



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as a Palimpsestuous Adaptation: A Postmodernist Reading

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> April 11, 2020</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> June 15, 2020</p> <p><b>Online:</b> June 30, 2020</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Adaptation, Intertextuality, <i>Omeros</i>, Palimpsestuous, Postmodernism</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b></p> <p>hinarafique43@yahoo.com</p>	<p>This research study aims at doing analysis of the poem <i>Omeros</i> by Derek Walcott as a postmodern text. The researcher investigates the postmodern elements in the epic under study by applying Linda Hutcheon's <i>theory of adaptation</i>, as a theoretical framework. <i>Omeros</i> presents an intricate web of plots in multiple settings with different temporal shifts. It unfolds the post-colonial wounds of the locality of St. Lucia, which are stuck in a limbo of modern transformation of their island, black racial struggle and a past of colonial slavery. Thus, within domain of theory of adaptation, the researcher divulges in extensive intertextual and palimpsestuous engagement of <i>Omeros</i> with the classical literary gems; Homer's <i>Iliad</i> and <i>Odyssey</i>, Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i>, Dante's <i>Divine Comedy</i> and many more, thus exploiting <i>Omeros</i> as a modern adaptation. The characters, plotline, themes and intertextuality present in the text are interwoven with the classical epics. On adaptative platform, exhibiting the legendary characters; Philoctete, Achilles, Hector, Helen (from classics) and Walcott himself, the epic narrates the psychological pandemonium of these characters struggling for their identity and home at present time. Hence, the researcher focuses on the intertextuality and palimpsestuous elements in <i>Omeros</i>; <i>Omeros</i> emerges as a collage of all these classical texts.</p>

## Introduction

Derek Walcott is a versatile poet and dramatist of Caribbean literature. He has greatly relied on classical works to express his ideology and among his anthology the epic poem *Omeros* is his magnum opus. The epic *Omeros* is a pithy and complicated poem employing various techniques and a multitude of themes. It is a remarkable poetic feast of contemporary times featuring the classical characters coming out of antiquity and playing their roles in the multicultural African lands and seas but facing the same trial as their original namesakes. This ingenious poem gives an account of multiple stories interwoven with each other: a love triangle between a maid Helen and two fishermen Hector and Achilles, the allegorical pain of Philoctete's wound and its healing by Ma Kilman, the diasporic nostalgia of an English Major Plunkett and his Irish wife Maud and at last but

not the least it unfolds the narration of the poet himself in which he shares his philosophies of life and resolves his personal baggage with his father.

Due to the presence of classical reverberations, the researchers aim at analyzing the text of *Omeros* as a postmodern adaptation as it establishes postmodern qualities in its themes, ideas and form. In order to do so the researcher reveals the postmodernity of the epic under the framework of Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation*, taking palimpsest and intertextuality as a background of this theoretical framework. The researcher divulges in an extensive Intertextual and palimpsestuous engagement of *Omeros* with the great Classical literary gems including Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and many more, thus exploiting *Omeros* as an adaptation.

### **Literature Review**

*Omeros* is one of the most important classical epic poems in Caribbean literary canon. Many critical acclaims highlighting different aspects of the text have been given by researchers since its publication in 1990. There are few of them to cite here. The researcher Farrell in his research study has debated on the genre of *Omeros* and its position as an African epic. Farrell has negated the ideas of critics like Sidney Burris and John Figueroa and even of poem's composer Walcott, that *Omeros* is not an epic and proposed the reader to keep an open mind. Including the stereotype of racism and judgmental mentality in academia, the researcher also admonishes the old critics like Maurice Bowra who considered Africans to be incapable of producing such art of high quality. No doubt, he accepts that on the basis of traditional European epic standards *Omeros* is a "deliberate non-epic" but he refuses the "rigid conceptions" of this conformist tradition. Furthermore, calling *Omeros* as a dialogical invention echoing, but not copying, the characteristics of "Greek poetry of Hellenistic period" (Farrell, 1997, p.283) including that of Virgil, Camoes and Milton, Farrell calls *Omeros*, "...as a logical extension of the epic genre's capacity to reinvent itself through inversion, opposition to epic predecessors and ironic self-reflection" (p.283).

