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The Drama Viewed from Elsewhere

Robbie Shilliam

In their contributions to this volume Mervyn Frost and Ned Lebow (and with qualification, James Mayall and Kamila Stullerova) propose that the agonistic moment of tragedy might be understood as a cathartic one through which crusading forces discover that the pursuit of a particular ethic must not be mistaken for the realization of a universal truth. In various ways, Peter Euben, Chris Brown, and Nicholas Rengger all critique this 'optimistic' viewpoint by pointing to another core aspect of the tragic tradition, namely, the disjuncture it asserts between understanding and action leading to the possibility that knowledge of the self in the world is irreducibly fractured by the contingent character of that world. The debates reveal how pluralistic readings of the tradition of tragic thought can be (a point developed well by Catherine Lu in the previous chapter). However, at the heart of the conversations lie both epistemological and ontological questions about the constitution of 'tragedy' itself: is it an art-form representing life, or is it life itself? And most importantly, can tragedy be filtered into a philosophical form of reasoning mobilized for prescriptive use?

These questions have in large part defined the engagements of contemporary political theory with the notion of 'tragedy'. However, these engagements exhibit a deeper orientation in the way that they approach tragedy as a universal condition/idea that in some way can be brought to bear upon the problem of modernity.¹ The cues for this orientation (but by no means the only ones) are often influenced from readings of Hegel's dialectic (as is the case with Frost) wherein modern world development is produced out of the diremption and then resolution of clashing modes of consciousness;² and (as exemplified by the contributions from Benjamin Schupmann and Tracy Strong), from readings of Nietzsche's early works that alternatively celebrate the life-force of the

'archaic Dionysian' emotive-poetic against the 'Apollonian' enlightened – but deadening – vision of analytical reason.³ Generally, though, one could say that the attention given to tragedy is part of a wider movement that places Ancient Greece as a historical reference point, a comparator, or a symbol, in fine, a *difference* that clarifies for contemporary theorists the problems and challenges of our modern condition.

In this chapter I use the work of the Nobel Prize winning Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott to tease out the way in which the contemporary symbolic association of Ancient Greece with European modernity allows some but disallows others a meaningful engagement with the tragic drama. Through his poems and plays Walcott attempts to find a way to redeem the New World past for its present inhabitants, especially for (but not only) those whose descendants arrived in slave ships, so that they might become subjects in their own right rather than objects of European history. Walcott's dramatic explorations of New World subjectification are neither Apollonian nor Dionysian, nor an inter-relation of the two, but Adamic. By investigating the Adamic form of Walcott's poems and plays I argue that in order for critical self-reflection on fate, freedom, morality and wisdom, drama must be enfranchising to the effect that peoples from elsewhere can be *both* subjects and objects within it. The symbolic association of Ancient Greece with European – and hence colonial – modernity falls short of this requisite. Hence, the ethical return to Ancient Greece via the reading of its tragic dramas cannot be direct but rather requires journeying beyond one's own city.

Colonial Greece

To begin with, I wish to take a prompt from Peter Euben's musings on tragedy: contemporary political theorists, Euben notes, are meta-theorists in a way in which classical tragedians were not meta-dramatists.⁴ Contradictions in modern political thought to take tragedy as a universal category/condition (even if applied to a specific temporal 'epoch'), issues of fate, freedom, morality and wisdom have always been debated within and by immediate reference to a temporally and geo-culturally specific context. And as a specific medium for these debates, tragedy is no different.⁵ The origins of the tragic tradition are to be found in the festival plays of Ancient Greece that paid homage both to the spiritual mysteries of Dionysus and the political issues of Athens as a city state, and that encoded both the poetic and the analytical within their public performances.⁶ Deriving their narratives from existing mythical epics, the tragic plays partook of a 'double reading' by making these epics

speak in indirect or direct ways to contemporaneous issues in Greek life. To this effect, the dramatic roles of the chorus replaced that of the epic narrator with an array of enunciative positions ranging from commentators of the plot, to critics of the plot, to evoking responses to the plot, to participants in the plot. Through this prelocutory and interlocutory mobility, the audience and the actors (and their actions) were connected in the unfolding of the drama and journeyed through the narrative as an inter-related entity that encompassed both subject and object positions. In fine, the drama was not solely composed as a spectacle to be viewed by a dis-embedded onlooker,⁷ rather, 'the city turned itself into a theatre watching itself as an object of representation on stage'.⁸

