

‘Time is the difference between us and the Indians’: Walcott’s Catherine

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1. Introduction

Catherine Weldon was a widow who left Brooklyn in 1889 and travelled West to Standing Rock, Sitting Bull’s reservation in the Dakotas, in order to help him defend his land against the US Government’s claims.

Her figure has been employed by Derek Walcott in two of his works, namely the famous 1990 poem *Omeros*, which was followed by the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992, and a play entitled *The Ghost Dance*, which was first staged in 1989 and whose final and revised script was completed in 1995, but which was published only in 2002 – the latter being therefore the result of long process of reworking. In particular, her persona is referred to in books IV and V in *Omeros*, where she is one of the invited outsiders populating the poem, and becomes the main female character in *The Ghost Dance*. Through her words and deeds Walcott clarifies his conception of Time and History, depicting them both as unstoppable – indeed Catherine did not succeed in avoiding either Sitting Bull’s death or the subsequent massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, during which about two hundred Indians were killed by the US army (Pollack, 2002). It is yet noteworthy that he has chosen to rediscover and rewrite in two different works the story of this woman, who tried to prevent the inevitable from happening.

Therefore, the aim of this paper will be to analyse, through stylistic means, the conception of Time and History appearing from Catherine’s words in both works, and to investigate whether and in which ways Walcott has developed her figure during the years between *Omeros* and *The Ghost Dance*.

2. The texts

Text 1 (Walcott, 2003: 368)¹

<<[1] This was history. [2] I had no power to change it.
[3] And yet I still felt that this had happened before.
[4] I knew it would happen again, [5] but how strange it

was to have seen it in Boston, [6] in the heart-fire.
[7] I was a leaf in the whirlwind of the Ordained.
[8] Then *Omeros*’s voice came from the mouth of the tent:

“[9] We galloped towards death swept by the exaltation
of meeting ourselves in a place just like this one:
[10] The Ghost Dance had tied the tribes into one nation.

[11] As the salmon grows tired of its ladder of stone,
[12] so have we of fighting the claws of the White Bear,
[13] dripping red beads on the snow. [14] Whiteness is everywhere”>>.

[15] Look Catherine! [16] There are no more demons outside the door.
[17] The white wolf drags its shawled tail into the high snow
through the pine lances, [19] the blood dried round its jaw;

[20] it is satisfied. [21] Come, [22] come to the crusted window,
[23] blind as it is with ice, [24] through the pane’s cataract;

[25] see, [26] it's finished. [27] It's over Catherine, [28] you have been saved.

Text 2 (Walcott, 2002: 243-44)²

MCLAUGHLIN

[29] Where will you be going now, Mrs. Weldon?

CATHERINE

[30] I wish it were in those white hills to join them.

MCLAUGHLIN

[31] What would be the point of that? [32] You'd freeze to death.

CATHERINE

[33] Hallucinatory autumn, phantom spring,
the immaculate annihilation of deep winter,
to summer, sitting by the door, a distant cousin,
shucking cobs in a basin, the wife I was,
golden and ripe, growing up in the Dakotas,
with a brown firm husband, coming through the corn
with a brace of partridge over his shoulder,
to that girl, drowsing in midsummer's fire.
[34] I know that he'll not come through the charred corn
with a brace of partridge over his shoulder;
[35] I have arrived at that natural acceptance,
[36] through nature, [37] not through Progress. [38] I can stand now
at the dead centre, [39] at the heart of Time
where Time itself becomes a Ghost Dancer,
[40] and everything that seemed surely insubstantial
returns, [41] and that is the joy of the Ghost Dance,
[42] that they, [43] the Sioux, [44] if they believe in nature,
[45] must first die to return. [46] Just like the seasons.
[47] I was mad once. [48] But this bright interval
is as lucid as a shaft of summer light
on a cabin's kitchen floor, [49] when I was
what Lucy called me, [50] "Bright Hair Who Loves Us."

3. Text 1: the analysis

The choice of the extracts which will be subjected to stylistic analysis has fallen on the last but one "conversation" involving Catherine in both *Omeros* and *the Ghost Dance* (in both cases the argumentation built up in these two exchanges is reinforced in the final conversation, but no significant new information is added).

A glance at the graphology of Text 1 [T1] (first and foremost the arrows and the inverted commas, which are usually employed by authors to signal direct speech in a conversation taking place between characters) reveals that it represents the report of the only conversation between Catherine and the protean character Omeros in the poem. Omeros is Homer's alter-ego. He appears throughout the poem conversing with other characters and/or with the author/narrator Walcott.