The researcher Mathias Irero Orhero supports the form of the poem as a radical narrative epic. He states that "Walcott's poem lacks the heroic candour of The *Odyssey* or The *Iliad* but it takes up the life of low Caribbean characters as they struggle to make sense of their society."(Orhero, 2017, p.56). Furthermore, Orhero also perceives the stylistic association of Walcott with Dante through the use of terza rima rhyme scheme and with Homer due to frequent use of traditional epic hexameter which gives a "Homeric verbal style" to the poem. Besides, the researcher examines that through this style the themes of historical colonization and slavery in accompany with sentiments of guilt and acceptance are highlighted. Additionally, this study also observes the narration of Walcott which features a masterly use of visual imagery. The images of canoe, iguana, sea, and trees have been focused resulting in a vivid depiction of beautiful African landscape.

In his research, Levine expertly unveils the fact that Walcott has prioritized themes more than plot in composing *Omeros* through his narration. The researcher does so by evaluating the themes of "Creation of a syncretic identity" (Levien, 2018, n.p) of St. Lucia, trauma of slavery and black and white experiences, postcolonialism and historical

colonial exploitation, identity crisis, opposite concepts of pain and cure and “the equivalence of St. Lucia’s African and European cultural elements” (Levine, 2018, n.p) in detail through excerpts from the text. Levine indicates that use of traditional pre-existing mythologies of *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* are molded marvelously in St. Lucian setting. Moreover, the reiteration of colonial history and depiction of contemporary imperialism through induction of flashback technique and narrative style make *Omeros* a memorable document in the Caribbean literature.

Amanda Hopkins has done a comprehensive analysis of *Omeros* with classical poem evaluating the style and themes of “concerns of individual and national identity” (Hopkins, 2012, p.1). She observes the poetic inspiration of Derek Walcott in a clear and vivid manner. In her observation, she gives vent to the idea that many characters in *Omeros* have the name similar to that of Homer’s characters like Helen, Achilles, Hector and Philoctete. Similarly, the name of the poem “*Omeros*” and the character of Seven Seas is based on Homer. Hopkins explains the reason that, “Walcott’s intention is clearly both to evoke the tradition of epic poetry and to express how the great poets and their names have become mundane, their origins forgotten, their importance lost.” (p.2)

Michael Thurston, in his book *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry; From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* has analyzed Walcott’s *Omeros* critically. He has ventured upon the presence of Underworld and extra temporal lands in *Omeros* and other poems of parallel significance. Moreover, Thurston has compared many of the great poems like Eliot’s *Little Gidding* and Dante’s *Inferno* to Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*. The poetic responsibilities of both Eliot and Walcott have been compared by Thurston with the mention of “Homeric/Virgilian and Dantean necromantic encounters” (2009, p.124) and the ghost encounters in Eliot’s *Little Gidding* and Walcott’s *Omeros*. Thurston proposes that both the poets considered Homer, Virgil and Dante as their model for poetic inspiration. Writer has further analogized Dantean Underworld in *Inferno* to Walcott’s Soufriere where the narrator has travelled through a purgatorial journey. The guide of the narrator to the Dante’s Underworld is Homer’s bust.

A critic of comparative literature Patricia Novillo-Corvalan has compared Walcott’s *Omeros* with works of Homer and James Joyce in her research and found a linguistic, thematic and historical affiliation between their works. Corvalan begins that both Joyce and Walcott have postcolonial background, therefore, this historical reciprocity gives a way to meeting of minds. They both wielded code-mixed colonial language for their own use. In addition to this, the researcher observes that imitating Irish writers, Walcott also takes inspiration from Greek tragedies to convey his “Caribbean reality” (Novillo-Corvalan, 2007, p. 160). Moreover, a cultural transference, shown by Walcott in his epic *Omeros* which migrates western history of colonization and language to St. Lucian culture, is also a focus in this research study.

Despite of the fact that much study has been conducted on this text, there is a gap which is left unexplored. Nevertheless, the researcher has taken a different perspective of this text for the present research study. The research area taken by the researcher is to analyze *Omeros* as a postmodern adaptation by applying Linda Hutcheon’s *Theory of Adaptation* along with other postmodernist techniques like palimpsest and intertextuality.