Many political theorists who use the tragic tradition admit that because the original Greek context was so intimately woven into the dramatic articulation and reception of tragedy, the classics cannot speak to us moderns directly. We do not share the same conventions that situated the actors, narrators and audience in relation to each other, nor do we share the same mythical universe within which these related entities pursued the tragic plot. However, these political theorists also argue that classic tragedy consisted of enough ambiguities that allow the original context to be translated into a contemporary context thus creating new cathartic experiences (if with old words). For example, if compelled to end the plot in the same way, the classic tragedians could, nevertheless, re-narrate the time in-between with different emphases and occurrences. This was possible because tragic plays were not narrated through a single authoritative voice. Rather, the plot often unfolded in secret, behind the scenes (literally off-stage in the *skene*), producing a certain amount of ambivalence in the meaning to be extracted from the narrative.⁹ Even within the original dramas, then, the political and social issues of their present were made sense of by a reconstructed relationship to an epic past. It has been argued that the resulting ambiguities and ambivalences of this temporal relationship can serve modern political theory well. They become, in effect, hermeneutical spaces whereby, to use a phrase from Gadamer, a fusion of horizons can take place between the past and the present in order to better glean the specificity that issues of fate, freedom, morality and wisdom take on in the present.¹⁰

Yet what I wish to point out is that fusing horizons between the past and the present is *not* necessarily the same task as fusing horizons between different geo-cultural contexts, especially when the difference between these contexts has been previously constructed through colonial rule. This is an important point because there exists a strong tendency in many of the contributions to this volume – and in the

more general attempt to make tragedy speak to political theory in the Western academy – to assume that membership of one geo-cultural context, 'European' (or perhaps 'Western') Civilization is a universal condition, or if this assumption is not made, to then only talk of those enfranchised within this Civilization. Think, for example, of how the canon of tragic plays and thinkers is usually constructed as quintessentially European: from the Greek to Roman to medieval to Shakespearean to neo-Classical and Romantic; or from Aristotle to Hegel to Nietzsche. Even if this homogenization of tragic tradition through its canonization is critiqued, the critique rarely extends outside of the proscribed canon.

It is true that all translation – inter-temporal and inter-cultural – requires re-shaping the same prelocutory and interlocutory webs of, for example, vocabulary, tone, sound, rhythm, cognitive systems, legal frameworks and cultural reference-points.¹¹ It is also a truism that 'Europe' is as much as anything else a constructed category of cultural affiliation, indeed, often a hyper-real category in its instantiation as the cultural artefact (European) Civilization. Nevertheless, this constructed character does not make the substantive organizing and segregating effects of European subjectification¹² any less real to those categorized as outsiders to this Civilization. And it is this cultural affiliation – either presumed or assumed – that ultimately manages the construction of traditions of thought via the translation of past works into the present. In other words, the European 'heritage' is the geo-cultural space that allows for a fusion rather than apartheid of horizons. The point is that however tragedy might be problematized or critically reassessed in temporal terms, contemporary thinkers who are unproblematically considered 'European' or 'Western' can proceed by taking their seats as participants in the old theatre. But there are places and peoples in the world that, through colonial rule, have not been allowed such direct affiliation and access.

