1. In addition to essays by scholars, *Ben Shahn's New York: The Photography of Modern Times* includes a valuable appendix with reprints of reviews and other primary material relating to Shahn's career.
2. Clement Greenberg, "Art," *The Nation*, November 1, 1947), reprinted in *Ben Shahn's New York*, 312.
3. Shahn's Sacco and Vanzetti paintings will be the subject of an exhibition at the Jersey City Museum, curated by Alexandro Anreus, May 16–August 31, 2001.
4. For a comprehensive and insightful discussion of Ben Shahn's post–World War II career, see Francis Pohl, *Ben Shahn: New Deal Artist in a Cold War Climate, 1947–54* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).
5. Ben Shahn, *The Shape of Content* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 117.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Greenberg, 312.
8. Nancy Newhall, "Ben Shahn," *Photonotes*, November 1947, 3, reprinted in *Ben Shahn's New York*, 310.
9. Shahn, 71.
10. Clement Greenberg, "Review of Two Exhibitions of Marsden Hartley," *The Nation*, December 30, 1944, reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1, Perceptions and Judgments 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 248.

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Paris No Paradise for Pissarro in New Epic Poem

Gail Levin and John B. Van Sickle

Derek Walcott. *Tiepolo's Hound.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000. 164 pp., 26 color ills. $30.

Known as poet, playwright, and essayist, Derek Walcott, the Nobel laureate for literature in 1992, has also painted since boyhood. Born in St. Lucia, Walcott's gifts would propel him to leave home, ultimately leading to his epic of exile, return, and Caribbean paradise to lose or gain—*Omeros*—(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990). Now in *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott seizes on the coincidence that another painter, Camille Pissarro, was born on a Caribbean island and felt constrained by his artistic gifts to leave. Imagining the formative impact of relentless island light on the Father of Impressionism, Walcott develops parallel yet contrasting plots: Pissarro leaving for the impressive shock of Paris yet haunted by the Caribbean; Walcott himself more rooted in the islands yet compelled by a European fantasy—the hound that gives the poem its title and becomes the vehicle for a complex meditation on Venetian painting.

From his own perspective as a poet and painter, Walcott revisits and reviews not just Pissarro, but also Cézanne, Gauguin, Corot, Goya, Millet, Turner, Claude, Guardi, Giotto, and most intensely Veronese and Tiepolo. His searching and prismatic gaze also refracts colonial history, postcolonial culture, the empires of Venice, France, and Rome, as well as the diasporas of Africans and Jews.

Establishing motifs that will return and vary throughout, Walcott shows that he, unlike Pissarro, had the example of a father who painted. Dying Warwick Walcott left his young son the sketchbooks and paintings of a gifted amateur, who drew in the English topographical tradition. Young Derek absorbed as well the reproductions in the public library, even the "false pastorals" of Puvis de Chavannes. He recalls the turning point when he learned that one master had painted in Martinique, which lies just north of St. Lucia: Gauguin, Walcott says,

> . . . made us seek
> what we knew and loved: the burnished skins
>
> of pawpaws and women, a hill in Martinique.
> Our martyr. Unique. He died for our sins. (17)

Instead of sketchbooks Pissarro's family offered their son commercial ledgers. Walcott imagines him restive and coming to feel

> . . . the same crisis
> every island artist, despite the wide benediction
>
> of light, must face in these barren paradises
> where after a while love becomes an affliction. (24)

With implicit reference to his own calling, Walcott imagines Pissarro leaving to take up his destiny as a "subject of the Empire of art."

Paris, then, transformed Pissarro's island eye:

> the rhyme of his stroll repeated Paris, Paris,
> the pallor of daybreak on a frightened canvas.
>
> Such fears, such exaltations! Even the rain
> gusting across her lamps had history,
>
> strong as her fiction the grey confirming Seine
> flowed with a force that hallowed memory. (36)

Walcott imagines the "blurred prism || streaked like a window glass or when the damp | paper wriggled with Impressionism."

From Paris and the emergence of the Impressionist aesthetic, Walcott follows Pissarro's retreat to

> . . . a landscape . . .
> to be looked at tearfully, with not a schoolboy's eyes
>
> but a prodigal son's. The loss of St. Thomas shone in
> the hermitage of his new home: Pontoise. (51)

Biographical details creep in: Pissarro as a boy had been sent to school at Passy; later he would depict the part of Pontoise known as L'Hermitage. Walcott will evoke, too, Pissarro's relations with Cézanne and Gauguin, "both calling him master," and observe "something uxorious in Pissarro's

landscapes" as "compared to the anger of his friend Cézanne, whose | canvas rants . . . brush muttering imprecations" (64).

