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The Dynamics of Literary Response

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tent and its defensive management lets us infer Conrad's myth: the wish to bring to light a "distinct, significant fact" and hang onto it lest one sink into engulfing depths. Though we have arrived at the myth for Conrad from just one novel, countless examples from Dr. Bernard C. Meyer's fine biographical study[8] confirm it. After examining Conrad's total *œuvre*, Dr. Meyer concludes: "Conrad's heroes are motherless wanderers, postponing through momentary bursts of action their long-awaited return to a mother, whose untimely death has sown the seeds of longing and remorse, and whose voice, whispered from beyond the grave, utters her insistent claim upon her son's return." As for his life, "Throughout . . . Conrad displayed an incorrigible restlessness, an inability to tolerate the same ship, the same house, or even the same mode of life for any sustained length of time." Conrad himself described his leaving Poland this way: "He desired naïvely to escape with his very body from the intolerable reality of things." He invented adventures in the Congo—"his claim to have been saved by a native African woman who brought him water every day and his account of being rescued at the last minute after blowing three times on a whistle as he sank helplessly in a bog." And, perhaps most revealing of all, he answered a friend who tried to interest him in Freud, "I have no wish to probe the depths. I like to regard reality as a rough and rugged thing over which I can run my fingers—nothing more."

Yeats is right—there is "some one myth for every man." And one can discover it from just a small segment of his total work. Our model, too, is right. Though the concept of literary works as fantasies modified by defenses was designed to explore the reader's mind, it can be turned around. We can go from the text not only to the audience's mind but also to the writer's and from thence to his life to confirm a pattern of fantasy and defense. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? For we have seen the essence of our response is that a Fellini or a Hopkins or a Conrad takes over, for the long moment of a literary work, a portion of our minds, ordering it according to, not our, but their creative gifts.

9 Myth

Myth criticism—the finding of myths or rituals embedded in literary works—seems to have become a major sport among students and critics. As sport, one can hardly object, but the myth critic goes further: he says that these things he finds are what create our emotional response to the work. Northrop Frye or a host of followers tell us that *Tom Sawyer* acts out again the journey to the underworld of the matriarchal cave; that within *Great Expectations* lies the tale of the wicked witch and the enchanted princess; or that behind Richard III lurks the boar that slew Adonis. And when they tell us these things, the work of art seems suddenly to drop from the immediate world into the timeless and cosmic. I, at least, get a peculiar feeling of satisfaction, richness, and depth, a sense of the prehistoric, the echoing corridors of time, the great continuities of human experience experienced again in and through myself. But why? The myth critics seem content to say this feeling of resonance comes about because myth taps some sort of collective unconscious, the deepest memories and fantasies of the race. But these are airy nothings psychologists proper have long hooted at.

Even so, a myth critic could answer, all writers, no matter when or where, seem to turn out variations on one or the other of two basic myths: first, the dying god favored by mythographers such as Frazer or Joseph Campbell or literary critics like Frye and his fol-

lowers; second, the triple goddess evoked by mythographers such as Freud or Erich Neumann and applied in literary criticism mostly by Robert Graves. Certainly, once you begin to look, you can find under every literary bush a vegetation god or great earth mother, coupled or separate. From Sumer to Saul Bellow, Melanesia to Malamud, vast masses of legend and literature, pagan, Christian, Arthurian, Homeric, red Indian or brown, fit the pattern of one or both of these two basic myths. Virtually any episode in a work of literature: feast, marriage, journey, struggle, quest for Grail or whale, will match one episode in Campbell's monomyth or Cornford's. Virtually any hero—Faust or Don Juan, the picaro, the rogue-artist, the various lords of misrule—can be felt as gods dying with or without rebirth. Virtually any heroine can find her place in the Jungian pantheon of Virgin, Mother, and Crone. Even genres become the hardened crusts of myths. Comedy and tragedy (as the death or triumph of a hero) are where the theory started. Elegy, too, is obvious enough, as is epic: all self-respecting epics must have their journey to the underworld or, in mythic terms, a death-and-rebirth. Even pastoral has its link through the *bonus pastor*, the good shepherd, to Christ, dying and reborn; through *otium*, the leisurely pastoral life, to the mythic theme of the quest refused.

Clearly, one simple way of explaining the fact that these patterns turn up in all times, all genres, and all cultures is to say that we inherit these patterns as some kind of collective or archetypal or imprinted unconscious. But that is not the only possible explanation, and others do not require the troublesome assumption that our RNA and DNA, already so fraught with information, must carry Grimm's fairy tales as well.

The most obvious alternative is to say not that literature comes from myth, but that myth and literature alike stem from common psychological drives, universal because they are intrinsic to all human development. Thus, Freud in *Totem and Taboo* showed that tragedy and, in general, the myth of the slain, eaten, and reborn god act out a son's wishes toward a father (and, of course, one would now have to add the qualification from Malinowski, the

father-substitute in a matriarchy, typically the mother's brother). Similarly, in "The Theme of the Three Caskets," Freud showed (if we eke him out a bit) that the myths and cults of the triple goddess act out a son's attitudes toward a mother: as fruitful, bountiful, and nurturing; as sexually desirable but unattainable; as threatening and punishing, even killing. Unlike the collective unconscious used to explain the ubiquity of myth, such recurring fantasies about parents can be documented independently of myth by thousands of case histories from couch or clinic.

The myth critic, however, when he makes his assumptions explicit, feels that he is explaining something besides the ubiquity of myth, namely, that special feeling of resonance. The great myths and legends, he claims, because they express the deepest unconscious feelings of the race, have the power to evoke in literature our deepest responses. The dynamics or economics of this process myth critics, at least, do not make very clear—perhaps the simple notion of "resonance" will have to stand, though obviously there is more to it than that.

For one thing, although all works of literature embody myths, not all give that deep, rich feeling of resonance: not *Iolanthe*, for example (based on the Great Mother), nor *Other Voices, Other Rooms* (the Grail quest), to mention two such critical *trouvailles*. Another problem: merely pointing to the myth does not tell us what the work of art does with it. "The drama," C.L. Barber aptly insists, "controls magic by reunderstanding it as imagination."[1] But, unfortunately, very little myth criticism follows Professor Barber's warning. Very little tells us what has happened to the myth or ritual as it became art or how the effect of the work of art on us therefore differs from the effect of the myth.

There are, too, strong resistances to explaining the resonance myth evokes. One, I think, is something in the nature of apologetics going on underneath much myth criticism. That is, because the two fundamental myths seem to occur everywhere and always, the myth critic claims a kind of validity or authority for the one he prefers and therefore for the particular kind of religion associated

with that myth: the death and rebirth of Christ favored by Frye or the cult of the Great Mother espoused by Graves. Yet, clearly, as Freud's and Frazer's use of myths and rituals show, the ubiquity of myth cuts two ways: one can justify atheism by showing that modern religions are essentially the same as primitive ones long lacking in worshippers (except for Mr. Graves). Essentially, the ubiquity of myth simply puts all religions on an equal footing. All gain the same authority—or lack of it—and the choice of religion or none remains one's own.

Yet here the apologetics implicit in myth criticism can call upon the other datum: resonance. Myths seem to have the power to evoke or resonate our deepest selves. The religions implicit in these myths or rituals must also somehow be in tune with our deepest selves. Myth-in-literature, then, "proves" the existence of the kind of religious emotion proclaimed by Tillich and other neo-orthodox theologians. In this sense, myth criticism becomes just one more phase in Arnold's strategy of claiming for religion a poetic validity or for literature a religious sanction. Myth criticism thus paves a way for the rather vague theism so much in vogue now—on the basis of our subjective experience of resonance.

There is another block to understanding the resonance of myth —where does it come from, the work itself, the myth, or the work plus our knowledge of the myth in the work? Most myth critics, I think, believe that myths in literature make us resonate without our being consciously aware of them. I can only say I have had the contrary experience. For one thing, I find the myth critic's vocabularly itself peculiarly sonorous and rich, with its sons and seasons, winter lords and summer kings, crone goddesses and great mothers. Such phrases as "the joy of that strong generative power which impels the endless succession of seeds and sexes" stir me almost as a work of art does. Then a myth critic comes on the scene, in this case Mr. Sherman Hawkins (in the phrase above), and, by making me aware of the myths in *The Shepheardes Calender*, enables me to respond with an emotion I could not feel before. To me, it is very clear that in such a situation, I am resonating, not simply because there is myth in the work, but because there is myth and I know there is myth. My conscious knowledge seems to be a *sine qua non* for that special feeling of resonance and sonority. But perhaps instances can do more than theory can to make the matter clear.

Man and Superman makes a particularly useful instance, for the play exists, as it were, both with and without myth—or, perhaps more accurately, legend, which seems capable of the same effect. Most of us have seen the play without the Hell scene. As such, it seems to me a bright comedy, a sexual duel with some philosophical preoccupations, but not too far removed from Pinero and Jones or, for that matter, Terence Rattigan. But, with the Hell scene, Mozart's majestic chords signal a sudden drop into the timeless. The legendary dialogue casts long shadows into what preceded and what follows, and what had been simply a witty-lovers comedy becomes something else: richer, deeper, more resonant—at least for me. It is, then, my conscious knowledge of the legend that colors my response; but why?

Somehow, because I can see Jack Tanner both as his individual self and as the timeless, legendary Juan Tenorio playing a foreordained role, I get a feeling of resonance. It is something like "a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole." That phrase describes the "oceanic feeling" which Romain Rolland offered Freud as the "true source of religious sentiments." I, too, would associate the resonance mythic parallels make me feel with religious feelings and also with political commitments—as Erikson suggests, they, too, give one the feeling of being submerged and nurtured by a larger entity. Marvell described the feeling in "The Garden":

> the mind from pleasure less
> Withdraws into its happiness.
>
> . . .
>
> Annihilating all that's made
> To a green thought in a green shade.

Freud set out to explain this "oceanic feeling" and arrived at an hypothesis later observers have confirmed and which we have used many times—the crisis of self-object differentiation.[3] Originally, the child does not perceive himself as separate from his nurturing mother. In time, he learns she—and he—are separate beings, but even in adult life certain experiences will bring back that "oceanic feeling" of "limitlessness and of a bond with the universe," which had once been mother. Freud suggested that religious feelings brought the sensation back; Erikson has shown that ideological commitments also can. Now, it appears that mythic parallels in literature do, too. It is no coincidence that Marvell's "The Garden" builds on the myth of the primal garden of at-oneness with God; we were thrust forth from it by knowledge, knowledge, in a way, of our own separateness from God, our own identity as man.

> And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:
> Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden . . .

Thus, I am suggesting, the resonance we feel at myth represents a re-experiencing of that earlier sense of being merged into a larger matrix, a living forever in a role laid down from time immemorial.

"And eat." This sense of merging or resonance takes us back to a time when our life was primarily a life of the mouth, when our fantasies revolved around the two poles of "taking in": devouring and being devoured, as in "The Garden":

> Ripe apples drop about my head;
> The luscious clusters of the vine
> Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
> The nectarine and curious peach
> Into my hands themselves do reach;
> Stumbling on melons as I pass,
> Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.
>
> Meanwhile the mind from pleasure less . . .

Marvell images being fed as followed by the oceanic fusion; he thus suggests a check on our hypothesis. If the resonance of myth comes from our re-imagining our original fusion in and separation from the primal matrix, then we should expect to find oral elements: motifs of being engulfed, of devouring and being devoured, in literary works where myth plays a role and where the feeling of resonance is strong.

Certainly, we find them aplenty in *Man and Superman*. Listen, for example, to this Don Juan on love: "While I was in the act of framing my excuse to the lady, Life seized me and threw me into her arms as a sailor throws a scrap of fish into the mouth of a seabird." [4] By contrast, the true artist, "half vivisector, half vampire," "steals the mother's milk and blackens it to make printer's ink to scoff at her." While he still thinks Ann is in love with Tavy, Tanner tells him, "There is no love sincerer than the love of food. I think Ann loves you that way: she patted your cheek as if it were a nicely underdone chop." "Why, man, your head is in the lioness's mouth: you are half swallowed already . . . she breaks everybody's back with the stroke of her paw; but the question is, which of us will she eat? My own opinion is that she means to eat you." To Ann herself (after she has pretended to be a boa constrictor), he explains why he lost interest in her as an adolescent:

> TANNER. It happened just then that I got something that I wanted to keep all to myself instead of sharing it with you.
> ANN. I am sure I shouldn't have asked for any of it if you had grudged it.
> TANNER. It wasn't a box of sweets, Ann. It was something you'd never have let me call my own.
> ANN. (incredulously) What?
> TANNER. My soul.
> ANN. Oh, do be sensible, Jack.

