



Philoctete's Healing: Echoes of Dante's Purgatorio in Walcott's Omeros

By Pamela Beattie and Simona Bertacco

History says, Don't hope
on this side of the grave
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
and hope and history rhyme.

(Seamus Heaney, *The Cry of Troy*)

1. INTRODUCTION

Entering a text that, from its title, recalls another is a complex reading adventure: we think we know what to expect – and, at least to a certain extent, we do – yet we are curious to see what happens to the familiar plot and the familiar characters. Rewritings force us to re-read the old text face to face with the new one, often from the perspective of a minor character, to try to understand why, for instance, a book such as *Robinson Crusoe* has become so central to the Western canon, but also which other books have been excluded from that same canon and why. One such complex reading adventure is the one awaiting the reader of *Omeros*, a book-length poem published by



Derek Walcott in 1990 and considered by many critics as Walcott's most important book. It certainly is Walcott's most famous book and, with a title reminiscent of the Greek poet par excellence, an ideal text to talk about re-writings and re-readings of the Western classics. As readers, we enter *Omeros* expecting a close re-writing of the *Odyssey*. We find, instead, a text that recalls, in its structure, its leading themes, and its prosody, Dante's *Commedia*, in particular, the central *cantica* of *Purgatorio*. We are, literally, thrown in the middle of an intricate web of textual references by a writer who was very well-read in the literary traditions that as a colonial he claimed as his own.

In this essay, we will follow the interpretation that can be unlocked by reading Walcott alongside with Dante. We will focus on the character of Philoctete, with which the poem of *Omeros* begins and on the theme of healing that he embodies in the poem. While Philoctetes, with an *-s*, is a 'very' minor character in Homer's *Odyssey*, Walcott's appropriation of the Greek characters in *Omeros* is both complicated and enhanced by his reading of Dante. Indeed, the theme of healing is not only pervasive in Walcott's *Omeros*, but it represents the beating heart in Dante's vision of repentance from sin and salvation in his *Commedia*. And it is the poetry, in particular Dante's and Walcott's creative use of *terza rima*, that – before anything else – leads us on this interpretive path, because of how the two poems read and sound. If the *terza rima* was the form Dante 'invented' for his new poem in the vernacular, the fact that Walcott adopts the *terza rima* in *Omeros* is in itself an important intertextual reference that cannot be left unscrutinized.

For Dante, the interlocking rhyme scheme demonstrates his vision of an orderly universe replete with underlying patterns created by God. The systematic, almost mathematical, approach to his subject reflects Dante's ultimate optimism about human nature and Divine Providence, despite his biting and acerbic criticisms of the institutions of Church and State which govern the world he lives in. The heart-wrenching beauty of his poetry coupled with the immediacy and the vernacularity of his language manage somehow to give a voice to both the lowly along with the great. Indeed, despite the hints of arrogance and self-aggrandizement in the *Commedia* (which, it must be noted, Dante himself recognizes and refers to multiple times, especially in *Purgatorio*), it is ultimately the poem itself to which Dante ascribes significance. The essential difference between Dante 'the poet' and Dante 'the pilgrim' in the poem highlights Dante's primary concern with the soul of the individual person, no matter how great or how humble. His argument seems to be that the wellbeing of society, as mirrored in its institutions, depends in turn on the spiritual health and wellbeing of these individuals.

Walcott's *Omeros* demonstrates a similar interest in the complex relationships between individuals and the societies in which they live. *Omeros* embraces a markedly different view of history from that manifested in Dante's *Commedia*, which is still strongly inflected by the ghostly memories of a Mediterranean unified by imperial Rome and an imagined "Christendom." However, while *Omeros* initially seems to eschew Dante's view of a world inscribed by a benevolent divine providence, Walcott's creative manipulation of *terza rima* within the overall structure of his poem shows that he has appropriated more than some of the formal characteristics of the *Commedia*.



Like Dante, Walcott manipulates the complex relationship between structure and meaning in his epic poem in a way that ultimately betrays a similar optimism about the possibilities of human nature.¹

Although Dante does not refer specifically to the legends about Philoctetes in his poem – somewhat surprisingly in light of the vast array of legendary and mythological characters he deploys in the *Commedia* – he does integrate Christianized versions of the classical themes illustrated by these legends most pointedly into the central *cantica* of the *Commedia*, namely the *Purgatorio*. Dante's unique and (it must be said) somewhat unorthodox understanding of the 'economy' of purgatory on display in his poem, centers on themes of healing and reconciliation. These are expressed not only in the sacramental sense of later medieval Christian theology and religious practice, but also in terms of their impact on human relationships. In particular, Dante's *Purgatorio* explores the link between individual healing and reconciliation, and their effects on community. This same thematic juxtaposition is fulfilled precisely by the character of Philoctete in Walcott's *Omeros*. Although Philoctete is usually considered a minor character in terms of his function in the poem's over-arching narrative, thematically he serves as the lynchpin for Walcott's poetic exploration of these same themes which are so central for understanding Dante. In a sense, the significance of this minor character for the meaning of *Omeros*, can be seen as a metaphor for Walcott's championship of the ordinary man and the "everyday" as fitting subjects for his, to use Hamner's term, "epic of the dispossessed" (Hammer 1997).

2. PHILOCTETE'S WOUND

In classical legend, Philoctetes is dispossessed of his heroic opportunities at the outset of the Trojan War due to a combination of ill-fortune and the smooth-talking persuasiveness of Odysseus. As with most classical mythology, there are many variations of the legend of Philoctetes, but the general outlines of the story are closely linked to the myth of the apotheosis of Heracles and can be sketched out as follows. Philoctetes' homeland was in the north of Greece, in Thessaly, a wild and mountainous place. This is where Heracles fled at the end of his life, and commanded that he be burned alive on a funeral-pyre sacred to Zeus. When the time came to light the pyre, only Philoctetes could be persuaded to do it, and in return, Heracles bequeathed him his famous bow and arrows, originally gifted to him by Apollo. Subsequently, Philoctetes set sail for Troy with the other Achaeans but *en route* suffered a terrible misfortune. The place where the fateful mishap occurred is variously located but is

¹ Walcott's ambivalence towards History with a capital 'H' is well known. Indeed, he addressed the issue in his essay "The Muse of History" and *Omeros* contains sporadic but numerous (mostly) negative references to History. On the other hand, Walcott is a poet very much interested in structure, something that certainly has parallels with Dante's poetry and therefore it is possible to see a complicated echo of a Scholastic world view in the background of *Omeros* alongside the ambivalence about History. For more discussion on this point, see Loreto 2009. We thank the anonymous reviewer for this reference.



consistently associated with a shrine on one of the Aegean islands where the Achaeans were instructed to conduct ritual sacrifices. Philoctetes knew where to find the shrine because his father, who sailed with Jason and the Argonauts on their quest for the Golden Fleece, had previously stopped there to sacrifice to the same deity, Chryse. The shrine was in the open air and so Philoctetes inadvertently invaded the sacred precinct and was bitten in the foot by a serpent guarding the place. The wound suppurated and soon the stench and the cries of excruciating pain uttered by Philoctetes made it impossible for him and the other Greek leaders to complete the required religious rites. Odysseus was instrumental in convincing the others to abandon Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos, leaving him exiled with only his magical bow and arrow for survival. But this was not the end of Philoctetes' story.