How, then, is the European drama viewed from elsewhere? And, how is it viewed, moreover, by intellectuals of the (post-)colonial world who have been marked through colonialism as external not simply because of their geographical/geo-cultural location but also because of their temporal disjuncture, that is to say, as belonging to peoples 'outside of history'? It is important to note that for many colonial intellectuals, a linear trajectory of technological and moral progress has at the same time been presented as a singular civilizational stream that has justified violent overflow into the pre-historical matter of existing societies on behalf of a dynamic History.¹³ From this perspective, the Greek classics have been transmitted through colonial education as part of a monologue of (European) Civilization.

Those 'native intellectuals' who have attempted to narrate the drama in which they have been caught up, and with resources taught to them rigorously through a colonial education, have been paradoxically denied a subject-position within the rise of Civilization. Instead, these intellectuals have had to make do with *analogy* (via metaphor or simile) as a positional device. However, 'as if it were Greek' has usually implied a chronological inferiority and geo-cultural separation: the mimic is not creative but derivative of an original.¹⁴ In this situation, the whole utility of tragedy as a cathartic art-form – and the general purpose of drama as a medium for critical self-reflection in both personal and public terms – breaks down because apartheid is introduced into the various enunciative positions. The audience does not sit in the theatre of the City, the play is not about their past, and they live in the present only vicariously through alien actors. There is, in other words, a stratification of the prelocutory and interlocutory mobility afforded to those affiliated with European civilization who can journey through the narrative as inter-related subjects and objects of the drama.

To pursue these issues a little further I shall now turn to the work of Derek Walcott. A little justification is in order here regarding this selection. Walcott is not a tragedian (and there is, in any case, more than one form of tragic drama in the postcolonial world),¹⁵ yet he is famous – and partially infamous – for his use of Homeric tropes that he has geo-culturally grounded in the Caribbean. Walcott's most commented upon work, in this respect, is *Omeros*, a book-length poem that combines, among other elements, the Homeric epic of the contest between Achilles and Hector and Sophocles' tragedy of Philoctetes into a drama based upon (and about) St Lucia.¹⁶ Walcott has also written a stage version of the *Odyssey* for the Royal Shakespeare Company that counterpoints Homeric and Caribbean themes.¹⁷ As noted already, tragedy – in its *world-wide* reception and transmission – has to be understood politically as one aspect of Greek drama with all the civilizational affiliations and segregations that have been condensed into its pages when turned by colonial hands. And it is with regards to this reception and transmission that Walcott, standing elsewhere from European civilization, orients his relationship to the Ancient Greeks.

The Adamic new world

It seems that Walcott, similar to many literary intellectuals of the post-colonial world,¹⁸ is interested in the colonizing of the past by 'History', that is to say, by a Newtonian-causative narrative that proceeds as

a series of European subjects acting upon non-European objects. This colonizing process is perhaps especially acute when attempting to document a Caribbean past where the original inhabiting subjects were decimated, where subjects from Africa became legal objects upon undertaking the Middle Passage, and where Indians were introduced as quasi-objects in their capacity as indentured servants. Walcott stands against this colonization of the meaning of the past: 'history makes similes of people, but these people are their own nouns'.¹⁹ For example, Walcott deploys Odysseus as a colonial critique: when asked to provide his name by Cyclops (a totalitarian authority that seems to embody both fascist and colonialist traits),²⁰ he calls himself 'nobody'. Cyclops is distracted by what he thinks is Odysseus' comic existence, but this merely allows Odysseus to blind the monster. Cyclops shouts 'Nobody has escaped! Nobody blinded me!' Odysseus shouts back 'My name is not nobody! It's Odysseus! And learn, you bloody tyrants, that men can still think!'²¹ This passage is redolent of Hegel's *Herr/Knecht* dialectic, however, the importance given to naming, as I shall now discuss, prompts a different understanding of post-colonial subjectification.