Tanner's ambiguities make it seem as though Ann could eat up his masculinity like chocolate. Thus, on learning that Ann is in love with him: "Then I—*I* am the bee, the spider, the marked down victim, the destined prey," and he flees. At the end of the play, Tanner's engagement to Ann acts out an acceptance of his role as

"the destined prey," and he capitulates. "I have no heart's desires," as though he were sated. His last tirade evokes only "Universal laughter"—an image, among other things, of millions of bared but unhostile teeth. In short, the play as a whole gives us a character talking or running himself loose from the matrix, but finally accepting his role, and we are suitably reassured: it is funny.*

That is to look at the play from Tanner's point of view—how do we in the audience recapitulate his experience of being swallowed into a role demanded by the life force, his flight from it, his ultimate surrender and trust? Shaw establishes the appropriate tension in the very first moments of the play through the highly conventional figures of Ramsden and Tavy, creatures of role, their separate identities lost in conventionality, here, submerged in the hushed tones of death. To the extent we contemn and reject them, we try to defend against such loss of identity. We are ready, then, when within a hundred lines Shaw poises against them the figure of Tanner, furiously asserting his unconventionality through pamphlets, rhetoric, in general, words pouring out of his mouth. We take his way in as our way of escaping the anonymity of Ramsden and Tavy. Then, the next character to enter is the passively masterful Ann

* Viewing Shaw through the lens of transformational linguistics, Richard Ohmann notes his passion for tight categories and exaggerated opposites, cliché-juggling, paradox, discontinuity, the use of imperatives and interrogatives, and persons as representing attitudes. Ohmann concludes that Shaw makes

> an affirmation of human mind and order, as against the destructive forces of mechanism and chance. The quest for likenesses is a struggle to overcome through the organizing energies of mind, the threatening randomness of experience. In embracing discontinuity, on the other hand, Shaw rejects the mechanical tyranny of past over present and asserts man's right to control himself and his world, rather than doing (or thinking, or writing) what was done (or thought, or written) last time. Similarly, his affection for the everlasting "nay" represents an unalterable opposition to the blockhead, the man who impoverishes human life by his slavery to "ideals" and deceptions.[5]

In short, Ohmann, traveling by the route of linguistics comes to virtually the same point I reach by psychoanalysis: that Shaw's basic theme is the (oral) one of talking oneself loose from an enslaving matrix (such as woman or the past) felt as demeaning or threatening the very separateness of his identity.

who will ultimately (as in this opening scene) prove the mediator and Hegelian synthesis between the two modes of character already there and conflicted. The play will introduce one other mode of defense, an ambivalent flight in space and into the timelessness of myth and Lamarckian philosophy. Our allegiance to conflicting modes of character, though, has already established the basic tension: between being swallowed into a role or asserting onself through words, with Ann offering an attractive compromise: "Never mind her, dear. Go on talking."

One of the richest embeddings of myth in literature is the rejection of Falstaff. As J. I. M. Stewart and Philip Williams have shown [6] he is compared in *II Henry IV* to the Martlemas beef and the Bartholomew boar-pig, scapegoat animals ritually slaughtered to commemorate spring and harvest. Falstaff, the myth critics tell us, is a "dethroned and sacrificed king," "the scapegoat sacrificed to cleanse a Waste Land." More reasonably, he is, in C. L. Barber's fine analysis, the Lord of Misrule from a variety of Elizabethan festivals who must be banished for the hero-king, Henry V, to come into being. Though we feel sorry for the old reprobate, we also feel his banishment as "inevitable and just," as Williams says, though for explanation he calls on "Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious of the race": "Archetypal images of king-fathers and sacrificial rites are our inescapable heritage." Maybe so, but how many of us, really, have inherited any Martlemas beef archetypes?

There is, again, the simpler explanation: that the banishing of Falstaff recapitulates in each of us the separation of ourselves from the matrix of our mouthy infancy. Though it seems redundant even to mention it, the oral element is very strong in this play about the world's archetypal fat man. There are, though, other people in the play besides Falstaff. The entire play involves a change of identity from the madcap prince to the hero-king, and these changes are often stated in imagery of the food and mouth. The very first thing we see is Rumor, the prologue, "painted full of tongues." The whole commonwealth is a "beastly feeder," now

vomiting up Henry IV, for "Their over-greedy love hath surfeited." Hal himself must put aside "the feeder of my riots" to become the hero-king; he must accept the crown that "hath fed upon the body of my father," that "hast eat thy bearer up." And when he rejects the "surfeit-swelled" Falstaff, he does so in terms of food and being devoured:

> Leave gormandizing. Know the grave doth gape
> For thee thrice wider than for other men.

Though, at the moment of the crowning, Falstaff called Hal, "My Jove!" thus identifying himself with Saturn who devoured his sons, he now must learn to accept a new identity, based on a new relationship between him and Hal. Where formerly Hal and Falstaff had been a unit ("Banish plump Jack and banish all the world!"), now Hal tells him:

> When thou dost hear that I am as I have been,
> Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast

(the converse of the way a new "I" grows out of the separation of two people). Hal has rejected this man he was taking in like a "strange tongue," and now he immerses himself in another matrix: God's, nature's, his father's. He tells Falstaff's enemy, the Lord Chief Justice, who was "the person of [his] father," "the image of his power,"

> You shall be as a father to my youth.
> My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear.

The image is the very one that Shakespeare used to harness our hunger and merge us into the play with its first words:

> Open your ears, for which of you will stop
> The vent of hearing when loud Rumor speaks?

In *II Henry* IV, myth serves, not to dredge up some hypothetical racial unconscious, but to make us experience for ourselves the characters' choices. They either find identities by merging into a primal, nurturing matrix, or they fail to fit the larger order because

of their own selfish appetites for food, drink, words, or power. For Hal, we feel this merging as triumphant, a kind of apotheosis. For Falstaff, we feel a wry and melancholy necessity. But for both (unlike the defeated rebels) we feel a reassuring return to a foreordained role.

Close chronologically and psychologically to *II Henry IV*, comes *As You Like It*.[7] There, too, the oral theme is strong. The older brother makes the younger "feed with his hinds," and the younger flees to join the banished Duke in a forest. He fights him for food first, but then learns that the forest nurtures like a mother, gives a "sweet" life ("Sweet are the uses of adversity") and the Duke and his men "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world." The action is for the brothers and the Dukes to find their proper social roles again. The bad brother improbably reforms as he is about to become "Food to [a] sucked and hungry lioness" "with udders all drawn dry." As for the good brother, Orlando, Rosalind's catechism of Orlando taught him love: "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." In the stately finale, Rosalind ritually pairs off the appropriate lovers, and again we get the sensation of a comfortable merging into a foreordained role. In the play as a whole, though, the role is not mythic but pastoral. Just as *Man and Superman* shows how legend can carry out the function of myth, *As You Like It* shows how the traditional trappings of a genre, perhaps even a simple phrase like "Once upon a time," can give the same resonant feeling of lapsing into a matrix, though to a lesser degree.

Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*[8] shows that even the mere awareness of myth without certain knowledge of it is enough to permit the feeling of mythic resonance. The film divides roughtly into halves. The first presents (in a realistic setting) a series of mismatched couples: aging husband and young, virginal wife; theological son and sluttish serving-girl; motherly actress and murderous Count. This half of the film hints at a Phaedra plot, but

does not act it out, and there is no particular feeling of resonance.

The second half of the film is richly mythic—and resonant: a feast at the castle of the actress, Desirée's, crone-like mother. The old woman is carried to the feast like the image of death on Walpurgisnacht, and she invokes the spell with a magic wine:

> A story is told that . . . to every cask filled with this wine a drop of milk from the swelling breasts of a woman who has just given birth to her first child and a drop of seed from a young stallion are added. This gives the wine a mysterious stimulating power, and whoever drinks of it does so at his own risk.

In the magical moment of the toast and the wishing, Bergman's camera moves from face to face with catchlights from the candles and soft-focus to suggest each character's sinking into an inner self.

The rest of the night works itself out to a ritual refrain spoken magically and quite unrealistically by the servant couple:

> The summer night has three smiles, and this is the first—between midnight and daybreak—when young lovers open their hearts and bodies.
>
> Now the summer night smiles its second smile: for the clowns, the fools, the unredeemable.
>
> And then the summer night smiled for the third time. For the sad, the depressed, the sleepless, the confused, the frightened, the lonely.

The night comforts, and perhaps the smile suggests a nurturing person (for nights do not, after all, smile).

In another exquisite image, we see the roles of man as figures that rotate on the town clock, and as the time passes, the young lovers elope; the servants couple in a haystack; Fredrik and the Count fight a duel with blanks which leaves Fredrik with a sooty face. The Count and his wife, both mechanical and sadistic, accept each other. Fredrik ends up nestling by Desirée like a tired child, as she tells her mother she is "studying [her] new role." And the servants pronounce the final words: "The clowns will have a cup of coffee in the kitchen."

In short, the action is a reassuring charm to let each find his proper role, even (wryly) to accept aging and death. The resonance is rich, even though the mythic parallel is more general than particular. There are elements of midsummer-night rituals: fires, copulation in the fields, the image of death, the wine and wishes. The ladies constitute a triple goddess: the young wife is the Virgin; Desirée is the Mother; and her mother is the Crone; with the sadistic Charlotte focusing in herself Persephone the Destroyer. At one point, Frid the porter leaps about like a satyr, and Fredrik with the soot on his face is the *melanthos* of Attic drama, having recently suffered a death-and-rebirth into the mothering arms of Desirée.

The myths and rituals are vague, though Bergman calls attention to their presence. With them, we find the oral elements of much wine, coffee, kissing, magical speech, feasting, blowing trumpets, smiling—even more important, mothering. Throughout, the men's aggressive efforts to break out of their roles are foiled by the women's managerial, motherly talents, and it is this sense of being engulfed in a matriarchy that lets our knowledge of the myths, however inchoate, generate the true feeling of resonance.

Myth by itself is ubiquitous, let alone legend (Don Juan), the traditions of genre (*As You Like It*), or the dim awareness of mythic elements without any specific parallel (*Smiles of a Summer Night*). Obviously, if myth be ubiquitous, one cannot demonstrate in a finite space that it always gives us a resonant feeling when associated with a fantasy of being absorbed into a matrix. I can, however, further the argument by instances that the opposite proposition is true. That is, where myth is embedded in a literary work and we know it is there, but where our feeling of resonance is not strong, the fantasy of return to the original mother-child unit is flawed or defeated or absent. We would expect, too, that the symbols of orality would be weak or gone.

One instance that confirms this opposite proposition is "The Rocking-Horse Winner."[9] Like so many of D. H. Lawrence's stories, it has a mythic matrix. Paul's father hints at it by his role—or

lack of it. We scarcely hear of him except to learn, at the opening, that his wife does not love him, that he goes "to town to some office," that he "never *would* be able to do anything worth doing," that he is "very unlucky." At the crucial discovery scene, when Paul's mother finds the boy collapsing on his rocking-horse, the father is downstairs "mixing a whisky-and-soda." The man who takes the father's place, who has money, leisure, luck, the boy's companionship, is his uncle—the mother's brother, that is, the man who would take the father's place in a matriarchal culture, particularly if the secret of fatherhood is not known.* His first name is Oscar, derived ultimately from Osiris; his last name is Cresswell, with overtones of growth and prosperity. Correspondingly, the mother's name is Esther, derived ultimately from Ishtar. In short, we seem to be dealing on the mythic level with some kind of cult of the Great Mother—though, in the actual story, of course, Esther-Ishtar is a cold, stunted, unloving mother.

The story has elements of a later religion, too. Paul, like his saintly namesake, has both pagan and Christian roles to play. He, too, falls from his horse because of a vision, ultimately blinding, that makes his eyes "like blue stones." Bassett, his gamekeeper-mentor, tells us, "It's as if he had it from heaven." Bassett himself, lowly, lamed, and priestly, talks of winning money "as if he were speaking of religious matters," "serious as a church." In effect, Lawrence sets off a slavish, money-grubbing religion of children and slaves against an ampler, matriarchal paganism.

Knowing this mythic side, however, gives no feeling of resonance to me—or to anyone to whom I have mentioned it—though the evidence is as ample as evidence usually is for mythic readings. Perhaps we can see why the resonance doesn't happen.

* It is some further confirmation of the reading to note that the same mother's brother role occurs in Strindberg's *The Father* where precisely the matters at issue are matriarchal rule as against patriarchal, the question hinging on knowledge of fatherhood. It would be possible to see Paul's need to know about riding-leading-to-multiplication as a symbol of sexual knowledge—but, if so, the Lawrence story disguises the theme much more than the Strindberg play.