After ten years, the war against Troy was not going well for the Greeks. They beseeched their own seer, Calchas, for advice and were told that they should capture the Trojan prince Helenus, a prophet in his own right. Only Helenus could foretell how the war would end. He prophesied that the war would only reach a conclusion when two things happened: first, Achilles' son needed to come to Troy from his home in Scyros and have returned to him Achilles' armour, his heritage. Second, Philoctetes must rejoin his comrades at Troy and launch the invincible arrows of Heracles against it. Both of these conditions were accomplished. Odysseus was instrumental in fetching Philoctetes from Lemnos; Philoctetes' arrows killed Paris and set in motion the episode of the Trojan Horse. At Troy, Philoctetes' wound was healed by Machaon, the son of Asclepius (the god of healing) and following the war, he returned safely home to Thessaly.²

Philoctetes is very much a minor character in Homer, mentioned only in passing in each of his epic poems. For example, he makes a brief appearance in the second book of the *Iliad*, in the famous catalogue or enumeration of Greek (Achaean) warriors and their ships that set out for Troy, which deserves to be quoted at length:

From Methone, Thaumacia, Meliboea, and rugged Olizon, seven ships, commanded by the mighty bowman Philoctetes, were manned by fifty oarsmen skilled in archery. Now, King Philoctetes lay in agony on holy Lemnos' isle, where the Greeks had left him suffering a deadly water-snake's foul venom. Though longing for him, his men were not leaderless, since Medon, the bastard son of Oileus, commanded, whom Rhene had born to that sacker of cities. From Tricca, and Ithome of the crags, from Oechalia home of Eurytus, came thirty hollow ships, commanded by Asclepius' two sons, the skillful healers Podaleirius and Machaon. (*Iliad*, 2. 681-759)

² Surviving ancient Greek sources for the legends surrounding Philoctetes include (Pseudo) Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca*), Stasinus of Cyprus (*Cypria*), Lesches of Mitylene (*Little Iliad*), Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argonautica*), Pindar (*Odes*), Strabo (*Geographica*), and of course, Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*). Although all three of the great tragedians of classical Greece wrote plays in which Philoctetes was the central character, only one by Sophocles remains (his *Philoctetes at Troy* is also lost).



This brief passage, which simultaneously looks backwards and forwards in time, is important both in the classical myth and in Walcott's appropriation of the character because it decisively associates the healing of Philoctetes' wound with the success of his greater community, even though they have previously abandoned him. Walcott also situates the healing of *his* Philoctete's wound in a temporal locus that looks both to the past and conveys a sense of optimism for a positive future through acceptance.

In the *Odyssey*, when Telemachus visits the court of King Nestor of Pylos in the course of his search for his father, Nestor recounts the safe homecoming (*nostos*) of some of the Greek heroes from Troy, including Philoctetes:

And so, dear boy, I made it home from Troy,
in total ignorance, knowing nothing of their fates,
the ones who stayed behind:
who escaped with their lives and who went down.
But still, all I've gathered by hearsay, sitting here
in my own house – that you'll learn, it's only right,
I'll hide nothing now.
They say the Myrmidons,
those savage spearmen led by the shining son
of lionhearted Achilles, traveled home unharmed.
Philoctetes the gallant son of Poias, safe as well [...]
(*The Odyssey*, 3. 206-215)³

Brief as these references are, they do indicate several of the elements that Walcott deploys in his use of the Philoctetes character, primarily the convergence of themes such as the isolating effect of the wound, the connection of that wound to sacred space and practice, the natural environment as a locus for the sacred space, the connection between the sufferer and the broader community which ultimately relies on him for success, the theme of healing, and an allusion to a successful homecoming. This last point is the theme underlying the entire *Odyssey* and clearly inspires the framework for Walcott's own exploration of questions surrounding what a home is and what it means to come home as unifying themes in *Omeros*.

In Walcott's poem, the curing of Philoctete's wound becomes emblematic of Walcott's own sense of homecoming to St. Lucia. For this reason, it can be argued that greater inspiration for Philoctete's role in *Omeros* is perhaps derived from Sophocles' eponymous play which expands on the metaphor of the wound in exploring the social roles of mythic heroes.⁴ Sophocles' treatment of the Homeric material focuses on

³ Philoctetes is also referenced in Book 8. 250-253 (p. 198) by Odysseus when he is engaged in his athletic contest with the Phaeacians; Odysseus boasts: "Philoctetes alone outshot me there at Troy/ when ranks of Achaean archers bent their bows. / Of the rest I'd say that I outclass them all--/ men still alive, who eat their bread on earth."

⁴ We are not arguing that Walcott necessarily read the Sophocles play or consciously borrowed from it; Sophocles' version of the myth of Philoctetes' wound was well-known both in the ancient and medieval worlds just as it continues to be well-known today. Rather we are drawing attention to the thematic coincidences between the treatment of Philoctetes in Sophocles and Philoctete in *Omeros*.



