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Whose Troy? Whose Rome? Whose Europe?

Three Medieval Londons and the London of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

Abstract

What does it mean that so many medievalists, especially in the United States and in Canada, study the European middle ages without being from or of Europe? What does it mean if we specify, further, those who don't come from the United States or Canada either, but from areas of the world that experienced western European empire, as most of the globe did, as a systematic political and psychological subordination to Europe? I take the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott's depiction of late twentieth-century London in his long narrative poem *Omeros* as a way to pose the question of what Europe might look like from the other side of the relationship of domination, that is, to define Walcott's Europe. Walcott's London repudiates Europe, and with it what he calls History, exactly the kind of history made by the European epics of Homer, Virgil, and Dante in the form of the world-destinies they constructed for Europe in the cities of Troy and Rome, and made by their would-be successor London. But he does so with difficulty: the Troy of Homer and Virgil has long sought to seduce him into rendering his own island into its terms, elegiac and nostalgic. He seeks instead a poetry of the local, the small, the unvarnished, and the present tense. In doing so, he constructs a point of view that exposes the presumption and the brutality that sits inside medieval texts offered to the reader as celebrations of London and the history it contributes to making; but his perspective also brings out of the same texts their half-conscious efforts, repressed in the name of History, to speak for the local, the small, the unvarnished, and the present, on behalf of the desire for human adequacy to self, sociality, and community without war. Roughly speaking, desire, or history, shows up in the view from Walcott's St. Lucia in the face of the History for which Europe is a metonym. Medieval texts read from outside the European frame are liable to be different from those read from within that frame; we need medieval readings from underneath and outside the European matrix that can put Europe in question, though it may be that History, and the project of a dominating Europe, remains too seductive to renounce.

This article originated in a conference on the topic "Theorizing Medieval *European* Literatures" held at York, England, from June 30 – July 2, 2016, co-sponsored by the University of York and the Centre for Medieval Literature at the University of Southern Denmark. It would seem a good thing if the challenge of the conference to turn around upon the word Europe in our definition of our field of study catches European medievalists/medievalists of Europe off balance. It does me: when I make the word Europe visible as a defining term in what I study and teach, a process that seemed straightforward in the experience of becoming a medievalist looks less simply motivated on review. As someone born in pre-independent Khartoum, Sudan who grew up in Jamaica with English parents who arrived there in 1960 (before Jamaican independence in 1962), who made his professional life in the U.S.A., and who identifies himself as Jamaican more than anything else, why did I make that profession the study of medieval European, chiefly English (from England; in English), texts? How is it that I have come to study a past that is the past of a part of the world with which I do not identify as a citizen or in my primary engagements, allegiances, attachments, or commitments? What is Europe to me, as a constituting object of a lifelong scholarly career?[1]

Those are personal questions. Their institutional form would ask, what is Europe to those many medievalists, mostly in the U.S.A. and Canada, who study Europe without being part of the European community (however defined)? That we were born, grew up, were educated, and today live (most of us) somewhere else is the mark of many other gaps between us and our subject: at root, of our removal from the scene of our study variously by different ancestries, ethnicities, citizenships, domiciles, circumstances generally – our removal, then, by engagements, attachments, allegiances, and commitments that inform our existential horizons. In short, our spatial removal is a mark of our own personal and communal pasts, presents, and futures. Under these circumstances, what is happening when we spend the decades of our professional lives on the artifacts of where we do not live, and what we are not existentially engaged with? It is not that answers are hard to come by: a commitment to a common humanity would provide a good first answer, and a commitment to some version of genealogical thinking if the U.S.A. and Canada are seen as derived from (even if developing over and against) Europe, a good second one. But further response to the condition of studying a world as alternative as medieval Europe to the one we live in can point in other directions too: for my purposes here, to the possibility of a double split in the European medievalist

said more about its motivations. Thanks, too, to Jill Levin, for her long-ago certainty that the Caribbean would out one day in one medievalist's work. Finally, to the two anonymous readers for *Interfaces*. One, for his/her caution lest, when all was said and done, using Derek Walcott to resituate medieval Europe maintains the European project in its premise that it is always Europe that compels resituation, so that we are left still waiting to break out of Europe's gravitational field as the subject of history. Other actual and possible histories are potential in the thick of medieval Europe, for example, descriptions of medieval London posed against Abbasid, Indian, or Chinese cities, the Thames against the Ganges, Nile, or Yangtze. (Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy dramatizing the three-way trading relationships among Britain, India, and China in the early nineteenth century has illustrated for me a far wider canvas polarized in quite other ways than by Europe, the intimations of which other polarities surely abound in the medieval texts we study.) The other reader, for such sharp attention and thoughtfulness point by point, for the prompts to valuable further reading and bibliography, and most of all for sending me back to Walcott's own "The Muse of History."

who is not from or of Europe, or at least in myself, a split that is both psychological and political. If I trace this split to its source, I find that source in desire, namely a desire of community; but, in that case, a desire that, from within the Englishness I inherit and the English I speak, collides with that form of coerced collective humanity that has been western European empire.

If a spatial separation from Europe distinguishes medievalists of Europe from beyond Europe from those within it, we share with our European colleagues our removal from medieval Europe by time. That temporal distance is also a function of space, however: the temporalities of those in regions once dominated by Europe, and so inserted into European time (the time of the development of the nation-state quite apart from the time of empire, for example), are not the same temporalities as those whose medieval Europe is broadly ancestral. Perhaps some of us were attracted by a sense, knowing or unknowing, that we could do an end-run around the narrative of domination that Walcott will call History in distinction from history, or around the also-dominating modernity that is the existential style of a supposedly post-imperial Europe; by a sense, then, that we could make contact with forms of the masters' worlds that were more like the world we lived in (simply: poorer, less literate, even themselves postcolonial in the shadow of the Roman empire as fact and idea, and in the shadow of the various colonizations across western Europe documented by Robert Bartlett). Perhaps scholars from the United States or Canada and many postcolonials intuited in the western European middle ages a vernacular world in the making in the presence of Latin, as was the case of the local vernacular worlds being made, often in polyglot conditions, in the presence of English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and so on. If these suggestions have merit, medieval Europe can pull on us who study it from outside because we find something of ourselves already there, and exactly in Europe's own pre-imperialism or the self-making of its many parts in the face of and in the wake of Roman empire (even though, if our eyes are open, we will find imperial Europe already there from before the start, as it were, and we might impute to Europe only more deeply the source of the diminishment of the colonized parts of the world). For readers of medieval English texts on a Caribbean island, there's an allegory of the creole condition to find in Chaucer's demotic English, meaning an allegory not only of the local language condition, but of the generation of human stories in that condition, more broadly of the generation of the representation of desire in written language, all the way to the project of making a community or building a nation.

Whose Idea of Europe?

To bring this line of thinking into focus, I wish to ask, *of whom*, in the sense of possession, is this past Europe that those of us who are doubly removed from it investigate, teach, write about? This question should be uncomfortable, because of the concept of possession in the pronoun. Possession connects and attaches, turning into the gospel of private property that underpins so much of western law and culture, and into ethics, in notions of the propriety and the proper. Possession is a legitimating ground for action. Its direction of power, from the owner to the owned, creates accountabilities and responsibilities, and carries within it the potential, often the appeal, of violence, either to the owned thing (my pounded computer) or in its name (my country, perception, belief, action).

　　Possession can be put into relationship with being. For Bruno Latour, the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde's emphasis on the lexical resources around 'to have,' far richer than around 'to be,' is decisive. 'To be' contains no connection to the world; from 'I am,' I can deduce only myself. If only philosophy, says Tarde, had grounded itself on 'to have,' not 'to be;' as Latour puts it, 'having' involves attachment, and "to be attached is to hold and to be held. Possession and all its synonyms are thus good words for a reworked meaning of what a 'social puppet' could be. The strings are still there, but they transport autonomy or enslavement depending on *how* they are held" (*Reassembling*, 217).[2] The concept of having has the virtue also of coming to within one step of identifying the basic psychological motivation of having, namely, desire, so that desire is a motif in the following discussion. My points are two: first, that Europe has been the most massive ownership conglomerate the world has ever seen. It took literal or effective possession of most of the land surface of the globe (see the rising arc of European power, till western Europe, its colonies, and its former colonies constituted about eighty-five percent of the land surface of the planet by 1914, most of it under one form and degree or another of western European power; Magdoff 29, 35).[3] To what extent is the western Europe we have in mind when we study Europe this Europe? Second, the question 'whose Europe?' puts me on notice that I am at stake when I identify *my* Europe. As in the reference to perception or belief above, the relationship of possession holds for ideas as well as objects: much is at stake in the question of what idea of Europe we possess. In asking what my (idea of) Europe is, I enter a debate about violence (among other

2. Latour grounds an entire ontology of the human and non–human, let alone a comprehensive academic methodology, on the concept of the network within which the "social puppet" finds itself and in relation to which it experiences its freedom or unfreedom.

3. Cf. Fieldhouse 178 (Magdoff's essay, originally published for Encylopaedia Britannica, contains no footnotes). Fieldhouse and Magdoff specify that the landholding figures apply not to Europe exclusively, but include land constituted by former colonies of Europe – as Magdoff notes, chiefly in North and South America. This matters, because in Pagden, ed., both Pagden ("Introduction" 10) and Tully (335) cite these numbers, but derive them from Kennedy (150) and Said (8) respectively, both of whom miss this significant qualification.

4. "I am conscious that as a New Zealander I am not a European. I am, therefore, looking at 'Europe' from the outside; I am not committed to it" (Pocock 56). A short-list of scholars whose generation of productive conceptual frameworks for British history might be, like Pocock's in his life-long work (cf. his 1975 "British History: A Plea for a New Subject"), a function of their oblique or once-removed relationship to England/Britain/the United Kingdom would include, in my view, Geoffrey of Monmouth, who I think can be demonstrated to be of a committedly Breton background, and Wace, a reworker, as well as translator, of Geoffrey's insular history, writing out of his birth and early upbringing in Jersey in the Channel Islands in the time of the Norman-Angevin empires, and out of his clerical career in Caen (Blacker).

5. It can be an education to pause over each European nation in this list. In the image of Africa in the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*'s map of the world in 1913 (Puchner 1006–07), textual labels assign to each demarcation of African land its European power, with a comprehensiveness that can still stun; meanwhile, the European powers themselves are visible on the same map as a kind of appendix to Africa's vastness. As an image in a mass-market textbook, this map confronts teachers with an oblivion in students so near to total that it baffles pedagogy, challenging virtually all students and many teachers to a cognitive and imaginative leap that not many can make. A parallel map of the Caribbean would reproduce in miniature the interest in offshore domination of the same multiplicity of western European nations. This catalogue of nations confirms that the Europe of so much of the non-European globe is actually western Europe, the violence inflicted by Europe actually by western Europe. As Pocock insists, what in our academic discourse we most have in mind when we talk of Europe is its far west; we have so torqued our use of the word 'Europe' that we have come to call "an Atlantic peninsula... a continent" (Pocock 60; this sounded strange to me until I looked harder at the maps).

things: for example, desire and community), the violence latent or active (like desire) in the claims of possession.

By "Whose Europe?," then, I don't mean who possessed the Europe that we study. I mean whose idea of Europe is it that informs our scholarship, as a question directed to all of us who study and teach medieval Europe. A first answer is readily found in the ideas of Europe of the two entities already indicated – roughly, those medievalists native to or citizens of Europe, and those who are native to or citizens of other places. Speaking now of my own domain of study, English medieval studies, the combined institutional world of the U.S. and Canada alone dwarfs that of the United Kingdom, even before we add those of Australia and New Zealand, and the much slighter presence of medievalists in English medieval studies from India, the Caribbean, Africa, or east Asia (as in the case of South Korea and Japan). On the premise that an academic's ideas and material circumstances have mutual causal relationships, I assume that, when we ask 'Whose Europe are we speaking of when we study Europe?', we will – broadly speaking – describe different Europes on either side of this rough and ready divide between two classes of possessors of the concept 'Europe.' At the moment of this broad distinction, another, equally broad, has to be made: roughly between western and eastern regions of most any territorial definition of 'Europe' as distinct from 'Asia.' The imperial Europe I refer to above is located in the western regions, while most of the eastern regions, far from participating in global empire, have instead had long histories of subjugation by European conquerors external to them, most recently within an internal European empire centered in Moscow (the U.S.S.R.); and its Franco-German center of gravity gives the European Union today features of imperial domination for member-countries on its southern and eastern peripheries – as in the economic crisis in Greece since 2007, the handling of which by the Union came at heavy costs to Greek sovereignty. Here too, the 'Europes' of those on either side of this rough east/west (sometimes north/south) dividing line will be very different, with much of Europe able to think of its own abuse by Europe.

From New Zealand, the historian and theorist of political thought J. G. A. Pocock describes the very *concept* of "the continent of Europe" as "the product of the exceptionally self-centered and world-dominating outlook developed by a civilization that took place in those lands" (Pocock 57).[4] That domination goes under the title of European empire: British, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Belgian, Dutch, Danish, German, Italian, Swedish.[5] These quite distinct in-

stances of Europe spread themselves in various degrees, and according to various chronologies, across all of North and South America – the western hemisphere – and all of Asia, Africa, and Oceania; western European empire has been experienced outside Europe therefore by vast numbers of the world's population, either directly in the age of empire (whether from the end of the fifteenth century, or from the late nineteenth century, to about fifty years ago), or indirectly in the age of ebbed empire, in the form of a power that has shaped their present lives in in-grown and complex ways. This phenomenon has not yet had its terminus, and is unlikely to; from another angle beyond Europe, the anthropologist Talal Asad remarks that:

> Europe's colonial past is not merely an epoch of overseas power that is now decisively over. It is the beginning of an irreversible global transformation that remains an intrinsic part of 'European experience' and is part of the reason that Europe has become what it is today. It is not possible for Europe to be represented without evoking this history, the way in which its active power has continually constructed its own exclusive boundary – and transgressed it. (Asad 218)[6]

The western European empires brought with them not only the idea that they were 'Europe', but the idea that that Europe was the incarnation of history itself. "[W]hen did it begin to be implied that all history was the history of Europe?" (by virtue of his own insight cited above, Pocock might have asked when history began to be seen as the history of "an Atlantic peninsula"). Pocock finds the answer in Enlightenment thought (62). The Canadian political scientist James Tully argues in turn that what he calls in shorthand "the Kantian or federal idea of Europe" (331) based on Kant's concept of cosmopolitanism, has become in the last two hundred years the normative template for a global vision of cosmopolitan federalism that influences much contemporary statecraft and much western academic scholarship. This normative template he calls Eurocentric. It assumes the sins of European imperialism and deplores them, but sees what imperialism did to the global map as irreversible, and bound to condition the terms of development of the new cosmopolitan federalism (see especially Tully 335–36). Tully argues that this assumption is prejudicial and premature. For one thing, the next hundred and fifty years and more after Kant's *Perpetual Peace* in 1795 belied Kant's confidence that Europe's tendency and future lay in cosmopolitan

6. This is a highly topical issue, as in an impassioned major article in *Die Zeit* on August 2, 2018, by Gero von Randow and the rejoinder to it by Jochen Bittner et. al. two weeks later (among many other recent articles on German colonialism in Africa in German print media in 2018), attempting to adjudicate to what extent European colonialism, in particular German, not only provides an explanatory model for such phenomena as the current immigration and refugee crises in Europe, but imposes a duty of restitution.

federalism. On the contrary, it saw the *acceleration* of empire. For Tully, the political, economic, and constitutional forms that are entwined with Europe's age of empire should *not* be assumed as part of the matrix for the forms of the global future; forms of development from outside that matrix must be developed. Tully's portrait gives a kind of objective correlative for the relative invisibility of medieval western Europe as the future bearer of domination across the globe when we study its texts. In both cases, medieval studies and contemporary political thought, a particular paradox may be too convenient: if empire is a given, "it's already there." If it's already there, it's presumptively visible; so we don't need to recall it to our attention, which easily becomes, we don't see it in front of our noses. Some such dynamic has something to do with why Europe as a summary word for global domination was not one of the Europes much on view at the York conference I refer to in my opening above.[7]

That Europe is today, for so much of the world beyond it, a metonym for a distribution of power that drew the global maps we know, and for history as the history of power and force, even though this is to elide the experience of eastern Europe, is to say one thing in particular: those who study Europe from outside Europe do so from places in greater or lesser degrees formed by the violence of the imperial powers and their colonists. There is obviously nothing special to Europe about violence in itself, endemic as it is to all human cultures from within them (cf. Robert Bartlett on violence *within* Europe, that is, by 'Europeans' against 'Europeans;' or drop in at any synchronic moment in the human history of any of the continents). But at this point, the political aspect of the study of western Europe from outside Europe can become visible; and if politics is always a function of desire, that study shows its psychological aspect too. Violence inflicted from outside, domination by various kinds of others-to-the-community, produces special effects: not only exploitation of local resources by those external to the community, but a psychological subordination, as the locus of power damages local self-concepts, even sliding into the assumption *often on both sides* of an intrinsic superiority of the invader to the invaded, that has an afterlife of many generations after the manifest structures of empire have disappeared.[8] About such effects, here on African peoples or their descendants, there should not be much surprise. The case of the Belgian Congo is notorious, though not notorious enough; Sven Lindqvist's *Exterminate All the Brutes* convincingly lays at the door of several western European lands what is commonly confined to

7. On a participant by participant basis, there is of course no reason on earth why it should have been; in the conference as a whole, however, the absence of attention to how many centuries of actualization of Europe as the exporter of domination might affect study of some of its earlier texts caught me by surprise. Beyond the conference, postcolonial approaches make strong and expanding contributions to medieval studies, of course. I cannot develop the thought here, but for my taste a lot of postcolonial medieval scholarship work is politically driven to a degree that denatures literary operations (as vexed as the word 'literary' may be), and can look like a scholarship of ressentiment (not resentment, but a kind of moral reflex that cuts off inquiry into the phenomena, in this case the literary phenomena, the evidence of the texts, too soon).