A closer look at graphology reveals a three-part structure. The first section begins at [1] and ends at [14], and it is opened and closed by double arrows ('<<' and '>>'). The second section begins at [8] and finishes at [14], and it is signalled 'traditionally' by inverted commas. The third section starts at [15] and ends at [28], and it is distinguished

from the preceding two because of the absence of the arrows and/or inverted commas. In other terms, there are no graphological signals flagging direct speech.

As already suggested, the presence of the arrows first and of the inverted commas later induces the readers to believe that this is a conversation between Catherine and Omeros. However, if this really were a conversation between these two characters, the first set of arrows signalling Catherine's turn should be opened at [1] and closed at [7], before Omeros' turn starts at [8] and ends at [14]. This is not, however, the case, since both the arrows and the inverted commas are closed at [14], one set after the other.

This device makes it clear to the readers that sections one and two identified above are actually two sub-sections of the initial section, which therefore starts at [1] and comes to a close at [14]. This leads to the further conclusion that no conversation is taking place in [1] to [14]: only the first character, Catherine, is talking, and she reports the words of the second character, Omeros from [9] to [14], with [8] representing the reporting clause which introduces Omeros' words. But, when readers no longer expect any conversation to take place, given the absence of arrows and/or inverted commas in the remaining part of the extract following [14], they are presented in [15] with a clear instantiation of Free Direct Speech [FDS]. The use of graphology is thus clearly anomalous, and requires an explanation. The next section will be devoted to a brief analysis of these three sections and to giving an account of their function in order to clarify the anomaly.

3.1 T1: the three-part structure

That the first section of the excerpt appears to represent the first turn in a conversation between Catherine and Omeros is signalled by a) graphology (the inverted commas), b) the brevity of the sentences employed, and c) their simplicity: sentences [1], [2], [3], [7], [8] are all simple sentences, as defined by Arts and Arts (1982); [4]-[6] is a compound sentence constituted by two main clauses, ([4] and [5]) conjoined by the coordinating conjunction 'but', and a prepositional phrase ([6]) upshifted to the level of clause. In this case, rankshift does not perform its standard, general function of making the text more complicated, since the compound sentence [4]-[6] still appears to be easy to understand.

The adverbial or discourse marker 'Then' opening [8] signals a change in the course the conversation has taken so far. Three other linguistic markers contribute to signalling this change: a) a new human subject, substituting the first person pronoun 'I', is introduced, namely 'Omeros'; b) the colon at the end of [8] indicating some form of 'change'; and c) the opening of a new set of inverted commas at [9]. These four syntactic and graphological devices warn readers that what they are about to read, ([9]-[14]), is not Omeros' reply to Catherine's preceding turn, or, to put it another way, it is not part of a conversation which is taking place at the same time as the narration, but is a reporting of Omeros' words on the part of Catherine.

Therefore, no conversation has been presented and the rest of the extract appears to be narration. However, in [15], the imperative form of the verb 'to look' and the vocative 'Catherine' are clearly employed by the narrator as phatic signals to start a conversation with the character. Strange to say, no graphological devices introducing direct speech, such as inverted commas, are inserted in this case, for the narrator is often involved in exchanges with characters and readers throughout the poem without the conversational exchange taking place being signalled by any explicit graphological or syntactic signals (a secondary norm in stylistic terms: Douthwaite 2000).

Ambiguity is thus a feature of this passage, for what at a first, superficial reading might have seemed to be a conversation between Catherine and Omeros, is in actual fact constituted by Catherine's direct speech [DS] in the first part, [1]-[7], and Omeros' words reported by Catherine in the second, [8]-[14]. Thus, the whole section [1]-[14] is, in actual fact, part of the conversation Catherine is indeed having with the narrator, who, in turn, apparently replies with an instantiation of external narration, [15]-[28], given the absence of the arrows and/or inverted commas (external narration which immediately appears to be conversation, given, just to start with, the imperative form used as theme of [15])³. Having identified the three sections in which T1 can be divided, and their overall textual function (namely, that of presenting three different viewpoints), I now turn to a more in-depth stylistic analysis of the T1, in order to find additional evidence to support the thesis presented so far.

3.2 A closer consideration of T1

Going deeper into the analysis, [1] starts with a deictic form, 'This', referring back to something which we presume must have happened. The reference is in fact to the Massacre at Wounded Knee⁴, described previously in the poem, the aftermath of which Catherine has witnessed. The noun 'history' is linked to the subject (performing the function Subject Attribute – SA), which, through the deictic 'This', is in turn deictically linked to 'what has happened before', namely Wounded Knee Massacre – therefore, the SA is, in the final analysis, synonymic of 'massacre'. The latter is one of the subtle linguistic devices Walcott employs to make his notion of History, conceived of as a sequence of episodes inevitably implying some kind of loss for one or more of the parties involved, become transparent for his readers.