## **Material and Methods**

The researchers have adopted the qualitative research methods in the collection of data. The researcher also employs the interpretive research method as research technique to analyze and interpret the selected text. This research study deals with a textual analysis of the Caribbean epic *Omeros* by Derek Walcott under Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation*. For this purpose, the text of the poem serves as the primary data source in this research study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the research study comprises of postmodern concepts of adaptation and intertextuality. Postmodernism is a literary movement which questions all the other school of thoughts, philosophical and practical wisdom, and acquired societal norms thus developing ideologies regarding chaos, irregularity, uncertainty, multiplicity and imitation. Therefore, these projections can be observed in the literature written in the postmodern period in the form of:

...temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs; the loose association of ideas; paranoia and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse. (Lewis, 2001, p.123)

In addition to these attributes, "intertextuality is also an important manifestation of literary postmodernism" (Hansson, 1998, Abstract). This manifestation of intertextuality further developed the theoretical reflections of adaptation and palimpsest, which are the main concerns of this research work. In this regard, Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian scholar and an expert in postmodernist theories, wrote an extensive book on the product and process of adaptation by the name *Theory of Adaptation*.

The literal meaning of adaptation provided by Cambridge University is "the process of changing to suit different conditions" (Cambridge Dictionary) and adaptation is usually understood by people as films based on novels or books of other genres. However, literary adaptation connotes the use of previous texts and their implementation in new forms, new mediums and new time frames. It is observed that same term of adaptation is used for both the product and the end-process. According to Hutcheon adaptation can be described as the following:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended Intertextual engagement with the adapted work. (Hutcheon, 2013, p.8)

In the light of this definition it is comprehended that an adaptation is a product of transformation of a previous work or multiple works. The change in genre (from poetry to novel or novel to drama) or the change in medium (from film to music or music to opera) can be seen in its process but Hutcheon (2013) suggests that an adaptation can also occur

within same medium or genre. According to Hutcheon, an adaptation is a product of transformation of a previous work or multiple works.

Moreover, Hutcheon explains that adaptation is not just photocopy; instead it is created by first interpreting a single or multiple works by the adapter. The theorist states: "Like classical imitation, adaptation also is not slavish copying; it is a process of making the adapted material one's own. In both, the novelty is in what one does with the other text" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 20). Thus, the inspired works are filtered, expanded and altered by the adapter according to his will. During this process use of intertextuality is unavoidable and somewhat necessary for an adaptation, but it is not considered plagiarism. It gives a palimpsestuous quality to the text. It invokes the memory of the reader or the audience of the adaptation and helps them to associate the present text with the preceding works. As Sara Dillon opines that a palimpsest embodies "the mystery of the secret, the miracle of resurrection and the thrill of detective discovery" (as cited in D'Angelo, 2009, p.333).

Therefore, this palimpsestuous adaptation is the nucleus of this present study. By definition, palimpsest is usually a parchment or a manuscript on which new text was imprinted upon, merging the old and new texts. Whereas, in words of Sara Dillon (as cited in Kinossian and Wrakberg, 2017) palimpsest is defined as "a surface phenomenon in which two or more texts are inexplicably entangled and intertwined." (Kinossian and Wrakberg, 2017, p. 90). Therefore, a palimpsestuous adaptation contains the intermingling of at least two texts i.e. the adapted text and a new text which an adapter imprints on already present text. This is the reason that Gérard Genette (as cited in Hutcheon, 2013) called palimpsests as text in the "second degree".

### **Analysis/ Discussion**

This section aims at doing a postmodern analysis of the epic *Omeros* by Derek Walcott, a prominent Caribbean poet. The focus of researchers is particularly on a textual analysis of the poem by application of concept of adaptation, as proposed by a postmodern theorist Hutcheon in her book. Furthermore, the study underhand focuses upon bringing to foreground the palimpsestuous quality of the poem which collaborates and supports the theory of adaptation. Thus, "Subtle and highly-informed, dealing in ideas a lifetime in the developing, the poem is deeply referential, both to Walcott's life and previous work and to his literary masters" (Bernard, 2012, p. 2).

### ***Omeros* as a Palimpsestuous Adaptation**

According to Hutcheon (2013), an adaptation can be any product of transformation of any previous work or multiple works. Coming towards the analysis of *Omeros* in framework of *Theory of Adaptation*, the researcher argues that it is much more than a simple adaptation; rather it is a palimpsestuous adaptation. From the study of complete seven parts of *Omeros*, it becomes evident that Walcott has taken the aid of many phenomenal epicists and writers of their times to accomplish this fleet of writing an epic. Therefore, not only its characters, but the setting in the poem, the style, the themes and the plot are also woven with some important poems of the past.