The point of view shifts to Walcott in St. Lucia, at mid-point in the poem, but also mid-way between "Time measured in ruins, the empires of Europe" and "the still pond and the egrets beating home" (88). He reflects on the insult of history as opposed to the island "egret's ewer of light"; and he embroiders on the imprint of European names and patterns, his own fear of painting, and why he perseveres. In punning metaphors he crosses writing with painting and a military campaign:

If I pitched my tints to a rhetorical excess,
it was not from ambition but to touch the sublime

to heighten the commonplace into sacredness
of objects made radiant by the slow glaze of time.
(98)

Book Four at last brings the poet to Venice looking for the source of the white hound that has lured and driven him throughout:

I would discover in some flaking church,

with peering pilgrims scuffling inside
water-webbed walls, the creature of my search.
(116)

In Venice Walcott feels "imagination's envy," gives

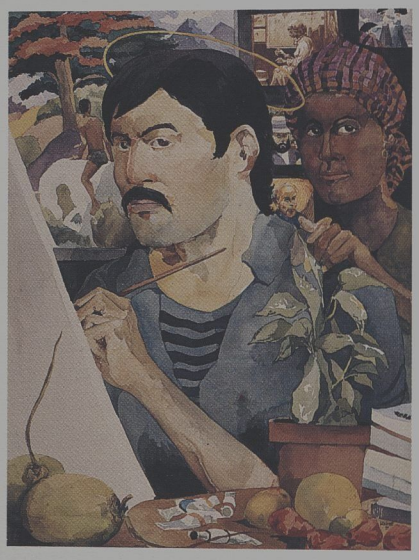
. . . an astonished groan

at irresistible light, at water writing
reflections, signatures . . . (117)

The book proceeds, then, by alternately pressing, doubting, renouncing, and reaffirming the recurrent yet elusive vision of the hound, a process that recalls Walcott's lingering farewell to his initial metaphors in *Omeros*.[1]

The closing revisions send us back to look more closely at the hound's arrival on the scene. In Book One the first chapter set down themes for the whole work in four swift movements. First came Pissarro's roots in St. Thomas and the force of island nature and light. Walcott emphasized the Sephardic origins of Pissarro's Jewish family, "who fled the white hoods of the Inquisition" (3). In "white hoods" he linked diverse domains, mapping the Inquisition to the Ku Klux Klan in the American South. He also imagined young Camille, while strolling with his family, trailed by a black mongrel.

The second movement portrayed Walcott in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, building his literary career. He writes of a black dog crossing Woodford Square; he describes the great public park as "the Savannah, not the Tuileries," its "brush-point cypresses || like a Pissarro canvas"; and he maps other points of local color onto elements from world art that return



as leitmotifs: "the saffron of Tiepolo sunsets" and "the croton hues of the Impressionists" (4–6).

The third movement represented a defining moment in Walcott's development as a painter: his "first trip to the Modern" seeing the "ridged linen of a Cézanne" as a "first lesson" and at the Metropolitan being "stunned" at the sight "of a Renaissance feast":

Then I caught a slash of pink on the inner thigh
of a white hound entering the cave of a table,

so exact in its lucency at The Feast of Levi,
I felt my heart halt. . . . (7)

Calling the sight a "miracle" and the "epiphanic detail" that "illuminates an epoch," Walcott sees the hound as his link to Venice. Yet he adds at once:

. . . even as I write,

paused on a step of this couplet, I have never found
its image again, a hound in astounding light. (8)

And he further warns that after the epiphany, "Everything blurs," even whether the painter was Veronese or Tiepolo.

In the chapter's fourth and closing movement, Walcott asks: "But isn't that the exact perspective of loss, | that the loved one's features blur . . . ?" With this he begins to weave the memory of his first love (the blond Anna of his autobiographical poem, *Another Life*) into his stunning Renaissance banquet, writing that "her wrist || in my forced memory caresses an arched hound" (8–9). These are the elements, then, that he would elaborate in various returns until Book Four, where he forges a further metaphor, mapping his beloved onto "bejeweled Venice . . . a radiant whore . . . stretching her hand to feed an arching hound," which he then imagines "looking over her emerald sleeve with parted lips | the white wolf, eyes slits, nudging her knees" (120).

The layering metaphors astonish and exalt. The white hound becomes a symbolic catalyst, evoking European dimensions in the poet's life and art, standing in counterpoint to the black mongrel, which acts as a reminder of his Caribbean roots. Yet informed readers must already have remarked how Walcott appropriates and transforms. The Veronese painting, originally called Last Supper, hangs in Venice's *Accademia* not the Metropolitan. It features a piebald hound hunched at a discreet distance from a draped table, behind which appear Christ and disciples, but no woman. The hound in the foregroud scandalized the Inquisition, which ordered it replaced by Mary Magdalene to make a proper Last

Derek Walcott. *Gauguin in Martinique*, 1991. Watercolor on paper. 30 x 2 x 2 in. (76.2 x 5.1 x 5.1 cm). Collection of Mary-Alyce St. Juste-Chen and Colvin Chen.

