agreed to publish this mish-mash" (Cartledge 2003, 238). The language of the debate and responses to Bernal have tended to feature an invariably and heightened critical tone, and have often been characterised by an absolutist and polarising rhetoric, which has likely further escalated the way in which his work has been discussed in popular culture and scholarship alike.[49]

In establishing a link between Afroasiatic spheres and the Aegean, *Black Athena* inevitably became part of conversations within the field of Black Studies, whereby the project has prompted a number of responses from critics considering the changing connotations around the concept of race from antiquity to the modern era.[50] The issue of race becoming a central point in the *Black Athena* debate has surely further contributed to its entering the popular mainstream at the time, as well as to the continuing influence it holds today. An upload from 2019 of the 1996 public discussion between John Henrik Clarke, Martin Bernal, Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers, for instance, has almost one million views on YouTube and features over 4100

[48] See, for instance, Rendsburg (1989, 69; 80).

[49] For instance of this type of rhetoric: "It is false to claim, as does Bernal, that Western and especially German classical scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were unwilling, out of nationalistic or even racial prejudices, to recognize the value and importance of any non-Western culture and of any languages other than the Indo-European ones" (Kristeller 1995,125). Here, the scholar offers personal anecdotes to support his claim. The controversies of the Black Athena debate are also usefully summarised in Burstein (1996, 3-4).

[50] For instance Keita (1993, 295-314).

comments.[51] As scholars like Reed and McConnell have already recognised, the Black Athena debate especially in the 1990s seems to have shaped the representation and role of Egypt in the OSV. Egypt is a place that, while it may be physically far away, is on everyone's mind throughout the goings of the play. At the athletic competition in Alcinous's palace, for instance, the third courier casually mentions that the javelin Odysseus has hurled has "gone to Egypt", after which the fourth courier jokingly suggests that the second courier may "slip over to Egypt and bring it home" (52).

It is, in particular, Eurycleia's expanded role and her clear association with Egypt that creates the basis for the OSV's intertextual engagement with Bernal's *Black Athena.* As outlined above, in antiquity the character of the nurse as an "advocate of action" has long been marked by intelligent and convincing speech, as well as the prudent advice she is able to give to her masters. Not only in Homer's *Odyssey* but throughout the classical tradition, the nurse has thus become a diachronic *topos* carrying connotations of authority, action, and intelligence, from early choral performances to her winning unrestricted authority for action' in Euripides's *Hippolytus* (Karydas 1998, 161, 179). Creating such a clear link between Egypt and the OSV's Eurycleia, as she embodies clear power and influence over Odysseus's household at Ithaka, is a clear statement on Egypt's importance not only for the narrative but Greek culture more widely.

Eurycleia is not the only character associated with Egypt. Penelope calls the bard Demodocus an Egyptian (123), and Telemachus relates a tale that Eurycleia told him in which "Athena, the sea-eyed, is Egyptian" (8). Framing one of the most important Greek goddesses as originating from Egypt may be a direct commentary on Bernal's thesis on Egypt's impact on ancient Greek culture and religion (Bernal 2006, 8, 255, 371).[52] Telemachus later also refers to an "Egyptian herb that my mother uses" (32), expanding on the divine and mythical associations of Egypt for the world of the OSV. The most famous reference to an Egyptian herb from the *Odyssey* is the drug Helen gives to Odysseus and Menelaus's court to help them repress the pain of their war memories and allow them to reminisce (4.243-51). This has an ostensibly positive effect, allowing stories of the past to be told in a communal setting (Doyle 2010, 7). This action of underhandedly administering the Egyptian drug, however, has led to Helen being associated with a Φαρμακίς, a sorceress, comparable to mythological women like Calypso and Circe whose powers threaten Odysseus's νόστος, the *Odyssey*'s overarching goal (ibid.).

[51] Reelblack. 2019. "Dr. John Henrik Clarke vs Mary Lefkowitz: The Great Debate (1996), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmei-hUQUWY. (Accessed 25 May 2022).

[52] Also: "the etymologies claimed in this chapter, however, indicate an intimate connection between Greek religion and those of Afroasiatic speakers" (451-2).