Lawrence's "Rocking-Horse Winner," W. D. Snodgrass suggests,[10] attacks masturbation (the boy's furious rocking on his wooden horse) as an inadequate substitute for union with another human being. We could look at the story in another, but related, way: as a tragedy of sublimation, of accepting more and more complex and devious substitutes for one's real desires. As Uncle Oscar concludes, "He's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking horse to find a winner." We can also think of it in still a third, but again related way: as the boy's trying to achieve a real relationship or union with the Great Mother by a devious Christian money-grubbing and money-charity.

But, of course, such union as he gets with his mother comes too little and too late—though it does come, towards the end of the story:

> The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. . . . His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half-an-hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.
>
> Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in commonsense. But it was too strong.
>
> His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.
>
> But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained . . .

In many ways, that horrible "But" carries the whole tragedy. "The Rocking-Horse Winner" is a story of desperate hunger, seemingly for money or luck, but actually for love, and there is no satisfaction of the hunger (unless we can see Paul's death as some kind of union with an ultimate mother). This lack of satisfaction shows another way: by the few references to the mouth. What few there are speak not of feeding, taking in, through the mouth, but instead

of facial expressions: "smirking," "a roar of laughter," "He pursed his mouth tight." "A cold, determined look came on her mouth." "He saw, by the lines of her mouth that she was only trying to hide something from him." This is a story about very definitely *not* being fed, *not* (except by dying) achieving union with a mother. And knowing the myth in the story does not give us the kind of resonance, the sense of an antediluvian self prior to our historical individuality, that knowing myths in other works so often does.

Miss Claire Rosenfield has found a mythic parallel in a novel we have already considered, Conrad's *The Secret Agent*.[11] She points out that Conrad's London is something on the order of a classical labyrinth with its dirty brick walls, jumbled street signs, an "immensity of greasy slime," a "slimy aquarium," a "slimy dampness." It is the hell-mouth or the bowels of the monster (in the terms of Joseph Campbell). As we have seen above, contrasted to these images of water, the action of the novel is to fish. The Assistant Commissioner tries to catch a "sprat" (Verloc) to get the whale (Vladimir). The Assistant Commissioner looks like a "queer foreign fish" when he plunges into the murky depths of London. His patron in Parliament is preoccupied with his Fisheries Bill. But, again, the myth, far from giving us a feeling of resonance, seems to parody the fishing motif, described by Frye as "bringing life out of the waters." Instead, the detectives' discovery issues not in life, but in Winnie's murder of Verloc, and she herself drops off a Channel boat into the sea.

Winnie herself is the snake-goddess (like Persephone, the destroyer) who is to her lover, Ossipon, "twined around him like a snake, not to be shaken off. She was not deadly. She was death itself—the companion of life." Indeed, Ossipon is a grotesque parody of the sun-god. Stevie, the idiot brother Winnie loved, whose death in Verloc's attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory sets off Winnie's vengeance, is fraught with myth. Professor Guérard notes that he is both visionary and victim. Miss Rosenfield sees in him the child-man of double parentage (his real parents and his adopted: Winnie and Verloc), whose birth is described as being borne in a roomy "barque" down the "lazy stream" of Mr. Verloc's life (something in the manner of Moses). He suffers the traditional *sparagmos* of the scapegoat, being torn to pieces (by the bomb), though instead of the ritual eating of the slain god, alas, the police inspector only loses his appetite—and very nearly his breakfast—at the sight of Stevie's remains, the "raw material for a cannibal feast." The parallels are striking, but the effect, so far from being the resonance and deepening we associate with the presence of myth, is rather one of grotesquerie or parody.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, many elements in the novel have to do with the primal unit of nurturing mother and suckling child. Each of the anarchists depends upon some woman. All the men relax into easy faiths. Verloc looks as though he has wallowed in bed all day. Sinking into the moral swamp signifies, at the deepest level, relaxing into a passive position toward a nurturing woman. Thus, the very knife the "maternal and violent" Winnie uses to stab Verloc, he has just used to cut himself thick slabs of beef. The nurtured Stevie becomes "the raw material for a cannibal feast." Winnie's first lover was a butcher-boy.

The novel, though it builds on a wish to lapse into an engulfing, nurturing environment, builds against the wish. It presents that environment as dangerous and dirty: "slimy," "greasy," "muddy." Verloc is murdered for his moral indolence, his complacent willingness to take what comes. Winnie's submerging kills her. The feeding and obesity are repulsive. In the words of the ambassadorial injunction that starts the action, "What is required at present is . . . the bringing to light of a distinct, significant fact—I would almost say of an alarming fact." This is the fishing motif, but also the explosion itself, the sacrifice of the scapegoat Stevie, the emergence of his identifying name-tape (*anagnorisis*), the Professor's detonator, the Commissioner's quest for Vladimir, or even the withdrawal of Verloc's bank account. But all this fishing for things fails: Winnie sinks into the ocean and the buried treasure into Ossipon's pocket.

Though Conrad tempts us a little toward the "immensity of greasy slime" by the promise of secrets (even pornographic se-

crets), the style and structure and action of the novel as a whole move against it. The book persuades us that to let oneself over the side into the dark, engulfing labyrinth of secrets would be dangerous or disgusting. The right action is to fight free of it. And we feel the myth as parody.

In short, where the literary work as a whole makes us feel that lapsing into a protective, nurturing, maternal environment is pleasurable (*Man and Superman*) or necessary (*II Henry IV*) or to be wryly accepted (*Smiles of a Summer Night*), we feel the resonance of myth, joyous in one case, melancholy in another, but in all, deepening and enriching. When, however, the work of art makes us feel that such a lapsing into a succored passivity is dangerous or disgusting (*The Secret Agent*) or impossible ("The Rocking-Horse Winner"), the work of art blocks whatever feeling of resonance we might get from our knowledge of a mythic substratum.

In effect, myths in literature either work with or work against our original merger with the text. Analyzing the "as if" or "willing suspension of disbelief," we found that we approach a literary work with two conscious expectations: the work will give us pleasure; it will not ask that we act on the external world. These two conscious expectations find a matrix in us, a memory of the primal at-oneness with a nurturing other. In "taking in" a poem, story, or drama, we partly regress to that state where we did not differentiate what happened "in here" from what went on "out there." Our conscious knowledge of a timeless, mythic substructure furthers this original "as if." It, too, offers us the chance to merge the plot, characters, and ourselves into a larger sustaining matrix—the myth. Really, then, myth works in our response to deepen and strengthen our existing introjection of the work—if the tenor of the whole permits it to.

The ubiquity of myth in literature and the feeling of resonance it gives—these have led most myth critics to lean on the hypothesis of a collective memory or racial unconscious. But surely this is a difficult idea to maintain, that we inherit brain-traces of such complicated and exotic matters as the Tibetan King of the Years.

Surely it is easier to believe that it is not some impersonal racial memory, but we ourselves who make the emotional experience of art out of our own drives released through our own conscious knowledge of meaning and myth.

Our study of resonance and particularly the sometime lack of it suggest a much simpler explanation of the role of myth. The mere presence of a mythic parallel in itself enables us to re-experience a total unity of self and nurturing environment, if we passively accept the parallel. The particular content of the myth will express for us fantasies derived from our experience of our own bodies and our parents', just as any plot or symbolism does. Then, in some literary works, the tenor of the whole may resist the passive acceptance of the myth, and we will feel it as parody or irony.

What is perhaps difficult to accept is that it is not the myth *per se* that makes the feeling of resonance possible, but the myth plus our conscious knowledge of it. This seems something of a paradox: that part of the effect of a work comes from something outside it —our knowledge of its mythic underside. But we have already seen (in Ch. 6) how we need a sense of meaningfulness in order to release and transform the fantasy a literary work embodies. Indeed, how could any plot or word release our unconscious drives unless we consciously understood it?

With myth, our conscious awareness (dim or exact) of the myth can provide (if the context permits it) a rationale that lets us gratify an unconscious wish to return to an ancient, timeless, and universal at-oneness with the world. The work of art itself allows us to submerge a complex and perhaps painful sense of personal identity. Then our knowledge of a mythic parallel offers us a still greater sense of some nurturing and sustaining role into which we can relax. At the same time, that conscious knowledge of the myth provides an Ariadne thread, a way out of that engulfing labyrinth and back to a sense of self. To put aside the notion of collective memory or racial unconscious, though, to accept the more rational explanation—this is, in an even larger sense, to escape into and from the labyrinth of myth.

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Derek Walcott

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Omeros

Introduction

Sunt lacrymae rerum . . .

These are days not only of fast food but also of immediate literary comment and judgement. Even before *Omeros* was out one was given an advance copy – and six weeks to write a chapter on the book for the then forthcoming *The Art of Derek Walcott*. I have been acquainted with parts of the work for some time. But the complicated concerned music of the poem I met just six weeks ago. So I realise that although I must say what I have to say clearly and without hedging my bets, there will be much that I have missed, and more that I will see in a different light after prolonged re-reading.

Of one thing I am quite sure: this 325 page poem is an outstanding achievement, by a gifted and hardworking poet whose multifaceted Caribbean upbringing and experience was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the production of this masterpiece. While not lacking in any way lyrical fire, it makes meaning, and displays deep human concern, through a sort of novelistic structure of a mosaic kind.

I intend to examine this remarkable poem through well tried, or if you prefer old fashioned, categories: Historical, Metaphorical, Moral and Anagogical.

Historical

> We helped ourselves
> to these green islands likes olives from a saucer,
>
> munched on the pith, then spat their sucked stones on a plate.[1]

Like all history this poem tells a story, a complicated story, which in modern times we tend to associate with a novel rather than a poem. But in another sense it is, of course, fiction. It is fashioned, it is made up – the better to make sense of human actions, which of necessity happen in time, and along a continuum of time.

Its chief characters are taken from the island of St Lucia which was once struggled for, in the old empire days, by the then powerful forces of France and England. In fact it changed hands fourteen times between these two powers aiming to split the green calabash of the world between them. When at the Battle of the Saints De Grasse was defeated, if not outwitted, by the new tactics of Rodney, Britain was certain of its predominant position, not only in the Caribbean but also in Canada and India.

It is his preoccupation with this battle that prompts the character Plunkett's research, and brings him to the distinguished historical work of Breen:

> Now he could roar out Breen's encomium by rote
>
> . . . He taught Maud to say it by heart:
> "*When we consider the weighty interest involved in the iss-*
>
> *ue* . . . " (there was always a spray of spittle with this part,
> as the sibilants reared with an adder's warning hiss),
> "*Whereby the mighty projects of the coalesced powers*
>
> *were annihilated and Britain's dominion on the seas*
> *secured* . . . " Maud recited it to the yellow allamandas
> as if they were fleurs-de-lys, as her clicking secateurs
>
> beheaded them into a basket and up the stone stairs.[2]

St Lucia – much fought for – which played its part in this battle, is one of the main characters in the history that is this poem; it is also the home or operating focus for other main characters: Hector, Helen, Achille, Philoctete, Seven Seas, Ma Kilman, Dennis and Maud Plunkett, the Narrator and his father and mother, the barber, the tall standing black women who like ants carry their hundred weight loads of coal.

But the poem is historical in the wider sense of bringing in not only the French and the English and the Dutch in their so self-confident

attitude of pillage and ownership: the Indians of the Plains are seen also as they are expected, by the citizens of the newly formed, revolutionary, democratic United States of America, to disappear like their smoke signals, meaningless and no longer visible as night falls over the Dakotas. The devastation of chattel slavery upon parts of Africa is also spelt out; and the dilemma faced by the modern 'development' of a place like St Lucia is brought clearly before our eyes.

But it must be stressed that the lyric intensity of the poem remains throughout what is of necessity outlining in a rather abstract and summary way:

> Art is History's nostalgia, it prefers a thatched
>
> roof to a concrete factory, and the huge church
> above a bleached village. The gap between the driver
> and me increased when he said:
> "The place changing, eh?"
>
> where an old rumshop had gone, but not that river
> with its clogged shadows. *That* would make me a stranger.
> "All to the good," he said. I said, "All to the good,"
>
> then, "whoever they are," to myself. I caught his eyes
> in the mirror. We were climbing out of Micoud.
> Hadn't I made their poverty my paradise?[3]

Another main character who moves in and out of the poem, and plays a significant part, is Omeros, Homer himself, in the guise of the old blind poet, the seer without eyes, the beggar full of riches, the master of that long resounding line beating upon the conscious and unconscious ear like the ever breaking waves in the Peloponnesus or the Caribbean – *poluphlois boio thalasses. Toujours recomencée la mer!*

The structure of this history or fiction is, as in so much of Walcott, with his Horatian background, mosaic. We do not start with the Wrath of Achilles nor end with the funeral rites of Hector the tamer of horses. We do not have a straight line development, but rather like Penelope's weaving, under pressure from suitors, or Maud Plunkett's knitting of birds – those animals of wonder to the Greeks, and of shame to those moderns who long to be *rooted* somewhere or in some Nowhere – we have complicated patterns, and some puzzling

juxtapositions, made less, rather than more, clear by the author's direct interventions in the style of old time novelists. Sometimes it is but the intervention of the *narrator*, but sometimes it appears to be the author, and in one place, at least, the *I* becomes a kind of general consciousness, or the locution of one of the characters, as if in the author's voice. A prime and rather confusing example of this takes place in the incident between the young Plunketts on the hillside during the war, as the camouflaged ships steam under the cliffs, and Dennis decides not to take the physical possession of Maud which she in her generosity is offering.