Supper. Veronese merely changed the title. Walcott's sensuous hound and woman thus reveal his own imaginative agenda and invite inquiry. Indeed Tiepolo's Hound merits and will reward fuller study. A poem so interdisciplinary seems the perfect candidate, too, for teaching in the new classrooms where diverse images and texts can converge from the World Wide Web. One might well also investigate Walcott's metaphoric power, especially his cross-mapping of verbal and visual domains: *Tiepolo's Hound* should become a resource for cognitive studies.[2]

Walcott has shown his own paintings,[3] and they have long adorned the jackets of his books. Here for the first time a few come inside the covers, including two scenes from the Savannah in Port-of-Spain, several from St. Lucia, an English garden with a marble Venus dissolved in light, and a view of a beach in St. Malo, where someone walks a small black dog.

Perhaps most intriguing are two images of Gauguin. The earlier, a pastel entitled *Gauguin's Studio* (1986), offers a nearly cinematic montage of multiple views of the painter, his models, and other still-life and landscape subjects. Some evoke Gauguin's tropics, while other motifs suggest allusions to the work of Renoir, Cézanne, and even Matisse. As in *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott compresses various moments of time into the one frame.

In the watercolor, *Gauguin in Martinique* (1991), Walcott depicts his patron-saint painting. The same dark-haired, mustached visage now sports a slender but distinct halo. An attractive, dark-skinned woman rests one hand on Gauguin's shoulder and gazes enigmatically towards the viewer.

Emulating Gauguin and Pissarro, Walcott, too, works in oil on canvas. Of the latter medium he writes:

> *I approach every canvas with a pompous piety,*
> *faithful to the lines of the drawing, a devotion transferred*
>
> *from a different servitude, to lines of poetry*
> *proceeding by a systematic scansion, brushstroke and word.* (98)

Yet devotion to the lines of drawing already characterized the works on paper, especially in watercolor, where the style shows a delicacy and precision of detail that recall the early Winslow Homer, a painter Walcott admires, as well as the English topographical heritage. One senses the hand of the skilled watercolorist crossing over to a different medium in the execution of the oils, where even the clouds emulate the washes of watercolor.

The depth of Walcott's passion for painting, and for his island roots, emerges again towards the close, when he gathers favorite leitmotifs into a prayer that recalls a classical apostrophe to a Muse:

> *Help me to crease the pleats of an emerald sleeve*
> *Giambattista Tiepolo, Paolo Veronese,*
>
> *an idling wrist, the light through a cloud's sieve,*
> *Camille Pissarro, on our beaches the breezy*
>
> *light over our bays, help to begin*
> *when I set out again, at sixty-nine,*
>
> *for the sacred villages. Dole out, in each tin,*
> *clear linseed and redemptive turpentine.* (161)

Faithfulness to form is Walcott's hallmark. In form *Tiepolo's Hound* challenges and revises most immediately *Omeros*, but behind it the tradition of epic back to Homer, with its divisions into books. The lines form couplets joined in quatrains (see above, ". . . seek | . . . skins || . . . Martinique. | . . . sins"). Surprises at the line-ends give the whole metaphoric project its basic quickening charge.[4]

The highest homage paid *Omeros* by the world of literature is that it has changed forever how we see Homer and his tradition. Walcott's metaphoric take on epic is so powerfully originative as to put the whole genre in a new light. Now the realms of literature and art face an equally originative take on landscape, ekphrasis, Impressionism, Venice and the whole matter of crossings between verbal and visual craft. The art world forms an expected and privileged audience for *Tiepolo's Hound*. Its responses whether in images or words should yield new rounds in the age-old conversation between poetry and painting.

1. See John B. Van Sickle, "The Design of Derek Walcott's *Omeros*," *Classical World* 93, no. 1 (1999), 7–27.
2. See, for example, Gilles Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thought and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
3. Gail Levin and John Van Sickle, "The Painterly Visions of Derek Walcott and Donald Hinkson," review of the 1998 SUNY-Albany exhibition *Island Light: Watercolor and Oil Paintings by Derek Walcott and Donald Hinkson*, *Latino(a) Research Review* 4, no. 1–2 (1999), 4648.
4. On "slant or half-rhymes of great practitioners" as "muted pyrotechnics," see Walcott himself in the volume of essays that provides both *Omeros* and *Tiepolo's Hound* a theoretical frame: *What the Twilight Says* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 205.

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