Note the change of the subject in [2] concurrently signals a change in the focus of the speech: narration in the third person gives way to first person narration, which, together with the ideational content, is meant to manifest Catherine's will to express her own participation in the event. [2] is again a simple sentence, but "less simple" than the preceding sentence. Indeed, [1] is constituted by 3 words, (subject, predicator, subject attribute), while [2] is constituted by subject, predicator, and predicator complement, which is realised by a noun-phrase functioning as direct object of the finite verb ('had') postmodified by a verbless clause. Furthermore, [1] is a plain assertion, in which the copula, which usually conveys little information compared to lexical verbs, expresses an essential characteristic of the entity referred to, its very existence: 'this *was* history' leaves no room for objections. After such a strong assertion, a negative sentence is expressed in [2], with the negation employed in a slightly less standard usage, namely to negate the noun 'power', (in lieu of the canonical negation of the lexical verb, as in 'I did not have'). Since the noun 'power' bears in itself a whole range of connotative meanings (strength, action, success – to be powerful means to have a high degree of probability in succeeding in what one wants to achieve), Catherine is thus implicitly denied any probability of success – which is exactly what happened in 1890: she did not manage to change Sitting Bull's fate and was even held partly responsible by the press of the time for both Sitting Bull's death and for the Wounded Knee massacre (Pollack, 2002). Interestingly enough, what she is denied power to do is to change things, "change" being the main feature implicitly assigned to History and Time in the following two sentences. Having placed the conjunction 'And' in thematic position, [3] immediately signals cohesiveness (Halliday, Hasan 1976) with [2], which increases the

statistical possibility that coherence is implied too, so that thematic progression is at hand.

In [3], indeed, Catherine links ‘history’ with ‘time’, both through syntax and semantics: the circularity of history, in which what has happened in the past returns in the future, is described both through verb tenses (‘had happened’, ‘would happen’) and through the selection of time adverbials (‘before’, ‘again’). Furthermore, this circularity is described as being the result of two mental processes (Halliday, Matthiessen, 2004) whose senser is Catherine: she feels, [3], she knows, [4]. In particular, both mental processes are described using the past tense, expressing a consciousness which has by the time of the narration become a matter of fact for the character. This is confirmed by the co-text, for going back to Book IV we read: ‘She had believed in the redemptions of History,/ that the papers the Sioux had folded to their hearts/ would be kept like God’s word’. The reference here is to the treaties signed by both the US Government and the Indian tribes to put an end to the conflicts between the two parts, which have constantly been violated by the US Government (Pollack, 2002). In this quotation too the tense of the verb is revealing (the past perfect – ‘had believed’), signalling an action which is over at the moment of the narration, implying that Catherine’s hope in the reversibility of Indians’ doom soon ceased to exist. In the later work *The Ghost Dance* the impossibility of exerting a direct influence over history is expressed even more explicitly, with Catherine claiming: ‘I thought I could change things, but I can’t’ (Walcott, 2002: 204).

[5] begins with an adversative conjunction immediately suggesting the change in the direction of the argumentation. That this change is going to be a peculiar one is also made explicit through semantics, the adjective ‘strange’ constituting the head of the adjective phrase which follows the adversative conjunction: readers discover at this point in Catherine’s speech that in actual fact she did not witness the massacre, or its aftermath, but that she must have imagined it, for she was in Boston at that time⁵. This is an implicature which readers calculate exploiting their knowledge of the world, because [5] does not explicitly state that Catherine was not there, the apparent illocutionary force being that of expressing surprise. It is highly improbable, however, that anybody could witness the killing of two hundred Indians while finding themselves on the other side of the continent.

In this respect, [6], the prepositional phrase upgraded to the level of verbless clause (hence a grammatical unit whose information value has been increased), is particularly important, conveying the image of a person whose imagination is abstracted in watching the fire. Furthermore, since Walcott has the snow, and related lexemes, dominate the setting of the massacre, the description of a fireplace aims to distance her from the place and time of the event. The implicature that reader should draw at this point is that Walcott is creating a parallel between Catherine and himself, which might also explain the reasons lying behind the choice of retelling her story: like Walcott, who can only imagine the massacre of the indigenous populations of his native island he is writing about, for he was not there, so Catherine has to imagine what must have happened, because her “failure” has led her away from those she had tried to help. But through her story Walcott can recall the steps of the Indian genocide (in particular, the ‘Manifest Destiny’ and the ‘Trail of Tears’. Cf. Walcott, 2003: 296; 300), which is compared to that of the Aruacs (cf. Walcott, 2003: 278; 352), the native population of his island, on more than one occasion.