8. Cf. "The Negro and Psychopathology," especially, for their special pertinence to an essay on Europe, 109-19 and 144-57, and "The So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples," chapters in the Martiniquean psychologist Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*; or consider the "wound in our soul" that Chinua Achebe writes of on behalf of "the thinking African" (44).

Germany's: planned genocide and the concentration camp, models for Hitler's Third Reich. Western Europe has reckoned with its empires mostly on its own terms. Amnesia is one evasion; another is a preference to talk in quantitative terms, economic, for example, of the malign effects of imperial Europe rather than of its psychic effects, from trauma to an everyday diminishment of local being (not that the two domains are unconnected).

The idea that Europe is history, an idea that keeps company with the on-the-ground history of the empires that radiated outward from the western edge of Europe, is epistemologically and ontologically a particularly ambitious and therefore potentially particularly devastating idea to implant in human heads, an intensification of the psychological wounds empire inflicts on its objects. If at the moment, this seems a long way from relevance to reading a medieval text, one might think of reading Dante's *Commedia*, with its mystique of the Roman empire, from the other end of the experience of European imperialism; or reading a medieval celebration of London as a capital city, as we shall shortly, from the perspective of an early immigrant from Jamaica to the United Kingdom arbitrarily today denied British citizenship in the current Windrush affair (cf. United Kingdom Parliament, *The Windrush Generation*).

Having tried to take two steps in one leap by an insistence which to some will seem unnecessary, either because the voice of anti-empire seems to them alive and well, or because it seems outdated, I will now take one step backwards. It matters to what I want to say in the substance of the article below that the same absence at the York conference of Europe as a word for empire and for violence done to the world beyond Europe means that something else was necessarily missing: the nature of empire as not *only* violence, but as desire. Here, in the minor key of my purpose, lies something to my eyes underexplored, including in postcolonial criticism, namely that empire overlaps with kinds of desire that are not malign, as is the *libido dominandi* made diagnostic of the human political sphere by Augustine, but that are constructive of the world in ways that answer to common human needs, and that are expressed in Freud's view that, in the face of an implacably opposed aggressive instinct, Eros drives the human species to expand its communities:

> civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose
> is to combine single human individuals, and after that
> families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity,

the unity of mankind. Why this has to happen, we do not know; the work of Eros is precisely this. (Freud 122)

The recognition that the structures of empire can open as well as close doors to human desires is one of many things to like about Dipesh Chakrabarty's nonetheless radical (as accurately reflected in the title) *Provincializing Europe* (4, an approach expanded upon in his Preface to this 2007 edition). This minor key on desire in relation to empire's violence is, then, important to what I'd like in this essay to do. At the same time, I should be clear that my principal concern in this discussion is, what medieval European texts can look like when the Europe of the reader (in that possessive sense of his or her idea of Europe, based on an epistemology and ontology that are necessarily different from those of the European medievalist of Europe) is the active and aggressive force that imposed itself, both bloodily and psychologically, on the world he or she lives in.

Troy, Rome, and Europe, Homer, Virgil and Dante in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*

My avenue for pursuing this question is *Omeros*, the long narrative poem of the St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott. He is not the only Caribbean Anglophone poet who might inform a Caribbean medievalist's studies; Kamau Brathwaite offers a poetics of Caribbean history and culture in his verse trilogy *The Arrivants* that filters Europe out of his discovery, invention, and construction of the Caribbean in some sense more radically than Walcott does (though, like Walcott, he also retains a Europe).[9] I don't have the same Caribbean identity as Walcott's or Brathwaite's (nor do they have each other's), but both have helped to form me as a reader of medieval texts. In the case at hand in this essay, *Omeros* has the quality of being irreducibly European in many ways, variously redirecting, taking flight on the wings of, and ruling out of court Homeric, Virgilian, and Dantean poetics and (because all three function as inventors of history in the present context), historiography. Walcott's uses of them serve for the making of a Caribbean history and poetics that feed on the literary genre of epic while rejecting that genre's premises by making the local world of the small place, an island in the eastern Caribbean, on nothing more than its daily scale, sufficient to the demands of epic for memory and fame (recognition by others) and for a communal iden-

9. As further and profound exemplars of a radical Caribbean poetics, Walcott himself cites St.-John Perse and Aimé Césaire from the Francophone Caribbean ("The Muse of History," 37–43, 48–54).

10. The line counts, lacking in the published edition, are mine, made chapter by chapter.

11. This is a rough logic for sure, the last proposition being preposterous in the time of Brexit, but thereby carrying its own message.

12. This essay may be related to Svend Erik Larsen's advocacy of a new post-national 'comparativity' that dissolves the spatial and temporal borders erected by a 'comparatism' founded on the model of national literatures. His chief illustrative text for application to European (and other) texts is the great novel by Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*. I have found Bruno Latour's model of a single plane on which connections across time and space can be made to be the richest and deepest-reaching body of thought for making the kinds of 'comparativity' that Larsen proposes and I attempt here. Like (I believe) Larsen, I would express the joining factor across time and space on this single plane to be 'the literary,' which I would define as the power of language to dissolve the world of things as we experience them in their facticity in order to recreate other worlds of objects, in an unending loop (what Latour calls the unending process of reassembling the social). That is, the literary functions as a solvent in which history can be constituted and reconstituted by a kind of brokering of what we call things or facts in the presence of desire and invention through the medium of language, so that history and fiction meet as life; Walcott is a poet of such procedures, most of all in one of his most reflexive strategies, his play on the sounds and etymologies of words and his play with metaphor which together compose a poetics of ceaseless metonymic substitutions. This quality of metonymy constantly breaks down semantic borders all the way to the borders between history and fiction, or between now and then, or here and there, as each pole in each pair shuttles with its other: language dissolves and reconstitutes the world according to its own operations. Regarding the reversibility which is nonetheless a non-identity of history and fiction, I have found Paul

tity, or more plainly for sufficiency of being. Walcott's is an existential response to the experience of empire from the side of subjects whom it made its objects, subjects of whom it took possession in real senses.

Walcott's engagement with imperial forces ranges from British to European, and by the usual unhappy *translationes*, to the "new empire" of the United States (169.11, 206.1 – where he's its servant),[10] all of which continue to maintain their effects on island life. I select here, as a center of gravity that enables our return to texts of the middle ages bearing Walcott's Europe in our train, his depiction of London in *Omeros*. His London is the primary manifestation in the poem of his multiply imperial western Europe (though he catches up Soviet empire in Poland, 210–12.1–48). The subject, the metropolitan city of the most extensive of the western European national empires, allows us to string a series of medieval Londons on a single line running more or less backwards, from the poem "In Honour of the City of London" in 1501 often attributed to William Dunbar to that of the biography of Edward the Confessor in the *Vita Edwardi Regis* in 1065–67. Each case is a test case of western Europe, by virtue of the premise that London centers England, that England centers Britain, and that Britain (in the form of the Victorian empire) was the most consequential part of that western Europe that bred the global empires and came to be taken by many to be Europe.[11] This relay of premises is implanted in a metonymics of history whose principal figures are cities that reach from off the continental European coast in London through Rome to the Mediterranean and into Troy, whose location in Asia threatens to weaken the membrane of the myth of Europe. So Walcott's London is a port of entry into a world as wide as what Walcott calls, with contempt but also fascination, History; and medieval Londons are ports of entry into both History and history (if we take Walcott's wished-for local focus as the correlate of the lower case).[12]

St. Lucia was just one of many Caribbean islands to be crisscrossed by the western European empires once Columbus chanced there. The Caribbean experienced Europe, was *made over* by it, and *made* by it, was *constituted*, through the activities of Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and of course Britain (with marks left also by Denmark and Sweden). Conquest, more or less genocidal, in spirit or in deed, was the crime that depopulated the island (reflected in the memories of the Aruacs in *Omeros*); slavery was the crime that re-

Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* a uniquely satisfying encounter with ways of thinking about what the writing of history and the writing of

fiction share: the two great narrative forms refigure, rather than refer to, the human experience of time, Ricoeur argues.

13. Rodolphe Gasché, writing on Europe, invokes Heidegger on a relationship of "difference and reciprocity" between thought (philosophy) and poetry in "the saying of an originary world" (150) and the founding and disclosure of Being as that in the presence of which a people finds its historical existence (*Dasein*) (151–52). For Heidegger, Homer is the locus of this founding of Being "'for occidental thought;'" but "'contemporary historical Dasein can nonetheless not return to [the Greeks]'" (152): it must "found its destiny in an originary world of its own," in Gasché's words. For Heidegger, Hölderlin is the poet of the new originary world of a German people who had been deserted by their gods and awaited the naming of the absent God who would constitute a home for them in that new originary world. As such, the poet Hölderlin is a figure of beginning, including a beginning in "the destiny of Europe in its entirety" (given the place of the German people in Europe); he is so much a beginner that he is even, in Heidegger's present moment, a foreigner to the Germans themselves (153). In this function of poetry in relation to the function of philosophy, namely to bring an originary world into being for a people, in this poetry's task of a new foundation that cannot return to Homer while remaining in touch with him, and in this poetry's capacity to be unrecognized by the people on whose behalf it is written, I understand to be expressed the force of the poetry of Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite.

14. I take Kermode's birth and childhood on the Isle of Man to have something substantial to do with his astonishing suggestiveness on the literature of empire.

populated it. Several of the empires just mentioned – French, Portuguese, and Dutch, as well as British and that of the United States – make their promiscuous presence vividly felt in *Omeros*, leading to a world that, as small as it is, produces a medley of peoples, languages, and faiths. France and Britain, especially, fought over St. Lucia, so that Walcott's characters continue to speak a French creole and to mix Catholic and Protestant. The poem's principal characters are the descendants of enslaved Africans, together with a white couple, the Englishman Dennis Plunkett, now a local pig-farmer, and his Catholic southern Irish wife Maud; Major Plunkett carries memories of his time as an officer in the British army of World War 2, including in the north Africa campaigns, a trauma for which his life on St. Lucia is a healing antidote. The poem's engagement with these characters' history is necessarily an engagement with the imperial Europe to which they owe where they find themselves.

The engagement with western Europe is a double one, because in taking on the subject of a people who have been at the mercy of this Europe's use of them, the poem mediates and modifies, as well as side-steps and undoes, European genres, styles, and contents: Europe's ways of constructing itself in historiographical and literary texts, and Europe's self-representations. Here, epic is central, for its use of narrative verbal art to arrive at the civilization of peoples. Europe, empire, and epic converge in a discussion of Virgil's *Aeneid* by Sanford Budick. Budick carries out a full-fledged reading of "a certain characteristic moment" in Hegel's philosophy of history (750), decisive for Hegel's concepts "both of history and of mind" (751).[13] This moment, Budick argues, is Hegel's reading of a scene in Virgil's *Aeneid*: Aeneas's killing of Turnus at the poem's end. At the scene's root, in its recollection of the *Iliad*'s duel between Achilleus and Hektor, lies *the fall of Troy*, to be redeemed by the foundation of Rome (756–57). For Hegel, says Budick, the scene has to do at the same time with the constitution of "universal self-consciousness" and with "virtually the emergence of Europe" (754). In it, as Budick puts it, "one might say that... Virgil discovered empire" (755). Nothing could make violence more internal to the nature of the idea of Europe than such formulations. In his own fine distillation, Frank Kermode lays bare T. S. Eliot's correspondingly pivotal Virgil, involved in empire, Europe, and universe, who is then sublimated in Dante (Kermode, 13–46).[14] Eliot sees, for example, that to work outside the Dantean/ Virgilian frame is to work in the provincial (26), the provincial being the antithesis of the classic, because it inhabits time and change,

15. Watching rural performances of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana* in Trinidad, Walcott will later reproach himself for leaving out of account the continuing enactment of epic recollection among the south Asian diaspora in the formerly British Caribbean, or for seeing in it only (poor) theater instead of a living faith (Walcott, "The Antilles," 65–66). *Omeros'* relationship to the epic mode and to the indicated epics among such others as Joyce's *Ulysses* has been much discussed. Between them, Farrell, Davis, Hamner, Hogan, Dasenbrock, Breslin, and Jay provide both a rich systematic exposition of this relationship, and rich provocations on its literary and ideological implications (on the former, the question especially of whether Walcott makes something new or not). See also considerations of *Omeros'* relationship to Dante's *Commedia*, n. 18 below.

16. The push and pull of the double-consciousness indicated here is reflected in Walcott's impatience with descriptions of *Omeros* as an epic, and I think recognition of what he is up to depends on understanding why he is impatient. Walcott has talked at length about the function of all of the epics identified here in *Omeros*; at the same time, he execrates exactly the History of war, domination, and their legacy in monuments that epic in Homer, Virgil and Dante in such large part serves. His homage to them is one with a freedom from them. The dual attitude is partly a function of a reverence that is more deeply for the figure of the poet than for the poet's literal work, and perhaps for the poet of Walcott's imagination rather than the one who inhabits literary history. Farrell has written brilliantly about Walcott's radical option for a vagrant 'Homer' who figures an oral poetics proper to the Caribbean, as reflected in the very name Omeros, which puts a vernacular distance between him

instead of dwelling in permanence. For Eliot, Rome continues to define the order of history – in the Christian/Catholic Rome that emerged from the pagan empire (25–26), one universal structure from another, it even defines an *imperium sine fine*. Altogether, Dante is for Eliot "the most *universal* of poets in the modern language," but "first a European" (Kermode's citations of Eliot, 24).

Message lies in the medium of *Omeros'* as-if epic cast. Through allusion and imitation, but also through confrontation, the poem inhabits to the point of saturation with them the literary worlds of Homer's two epics, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Dante's *Commedia*. This is to put to the side *Omeros'* evocations of the biblical epic, with its own world-encompassing, world-community-making, imperative, and of Milton's related *Paradise Lost* and Joyce's *Ulysses*.[15] To say this is to say equally that in epic, Walcott engages Europe, and in Europe epic, and that that functional identity of epic and Europe for him (the identity is not inherent) is inseparable from the words and images of Troy and Rome. In echoing the European epics, Walcott must be understood to make echoes of them in turn: he invokes their constitution of History, but also voices the local and the small in a displacement of that constitution, so that the local and the small can sound in those epics as what is lost in the name of History. Where form and matter are concerned, Europe is for Walcott's *Omeros* both a point of entry into the local and material for Caribbean transformation while *also* the measure of what is separately and distinctly Caribbean.[16] In involving this literary history composed by Homer, Virgil, and Dante, Walcott, as we are about to see, works his way through but also around the latter two, Italian and Latinate poets of Rome, to the Greek Homer, curiously also the poet of Asian Troy; this identification with a more easterly Europe rather than with Rome, to the extent of crossing the Mediterranean into Asia, and orienting his vision from the perspective of smoking Troy, already declares a sympathy with the victims of European domination.