The element of forgetfulness implicit in the administration of the drug also contributes to the sense of unease produced by "fracturing and fragmenting of the truth" within these moments of reminiscence in book IV. This is felt particularly in Helen's recounting of her own μῦθος of her implausible encounter with Odysseus (4.269-96), whereby the etymology of μῦθος does not carry the same truth value associated with λόγος, "verbal account or word" (Doyle 2010, 10-11). As A. Doyle argues, "Helen's drug cocoons her audience from the fractures in her story while those of us unaffected by such sorcery start to question her 'plausible truth'" (ibid.). In the OSV, however, the herb's ownership is transferred from Helen to Penelope, granting the latter the same power and magic but without the negative connotations associated with them. The OSV does not feature a comparable scene to *Odyssey* 4 in which Penelope might use the Egyptian drug to control or even falsify narratives of the past to portray herself in a better light. In fact, there is no comparable scene at all, only a brief reference that Penelope uses the herb to help with her sleep (32). Associating the herb with Penelope, the one who remembers, who "weaves and . . . prays that he'll one day come home" (135), is a clear way to deconstruct its Homeric associations with the dangers of forgetting.[53] Egypt remains a mystical and powerful presence in the play, but its connotations are altogether more positive, now solely associated with nurturing female characters such as Athena, Penelope and Eurycleia.

This reframing of Egypt has wider-reaching consequences on the politics of the OSV. Imagining Egypt as closer – geographically and culturally – and more influential in relation to the events of the OSV can be understood, especially at the time of the play's publication, as an implicit endorsement of Bernal's arguments as outlined in *Black Athena.* As I have outlined above, Walcott's reception style tends to be mosaic and accumulative, both in the OSV and other works such as *Omeros*, wherein the wide-ranging and diverse quality of the references has often contributed to a sense of ambiguity associated with many of the characters and storylines. *Omeros*'s Achille, for instance, completes a quasi-epic κατάβασις journey of discovering his ancestral roots in West Africa. His storyline ends on a note of uncertainty wherein he is able to connect with aspects of the past, but experiences most of it as imagined and fragmented, and his own identity as a Caribbean man, named after a Greek hero, keeps him from connecting with vital parts of his identity.[54] His story ends with Helen, the mother of his child, refusing

[53] Penelope further disentangles her possible associations with Helen when she states "I'm not Menelaus' whore" after Odysseus has killed the suitors (154).

[54] Achille's conversation with his father Afolabe's spirit: "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" (Walcott 2002, 137). This is discussed in detail in Scherer (2021, 168-86).

to give their baby an African name, a decision that becomes emblematic of the narrative's ambiguous outlook on the ways in which Achille's origins will continue to shape his life and that of his descendants (Walcott 2002, 72). Especially within this tradition of Walcott's mode of reception, his reframing of Egypt in the OSV is uncharacteristically and univocally positive, and thus worth taking note of.

Walcott's representation of Egypt accompanies the transcultural framework of the play, echoed within the narrative's references to both the environmental features, languages, music, and religions of the Caribbean as well as the play's wider allusions to African literature.[55] Interweaving retellings of ancient Greek narratives with Caribbean and African cultural referents, in conjunction with the allusions to Bernal's *Black Athena*, allows the OSV to make more than a neutral gesture to a current debate within scholarship. Walcott here declares allegiance to the spirit of Bernal's argument in outlining a mutually constitutive relationship between Greece, African, and Caribbean cultural spheres, which is reminiscent of the impact Bernal described Egypt as having on ancient Greek language and culture.[56] Although in isolation each allusion could be read as minimal and schematic, in conjunction they compound to Walcott taking a stance in a debate contemporary to the writing of his play, in describing Egypt and its influences as both nurturing and culturally significant.[57] This fits into the established pattern of Walcott's mode of reception: the ways in which singular references may be missed by an audience but even schematic audience memories can accumulate into an overall mood, idea, or message through the widespread distribution of diverse allusions throughout Walcott's texts. Walcott's reference to *Black Athena* may not be picked up by all members of his audience, but the Afrocentric message of the OSV is communicated through the heightened importance of Egypt across the play, Eurycleia's positive representation, as well

[55] The reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The potential intertextual relationship between the OSV's underworld scene has been compared by Scherer to Kamau Brathwaite's system of *tidalectics* (2021, 192ff.).