Beginning the discussion on the adaptive nature of *Omeros*, the first and foremost focus goes to the change in the genre of the text. The researchers put forth this idea that usually in the process of adaptation, the genre of the product of adaptation changes but there is no change in the genre of *Omeros* as an adaptive work of previous epics, even when it does not fall under the traditional epic criteria. The writer of the poem himself claims that he didn't intend to write an epic poem. Nonetheless, in this era of postmodernism the critics have more claims on a work than the writer. It is because of this claim that most of the critics have categorized *Omeros* to be an epic poem.

Despite of certain discrepancies in its genre due to down-playing of traditional epic rules by Walcott, there are certain epic elements in *Omeros* which cannot be ignored. Rather they give an air of elegance and colossal quality to this postmodern epic. The reason lies in the fact that *Omeros* "dignifies the descendants of slaves and represents them as sympathetic, even mortal paradigms" (Joseph, 2014, p. 235).

Moreover, the poem narrates a personal and psychological journey of the poet himself, giving an autobiographical dimension to the poem which is similar to Dante's ideology, who poeticized his personal spiritual journey in search of God in his epic *The Divine Commedia*. In this regard, Mike Tynan (2006) has given the justification of *Omeros* being an epic by comparing it to the ideology of James Joyce: "It is therefore, an epic in the manner set out by Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, who defines epic as a literary form in which the "personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea." (Tynan, 2006, p. 234)

Furthermore, Joseph Farrell in his research paper ends the debate on the question of whether *Omeros* is an epic or not with this statement that: "To distinguish the poem from its predecessors in the canonical epic tradition on the bases of its capacity to celebrate alterity is to ignore the European epic's capacity for self-questioning and for radical reinterpretation of its own generic roots" (Farrell, 1997, p. 274)

In addition to the genre, Hutcheon observes that adaptation may experience one of the "three modes of engagement" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 22) which includes telling, showing and performance mode. Among them, *Omeros* experiences 'the mode of telling'. Telling mode is engaged in written or narrative form which is compatible to the writing style of the poem. This narrative form can be realized through dialogic conversation between Achilles and his father Afolabe in the first chapter of book three.

However, in case of the themes of *Omeros*, Robert Levine (2018) has stated that: "*Omeros* emphasizes on theme more than on plot, although aspects of theme impact the narrative and its inclusion of history and myth" (Levine, 2018). Therefore, the researchers also opine that the themes from the past texts of great literary times have been recounted by Walcott, but in different context. The woundedness of Philoctete has been depicted as a racial trauma and the extra-spatial journey of Achilles is a search for history instead of a quest for future comparing to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Similarly, the narrator's autobiographical exile and journey to underworld is to find his self, which is quite different to the context of Dante's 'katabasis' which is quite religious in nature.

In addition to themes, no doubt the adaptive nature of the text can also be observed from the title of the poem *Omeros*. Walcott has taken the classical epic poet Homer as his Muse and took him as an inspiration for this piece of writing. It is a traditional quality of canonical epics to take an exemplary and unparalleled icon to be the Muse of an epic poet, as Dante took the Roman epic poet Virgil as his Muse who guides him through *Inferno and Purgatorio*. Similarly, Walcott takes help of Homer, in the form of "Omeros" and the character of Seven Seas to write about his feelings in poetic form. The inspired tone of Walcott can be realized in the beginning of the poem when the spirit of Homer is invoked:

O open this day with the conch's moan, Omeros,  
as you did in my boyhood, when I was a noun  
gently exhaled from the palate of the sunrise. (Walcott, 1990, p. 13)

The word *Omeros* is an African substitute name for the blind Greek bard. In the poem, while taking the lessons for Greek language, Antigone teaches the narrator the meaning of the word 'Omeros'. At this point the poet explains the etymology of the Greek term 'Omeros':

And *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was  
both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,  
*os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashe  
and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.  
Omeros was the crunch of dry leaves, and the washes  
that echoed from a cave-mouth when the tide has ebbed. (Walcott, 1990, p. 14)

This description of the word *Omeros* signifies the idea of liberated language by Walcott as he has combined the words of two languages Caribbean (*Omer*) and Latin (*os*) to form a Creole. Moreover, thematically as sea is an important motif and symbol for both fishermen and in the poem, here it has been symbolized for Homer. Therefore, in a parallel sense Walcott relates *Omeros* to an inspiring idol for himself, whose work is so impressive to him that he introduces the character of *Omeros* repeatedly in the poem.