The narrative, encompassing a period of about three years (323.73; carefully documented in the poem's temporal signals) intertwines the stories of a handful of villagers (or townspeople; the textual clues play on the border between both scales) on the island and of the Plunketts who have settled among or alongside them with the story of the poet-narrator over this period, partly as he comes and goes on the island, partly as he lives or travels in North America and western Europe. Those villagers announce the Trojan-epic approach: the fishermen Achille and Hector, the woman they compete for, Hel-

and the 'Homer' of the classical tradition; it is revealing that the narrator-figure for Walcott in *Omeros* tells Omeros he never did finish reading the *Odyssey* (Farrell 252–57 and 263–65). Breslin 268–69 isolates the astonishing quality of this revelation of not-reading, so flagrantly opposed to reading to adapt, purposefully misread, or subvert your predecessor. With a typical perversity, however, at the moment Walcott avows the incompletion of his reading of Homer, he also calls himself "the freshest of all your [Omeros'] readers" (283.111). Walcott's poetics rejects any hint of secondariness in favor of the placement of works of art on a plane of timelessness in which they move back and forth among each other "without a tremor of adjustment," as he says of another Caribbean 'epicist', St-John Perse ("Muse", 38).

en, and their fellow-villagers Philoctete, who bears an incurable and foul-smelling wound on his leg, and the blind Seven Seas, or St. Omere, point to Homer's *Iliad* and, in the traveling narrator and in the former sailor Seven Seas, *Odyssey*; "[Helen's] village was Troy," Plunkett muses (31.175). The love triangle cuts directly to the Homeric narrative, but St. Lucia itself, called Helen in the eighteenth century because it changed hands so often between French and English, is the profounder Helen and love object. Most explicitly, independently of blind St. Omere (a St. Lucian surname) who is Seven Seas, and who thus doubles and sometimes merges with him, Omeros, the Greek name for Homer, is himself a figure in the narrative, appearing variously as the poet's muse (12–13.88–112), in the form of a bust real (14.115–16) or imagined (279–80.1–22), in the flesh or in vision or dream as a character (193–96.1–72), or as a guide to the narrator (279–84); but also appearing independently to nineteenth-century Catherine Weldon, who had left the north-east United States to join the Sioux in the Dakotas in the period of the Ghost Dance Movement (216.64–72, 217.90–96). There is, further, "our age's Omeros," James Joyce (200–01.58–87 at 65), sighted by the narrator in Dublin, another islander athwart the British empire, though from within western Europe. Whether by surrogacy, analogy, anti-type, or misprision, this will be a Homeric and Trojan tale. From beginning to end, attending innumerable moves large and small, is the reflex by which island life, from its smoke to its middens to a boy riding a horse on a beach, recollects to the poet Homer's Troy; in tension with this reflex is his effort to train himself out of it, and break the spell of History in favor of nothing more than his own locale.

As a Trojan tale, *Omeros* is not only Homeric, but Virgilian and Dantean. The *Aeneid* is of course itself Homeric, symmetrically divided into the first six books of Aeneas' and the Trojans' wandering that paid homage to and competed with the *Odyssey*, and the six books of war led by Aeneas the commander and father-figure of empire that did the same to and with the *Iliad*. Troy being as yet unfallen in the *Iliad*, the motif of burning Troy (31.175–76, 35.57, 99.107–10, 297.71), is fundamentally Virgil's. So is Achille as a wandering counter-Aeneas (301.48). More thematically, the poet's two meetings with his dead father (67–76; 186–188.96–138), and these meetings' role in clarifying the poet's mission, tap Aeneas' meeting with his father Anchises in the underworld at Cumae in *Aeneid* vi, as does a pervasive explicit sibyllic presence, chiefly in Ma Kilman, proprietress of No Pain Café, and healer. Most of all, a critical reference to a

17. See Farrell 261 for the way Walcott's lines here also play precisely off and radically *against* the opening lines of the *Iliad*. Despite the details of its intertextuality, the simultaneous rewriting of both epic invocations at once reads as a freedom from them, not a homage to literary bonds; correspondingly, Farrell 265–67 reads deeply into Walcott's scrambling of the chronological time of paternity, genealogy, and ancestry, all of which are indispensable to classical epic, in a temporality discovered and invented for the Caribbean.

18. As well as Fumagalli (in particular), Hogan, and Dasenbrock, Austenfeld and Loreto are rewarding on the intertextual relationships of *Omeros* to the *Commedia*. Loreto's discussion is especially fine, finding Dante in *Omeros'* language and images, most of all of the image of light, rather than in the plot, themes, narrative, and characters; from my perspective, this allows her to separate a Dante, the poet of History, whom Walcott could only have deplored had he commented on Dante's imperial vision, from a Dante whose unforgettable voice and visionary imagery Walcott does not stop hearing and seeing throughout his poetic life.

fog that "hides the empires: London, Rome, Greece" (196.72) cannot be other than to Virgil's Rome, as confirmed when in the reference just noted, Achille is imagined "like another Aeneas, founding not Rome but home" (301.47–48): Virgil's Rome is a constant subliminal presence as an exemplar of the abstract as well as concrete empire that is History. *Omeros'* last chapter begins with a sequence of three "I sang"s that refigure the *Aeneid's* opening words (320.1–10) in the poet-narrator's pointed subversion, in the fisherman Achille, the fishing tackle of his necessity, the wide country of the Caribbean sea, of the three things that Virgil sings in i.1–8: the man, the arms, Rome.[17]

If Virgil's *Aeneid* invests *Omeros*, so does Dante's *Commedia*, which took up the baton of History Virgil had taken from Homer.[18] The *Commedia's* Virgil functions as a principal character in his person and as the voice of pagan Rome's role in history, and as Dante's mentor and guide till Beatrice takes Dante where a Virgil enclosed in the limits of pagan vision could not: to Paradise. The case of the pilgrim-poet Dante, seeker and wanderer, which includes the search for a mission at once personal and historical, ensures that Virgil's merging of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is maintained by Dante. As Homer appears in the very first word of Walcott's poem, its title, Dante appears in its first three lines, saluted by the first of the irregular but disciplined *terze rime* (the verse form invented by Dante for the *Commedia*) into which Walcott shapes the roughly hexametrical lines associated with classical epic.

This four-cornered body of texts, the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, and *Commedia*, together makes a surpassing contribution to whatever one might mean by Europe in its historiographical and literary monuments. This is partly so because they function not alone as literary texts, but as declarations of the nature of history as the human condition, even to the point of declaring the human condition properly to be European. For Walcott, the category of History encompasses Rome as the expression of the experience of time and human purpose in the language of force; his project is to deplore History in favor, at most, of history: preferably, of a kind of naturalization of history into a fusion of the human and the human's land, sky and seascapes. So for Walcott the motifs of History and of the wanderer stamp Homer, Virgil, and Dante. All of this is to say that *Omeros* engages Europe and the European literary tradition. In solution together are the agon between Asia and Europe in Homer's Troy, Virgil's movement of world history from Asian Troy to Rome, and

Dante's poetics of universal Roman empire and universal Roman church (and of course the gods were always universalizing by underwriting the Homeric and Virgilian worlds).[19] This solution sits within the conceptual frame of a purported universal history understood in the Christian era to be structured by *translatio imperii* on its westward course from Old Testament Mesopotamia and then Asia. Altogether, in engaging Homer, Virgil and Dante, Walcott engages Europe's surrogacy for History, within which Rome's empire was in turn to be seen to migrate to France, and then Spain and Britain (before much later crossing the Atlantic to the USA as western Europe's progeny). Of the four texts, Walcott's relation to Dante's *Commedia* tells us most about his model of history in *Omeros*, in relation to which many medieval texts, with their incipient 'Europe,' look quite different from the view from within that Europe's making or madeness (as in the *Commedia*).

We have seen Walcott's fixation with Troy and Rome as markers of History in Virgil. So it is illuminating that where the *Commedia* is concerned Walcott shows no interest whatsoever in Dante the great poet of papal and imperial Rome as the fulfilment of a divine plan that issued from the fall of Troy.[20] Nonetheless, Walcott draws abundantly from Dante's poetic universe. *Omeros* is populated by figures who appear out of the past within a universe that reaches from hell (with its own imprecatory Malebolge and infernal circles, 59–60.121–59, 289–90.1–39) to paradise (where is the poet's dead father? See 187.107–08, 70–71.77–87), and furnishes its own "charred ferryman" on whose boat the poet sits in "weightlessness" to see a spectral French fleet preparing to fight over Helen, the island (285–88 at lines 55 and 5).

One motif will have to be enough here to indicate the drive behind Walcott's use of Dante: the relation of fathers/ancestors to sons/descendants. This is partly because this device is a strategy for building temporality into the poetic vision at the same time that this vision is turning its back on History; and partly because it catches Walcott's focus on the personal and local. Together, these elements produce the engagement of a person with the historical (not Historical) world. In *Omeros*, the poet's father's two appearances to his son are closer to Dante's encounters with shades of the dead than to Aeneas's encounter with his father in Virgil, being focused on the formation of a poet, not of a maker of History. In the first, Warwick's charge to his son cuts to the bone: as a boy, he had watched the local women carry coal by the hundredweight basket on their heads: "'the

endless repetition as they climbed the / infernal anthracite hills showed you hell, early'" (73–74.64–87 at 74.86–87). The chapter-section following (74–76.88–129), can be read as Walcott's own utter repudiation of the project of Dante the pilgrim-poet, to grasp the beyond; his father charges him simply to

> 'Kneel to your load, then balance your staggering feet
> and walk up that coal ladder as they do in time,
> one bare foot after the next in ancestral rhyme.
>
> Because Rhyme remains the parentheses of palms
> shielding a candle's tongue, it is the language's
> desire to enclose the loved world in its arms;
>
> or heft a coal-basket; only by its stages
> like those groaning women will you achieve that height
> whose wooden planks in couplets lift your pages
>
> higher than those hills of infernal anthracite.
> There, like ants or angels, they see their native town,
> unknown, raw, insignificant. They walk, you write...' (75.103–14)

The poet's trajectory is the opposite of Dante's: to turn towards a literal earth.

When, nearing the end of *Omeros*, the poet meets his father for the second time, we can hear Dante's meeting in *Paradiso* with his ancestor Cacciaguida. In *Paradiso* xvii, Cacciaguida offers his descendant a prophecy of the latter's life of exile and of his final triumph as a poet; the poet-narrator's father closes the encounter with the following words:

> 'Once you have seen everything and gone everywhere,
> cherish our island for its green simplicities,
> enthrone yourself, if your sheet is a barber-chair,
>
> a sail leaving harbour and a sail coming in,
> the shadow of grape-leaves on sunlit verandahs
> made me content. The sea-swift vanishes in rain,
>
> and yet in its travelling all that the sea-swift does
> it does in a circular pattern. Remember that, son.' (187-88.127-34)

The scene has designs on Virgil's leave-taking of Dante in *Purgatorio* xxvii.142, at which Virgil crowns (*corono*) and miters *te sovra* ("over yourself") a pilgrim-poet finally fully prepared for his entry with Beatrice into Paradise. In the language of travels and sails, Walcott merges himself as Dantean soul/poet with Dante's Odysseus (Ulysses), the explorer condemned for traveling in search of too much, who was also Homer's home-finder. By affirming the poet's travels, by picturing to him home instead of (like Cacciaguida) exile, and by seating him in a barber-chair in St. Lucia instead of crowned in the amphitheatrical rose of the divine court, Walcott reverses the direction in which one poet of Troy and Rome passes a baton to his Christian successor as a poet of universal history, or of empire and Europe. The local place, empire dissipated, suffices: though empire has gone to make what it leaves behind.

The spatial dimensions of Walcott's radical reorientation of Dante's universe from a view outside Europe appear when the poet-narrator and his father prove not the only versions of Dante and Cacciaguida. Achille has a long visionary return across the Atlantic and three centuries to a village upriver on the Congo (133–52; so undoing Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* too); "[h]alf of me was with him," says the biracial narrator (135.58), who thus meets a forefather far deeper in time than his father, a closer parallel to Cacciaguida.[21] There, Achille meets his ancestor, Afolabe (136–39.67–132) – the man whose son had left as a slave so long ago – who asks him what his name means (Achille does not know), and challenges him to recover the language, or the faith that language can name things and, decisively, people, that was lost in the Atlantic crossings. "Are you the smoke from a fire that never burned?" asks Afolabe, in his own Trojan commentary (139.129). Achille's encounter in the same visionary experience with a blind griot echoes Dante's with Cacciaguida in another way, the griot prophecying the past of Achille and his people, as Cacciaguida did Dante's, and charging him with historical memory (139–40.1–30, 148–49.1–24). When Achille returns to himself at sea in his boat and makes for his village, healed and renewed, he becomes another Homer: "I'm homing with him, Homeros, my nigger, / my captain, his breastplates bursting with happiness," says the narrator-poet (159.73, playing on the painting *The Gulf Stream* by Winslow Homer that he sees later in a museum, 183–84.28–40). The poet's identification with Achille (see what is entailed in this identification by another look at 301.47–48) means that a Virgilian-Dantean *topos* of the meetings

21. Achille's journey to the continent of Africa is the geo-spatial expression of a break, but also a splice, with Europe that runs throughout *Omeros* in innumerable ways to produce a Caribbean derived from Africa, but no longer of Africa; and a Caribbean also permanently inflected with Europe, but not of Europe: altogether, a new community. Africa in *Omeros* thus dramatizes a change in the axis of vision that demands more attention than I can give it here, and that would in my view call up the epical poetic trilogy of Kamau Brathwaite in his *The Arrivants* (written as Edward Brathwaite), a work that weighs in the balance equally with *Omeros*. There, his litany of cities – "O Kano Bamako / Gao" – and villages ("Prelude", 5) records an imagined migration of Caribbean ancestors across west Africa to nominate a radical alternative genealogy to that from Troy. Baugh (192–94) brings home another revolutionary African axis when he discusses the sibyl figure Ma Kilman's discovery of the healing root transplanted from Africa that cures Philoctete: a biological remedy to the illusion of urban Troy.

across the border between the living and the dead of ancestor/father and descendant/son, in particular the Dantean turn on that *topos*, works to undo the dedication of the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia* to a History that is the history of empire/Europe, and at the same time to found a poetics from outside Europe's gravitational pull in a way that makes Europe outside the gravitational pull of the Caribbean.

Since the pulse of *Omeros* is the figure of the narrator-poet on a visionary journey towards the light and the prophetic declaration of his craft, even if that craft's object is a St. Lucia seen in a light free of Troy, the case is there to be made that Dante is for Walcott a resource, as well as a provocation to resistance still deeper and massier than his resistance to classical Homer in Omeros. Within a few lines of the opening of the last book of the poem, the poet is in Omeros' company at the top of a cape on his island:

> I could hear the crumpling parchment of the sea in
> the wind's hand, a silence without emphasis,
>
> 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. (282.71–81)

Here, the poet confirms in the imagery of a new incorporeal sight that he has learned a Dante-like capacity to see, but whose object is not paradise, nor the earth and its history from paradise's perspective, but his small piece of the globe in the island named after the blind saint whose name means light, and who, with the Virgin Mary, had prompted Beatrice to stir a lost Dante towards that light.[22] For the ideas that Troy can be found in St. Lucia, or that History should be looked for in St. Lucia, are illusions, and the narrator's struggle is to be dispossessed of them and of their fabricators. Several pages earlier, the poet-narrator had uttered his frustration:

All that Greek manure under the green bananas,

22. Walcott has discussed the reference to the last cantos of the *Paradiso* here, "Reflections," 234. But he does not mention there what seeing in shadowless light meant for Dante: that he (Dante) was right to read history in the light of the fire of Troy, and so commit himself to an eschatologized History.

under the indigo hills, the rain-rutted road,
the galvanized village, the myth of rustic manners,

glazed by the transparent page of what I had read.
What I had read and rewritten till literature
was guilty as History. When would the sails drop

from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse

shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,
the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros;"
when would I enter that light beyond metaphor? (271.82–93)

23. My attempt to do justice to *Omeros'* figuration of history can only be partial. Much else contributes to the depth of the poem's historical field, for example the story of the eighteenth-century midshipman Plunkett as both ancestor and newly discovered son for Dennis Plunkett, or in the deepest temporal reach, the pre-Columbian Aruacs of the Caribbean basin (3–8.1–126, 161–64.26–93); looking into the future, the island is slipping away from itself through local political corruption and the economic power of local and global capital (289–90.1–39).

24. Walcott's own essay "The Muse of History" opens up what such invention and discovery might be, as he refuses the options readily imposed on him of an assimilation to Europe or revolutionary rejection of it in favor of Africa; Walcott here pulls off a nearly impossible task, it seems to me, arguing for not less than a certain veneration for a European poetic legacy while holding nothing back in his disgust for European empire and racism, and locating a new poetics in the Caribbean somehow unrooted in European poetics while honoring that poetics and even sharing something with it.

This lament prepares the way for the final book, which, via repeated statements of the false lure of Troy (312–13.57–87, 322–23.43–75), seeks to secure the poet's arrival at a new poetics, stated and exemplified in the poem's final chapter, with its three-part rejection of Virgil (cited earlier). Along the way, the shadow of another great medieval figure is discernible. Referring to Achille, the narrator writes that "History has simplified / [stanza break] him. Its elegies had blinded me with the temporal / lament for a smoky Troy..." (297.69–71). This implicates Augustine seduced by *Troiae incendium* ("the burning of Troy") and weeping over Dido and Aeneas in Carthage in the *Confessions* (I.13.34–40 at 40), a scene that for T. S. Eliot marked out that north African on the same shoreline as Carthage as, before his conversion, a mere provincial (see Kermode 26). But in seeking to extricate himself from Troy's embrace, Walcott is as anti-Dantean as he is in his effort to find his destination in the local; both mean, in direct opposition to Dante, freeing himself from empire, from Europe, and from History.[23]

The propulsion behind such a project is of the order of Frantz Fanon's call in *The Wretched of The Earth*, cited by Tully, "Let us decide not to imitate Europe;" "we must invent and we must make discoveries" (Tully 338).[24] Walcott illustrates what such invention and discovery might look like. Resituating his locality in a lower-case history means a new, lower-case, poetics as well. "Art has surrendered / to History with its whiff of formaldehyde," he writes of a visit to a museum (182.5–6), going on to accuse himself of seeking to hold the lives of the poor "in amber, / the afterglow of an empire" (227.83–84);

"Art is History's nostalgia" (228.96). Hence the poetics of small spaces, not "the weight of cities that I found so hard to bear," nor the sighs for "a place that was not mine," nor statues, but "the bird in the statue's hair" (204.72–78), or, as Omeros tells him later, "'the love of your own people'" (284.132). Walcott's poetics means, then, stripping proper names of their accretions over time: especially the words Troy, Rome, and, as we shall see, London, but also personal names, not only Achilles or Helen but Homer, and most fundamentally History and Art, whose accretions are the build-up of discourse under the aegis of official power. Walcott's extra-European perspectives in the creation of a Caribbean history and art can thus illuminate perspectives internal to Europe, both Europe's own captivation by History and its proper names, and its own desire for lower case history and art.