Philoctetes' innocence and raises issues of basic humanity centering on justice and empathy. In so far as the wound of Walcott's Philoctete stands in for the wounds of colonialism, which in *Omeros* demand both recognition and justice, the two texts resonate with each other. These affinities in theme are even more striking when one considers Sophocles' emphasis on the reintegration of Philoctetes with the Greek comrades who had previously abandoned him and the subsequent healing of his wound as prerequisites for Greek success against Troy. In *Omeros*, the healing of Philoctete's wound becomes the catalyst for the moments of self-discovery, healing, and reconciliation for all the other characters in the poem. The process culminates in the penultimate chapter which focuses on the hope for the future symbolized by Helen's pregnancy. Ma Kilman speaks:

"[...] Philo standing godfather. You see?
Standing, Philo, standing straight! that sore used to burn
that man till he bawl, songez?"
"I heard his agony
from the yam garden," Seven Seas said. [...]
Seven Seas sighed. What was the original fault?
Plunkett promise me a pig next Christmas. He'll heal
in time too"
"We shall all heal." (62.ii, 318)⁵

Significantly, the reference to the "original fault" in this passage links the motif of healing, reconciliation, and new life to Dante's exploration of the remedy for original sin in *Purgatorio*. Philoctete "standing straight" in health echoes Virgil's words to Dante after he has passed through the cleansing fire of the final terrace of purgation:

Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno:
libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
e fallo fora non fare a suo senno.
Per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio.
(*Purgatorio*, 27.139-142)⁶

⁵ All subsequent references to *Omeros* will be parenthetical and include chapter, section, and page number. Walcott is not the only contemporary 'postcolonial' poet to seize upon the powerful imagery of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* for adaptation and meaningful expression of contemporary political and social issues. In Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1991), which was used for the opening epigraph, for instance, Heaney notes parallels between the themes of Sophocles' play and the process of reconciliation following the collapse of apartheid in South Africa.

⁶ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri Volume II: Purgatorio*. Robert M. Durling, ed. and trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 462-463. All subsequent references to the *Purgatorio* will be to this edition and translation.

No longer await any word or sign from me: free,
upright, and whole is your will, and it would be a
fault not to act according to its intent.
Therefore you over yourself I crown and mitre.



Although Dante would not have encountered Philoctetes directly through the Greek sources, he would certainly have been familiar with the legend of Philoctetes' wound and its classical associations with communal reconciliation. For example, Dante drew frequently from the well of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a significant repository of classical mythology whose overall theme of transformation resonated with Dante's thematic interests in the *Commedia* in general and *Purgatorio* in particular. In fact, Ovid's references to Philoctetes in the *Metamorphoses* (three in total), pertain primarily to his association with the legends of Heracles, his bow and arrows, and their part in the climax to the Trojan war, and this may partially explain why Dante does not refer to Philoctetes specifically.⁷ Moreover, Dante's main source for classical mythology is, of course, Virgil, who in the *Aeneid* includes only the briefest reference to Philoctetes (understandable in view of the fact that he was an enemy of Aeneas' Trojan people). Virgil eschews discussion of the wound entirely, mentioning only a later legend recounting that, after his return from the Trojan War, Philoctetes was driven out of Thessaly and established a small, fortified town on the Italian coast.⁸ Nevertheless, Dante's exploration of the link between individual and communal reconciliation and healing found especially in the *Purgatorio*, receives some of its distinctive shape through his fruitful encounters with the full range of classical texts, even if Greek ideas were mediated through Latin translations and adaptations.⁹ Just as Walcott will do later, Dante freely weaves these classical characters and themes into the new tapestry of his poem, appropriating them for his distinct poetic aim.

In chapter 54 of *Omeros*, Walcott articulates the complex relationship with history and tradition for the postcolonial writer:

All that Greek manure under the green bananas
[...]

⁷ Ovid's references to the Philoctetes legends can be found in *Metamorphoses*, Book IX (The Death and Transformation of Hercules), Book XIII (The Debate Over Achilles' Arms: Ajax's Speech), and Book XIII (The Debate Over Achilles' Arms: Ulysses' Speech). These passages emphasize the prophecies about the future role of Hercules' arms at Troy, the suffering and isolation of Philoctetes on Lemnos, and his role in the final destruction of Troy. Dante does include many references to Hercules in the *Commedia*, at least thirteen in *Inferno*; in the Middle Ages, Hercules was often read as a benefactor to mankind and a chief mythic parallel to Christ. On this see Clarence H. Miller (1984). Other classical Latin sources of the Philoctetes legends include Quintus Smyrnaeus (*The Fall of Troy*), Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History*), Hgyines (*Fabulae*), Pausanias (*Description of Greece*), Valerius Flaccus (*Argonautica*), and, of course, Virgil (*Aeneid*), Dante's primary inspiration.

⁸ Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.475-476; trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006) 117: "here little Petelia built by Philoctetes, / the Meliboean chief, lies safe behind its wall." It should probably be noted, however, that this book begins with Aeneas' horrific encounter with Polydorus' ghost who speaks to him through the oozing blood that comes out of the green stalks of a bush that Aeneas tries to pluck in order to sacrifice to his mother and the other gods (*Aeneid* 3.24-82). The motifs of wounds and ghosts in the natural world may find faint echoes in *Omeros*, but are certainly a source for Dante's "wood of the suicides" in the seventh circle of hell (*Inferno* 13).

⁹ For an accessible survey of Dante's encounter with the classical poets which addresses questions of mimesis and literary models, see Kevin Brownlee (2007).



What I had read and rewritten till literature
was guilty as History. When would the sails drop
from my eyes [...]
when would I enter that light beyond metaphor?
But it was mine to make what I wanted of it, or
what I thought was wanted. [...] (54.iii, 271-272)

Manure is something other than “shit” – a word Walcott does not shy away from. So, his reader is forced to grapple with the positive, if ambivalent, implications of his choice of vocabulary in order to grasp the complexity of his attitude towards his classical sources. The final line and a half of the quotation hammers the point home, which is one that Dante would have happily endorsed. Confirmation of Walcott’s approach can be seen in the often referenced lines of poetry from chapter 56, where Walcott the character confesses to Omeros that he never read his book, “not all the way through”. [...] “Forget the gods,” Omeros growled, “and read the rest.” Although often read literally, as a kind of confession on Walcott’s part, this passage could be read metaphorically in the context of the poem: Omeros’ instruction to “forget the gods and read the rest” can be seen as a validation of Walcott’s instinct “to make what I wanted of it [classical literature]”. The several references to Omeros as “Master” in the same section (56.iii, 282-284) also confirm this view, while underscoring the complexity of the intertextuality of the poem. Omeros is recognized as a master, but the meaning of the word “master”, given the Antillean context, is polyvalent: it simultaneously evokes the wound of slavery as well as the healing effects of literature.