That Walcott has been creating a parallel with this character, almost building Catherine as one of his alter-egos, is again confirmed through co-text: not only is Catherine

defined as his guide ('<<Somewhere over there>> said my guide <<the Trail of Tears / started>>'; *ibid.*: 300), but they are also depicted as sharing the same body ('<<This was the groan of the autumn wind in the tamaracks/ which I shared through Catherine's body>>'; *ibid.*: 352).

[7] represents the last sentence with a first person narration and deploys a metaphor aiming to describe the impotence Catherine felt. The noun 'leaf' functions as SA, and therefore bestows on the subject both its denotative and connotative meanings, in particular those related to autumn, to leaves falling from the trees, incapable of opposing this natural fact and doomed to fall prey to the wind. In fact, 'leaf' collocates with 'whirlwind', which reinforces the idea of an entity subjected to external factors. The metaphor is further developed by the contiguity between 'whirlwind', conveying the denotative meaning of an atmospheric event and connotative meanings such as 'fury', 'violence' and 'impetus, and 'Ordained', which conveys the image of ordered, prefixed, regular rows or ranks. The aim is that of communicating the violence connected with the forced respect of the pre-established order of things (in this case, that the Indians had to be fought to be converted and assimilated [viz. 'Ordained'] into "the order") and the her weakness stemming from her non-respect of that order. From this moment on, metaphorical language becomes a recurrent feature of the selected extract.

The metaphor in [8], ('the mouth of the tent'), placed in end-focus⁶ and thus rendered more salient, takes us back to the Indian camp at Standing Rock. That the facts related to the massacre are reported in [9]-[14] as having been recounted by Omeros to Catherine underlines her distance from the events a second time: she seems to have gone back to her imaginary world, to Standing Rock, and she is the one in charge of retelling what she has been told, but which she did not experience first hand.

As has already been suggested, the metaphorical dimension becomes the predominant one here: Indians 'galloped towards death', rather than towards US army; they were fighting a bear rather than soldiers (note, here, the synecdoche 'the Claws of the White Bear', so as to signal that the soldiers composing the army were only the tool realising somebody else's orders); 'red beads' fell 'on the snow' rather than blood drops.

At a semantic and metaphorical level, the semantic fields of colours and animals represent a cohesive device which links the two tercets dedicated to Omeros with the following two tercets, where the narrator's voice can be heard. As the US army, or, to be more exact, the government which had given them the order to attack the Indians, was defined by Omeros as a 'White Bear', Walcott defines it first as a 'demon' and then as a 'white wolf', ('demon' being associated with an animal in this case precisely because of its collocation with both 'White Bear' and 'white wolf'), the connotative meanings of these lexemes strengthening one another.

The dehumanizing effect is further accentuated by the insertion in the last two tercets of words related with the negative danger represented by the US army, namely 'drags', 'shawled tail', 'blood dried', 'jaw', 'satisfied'. The effect is amplified at a third level by the associations created through the semantic field of colours. While the Indians, "the reds", are associated with blood, spilled on the snow and dried round the jaw of the murderer, the US soldiers are associated with white, white as is their skin. In general, the connotations of this colour are positive (purity, innocence, and so forth). Walcott reverses these connotations, for he has the white, as well as the snow, (which also usually has positive connotation: Christmas, holiday, presents etc), become a sign of death, the whites themselves being those who bring death: 'white' is the adjective used

to premodify two of the three nouns used to metaphorically define the American soldiers; the colour white becomes a metonymy for the snow and the ice: the ice makes the windows, another metaphor for “eyes”, blind (which evokes the whiteness of blind eyes, and implicitly refers to the blindness of the American population witnessing the genocide); white is the snow which has fallen down unstoppable, as unstoppable as the US army, to cover the Indians’ corpses, so that Omeros had concluded by saying that ‘Whiteness [was] everywhere’, referring to the final victory of the whites over the Indians – the 1890-1891 war was indeed the last Indian war.

4. Text 2: the analysis

Let us now turn to Text 2 [T2]. *The Ghost Dance* owes its title to the homonymous phenomenon which, as Omeros said in T1, ‘tied the [Indian] tribes into one nation’ between 1890-91. This was a religious movement which spread among the Indians of the Plains, predicting that the Indians should dance in order to meet their recently dead relatives and their ancestors, while waiting for the arrival of a messiah which would pave the way for the apocalypse, namely a wave that would destroy every trace of human life apart from those of the Indians (Pollack, 2002). Despite the similarity of the basic concepts of this religion with those of the Catholic belief, (which Walcott himself underscores through Catherine’s words: ‘First, we preach the Resurrection and the life,/ of a Second Coming, of a pale-faced Messiah/ [...]/ When they go a little further, as all converts do,/ [...]/ you turn and call them crazy’; Walcott, 2002: 226), its rapid spread among the Indians of the Plains was viewed with great suspicion by the white population. This, as Catherine had prophetically said to Sitting Bull, soon became an easy excuse for the American army to attack them, because they were afraid of an Indian uprising possibly deriving from this new belief.