Furthermore, the character of Seven Seas in the poem is deemed as a blind seer, guide and philosopher in the poem. He interacts with other characters in the poem and guides them, like Achilles when he goes into the past to look for his ancestors. Even the narrator himself, when he's going through a cathartic journey, is guided by Seven Sea as he transforms himself into *Omeros*. "They kept shifting shapes, or the shapes metamorphosed / in the worried water" (Walcott, 1990, p. 280). This gives an indication that he has traveled far and wide and like the prophet of Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Teiresias, who can change his appearance. Moreover, just like Teiresias, he is the observer of many tales, in the knowledge of many secrets and consolidator of many characters.

In the poem the lines, "he sat as still as a marble, / with his egg-white eyes, fingers recounting the past / of another sea, measured by the stroking oars" (Walcott, 1990, p. 12) indicate that he is a blind man who has knowledge about a sea journey. The researcher negotiates that this journey is of Greeks who crossed Aegean Sea to reach Troy. Along with this, when observed by Ma Kilman in her shop, it becomes clear that his character was based on the personality of Homer himself, who would sing songs in a language similar to Greek language or African Babble. She says,

...Old St. Omere.

He claimed he'd sailed round the world. "Monsieur Seven Seas"

...But his words were not clear.

They were Greek to her. Or old African babble. (Walcott, 1990, p. 17-18)

About these lines Hamner (as cited in Oliaee, 2012, p. 3) opines that Ma Kilman did not know about irony in which she juxtaposed the Greek and African languages as the irony lies in the fact that the writer has too juxtaposed the circumstances of his poem's characters to their Grecian namesakes. Moreover, the irony of this putting of Greek parallel to the African tongue is the bases of *Omeros* as a palimpsestuous adaptation. One of the reasons lie in the plotline of Philoctetes, his wound and his racial struggle. The wound of Philoctete is one of the most important sources of thematic drives in the poem and its healing by the obeah woman Ma Kilman is emblem of the search of an independent identity and self-reliant history of St. Lucians.

As it is known from the past texts of Homer and Sophocles that Philoctetes gained a wound of asnakebite on his leg, while the army was traveling to the city of Troy for Trojan war. The wound became infected and emitted a bitter smell, this caused the Greeks to exile Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos. He became angry and bitter due to this abandonment from the great warriors. Similarly, this marginalization is also experienced - rather forced- by Philoctete upon himself in *Omeros*. He thought that as his wound was ugly looking and emitted horrid smell, therefore, nobody would want to come near him. The description runs as,

Soon he would run,

hobbling, to the useless shade of an almond,

with locked teeth, then wave them off from the shame

of his smell, and once more they would leave him alone

under its leoparding light. (Walcott, 1990, p. 10)

This self-inflicting marginalization was also triggered by his complex of being a black of slave origin. The researchers negotiate that there is clear trans-cultural adaptation in the character of Philoctete, who faces racial-distinction at the hand of tourists and colonizers due to his background. This demeaning ancestral past made him



self-conscious and symbolically this was the same “wound” inflicted upon him from his “grandfathers”.

He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles  
of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?  
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's  
but that of his race, for a village black and poor (Walcott, 1990, p. 19)

Explaining similar ideology, Robert Levine (2018) observes the dilemma of the wound of Philoctete as not only the injury of the flesh, but a pain deeper than skin. According to him:

Metaphorically, the gash in his shin was left by his ancestors' leg irons, tearing into him a century and a half after emancipation sundered them in the physical and legal senses—just as his people still suffer, both externally and internally, as a result of slavery. The anchor that actually wounded Philoctete reflects this deeper import of his injury, symbolizing the chains of slavery as well as inability to progress beyond the past (Levine, 2018)

Therefore, similar feeling of bitterness and loneliness from the tragedy of Walcott's Philoctete a decedent of Sophocles' Philoctetes with a different context.

However, in Homer's poem, Helenus, the seer of Troy revealed that in order for Greeks to win, they would need the help of Philoctetes, as he has the Bow and arrows of Greek God Heracles. This forgiving deed of Philoctetes i.e. coming back with Odysseus, who previously stranded him on the island, heeled his wound and regained him access to the title of a brave and worthy warrior who controlled his own destiny. The researcher here negotiates that this same narrative thread is adapted in *Omeros* as the wound of Walcott's Philoctete is heeled by an obeah seer Ma Kilman, who uses old herbal plants from the woods of his birth island in order to cure him so that the air of misery he creates around him could vanish. (Walcott, 1990)