3. A POSTCOLONIAL PURGATORY

Both Dante and Walcott are highly allusive poets, their words often evoking only the barest hints of the literary texts that were inspirational to them. Recognition of Walcott’s conflation of the ancient legends of Philoctetes’ wound with the Christian themes of reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing evident in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, is a prime example of the benefits of reading Dante and Walcott side by side with some of their classical sources. The central chapters in the narrative arch of Philoctete’s healing, when Ma Kilman finally discovers the African plant that she will place in Philoctete’s (baptismal) bath to heal his wound, are evidence of this conflation. Since the very beginning of the poem, Ma Kilman who is represented as a traditional African wise-woman (*obeah*), has been struggling to remember an ancient remedy for Philoctete’s pain (Book One, 3.ii-iii, 15-19). The memory tickles at the back of her mind:

“It have a flower somewhere, a medicine, and ways
my grandmother would boil it. I used to watch ants
climbing her white flowerpot. But God, in which place?”
Where was this root? What senna, what tepid tisanes,
could clean the branched river of his corrupted blood,
whose sap was a wounded cedar’s? (3, ii, 19)



The foreshadowing of Philoctete's cure is embedded in the name of Ma Kilman's café, "the oldest far in the village" with its sign: "NO PAIN CAFÉ ALL WELCOME."

The NO PAIN was not her own
idea, but her dead husband's. "Is a prophecy,"
Ma Kilman would laugh. [...]" (3.ii, 17).

However, the actual process of healing does not begin until Book Six of the poem. As Ma Kilman, covered in sweat and the trappings of a respectable, western, church-going female, makes her way to five o'clock Mass,

[...] The white spray of the thorn,
which the swift bends lightly, waited for a black hand
to break it in bits and boil its leaves for the wound
from the pronged anchor rusting in the clean bottom-sand. (47.i, 235-236).

As she sits in church where sometimes she has to straighten her wig as she prayed "until the wafer dissolved her with tenderness, / the way a raindrop melts on the tongue of a breeze [...] / numbering her beads, she began her own litany/ of berries [...]" (47.i, 236). In this remarkable passage of the poetic aura of the ordinary, the imagery gradually shifts from that of traditional Catholic devotional practice to that of traditional African folk medicine by enumerating the properties of the indigenous flowers of the island:

the hole in the daisy's palm, with its drying blood
that was the hole in the fisherman's shin since he was
pierced by a hook; [...] (47.i, 236)

Previously the vice of the "swollen stockings" around her calves had reminded her of Philoctete's wound and praying the rosary reminded her of the herbal remedy she was seeking. However, the plant continues to keep "its secret when her memory reaches". It is not until after church, Ma Kilman is drawn towards it by its stench. "The mulch / it was rooted in carried the smell, when it gangrened, / of Philoctete's cut." (47.ii, 237-238) Following the odorous associations of the healing plant, the reader cannot help but think of the smelly but nourishing "manure" of the western tradition when reading these lines.

And then Walcott elides two of the most striking symbols of *Omeros*: the ants, which represent the enslaved ancestors of the poem's humble protagonists, and the swift, which Walcott has linked to the theological and spiritual implications of the crucifix of the suffering Christ. The swift has carried the seed of the healing plant to the island and the lines of ants, foreshadowed on her grandmother's flowerpot in Book One, literally lead Ma Kilman to the place up the mountain where the plant could be found (47.ii-iii, 237-239). Ma Kilman's discovery depends upon her recognition of the ants and her great-grandmother, which includes the names of the traditional African



gods – a language that Walcott has now incorporated into the story of his St. Lucia. (48.i-iii, 24240-245). Ma Kilman bays in agony, a sound that reverberates in the reader's mind while the echoes of Philoctetes' cries of pain and alienation in Sophocles' play mingle with those of Philoctete in Walcott's poem. Traces of the classical Philoctetes' wound are clear in these chapters of *Omeros*. But so are the Dantean allusions present in Walcott's Christological imagery, the Christian ritual passage, and Ma Kilman's salvific struggle up her own purgatorial mountain. Again, the allusions are complex, partial, and multivalent but that is what makes these passages of poetry so compelling. Whatever Walcott may say about History (with a capital "H") in *Omeros*, the locus of Philoctete's healing is found in a simultaneous moment of looking back and looking forward.

This is Dante's vision of healing in *Purgatorio* as well. Central to medieval Christian sacramental theology surrounding what is today referred to as the sacrament of reconciliation are three crucial components of self-examination (looking back), confession (the present), and penance/reconciliation (looking forward). These are signaled by Dante in the rich allegory of the Gates of Purgatory (*cantos* 9 and 10). While he lies dreaming, Dante is carried up to the gates by St. Lucia, the blind saint who represents spiritual sight, in a scene that is reminiscent of the dreamscape of Ma Kilman's purgatorial struggle up the side of the island of St. Lucia's volcanic mountain towards the plant that will contribute to healing the island's postcolonial wound. Walcott is sitting on the mountain and is happy. He writes:

but I saw no shadow underline my being;
I could see through my own palm with every crease
and every line transparent since I was seeing
the light of St. Lucia at last through her own eyes,
her blindness, her inward vision as revealing
as his [*Omeros*'], because a closing darkness brightens love,
and I felt every wound pass. I saw the healing
thorns of dry cactus drop to the dirt, and the grove
where the sibyl swayed. I thought of all my travelling (56.ii, 282)

Just as the structure of Walcott's narrative itself, as well as the journeys taken by his protagonists, are circular, so is Dante's climb to the top of Mount Purgatory, where he ultimately reaches earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden. The "branched river of his corrupted blood" associated with Philoctete's wound at the outset of Walcott's poem is matched by the two rivers which flow from the top of Mount Purgatory: the river Lethe, in which Dante receives his purgative "baptism" and which causes him to "forget his sin," and leave it behind, and the Eunoè which strengthens the pilgrim in virtue for the future performance of good deeds by restoring the memory of good actions. Walcott's emphasis on the role of memory (as distinct from history) in the central chapters dealing with healing in *Omeros*, therefore reveals the deep imprint of Dante's *Purgatorio* on his own vision of history. Another parallel between the treatment of "history and memory" by Dante and Walcott can be seen in the juxtaposition of the majestic, awe-inspiring, and apocalyptic pageant of all history at



the top of Mount Purgatory, with the participation of Philoctete and Achille in the Boxing Day celebrations that include ancestral rituals. As Achille dances,

[...] All the pain
re-entered Philoctete, of the hacked yams, the hold
closing over their heads, the bolt-closing iron,
over the eyes that never saw the light of this world,
their memory still there although all the pain was gone. [...]
[...] Philoctete sat down. Then he wept. (60.iii, 277)