[56] For a similar line of argument, it is also worth considering Wole Soyinka's writings on the relationship between Greece and Africa.

[57] I disagree with Matryniuk and Burian, who argue that "Walcott sets up the convention not least to subvert it, by revealing Eurycleia as the bearer of an older culture and its wisdom . . . but the point is surely not to endorse 'Afrocentrism,' but rather to recognize the layered complexities that negotiate difference not only in terms of opposition but also of inclusion" (Martyniuk 2005, 193). While Walcott's style of reception creates complexities and, at times, contradictions in its interweaving of different cultural contexts and perspectives, references to Egypt are frequent and positive enough to make it likely that Walcott at least intended to create a positive quasi-representation of Bernal's line of argument in *Black Athena*.

as allusions to writers such as Chinua Achebe.[58] Within a sea of allusions, a core message is established through accumulation, even if core elements of the mosaic remain incomplete. An analogy for the play's type of reception may be found in Telemachus's conversation with Captain Mentes after his conversation with Nestor:

> TELEMACHUS (*Aside to* MENTES)
> What have I learned from this foam-haired philosopher?
> CAPTAIN MENTES What the young should learn. Patience.
> TELEMACHUS He's told me nothing.
> CAPTAIN MENTES You heard what the young need to hear: old men suffer.
> (28)

The complex interaction between Telemachus and Nestor is stripped down to a core message, a core feeling about the world: with time comes experience as well as, inevitably, immense suffering. It does not matter if the audience remembers or even understands every historical reference Nestor touches on on in his conversation with Telemachus; as long as this core fact about the OSV's storyworld, this core aspect of its *Stimmung* is communicated, the play has achieved its aim. And as long as the audience has understood Eurycleia to be a positive – and most importantly, Egyptian – influence on the play's Greek *oikos*, it is likely to understand the OSV's intention to highlight the important relationship between Africa and Greece, even if it is unaware of either facet of the play's context: the Black Athena debate; the ways in which Caribbean literature has systematically been de-privileged in comparison with the European classical tradition; or Walcott's rewriting of Eurycleia's cry after the suitors' death, rendering her response more positive and less ambiguous than in Homer.

Eurycleia's influential position over the play's other characters and her unequivocally positive representation across the narrative works in accumulation with the OSV's other references to African literature and Caribbean landscapes, as well as its anti-colonial rhetoric. Together, all these strands of representation create an overall impression of Walcott's politics of cultural equality and envisaged simultaneity. This synchronous approach to reading Eurycleia does not undermine the impact of Walcott's diachronic engagements with ancient sources. The adaptation of Eurycleia's character in the OSV is detailed in its interactions with the nurse character's reception

[58] Justine McConnell has also outlined the influence of the Yoruba trickster figure, Ijapa the turtle, as well as the Ashanti Anansi the spider on the text (2012, 52). Meanwhile, Zargarzadeh and Gabriel have read Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors as influenced by Édouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon's ideas on the effects of violence (2020, 123).

history across classical literature and scholarship, but in the context of a fast-paced performance many of those interactions will remain unnoticed by the play's audience, especially those without a classical education. Instead, the OSV works through accumulative memory, relying on what an audience might remember or associate with Eurycleia as the narrative progresses. Therein, the fact that Eurycleia is a nurturing, intelligent, and compassionate figure in the play, fundamental to the wellbeing of the play's *oikos*, becomes inextricable from the fact that she is an Egyptian. References heaped upon references work together to create an impression of the play's storyworld and politics, and let all members of the audience come to their own conclusion on the question of whether or not the Graeco-Roman classics are separate from African traditions – even if they have never heard of the *Black Athena* debate.