As the postmodernism focused on the psychological development of human beings therefore, the characters were deemed as “the focus of an adaptation” (Hutcheon, 2013). Contextually, Walcott also focuses on his characters as this process of healing is quite psychologically painful and unbearable for Philoctete in this epic, just like for Philoctetes of Sophocles who had to overlook the abandonment of his comrades. Hence, by curing the infested wound he will “regain access to an earlier African past when his people controlled their own destiny, which he has been deprived of.” (Levine, 2018). This healing is so strong, that it brings a cleansing rain that washes away the grime and slime of past shame from the whole island and makes everything pure which is also felt by the poet as he explains:

The process, the proof of a self-healing island  
whose every cove was a wound, from the sibyl's art

renewed my rain-washed eyes. I felt an elation  
opening and closing the valves of my paneled heart  
like a book or a butterfly. (Walcott, 1990, p. 249)

After discussing Philoctete, coming next towards another evident adaptative plot and characters of *Omeros*, the researchers explore the love triangle of Hector, Achilles and Helen. The present text is associated with the preceding works for this purpose through these characters as their narrative plot commemorates the hypo-text of Homer's *Iliad*. Sasmita Aji also expresses that "the greatness of Greek mythology takes role in the establishment of identity for *Omeros*, since the poem explicitly renders the lives of those past heroes" (Aji, 2017, p. 231).

Though, it becomes clear that these characters are quite different than their historical namesakes, as Hector and Achilles are fishermen instead of warriors and Helen is ebony but a beautiful maid rather than a queen of great city, still there is a resonance of Homeric touch in their characters and narration. Walcott himself asks this question in the poem that when he would be able to remove his literary thinking from the inspiration of *Omeros*:

When would the sails drop  
from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War  
in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman's shop?  
When would my head shake off its echoes like a horse  
shaking off a wreath of flies? When would it stop,  
the echo in the throat, insisting, "Omeros"; (Walcott, 1990, p. 271)

However, their problems and their psychic depression of imperialism and fight of love are real. Certain change can be seen in the plot from the old *Iliad* because of the absence of character of Paris, but the conflict between the two heroes is real as it was in original *Iliad*. They are both fighting for Helen, repeating the past but the difference here is that their fight is over love. As described by Walcott during the Olympiad in the village on St. Peters day:

...Hector  
would win, or Achille by a hair; but everyone  
knew as the crossing ovals of their thighs would soar  
... that the true bounty was  
Helen,... (Walcott, 1990, p. 32)

As an adapter, Walcott has brought many changes to the status and relations of the original epic's characters and he has changed the portions of the plot according to his own interest and satisfaction with alternative plotline. There is no great mass of armies, or help from gods, or the great city of Troy as was in *Iliad* but there is a fight over pride and greatness, the emphasis can be realized from the idea that they both represent their culture and community. Their struggle is real as Hector fights with his friend Achilles over love, causing an un-mendable rift between them. "Achille felt his body drained of all the pride it / contained, as the crowd came between him and Hector." (Walcott, 1990, p. 39). After establishing his relationship with Helen, he leaves fishing and tries to cope with modernization of St. Lucia by being a driver, but this unsettling change becomes the cause of his death. On the other hand, Achilles feels disconnected from the changing world around him and he begins to question his ancestry as well. It would seem that they are quite opposite to each other, Hector leans for modernism and dies of staying away from nature, while Achilles turns towards a longing for his past and busies himself with his traditional profession; fishing.

However, the adapted textual aspect is event as their pride and struggle are parallel to their 'Homeric characters', who fought for the same pride, greatness and survival of their great cities. Similar to the Grecian Hector, the death of St. Lucian Hector is because of the stubborn fight for pride and ego causing him to deny his identity and origin which Achilles is himself looking for. Achilles feels the loss of Helen as the Achilles in the Trojan War felt the loss of his greatest friend and companion Patroclus. He has taken Patroclus revenge from Hector and has killed him. But in *Omeros*, Hector dies of his own pride and frenzy to make money.

Moreover, the woundedness is not only limited to Philoctete, it is the state of most of the characters of *Omeros* as they are all suffering from a pain hidden within them. Tynan believe that: "Though manifesting in diverse ways, this wounding is recognized as being a consequence of colonization and draws no distinction between oppressors and oppressed" (Tynan, 2006, p. 235). In the same metaphorical wounded state, Achilles, after the realization that he is not in good term with his past, embarks a cathartic supernatural and imaginative journey to the past to meet his ancestors and learns his real name and his origin. This journey of Achilles to escape his reality is considered parallel to the journey of Aeneas depicted in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Thus, as Walcott's Achilles has high moral grounds and kindred heart, therefore, his virtues of obedience, responsibility and compassion dominate over his pride and rage. These qualities place him closer to Virgil's Aeneas than Homer's Achilles as he was famous for his mortal flaw i.e. his rage. Keeping this aspect of Achilles' personality in mind, the thematic connection in Virgil's *Aeneid* and Walcott's *Omeros* regarding the healing, forgiveness and high moral ground can be established which strengthen an adaptive claim over *Omeros*.