The relationship of tears to baptismal motifs and healing are ubiquitous in medieval spiritual writings in general and are an important motif for Dante as well. Philoctete's tears imitate those of Dante when he meets Beatrice in the Garden of Eden, and later when he weeps both for his own sins and for the sins of history. The pilgrim's tears also anticipate the restoration of his upright nature and his preparedness to ascend to the beatific vision he will experience in *Paradiso*. Dante realizes that Virgil is gone and Beatrice reprimands him:

Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi
di sé—Virgilio, dolcissimo patre,
Virgilio, a cui per, mia salute die'mi—,
né quantunque perdeo l'antica matre
valse a le guance nette di rugiada
che, lagrimando, non tornasser atre.
"Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,
non pianger anco, non piangere ancora,
ché pianger ti conven per altra spada."
(*Purgatorio*, 30.49-57)¹⁰

Parallels between Walcott and Dante can also be seen in the baptismal imagery of the healing of Dante in earthly paradise and of Philoctete in Ma Kilman's backyard cauldron. For Dante it is a double baptism. First, after he faces Beatrice's initial accusations, he repents ("Tanta riconoscenza il cor mi morse ch'io caddi vinto..." 31.88-89)¹¹ and finds that the mystical Matelda was drawing him through the Lethe river:

Poi, quando il cor virtù di fuor rendemmi,
la donna ch'io avea trovata sola

¹⁰*Purgatorio*, trans. Robert Durling, 512-513:

But Virgil had left us deprived of himself –
Virgil, most sweet father, Virgil, to whom I gave
myself for my salvation –,
nor did everything our ancient mother lost
suffice to prevent my cheeks, though cleansed with
dew, from turning dark again with tears.
"Dante, though Virgil depart, do not weep yet,
do not weep yet, for you must weep to another sword."

¹¹*Purgatorio*, trans. Durling, 534-535: "So much recognition bit my heart that I fell overcome..."



sopra me vidi, e dicea: "Tiemmi, tiemmi!"
Tratto m'avea nel fiume infin la gola,
e tirandosi me dietro sen giva
sovresso l'acqua, lieve come scola.
Quando fui presso a la beata riva,
"Asperges me" sì dolcemente udissi
che nol so rimembrar, non ch'io lo scriva.
La bella donna ne le braccia aprissi,
abbracciommi la testa e mi sommerse,
ove convenne ch'io l'acqua inghiottissi. (Purgatorio 31.91-102)¹²

At the very end of *Purgatorio*, Beatrice instructs Matelda to lead the pilgrim to the Eunoè to "revive his languishing powers" (33.127-129). She takes his hand and leads him to the river. Dante writes:

S'io avessi, lettor, più lungo spazio
da scrivere, i' pur cantere' in parte
lo dolce ber che mai non m'avria sazio,
[...]
Io ritornai da la santissima onda
rifatto sì come piante novelle
rinovellate di novella fronda,
puro e disposto a salire a le stelle. (33.136-145)¹³

¹² *Purgatorio*, trans. Durling, 534-535:

Then when my heart gave me back my external powers, the lady whom I had found alone I saw above me, and she was saying: "Hold me, hold me!" She had drawn me into the river up to my throat, and, pulling me after her, she was walking on the water as light as a little boat. When I drew near the blessed shore, "Asperges me" was heard so sweetly that I cannot remember, let alone write it. The beautiful lady opened her arms, embraced my head, and submerged me, so that I had to swallow some of the water.

¹³ *Purgatorio*, trans. Durling, 572-573:

If, reader, I had more space to write, I would continue to sing in part the sweet drink that could never satiate me
[...]
I returned from the most holy wave refreshed, as new plants are renewed with new leaves, pure and made ready to rise to the stars.



The final image of *Purgatorio* circles back to one of the first, which occurs at the very beginning of the first canto. There Virgil and Dante walk towards the shore of the island and,

Quando noi fummo là 've la rugiada
pugna col sole, per essere in parte
dove, ad orezza, poco si dirada,
ambo le mani in su l'erbetta sparte
soavemente 'l mio maestro pose:
ond 'io, che fui accorto di sua arte,
porsi ver' lui le guance lagrimose;
ivi mi fece tutto scoperto
quel color che l'inferno mi nascose.
Venimmo poi in sul lito deserto,
che mai non vide navicar sue acque
omo che di tornar sia poscia esperto.
Quivi mi cinse sì com' altrui piacque:
oh maraviglio! ché qual elli scelse
l'umile pianta, cotal si rinacque
subitamenta là onde l'avelse. (1, 121-136)¹⁴

The circularity of Dante's poetry, the confluence of the symbols of water, the sea, plants, new life, and healing are all consonant with Walcott's thematic treatment of the healing of Philoctete's wound. The "baptismal" scene in chapter 49 of *Omeros* is simply remarkable, evoking so many elements of the daily life of Walcott's protagonists on the island. Ma Kilman's cauldron is out in the backyard and is one of the basins from the old sugar-mill,

[...] looking like helmets that have tumbled downhill
from an infantry charge. Children rang them with stones.

¹⁴ *Purgatorio*, trans. Durling, 24-25:

When we were where the dew resists the sun,
being in a place where it evaporates but little in the
breeze,
both his hands, spreading them, my master
gently placed on the tender grass: and I, aware of
his intention, offered him my tear-stained cheeks; there he
uncovered all that color of mine which Hell had
hidden.
Then we came on to the deserted shore, which
never saw any man sail its waters who afterwards
experienced return.
There he girded me as it pleased another: Oh
wonder! for as he plucked the humble plant,
it was suddenly reborn, identical, where he had
uprooted it.



Wildflowers sprung in them when the dirt found a seam. (49.i, 246)

This has the whiff of Dante's garden, but Walcott has utterly transformed the imagery, firmly planting it in the here and now of his St. Lucia. The cauldron itself is described as lying "agape in its crusted, agonized O: the scream of centuries." (49.i, 246) Ma Kilman must heal the basin itself by "scraping its crusted scabs" and scouring it before she can use it for Philoctete. Unlike the naturally occurring (God-created) rivers of earthly paradise in Dante's poem, Ma Kilman must work hard to fill the basin with water:

[...] In the scream she poured
tin after kerosene tin, its base black from fire,
of seawater and sulphur. Into this she then fed
the bubbling root and leaves. (49.i, 246-247).