Omeros' London

Walcott's London, which appears about two thirds of the way through the poem, is marked out in the poem's system. At the end of Book Four of the poem's seven books, on a beach at Marblehead, Massachusetts, the narrator's father, in his second appearance to his son, commissions him to visit the cities of History that for him had been so impossibly elsewhere and had once so diminished him on his small island. But he warns the poet that "'there is pride in cities'" (187.126), and, as we have seen, asks him, once his travels are over, to "'cherish our island for its green simplicities.'" The poet takes up his pious commission immediately, at the opening of Book Five: "I crossed my meridian," he reports, leaving the U.S.A. to place himself in "this mud-caked settlement founded by Ulysses:" Ulissibona, Lisbon (189.1–5). From its wharves, he gazes out as the "clouds read backwards" across the Atlantic till they arrive at the wharves facing Lisbon in Port of Spain, Trinidad (long a home of Walcott's; 189.13).

Once upon a time, Pope Alexander (VI) had split the world like a calabash, and given half to Lisbon along with the seeds of its races, and half to Imperial Spain (191.43–44, 193.93–95). It is their commerce in sugar and slaves (190.37–38), across "waves like welts from the lash" (191.41), that join the wharves facing each other across the Atlantic. "Across the meridian, I try seeing the other side," the poet remarks drily (as if there really were two sides), from "this port where Europe / rose with its terrors and terraces" (191.40, 62–63).[25] His is

25. In another image of antipodality, Dennery in St. Lucia faces Dakar (224.5–9).

a "forked shadow" (191.51), split, as he arrives in a place he felt he somehow already knew: "My shadow had preceded me. How else could it recognize / that light to which it was attached, this port where Europe / rose …?" (191.61–63). This is the narrator of his European forefathers. Lisbon had once been one of History's sites, but History has receded from it (193.90–91), lingering on only in its deteriorating monuments (192–93.64–65, 80–85, 92–93); meanwhile, History had never arrived in Port of Spain (192.67–72), which, "the ebbing market in slaves / and sugar declining below the horizon" (190.37–38), has lapsed now, into "an infinite Sunday" (192.73). This is the narrator's first view in *Omeros* of Europe across the line drawn by the papal meridian between two worlds, that of, let us say, the medieval T and O maps which had no space for the Western hemisphere, and that of today's maps situating many of us who do our work on medieval Europe off those medieval maps.

Directly from Lisbon, Walcott's scene passes to London, where the shaggy figure of Omeros arises as a bargeman from the Underground at Charing Cross to sit on the steps of the church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, hunched over a paper manuscript of the *Odyssey* till a warden from the church chases him away. The bargeman steers himself towards the Thames; in echo of the just-given admonition of the poet's father, "London rustled with pride" (195.39). At the Embankment, he "curled up on a bench… / He saw London gliding with the Thames around its neck / like a barge…" (195.40–42). It is Omeros who lies on the bench. But it is Walcott who sees with the eyes of his master: he makes it clear later that he was on the spot in person to see Omeros make his appearance (282.82–86), and the distinction between the two fades when the poet takes up the thread in the first person plural pronoun on behalf of "our island people" (196.83) to indict the city Omeros scrutinizes for its assumption of the power to measure all things. What does Omeros/Walcott see? Like Lisbon, London's monuments are caught at a disadvantage, and soiled (195.43–46), but unlike Lisbon, the London Walcott now launches upon is full of menace, or the realities of a brute power that is contemporary.

Omeros/Walcott sees bridges, piers, boats, tugs, barges – the river traffic of the Thames – tour buses, churches, spires, bells, many monuments, landmarks, and buildings: the Thames and its Embankment, Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, Westminster Bridge, St. Paul's, All Hallows, St. Martin-in-the-Fields and other churches, the Tower of London, Greenwich, Shoreditch, the

Corn Exchange, the National Gallery, Brixton, the Serpentine in Hyde Park and other parks, Madame Tussaud's. The imagery into which all these are set converges on money, especially trade and banking, and power. The Thames itself is coin (195.58, 197.106), the corn of the Corn Exchange is alchemical (196.78); London sets prices and scans bank-rates (197.88, 99). That coined river applauds the Houses of Parliament (195.58, 196.67–69), but brings to the observer's mind a "devalued empire" (195.57) and "the wash of far navies" (196.66); hard power is also suggested by the spears of the park railings and the menace of "the Tower" (195.49–50). Another kind of power accumulates in the progressive emergence of Christian, liturgical, evangelical, scriptural London. The function of the references to All Hallows church, Westminster Abbey, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, St. Paul's, Michaelmas, and "the Saints' litany" (196.83) is devastating. Punning on Jesus' address in the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples as the salt of the world (196.84), and the light of the world (197.100; cf. Matthew 5.13–14), an oracular voice finds a Christian city and church indifferent to the poet's island people (196–97.73–111), its touch with the gospels lost (in the previous section, a church warden has chased the vagrant-looking Omeros from the steps of the St. Martin that appears again here at 196.80).

The most persistent imagery threads the description of London with the institution in which the ubiquitous money and the powers temporal and spiritual had cooperated: slavery. London pulls the Thames as if the yoke of Time lay on its neck; the sounds of the tinkling Thames are those of its ankle-irons, its barges are chained to it "like our islands" (195–96.41–42, 51, 77). A pun made by a line break noted by Roy (148) gives us "the City that can buy and sell us / the packets of tea stirred with our crystals of sweat" (197.101–02), in an image that compounds slavery with the two great crops of British empire, including that of the Caribbean, sugar. Another, earlier, pun darkens the image of London from across the antipodal divide: Omeros sees "where a couple suns / near the angled shade of All-Hallows by the Tower" (195.49–50), an image of easy local eros in the shade of English/Anglican spiritual and political authority. The indictment of England (metonym for Britain) deepens at the end of this section: though the day seen from Omeros' bench has been one of midsummer heat, "the sunflower sets after all... / ... as a gliding fog hides the empires: London, Rome, Greece" (196.70–72). Altogether, it is London "rustl[ing] with pride" (195.39), in Augustine's term of radical opprobrium for the Roman empire (Latin *superbia*; see *Con-*

26. Robert Hamner notes the strong echoes in 195–96.59–72 of the description of London and the Thames at the opening of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; the fog recalls the terrible gloom brooding over that London (Conrad 3–4). The Polish Conrad's dismal and terrifying London is of course seen from an eastern European perspective, from outside the cluster of western colonial powers; he'd have had his own relation to Walcott's reference to the dialects of the shadows from the Outer Provinces (195.59–60).

cerning the City of God Book One, chapters 1–6) that leads back to Rome and Greece (where Greece is metonymized in *Omeros* by Homer's Troy).[26]

So Omeros and Walcott see the London that the fog of empire would have it be, the measure of all things. In this vision not from the perspectives that London arranges for itself, however, but from those of a bargeman-cum-vagrant and of the "Outer / Provinces," from under the scrotum of the rearing bronze stallions, or in upside down form in the reflections from the river (195–96.59–60, 46, 67–9), empire is belittlement, a ransacking of the local psyche in the ransacking of the local economy, underwritten by a diminishment of the provincials' language (picked up, as is the motive of money, in Plunkett's London, 251–52.1–30). It is clear that, in the 1980s of the poem (as in the 2010s of the present moment), *empire is not a past thing*. Walcott's London continues to core the humanity from the objects of its past imperial power. It measures them according to another reduction crucial to Walcott's Europe, and coincident with the reductions made by trade, navies, parliament, and church, namely History and Art. London is in "[t]he meridian of Greenwich" the measure of time (196.73; see also 195.43) and of desire (figured as the light of the world that is Art, as in the reference to the National Gallery, 197.100).

Medieval Londons: The London of "In Honour of the City of London" (*c.* 1501)

This London of Walcott's is in a dialogue, across a level plane of time and space that is mutually reversible, with medieval Londons. Omeros/the poet-narrator sees the usual stuff of the city of Westminster area and the present face of the earlier medieval cities of London to Westminster's east: All Hallows by the Tower was founded in the seventh century, St. Paul's in the seventh, Westminster Abbey in the tenth century, Westminster Palace in the eleventh, the Tower of London in the eleventh, the Bloody Tower in the thirteenth. Back behind the Thames, Omeros, himself from an even remoter age, seems to see the marshlands that preexisted Westminster, in a passage alluding (I take it) to Conrad's evocation of early Roman days on the banks of the Thames and Rome's own far navies (196.62–66; cf. Conrad, 5–7). But the residence of medieval London in Walcott's London gives rise to an explicit moment as well, in his reference to it as of "cities all the floure" (195.48), a citation, with a change in the

word order, from a poem commonly attributed to William Dunbar, "In Honour of the City of London" (*c.* 1501).[27] The first two stanzas forge strong links to Walcott's London:

> LONDON, thou art of townes *A per se.*
>   Soveraign of cities, seemliest in sight,
> Of high renoun, riches and royaltie;
>   Of lordis, barons, and many a goodly knyght;
>   Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
> Of famous prelatis, in habitis clericall;
>   Of merchauntis full of substaunce and of myght:
> London, thou art the flour of Cities all.
>
> Gladdith anon, thou lusty Troynovaunt,
>   Citie that some tyme cleped was New Troy;
> In all the erth, imperiall as thou stant,
>   Pryncesse of townes, of pleasure and of joy,
>   A richer restith under no Christen roy;
> For manly power, with craftis naturall,
>   Fourmeth none fairer sith the flode of Noy:
> London, thou art the flour of Cities all. (Quiller-Couch 26.1-16)

The author's charge is eulogy of a chief city in a monarchical, aristocratic, and parliamentary order (lines 4 and 5–6 effectively constitute the houses of Parliament), not to mention in the current of universal time since Noah's Flood. In the political sense, time makes some difference to Walcott's London. Otherwise, the two Londons have much to agree on. 'IHCL''s London, like Walcott's, is a city of money and of religious as well as of secular power; it is a city that declares epochs, as in that since the Flood (cf. Walcott's London's "somnolent sphinxes," 195.47), a city that recalls Troy, and a city at a global zenith (26–27.2, 11, 31–32). The rest of the poem builds on this salute. The city is "Strong Troy in vigour and strenuytie / ... / Empress of townes, exalt in honour, / In beawtie berying the crone imperiall" (26.19–22). There is no mistaking the force that underlies the face that London presents to the world: an early pledge of domination under the aegis of the god of war, Rome makes its appearance through the Tower actually built by William the Conqueror:

> By Julyus Cesar thy Tour founded of old
> May be the hous of Mars victoryall,

>　Whose artillary with tonge may not be told:
>　London, thou art the flour of Cities all. (27.37–40)

Political power is the corollary of military. London is the epitome of mastery, "Soveraign of cities" (26.2): the epitome of, first, mayoral (the entire last stanza), then baronial, then royal, and finally imperial, power. Economic power is abundantly on show in its merchant class ("Rich be thy merchauntis in substaunce that excellis," 27.45).

The Thames is recognizably Walcott's Thames: fair streams "under [its] lusty wallys" (26.27), barges, ships and other vessels, sails and oars (27.29; Walcott 193.7, by association, and 194.25), the swans on the Thames (26.28) that respond to Walcott's on the Serpentine (in Hyde Park; 197.94); there are the places of religion and their bells ("Blith be thy chirches, wele sownyng be thy bellis," 27.44; cf. 195.48), and the clerical dress of the prelates (26.6), echoed in the "soutane" of Walcott's church-warden at Saint Martin-in-the-Fields (194.31). The knights' "cheynes of gold" (27.36) echo Walcott's metaphors evoking both slavery and the money motive, as does the appearance of the "sovereign" of St. Paul's (197.103) in 'IHCL's first line. The atmospheric correspondences in the auras of wealth and power are supplemented by an erotic touch. In a narrative thematically interested in Edens ("'It's like Adam and Eve all over,'" Maud Plunkett says to her husband of the St. Lucian landscape, 63.217; cf. also 97.59), Walcott's own faintly paradisial allusion, immediately on citing 'IHCL,' to a couple sunning in a park by a tinkling river (195.49–51) glances at a civic erotics more firmly stated by the late-medieval author ("Fair be [the merchants'] wives, right lovesom, white and small; / Clere be thy virgyns, lusty under kellis [their headdresses]," 27.46–47).

In this variety of ways, the poets' Londons are in their constituting objects the same. Walcott doesn't dispute even London as flower. But from Omeros/Walcott's perspective, the earlier poet's celebrated and prosperous London is a brutal place, its flower either Time as iron in the clock face of Big Ben (196.76), or, as Hamner points out (110), the sunflower of the empire that claimed its sun never set (196.70). London in 1501 is of course not London of the Victorian imperial Britain that invests Walcott's London; there are as yet no analogous "shadows... multiplying from the Outer / Provinces, their dialects light as the gingko's leaf, their / fingers plucking their saris as wind picks at water" (195–96.59–61). 'IHCL' intimates a civics, and its picture suits what the narrator who opens the *Heart of*

28. Cf. Maljo's eccentric candidacy in national elections as founder of the United Force party, to launch a "new age" in repudiation of the alternatives, Marxist and Capitalist (sic; *Omeros* 104–09:1–135, at 8 and 27).

29. See Reeve in Geoffrey of Monmouth lix and 3 on the correct title of this work, usually cited as *The History of the Kings of Britain*.

Darkness terms "[t]he dreams of men, the seeds of commonwealths, the germs of empires" carried outward on the ebb of the river Thames, a schema that has the advantage of making London a city constructed not out of the motive of domination alone, the germ of empire, but of many motives, some of which, the dreams and the seeds, it may share with Walcott's St. Lucian villagers and villages.[28] But the dreams and commonwealths have soured in *Omeros*. In his Houses of Parliament, Walcott's London's is a debased citizenry. Walcott's disposition of London's elements ensures that the Eden-touched scene of the sunning couple takes place in a park enclosed by spear-shaped rails and shaded by a church whose name, All Hallows by the Tower, refers to one of London's most enduring and ominous expressions of central power; the river's tinkling that accompanies the scene is the sound of the Thames' ankle-irons. Turning to 'IHCL' from *Omeros*, we are likelier to see less the civic eulogy, and more the city's imperial brutality, which can be rendered as a boast in the images of London as another Troy (26.9-16) and city of Julius Caesar's Tower, beneficiary of the house of Mars (27.37–38). From the Omeric perspective, the *laus urbis* is an indictment.

Trojan London is the invention of the *De gestis Britonum* (*DgB* hereafter) by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the first text to identify the long-recognized city of Trinovantum as London (Clark, "Trinovantum" 138–41) and to see in the name a corruption of *Troia Noua* (Geoffrey 31.22.493-96).[29] In arriving at *DgB*, we arrive at the great insular British textual monument, in its assumption of and response to Virgil's *Aeneid*, to the force of imperial Rome as the measure of worldly history (for this most seminal text, see Ingledew, "Book of Troy"). It is bold enough to offer a counter-imperial history for Britain based on Britain's descent, commonly with Rome's, from Troy but with the New Troy, future London, built some four centuries in advance of Rome. If Walcott could not help seeing Troy in the details of daily life in St. Lucia, neither could Geoffrey not hear, or claim to hear, something like the language of Troy in Welsh (28:21). Geoffrey's account of earlier British history, preemptive until beyond the time of 'IHCL,' assigned London's foundation as *Troia Noua* to that figure only three generations removed from Homer's *Iliad*, Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas, who thus fulfilled Diana's prophecy to him of an *altera Troia* and an imperial future that was to be approached in Arthur's reign – in a rare medieval use of the word, he aims to conquer *totam Europam* (Geoffrey, 205:154.235) – and fulfilled in Victoria's reign: "'From your descendants will arise kings, who / will be

masters of the whole world'" (20:16).