Then later in the poem, 'the katabasis' of both Walcott and Achilles along with Philoctete in guidance of Omeros and Seven Seas is an epical journey, which shows palimpsestuous characteristics in them. Orhero (2017) is right in saying that "the epical journey of heroic characters into the underworld as seen in the epics of Dante mutates in this poem into the psychic journey of Achille to Africa where he meets with his mother, like Odysseus, and ultimately his father, Afolabe" (Orhero, 2017, p. 56).

The 'katabasis' journey of Achilles is by the sea; thus, it presents many sea images which seems to be an imitation of the sea journey dictated in Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. In Walcott's autobiographical poem *Another Life*, he himself has admired the style and imagery of Hemingway's poetry, therefore it will be no surprise to see some of the palimpsestuous elements in this text. During Achilles' journey, he depicts same behavior and actions as by Santiago in *Old Man and the Sea*. Achilles is guided by "sea swifts", whereas Santiago witnesses "sea-swallows" in the sea. In *Omeros* the guidance of sea swift is narrated as:

as he followed the skipping of a sea-swift  
over the waves' changing hills, as if the humming  
horizon-bow had made Africa the target  
of its tiny arrow. (Walcott, 1990, p.125)

Moreover, they both travel over the seas with same colour of "purple blue water" (Walcott, 1990, p.126). In addition to this, the same sailing actions and conditions of urinating over the side of the boat, patches of flour sacks stitched on the sails, pouring water on the head to escape from the scorching heat and watching of airplane on the wide-open skies from their boats explain the palimpsestuous similarities between both texts.

Moreover, leading to the heroine of the poem Helen, the great deal of psychological and emotional developments in Helen's character can be noted. Helen is an ordinary but mysterious ebony maid and waitress, who is the nucleus of love triangle between Hector and Achilles. The absence of character of Paris from *Omeros* does not mean that there is no conflict between the other two male lovers of Helen. She is a bane of their friendship. Thus, this woman has much similarities with Grecian namesake. She has the same magnetic allure as Helen of Troy that attracts Achilles, Hector, Major Plunkett, Philoctete and even Walcott/Narrator himself. She connects all the other characters and at the time of her pursuit brings all the characters to a single platform. In the poem the narrator narrates:

I felt like standing in homage to a beauty  
that left, like a ship, widening eyes in its wake.  
"Who the hell is that?" a tourist near my table  
asked a waitress. The waitress said, "She? She too proud!"  
As the caned lids of the unimaginable  
ebony mask unwrapped from its cotton-wool cloud,  
the waitress sneered, "Helen. " And all the rest followed. (Walcott, 1990, p.23-24)

Moreover, as Helen of Troy was an established figure of Homer's epic saga, Walcott gives her same distinguished position here. In *Omeros*, Helen "is a metonym for St. Lucia, Walcott's native island, who is described as the 'Helen of the West Indies'" (Joseph, 2014, p.214). The title is given to Helen by his master and employer Major Plunkett, who is obsessed by her beauty and considers her the personification of her island. Walcott states,

Her head was lowered; she seemed to drift like a waif,

not like the arrogant servant that ruled their house.

It was at that moment that he felt a duty

towards her hopelessness, something to redress

that desolate beauty

so like her island's. (Walcott, 1990, p. 29-30)

This reveals that she didn't have a voice or an identity of her own, but is recognized as the connection to the other characters.

Moreover, both characters of Homeric Helen and Walcott's Helen were established by authorial opinion. However, Walcott follows Ronald Barthes' concept of text as 'a polysemic space where the paths of several possible meanings intersect' (as cited in Whalen, 2008, p.333) to formulate the character of Helen through different voices in the poem. During the reading of *Omeros*, it appears that Helen is a self-centered, spirited woman who is haughty and seductive. She is an enchanting Caribbean beauty, "a charming object for the camera lenses of the tourist" (Walcott, 1990, p.220). This opinion is also developed by many critics for the character of Helen of Troy, who in her selfishness became the cause of battle between two great cities.