Then, much as Matelda led Dante into his baptismal river(s), Ma Kilman "led Philoctete to the gurgling lava. Trembling, he / entered his bath like a boy." (49.i, 247) As Philoctete bathes, he feels "the putrescent shin/ drain in the seethe like sucked marrow, he felt it drag/ the slime from his shame." (49.i, 247)

Walcott ends the scene of Philoctete's healing with the question, "What else did it cure?," thus pointing to the connection between individual healing and communal reconciliation that we saw so firmly entrenched in the classical legends of Philoctetes. The healing of Walcott's Philoctete, in conjunction with other events on the island, inaugurates the healing of his community. Despite the fact that the story of Philoctete features primarily in the narratives of Books One, Six, and Seven, Walcott makes regular references to the motif of the wound or the act of wounding throughout his epic poem. Philoctete's wound comes from the sea – from a rusty anchor. In the end, it is the sea water in Ma Kilman's cauldron that restores him to health. The sea is the space for the Middle Passage, and thus Philoctete's wound is tied to the continuing festering effects of the history of slavery in the Antilles:

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles
of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's
but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage,
then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir. (3.iii, 19)

Philoctete's anguished isolation in his yam garden simultaneously mirrors that of the abandoned Philoctetes on Lemnos, but it is also emblematic of the anguish and isolation of his fellow St. Lucians. Philoctete slashes at his yams and curses them: "Salope! / You see what its like without roots in this world?" (4.i, 21). In Book Two, Achille shares this sense of sorrow and isolation after Helen moves in with Hector: "He believed he smelt as badly as Philoctete / from the rotting loneliness that drew every glance / away from him, as stale as a drying fishnet" (22.i, 116). In Book Three, when



Achille goes to Africa, he walks along the ocean floor “through vast meadows of coral, over barnacled cannons whose hulks sprouted anemones / like Philoctete’s shin (26.iii, 142). In that same book, there is another foreshadowing of Philoctete’s restoration to health. In a touchingly ordinary scene that reminds one of Odysseus’ encounter with his faithful dog upon initial return to Ithaca, Seven Seas goes outside to scrape food into his dog’s “enamel plate” and “then he smelt Philoctete entering the yard.” The men have a conversation about Achille, whom Philoctete’s presumes has drowned at sea. South Seas tells him that Achille is out looking for his name and his soul. Philoctetes asks, “where that?” and South Seas replies, “Africa. He go come back soon.” Walcott writes:

Philoctete nodded. What else was left to believe
but miracles? Whose vision except a blind man’s
or a blind saint’s, her name as bright as the island’s? (29.ii, 154)

Later, after Achille returns, up in his yam garden, “Philoctete planting green yam shoots heard the moaning sea, / and crossed his bare, caving chest, and asked God pardon / for his doubt.” (30.iii, 130). Walcott is laying the foundation for the scenes of healing and reconciliation in the final two books of his poem. Even in Book Four, when Walcott the author finds himself lonely and isolated in Brookline following the dissolution of his marriage, he writes of “looking for a letter, for its rescuing sail, till I grew tired, like wounded Philoctetes (33.ii, 171). Interestingly, this is the only place in the poem where Walcott uses the Greek spelling of this name. One of the most touching examples of the communal impact of Philoctete’s healing is foreshadowed at the beginning of Book Six when the process begins. It is marked by Philoctete’s auspicious blowing of a shell as part of the burial rituals for his friend Hector. He then hobbles over and rests “his hand firmly on [Achille’s] shaking shoulder / to anchor his sorrow.” (46.i, 232)

The shadow of Philoctete’s wound hovers over the entire narrative of *Omeros*, even when the character himself is not present. The effect of his healing, then, is similarly ubiquitous. Walcott anticipates this in chapter 48 when Achille learns that

there is no error in love, of feeling
the wrong love for the wrong person. The still island
seasoned the wound with its sat; he scooped the bucket
and emptied the bilge with its leaves of manchineel,
thinking of the stitched, sutured wound that Philoctete
was given by the sea, but how the sea could heal
the wound also. And that is what Ma Kilman taught. (48.i, 241-242)

As Philoctete’s wound drains in his cleansing bath, Achille also begins to heal, “The bow leapt back to the palm of the warrior. / The yoke of the wrong name lifted from his shoulders.” (49, ii, 247) Dante’s penitential tears feature in this section:



But now, quite clearly, the tears trickled down his face
like rainwater down a cracked carafe from Choiseul,
as he stood like a boy in his bath with the first clay's
innocent prick! So she threw Adam a towel.
And the yard was Eden. And its light the first day's. (49.ii, 248)

Finally, Walcott the character feels the wrong love leaving him: "I felt her voice draining from mine" (49.iii, 249). The process of his healing extends through Book Seven where he follows the marble bust of Omeros, much in the same way as Dante follows Virgil, as he climbs up the island mountain. Although the community has to endure the shocking death of Hector, also previously associated with Philoctete's wound, his death becomes an occasion for the community to draw together. Helen and Achille are reconciled, something that Philoctete has been trying to accomplish since the outset of the story (8.iii, 47). And although Maud also dies, her death occurs following a meaningful journey that she and the Major make past the Malebolge, to the top of the volcanic mountain of suffering (Soufrière) and the Major too, finds his own place in the community of St. Lucia. The communal effects of Philoctete's healing are perhaps most strikingly symbolized in the Christmas meal the protagonists all celebrate together at Ma Kilman's (55.i, 272-273).

Following Walcott's own purgatorial journey up Soufrière, in a passage reminiscent of Dante emerging on the shores of Mount Purgatory in the early morning of Easter Sunday (*Purgatorio*, 1), Walcott is enjoying his view of the island and looking down on the sea:

In that blessed space
it was so quiet that I could hear the splutter
Philoctete made with his ablutions, and that deep "Ah!"
for the New Year's benediction. Then Philoctete
waved "Morning" to me from far, and I waved back;
we shared the one wound, the same cure. (59.i, 295)

Dante's treatment of the communal impact of the wound and its healing in *Purgatorio* is firmly rooted in Christian theological ideas about the original sin caused by Adam and healed by Christ. One of the most striking examples of Dante's understanding of the relationship between the individual and the community expressed in *Purgatorio* lies in the nature of the penitential suffering on the individual terraces of the mountain. Dante's "saved" sinners anticipate the communal unity of Paradise and God's presence by working together to move up the mountain safely. Dante encounters the inhabitants of *Purgatorio* in groups which move along together, sing together, and encourage one another. Another instance of Dante's recognition of the link between the individual and the community is the fact that his pilgrim in some ways is seen as an "everyman." The famous opening lines of the entire *Commedia*



signal this literary conceit: “Nel mezzo del cammin di *nostra vita*”¹⁵(*Inferno* 1.1, emphasis added): the collective pronoun ‘our’ makes Dante’s pilgrimage exemplary for and applicable to the whole humankind. With a similar operation, in *Omeros*, Walcott uses Philoctete as a symbol of St. Lucia’s everyman as Helen is a symbol of St. Lucia’s everywoman.