The selected excerpt is a conversation between Catherine and James McLaughlin, the white agent of the Indian police who was in charge of Sitting Bull’s reservation. This conversation in particular takes place soon after Sitting Bull’s death, when both Catherine and McLaughlin are leaving the reservation.

4.1 General features of the passage

For limitations of space, only clauses [35]-[50] will be taken into consideration. At a general level, this portion of the text appears to be ‘chopped up’. This impression is created through a range of foregrounding devices (Douthwaite, 2000). First of all, the choppiness of clauses from [35] to [46] is created on a graphological level by the commas continually interrupting the flow of the sentence. This operation creates a number of phrases rankshifted up to the level of clause, which, as we shall see, will turn out in many cases to constitute examples of foregrounding; coordination is another important foregrounding device employed: the subsequent clauses, [40] and [41], are coordinated through the conjunction ‘and’ in sentence initial position, which gives the impression that the two clauses are conveying two connected ideas of equal importance. As we shall see in the next section, however, this is far from being the case, since [41] constitutes, in actual fact, an anaphoric reference to [40]. All these devices create foregrounded structures: the phrases [36], [37], [39], [43], [46], [50] are foregrounded by having been rankshifted up to the level of clause (since each unit is thereby stressed), while the coordinated clauses [40]-[41] are foregrounded by virtue of being rendered parallel through the conjunction ‘and’ in sentence initial position (viz. parallelism).

Therefore, the style appears to be conversational, reproducing the trend of the character's thought.

The turning point is represented by [47]. This declarative sentence in the past tense, expressing something which no longer exists, namely Catherine's madness, is indeed followed by a linguistic style which is less conversational. [48]-[50] is a complex sentence, which is divided into three clauses only, while the preceding sentence [38]-[45] had been divided, through the deployment of commas, into eight clauses. I now turn to a more detailed account of T2.

4.2 A closer analysis

[35] is a main clause containing an anaphoric referent, 'that', referring back to the death of Catherine's husband reported in [34] ('I know that he'll not come through the charred corn/ with a brace of partridge over his shoulder'). The third constituent of this clause is the prepositional phrase 'at that natural acceptance', where the prepositional complement 'that natural acceptance' is assigned end focus, in order to make it more salient by underscoring the inevitability of Catherine's reaction to her husband's death and reminding the readers her impossibility to change history, which has already been depicted in T1 ([1]-[4]). To be precise, the prepositional phrase occupies end focus by dint of the inclusion of the comma immediately following it, which "detaches" [36] ("through nature"), upshifting the latter prepositional phrase to the level of clause. Indeed, a more "normal" rendering of [35]-[37] would have been: 'I have arrived at that natural acceptance through nature and not through progress'.

Furthermore, the repetition of the words 'natural', as premodifier of the noun 'acceptance' in [35], and 'nature' in [36], strengthens the idea of the inevitability of human resignation before history and time. Indeed, as was implicit in the preceding argument, [36] and [37] are two prepositional phrases upshifted to the level of clause whose structure is parallel, one representing the negation of the other. They clarify the fact that what helped Catherine to accept her faith was nature, not progress, the first being implicitly related to "Indians" and the latter to "Westerners". In the remaining portion of T2 Catherine continues to side with the Indians, We now turn to the linguistic devices employed to convey this fact.

[38]-[45] is the longest sentence in the extract considered and has an extremely complex structure. The grammatical subject and agent of the material process described in [38] is Catherine. The action described is that of standing, which involves immobility – an action which denies action. This, in turn, again reminds readers of Catherine's impotence. Nonetheless, the epistemic modality expressed in [38] is also meant to underline 'the natural acceptance' arrived at by Catherine, and her ability to face Time, to 'stand at [its] heart', derived from such natural acceptance⁷. The adverbial "now" is given importance through graphological salience achieved by occupying end-position in the line, which it does thanks to the clause having been "interrupted" through having placed the subsequent prepositional phrase ('at the dead centre') in line-initial position in the following line. In this way the adverb is made to convey once again the idea of a consciousness that has arisen after a long process of acceptance.