In order to retrieve a past for Caribbean peoples that is meaningfully their own, rather than a vicarious one retrieved via metaphor or simile of some other place and time, Walcott promotes an Adamic vision of the New World. This is not an Adamic vision in the orthodox biblical sense whereby Adam is granted (a suspiciously colonial-like) authority to name the world around him, but in the ideographic sense that Adam is endowed with the power to recognize the significance of the given forms that he comes across in his New World sojourn.²² The Adamic vision of the New World is, in this respect, awesome in the light of its own possibilities rather than being illuminated by the light of European civilization that stands behind the sojourner so as to cast a shadow on that being encountered.²³ To this effect, the past of the New World has a naturalistic basis for Walcott, but not one that is either utopian or romantic (in the German sense). Rather, it is the awesome nature of the New World that constitutes the theatre and makes it resonate as a public space. The drama directs the actors and audience to contemplate the bitter methods that led to their (re-)population of this space, the conditions of possibility that *nevertheless* led them to an awesome subjectification as part of a New World. So for Walcott there is a crucial contrast to be made between dramatizing the past of New World peoples in terms of their subjectification in New World nature, and dramatizing this past in terms of their objectification by reference to European civilization.

In his early work, specifically, in a series of plays on the Haitian revolutionaries, Walcott did in fact use a tragic trope through which to present the fate of Dessalines and Christophe (the first two black leaders of Haiti after independence). These noble heroes had sought to overturn an ordered universe of the slaveholder so as to become the masters of their own destiny; yet the hubris of this act was for them to turn into similar tyrants in the process. Walcott later comments on the harmfulness of this tragic trope for self-reflection by Caribbean peoples because it ultimately represents their past through the narrative of History as 'one race's quarrel with another's God'.²⁴ For Walcott notes in his reflections of these early plays:

There was one noble ruin in the archipelago: Christophe's massive citadel at La Ferrière. It was a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach [another] God's height. It was the summit of the slave's emergence from bondage ... To put it plainer, it was something we could look up to. It was all we had.²⁵

Effectively, Walcott is arguing that a tragic reading of this seminal and novel emancipation struggle makes its protagonists elegiac mimics of an original European drama.

And yet the choice for Walcott, a colonial intellectual versed in the classics as expertly as an Etonian,²⁶ is not really one of embracing or refusing Ancient Greece. The key issue, rather, is to resist presenting the Caribbean islands as a simile of the Aegean – with elegiac ruins and all – because this would 'humiliate' the landscape of the New World in so far as it robs this nascent public space of its Adamic constitution.²⁷ There is therefore a fundamental prerequisite for making Greece coterminous, in an egalitarian sense, with the Caribbean: the stage on which the drama takes place cannot be constructed within the narrative of History as the monumental ruins that are invocative of another place.

It is for these reasons that Walcott deems it necessary to construct the stage of New-World drama out of naturalist rather than monumental substances. This sentiment comes out in a quasi-autobiographical discussion:

The great poets of the New World, from Whitman to Neruda, reject this sense of history. Their vision of man in the New World is Adamic. In their exuberance he is still capable of enormous wonder. Yet he has paid his accounts to Greece and Rome and walks in a world without monuments and ruins.²⁸

Hence, we have Walcott's tendencies to use unmarked spaces as the dramatic stage – and we can attribute these tendencies to the fact that these 'landscapes with no tenses' level epochs and empires.²⁹ In this regard, the sea (viewed, especially, from the shore line of the New World) is a favourite space for Walcott,³⁰ and *The Sea is History* is exemplary of this mobilization of nature. The short poem works through a biblical narrative from Genesis to the New Testament as well as through a political narrative of renaissance to emancipation to national independence. However, it represents these epochs and events through a set of submarine and oceanic metaphors most of which invoke the multitude of slaves thrown overboard (or who threw themselves overboard) during the Middle Passage, for example:

Then came from the plucked wires
of sunlight on the sea floor
the plangent harps of the Babylonian bondage,
as the white cowries clustered like manacles
on the drowned women,
and those were the ivory bracelets
of the Song of Solomon,
but the ocean kept turning blank pages