As has been observed several times throughout this essay, Philoctete is not the central hero of *Omeros*: he is a secondary character in the Greek literary tradition and remains a secondary character in Walcott’s postcolonial rewriting of his story. *Omeros* is a choral work in its structure and, like Dante’s *Commedia*, simultaneously follows the destiny of the poet as well as the destiny of the poet’s community. In *Omeros*, Philoctete is a member, like Walcott, of the St. Lucian community, but is not cast as its quintessential protagonist or mouthpiece. In fact, there is no hero in this story. In line with his interest in telling the stories of the average people, the forgotten masses of history, Derek Walcott selects from the mythological tradition a character that is known for his pain and survival, but that is not aggrandized because of it.

4. CONCLUSION

The allusions to the *Commedia* in the pages of Walcott’s own epic of memory and history, healing and reconciliation are deep and pervasive. They are visible at the level of the characters and the themes, but also at the level of the general structure as well as the prosody of the entire poem. Structure, in both works, is carefully studied: the *Commedia* is divided into 3 *cantiche*, each one – except for the *Inferno* which has 34 – contains 33 *cantos*, and the *Purgatorio*, in particular, is firmly structured around the 7 deadly sins, and the 7 Ps, that Dante the pilgrim has to wash off his forehead as he climbs up Mount Purgatory. Seven is a symbolic number in *Omeros* as well. The poem is in fact divided into seven books and counts a total of sixty-four chapters, with each chapter containing three parts. In terms of plot, the seven books of *Omeros* are neatly divided, on the basis of the setting of the story, into three distinct blocks: the island of St. Lucia establishes the beginning of the story in Books One and Two; a journey outward to Africa, North America, and Europe occupies the central books (Three through Five), before a full return to St. Lucia as home can occur in Books Six and Seven.

Both poets aim at achieving a supreme clarity of vision through their poetries. In a creative writing workshop held at the University of Milan in July 2001, Derek Walcott articulated the idea of the indissoluble link between form and subject matter in poetry in terms that make us understand how essential Dante’s influence was on his own writing:

¹⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Vol. I: *Inferno*. Ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 26: “In the middle of the journey of our life...”



The ultimate serenity, the supreme clarity, is by example Dante, more than Shakespeare. In Dante, the phrase becomes so clear that it is like light. And the language is what we may call simple, but it's a simplicity arrived at, such a worked-out simplicity, very crafted. (Loreto 2009: 171)

Such a crafted simplicity is the one the reader encounters when reading – and re-reading – *Omeros*. Moreover, Walcott's use of hexameters, instead of iambic pentameters, in *Omeros* allowed him a more relaxed pace to weave the narratives of Philoctete and his fellow St. Lucians, through easy-to-recognize literary references; while the rigidity of the rhyming scheme and of the overall structure of the books composing the poem kept the horizon of the poem's overall significance always in front of the readers's eyes. In very literal terms, Dante's *Commedia* provides the model as well as the mold for *Omeros*.

But there is one final aspect to consider when talking about the Dantean echoes in Walcott's *Omeros* and it concerns Walcott's use of the *terza rima*. The same symbolism that the location of the story conveys, connecting St. Lucia to the world, via Africa, the US and Europe, interweaving the local and the global, the historical and the eternal, is duplicated throughout the poem via the interlocking rhyming scheme that Walcott adopts and adapts from Dante. The opening lines of Dante's *Purgatorio* read as follows in the English translation by Robert Durling (1996: 1.1-5):

To run through better waters the little ship of
my wit now hoists its sails, leaving behind it a sea
so cruel,
and I will sing of that second realm where the
human spirit purges itself and becomes worthy to
ascend to Heaven.

But, in the original, Dante's *terza rima* sounds like this:

Per correr migliori acque alza le vele (a)
omai la navicella del mio ingegno, (b)
che lascia dietro a sé mar sí crudele; (a)
e canterò di quel secondo regno (b)
dove l'umano spirito si purga (c)
e di salire al ciel diventa degno. (b)

The rhyming scheme (a-b-a / b-c-b) of the first tercet is "interrupted" by a new sound (c) which weaves into the stanza the first rhyme of the following tercet, thereby providing compactness and cohesiveness to the poem both conceptually and formally. While, as Hamner observes, "Walcott's overall pattern never achieves Dante's intricately wrought hierarchical framework" (Hamner 1997: 5), the poem is indeed composed in *terza rima* stanzas of hexameters. And while there is a lot of variation in terms of rhyming patterns in *Omeros*, it is nonetheless easy for the reader to detect the



underlying prosodic unity provided by the *terza rima*, even when it is reproduced with variations, as we can see in the opening stanza:

"This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes." (a)
Philoctete smiles for the tourists, who try taking (b)
His soul with their cameras. "Once wind bring the news (a)
To the laurier-cannelles, their leaves start shaking (b)
The minute the axe of sunlight hit the cedars, (c)
Because they could see the axes in our own eyes. (d) (1, i, 3)

What can the *terza rima*, so difficult to reproduce in a language such as English, offer Walcott that another rhyming scheme – more native to the Anglophone literary tradition – could not? One possible answer is the profound unity of form and content that characterizes both Dante's *Commedia* and Walcott's *Omeros*, the visibility given to the poem itself, as well as the way in which both poets renew old forms and old stories by forcing together old myths and literary genres with new and apparently incompatible forms and interpretations of those myths. At the creative writing seminar mentioned above, which focused on the reading and translation of American poetry, Walcott discussed meter and melody as the translator's (as well as the poet's) first responsibility:

If you set yourself the rules of *terza rima*, then you are allowed to write about Paradiso. If you do Paradiso in free verse, it's not Paradise, because it has no order. [...] There is an idea of order, [...] the poem creates its own order. (Loreto 2009: 175)

The *terza rima*, then, allows the poet to achieve a sense of structure and, most importantly, the melody that gives that structured vision a material expression made of words but firstly of sounds. In poetry, meter conveys the song, the beat, that makes possible the "incantatory celebration of astonishment" (Loreto 2009: 177-78) that poetry – for Derek Walcott – ultimately is.