[39] is a prepositional phrase realising exactly the same function realised by the prepositional phrase in [38], namely adverbial. Multiple realisation thus constitutes parallelism. This device creates a striking effect, since the noun 'heart' is usually synonymous for "life", rather than for "death" (the fact that 'dead centre' is an idiomatic expression meaning "the exact centre" should not prevent us from noting the oxymoron

created between both denotative and connotative meanings of ‘heart’ and ‘dead’). The reason will be now investigated in the co-text.

[39] is a prepositional phrase upshifted to the level of verbless clause with the *wh*-clause as postmodifier of the head of the noun phrase realising the prepositional complement (‘the heart’). The fact of having raised the phrase to the level of clause increases the value of the information conveyed by that grammatical unit, namely that the abstract entity ‘Time’ has been turned into a human subject, into a ghost dancer, just as Omeros had been in [9]-[14] in Text 1. However, distinctions of value can be identified within the phrase itself, since the postmodifier – the finite clause ‘where Time becomes a Ghost Dancer’ – has been downgraded to the level of word, thereby diminishing the importance of ‘Ghost Dancer’ in relation to ‘Time’ (since the latter is head of the noun phrase). However, this downgrading operation is fully offset by having made the clause graphologically salient through its occupying an entire line, thereby restoring a relationship of equality between the two elements. The “synonymity” of the two entities ‘Time’ and ‘Ghost Dancer’ is further underscored on a graphological level through the use of capital letters (‘Time’, ‘Ghost Dancer’).

[40] and [41] are two coordinated main clauses with a parallel initial structure, (since, as already suggested, both begin with the coordinating conjunction ‘and’), and are thus presented as two related pieces of information having the same value. In actual fact, the structure built up through these coordinated clauses is ambiguous, since [40] might be related to either [39], (‘where Time itself becomes a Ghost Dancer, and where everything that seemed surely insubstantial returns’), or to [41]. In turn, the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ in [41] is both an anaphoric reference to clauses [38]-[39] and [40], and a cataphoric reference to [42]-[45]. Since a pronoun cannot perform both operations at the same time (Saussure, 1916), this implies that the clause is syntactically ill-formed, hence foregrounded. The foregrounding operation is further developed in [42], where the repetition of the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ is employed as an anaphoric reference to the subject of the preceding clause. [42] to [45], indeed, represents the explanation of the subject of [41], and could cover the function subject itself: ‘That they, the Sioux, if they believe in nature, must first die to return is the joy of the Ghost Dance’.

[42]-[45] is thus a repetition of the subject of [41]. Furthermore, it has been attributed greater information value by having been foregrounded through having been assigned a position which it usually does not occupy (since the subject in an English sentence precedes the predicator, it does not follow it). In addition, if we look at the internal structure of the clause, we can note that [43] constitutes an inner parallelism because it is itself a repetition of the preceding subject ‘they’, just as the clause in which it is inserted, [42]-[45], is, structurally speaking, a “repetition” of [41]. Stated differently, the structure built by [42] and [43] is redundant, (since, as already suggested, the latter is the repetition of the former). More importantly, it presents a reverse order: ‘they’ is a substitution form, which implies that it should substitute something which has already been introduced, rather than the opposite. All these devices contribute to assigning the noun phrase ‘the Sioux’ far greater importance than it would have if the preceding pronoun ‘they’ had not been employed, so that the importance Catherine attaches to this people is highlighted (*viz.* foregrounded).

[44] is a subordinate clause which, together with [43], splits the “that clause” ‘that they must die to return’ into two parts, isolating the subject from the predicate. By repeating the subject of the “that clause” [42] (‘they’) in [43], and by interrupting that very same

“that clause” through the insertion of the subordinate clause [44] (‘if they believe in nature’), the “that clause” does not graphologically appear to have a subject. This foregrounding operation highlights [45], giving the information it contains inordinate importance, an operation which is bolstered by its occupying the beginning of the line. It can in fact be concluded that the oxymoron ‘die to return’ represents the key concept of the sentence, reiterating the circularity of time and history: what happened in the past will return in the future.

At this point, if we then look back at the sentence, we realise that both lexemes ‘die’ and ‘return’ had been already employed: ‘*dead* centre’, [38], and ‘everything that seemed surely insubstantial *returns*’ [40]. We then realise that ‘the dead centre’, which is synonymic for ‘the heart’, was not a purposeless choice at all. ‘Time’ is “turned” into a dead entity in order to allow ‘everything that seemed surely insubstantial’ to return, the latter representing a reference to the spirits of dead people for whose ‘return’ the Ghost Dance was performed. Time itself cannot return before having been “turned” into a ghost, for only after death can the Ghost Dance be danced and the dead (Time included) are allowed to return. Not only does the fact of “turning” the concept of time into a figure which is so bound to Indian culture underscore once again Walcott’s tendency to bend events, concepts and characters to the needs created by his mode of reconstructing history, but it also makes the stance the character and, implicitly, the author, has adopted obvious. In other words, this device makes it crystal clear on which side of the fence Catherine and Walcott stand – they are part of the Indian cause, and adopt the Indians’ concepts to describe even their reality.