Having named the island *Britannia* after himself, Brutus prospected the entire land for the site for a city; coming upon the Thames, he treads its banks (*deambulauit littora*, 31:22.492), as Omeros will later, and sees the spot he seeks; he supplies the city with citizens, and provides the code of law that will keep the peace. Lud will later supply walls and towers (30:22). The first paragraph of the *DgB* has already remarked the Thames' role (along with the Severn and Humber) in bringing *transmarina commercia ex uniuersis nationibus* into Britain (7:5.37; "foreign goods... from every land" in Wright's translation, 6:5). British history thus becomes a function of a city as much as the Roman empire's will later be (Pagden is forceful on a significance of the city as city that is peculiar to Europe, "Conceptualizing" 39–41). In the fourth century before Christ, in accordance with a widely known datum of Roman historiography, (the British king) Belinus, with his brother Brennius, conquers Rome; on Belinus' death, his ashes are placed in a golden container on the top of a tower he had built, in a clear evocation of the well-known obelisk in Rome containing Julius Caesar's (Geoffrey, 58:44; Master Gregorius, 34–35:29). Similarly, the bronze statue of Cadwallo as horseman, containing the king's body, parallels a statue thought at the time to be of the emperor Constantine – in the *DgB* half-British through his mother Helena – and recorded in a description of Rome contemporary with the *DgB* (Keene 73 and 71; *DgB* 276:201). Later, in Book iv, Geoffrey will signal his own attitude to Rome in the light of its Trojan origins by recounting at length Caesar's two failures to conquer Trinovantum: the British, and even their Norman successors, can see present London in the glow cast ultimately from Troy, in a manner that Walcott in St. Lucia strains to turn away from.

If the *concept* of cities, Rome and London, that trace to Troy helps to center the *Aeneid* and the *DgB* alongside *Omeros*, the *particulars* matter too. Keene draws attention to the multiple spatial and monumental features of twelfth–century London which appear as early as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's London. Long before Lud's walls and towers, Belinus builds in Trinovantum a marvelously made gate since called Billingsgate after his name, set in a great tower with a shipping port at its feet (Geoffrey 58–59:44; Keene observes the accuracy of this last reference to a modification to make access to ships docking there in the Thames easier). Keene points to Geoffrey's interest in St. Paul's as a royal mausoleum and in its neighbor church at St. Martin (on Ludgate Hill; not Walcott's St. Martin-in-the-

Fields; but the play in words in Walcott means there is no loss in the difference); to Geoffrey's hint at an engineering project to control the waters of the Thames that came to be attempted in 1190, a project Walcott might be seen to roll back at 196:62–64); and to the heroic history he attached to London's western gate by St. Martin's, Ludgate (Geoffrey 276:201) as well as to Billingsgate (Keene 73–74, 77–79). If we follow Walcott's lead once again in placing Londons contemporary and ancient on the same level plane of time and space, then Geoffrey's Trojan London is sculpted into Walcott's. When Omeros/Walcott looks at London from under "the balls of rearing bronze stallions," he might as well be looking at the bronze horse *mirae pulcritudinis* ("of marvelous beauty") on which the last great British king Caduallo sat on that west gate (Ludgate) in Geoffrey's history (277:201.508–09), its beauty fatally besmirched.[30]

'IHCL' and the *DgB* evaluate London differently, the one pro-Roman, the other anti-. But both celebrate power and empire, and the violence that sustains them, and derive them from Troy. We reach back into a medieval endorsement of a more or less unrestrained *libido dominandi* of the sort Augustine indicted in the Roman empire and in the earthly city in itself. The capacity of Britain's and London's Trojan origin not only to form contemporary knowledge of the island (for knowledge is what it counted as), but to enter into contemporary thinking about and shaping of the realities of the present is abundantly witnessed in the wake of Geoffrey's work. It can even be that Walcott helps us to take the *DgB* seriously in this way (though why would we not, on the grounds of its factitiousness, when we are able to take seriously the magisterial Virgil and, two hundred years after *DgB*, the magisterial Dante, masters of all discourses, and their factitious Troys and Romes?). A tight conceptual logic binds the idea of Troy in the *DgB* to the inheritors of the Norman conquerors to whom Geoffrey variously dedicated his history (Ingledew, "Book of Troy" 691-92). At the same time, that is not the whole story of the *DgB*; it is also an appeal for the making of a polity by a people bound by blood and law and the arts of civil life, emotionally so in the first person lament that we mostly take to be Geoffrey's own voice (according to himself, he is only the translator of his source) at the British inclination to civil war (Geoffrey 256:185).

In *Omeros*, then, the Homer who is the bargeman on the bench looks from underneath it at the London monument of a figure in the history of an island whose chief city had been founded by the people whose defeat in Troy he had told in the *Iliad*. For us to see such

30. An image that doubles the shat-upon bronze horseman monumentalizing the wharves of imperial Lisbon, in parallel with imperial London (*Omeros* 192.64–72).

intertextual connections in Walcott's poem is to respect his own methods, in which History is undone and Homer, or rather Omeros, can appear to the poet in St. Lucia as he does in London: it is to recognize that for Walcott poetry, if it eludes official power's efforts to conscript it to construct History, can create our history more fundamentally than our historiography does. Tutored by Omeros and his father, the narrator-poet comes to view the call of Troy as the call to surrender to the fixing of time and its investment with value by History. Cancelling time as a force of separation and distinction, to the point of allowing texts to talk in either direction to one another, enables 'IHCL' to gloss today's London, or Omeros to see a horseman who is metamorphically one of his Trojan progeny on the Thames Embankment (the space of London is the same by definition; the time is a constant uninterrupted by the breach between pre-modern and modern that Latour seeks to dissolve in *We Have Never Been Modern*). If this is so, 'IHCL', and medieval texts in general, are synchronous with Walcott's, and call in turn for readings that can undo their service, much of it unconscious, of official power in favor of the ordinary history that we see glimpses of in 'ICHL.'

Medieval Londons: The London of *Leges Anglorum Londoniis Collectae* (*c.* 1215)

I turn now to a medieval construction of London within a Trojan framework that strikes the note not only of imperial desire, the desire for History, but also of the more benign desire of human community. Walcott's confrontation of London's darker history can clarify also how a London can give expression to the same desires that motivate the villagers on his island: a desire to create a community that functions to realize ordinary human wishes to make a living, to form connections to other people who constitute communities, to have a voice in government, to take pleasure in the arts of social life. At the same time, this vision is set within one of the most ambitious statements of an empire ruled by the actually existing English monarchy (as against the projection of such a vision backwards, as in the *DgB* and its translators and mediators) in the medieval period. This construction takes place within a larger project: the massive collection called the *Leges Anglorum Londoniis collectae* by its editor Felix Liebermann.[31] This compendium of laws and legal treatises, assembled and framed in London by an unknown cleric over the years lead-

31. Liebermann's intimidating body of work on the materials of this collection remains indispensable, uniquely rigorous and penetrating. Six manuscripts are extant (O'Brien *GPKP* 205-06).

32. The article by Derek Keene on this collection, exactly because it is so fertile, makes an economic foil for this case. Keene's map of the collection (84) begins with folio 3v; for what is thereby cut out, see Riley 2.ii.624–26 (the earliest and best manuscript is online: Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS Lat. 155). It is basic to my point in this essay that the function of the phrase *regnum Britannie* that unfolds from Troy is not simply *missing* in Keene's map, but is *in effect not visible*, either to him or, in its implications, to any other commentator on the collection. These commentators are, as it were, immune to that spell that Troy can cast not only on the collector seeking to know and make his world, but on Walcott seeking to know and make his (though for one Troy is a necessity and for the other something to liberate oneself from). What the commentators on the *Leges Anglorum* miss or dismiss is the depth of the drive for an imperial vision that is variously the drive for participation in History, the drive for an encompassing community, and the drive for an intelligible world, in this case one with its necessary violence alongside whatever community-making desires may also be at work.

33. Translations from the *Leges Anglorum* are mine unless otherwise indicated.

ing to the crises of John's reign that produced the Magna Carta (1206–15, O'Brien *GPKP* 118) purports to lay out five hundred years of English law from Ine, *c.* 690, into the reign of Richard I. The perspectives and interests of London motivate the entire collection (O'Brien *GPKP* 118, Keene 69), and from it London emerges as the realm's political and civic center of gravity. What is missing in O'Brien's and Keene's characterization is that this centrality is embedded within the framework of Galfridian, that is, Trojan-derived, history: London is the center of the kingdom of the English when this kingdom is, the collector and editor of the materials tells us, what was formerly called the *regnum Britanniae* (e.g. Liebermann *Gesetze* 1:635.11.1.A4), for which, as the collection makes clear, Anglia is the current name. The collector – the Londoner, as Liebermann calls him – defines this *regnum Britanniae* at the collection's opening as the unitary insular and archipelagic kingdom of the *DgB*, encompassing Loegria, Cambria, and Albania and offshore islands, and he sustains this usage at critical points throughout the collection.[32]

If the *regnum Britannie* defines in principle though not in fact the *territorial* reach and *political* character of the contemporary realm of England under John, it is also the collection's *ethical* fulcrum. The enumeration of the parts of the *regnum Britannie* in the collection's opening – from its *provinciae*, *patriae*, and *insulae* to its seventy shires and next its hides – closes by evoking the three archbishoprics the island once had, that is in the British history of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and its twenty-eight bishoprics put into place *per constitutionem bonorum patrum et praedecessorum; ut expedit, et decet, et oportet, ad utilitatem, et ad salutem, et ad profectum animarum populorum totius regni praedicti* ("through the founding activities of the good fathers and predecessors; to effect, and befit, and be proper to the utility, and health, and advantage of the souls of the peoples of the entire aforementioned kingdom;" Riley 2:ii.626).[33] This is the first sounding of the ethical idea of the *regnum* as a Christian community that will pervade the Londoner's adaptations of his sources throughout the collection. The territorial, political, and Christian-communitarian drives of the *Leges* come clothed in, such that we may say constituted by, an appeal to Trojan temporality, a time-since-Troy. The burden of this editorial work is to forge from three separate laws across the island and beyond into its adjacent islands (Ireland excepted out of obedience to the model of the *DgB*, despite being since 1177 attached to John as *dominus Hiberniae*), namely those of Wessex, Mercia, and the Danelaw, one law and to establish it as the

ancient law *of the island and its islands*: this burden is to civilize the island and the archipelago it centers; it is also to imperialize it, because to rule over dominions with separate laws is to rule an *imperium*, as the writer explicitly notes (Riley 2:ii.624).

From the opening of the *Leges Anglorum*, the phrase *regnum Britannie* provides the hinge at point after point in the diachronic survey of the laws of the realm that follows. At the end of each of the first three reigns covered, those of Ine, Alfred and Aethelstan (all three already by 1215 iconic figures in medieval English historiography, and the last of them the point figure of *translatio* for the *DgB* 281:207.597), the Londoner announces how long the respective kings ruled over the *regnum Britannie* (the relevant passages are transcribed in Liebermann, *Über die leges* 12–14:6–8 [Ine]; 19–20:11,1–12 [Alfred]; and 22–23:15 [Aethelstan]; they can be read in context in Rylands 155, at 10v, 20r–20v and 34r respectively). He also alters his source so that both Ine and Alfred are made to speak in their legal codes of the *regnum Britannie*: it is a concept they are made to know and assert. Similarly, it is this Trojan-derived *Britannia* and the territories that belong to it, not *Anglia*, that Knut conquers and with which he enfeoffs his followers (*Über die leges* 26–27; Rylands 155 34r). With Knut's law codes for the *regnum Britannie* that he rules duly entered into the *Leges Anglorum*'s record, the next links in the chain of references to the *regnum Britannie* are the collection's most decisive, binding Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror, that is the great *translatio* into the present, into its legal, political, and community-of-the-realm-making model. At the center of this section lies the Londoner's version of a text of the *Leges Edwardi* (the Confessor; so I will refer to it as *LEC*) first written in *c.* 1130, in a fourth redaction that I will refer to as *LEC4*. As by far the most intensively reworked text by an editor thinking systematically, this work carries the brunt of the ideological project during these years of constitutional crisis.[34] It is this text within this ambitious summa of English and would-be insular law that does most to make London the center and fullest expression of the imperial *regnum Britanniae*.

In its first appearance in *c.* 1130, the *LEC* was part of an Anglo-Norman project to bridge the rupture of the conquest of 1066 by claiming that William the Conqueror had ratified traditional English law (see O'Brien for and on this text, *GPKP*; for William's explicit reconciling of Norman, English, and Norse-Danish interests, 190–92). It is therefore a document in the long *translatio* from English to Anglo-Norman rule: a work constituting as well as flexing power. By

34. For a concise and revealing introduction to this redaction of the *LEC*, see O'Brien, "Forgers."

the beginning of the thirteenth century, it is well circulated and established in three versions under the name of the English king and saint. In the context of this discussion, the first thing to know is that in these three versions, *there is not a single mention of London*. In *LEC4*, London now becomes centripetal: national law, which is the law of a multiethnic polity, is made *metropolitan* at the same moment as it is made insular (made to apply to the entire island, and not England only), where insular means imperial. Cutting athwart Walcott's London, however, the *LEC4* is also a statement of liberties, an effort to build human collectives protected from arbitrary power, and, quite remarkably, an effort to construct a realm constituted by a multiethnic citizenship. It represents London as a city of desire as well as of domination.

The redactor treats of London most directly and explicitly under his new rubric *De heretochiis et libertate Londoniarum et uenationibus regni Britannie* ("Of the commanders and liberty of London and of the [laws/rights of] hunting of the kingdom of Britain;" Liebermann *Gesetze* 1:656.32.B).[35] *Heretoches* is the Angles' word, he explains, for what the Romans (by implication) called the *ductores exercitus* ("leaders of the army") and the French *capitales constabularii uel marescalli exercitus* ("the heads of the militia or marshalls of the army"), namely *barones nobiles et insignes, sapientes et fideles et animosi* ("noble and distinguished lords, wise, faithful, and courageous"); they are the heads of the militia, in this case of the city of London. This means that this rubric foregrounds the function of force and the function of liberty together, the militia and its practices of hunting that serve as training for fighting, and the liberties of the citizens of London. It spells out London's place in these regards in an imperial British context, that of the *regnum Britannie*, and much of the drive of what follows is to lay out procedures that should apply across the realm. The editor-compiler had to work hard to make this London, the product of force (one expression of desire) and of the desire for a space of liberty, into a feature of the laws of Edward as the laws of an Anglia that is *in principle* (he knows that, *de facto*, it is not) the *regnum Britanniae*. He begins by universalizing the heretoches' elections across the *regnum*. The heretoches were elected, one per county, *in pleno folkesmot* ("in full assembly of the people"), as sheriffs (*uicecomites*) had to be, through *commune consilium pro communi utilitate regni* ("common counsel for the common benefit of the kingdom"). The system applies throughout the kingdom of Britain, in its *patriae*, *provinciae*, and *comitatus* (counties), a literal recollection of

35. Regarding Liebermann's formidable mise-en-page: he prints the compiler-editor's interpolations into the *LEC* in this fourth redaction under the rubric *Leg. Angl. Lond s. XIII coll. zu E. Cf. retr.*

the definition of the kingdom of Britain with which the collection opens (Riley 2:ii.624).