> . . . with gulls buzzing the cliff
>
> and screeching above us when she parted both lips
> and searched for his soul with her tongue, her wild grey eyes
> as flecked with light as the sea, then she was urging
>
> me to go in, port of entry, with my fingers
> and I could not.[4]

This particular intrusion of *I*, whether it be the voice of Plunkett or of the authorial voice is not, of course, new in Walcott. It appears in *Another Life*[5], but also long before that in 'Tales of the Islands'.[6] At times it is not clear enough just what is happening, or rather who is intended to be speaking.

To return to the Historical aspect, the historical theme is not so much, as had been asserted, *exile*. It is rather *where is home?* And, of course, man's inhumanity to man. The historical movement of people is often forgotten now, even in places like the Caribbean, which has been one of the greatest recipients and results of this movement, whether voluntary or forced. It cannot be by accident that the poem opens with what is to the local fishermen their main means of movement:

> "This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes".
> Philoctete smiles for the tourists, who try taking
> his soul with their cameras . . . [7]

And notice too that the tourists are also involved in this process of the movement of people.

Much later in the poem we hear of Plunkett that his wanderings are over:

> Despite that morning's near accident, the old Rover
> sailed under the surf of threshing palms and his heart
> hummed like its old engine, his wanderings over,
>
> like the freighter rusting on its capstans.[8]

And the poem ends with the beach and "the sea was still going on."[9]

In the beginning and the end, Achille has travelled back to Africa, the Indian (sub continental) diaspora has taken place, the Indians of the Plains have been moved very nearly into extinction; we have been to Holland, where the young midshipman, also called Plunkett, has been spying for Rodney. We have been in the desert with Plunkett's fighting colleagues, we have been in Istanbul, and seen Athens and Atlanta, Georgia. We have, as they say in Nigeria, 'travelled'. And although the pivot and focal point is St Lucia, and Maud and Hector, and the father of the narrator, end their lives there, and Omeros appears there to show the narrator the way, there appears to be a secular version of the Augustinian conclusion somewhere in the background – "our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee". Or as we hear in connection with Seven Seas, who is the islander who has travelled most, and has lived among the "Red Indians":

> Seven Seas sighed. What was the original fault?
> "Plunkett promise me a pig next Christmas. He'll heal
> in time, too."
> "We shall all heal."
> The incurable
>
> wound of time pierced them down the long, sharp-shadowed street.[10]

But that is perhaps to anticipate the last aspect of our probing and analysis.

The historical aspects of this remarkable poem, then, are wide ranging. It is not only Helen of St Lucia who is portrayed and explored, but St Lucia herself – one of her names was Helen – and the displacement of people as an aspect of their human condition. The poem, much more a novel than an epic, while never losing its lyrical fire, is complicated in structure, gaining some of its meanings by the juxtaposition of episodes. For instance, an outburst on the part of the author:

There was no difference
between me and Philoctete . . . [11]

comes in between Ma Kilman's search for the proper native, traditional herbs which will cure Philoctete of his longstanding wound which stinks, and which isolates him, as it does his namesake in the Iliad, from human comradeship. And the cure that works on him, the prayerful use of the traditional, of the *native*, which is downgraded by the modern, whether secular or religious, that cure works, in a different way, on the narrator for his heart wound, the wound of living, and perhaps loving not wisely but too well. So the fictional and poetic power of the poem, and the poet, seem to suggest to us. But I have to say that on this occasion, when recollected in tranquillity, the sleight of hand does not seem quite to work.

It is now time to say something about the appearance of Homer in this poem, as well as the appearance of the Homeric characters, or more accurately names, already mentioned. For despite its title, and despite the loving appearance of the blind bard himself – in St Lucia and on the steps of St Martins-in-the- Fields – this poem is in no way written, as it were, over the template of the Iliad or the Odyssey. Helen (of St Lucia) appears, and Hector and Achille. And there is a fight over her mysterious beauty. But these St Lucians also bear these names because of the tradition started in slavery of giving slaves such heroic names. Walcott somewhere calls the result of this custom "the shadow of names". Perhaps as a poet he has always exaggerated the power and importance of names, the giving of which he has more than once reminded us was Adam's role and privilege.

The Homeric aspect, and context of meaning, in this poem is more in the sea and the struggles with it, in what men fight for in Homer and elsewhere, in the displacement and dislocation of people; the Wrath of Achilles, in the Iliad, sent the souls of many noblemen to Hades, leaving their bodies as carrion for the dogs and passing birds.

But the real heroes in this poem are not nobles, or "Kings of Men" as they are in Homer; they are noble people, but most without rank. There are a few with rank, such as Comte de Grasse and Rodney, rivals at the Battle of the Saints. But they are few and unimportant. The real heroes are Hector and Achille and Helen and Philoctete and Seven Seas, some of them fishermen finding it difficult to make a living in the days of trawling fishnets almost as big as St Lucia:

banks robbed by thirty-mile seines,
their refrigerated scales packed tightly as coins,

and no more lobsters on the seabed. All the signs
of a hidden devastation under the cones
of volcanic gorges. Every dawn made his trade

difficult and empty . . . [12]

Aristotle's dictum about the hero needing to be a prince or a leader of men is turned around. This is in fact one of the achievements of *Omeros*. And not only in the respect of the fishermen: Ma Kilman, who cures Philoctete, is a shop-keeper and a sybil/obeah woman; Helen is a maid and waitress; Maud Plunkett, one of the book's most sympathetic characters, is a gardener from Ireland in St Lucia because her husband is there looking for a son and for a connection with History. They are indeed noble people, but not people of the nobility. They belong to another stage and type of History.

Metaphorical

"This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes".[13]

This is how Philoctete is made to start this long poem. Here we have the language of metaphor at work: that move beyond, but at the same time with, the purely ostensible signification of the words at hand. It is the way language is often used in every day converse, although there the cliché, and the hidden metaphor, often hide from us what is really going on. It is often forgotten that language as metaphor belongs not only to poetry, but also to other forms of fiction such as novels and short stories.

But, of course, poetry uses more intensely, and in a more structured way, this quite common kind of language. Philoctete continues:

"Once wind bring the news

to the *laurier-cannelles*, their leaves start shaking
the minute the axe of sunlight hit the cedars,
because they could see the axes in our own eyes.[14]

Notice the use of "shaking" in which, as so often happens in poetry, the ostensible and the metaphorical use are equally evident; whereas in "the axes in our own eyes" the metaphorical has taken over, in a

rather sinister way. For the trees and the waterfalls and the mountains and the ground-doves' mating call – as they are used here as the poem becomes air-borne – continue to play on our feelings in a certain way because they have been made to become not only sentient but personal communicating beings, realising what the work of the axe means to the *laurier-cannelles*. Whereas to the fishermen, as to the warriors of the Iliad, the felling and hollowing by fire of the proud trees are but necessary steps in their vocations.

Note also that because of the dramatic and novelistic nature of this poem, these words are put into the mouth of Philoctete, who uses a slightly bantering tone: he is showing off just a little to the tourists. After all, he is going to get to the very important matter of 'raising' some money from them by showing them the scar on his leg: "It have some things" – he smiles – "worth more than a dollar".[15]

No doubt there is no need to labour the importance of being constantly aware of how the poet is using metaphor to have us react in a certain way, not only to make the meanings he desires, but also to have us feel and respond in a certain way. The poem is, in the sense discussed, History, it is a story. But it is pre-eminently metaphor. Not only in its words and images, but in a larger sense, in its structure, story, the characters it delineates and the way it relates its various parts to the whole which it slowly becomes as we develop our relationship with it. We need a careful knowledge of the poem in order to enjoy and appreciate it, but it is as much a knowledge of acquaintanceship as of learning.

I shall draw attention to a few more ways in which metaphor works in this poem, as much to keep us sensitive to one of the main poetic uses of poetry in general as to acquaint us with Walcott's way with language. Just as single words or images – the *shaking* of the leaves above, for instance – take on meanings beyond their first or 'literal' significance, so episodes or persons can metaphorically signify some thing beyond themselves, and so involve us in seeing, and learning to see, further significance:

> She was selling herself like the island, without
> any pain . . . .[16]

This is said of the St Lucian Helen, whose preparation for the Friday night festivities has made Achille *nauseous with jealousy*. So much so that Achille, like his namesake Achilles, sulked "in his tent" and refused to join in the fête. He has watched her taking her careful bath in the outside shower. "Is the music,/ the people I like" she says. But

> he sat in the frame of the back door to the yard
> watching her head, in the shower he'd built for her
> from brand-new galvanize, streaming from the white foam
>
> with expensive shampoo, and, when it disappeared,
> came back, the mouth parted, the eyes squeezed with delight.[17]

She makes her full preparation; she tries to persuade him to join in, but he goes off to the canoes on the beach from which point he can watch

> her high head moving through the tourists,
> through flying stars from the coalpots, the painted mouth
> still eagerly parted. Murder throbbed in his wrists
>
> to the loudspeaker's pelvic thud, her floating move.
> She was selling herself like the island, without
> any pain, and the village did not seem to care
>
> that it was dying in its change, the way it whored
> away a simple life that would soon disappear
> while the children withered on the sidewalks to the sounds[18]

By metaphorically linking the island with Helen in the aspects of the new, the vibrating, the flying stars, as well as the pelvic 'self selling', the author intensifies our involvement in the history and the fiction which have their value in being images of the real world. Whether it is easier to understand, and to sympathise with, Helen or with the neonatal St Lucia is difficult to say. But both are images of each other; both cast light on the other's predicament. Whether when we realise this we are any nearer an insight into what might be the solution to this 'developmental' problem, we shall discuss when we look at the moral aspects of this poem.

In another part of the world, in another aspect of the human condition, the author deepens our insight by a different use of metaphor. We are with the sad experience of the Native Americans, more commonly called the Amerindians. Immediately after the moving interlude which starts "House of umbrage, house of fear",[19] and which refers to the breakdown of his third marriage, our author turns to the fate of the Crow horsemen among the Dakotas. There is no doubt a metaphorical significance in this structual juxtaposition: "Our contracts// were torn like the clouds, like treaties with the

Indians,/ but with mutual treachery."[20] And a new woman, Catherine Weldon, comes onstage. Walcott's woman has left; but Weldon is present to the Indians, even though her hopes for them are to be betrayed:

> The nausea stirring her loins
> was not from war, but from the treachery that came after
>
> war, the white piece of paper so ornately signed
> that perhaps that sound was really the loon's laughter
> at treaties changing like clouds, their ink faded like wind.
>
> . . .
>
> She had believed in the redemptions of History,
> that the papers the Sioux had folded to their hearts
>
> would be kept like God's word, that each signatory,
> after all that suffering, had blotted out their hates,
> and that peace would break out as widely as the moon.[21]

The original image of "nausea stirring in her loins" is, in this context, made even more powerful, and throws more light on the plight of the Indians, because it does not here anticipate birth, but rather contemplates treachery and murder. Similarly the soon to be used metaphor of 'flour' for 'snow' gains an intensity by obliterating, while still bringing to mind, all the gentle associations we have with flour. And to baste a corpse with dry, cold flour is as "contrary to nature" an activity as one can imagine.

Note how these passages reinforce each other by the image of changing clouds and torn tatters of paper. The white piece of paper also echoes the white snow which the author tends to make something frightening, choking like dry flour:

> The snow blew in their wincing faces like papers
> from another treaty which a blind shaman tears
> to bits in the wind . . .
>
> . . .
>
> The flour basting their corpses on the white fields.[22]

In fact throughout the Indian pieces one is reminded of the frightening nature of whiteness and the white snow as portrayed in Walcott's early poem 'God rest ye merry gentlemen':

> What had I heard,
> wheezing behind me with whitening breath? . . .
> The night was white. There was nowhere to hide.