[46] offers a confirmation of this reading. Again, a phrase is rankshifted up to the level of clause (in this case, sentence) thereby increasing its information value. Other foregrounding operations here include: a) the only content word is ‘seasons’; b) the sentence occupies the end of the line; c) brevity; d) ‘seasons’ occupies both end focus and is the last word in the line. Together, these four devices render the lexeme ‘seasons’ perceptually salient. In other words, the reader is being invited to give great importance to the entire expression, and to pay particular attention to the word ‘seasons’.

The fact that Catherine speaks of ‘seasons’, is indeed a confirmation of her adherence to the Indians’ beliefs⁸, in this case the Indian conception of time.

This thesis is supported by the co-text, in particular by the quotation which was recalled in the title of this paper: earlier in the play Catherine had claimed ‘Time is the difference between us and the Indians. They think in seasons. We think in days’ (Walcott, 2002: 148). This assertion is made by Catherine while talking to McLaughlin in a previous exchange. Here, just as in the extract which is being examined, a clear-cut distinction is expressed between Catherine’s and McLaughlin’s (hence the Western) conception of Time and the Indians’ concept of that entity.

Two quite different spans of time are highlighted here through linguistic means. Not only is the lexeme ‘seasons’ employed again to convey the meaning of time passing by in prefixed circularity, but the comparison, which is intended to underscore the distinction, is made on the linguistic level first of all. Just to start with, the prepositional phrase ‘between us and the Indians’ is less typical than the reversed order ‘between the Indians and us’, placing ‘the Indians’ in end-focus, thus assigning them greater salience. The following two sentences, (‘They think in seasons. We think in days’), have exactly the same structure (subject + predicator + complement, with ‘seasons’ and ‘days’ realising the function prepositional complement), but the order is reversed: the Western conception is presented before the Indian one, thus building a chiasmus, which,

untypically enough, allows the Indians' belief to precede Western conceptions. '[s]easons' and 'days' are then syntactically linked and directly compared, in order to make the difference more transparent: months against hours. Furthermore, the two references to nature in the extract selected, ('through nature', 'if they believe in nature') may constitute evidence of the fact that "thinking in seasons" corresponds to living a life according to the rhythms of nature.

We are thus implicitly told that Indians divide their existences into spans of time constituted by three months, each possessing order and fixed, predictable characteristics (the heat being typical of the summer and the snow being typical of the winter, talking about the Dakotas, obviously). Westerners are instead implicitly depicted as having shorter lives in one sense, constituted by short spans of time rapidly following one another, in a situation where no exact predictions can be made, for days cannot share the same general degree of expectation that can be assigned to seasons (summer days are usually sunny and hot, but rain cannot be excluded *a priori*).

Catherine had expressed a similar concept in *Omeros*, when she claimed that 'Life is so fragile. It trembles like the aspens. All its shadows are *seasonal*, including pain' (Walcott, 2003: 308; emphasis added).

Life is then the third member of the triplet, time-history-life, which constitute concepts that in Walcott's work cannot but be deeply interwoven with one another. Here again 'seasonal' evokes the circularity described by [3] and [4] in T1 and the difference between Indian and Western conceptions of time expressed in the quotation from *The Ghost Dance*.

It should be clear by now that the deployment of this lexeme on three different occasions on the part of Catherine is an obvious sign of her adherence to the Indians' conception, despite the fact that she formally includes herself together with McLaughlin in the 'us' describing the Western idea of time, and despite (or maybe, because) the fact that time is one of those culturally-bound concepts which distinguish one culture from another.

As previously suggested [47] represents a turning point, further confirming our thesis. Indeed, Catherine claimed she had been mad once, and we may hypothesize that 'once' means "when I did not understand the Indian way of life".

[48] begins with an adversative conjunction which immediately signals a change. Without going too deeply into the analysis for reasons of space, it can be observed that in the last part of the extract the distinction between the madness of the past and the consciousness of the present is achieved at the lexico-pragmatic level, with the construction of two distinct visual levels. To darkness, evocative of madness and the obscurity of the mind, is counterpointed brightness (the adherence to Indian beliefs): 'bright interval', 'lucid', 'summer light', 'Bright hair'.