Finally, there seems to be a deeper reason bringing together these two poets and their works and which connects with the overall motif of healing explored in this essay: it is the faith in the power of literary language to cure and provide both solace from the present and hope for the future which can be found in both works. The opening lines of the *Purgatorio* quoted above are echoed in Book Two of *Omeros*:

Like Philoctete's wound, this language carries its cure,
its radiant affliction; reluctantly now,
like Achille's, my craft slips the chain of its anchor,
moored to its cross as I leave it, its nodding prow
lettered as simply, ribbed in our native timber,
riding these last worried lines; its rhythm agrees
that all it forgot a swift made it remember [...] (64.ii, 323)



The image of the boat ribbed in the native timber, the local rhythms fusing together echoes of the past, of Homer, Sophocles, Dante, and hints to future developments that only the sea will hear, point to the life of the literary text, born in a specific context, conceived and delivered, in part, in the local accent, but able to go beyond the place and time of its creation. Interestingly, the healing process passes, from the poem's characters, to the poem's language and thus to the poet's art. This movement from an author to an audience is interesting, as it points to the moment in which the literary text comes fully into being.

What turns linguistic innovation into a literary event is the act, or event, of reading – the moment, that is, in which the reader lives and enacts the opening up of new possibilities of meaning and feeling conveyed by the text. In the words of Derek Attridge:

it is only when the event of this reformulation is experienced by the reader [...] as an event, an event which produces new possibilities of meaning and feeling (understood as verbs), or, more accurately, the event of such opening, that we can speak of the literary. (2004, 59; original emphasis)

As Walcott asks himself:

[...] Why not see Helen
as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,
swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone,
as fresh as the sea wind? Why make the smoke a door? (54, ii, 271)

As readers, we could indeed see Helen as Helen, with her plastic sandals and her yellow frock, and not “read” her through the Homeric shadow of Helen of the Aegean Sea. We could, by extension, read Walcott's poem as a postcolonial epic and focus on its Caribbean uniqueness, leaving the Western literary tradition, with its echoes of exploitation and belittlement of the local people and their culture and injustice, behind. So much, however, of the poet's reflection on history, on healing, and on the public function of art would be lost if we refused to let the past – in a(n ideological) postcolonial reading – or the global present – in a(n elitist) classicist reading – in. And this would be a pity, a sin even, in Dantean terms – but sin would have, of course, an entirely different meaning.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Alighieri D., 1996, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Vol. 1: *Inferno*. Trans. R. M. Durling and Intro. R. L. Martinez, Oxford University Press, Oxford.



- Alighieri D., 2003, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Vol. 2: *Purgatorio*. Trans. R. M. Durling and Intro. R. L. Martinez, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Homer, 1996, *The Odyssey*, trans. R. Fagles, Penguin Books, London.
- Walcott D., 1990, *Omeros*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- Walcott D., 1997, "Reflections on *Omeros*", *South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.2, pp. 229-246.
- Walcott D., 1998, *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Attridge D., 2004, *The Singularity of Literature*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Austenfeld T., 2006, "How to Begin a New World: Dante in Walcott's *Omeros*", *South Atlantic Review* 71.3, pp. 15-28.
- Balfour M., 1998, "The Place of the Poet: Dante in Walcott's Narrative Poetry", in N. R. Havelly (ed.), *Dante's Modern Afterlife: Reception and Response from Blake to Heaney*, St. Martin's Press, New York, pp. 223-41.
- Baugh E., 2003, "Derek Walcott and the Centering of the Caribbean Subject", *Research in African Literatures* 34.1, pp. 151-159.
- Brownlee K., 2007, "Dante and the Classical Poets," in R. Jacoff (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 141-160.
- Burnett P., 2000, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- Cimarosti R., 2004, *Mapping Memory: An Itinerary Through Derek Walcott's Poetics*, Cisalpino, Milano.
- Fumagalli M. C., 2000, "Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and Dante's *Commedia*", *The Cambridge Quarterly* 29.1, pp. 17-36.
- Fumagalli M. C., 1993, *The Flight of the Vernacular. Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York.
- Hamner R. D. (ed.) 1993, *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, Three Continents Press, Washington D.C.
- Hamner R. D., 1997, *Epic of the Dispossessed: Derek Walcott's Omeros*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London.
- Hawkins P. S. and R. Jacoff, 2003, "Still Here: Dante after Modernism", in T. Barolini, and H. W. Story (eds.), *Dante for the New Millennium*, Fordham University Press, New York, pp. 451-464.
- King B., 2000, *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Loreto P., 2009, *The Crowning of a Poet's Quest: Derek Walcott's Tiepolo's Hound* Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York.
- Miller C. H., 1984, "Hercules and His Labors as Allegories of Christ and His Victory Over Sin in Dante's *Inferno*," *Quaderni d'italianistica* 5, pp. 1-17.
- Ramazani J., 1997, "The Wound of History: Walcott's *Omeros* and the Postcolonial Poetics of Affliction", *PMLA* 112.3, pp. 405-417.



Shaw P., 2014, *Reading Dante: From Here to Eternity*, Liveright Publishing Corporation (W.W. Norton & Company), New York and London.

Sowell M. U. (ed.), 1991, *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Binghamton.

Terada R., 1992, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry*, Northeastern University Press, Boston.

Zoppi I., 1999, "Omeros, Derek Walcott and the Contemporary Epic Poem", *Callaloo* 22.2, pp. 509-528.

Pamela Beattie is Associate Professor of Medieval Studies in the Department of Comparative Humanities at the University of Louisville and a specialist in the history of medieval religion and culture. She is co-editor of *Translation and the Global Humanities*, a special issue of the *New Centennial Review* (2016) and author of the Latin critical edition and study of Ramon Llull's *Llibre contra Anticrist in the Raimundi Lulli Opera Latina 36, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (2015).

pamela.beattie@louisville.edu

Simona Bertacco is Associate Professor of Postcolonial Studies and Director of Graduate Studies in Humanities at the University of Louisville. Her fields of research are: postcolonial literatures, gender studies and translation studies. She is the editor of *Language and Translation in Postcolonial Literatures* (Routledge, 2014); the co-editor of *Textus: Postcolonial Crimes: Crime Fiction and the Other* (2014), and of the special issue of *The New Centennial Review: Translation and the Global Humanities* (16:1, 2016).

simona.bertacco@louisville.edu