One feels in fact that Walcott's reference in *Omeros* to Melville about the supremacy of the white is somehow mistaken. I find it hard to think of any embodiment through metaphor of what can be so uncomfortable about 'whiteness' than the book *Moby Dick*. This we find not only in the main character, the cruel whale, but also in the slightly sick-making enormous squid, in the monomania of Ahab, and in all the other matters brought up in the chapter on whiteness! It quite puts into the shade the references in Shakespeare to "lily livered" and "death's pale flag".

But whatever Melville thought of whiteness, Walcott manages here by using that image, to cast a sickening veil, created by others out of perversity, callousness and disdain, over the being and experience and absence of the native Americans:

> As the salmon grows tired of the ladder of stone,
> so have we of fighting the claws of the White Bear,
> dripping red beads on the snow. Whiteness is everywhere.[23]

The Metaphor of Homer

I have stated already that Walcott's poem is not an imitation of either the Iliad or the Odyssey. Even though some of the characters in a sense match some of the Homeric personnae: Helen, Hector, Achille, Philoctete. The author even speaks of himself as Telemachus to Plunkett's, and his father's, Odysseus. But the point of the use of Homer lies elsewhere. Certainly Homer is honoured as the great creator, especially of the long hexameter line which he uses so skillfully to delineate, among other things, the combers of the sea: "the breakers slow-dolphining over more breakers".

Walcott has always admired this clean Homeric line, especially when it spoke of the sea, the roaring sea, and likened to it the rushing back of the army from their boats and tents to their meeting place:

> exe ws ote kuma poluphloisboio thalases
> aigialw megalw bremetai, smargei de te pontos.[24]

In fact the author tells Omeros

> I have always heard
> your voice in that sea, master, it was the same song
> of the desert shaman, and when I was a boy
>
> your name was as wide as a bay, as I walked along
> the curled brow of the surf; the word 'Homer' meant joy,
> joy in battle, in work, in death,[25]

But Homer is honoured also as the Blind Seer. Two of the many traditions which attach to him are quite contrary: one is that of a sort of court poet singing what are essentially praise songs, epics that give a failing aristocracy a kind of legitimacy by associating them with the heroic deeds of the past; the other is more that of the wanderer, the beggar poet who was not treated too well. It is the latter figure which Walcott really uses; that plus the always fascinating all-seeing blind person, like Tirisias. (Blind people play an important role in this poem: Seven Seas, Homer and St Lucia herself.) Omeros also acts as a guide to the Narrator in the manner that Virgil guided Dante through Hell.

In discussion of what his works have meant to our author, Homer tells him to "Forget the gods".[26] He is referring to the way in which, in his epics, the struggles among the gods and godesses influence the story and the fates of its characters. Walcott has followed this advice; he ranges all over the world, enabling us to look at suffering and the human condition in many places, but this suffering and displacement are not brought about by the almost childish games of Grecian gods.

Omeros comes to guide our author through his own St Lucia. Before that Homer has been the blind beggar and wanderer met in London as well as in the ruins of the Amerindian tents. In these places he is the witness to suffering and stupidity, and the means of our gaining insight. On the banks of the Thames, in the guise of an old sailor, or a sort of Wandering Jew, with his manuscript tucked underneath his arm, he watches the river go by like a barge drawn along by Time.

One may wonder whether he would have been treated as badly as is portrayed in this poem, on the steps of St Martins in the Fields! But as he sits "curled up on a bench underneath the Embankment wall"[27] he watches empires pass:

> And the sunflower sets after all, retracting its irises
> with the bargeman's own, then buds on black, iron trees
> as a gliding fog hides the empires: London, Rome, Greece.[28]

The appearance of Homer in London, and the treatment he receives (on which he comments later) leads to a remarkable passage. It is as though the long-lasting blind bard, who has seen so much, stirs up the universal conscience to ask a series of questions about our destiny, questions which seem to be answered (by our author?) with no little bitterness. The questions include: "Who decrees a great epoch?", "Where, in the stones of the Abbey, are incised our names?", "Who screams out our price?", "Who will teach us a history of which we too are capable?", "Where is the light of the world?", "Where is our sublunar peace?"[29]

The answers to these questions are deep and depressing: one wonders whether we should go on living, or rather go on dying.

> Where is the light of the world? . . .
> . . . In the City that can buy and sell us
> the packets of tea stirred with our crystals of sweat.[30]

This section, juxtaposed to, and in some ways stirred up by, the presence of Homer and the treatment he receives ends, as it must, in the shadows: "dark future down darker street."

But when next the metaphor of Homer emerges – of Omeros – the colours are lighter, "One sunrise I walked out onto the balcony/ of my white hotel".[31] The marble head of Omeros arises on the shores of St Lucia, metamorphoses into human form, and the author sets off with his guide, Omeros, to a deeper knowledge of his own St Lucia, whose patron saint was herself blind but seeing all, blind to preserve her honour:

> 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, 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 sybil swayed. I thought of all my travelling.[32]

It is Omeros and Seven Seas who bring him to a point of peace and reconciliation, and it is Omeros who saves him from the pit of hell in which certain poets are stewing in their pride and envy.

Finally, Homer, Omeros, as metaphor, allows the narrator of this poem once again to raise a question which concerns West Indian critics, and some West Indian politicians and nationalists, not a little: the role of the foreign in West Indian culture, especially of the non-African foreign:

> All that Greek manure under the green bananas.
>
> . . .
>
> when would I not hear the Trojan War
> in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?[33]

Notice the pointed ambiguity of "manure". The answer of our author to this question about "foreign" influence, as to all those about "the angst of influence", is quite simple: "But is was mine to make what I wanted of it".[34] It is the "making of something" out of it that matters; and the making of this magnificent poem from the Greek and other influences clearly shows that the question is not so much what influences are at play, and whether some are more relevant and more acceptable to the culture customs officers than others. The test will always have to be the quality of what is made – and that is the most likely point at which relevance and heritage will more or less automatically play their part.

Our consideration of the metaphor of Homer in *Omeros* must stop at this point. Space does not allow further consideration of this matter or of much more that should be considered under the heading of Metaphor, whether the role of images, of structure or of other personae. Under 'structure' we would have to investigate the further meanings added to the historical or story elements by the way in which episodes are juxtaposed in what is a complex mosaic treatment. Of the metaphorical use of other personae one need only mention the role played in this remarkable poem by such 'historical' inhabitants of St Lucia as the Father and Mother of the narrator, and of such characters as the Plunketts and Ma Kilman, and Achille in his journey back to Africa, to mention only a few.

Aspects of Moral and Anagogical Interpretation

This poem is too important, too well constructed, and too *concerned*, not to note its implication for human living and its echoes,

at least, of what Dante called 'eternal matters'. It quite often depicts, not without at least implied comment, the suffering inflicted on whole groups of people: Plains Indians, enslaved Africans, Poles who left their country for North America. It speaks in moving terms of the over-fishing of the Caribbean, the changes caused by tourism and the doubtful decisions made by local politicians, whose existence has hardly "made any difference" to Philoctetes's life.

But in the end it seems to project some sort of satisfied acceptance on the part of the Narrator, even to a sort of celebration. To what extent does this seem, to the reader, on quiet re-examination, justified:

> "but the right journey
> is motionless; as the sea moves round an island
>
> that appears to be moving, love moves round the heart
> with encircling salt, and the slowly travelling hand
> knows it returns to the port from which it must start.
>
> Therefore, this is what this island has meant to you,
> why my bust spoke, why the sea-swift was sent to you:
> to circle yourself and your island with this art."[35]

True these words are spoken in a dream by Seven Seas/Omeros. But some such resolution connected with love and care and art does seem in the end to be suggested as in the final gesture when with Hector dead, Maud Plunkett dead, and Philoctete cured, and the special canoe, 'In God We Trust', back in place, "Achille put the wedge of dolphin/ that he'd saved for Helen in Hector's rusty tin".[36]

Does this resolution ring true? It is a question which must be asked because this superbly crafted poem is not the work of some clever dandy showing us how well he can handle and vary *terza rime*, although he can certainly do that as any careful reading will show. Moreover in the poem itself moral questions are raised such as the ineptitude and dishonesty of local politicians, in connection with tourism, for instance, making other people's children waiters while their own read law.

The Narrator also shows clearly how human beings displace others at will, noting of the Revolutionary Citizens of America "all colonies inherit their empire's sin,/ and these, who broke free of the net, enmeshed a race."[37] This question of the moral and anagogical

implications is a topic that one would have desired much more space to ruminate upon, let alone discuss, and I would not be surprised to be found wrong by those who come after. But the topic is too important to dodge.

To what extent is a certain sort of fatalism and quietism implied in this poem? Is that really the way of human history: what will be, will be? How deeply has the *Salve Regina* sent its roots? *Exules filii Hevae?* To ask these questions simply underlines the respect and pleasure with which one reads and re-reads this poem.

The question about fatalism and quietism can be phrased differently: does the *denouement* seem contrived? Not perhaps in the heat of reading, such is the intensity of the lyrical quality of the poem and its rhythmic sweep. But in quiet contemplation of the poem as a whole one wonders if one has not too easily acquiesced in the image of the "motionless journey"

> "...as the sea moves round an island
> that appears to be moving, love moves round the heart".[38]

Of course the full meaning even at the moral level, and at the level of "eternal verities", must rest in the tension built up between the parts. It is a question of whether the displacement parts – what one might call the 'whiteness is everywhere' parts – do not totally outweigh the integrative parts, represented by Achille, for instance, and by the guidance of Omeros himself. It is not a matter easy to settle at this early stage of the public existence of this remarkable poem. But it would be cowardly and trivialising not to raise it.

It is connected with what one might call the '*Salve Regina*' aspect. This needs some explanation. Towards the end of the poem we read:

> Behind lace Christmas bush, the season's red sorrel,
> what seemed a sunstruck stasis concealed a ferment
> of lives behind tin fences, an endless quarrel . . . [39]

then Seven Seas, in his penetrating blindness, contemplating the whole situation,

> . . . at his window heard their faint anthem:
>
> '*Salve Regina*' in the pews of a stone ship,
> which the black priest steered from his pulpit like a helm,
> making the swift's sign from brow to muttering lip.[40]

In whatever way the "swift's sign" might alter the basic message of the '*Salve Regina*' (and it might in fact underline it) it is worth looking at the '*Salve's*' words which are usually sung to one of the most haunting of Gregorian plain chants; it is, of course, addressed to that Star of the Ocean, Star of the Sea, Mary the mother of Jesus:

> *Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae, vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve. Ad te clamamus, exules filii Hevae. Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle.*

It is the *clamamus, exules filii Hevae* which particularly interests us: "We cry to thee; we are exiles, children of Eve, groaning and weeping in this valley of tears." And it ends "after this exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus".

Notice the notion of exile, and of *Another Life* in which the blessed fruit will be experienced, and notice also the popular hymn connection between Mary and the sea and the wanderer, Star of the Ocean, Star of the Sea "Pray for the wanderer, pray thou for me". And of course Homer's Odysseus is one of the great wanderers, a fit icon for modern humans, driven from the islands, dragged from Africa, beaten across the snow-floured plains of North America, hastening from Poland and Nazi Germany, consoled only from time to time by birds that are free to leave, to return either every night, or annually like the cattle bird of Couva.

This displacement of human persons Walcott brilliantly delineates. But he goes out of his way to say that he has lost his faith in myths and religion; and Omeros seems to persuade him to the view "to love your own above all else". How does the loss of faith square with his real heroes, who are consoled by the *Salve*, cross themselves before most activities, seek cures in the old tradition, sympathetic medicine? They groan for the coming of justice but, for good or ill, they are consoled by something that is to happen *after this exile*.

And is not one of the main reasons for the disappearance of the Amerindians – like their smoke signals in the evening – precisely that the pale-faced loved their own? And Plunkett not only learnt to accept Maud's death but his real relationship to St Lucia; he had no longer found "his own" all that lovable.

There are other echoes of the eternal in human experience which are worth mentioning as they go well beyond the usual uses of metaphor. Unfortunately we have not time to explore them now, but the reader will easily see their implications for matters that are of more than passing interest. We will mention a few.

When Achille goes back to Africa in his vision he, who was originally called Afolabe and was renamed Achille by his master as a kind of honour, enjoys an interesting encounter with his father. One of the things his father has to say to him is cruelly moving, and relates to human experience at a deep level indeed:

> Why did I never miss you until you returned?
> Why haven't I missed you, my son, until you were lost?
> Are you the smoke from a fire that never burned?[41]

What lives, what loves, what faith we do not miss until they are lost? And what sons and daughters did Africa not miss until they returned?

Another echo occurs in the lines

> This was the shout on which each odyssey pivots,
> the silent cry for a reef, or familiar bird,
> not the outcry of battle or the tangled plots
>
> of a fishnet but when a wave rhymes with one's grave,
> a canoe with a coffin, once that parallel
> is crossed, and cancels the line of master and slave.[42]

This certainly pertains "to eternal matters". "Death lays his icy hands on kings". But is death only the leveller? Is death in any sense the reliever? What of paradise?

