

Bard

First-Year Seminar: The Self in the World

Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast* (2009-11)

Derek Walcott, "From the Archives: Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott in Conversation about the Epic," *Poet's House*, April 11, 1991

Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.1-15 (translated by Robert Fitzgerald)

Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (1990). New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

Radcliffe Bailey, *Windward Coast*

2009-11, piano keys, plaster bust, glitter, dimensions variable.

View a photograph of *Windward Coast* here: <https://www.artforum.com/picks/radcliffe-bailey-28746>

Also watch Bailey talking about this work, with further footage of the installation, in this video by Nola.com, The Times-Picayune (2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUC07YjvXw>

Derek Walcott, "From the Archives: Édouard Glissant and Derek Walcott in Conversation about the Epic," *Poet's House*

April 11, 1991

"The difference is that epics are generally written with some idea of a manifest destiny for the hero. The hero sets off, and the hero goes through lots of problems and quests and eventually the hero gets somewhere and you have the founding of the new hope, the new order, the new Rome.

"The Caribbean cannot presume that kind of destiny. That's one way it falls short of having an epic hero.... The whole idea of the destiny of the hero is not something that the Caribbean is interested in It is not because it is powerless that it is not interested. It is because what has evolved in the Caribbean is a society that does not need an epic.... I'm saying that if you use those terms of reference for what is contained in an epic, all the requirements for an epic are there. But the idea of one emblematic hero for the Caribbean...is not part of the Caribbean experience. Nor is it the wish of the Caribbean experience, as it was the wish of the British or Roman Empire to have such a figure."

<https://poetshouse.org/from-the-archive-edouard-glissant-derek-walcott-in-conversation/>

Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.1-15

(translated by Robert Fitzgerald, 1998. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux)

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, harried for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands
and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Hêlios, the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Walcott, *Omeros* chapter 1, section 1

(1990, New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux)

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

Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us
fishermen all our life, and the ferns nodded 'Yes,
the trees have to die.' So, fists jam in our jacket,

cause the heights was cold and our breath making feathers
like the mist, we pass the rum. When it came back, it
give us the spirit to turn into murderers.

I lift up the axe and pray for strength in my hands
to wound the first cedar. Dew was filling my eyes,
but I fire one more white rum. Then we advance."

For some extra silver, under a sea-almond,
he shows them a scar made by a rusted anchor,
rolling one trouser-leg up with the rising moan

of a conch. It has puckered like the corolla
of a sea-urchin. He does not explain its cure.
"It have some things"-he smiles-"worth more than a dollar."

He has left it to a garrulous waterfall
to pour out his secret down La Sorciere, since
the tall laurels fell, for the ground-dove's mating call

to pass on its note to the blue, tacit mountains
whose talkative brooks, carrying it to the sea,
turn into idle pools where the clear minnows shoot

and an egret stalks the reeds with one rusted cry
as it stabs and stabs the mud with one lifting foot.
Then silence is sawn in half by a dragonfly

as eels sign their names along the clear bottom-sand,
when the sunrise brightens the river's memory
and waves of huge ferns are nodding to the sea's sound.

Although smoke forgets the earth from which it ascends,
and nettles guard the holes where the laurels were killed,
an iguana hears the axes, clouding each lens

over its lost name, when the hunched island was called
"Iounalao," "Where the iguana is found."
But, taking its own time, the iguana will scale

the rigging of vines in a year, its dewlap fanned,
its elbows akimbo, its deliberate tail
moving with the island. The slit pods of its eyes

ripened in a pause that lasted for centuries,
that rose with the Aruacs' smoke till a new race
unknown to the lizard stood measuring the trees.

These were their pillars that fell, leaving a blue space
for a single God where the old gods stood before.
The first god was a gommier. The generator

began with a whine, and a shark, with sidewise jaw,
sent the chips flying like mackerel over water
into trembling weeds. Now they cut off the saw,

still hot and shaking, to examine the wound it
had made. They scraped off its gangrenous moss, then ripped
the wound clear of the net of vines that still bound it

to this earth, and nodded. The generator whipped
back to its work, and the chips flew much faster as
the shark's teeth gnawed evenly. They covered their eyes

from the splintering nest. Now, over the pastures
of bananas, the island lifted its horns. Sunrise
trickled down its valleys, blood splashed on the cedars,

and the grove flooded with the light of sacrifice.
A gommier was cracking. Its leaves an enormous
tarpaulin with the ridgepole gone. The creaking sound

made the fishermen leap back as the angling mast
leant slowly towards the troughs of ferns; then the ground
shuddered under the feet in waves, then the waves passed.