Across his oeuvre, Walcott has created new meanings and messages out of an interwoven web of existing allusions and references. The diachronic mosaic of Homer, Dante, Joyce, and others with Caribbean influences and traditions allows *Omeros* to exist in a simultaneous liminality, wherein none of these allusions appear to be prioritised or hierarchical.[59] The same technique can be seen in Walcott's reception of Robinson Crusoe, who Norval Edwards refers to as "one of the 'inaugural figures' of the colonial encounter" and who becomes "simultaneously Adam, Columbus, God, missionary, beachcomber, pirate, and Daniel Defoe" (Edwards and Walcott 1996, 15-16). Thus, Walcott's Crusoe becomes representative of the artist's status in the modern Caribbean, immersed in a variety of traditions and yet strangely separate from them, "a castaway who . . . has to forge an art from the detritus of shipwreck, and the encounter with a new world" (ibid.). Edwards reads this accumulation of influences alongside Eliot's thesis around imitation and originality, wherein the artist as the "individual talent" interacts with a "monumental order of tradition" (Edwards and Walcott 1996, 25). I would contend, however, that Walcott's relationship to tradition is too complex to fit neatly into this model. Walcott's famous meta-textual claim that he never read Homer's work "all the way through" takes a deliberate step back from the ancient Greek – and Europeanised – "monumental" tradition of the classics (Walcott 2002, 283). As Natalie Melas has argued, he is performing a gesture of distancing, a "rhetoric of disavowal" (Melas 2005, 157). She names his form of reception "incidental", "detachable", existing "only in the most general way" (ibid.). What she is alluding to here is the schematic nature of Walcott's references, in which, despite their clear relationship to ancient characters and narratives, they are simultaneously decontextualised

[59] This already discussed this at length in the chapter on Walcott in Scherer's *Memories of the Classical Underworld* (152ff.).

from elements of their diachronic reception history that would contradict the overall tone, message, or intention of Walcott's adaptation. Eurycleia is thus adapted as a wise caretaker from Egypt, her moment of exclamation over the dead suitors is rewritten as justified in the OSV, and Helen's Egyptian memory drug is mysteriously turned into a sleeping aid.

Omeros offers another example for this type of adaptation. Walcott's protagonist, Achille, assumes the role of Odysseus as he enters an underworld through a sub-nautical κατάβασις and recovers fragments of his ancestral past. In Homer's *Odyssey* the κατάβασις – or νέκυια – occurs in book XI, in the midst of Odysseus's wanderings. Rather than also adapting other elements of Odysseus's travels that might counteract the postcolonial impetus of the work, such as the Greek hero's warmongering and plundering, this episode remains in many ways separate from its ancient inspirations, wherein the trope of the underworld descent remains but the rest of the *Odyssey* is lost as an influence on Achille's κατάβασις.[60]

This is not necessarily an "incidental" form of reception. Many of the detailed implications that surround the κατάβασις in the *Odyssey* and its later reception history are adapted into the storyworld of *Omeros*. The failed embrace between Odysseus and his mother Anticleia, for instance, anticipates the fragmentary vision of Africa that Achille inhabits wherein he cannot touch nor change the history of enslavement and colonialism he later witnesses. Melas's claim that "[i]t is possible to write a great deal about *Omeros* without ever referring to Homer in any thoroughgoing way, or indeed mentioning him at all" nonetheless touches on an important aspect of Walcott's reception practices (Melas 2005, 157); a reader can understand the representation of the past in *Omeros* as fragmentary and incomplete without reading this through a Homeric lens. In Walcott's epic, Major Plunkett fails to write a history of the island, Achille does not remember his own ancestral name, and Helen sees her classical predecessor as a shadow that pursues her. All these are moments that accumulate to create the impression that the past is often inaccessible and must be restored through imagination, so that *Omeros*, in a meta-textual sense, may finally "enter that light beyond metaphor" (Walcott 2002, 271).