Finally, I believe this epigram from the Interlude contains pithily one of the antinomies in this poem so concerned with displacement and the location of home:

> House where I look down the scorched street
> but feel its ice ascend my feet
>
> *I do not live in you, I bear*
> *my house inside me, everywhere*[43]
>
> [my emphasis]

How does this view of bearing my house inside everywhere – with which I certainly sympathise – fit in with the special place St Lucia is to have, and with the notion of being displaced when not being in one's original home?

One stresses again the realization that in a poem like this one is dealing with a tension and structure of images and ideas, but there can

be a point at which parts seem to be hauling away from the overall design. Do we have examples of this in the three cases cited above as being concerned with "everlasting verities"?

"Where is our home? Is there ever any everlasting rest?" might well be questions which cannot be answered in entirely terrestial terms, any more than the fate of the Native Americans should have been decided entirely by where it suited the railroad companies to drive in the iron spike that linked the East to the West of the United States by rail.

L'Envoi

And so we come to a closure, if not a conclusion.

> Why waste lines on Achille, a shade on the sea floor?
> Because strong as self-healing coral, a quiet culture
> is branching from the white ribs of each ancestor,
>
> deeper than it seems on the surface; slowly but sure,
> it will change us with the fluent sculpture of Time.[44]

There is much in the poem I have not been able to cover, especially its touches of humour, and its connection with Homer and his great epics, and the role of the sea and the sound of the sea in *Omeros* and in the hexameters of Homer.

Omeros is not an epic, and it hardly touches on the gods. It has characters such as Helen and Hector and Achille. Of the St Lucian Helen one has to note that she is brought much closer to the reader than thy Homeric lady whose face "launched a thousand ships". Homer was very sparing in his description of her, leaving it to the old men chirping on the wall as she passed by pointing out her country's fighting men doing battle to regain her, leaving it to these worn-out fellows merely to say "No wonder there is a war, for her face is like that of an immortal."

But what is much more important than forced likenesses with the Iliad and the Odyssey is the not widely known fact that at the time of slavery in the Caribbean the masters had the custom (an obscure custom worthy of examination) of giving slaves grand names: Pompey, Phoebe, Cloe and Caesar. In Jamaica in 1760 during Tacky's rebellion Thomas Thistlewood, in reporting on run-aways, tells us

that Achilles was at liberty until 6 December when "about 3 p.m. our Achilles (alias Hercules) and Paradise Achilles came home together, of their own accord." And a Plato and Abraham also came back from liberty, to the bilboes, alas, despite the grand names. But it is possible that some of these names were given in recognition of feats performed not least of all in the European wars which then took place in the Caribbean.

In *Omeros* the grand names are given to simple folk some of whom had the kind of problems the noble heroes had in Homer's poems. With these problems they struggled, as with the "loud sounding sea", with no less dignity and humanity than all the heroes in the bloody wars that sprung from wrath, and saw so many become the spoils for carrion crows and wandering dogs. But what is common to Homer and *Omeros* is not only struggle and coming to terms with death and violence and separation from home, but the sea, the loud sounding *poluphloisboio thalassesie*. and its moods and sounds.

The armies gathered in Homer with the sound of rushing waves; in *Omeros*, in the end Achille

> scraped dry scales off his hands. He liked the odours
>
> of the sea in him. Night was fanning its coalpot.
>
> . . .
>
> A full moon shone like a slice of raw onion.
> When he left the beach the sea was still going on.[45]

The sea is still going on.

NOTES

1. Walcott, *Omeros*, London, 1990, Book 1 Chapter V, p.25.
2. *ibid.*, Book 2 Chapter XIX, pp.99–100.
3. *ibid.*, Book 6 Chapter XLV, p.228.
4. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXI, pp. 304–05.
5. Walcott, *Another Life*, London, 1972.
6. 'Tales of the Islands', *In a Green Night*.
7. Walcott, *Omeros*, Book 1 Chapter I, p.3.
8. *ibid.*, Book 6 Chapter LI, p.259.
9. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXIV, p.325.
10. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXIII, p.319.
11. *ibid.*, Book 6 Chapter XLVII, p.245.

12. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LX, p.300.
13. *ibid.*, Book 1 Chapter I, p.3.
14. *ibid.*
15. *ibid.*, p.4.
16. *ibid.*, Book 2 Chapter XXI, p.111.
17. *ibid.*, p.110.
18. *ibid.*, p.111.
19. *ibid.*, Book 4 Chapter XXXIII, p.173.
20. *ibid.*, Book 4 Chapter XXXIV, p.175.
21. *ibid.*, Book 4 Chapter XXXV, p.180.
22. *ibid.*, Book 5 Chapter XLII, p.214.
23. *ibid.*, Book 5 Chapter XLIII, p.217.
24. Homer, *Iliad B*, lines 209–10.
25. Walcott, *Omeros*, Book 7 Chapter LVI, p.283.
26. *ibid.*
27. *ibid.*, Book 5 Chapter XXXVIII, p.195
28. *ibid.*, p.196.
29. *ibid.*, pp.196–97.
30. *ibid.*, p.197.
31. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LVI, p.279
32. *ibid.*, p.282.
33. *ibid.*, Book 6 Chapter LIV, p.271.
34. *ibid.*, p.272.
35. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LVIV, p.291.
36. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXIV, p.325.
37. *ibid.*, Book 5 Chapter XLI, p.208.
38. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LVIII, p.291.
39. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXII, p.310.
40. *ibid.*
41. *ibid.*, Book 3 Chapter XXV, p.139.
42. *ibid.*, Book 3 Chapter XXX, p.159.
43. *ibid.*, Book 4 Chapter XXXIII, p.174.
44. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LIX, p.296
45. *ibid.*, Book 7 Chapter LXIV, p.325.

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Philoctetes in Historical Context

The tale of the wounded war-hero Philoctetes was spun over several centuries. Philoctetes' adventures were first recorded in the Homeric writings (*Iliad* 2.716ff.) around the eighth century B.C. They are best known through Sophocles' tragedy *Philoctetes,* produced at the end of the fifth century B.C., upon which this essay is based.[1] Many additional versions exist; for example, Ovid narrated the story at the end of the first century B.C., in his *Metamorphoses* (9.229, 13.45ff., 313ff.).[2]

The tale of the wounded war-hero is old, but it is not timeless. The Philoctetes myth must be viewed in its historical context. While the tale does not provide direct or specific historical information, it does illustrate several realities of the plight of the disabled veteran in the ancient world, particularly the lack of codified practice of matters such as medical care. While there may have been a small pension for injured war veterans, to be discussed below, there was no equivalent of the Veterans Administration hospital in the ancient Greek world, nor was there anything like the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Along with this lack of codified practice, there was little of the popular laudatory attitude toward the wounded and disabled soldier that is reflected in contemporary films such as *Forrest Gump* and *Born on the Fourth of July,* holidays such as Veterans Day, and celebratory events sponsored by the American Legion or by VFW posts. In other words, the category of the disabled veteran was not part of a package of patriotism as it is today. This is not a judgment that implies that the Greeks should have conformed to our standards; rather, it is an observation about the Greek world that helps put the tale of Philoctetes in context.

Summary of the Philoctetes Narrative

The story, which the Greeks set in the distant past of gods and heroes, begins when Philoctetes, taking with him the bow and arrows given to him by Heracles, joins the other Greek leaders and sets sail to make war on Troy.

During the voyage, he receives an injury to his foot by snakebite, according to most variations of the tale. The wound becomes infected, and Philoctetes is abandoned on the deserted island of Lemnos by his comrades, because they can bear neither the stench of the wound nor Philoctetes' screams of pain. Philoctetes remains on the island for nine years, in agony from this wound, which will not heal. Equipped with only his bow and arrows, he lives a miserable life foraging for food and searching for relief from his pain. Meanwhile, the Greeks learn that they will never be able to take Troy without the arrows of Heracles. Philoctetes and his weapons are fetched; the healers at Troy cure Philoctetes' wound. Troy falls, after which he returns to his native Thessaly.

Historical Interpretation

The narrative of the wounded soldier, then, is a very old one, and this particular narrative shows surprising resiliency. Of over 100 Sophoclean plays, *Philoctetes* is one of the seven that survive in their entirety. Furthermore, elements of the narrative have been adapted and interpreted over several centuries. In addition to the depiction of Philoctetes in art, the essence of the story survives through literary reworkings, most recently in Mark Merlis's *An Arrow's Flight*, a novel that weaves twentieth-century gay culture with the tale of Troy.[3]

From both an ancient and a modern perspective, the story of Philoctetes consists of elements that suggest attraction to and admiration for the wounded hero. The attraction is reflected in the artistic depictions of the sanitized and idealized agony of Philoctetes, such as is seen in figure 1. But there is also repulsion, reflected in the stench of Philoctetes' wound and his howls of pain, and rooted in the fear that nondisabled people have for disability. Pity, too, is expressed for Philoctetes by other characters in the play, such as Neoptolemus, who has come to lure Philoctetes and his weapons to Troy:

> I am filled with pity,
> Searing pity for this man,
> As I have been all along.
>
> (965–66)

The tale of Philoctetes is often discussed in mythological terms. Edmund Wilson, for example, in his essay "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," compares Philoctetes' wound with Oedipus's transgressions.[4] Both Philoctetes and Oedipus are pariahs; Philoctetes is an outcast because of his disgusting wound, Oedipus because of his dreadful sins.[5]

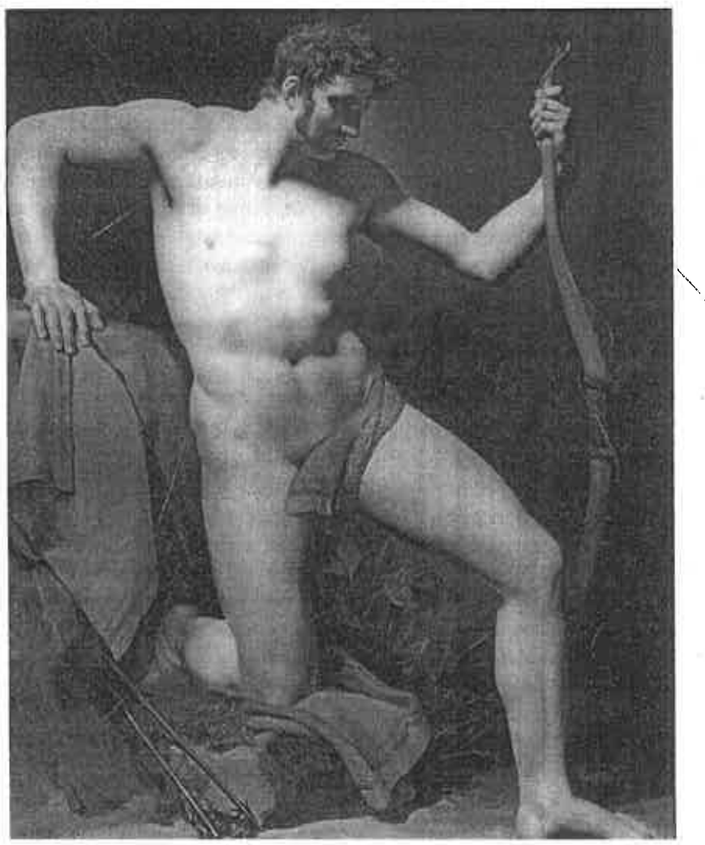

FIG. 1 Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *Philoctetes* (1807). (Reprinted by permission, The Museo de Arte de Ponce, The Louis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc., Ponce, Puerto Rico.)

While rich in timeless mythological symbolism, the story of Philoctetes is ahistorical in detail. The tale is also ahistorical in that it is heroic in proportion, rather than a depiction of ordinary people. Motifs such as Philoctetes' wound that seem obvious in their symbolism must be treated with caution. While it might be tempting for a modern audience to see Philoctetes' individual, physical suffering as symbolic of a larger, social suf-

fering, R. A. Martin points out that Philoctetes' pain cannot be interpreted as social or political commentary—that it is only in modern realism that characters discover truth through their bodily experience. The Greeks discovered truth through divine interaction.[6]

It is also important to remember the context in which Sophocles told the story of Philoctetes. At Athens, tragedies were given only one performance, as part of a religious festival. Just as scholars must not impose a twentieth-century reading on a fifth-century narration, it is also important to realize that any Greek tragedy will have nuances that are not immediately apparent to a modern audience. Ismene Lada-Richards, for example, argues that Philoctetes' bow, the main stage prop in the *Philoctetes,* activates a set of connotations associated with the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which a sacred object was also revealed as the culmination of the rite. The *thea,* or mystical sight of a sacred object, is implicit when the bow is revealed and the audience is invited to gaze at it.[7]

While the dangers of reading too much or too little into the *Philoctetes* must be taken into consideration, the Sophoclean version of the story is a cultural product of fifth-century Athens. Elements of the story provide a collage, if not a clear picture, of some historical realities.