Looking for History.³¹

This play on metaphors reveals the absurdity of any attempt at New World subjectification by way of mobilizing the narrative of colonial History. Alternatively, the end stanza points towards an understanding of the time of the becoming of the New World subject as non linear, non analogous to the Old World, non derivative:

and then in the dark ears of ferns
and in the salt chuckle of rocks
with their sea pools, there was a sound
like a rumour without any echo
of History, really beginning.³²

'The strength of the sea', notes Walcott, 'gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd'. The sea depicts immensity and the colonial

narrative of History can only appear as a sail of a ship – an ‘insignificant speck’ on the rim of its horizon that, instead of linear progression, allows travel in any and all directions (even to – but not *back* to – Greece).³³

It is important to note, once more, that whatever we might make of Walcott’s thoughts they cannot be understood as utopian or romantic:

It is not that History is obliterated by [the] sunrise. It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortal, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians ... are still serving time.³⁴

The purpose of Walcott’s drama, then, is not to find a place – socially or naturally constructed – outside of the colonial past. Rather, the purpose is to seek redemption of this past by rendering the meaning of the present not via History as tragic but as a specific kind of sublime experience that neither owes – nor pleads for – an affiliation with European civilization.³⁵ In sum, the tragedy of colonial History is not ignored or suppressed, but addressed and answered in awe of the possibilities of the New World and the delight of having simply survived the methods by which it was repopulated. Walcott’s dramatic explorations of New World subjectification are neither Apollonian nor Dionysian, nor an inter-relation of the two, but Adamic.

Beyond colonized Greece

Walcott’s writings can provide provocations for the debate on tragedy in International Relations (IR) theory in the following ways.³⁶ All the world cannot be compressed into one stage except by a drama the narrative of which follows colonial History. Drama is always also viewed from elsewhere, off stage, out of the theatre, beyond the City. We should not presume that modernity can be represented as a singular epochal drama within which the tradition of Greek tragedy provides a cathartic tool for self-reflection of (European) being in the (Western) world. For in order for critical self-reflection on fate, freedom, morality and wisdom, the drama must be enfranchising to the effect that peoples from elsewhere can be *both* subjects and objects within it. To take this point seriously means to recognize the depth of the contemporary symbolic attachment of Ancient Greece to European colonial history. And to recognize

this attachment means that this symbolism cannot be broken solely by making a critical temporal comparison between the European colonial symbolism of Greece and a pre-‘European’ pre-‘colonial’ body of Greek tragic drama.

I shall finish by drawing out this challenge by way of the following thought experiment. Firstly, it could be said that, in response to my argument above, the tragedy of theorists of tragedy resides in the fact that there is hubris associated with assuming that a particular geo-cultural context can be expanded into a universal condition. However, this claim would only make of Walcott’s writings monumental ruins that celebrate another place and story. Alternatively, and if it is accepted that any meaningful engagement with difference proceeds via the promise of self-understanding, the challenge that faces intellectuals unproblematically enfranchised within the Western Academy is described by Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*:

Europeans, open this book, and enter into it. After a few steps in the night, you will see strangers gathered round a fire, draw closer, listen ... They will see you perhaps, but they will continue to talk among themselves without even lowering their voices. Their indifference strikes at our hearts ...³⁷

Paradoxically, the ethical gain of this encounter might lie in loosening the obsession the Western Academic often holds of her/himself as subject, and to imagine herself/himself – for a while – as objects in the drama of someone else’s awesome subjectification. For this purpose, the final line of *Omeros* could be turned into an Adamic principle of orientation: Walcott’s Achilles, a fisherman, finishes his tasks for the day; ‘When he left the beach the sea was still going on.’³⁸

Secondly, and subsequently, it is possible to claim that the dialectic of objectification/subjectification discussed in the above paragraph was the *original* purpose of Greek tragedy before Aristotle sought to provide it with a rationalistic framework and before it became subsumed within the colonial narrative of European History. In fact, Walcott says something similar:

If we looked at them now, we would say that the Greeks had Puerto Rican tastes. Right? Because the stones were painted brightly ... As time went by, and they sort of whitened and weathered, the classics began to be thought of as something bleached-out and rain-spotted, distant.³⁹

I have no quarrel with this claim in its descriptive dimension. However, if Western Academics are to pursue it in depth, that is to say, if they are intent on re-discovering a non-colonial, non-colonized Greek tradition of tragedy, then they cannot achieve this by remaining within the city walls. For making the purely temporal journey from past to present and back again gives these walls an elegiac character which (as I have argued above) enfranchises some but presents a barrier to others. In order to return to the Greeks in the contemporary era the Western Academy must take the prompt of the classical Greeks themselves (as well as their Islamic interlocutors):⁴⁰ self-reflective theorizing requires geo-cultural travel so that the human drama may be viewed from elsewhere.

Notes

My thanks to the editors, Matthew Trundle and especially Xavier Forde for their comments.

1. On these issues see R. Williams (1966) *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 32–61; T. Eagleton (2003) *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 18–22, 204–9; C. Rocco (1997) *Tragedy and Enlightenment: Athenian Political Thought and the Dilemmas of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 1–7.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
3. F. W. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*.
4. J. P. Euben (1990) *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 46.
5. See also Williams (1966) *Modern Tragedy*, p. 45.
6. See Eagleton (2003) *Sweet Violence*, p. 9; Euben (1990) *Tragedy of Political Theory*, p. 58.
7. See, in general, C. Calame (2005) 'The Tragic Choral Group: Dramatic Roles and Social Functions', in R. W. Bushnell (ed.) *A Companion to Tragedy* (Oxford: Blackwell).
8. Euben (1990) *Tragedy of Political Theory*, p. 51.
9. R. Scodel (2005) 'Tragedy and Epic', in Bushnell (ed.) *A Companion to Tragedy*, pp. 164–5, 192; Euben (1990) *Tragedy of Political Theory*, p. 57.
10. Seminal examples of this enterprise, broadly stated, are Rocco (1997) *Tragedy and Enlightenment*; Euben (1990) *Tragedy of Political Theory*.
11. On these issues see M. Tymoczko (2002) 'Post-colonial writing and Literary Translation', in S. Bassnet and H. Trivedi (eds) *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge); L. Hardwick (2000) *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth).
12. My usage of this grammatical term is best associated with Raymond Williams's concept of a 'structure of feeling'. For an expansive discussion see P. Harrison (2000) 'Making Sense: Embodiment and the Sensibilities of the Everyday', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18/4, 497–517.
13. See for example, D. Chakrabarty and B. Attwood (2006) 'Risky Histories: Indigenous Past, Democracy, and the Discipline of History – A Dialogue between Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bain Attwood', *Meanjin*, 65/1, 200–8.