Walcott employs a radical form of memory-driven reception, throwing a wide net of allusions into his presumed transcultural pool of readership, and relying on audience members / readers of *Omeros* and the OSV to remember some of their associated characteristics. Those unfamiliar with classical

[60] Similarly, considering the *Aeneid* as an intertext of Walcott's *Omeros*, "Aeneas's forceful subjugation of the native inhabitants of Italy would, of course, violently clash with the anti-imperialist tone of *Omeros*", and is thus discarded from the adaptation (Scherer 2021, 167).

references may be familiar with the work of African writers like Chinua Achebe, and understand the destabilisation of Odysseus's Caribbean household as analogous to the impact of the European invasion on pre-colonial life in Nigeria. Walcott's allusions are schematic in that they adopt decontextualised versions of narratives and characters to fit into the *Stimmung* and intentions of his storyworld. All allusions are subordinated to this aim. Their acceptance by the audience relies on three factors: their brevity, which prevents its questioning changes to a perceived "original"; the deconstructive mode of the overall work, leading the audience to accept any perceived changes as intentional; and even possibly a presumption that the audience's memory may be incomplete, preventing them from noticing changes. Even within his rewriting of one of the most well-known classical epics in the OSV, more overt in its relationship to Homer than his "epic" *Omeros*, Walcott is gesturing towards a radical form of reception, his idea of "simultaneity",[61] wherein each allusion is integrated into his work as a fluid and decontextualised memory rather than a tradition that may carry connotations that would not fit his intentions (Walcott 1993). It is an attempt at levelling a hierarchy in which the classical referents are seen as primary and constitutive of later forms of reception, wherein Caribbean culture is not a "second-rate Aegean" but instead part of a global sphere of simultaneous creation.[62]

There is an undeniably political impetus behind this type of reception. Its impulse is egalitarian as it draws on a range of sources from across the globe while requiring only a fragmented, schematic and memory-driven understanding of a classical tradition that has often been locked behind an elite and Western education. It is unsurprising that the types of messages evoked through Walcott's work would be likewise politically charged: critiquing Fascism through the Cyclops episode, centring an anti-war message through Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors, and, finally, taking sides in the *Black Athena* debate that continued throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s. As shown above, the references to *Black Athena*, like many of the others in the play, are unspecific and decontextualised in their adaptation; however, they cannot be divorced from the play's overall political intentions. Walcott's references to Bernal's work are inextricably tied to his positive reframing of Eurycleia, to his references to other Caribbean and African myths and contexts, as well as to his vision of an egalitarian simultaneity, implicit in his style of reception. Likewise, it would be contentious to argue that Wal-

[61] See Walcott 1993b and Hardwick (2002, 244).

[62] Walcott's ironic statement on this: "What this does immediately is . . . say to the Caribbean sea. . .You must think yourself as a second-rate Aegean, or, on a good day, you can look like the Mediterranean" (1997, 232); quoted and discussed also in McConnell 2013, 122.

cott would not in any way be impacted by the racially charged discourse surrounding *Black Athena* or by the developing impacts of neocolonialism on St. Lucia. As Melas outlines, St. Lucia received 341,282 visitors in 1993, the year after *Omeros*'s publication, about 160,000 among them cruise ship passengers, in comparison with a native population of 135,000 people. As she phrases it, "Walcott awakens from the colonial nightmare of History to the global or neocolonial day-dream of tourism" (Melas 2005, 152). This is a context that has shaped the design of *Omeros* as well as the OSV, wherein the readers / audience members who consume these "Caribbean leisure spaces" and the "familiar colonial tropes – enchanted island, pre-lapsarian paradise, Robinsonnade and the romance of the shipwreck, the plantation fantasy" and others – become tourists in their own right (Melas 2005, 155). Walcott recreates the tourist experience of the Caribbean within his own storyworlds; but his adaptation is non-selective and also makes us tourists of ancient Greece, of Rome, of Dante, of Joyce, of America and elsewhere. And while many of the plays' interpretations can be gleaned from their most prominent reception contexts, the Graeco-Roman classics, those works do not carry the sole weight of the interpretative burden. Alone, they cannot gesture towards Walcott's message of equality between "original" and "adaptation" contexts and therein his way of advocating for social and cultural equality between Europe and Caribbean. By the same token, Walcott's Eurycleia cannot be read as a simple adaptation or deconstruction of her role in Homer; she has to simultaneously be understood within the various African and Caribbean traditions Walcott is immersed in. The positive aspects of the nurse are present in ancient epic and later tragedy, but they are politicised in Walcott through the framework of *Black Athena*, which then compounds with the play's wider politics of simultaneity, equality and social justice. After all, "[t]he classics can console. But not enough" (Walcott and Hirsch 1997, 111).

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