However, the other opinions about Helen to be an innocent woman of pure feelings of love and devotion are also realized by Walcott. As, it is first Achilles who comes to recognize her dilemma:

And Achille saw Helen's

completion for the first time. He saw how she wished

for a peace beyond her beauty, past the tireless

quarrel over a face that was not her own fault

any more than the full moon's grace sailing dark trees, (Walcott, 1990, p.115)

The realization that Helen is much more than a beautiful woman and a center of men's desire, is also acknowledged by Plunkett and the narrator himself. Walcott affirms that she is real and alive, a part of natural scenes of St. Lucia, she is more than a figment of imagination of an author or a fictional character of literature.

Furthermore, in addition to the classical literary masterpieces explained earlier, Walcott has also taken many of the references and allusions from his own works and the real-life events. For instance, the autobiographical introduction of the narrator / Walcott himself is taken from his other two poems, one is *Epitaph of the Young* and the other is his autobiographical poem *Another Life*. In both these poems, he speaks to the spirit of his dead father Warwick Walcott, who died in his early age. He also introduced his mother in the poem when he was leaving for Europe. He reminds her of his familial relations as she is suffering from memory loss:

"Who am I? Mama, I'm your son. "

"My son . " She nodded .

"You have two, and a daughter.

And a lot of grandchildren, " I shouted. "A lot to remember. "

"A lot. " She nodded, as she fought her memory. "Sometimes I ask myself who I am. "

We looked at the hills together, at roofs that I knew

in childhood. "Their names are Derek, Roddy, and Pam. (Walcott, 1990,p.166)

Donald Bernard states that: "*Omeros* is recursive, every reference picked up again, reworked and re-presented, the reader swept back and forth through Time and Space and finding double and triple meanings at every full stop" (Bernard, 2012, p.78). Therefore, in addition to his own works, Walcott also pays homage to a number of writers. As it is obvious from the previous discussion by the researchers that Walcott finds Homer, Virgil and Dante as his ideals, however, references from the works of many other writers like T.S Eliot, William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth and James Joyce can also be detected in *Omeros*. Walcott feels special association with Heaney and Joyce due to their island-based habitats and colonial backgrounds. This points strengthens the palimpsestuous adaptation proposition strongly.

Thus, through the detailed discussion, the proposition that *Omeros* is definitely a postmodern palimpsestuous adaptation, which celebrates the congregation of many famous classical literary works is contextualized. The researchers have discussed all the intertextual elements, palimpsestuous aspects and the relevant references from the text supporting the adaptation of *Omeros*.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, the purpose of researchers was to highlight and to provide the pleasure of going through a palimpsestuous adaptation to the readers. To elucidate this point, it was negotiated that the reverberations of past texts are so deeply embedded into

the structure of the adapted text of *Omeros* that they have exceeded the extent of being just the metaphors and have emerged as the researcher proclaims, as a palimpsestuous adaptation of the previous texts. Hence, *Omeros* presents as Sara Dillon says, “a surface phenomenon in which two or more texts are inexplicably entangled and intertwined” (as cited in Kinossian and Wrakberg 90).

Moreover, this intermingling is so rich that it is present in the themes, plots, characters, form and even to the minute details of *Omeros*. From the title to the themes, the adaptation can be felt by the readers of *Omeros*. This reverberation of the old wars, heroic adventures and language of grandeur in the new context of postcolonial Caribbean setting gives an open statement of imitation but they are not replicas of the prior texts in any way. Hutcheon strengthens this point that: “An adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (Hutcheon, 2013, p.9). Thus, proclaiming *Omeros* as a palimpsestuous adaptation, the researchers opine that warm familiarity, refreshing discovery and intertextual pleasure involved in reading the text of the poem. Besides, the researchers argue that *Omeros* is not even close to a blind imitation to the works of Homer, Virgil or Dante. Rather, *Omeros* gives a complex and unique dimension to the postmodern aspect of postcolonial adaptation, which is learning from the history and past to establish a significant and harmonious present and future.

The study revealed the constant and repeated presence of a previous texts do not lower the value or importance of an adaptation. They provide a dual aesthetic pleasure of familiarity and novelty for the reader. Hence, the adaptative framework of the Caribbean locality is very refreshing and evolutionary. Still there is space left to do more research on this text *Omeros* as its diverse stylistic devices are open to multiple interpretations and research areas to be conducted in future.

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