While parallels between the modern and ancient disabled war veteran exist, historical context shapes many differences. The psychological trauma of battle is universal, as Jonathan Shay illustrates in *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character.*[8] In contrast, the Philoctetes myth illustrates some differences between the ancient and modern aftermath of combat, including war injury and its consequences. It also highlights the Athenians' apparent lack of a concept of the injured war veteran. There is no evidence that the wounded veteran was formally categorized in the Greek world. There is no trace of any memorial honoring a social category of the wounded veteran in speeches, public monuments, or special funerals. The only apparent recognition of the wounded veteran is in Plutarch's mention of state support for Athenian men who were maimed in war.

This state support does not necessarily indicate that there was an Athenian category of "the disabled veteran." First, its very existence is questionable. Although the biographer Plutarch attributed its genesis to the sixth-century statesman Solon (*Solon* 31.2), Plutarch, who wrote in the first century A.D., is less interested in historical fact than in painting a portrait of his subject. The other reference to state support for injured veterans is the unreliable author Diogenes Laertius (1.55), in his third-century A.D. account of Solon.

The state support for wounded war veterans—if it existed as a separate

category—was probably similar to the very small payment awarded by the Athenian state to those unable to fend for themselves (Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 49.4).[9] Matthew P. J. Dillon argues that the state pension was not merely altruistic, but rather was a mechanism that, by making it unnecessary for impoverished citizens to seek private financial help, prevented aristocratic patronage, which would have endangered the Athenian democratic system.[10] The state pension for injured war veterans, if it existed at all, was not a bureaucratic recognition of a social category. It was a mechanism of survival for those who, for whatever reason, could not survive on their own.

Wounded and disabled veterans did not constitute a bureaucratic category; rather, they were individuals who would survive or not, be cured or not, and be able to continue to participate in the military or not. As Herodotus has Solon, the wisest man in the world, say, no man should be counted lucky until he is dead, for the fortunate man is the one who ends his life "without disfigurement, sickness, or evil" (Herodotus 1.32).

Weaponry

Philoctetes had remarkable weaponry, "arrows that cannot miss—death-dealing always" (105). No ordinary Greek soldier owned the bow and arrows of Heracles, and while the bow was, for fifth-century Greeks, an archaic weapon, Philoctetes' ownership of Heracles' bow exemplifies the lack of uniformity of the citizen-army of any Greek community. Soldiers provided their own armor and weapons, and there was little standardization.[11] National uniforms, for example, were not common until the fourth century B.C.[12] That weapons were personal, individual possessions rather than standard, state-issued items is illustrated nicely by the seventh-century lyric poet Archilochus (frag. 2), who writes:

> By spear is kneaded the bread I eat, by spear my Ismaric
> wine is won, which I drink, leaning on my spear.[13]

Medical Care in Battle

Philoctetes' wound, like his Heraclean weaponry, had divine implications; his suffering, too, was larger than life. He suffers from excruciating pain—the sort of pain that one would not imagine tolerating more than a few moments—for nine years. As he relates to Neoptolemus:

Ah, it's going through me,
It's going through me!
Oh, what misery!
Yes, lost, my boy—this pain's devouring me.
For God's sake,
If you have a sword to hand, lad,
Strike my foot—here on the heel!
Mow it off, quickly!
Never mind my life!
Quick, quick, my boy!

(743–50)

This wound of heroic proportions reflects a more humble historical reality, that of the vulnerability of a citizen-soldier to incapacity for future battle from significant physical disability caused by a battle wound.

Neither during battle nor after was there an organized method of treating the wounded. Because of the intense, close range in classical Greek battle, which was fought shoulder-to-shoulder with one's comrades and face-to-face with one's enemies, there was no opportunity to gather one's own wounded during battle, and the enemy wounded were most likely killed or left to die.[14] These wounded were more pitiable than the dead. Thucydides (7.75) describes the wrenching scene at the disaster of Syracuse, which had occurred a few years prior to the production of the *Philoctetes:*

> The dead lay unburied, and each man as he recognized a friend among them shuddered with grief and horror; while the living whom they were leaving behind, wounded or sick, were to the living far more shocking than the dead, and more to be pitied than those who perished. These fell to entreating and bewailing until their friends knew not what to do, begging them to take them and loudly calling to each individual comrade or relative whom they could see, hanging upon the necks of their tent-fellow in the act of departure, and following as far as they could, and when their bodily strength failed them, calling again and again upon heaven and shrieking aloud as they were left behind.[15]

The stench of Philoctetes' wound suggests the stench of the dead and dying soldiers left on the battlefield, where, in the hot Greek summers, when battles were fought, corpses would be putrefying within a few hours.[16] The phenomenon of rotting corpses appears in ancient accounts of warfare often enough to suggest that it was perceived as a standard result of warfare.[17] However, there is no suggestion that the wounded veteran was also perceived as a standard result of warfare.

There were no medical units attached to the army—indeed, rational medicine, as opposed to medicine dependent upon divine intervention, was in its infancy in classical Greece. Still, one soldier could attend another, as the famous vase painting of Achilles tending Patroclos suggests.

Medical Care after Battle

If a wounded man survived the battle, he returned home and hoped for the best. There were no hospitals, and certainly no equivalent of the rehabilitation unit. Permanent physical disability did not belong in the domain of rational medicine; in fact, a Hippocratic practitioner's recognition of an incurable case—a case in which he should not intervene—was part of his art.[18] The abandonment of Philoctetes by his comrades must have resonated with any soldier in the Greek world who had transported an injured comrade home, knowing that the wounded soldier might not join the next military engagement.

Men with severe wounds would have been left for dead on the battlefield,[19] but less-severely injured men who became permanently physically handicapped as a result of war wounds must have been numerous.[20] Even a simple injury by today's standards, such as a fall, could have irreversible consequences in the ancient world. Herodotus (3.129–30) tells us that the Persian king Darius, having dislocated his foot in the process of dismounting from his horse, lay in pain for several days. Finally a Greek physician was fetched, who was able to ease Darius's pain. Still, Darius gave up hope of ever using the foot again, and this despite having the best doctors. This passage is not a straightforward testimony, of course, but rather a showcase for the art of Greek medicine: only the Greek doctors could stop the pain.[21] Nevertheless, the underlying basis of the tale—that one risked permanent disability from a relatively minor accident—had to ring true with Greek audiences.

From the Homeric writings on, war injuries were noted as causes of permanent physical handicaps. In the *Iliad,* the god of war himself, Ares, reflects that he risked dying or living "strengthless by reason of the smitings of the spear" (*Iliad* 5.887), and an ancient Greek audience would know that Eurypylus, limping back from the battlefield with a wound in his thigh, was in serious danger (*Iliad* 11.809–11). An injury to the femur, the largest bone in the body, leads to complications such as torn muscles and long-lasting infections.[22] The author of the Hippocratic treatise on dislocations and

other injuries to bones and joints, *On Fractures* (19), observes that the fractured thigh bone will lead to a shortened thigh (19), and that the thigh bone distorts easily (20).[23]

There is, of course, a wide range of additional war injuries that would have led to permanent physical handicaps if the injured person survived. Injuries of any sort, whether as a result of improper healing, or as the result of infection, were much more likely to lead to a permanent physical disability in the ancient world, where even the most minor injury could have permanent consequences, than in the modern, developed world.[24] In the developed world, for example, we take for granted that, with medical attention, even the most severe fracture will be undetectably repaired. Without medical attention, fractures sometimes spontaneously and completely heal, but not always.[25]

While it is assumed in the developed world that medical attention to a broken bone will result in its healing, a visit from a doctor in classical Greece had many possible results. A Hippocratic writer (*On Fractures* 1) warns that some doctors, through their showy bandagings—for example by bandaging fractured arms in exotic rather than natural positions—do the patient more harm than good. We read spine-tingling instructions for setting bones, which, in most cases, could only have caused further damage. For a dislocated foot, for example, the physician is instructed as follows:

> As a rule two men suffice, one pulling one way and one the other, but if they cannot do it, it is easy to make the extension more powerful. Thus, one should fix a wheel-nave or something similar in the ground, put a soft wrapping round the foot, and then binding broad straps of ox-hide about it attach the ends of the straps to a pestle or some other rod. Put the end of the rod into the wheel-nave and pull back, while assistants hold the patient on the upper side both at the shoulders and hollow of the knee. The upper part of the body can also be fixed by an apparatus. (*On Fractures* 13)

A broken thigh bone that results in a shortened thigh because of faulty medical treatment, we are told (*On Fractures* 19), is evidence of poor medical judgment. It is not clear if the Hippocratic writer is giving literal advice or simply making a point when he advises the physician that it is better to break both legs and at least have them in equilibrium.[26]

Even if a bone is tended to and set properly, one must remain immobilized to effect complete healing. While animals with broken bones do this

by instinct, the need to tend a shop or a field probably overrode any instinct to remain idle.[27] A Hippocratic writer (*On Fractures* 9) notes that while a patient with a broken foot should remain immobile for 20 days,[28] "patients, despising the injury, do not bring themselves to do this, but go about before they are well."

A Greek would be lucky if the bone simply healed crookedly, as every bone injury was susceptible to infection.[29] Untreated by antibiotics, an infection can spread throughout the surrounding tissues, then the bone itself, attacking even the bone marrow.

Although in the Sophoclean tragedy, Philoctetes' wound is a religious pollution that keeps his comrades from sacrificing to the gods, thus forcing his comrades to abandon him (1–10), it is also a literal wound, graphically portrayed from the beginning of the play. Neoptolemus identifies Philoctetes' lair by various clues, including his bandages:

> Aha! Here's something else! Yes, some rags drying in the sun. They're reeking with matter from some terrible sore. (38–39)

The stench of the wound could have easily been drawn from real experience. Colin Hodgkinson, in *Best Foot Forward*, a 1957 account of his amputation, relates that his injured foot never healed, but stank for months. The stench, more than anything, led him to decide to have his foot amputated.[30] If the injured person survives severe infection, the necrotic bones become extremely deformed, not just at the injury, but around the whole area.[31]

Philoctetes, having spent nine years in agony from an open wound, reflects:

> And so I pine for the tenth year,
> Miserable, starving, sick,
> Working to feed my insatiable disease.
>
> (312–14)

While a decade of an unhealed wound is an exaggeration, it may have highlighted anxiety over the fact that some limbs did not heal at all, but were lost. Ischemia (localized anemia) and gangrene (decay of tissue resulting from this lack of blood supply) are common results of injury.[32]

Today, minor amputation can forestall or prevent major limb amputation, and, in an age of antibiotics, no amputation need necessarily mean infection, as various antibiotics are now prescribed for the healing process of any limb amputation.[33] Preventative amputation seems not to have been

practiced during the classical period. In the Hippocratic Corpus, amputation is always a passive matter; that is, the limb falls off on its own, or is pulled off only when it is ready to come away anyway.[34]

Philoctetes spent 10 years on an island fending for himself, deep in his agony of pain and solitude. The chorus laments the pitiful situation:

> He has no friend to nurse him, not a man.
> He sees no other face,
> He must be wretched, always alone, sick and in pain.
> He must go nearly mad,
> Wondering how to cater for his daily needs.
> How does a man endure such hardships?
>
> (171–76)

An ordinary wounded Greek soldier would be with his family, for physical care for an ordinary handicapped person was a family matter.[35] Still, Philoctetes' bare survival on the island of Lemnos provides symbolic parallels to the ordinary injured veteran's life. The economics of chronic disability suggest that all but the wealthiest of families would have been burdened; thus the quality of life for a significantly disabled veteran could not have been optimal.[36] As mentioned above, the disabled soldier, along with anyone who was unable to support himself, may have been eligible to receive a very small payment from the state, but only if he were destitute.[37] We can only guess at the range of conditions that must have existed for physically handicapped people who required care, for we do not have any direct information. The surviving literature shows us examples only of the extremes of children's solicitousness and neglect for their incapacitated parents.[38]

The Philoctetes myth highlights the lack of standardization in several areas of ancient Greek military life, including weaponry, medical care in battle, care for the wounded soldier after battle, and provision for the disabled veteran thereafter. In addition, because there was no category of "disabled veteran" and no custom of valorizing men wounded in battle, the myth highlights the dual reaction of admiration and disgust for the disabled soldier. In the twentieth-century Western worldview, there is an emotional and institutional category for the disabled veteran of war that did not exist in the ancient Greek world. This lack of standardization in the Greek world is a central consideration in an investigation of the ancient disabled veteran of war.