At this point, as a mark of his effort to compose the real of his own day, he must draw from one of the other texts in his compendium, the *Quadripartitus*, that is, on a separate work that appears in its own right earlier in his collection, in order to insert a series of laws of Knut into what he purports to be the laws of Edward. These laws concern among other things the vicissitudes of war (desertion or death) and hunting rights. In the process, he modifies several of them, and places them as a body inside a rhetorical frame derived from the distinctive political scheme and vocabulary of the collection's opening regarding the kingdom of Britain, and its core territorial, administrative, constitutional, and honorific features (1:657.32. B2-B7; cf. 1:365, 367, central columns). In this new section picking out London, into which the earlier laws of Knut are now inserted, the compiler identifies laws and constitutional practices defining the kingdom of Britain, especially concerning the regular assemblies called folkmoots. And then he invokes Troy. On every Monday in this London which is the head (*caput*) of the kingdom and the laws, and always the court of the lord king – the compiler continues – the husting (the central court) must sit: [*f*]*undata enim erat olim et edificata ad instar et ad modum et in memoriam ueteris magne Troie; et usque in hodiernum diem leges et iura, dignitates, libertates regiasque consuetudines antique magne Troie in se continet* ("For [London] was founded and built in time past in the image and manner and memory of the great Troy of old; and it contains within itself continuously up until today the laws and rights, dignities, royal liberties and customs of that ancient great Troy"). The thrust of this passage is visible in its explanatory conjunction, *enim*: what is done every week in the Monday husting is to be explained by laws and customs unchanged since the foundation of the city on the model of Troy.[36]

This claim is not made because the author believes there has been no interruption in these laws and practices; quite apart from the knowledge he must have of London's vicissitudes in its most recent decades, he has already been strong-worded about the suspension for several centuries of a fundamental Arthurian law that entailed London (Liebermann 1:655:32.A.8), and he follows the *LEC*'s reference in its earlier versions to a sixty-eight year hiatus of similarly realm-wide law in the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries that accounts for the rule of the Danish kings as an illegitimate interregnum (Liebermann *Gesetze* 1:662:34.1.b). The editor-compiler can make

36. Abigail Wheatley provides a rich treatment of London as Troy at exactly this period (52–64). Gervase of Tilbury (therefore presumably from Essex, but destined to be an aristocrat in Provence; cf. Banks) documents that the Tower is to London as the citadel of Ilium to Troy, the two castles opposing it on the west replicate Pergama, and all were built by Brutus to this end (Wheatley 57–59; along with Pergamum, Pergama is a Virgilian synonym for Troy or part of Troy). His work, the *Otia Imperialia* (*c.* 1211-14), written for the Roman emperor Otto IV, completed a project originating thirty years earlier, when Gervase was in the service not only of Henry II (Otto's grandfather), but of his heir Henry the Young King too, whose significance for London we shall see more of below (Banks, *ONDB*); in its treatment of Britain, it is heavily invested in Geoffrey of Monmouth's history. Most illuminating of all is Wheatley's attention to the civic seal of London, ancient in its temporal claims, radically new in its production; cf. 64–65 (the urban seal) and 68–74 (for the London seal in its precocity and its influence on several later graphic representations of London by Matthew Paris and in a manuscript of the *DgB*). Wheatley's discussion, together with Derek Keene's (esp. 76–78), makes it clear that in the time spanning Geoffrey's invention of London as New Troy *c.* 1138 and John's reign, an ambitious and deeply motivated project to produce a new status for London, both profoundly ancient and surpassingly new (in the form of the commune developing at this time especially in Italy, see below), was underway, reflected in an array of texts and artifacts; this amounts to a spell cast by Troy.

his statement about unchanging law deriving from Troy in good faith because he appeals not to a literal but to an abstract idea of London. This idea combines three features: London is the central royal court; the royal court is the fount of an unchanging law and custom; but London possesses liberties in relation to the throne and in this (he makes clear), it is only the most celebrated instance of fundamental liberties across the realm. The first two ideas are expressions of authority and force, the third is an expression of a different desire. The husting enters this overdetermined program into historical action. At this moment in the *LEC4*, the author's concern is that the husting embodies an authoritative structure within which operates a single process unchanged in principle in the encompassing history of the kingdom. Most binding among these constitutional arrangements is the annual oath of fidelity to the king by all his subjects that makes them *fratres coniurati*, as provided for in a law instituted by none other than king Arthur, the fullest expression of the Galfridian idea of insular history who, we have learned two pages earlier, thus *consolidauit et confederauit regnum Britannie uniuersum semper in unum* ("consolidated and confederated the entire kingdom of Britain [so that it is] always one;" 1:655.32.A.7). Though competing interests are being complexly mediated, in a manner that reminds us that there are many Londons, one of which is that of Londoners anxious to limit royal power, the ideational drive is toward a political unity measured in normative language of federation, consolidation, and above all (the reference to *fratres* appears several times), of brothers. This is the community of the kingdom as an ethical ideal.[37]

The author closes out the London-oriented segment of the *LEC4* by clinching this vision of unity in his final sentences (1:657.32.B.13). He imports phrasing from another set of laws within his collection, *De primo Henrico rege*, to create a simple economy: in the face of three discrete legal orders on the island, again, those of Wessex, Mercia, and the Danelaw (Liebermann *Gesetze* 1:555.9.10), the figure of the royal court ensures an unchanging practice in law and custom (*i.e.* over time) wherever the king is (in space): *usus et consuetudines suas una semper inuiolabilitate consuerat, ubicunque ipse rex fuerit* (compare 1:657.32.B.13 with 1:555.9.10.a). Echoing the ethos of the *regnum Britanniae* asserted at the opening of the collection, this law in London keeps faith with *ueteres consuetudines bonorum patrum et predecessorum et omnium principum et procerum et sapientum seniorum tocius regni predicti* ("the old customs of our good fathers and predecessors and of all the princes, nobles, and wise senior men of the whole king-

37. See Reynolds 262–302 on "kingdoms as communities," much of which is focused on the period of English constitutional history being reassembled by the *Leges Anglorum*; it is crucial to Reynolds that medieval concepts and forms of community-making were more various and more deeply motivated than constitutional and political historians have recognized.

dom aforementioned;" 1:657.32.B.13). The dovetailing of London with the *regnum Britanniae* in the section's heading is key to establishing the operation of History. That last point – *a Trojan identity now putatively vouched for by the Anglo-Saxon Edward* – is the thin edge of a Galfridian wedge that embeds Edward's laws in Geoffrey's British history and, as we have seen, even makes Arthur one of their authors. Troy seems to be necessary as the guarantee of an order that can defeat both contingency (by being constant) and division (by being one): it is the name of a mythology, or a mystique, or a spell. Anglia is the current case of a constant kingdom as London is the current case of a constant law and custom; both call on Troy to override local time and space, so that Troy becomes an abstraction outside history (much as a citizen of the United States might use the word "America").

The Londoner now passes directly from the London unit that images a unitary law to the second theme that calls on the idea of Troy, the question of who, legally, should people this kingdom of Britain: *De illis, qui possunt et debent de iure cohabitare et remanere in regno Britannie* ("Of those who are able to, and ought by law to, live and dwell/remain in the kingdom of Britain;" 1:658.32.C). The basis of the answer is the exemplary case of the first and founding king of the Anglia that is the *regnum Britannie*: Ine. By bigamously marrying Wala, after whom Cambria's name was changed to Wales, he acquired Wales, Cornwall, and the *coronam benedictam Britannie* held last by Cadwallader (the epithet *benedictam* is a mark of a blessed community; it is axiomatic to the *Leges Anglorum*, though I don't have the space to expound it here, that the *regnum Britannie* is a Christian institution). Ine's act first makes one out of two, Angles and British; but the principle quickly embraces the Scottish, and, in Rylands, the earliest manuscript, the Picts (fol. 69v). A fundamentally binary conception obtains in each case: whatever the combinations, *ita fuerunt tunc temporis per uniuersum regnum Britannie duo in carne una* ("there were in this way at that time throughout all the kingdom of Britain two people in one flesh;" 1:658.32.C.5); a few lines later, the product of intermarriage is *gens una et populus unus* ("one race and one people;" 1:659.32.C.6.a). At the base of the compiler's model of the two peoples who become one is his phrase's citation, noted by Liebermann, of Genesis 2:24, the foundational text for the institution of marriage: when a man leaves father and mother for wife, *erunt duo in carne una*. This is Adam speaking in the unfallen Eden of what God has done in making Eve and so instituting marriage.

In the compiler's use of Genesis, marriage recuperates an original separation (we might say, with Eve's partition from Adam's body, a division). When he and Eve are naked, and not ashamed, Adam sees marriage; the editor's citation of this moment for Ine's historical act in an ethnically split land is paradoxical, since the fall has consigned that moment to the other side of time, a pre-lapsarian time that cannot be restored. The Londoner appeals thus to an innocent moment in Eden to construct the history of a multiethnic reality at the level of the community of post–Babel peoples. The principle of citizenship of this polity applies to the named peoples *cum ueniunt* (1:658.32.C.1 and 1.a); as at 1:658.32.C, the tense of residence and citizenship is the present. The compiler-editor has the community of his own day in mind, as a community of communities (or peoples). The Edenic principle of *duo in carne una* is thus affirmed as politically foundational for the present polity. For the editor-compiler to cite Eden under these circumstances is no less fantastic than for him to cite Troy; or to cite Troy, no less thoughtful, knowledge-seeking, or efficacious than to cite Eden (we might recall Walcott's uses of Eden). The argument is part of a stunning expansion of the community of the realm. Bretons, Jutes, and Saxons all constitute, *sicut coniurati fratres* and as *proprii ciues*, *populus unus et gens una*, the Bretons because they are of British blood, the others because they are of Angle (1:658.32.C, C.1, and C.1.a).

This community of five ethnicities proceeding from two bloods, British and Angle, then expands in turn, since Angles married Scots and Picts, and Picts and Scots married Angles (again, the Picts appear only in Rylands 155, fol. 69v); and so emerged *per uniuersum regni Britannie duo in carne una* (actually so far seven in *carne una*). This is not the end of it. In one final torque to the ethnic plot, Arthur conquered the Norwegians, Christianized them, and made them part of the kingdom; they married noble British women. When by right of this blood relation they sought residence and citizenship in Britain – the island being described at length shortly before this point virtually verbatim from the opening of the *DgB* – the Angles fought them bitterly, a reference presumably to the era of the Viking raids: but eventually, the Norwegian-British and the Angles married each other, and the Norwegians too are considered by the English barons reporting to William – in the fiction of the dramatic framework of the *LEC* – to be *coniurati fratres nostri et sicut proprii ciues regni* ("our sworn brothers, such that they are properly citizens of the kingdom;" 1:659–60:32.E.1–E.6). Since William responds to the barons' presen-

tation by conceding them Edward's laws over the laws he thinks are superior, those of his *antecessores... de Norwegia* (1:664.34), that is, the Danelaw, an ironic circle closes: the Northmen fought off by the Angles have become the inheritors of the *regnum Britannie*, and join the seven other ethnic groups identified in the *carne una* that compose the community of the realm (the moment gives Walcott's reference to the outlandishness of the dialects of those from 'the Outer Provinces' a confounding irony).

Power is not dissipated in this resolution of the *regnum*'s differences and samenesses. As important to the compiler as the realm's polyethnicity is an asymmetry of power that ensures that the English remain dominant. This is the implication of pursuing the Londoner's history of the island's peoples. In the course of explaining why Malcolm III of Scotland had been only a *princeps*, no king, the laws of Edward now explain that whereas the Picts had been led by a leader called Pictus, and the Scots by Scotus, neither gave their names to the land of Albany; [*e*]*st enim Albania pars monarchie regni huius, quod uocabatur regnum Britannie. Dicuntur enim et uocantur Britones a Bruto rege, qui Troianus fuit, ex quo regnum uniuersum nomen suscepit. Britones enim quasi Bruti Troiani sunt; et uenerunt et exierunt olim a Troia magna* ("for Albany is part of the monarchy of this kingdom that is called the kingdom of Britain. For the Britons are called that from Brutus the king, who was a Trojan, from whom the entire kingdom took its name. For Britons, called this as if they were of Brutus, are Trojans; and they came and left long ago from great Troy;" 1:664.35.1.A.2). As the London of the Londoner's day correlates with the London founded in the image of *magna Troia*, which gives London its political and legal primacy, only rather more paradoxically, the one flesh and one citizenship of the many ethnicities of the kingdom of Britain commences with a first and single people. At the other end of this unitary beginning is the fantastic expansion of Arthurian empire all the way, named land by named land, up to Russia (1:659.32.E). The *LEC4* is both the imagining of a reconciled multiethnic community, and the rationalization of insular and extrainsular war and domination in the hands of the kings of England. At this point, the model is under considerable strain: as the one place, Troy/London, and the one people, the Trojans, are called up to guarantee Britain's eight ethnicities and many locations, we see a forced compounding of History, the imperial narrative, with history as the narrative of desire for an expanded community of peace.

As the foregoing illustrates, it is the present that compels the 'fan-

tasy' of what the compiler-editor reaches for. His Trojan London is in close dialogue with 'real' or contingent London (see also Keene 87–88). The institutions of violence weigh heavily in this practical anatomy of the city's workings, especially in the form of the city militia. The tactical responsibilities of the heretoches (Liebermann *Gesetze* 1:656:32.B) must reflect London's activity in the civil war of 1135–41, and its alliance with the Young Henry's rebellion against his father Henry II in 1173–74. In 1191, John, not yet king, entered London with an armed force in the course of a power struggle with Richard I's chancellor, who controlled the Tower of London (Williams 2); and as king he lost the city at the beginning of the baronial rebellion that led to Magna Carta and then threatened his deposition. Keene documents similarly many ties between the *Leges Anglorum*, especially the *LEC4*, on the one hand and commercial London of *c.* 1200 on the other. These are a matter of the local trading concerns of specific London interest groups and families, in the context of royal and European-wide interests, especially those of merchants from Germany and France (Keene 91–93). The *LEC4* is notably preoccupied with Denmark, Norway, and the Baltic region that matches Arthur's conquests, all of which figure strongly and often contentiously in the regulation of trade in contemporary London (Keene 94–97). In an indication of just how alert to its moment the collection was, the *Leges Anglorum* has a way of glancing at specific commercial and other matters which, as far as we know, were unresolved at the time of writing, but led to regulatory action in the decade or so after the collection was completed (Keene 97). As in 'IHCL' and Walcott, an energetically active commercial, trading, and civic London shows through, but with no hint of Walcott's judgements.

Most fundamentally in its efforts to construct a corporate body that remains constant over time through contingency and accident, London was already employing the political and constitutional vocabulary of the commune which had been developing in northern France and northern Italy from the eleventh century and was founded on the performance of an oath of fellowship for purposes that became increasingly civic, an oath much like that fraternal oath legally imposed by Arthur.[38] Henry II reined London's ambitions in, but under Richard and John, the city gained new areas of independence, in particular the election of sheriffs (reviving an earlier concession) formally recognized in the first year of John's reign, the election of their aldermen (the governing council), and the position of mayor (recognized in practice two decades before formal royal confirmation in

38. Brooke 34–35; on the London commune more generally, see Williams 1–25.

1215; cf. Brooke 41, 45–47, Williams 2–5, 33–34). Acting while Richard was away, his brother John, at the folkmoot site at St. Paul's in response to the sounding of the cathedral bell, conceded to London the status of commune in 1191; a communal oath from 1193 survives (Williams 1, 3). Some such oath shows up in William fitz Stephen's description of London, discussed below, the *sacramentum* sworn by the citizens of London that solves all conflict (Robertson 4.8). On the other hand, Richard never officially granted commune status, and when John became king himself, his charters did not identify London as a commune (Brooke 50). The London commune existed, then, in "a shadow world of semi-legality" (Williams 4), as an idea propelling much of what was happening politically in the city between 1190 and Magna Carta. Not only are these efforts to wrestle a new urban entity into being not inconsistent with the *LEC4's* Troy; Troy, and the Galfridian history derived from it, appears a necessary tool. It is still a relatively new one, an instrument of innovation, not a regression. This Trojan temporality, then, grounds a startlingly original and precocious text: ahead of, not behind, its time. This means that the most fantastic isn't at odds with the real but can be the condition of understanding the real: in the case of the *Leges Anglorum*, part of the making of History as both force (empire) and of history as community (a different desire).

Medieval Londons: The London of William fitz Stephen's *Vita Sancti Thomae* (c. 1173–74)

Buttressed as it is within the Galfridian framework of the entire *Leges Anglorum* collection, the *LEC4* counts as the most ambitious effort to establish in history a London that can tap the figure of Troy to ground an imperial London and an insular kingdom of Britain, that is, to ground England in History; the text interests doubly, because Troy is basic too to its model of a united and 'fraternal' community, meaning here a largely homosocial community of the well-to-do. The description of London (hereafter the *Descriptio*) that William fitz Stephen had written some thirty or forty years earlier in his *vita* of his master, Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, understood to have been murdered in response to the words of Henry II, king of the Angevin empire, touches similar bases, again in ways usually remarked only in passing[39] but which I take to constitute his historical vision and perhaps inflect even the archbishop's.[40] It offers an antic-

39. As in Jaeger's careful recent discussion, nonetheless limited by blinders over the text's Galfridian material, reflected in 314n10. Hanna's discussion (23–24, 31) is most suggestive; his distinction throughout this essay between a mercantile and a royal London at odds with one another is especially helpful for the relations between forms of power and forms of community.

40. For the date, cf. Duggan. Five manuscripts of the *Descriptio* exist, Kleineke 117–18.

ipatory version of the project of the *Leges Anglorum*, as it were, but even so shows, like that collection, the faces of both power/History, and of desire/history. In short, it is as permeable as 'IHCL,' Geoffrey of Monmouth's *DgB*, and the Londoner's texts to a view from prostrate on Walcott's Embankment bench.