14. A. Lefevere (2002) 'Composing the Other', in S. Bassnet and H. Trivedi (eds) *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge), p. 78.
15. See, for example, B. Crow and C. Banfield (1996) *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); K. J. Wetmore Jr (2001) *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky: Modern African Adaptations of Classical Greek Tragedy* (London: McFarland & Company).
16. D. Walcott (1990) *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux).
17. D. Walcott (1993) *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux).
18. For example, A. Nandy (1995) 'History's Forgotten Doubles', *History and Theory*, 34/2, 44–66.
19. Cited in R. D. Hamner (2001) 'Creolizing Homer for the Stage: Walcott's "The Odyssey"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47/3, 388.
20. See Z. Giannopoulou (2006) 'Intertextualizing Polyphemus: Politics and Ideology in Walcott's *Odyssey*', *Comparative Drama*, 40/1, 1–28; I. Martyniuk (2005) 'Playing with Europe: Derek Walcott's Retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*', *Callaloo*, 28/1, 188–99.
21. Walcott (1993) *The Odyssey*, pp. 71–2.
22. D. Walcott (1974) 'The Muse of History', in O. Coombs (ed.) *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean* (New York: Anchor Books), p. 2; R. Hanford (2000) 'Joseph Brodsky as Critic of Derek Walcott', *Russian Literature*, 349. Commenting on his play *Omeros*, Walcott says, 'what this poem is doing, in part, is trying to hear the names of things and people in their own context'; J. P. White (1996) 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', in W. Baer (ed.) *Conversations with Derek Walcott* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), p. 173.
23. Walcott's use of shadow and light to describe the effect of History is quite pronounced. See, for example, White (1996) 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 157.
24. D. Walcott (1999) 'What the Twilight Says', in D. Walcott (ed.) *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux), p. 13.
25. Walcott (1999) 'What the Twilight Says', p. 13.
26. C. H. Rowell (1996) 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', in Baer (ed.) *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, pp. 124–5.
27. See D. Walcott (1997) 'Reflections on *Omeros*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 96/2, 232.
28. Walcott (1974) 'The Muse of History', pp. 2–3.
29. E. Greenwood (2005) '"Still Going on": Temporal Adverbs and the View of the Past in Walcott's Poetry', *Callaloo*, 28/1, 132–3.
30. Walcott castigates those writers who focus upon shipwrecks on the shore via his critique of deploying elegiac monuments as representations of the New World; Walcott (1974) 'The Muse of History', p. 42.
31. D. Walcott (2007) 'The Sea is History', in E. Baugh (ed.) *Derek Walcott: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux), p. 123.
32. Walcott (2007) 'The Sea is History', p. 125.
33. White (1996) 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', pp. 158–9.
34. Walcott (1999) 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', in Walcott (ed.) *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, p. 81.
35. White (1996) 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', p. 170.

36. It should be made clear that this conclusion might be different if we were to focus on alternative poets and playwrights from elsewhere, for example, the Nigerian Wole Soyinka.
37. J. P. Sartre (2001) 'Preface to the Wretched of the Earth', in J. P. Sartre (ed.) *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (London: Routledge), p. 141.
38. Walcott (1990) *Omeros*, p. 325.
39. R. Brown and C. Johnson (1996) 'Thinking Poetry: An Interview with Derek Walcott', in Baer (ed.) *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, p. 183.
40. See R. L. Euben (2004) 'Travelling Theorists and Translating Practices', in *What is Political Theory?* (London: Sage Publications), pp. 145–73.

14

Learning from Tragedy and Refocusing International Relations

Toni Erskine and Richard Ned Lebow

Tragedy makes us confront our limits: it reveals human fallibility and vulnerability, illustrates the complexities of our existence, and highlights the contradictions and ambiguities of agency. It shows us that we can initiate a course of action without being able to understand or control it – or adequately calculate its consequences. It teaches us that wisdom and self-awareness might emerge out of adversity and despair. Tragedy cautions against assuming that our own, particular conceptions of justice are universally applicable and should be enforced as such. And, it warns of the dangers that accompany power's over-confidence and perceived invincibility. If an appreciation of tragedy thereby fosters a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of international relations – as we have maintained – how should this influence what we do? How can this understanding guide our actions as citizens or scholars, policy-makers or theorists, witnesses to or students of tragedy?

There are two ways of responding to these questions. The first response concentrates on the lessons that can be taken from tragedy to inform deliberation and decision-making, policy and practice in a way that might mitigate future tragedies. The second response speaks to the academic study of International Relations (IR) and addresses how its assumptions and categories are usefully refocused when viewed through the lens of tragedy. We explore both responses in light of the range of arguments presented throughout the volume and suggest that tragedy not only helps one to better understand contemporary international relations, but can also be valuably prescriptive of how we both view the world and act within it.

Learning from tragedy?

This volume was conceived on twin premises: that tragedy offers useful insights about contemporary international relations; and, that an