

DEREK WALCOTT

Omeros II.iii

“O-meros,” she laughed. “That’s what we call him in Greek,”
stroking the small bust with its boxer’s broken nose,
and I thought of Seven Seas sitting near the reek

of drying fishnets, listening to the shallows’ noise.
I said: “Homer and Virg are New England farmers,
and the winged horse guards their gas-station, you’re right.”

I felt the foam head watching as I stroked an arm, as
cold as its marble, then the shoulders in winter light
in the studio attic. I said, “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 crashes

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.

The name stayed in my mouth. I saw how light was webbed
on her Asian cheeks, defined her eyes with a black
almond’s outline, as Antigone turned and said:

“I’m tired of America, it’s time for me to go back
to Greece. I miss my islands.” I write, it returns—
the way she turned and shook out the black gust of hair.

I saw how the surf printed its lace in patterns
on the shore of her neck, then the lowering shallows

of silk swirled at her ankles, like surf without noise,
and felt that another cold bust, not hers, but yours
saw this with stone almonds for eyes, its broken nose
turning away, as the rustling silk agrees.

But if it could read between the lines of her floor
like a white-hot deck uncaulked by Antillean heat,
to the shadows in its hold, its nostrils might flare

at the stench from manacled ankles, the coffled feet
scraping like leaves, and perhaps the inculpable marble
would have turned its white seeds away, to widen

the bow of its mouth at the horror under her table,
from the lyre of her armchair draped with its white chiton,
to do what the past always does: suffer, and stare.

She lay calm as a port, and a cloud covered her
with my shadow; then a prow with painted eyes
slowly emerged from the fragrant rain of black hair.

And I heard a hollow moan exhaled from a vase,
not for kings floundering in lances of rain; the prose
of abrupt fishermen cursing over canoes.

Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Canada: Collins; London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 14-15.