The writer's description of London pitches the reader immediately into relationship with Walcott's London (as well as the London of 'IHCL'):

Inter nobiles orbis urbes, quos fama celebrat, ciuitas Londoniae, regni Anglorum sedes, una est, quae famam sui latius diffundit, opes et merces longius transmittit caput altius extollit. Felix est aeris salubritate, Christiana religione, firmitate munitionum, natura situs, honore ciuium, pudicitia matronali... (Robertson, 2)

Among the noble cities of the world that are celebrated by [f]ame, the [c]ity of London, seat of the [kingdom] of England, is one that spreads its fame wider, sends its wealth and wares further, and lifts its head higher than all others. It is blest in the wholesomeness of its air, in its reverence for the Christian faith, in the strength of its bulwarks, the nature of its situation, the honour of its citizens, and the chastity of its matrons. (H. E. Butler's translation in Fitz Stephen 48, with my emendations in square brackets; all translations of the *Descriptio* following are Butler's)

Walcott's and William's texts touch at expected points: Westminster Palace (two miles outside the city proper in William's day, in emblem of Hanna's point about, in effect, two Londons, 20); St. Paul's; 'the' bridge (though the London bridge of Fitz Stepehen 68–69, not Walcott's Westminster Bridge), the Tower of London (Becket has a role in rebuilding the Tower Omeros/Walcott would later see, and in increasing its military staffing, Robertson 19, 20), the estuarial river in its ebb and flow (3.4–5, 10.15). Other items are less predictable. William is already celebrating the fertility of Walcott's "alchemical corn" in two citations from Virgil's *Georgics* (3.6; cf. *Omeros* 196.78, 197.88, 106, 110); when fingers pluck their saris in Walcott's London (196.61), they pay homage to the Asian silks whose importation William marvels at (*Seres purpureas uestes*, "from China crimson silks," Robertson 7.12). A serendipitous conjunction even offers us Walcott's

"pleasant pastures" (197.89) in the *pascua* ("meadows") and *grata planities* ("pleasing plains") of 3.6. Throughout, what coincides has a mutually contrapuntal force reflected in the function of the weather in each: for William, the mild skies of London ensure that its people are no beasts, and slave to no lust (Robertson 2.3); Walcott's London lies in "scorched summer light" (193.1), and "[i]t was summer. London rustled with pride" (195.39).

William's London is built, first, on the idea of Rome. When, among the *nobiles orbis urbes*, London *caput altius extollit* ("lifts its head higher"), William alludes to the standard gloss of Rome as *caput mundi* ("the head of the world") to lift London above that city, at least in its contemporary form. Rome is a constant in this text's construction of an ideal human community in its politics, civic order, and above all its religious cult, showing up as the city Romulus and Remus built, as the golden city of Augustus Caesar and papal seals, the city Constantine handed over to the papacy, and as the Petrine city of the papal keys (12–13.9, 19.12). Rome appears more subliminally too. The London *matrones* are Sabines (4.8). The allusion points to William's understanding of the appropriation by early Rome of the Sabine women as husbands for Roman men in order to populate the city. Since the allusion clearly functions as praise of the women alongside that of London's leading men, we are left to infer not the rape of the familiar *topos*, but a voluntary process that does credit to both women and men. This does not explain the implication that two populations are involved, males from inside and females from outside the city, however. The use of *matrones* instead of *mulieres* points to the women's role in reproduction: I would conclude that William, then, as his name suggests an Anglo-Norman serving in the upper reaches of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin order, sees Norman-English intermarriage by analogy with Roman-Sabine (see also Keene 77–78, making a link between William's Sabine women and the representation of Roman-dressed women of London on a civic seal of *c.* 1220). Along with William's earlier reference to the chastity of the city's women, the allusion sounds erotic themes that, since Aeneas and Dido, regularly attend Rome when it takes the measure of human historical being and achievement in the secular realm. Rome permeates William's description as its ground of comparison for London.

As an expression of the depth of the Roman idea, Virgil figures prominently in the *Descriptio*, with two references from the *Aeneid*, and at least eight from the *Georgics* (two of them remarked upon

above). Most telling is a strenuous reworking of three passages from the latter. *Ex omni natione quae sub caelo est* ("from every nation that is under heaven"), William writes, come the trading ships indicated in Walcott's London of *Omeros* 195–96.56–72:

> Aurum mittit Arabs; species et thura Sabaeus
> 　　Arma Scythes; oleum palmarum diuite sylva
> Pingue solum Babylon; Nilus lapides pretiosos;
> 　　Seres purpureas uestes; Galli sua uina;
> Norwegi, Russi, uarium, grysium, sabelinas. (7)

> Gold from Arabia, from Sabaea spice
> And incense; from the Scythians arms of steel
> Well-tempered; oil from the rich groves of palm
> That spring from the fat lands of Babylon;
> Fine gems from Nile, from China crimson silks;
> French wines; and sable, vair and miniver
> From the far lands where Russ and Norseman dwell. (Butler 54)

Here, late-twelfth-century London is not fitted to Virgil as much as Virgil is to London, his text jerry-rigged to fit the new times of a city that might indeed rival twelfth-century Rome; London eclipses Rome rather than shadows it. In the passage from the *Georgics* closest to this (ii.114–23), the references to Arabs, Sabaean incense, and Seres appear; in another passage (i:57–62), echoing William's first one and a half lines, appears *India mittit ebur, molles sua tura Sabaei / at Chalybes nudi ferrum*. In both passages from the *Georgics*, wine appears in the form of *Bacchus* (ii) and *uuae* (i).[41]

　　In his retooling of Virgil's three passages, William adapts what suited Rome's place in the world in Virgil's day to what suits London's in his (which is the London of his masters Becket and Henry II). William turns the references to Bacchus and grapes into London's importation of French wine; the reference to the Norwegians and their furs reflects contemporary trade in London, as we have seen, and Williams documents early London's trading relations with Novgorod, Russia and Persia (10–11). When forty years later, in the *LEC4*, Arthur embarks on his conquest all the way through Norway to Russia, he gives William's lines in retrospect a quite literally imperial flavor: the furs arrive in London from a form of Walcott's "Outer Provinces," along, undoubtedly, with their peculiar "dialects" (195.59–60). In William's use of Virgil as raw material for a refined London product,

41. Several echoes come from a passage some lines after the first noted here, ii.136–39, strengthening the sense that William grapples with the Virgilian text, and testifying to Virgil's role for William as both inspiration and symbolic capital.

it would seem probable that his references to Babylon and the Nile, like the choice of *Arabs* instead of *India* for the verse's first line, reflect the impact of the crusades on geo-political consciousness in London. The lines of William's verse are no less a claim to a global centripetality for London than are Virgil's for Rome in the *Georgics*, through his homage to Augustus Caesar in the close vicinity of the passages William works on (at i.25, where the praise is extreme, depicting an imperial godhead to come for Caesar, and at ii.170). Meanwhile, Venusian London is Virgilian London: Jaeger notes that a reference to Cytherea's role in young love in the city (11.16) likely exploits connections between that goddess and the foundation of London, as in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia*, where Brutus builds Trinovantum [*i*]*nstinctu Veneris* ("[a]t the prompting of Venus"), who had favored the Trojans since Paris had awarded her the apple (398–99; Brutus can point, too, like Virgil's Aeneas, to ancestry from Venus, so sharing this symptom in fundamental imperial texts of the eros of history-making). This Virgilian city is commercial and civic, but it is predicated on a military one, William making sure to state that the city turned out 20,000 horsemen and 60,000 footsoldiers on Stephen's behalf in the civil war thirty years earlier.

The historical anchor of this displacement of today's Rome by London in *LEC4* arises out of deep time, namely a British history that is longer than the English, and still more deeply a pagan history that extends beyond its Christian one. William's discourse radically redates history. Immediately upon his Virgilian praise of London, he writes, *Urbe Roma, secundum chronicorum fidem, satis antiquior est. Ab eisdem quippe patribus Trojanis haec prius a Bruto condita est, quam illa a Remo et Romulo* (8.12; "London, as the chroniclers have shewn, is far older than Rome. For, owing its birth to the same Trojan ancestors, it was founded by Brutus before Rome was founded by Romulus and Remus," Butler 55). Showing through here is the reflexive phrase for dating so much of human history in the middle ages, *ab urbe condita*, a phrase that points to Rome as not only the effective starting point of contemporary history, but also that history's effective definition of civilization as an urban order. William subverts this phrase.[42] For this cleric in his service, Becket's London had been founded by Trojans long before Rome, with which younger kin-city it shared many (pre-Christian, therefore) laws and institutions – its senatorial system, its sheriffs (equivalent to the Roman consuls), its administrative divisions, its scheduled assemblies. London, then, is an *altera Troia*, a maintenance of Troy; the Trinobantes who drove

42. Though his effort dooms itself in its own syntax. If he could presume upon his historical model, he would begin with London, and have Rome built next; but the comparative ablative *Urbe Roma* makes Rome the point of departure, just as the citation of Virgil is the point at which he turns to London's founding. Troy is built much earlier, but it only gains its status by tapping the phrase *ab urbe condita*; it is a global center, but to depict that you must call on Virgil. Rome is discursively prior; and William's head is not freer of Rome than Walcott's of Troy.

back Julius Caesar were Londoners before the name (12.19; 12.18; William does not specify the Galfridian etymology of *Trinouantum*, but he surely assumes it). This moment is set up by several pages praising the competitive energies of young London men in many varied activities in the language of mock-battle, as Jaeger details, concluding with a salute to Londoners' wide-ranging hunting practices (in several counties in London's surrounds). This is to use the language of war without the war. At this moment in a continuous paragraph, we learn of Caesar's repulse, for all that he delighted in the spilling of blood (*sanguine fuso*). The logic of this textual moment is compelling. It is again a displacement of Rome, not a tapping of it (London's military is less bloody, and more effective). London is practised in the arts of defence and aggression through its *ludi*, and its ludic quality is basic to its supercession of Rome.

William fitz Stephen's description ends by saluting a city whose progeny have ruled *regna plurima et Romanum sibi subdiderunt imperium* (12.19; "subdued many nations and the Roman Empire to their sway," Butler 59), and so fulfilled the prophecy of Apollo to Brutus that the world would submit to his descendants. Fittingly, the worked-over passage from the *Georgics* of Virgil is here answered by a citation of a verse from the *DgB*; as poetic stanzas, the two verse-passages, Virgilian and Galfridian, bookend each other in an imperial key that again is not aimed merely to raise London to Rome's level. It is not certain that William slips when he has Apollo make the prophecy to Brutus, not Geoffrey's Diana. In the *Aeneid*, it is Apollo who had made the same forecast of a new Troy and empire to Aeneas (iii.11.80–98; noted by John Clark, "Trinovantum" 144). If the change is not deliberate, it would be an apt error, another mark of a preoccupation with Virgil, and signal William's ambitions to preempt Rome through London.[43] With the *DgB* preceding William's *Descriptio* in designating London – at a time when the matter was not necessarily decided – as the principal city of an imperial realm and a renewal of Troy, and the *LEC4*'s London following it, Troy emerges in high-profile texts to make Walcott's History, or at least to illuminate the present.

Troy, in turn, is not the *Descriptio*'s last stop. That role falls to Christian, not Trojan London, which, as Christian, eclipses pagan Rome and exists in relation to a new Rome, papal, not imperial, or papal-imperial. William's observation that London and Rome share variously political, legal, administrative and civic practices derived from Troy leads seamlessly into an array of cultural practices that, as

43. Or since Geoffrey places a temple of Apollo in Trinovantum, the future London, from very early in British history (Geoffrey 36.30), William might seek to transpose the original prophecy of another Troy in London to that god.

Christian, separate London from pagan Rome: church-going, observation of God's law, the acts of mercy, hospitality to strangers, weddings, funerals (8.12). The impulse of comparison becomes explicit: where Augustus Caesar was lauded for the spectacles and games of Rome, William makes the point that London's theater includes *ludos... sanctiores, repraesentationes miraculorum quae sancti confessores operati sunt, seu repraesentationes passionum quibus claruit constantia martyrum* (9.13; "holier plays wherein are shown forth the miracles wrought by Holy Confessors or the sufferings which glorified the constancy of Martyrs," Butler 56). It is true that the point is cursorily made, and from this moment on London's secular *ludi*, performed overwhelmingly by its young men, alter the description's tone, depicting a city youthful and vital. But a longer textual perspective is in order. From the lines just quoted, *passionum* and *martyris* focus the entire *vita* of Becket as it is represented in the first sentence of its prologue (1), and supply the heading for the *vita* proper (13); that *vita* then ends with several pages illustrating the third word that founds a superior urban theater in William's comparison with Augustus' Rome, the *miraculi* that attest Thomas' sanctity, including a vision of the crucified Jesus (150–53).

In between the operation of these words at the beginning and end of the *vita*, the body of the text countervails the ludic tone of much of the *Descriptio*. The *vita* is unreadable other than as a text that seeks to take the measure of the *sanguinis effusio* ("pouring of blood") that William witnessed at Canterbury (*passionem ejus Cantuariae inspexi*, 2; "I beheld his martyrdom at Canterbury," Butler 47). Correspondingly, for Becket's consecration as archbishop, William describes the replacement of the secular man in him by the Jesus of the passion, in a passage prefiguring Becket's end (36–37), and describes Jesus' appearance to Becket to speak of the coming shedding of his blood (83). The end of the *vita* reports another cleric's ambitious allegory once a third passion is invoked, that of Becket's namesake the apostle Thomas in India; the apostle was martyred in the far east and his feast-day falls on December 21; the archbishop was martyred in the far west and his feast-day is December 29. Christ's nativity falls in the exact middle. Meanwhile, Christ's passion took place in Jerusalem: the exact middle of east and west. All three together signify the centrality of Jesus's birth and passion to the ends of the earth. The *Descriptio*'s ludic quality notwithstanding, the *vita* makes good William's claim in it that dramas of miracles, passions, and martyrdoms ensure London's superiority to the entertain-

ments of old imperial Rome (154).

The thematic thread that ensures that a Christian London succeeds pagan Rome just as pagan London preceded pagan Rome is completed by the text's closing salute to four great Londoners in Christian times: the emperor Constantine, the empress Matilda (Henry II's mother) and Henry III (Henry's son and heir, crowned three years earlier in 1170, with whom Becket formed strong connections indicated in the *vita*, 121–22),[44] and, finally, Thomas Becket. Constantine's case more than eight hundred years earlier presses the point already made by London's religious theater: that London surpasses Rome not only by greater antiquity, but by its role in the new Christian order. In Constantine, it is a Londoner who gifts *urbem Romam et imperialia insignia omnia* to God, Peter, and the papacy, performs the office of the pope's groom, prefers the title of *defensor* (of the church) to that of *imperator*, and then, to clear Rome for the pope, builds and moves to Byzantium. This deference of the secular power to the spiritual corresponds to Augustan Rome's inferior status to papal Rome. The problematic goes to the heart of Becket's story to follow. What Christian Constantine's example means for a Christian city in a Christian kingdom is deference of the Christian king to the church. So, Constantine's service as the pope's groom is echoed in the *uita* following when, in a short-lived reconciliation between the two, Thomas dismounts to kneel before Henry, and Henry hastens to head the gesture off, instead holding the stirrup for Becket to remount (110–11). Henry II's mother, son and archbishop form a triangle that closes Henry II out, to match the verdict of the subjunctive of William's comment on London as *Urbs sane bona, si bonum habeat dominum* (4.7; "In truth a good City when it has a good Lord!" Butler 50), a subjunctive that has long made clear to readers William's judgment of Henry II.[45]

In short, London's significance in the Christian order of history is overdetermined. Constantine shows what the *vita* teaches: that having put Christian before pagan, we must also put papal before royal, though both are Christian; that means, archbishop before king. Still further: Constantine spells out that Rome takes precedence over the Byzantine church; the *Descriptio* has already ascribed a papal seal featuring Peter's primacy of the keys to Leo IX, who was the first pope to use the Donation of Constantine diplomatically to assert authority over the patriarchy of Constantinople. With William's London grasped within this order of secular and religious global history, we can now ask the most basic question of all. Why, for a

44. I will continue to refer to Henry II's son as Henry III instead of as the Young King, as is the usual convention, because this designation seems material to William's argument about insular history laid out below.

45. In the *uita*, Henry III thanks God that none of his men were present at the murder (Robertson 149).

uita of the archbishop of Canterbury, did William write a description of London *at all*, especially when it produced such a generic disjunction between its not only encomiastic but ludic tone and the passion that followed (C. Stephen Jaeger poses the question and its challenges especially sharply, 310).[46] It is odder still that London figures mostly only incidentally, certainly not structurally or thematically, in the *uita* proper that recounts Becket's life. As Jaeger asks, why not a description of Canterbury, city of the metropolitan see that Becket occupied and scene of his passion? As I observe above, the miracles described after Becket's death establish *Canterbury* as the locus of the marvels most to be wondered at.

Jaeger develops William's opening citation of Plato's *Republic* (along with Sallust)[47] to explain why he focuses on *rem publicam Londoniae occasione beati Thomae* (Robertson 2; "the constitution of London on the occasion offered me by the Blessed Thomas," Butler 48) into a reading of the *Descriptio* as a kind of aristocratic utopia (*Adelsutopie* or *adelige Utopie*) coaching a secular code of conduct embracing a social spectrum wider than the aristocratic and distinct in its emphases from the *urbanitas* of court culture. I propose instead that *rem publicam* here has a fully political meaning, making London the *res publica*, roughly state, as Rome was, or, better suited to London, something like commonwealth. William so signals that he presents not simply the ideal of an urban community and its codes but a quasi-allegorical representation of the realm in its combination of its secular center (we have seen how far this concept had been developed by *c.* 1215 in the *Leges Anglorum*) and its Christian primate.