Absence of the Category of Disabled Veteran

When it became clear that his arrows were needed to win the Trojan War, Philoctetes' former comrades were apparently able to bear Philoctetes' cries and stench after all. He was retrieved from Lemnos and taken forcibly to Troy, asking his captor,

> How is it, cursed wretch, I am not *now* lame, evil-smelling?
>
> (1031)

We see the flexibility of the category "able" in our own century: during World War II, people who had been considered incapable by nature, such as women and people with mental retardation, suddenly were deemed quite capable. Intelligence tests that would have labeled a potential soldier mentally retarded, thus unfit for service, were discarded in favor of simple screening processes. Steven Gelb reports that "many previously institutionalized soldiers compiled war records that caused the attitude of institution superintendents to shift from one of disapproval and skepticism to pride in the accomplishments of 'their boys.'"[39]

This phenomenon is documented in the ancient Greek world as well. The same people who were deemed useless by nature of their physical configuration (whether by age, gender, or ability) were, in emergency situations, employed to defend the city walls.[40] There was not so rigid a distinction as there is today between those who were fit to serve and those who were not. One did not have to be in near-perfect bodily condition to serve. In classical Greek hoplite battle, one needed to be able to hold one's ground in order to keep the line intact, not to run or move quickly.[41]

At the end of the Sophoclean play (1438–39) Philoctetes is promised a cure by the healing god Asclepius after nine years of intense suffering. While this cure is on one level the play's final divine intervention,[42] the symbolism reflects reality. Philoctetes' cure is not the only tale of complete recovery. While rational Hippocratic physicians recognized incurable cases, the Asclepiadic dedications at Epidaurus include many testimonies of miraculous cures of blindness, deafness, lameness, and so on.[43] Given the perceived possibility for spontaneous, miraculous cure, the concept of disability's permanence in the ancient Greek world was much less rigid than today in the developed world. The Greeks could certainly hope for, if not expect, an imminent cure for any ailment, including ailments we in the modern world would call incurable. An example similar to Philoctetes' miraculous cure is

seen in the case of a certain Cephesias, recorded on a fourth-century B.C. stele at Epidaurus. Cephesias, who had been thrown from his horse, injured his foot so badly that he had to be carried into the temple. He received this injury as divine punishment because he had laughed at the Asclepiadic cures for lameness, and was cured only after he recanted.[44]

Conclusion

In modern warfare, medical units quickly distinguish between the dead and the living, and the wounded are gathered, treated, and, if need be, rehabilitated. If the wounded become permanently disabled, they join a bureaucratic and social category, the disabled veteran. In ancient warfare, the line between wounded, dying, and dead was less clear. Philoctetes' persistent wound is an emblem of this ambiguity.

Because there was no military, social, or economic category of the wounded veteran, the plight of the individual wounded and disabled veteran could produce mixed feelings of pride and pity, admiration and repulsion. The scars of the disabled veteran were tangible reminders to the citizens of any given community of past wars as much as were the weapons on display in public buildings.[45] Without the social positioning of the disabled veteran that we have in the twentieth century, the ancient disabled soldier starkly represents the very real horrors of war.

NOTES

I thank William Ashcraft, Janet Davis, Julia DeLancey, Christine Harker, Sara Orel, and Steven Reschly for their generous help with this essay. I also thank David Gerber for his helpful suggestions.

1. All translations of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* are by Kathleen Freeman, in *Ten Greek Plays in Contemporary Translation*, ed. L. R. Lind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 160–210.

2. A full account of the textual history of the tale of Philoctetes is found in Oscar Mandel, ed., *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy: Plays, Documents, Iconography, Interpretations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

3. Mark Merlis, *An Arrow's Flight* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). Mandel catalogs the various interpretations of the play.

4. Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 232–33.

5. Ibid., 233.

6. R. A. Martin, "Metaphysical Realism in *Philoctetes*," *Classical and Modern Literature* 13, no. 2 (1993): 127–38.

7. Ismene Lada-Richards, "Neoptolemus and the Bow: Ritual *Thea* and Theatrical Vision in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117 (1997): 179–83.

8. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

9. As I argue in "Constructions of Physical Disability in the Ancient Greek World: The Community Concept," in *Discourses of Disability: The Body and Physical Difference in the Humanities*, ed. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 37–38, the speech that is about this pension, Lysias 24, illustrates that the pension is for any Athenian unable to fend for himself, not for disabled people in particular. Matthew P. J. Dillon, "Payments to the Disabled at Athens: Social Justice or Fear of Aristocratic Patronage?" *Ancient Society* 26 (1995): 27–57, catalogs the source material for the existence of a pension.

10. Dillon, "Payments to Disabled," 57. Dillon assumes (31, 37, 40) that physical disability meant economic dependence; otherwise, the essay is very useful.

11. Equipment of the hoplite soldier is discussed by Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 55–88, and by J. K. Anderson, "Hoplite Weapons and Offensive Arms," in *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience*, ed. Victor Davis Hanson (London: Routledge, 1991), 15–37.

12. Everett L. Wheeler, "The General as Hoplite," in Hanson, *Hoplites*, 140.

13. Translated by Richmond Lattimore, *Greek Lyrics*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1.

14. John Lazenby, "The Killing Zone," in Hanson, *Hoplites*, 103.

15. Translated by Richard Crawley, in Robert Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 471.

16. Pamela Vaughn, in "Identification and Retrieval of Hoplite Battle-Dead," in Hanson, *Hoplites*, 51.

17. The phenomenon is discussed by Vaughn, ibid., 51–53.

18. Heinrich von Staden, "Incurability and Hopelessness: The *Hippocratic Corpus*," in *La Maladie et les maladies dans la Collection hippocratique*, ed. P. Potter, G. Maloney, and J. Desautels (Quebec: Les Éditions du Sphinx, 1990), 110–11, concludes that "going on record in a more or less public way with an accurate prognostication of incurability enhances the ancient healer's standing, paradoxically at the very moment when the pronouncement itself unveils the limits of his powers."

19. E.g., Lazenby, "The Killing Zone," 102–3; Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 210–11.

20. Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 22, points out that war must have produced many disabling injuries.

21. Warren Dawson, "Herodotus as a Medical Writer," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 33 (1986): 88–89, summarizes Herodotus's narrative of Darius and Democedes.

22. René Bridler, "Das Trauma in der Kunst der griechischen Antike," Ph.D. diss., Universität Zürich, 1990, 50–86, catalogs the artistic representations from the seventh through fifth centuries B.C. of injuries inflicted during war. Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 142–47, discusses wounded soldiers, as does Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 210–18.

23. The Hippocratic Corpus is a compilation of material that spans the fifth through the second centuries B.C. It includes writings by Hippocrates himself, although

nothing is identified securely. The corpus also includes writings by the students of Hippocrates and other medical writers.

24. Srboljub Živanović, *Ancient Diseases: The Elements of Paleopathology*, trans. L. Edwards (New York: Pica Press, 1982), 171–72, writes that "the morphological deformities that arose are really beyond imagination at the present time." Maciej Henneberg and Renata Henneberg, "Biological Characteristics of the Population Based on Analysis of Skeletal Remains," in *The Chora of Metaponto: The Necropoleis*, ed. Joseph Coleman Carter, vol. 2 (Austin, Tex.: Institute of Classical Archaeology, 1998), 527, report that "despite the often fragmentary state of preservation which precludes observation of all possible sites of pathological processes on many skeletons, over 40% of the individuals showed some bone pathologies."

25. Paul Janssens, *Paleopathology: Diseases and Injuries of Prehistoric Man*, trans. I. Dequeecker (London: John Baker, 1970), 32–33; Donald Ortner and Walter Putschar, *Identification of Pathological Conditions in Human Skeletal Remains*, Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology 28 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 64. Lawrence Angel, "Ancient Skeletons from Asine," in S. Dietz, *General Stratigraphical Analysis and Architectural Remains*, Asine II: Results of Excavations East of the Acropolis, 1970–1974 (Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1982), 109 notes, for example, the evidence in a male from the Middle Bronze Age of a right humerus fracture with 15 degrees angulation and shortening of the bone; in another male from the Protogeometric period, a fracture of the left tibia shaft with 5 degrees angulation and shortening; and, in a male from the Hellenistic period, a fracture of the left femur angled 20 degrees and thickened.

26. Majno, *The Healing Hand*, 188–89, discusses dangerous ancient medical practices in general; see also Lawrence Bliquez, "Greek and Roman Medicine," *Archaeology* 34 (1981): 10–17.

27. Ortner and Putschar, *Identification of Pathological Conditions*, 65, explain that in both small and large fractures, the sensory nerve may be lost, in which case the lack of pain allows continued use of the broken bone, which of course prevents healing.

28. Actually, Ortner and Putschar, ibid., 63, estimate six weeks, in ideal conditions, for the primary callus to develop, which suggests that the Hippocratic doctors' underestimation of the time needed for healing would result in permanent injury.

29. Živanović, *Ancient Diseases*, 176.

30. Colin Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward: The Autobiography of Colin Hodgkinson* (London: Odhams Press, 1957), 80–85.

31. Živanović, *Ancient Diseases*, 177–78.

32. Živanović, ibid., 128, discusses gangrene in the ancient world.

33. John Bergan and James Yao, "Performance of Debridement and Minor Amputation in Patients With Ischemia," in *Gangrene and Severe Ischemia of the Lower Extremities*, ed. J. Bergan and J. Yao (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1978), 403.

34. We learn the details of when and how the necrotic bones might fall off from Hippocratic writers: for example, we learn in *On Fractures* 33 that "the more porous bones come away more quickly, the more solid more slowly." Similarly, *Prognostic* 9: if the fingers and feet are blackened, the patient will lose the blackened parts. It is difficult to determine exactly when amputation became a medical practice; it could have existed all along as a sort of barbershop service.

35. Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 30.

36. Garland, ibid., points out that while the very rich might employ a staff of slaves, this would be the exception.

37. Arthur Hands, *Charity and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 17–18, discusses the difference between charities as institutions that exist in their own right and the charity of the classical city-state, which had no legal personality and which was a matter of individual arrangements.

38. For literary examples, see Edwards, "Constructions of Physical Disability," 41.

39. Steven Gelb, "'Mental Deficients' Fighting Fascism: The Unplanned Normalization of World War II," paper presented at Cheiron Conference, June 1989, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 4. See also Gelb, "The Problem of Typological Thinking in Mental Retardation," *Mental Retardation* 35, no. 6 (1997): 448–57.

40. Barry Baldwin, "Medical Grounds for Exemption from Military Service at Athens," *Classical Philology* 62 (1967): 42–43.

41. Hanson, *Western Way of War*, 95; also see Edwards, "Constructions of Physical Disability," 39–41.

42. Martin, "Metaphysical Realism in *Philoctetes*," 137.

43. These testimonies are collected and translated by Emma Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimony*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945).

44. Ibid., 1:236.

45. A. H. Jackson, "Hoplites and the Gods: The Dedication of Captured Arms and Armor," in Hanson, *Hoplites*, 235.

David A. Gerber

Introduction: Finding Disabled Veterans in History

Disabled veterans are neglected figures in the histories of war and peace, and the historical scholarship about them at present is fragmentary. There is no synthetic history of disabled veterans. This volume is the only historical collection on the subject. The volume exclusively reflects the histories of large and relatively affluent Western societies, at times with particular emphasis on the United States that reflects both imbalances in the literature and the editor's own specialization. The volume also concentrates upon the experiences of regular armies as opposed, for example, to guerrilla forces. One consequence is that the disabled veteran written about here is always "he," for women have been infrequent and statistically underrepresented participants in Western national armies, and have rarely served in active fighting roles in such forces, though serving with distinction at times in irregular combat forces, such as the World War II antifascist resistance movements. To be sure, women have served in regular armies, mostly as uniformed nurses, and have been injured in combat zones and become disabled while doing so. If the American experience is representative, these disabled women veterans have been seriously neglected by the governments they have served. They have certainly been neglected by historians, whatever their nationality, for there is even less written about their experiences than those of men.[1]

He, then, is a man injured or becoming chronically ill while in military service, usually though not necessarily in combat. His military service is often thus foreshortened. Technically, he becomes a veteran only when he leaves the armed forces, but for our purposes we will begin to call him "veteran" from the moment it is clear that he cannot return to active duty, and is headed for civilian life.* Whether physical or mental, injury or illness may cause permanent impairment or disfigurement, and hence a changed

*For purposes of convenience, throughout this volume, the authors will continue to contrast *veterans* with *civilians,* though the veteran, of course, eventually becomes a civilian. We use *civilian* to mean those who have not served in armed forces.