A textual crux directly out of the *DgB*, specifically that part of it known as the *Prophetia Merlini*, that is, out of the book of Troy that has occupied us since taking up Walcott's *Omeros*, may explain how the two parts of this allegory interlock. Only three paragraphs into William's description of the city, we learn that London used to be the metropolitan see. This knowledge William owes to the *DgB*, where London is (with York and Caerleon) an archibishopric from the time of the second-century conversion of the British king Lucius (Geoffrey 88.72). The *DgB* meanwhile utterly elides Canterbury's status as an archibishopric, even in the wake of the papal missionary Augustine, whose appointment as the first historical archbishop of Canterbury (597 C.E.) receives no notice (258–60.188–89). William then notes that it is believed that London will be a metropolitan see once again: *et adhuc futura creditur, si remeauerint ciues in insulam* (2.4; "and it is thought that it will be so again, if the citizens return to the island,"

Butler 49). Christopher Brooke notes that the last five words cite the *Prophetia Merlini*'s *reuertentur ciues in insulam* (Geoffrey 149:108–09; Brooke 120–21), and suggests that William refers vaguely here to a millenial future. But the citation's context in the *Prophetia* encourages the view that William is urgently invested in topical affairs. He appears not to be the only one. In his *vita*, when Becket excommunicates Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, who took Henry II's side in the king's struggle with the archbishop, Gilbert at first refuses to conduct himself as an excommunicate, claiming on the grounds of the same historical argument that Canterbury does not have precedence over London (88). Becket knows the argument too, then, and likely Henry II as Gilbert's ally and Henry III as Becket's.[48]

In Merlin's *Prophetia*, one of the events triggering the return of the citizens will be the conferral of *pallia* (the vestments of archepiscopacy) on two cities by a figure designated as *sextus* (Geoffrey 149:114.99–104). Encapsulating an argument that needs more space, I suggest that William raises the possibility that Henry III as the sixth king after the conquest will renew the sees of London and Caerleon, this being why he has designated the young king as if he were already Henry II's successor. William's own stated agnosticism on the issue – he notes that both Canterbury and London could claim the stronger argument – may be caution; everything else suggests to me that his motive for combining a description of London with his account of the martyred primate lies in the notion that a more ancient and original order might return to make London the first city of the English church as well as of the English state: like Rome. The otherwise counter-intuitive matching of London to an archepiscopal Thomas is stunningly replayed on one of the two sides of the civic seal of *c.* 1220 (illustrated Keene 77), an image that perhaps dates to a design from the short-lived moment of London's recognition as a commune in 1191 (Wheatley 68–69). Both William's text and the seal meet in the city descriptions and archepiscopal status of London in the *DgB*, as both Wheately, citing the work of John Cherry (69), and Keene show. This is simply to say that the order of history caught in the island's Trojan narrative guides William's thinking as a clerk close to great events and people who is making sense of his world.

The Omeric view from the underside of the Thames Embankment throws an unsettling light on the ambition of William's description, which is laden with the issues of power from its Christian universalism to its doubly imperial cast, both secular and ecclesiastical – both claims to global primacy – and on to the question of the

claims of London to be the metropolitan see. William does nothing less than order the globe in ordering London. His description of London is an exhibit in the human effort to make History, an effort that never rests, and has its victims, as in the allusion to London's Sabine women, and in the unsavory picture of any attempt by a community to lift its head over all others; or even as in the rationalization I am suggesting of the shedding of the archbishop's blood. But a view from that Embankment bench would not be what it is if it did not also give voice to another kind of history, and there are sounds of this voice in the *Descriptio*, possibly despite itself. This has to do with that ludic voice of the work already remarked upon, to which I return.

Though it is likely not William's own heading (Butler 62), and though it contrasts sharply with the tone of the *vita*, the phrase *De ludis* that governs the last third of the description of London in Robertson's edition accurately represents not only its content but its tenor. A city must be *dulcis* and *jocunda* (Robertson 8.13). The tone is made by those of whom the text speaks: *juuentus, pueri, filii, ephebi, adoloscentes*; *puellae* (one glimpse of the latter, dancing in the moonlight); the apprentices and the unknighted. These participate variously in school exercises that are contests of wit, language, rhetoric, grammar; they horse-ride, or joust, including in boats on the Thames, they ice-skate pell-mell. The older participate vicariously as they watch, in memory of their own youth. There is delight (*delectantur*, 12.18), laughter at those who fall in the river (10.15), humor at the expense of the boars who will soon be bacon (11.17). An unforgettable passage praises the pleasures of the public cook-shop down by the river (5–6.10). The cumulative picture is that London is a city of imperial stature *quite different* from Rome: *Christian*; and *ludic* in a manner quite other than Augustus' imperial games.

Perhaps we hear in this voice or tone, and its application not to the city's mature generations but to its coming one, local history, the history of men (always this limitation) before their names are made, breaking the surface of official history. Comparing the *Descriptio* with three classic works of Roman city description, the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* (*c.* 1143–44), its second version in the *Graphia aureae Urbis* (*c.* 1154–55), and Master Gregorius' *Narracio de Mirabilibus urbis Romae* (early thirteenth century), which I have written about elsewhere (Ingledew and Mora-Lebrun, "The Roman Story-World"), however, leads me in a different direction. Those works are heavy with the monuments and often the ruins of Rome; uniquely, London in the *Descriptio* is a city peopled: let alone that those people give

such an effect of youth. This leads me to think that the emphasis on youth is less the mark of local history than part of the work's ambition to replace old Rome with new London, more a matter of the future makers of History. Nonetheless, if William's emphasis on the city's games is in this sense motivated by the spell of empire spiritual and secular, the games do not any less open up a different kind of history, in which, at least for the moment, the local and the everyday (the here and the now) might surpass the burden of History of being about there and then. The people of the town of Gros-Îlet enter their day in their own various rituals:

> These were the rites of morning by a low concrete
> parapet under the copper spears of the palms,
> since men sought fame as centaurs, or with their own feet,
>
> or wrestlers circling with pincer-extended arms,
> or oblong silhouettes racing round a white vase
> of scalloped sand, when a boy on a pounding horse
>
> divided the wrestlers with their lowering claws
> like crabs. As in your day, so with ours, Omeros,
> as it is with islands and men, so with our games.
>
> A horse is skittering spray with rope for its rein.
> Only silhouettes last. No one remembers the names
> of foam-sprinters. Time halts the arc of a javelin.
> (*Omeros*, 33.1–12)[49]

49. Cf. *Materials* 11.16.

The duplicating of worlds from city to village can be close, and differences, especially those of economics and class, illuminating:

> Far down the beach, where the boy had wheeled it around,
> the stallion was widening. Helen had heard its hooves
> drumming through her bare feet, and turned, as the unreined
>
> horse plunged with its dolphining neck, the wheezing halves
> of its chest distended by the rufflling nostrils
> like a bellows, as spray fanned from the punished waves,
>
> while the boy with an Indian whoop hammered his heels
> on the barrel of the belly into thick smoke

where its blur spun, whinnying...

... Troy burned... (*Omeros* 35.46–60, at 46–57)

Compare Butler's translation of the young horse-riding Londoners (the internal quotation marks reflect William's citations from Horace, Ovid, and Virgil): "Every Sunday in Lent after dinner a 'fresh swarm of young gentles' goes forth on war–horses, 'steeds skilled in the contest,' of which each is 'apt and schooled to wheel in circles round'... The fierce horses neigh, 'their limbs tremble; they champ the bit; impatient of delay they cannot stand still.' When at length 'the hoof of trampling steeds careers along,' the youthful riders divide their hosts..." (57).[50]

It is hard not to come away from the section *De ludis* without an impression of what it might mean to live momentarily in ignorance of History, or even of the burden of citizenship that the young people's parents are busy about. Hints of a more demotic and communal desire can amount to a pathos of the local in William's description of London, which, by calling on Troy to figure itself as Walcott had done for St. Lucia, confesses it cannot see itself as merely local; it's even an oddly creole moment, as the local insecurity shows itself in its recourse to an imported imperial Virgilian vision. But there's no doubting that the youthful energy and play of William's urban London serves the French-speaking Anglo-Norman citizen rulers, and the Latin of a universal church. The text's final turn to Constantine, Matilda, Henry III and Becket makes sure that the great poles of the secular and spiritual order are invoked, and their passional costs; and that what Becket represents, which is underpinned by Troy, Rome and London, signifies for the world, which is a Latin world: *omnibus bonis totius orbis Latini* (13.19; "to all good men in the Latin world," Butler 60). The spell of Troy holds over William as Walcott would have it not hold over him.

Coda: London before Troy: the London of *Vita Edwardi Regis* (1065-67)

Medieval Londons had a life before Troy: before Geoffrey of Monmouth. In the anonymous *Vita Edwardi Regis* of 1065-67, at the moment of the *translatio* of the Norman conquest, we learn that late in his reign, the holy king Edward invested heavily in an insignificant

50. See also Walcott's description of racehorses on the savannah in Port of Spain, *Omeros* 221–22.

monastery *in honore beati Petri*, located *extra muros urbis Londonie supra predictum amnem Temesin*: namely, *Westmonasterium*, Westminster (Barlow 66). He is drawn to it by its location next to the *famose et opulente urbi* of London, in its "delightful spot, surrounded with fertile lands and green fields and near the main channel of the river, which bore abundant merchandise of wares of every kind for sale from the whole world [*toto orbe*] to the town [*ciuitati*] on its banks" (Barlow 67-69; my square brackets). Moved by his love of the first apostle, Edward elects to be buried here. His building project, described in detail, is to make Westminster Abbey worthy of the apostle Peter, always a metonym for Rome, and of the adjacent city. The passage connects the precincts of Westminster, a compound of the palace and its rebuilt abbey, to a globalized city in a way that anticipates the Norman inheritance of London in William fitz Stephen and endures into Walcott's vision of London: a compound of spiritual and secular power with universalizing claims. Troy does not yet invest the vision of the city that would one day enclose Westminster, where Omeros would gaze at a monumental horseman from beneath the horse's belly; but had Omeros shown up as Edward rebuilt Westminster Abbey, he would still see the far navies on its river, and intuit the construction at the same time of the History that would conscript in the name of the formation of communities by power. Troy and Rome occupy and, echo in, so much medieval textuality. I propose the Walcott of *Omeros*, seeing from below (from lying on a bench), or from beyond (the Outer Provinces), as their diagnostic poet.

If he is diagnostic, however, where Europe is the object of diagnosis, he is also a maker in his own right, in Fanon's sense of an inventor and discoverer of new things. In their inventing, these new things make the old things look other than they do once the occasions of their own inventing have become invisible. In his Trojan and Roman materials, William was inventing and discovering London in his own present; with the same materials on a massive scale, Geoffrey of Monmouth was inventing and discovering an island and an empire. Both constructions can look absurd once the factitiousness of the materials is exposed, meaning their loss of credit as either History or history. But through Walcott's eyes on contemporary London and on St. Lucia, both the malign and all-too-real forces of History, and the benigner possibilities of communities of desire, become visible again in William of Stephen's London, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's Britain. In the end, William's London is no St. Lucian *res*

publica; it is constrained by its own legacies and by its construction within the social languages and political structures of its own time and place, and this means it opts for History and so reduces itself.

Walcott's "The Muse of History" articulates a poetics that at moments seems to free itself from Europe by freeing itself from cultural signs like those of Troy, Rome or London as these have figured in European poetry. The thrill of this poetics is there to be sensed in miniature, in my view, in one of Walcott's early poems, "Ruins of a Great House." The plantation house of the Caribbean era of slavery that is the titular Great House, prompted by remains in Guava Ridge, Jamaica (King 100–01), may as well be Troy, or Rome, or London, imperial Britain or imperial western Europe, and its ruin sufficient diagnosis and comment. So the poem is richly Dantean in its atmospherics (e.g. "The mouths of those gate cherubs shriek with stain"), while Walcott cares not in the slightest for the imperial apologetics dear to Dante; he reviles "the leprosy of empire" (7). This is an aesthetic in which homage is not debt or secondariness; in which, instead, Walcott might dare Dante to recognize in Walcott his fellow-poet's centeredness elsewhere. But repudiation is not where the poem's motions come to rest. The poet is enraged at the stench of the slave ships that led to this spot, his eyes burn with ashes, but "still the coal of my compassion fought / That Albion too was once / A colony like ours" (8). Nor is Albion sufficient to itself: the poem resolves into a citation of John Donne's *Meditation xvii*, from which the poet takes the lesson that the island of Albion is part of the main of Donne's Europe in this text, in analogy with every man's (*sic*) membership in mankind.

This is the moment when the heart is taken by surprise: "All in compassion ends / So differently from what the heart arranged: / 'as well as if a manor of thy friends…'" (8). The last line too, ending the poem, cites Donne's meditation, its "manor" set up by the great house's "manorial lake" some eight lines earlier, in which the poet has envisioned a slave body rotting. Compassion suspends rage, the logic of the chain of citations and analogies ordaining that the poet as a person is of a piece somehow with the manor, the manor with Albion, Albion with Europe, Europe being humankind; not so as to take the rot and stink from the poem, but so as to undo politics by art through the movement of language, especially metaphor, analogy, and a spray of citations, allusions, and references to poets and writers that makes the poem a kind of intertextual, word-playing mobile. Refusing ideology in favor of art's larger capacities of statement,

something of which Walcott has much to say in "The Muse of History," isn't to refuse politics. The poem's final elision of a decisive difference between the manor of one's friends and that of one's enemies, with the radically disturbing implication that you may find your friends in your enemy's manor, and your enemy may find his friends in yours, is a deeply political one, in which history has the last word in response to History; or, perhaps, in which neither history nor History succeeds in silencing its other. In this poetics, signs, from personal names (Homer/Omeros, Achilles/Achille, Helen/Helen) to places (London; Troy, Rome, Europe), are not fixed; in *Omeros*'s last words, as Achille brings his day to its close, "the sea was still going on" (325.126).

A Medievalist's Europe

About thirty years ago, the first two stanzas of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, with their beginning in Troy and triangulation of Troy, Rome, and Britain, caught hold of me. They seemed underread. *SGGK*'s opening lines told of origins, these origins were as if made-up, and I took them seriously, as Walcott could seriously see the smoke of Troy in St. Lucia. Now, I see them to put western Europe on the table, the Europe that did so much to corner empire and History. I think that *SGGK* reads mostly in the other direction, rejecting History's claims for the soul's (Ingledew, *"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" and the Order of the Garter*). The *SGGK*-poet sees his location in relation to the fires of Troy; in Aeneas' treachery and in the fissures in Arthur's court of Trojan descendants, he sees Troy's faultlines or split from itself and the disintegration of its genealogical claims to History. Though the poet does not share the premise, the poem's dramatic energy is predicated on the ambition of the claims of British empire in the forms of Arthur and the Edward III who invested in Arthur without reserve, an ambition that the poet empties of its rationale. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *DgB*, *SGGK*'s opening *topos* of Troy systematized, and then, eight years ago, the *Leges Anglorum*, continued to put to me the question of how to read the material of Troy in medieval European literature.

When I came across the *Leges Anglorum*, I had not read *Omeros* yet. *Omeros* suggests to me why I took the first stanzas of *SGGK* seriously: because words are generative in ways that their denotation cannot keep under control, so that a word for a non-existent thing, a

Troy that gave birth to Britain, can compose history, or seduce us into thinking so. With their assistance, we can build empires: forms of force that coopt desire. Western Europe has done it; today the United States does it, using its own spell-casting words (*Mayflower*, Founding Fathers, Constitution; America), whose denotative reference has long been lost under the accretions of their use in discourse over time. Empire *is* easily seductive, sometimes even for those it makes its objects; it organizes the event within a frame of significance that *can* seem to answer to human desires for significance, including the simple desire to belong to communities on a great scale, as in religious ideas of global community. In the face of this seductiveness, my experience of reading *Omeros* is that the poet of that poem does not shake himself free of Troy, and I don't think I do either; its seductions linger, spells remain to be broken.[51]

Finding oneself outside Europe may simply mean that a different discursive habitat makes the words that compose the spell look and function differently. If it is unavoidable that we write the past as a function of our present, the fact that most medieval scholars inhabit spaces and times made from inside the western European and U.S. imperial enterprises means that the present of the medieval text in its own time is limited by our presents: which means in turn that medieval texts continue to be read in line with the premises of the European imperial age, as Tully says of the prevailing models of political thought, including cosmopolitanism. One way back from such a limitation in our reading of such texts may lie in the nature of the imperial project as also a version, if mostly a bent and abusive one, of two incongruent human wishes, one, to find enough in one's own locality, and two, to feel connected to more people rather than to fewer. If the second wish gets fatally compromised in the project of empire, a poet like Walcott who would break with empire can show the possibilities of the first wish even in the heart of empire. There, we might glimpse in the horse-riding and ice-skating boys, apprentices, and young men, or in the food-sellers on the bank of the Thames of William fitz Stephen's London, as we do in *Omeros'* Helen, a local being who moves freely of the poet's (and Plunkett's) efforts to invest her with History, another possible history, of a locality that might be enough for itself if it weren't for their elders, inducted in the social languages of History.

51. See Breslin for a fleshed-out argument that *Omeros* does not entirely succeed in laying its Homeric burden, the burden of the Homer of History, to rest in favor of a new poetics.

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