In particular, [50] represents the most important part of the sentence. It is foregrounded firstly graphologically, by the inverted commas, by the comma preceding it in [49] and by being the final clause in the sentence (hence highly salient), and, secondly, syntactically, since it is realised by a noun phrase upshifted to the level of clause. [50] also represents the Indian name that another character in the play, an Indian girl converted to Christianity named Lucy, has given Catherine. Brightness is thus part of this name. To be exact, it is the most important part. The adjective 'Bright' is indeed the premodifier in the noun phrase 'Bright hair', which is a synecdoche for Catherine herself – Lucy's identification of Catherine with her hair clearly underlines the different appearance of a white woman among the Indians, a woman 'who loves them'. By

calling herself by her Indian name and by describing this as the final step which brought her to brightness and which metaphorically put an end to madness, Catherine ends up further confirming her total involvement with the Indians, in spite (or because?) of the inevitability of their doom.

It is also interesting to note that the system of reference to this character diverges in the two works. While in *Omeros* essentially two terms are employed to refer to her ('Catherine' and 'Catherine Weldon'), in *The Ghost Dance* many more terms are used instead: 'Catherine', 'Catherine Weldon', 'Mrs. Weldon', 'Mrs. Catherine Weldon', 'Kitty', 'Kitty Weldon', 'Lady from the East', 'The Bright Hair Who Loved Us', 'Bright Hair Who Loves Us' (the last but one being the result of a doubt on the part of Lucy about the sincerity of Catherine's involvement with the Indians).

Since the name of a person is an integral part of that person's identity, it is logical to hypothesise that, through this device, Walcott intended to build a more complex character in the second work, the many traits of whose identity cannot be defined by a single name.

Furthermore, we should also consider the fact that Walcott probably knew about the name Sitting Bull gave Catherine, namely *Toka heya mani win*, "Woman walking ahead" (Pollack, 2002). Walcott performs the same operation: he gives *his* Catherine a name. But, rather than underscoring her courage in walking ahead of her time in order to help Sitting Bull⁹, as the latter did, Walcott stresses what he probably thinks was the reason that led her to try and help Sitting Bull and his people: the love that she felt for them. The same love that encouraged her to leave her home, and the certainty of a life in the East, to go westward in the desperate attempt to beat the time that was walking ahead, the progress that required Indians' lands to be 'requisitioned' and the Indians to be assimilated.

5. Conclusion

In the course of the examination of two extracts from *Omeros* and *The Ghost Dance* I have attempted to show through stylistic analysis that Catherine's words embody a very precise conception of Time and History. Both are conceived of as invincible forces, over which the human being can exercise no influence – which does not imply that s/he should not try at least. The inevitable circularity of Time and the gulf between the Indian and the Western concepts have also been underlined through an analysis of the linguistic means employed to convey the two concepts.

In spite of the fact that Catherine did not succeed in preventing the inevitable from happening, it is noteworthy that Walcott chose to insert Catherine's story in *Omeros* and then turned her into the main female character in *The Ghost Dance*. He has thereby given a second life to the story of this woman, whose efforts had been hidden by history. Catherine has indeed died alone, neglected by the society of the time, who considered her behaviour immoral, for having lived for such a long time alone with a neglected indigenous man (Pollack, 2002). History, with its inevitability, had almost erased any trace of her¹⁰. Derek Walcott has told the world her story.

Furthermore, through her voice, he has given voice to the Indian people, another of those dominated peoples whose identity has been manipulated and almost completely destroyed during a colonizing enterprise, a people who had been living in what are now the American territories for thousands of moons, before the accelerated rhythms of Western Time reached them.

More importantly, Walcott has given himself the chance to develop the personality of *his* Catherine. In *Omeros* she is Walcott's guide and alter-ego, who has been given the task of reporting Omeros's words, and needs to be reassured by the narrator about the ending of the tragedy. In *The Ghost Dance* she is turned into a complex character, who has no problem in declaring her total involvement with the Indians' struggles and her total adherence to their natural style of life. A character whose name possesses many variants corresponding to the many traits of her developed personality. And to whom Walcott gives a name whose aim is to stress the love that is needed to leave a trace in history, in spite of history itself.

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¹ Clauses have been numbered for ease of reference.

² Sentences have been numbered for ease of reference. From [35] on, clauses have also been numbered.

³ The effect of ambiguity is reached on a psychological level. Readers do not expect a conversation to have the structure arrows (+ inverted commas) + narration in lieu of the more standard structure arrows + arrows (or inverted commas + inverted commas). In other words, they are led by the arrows and inverted commas to interpret as conversation what is inserted between them, and discover only in [15] that the real conversation is taking place between Catherine and the narrator, not between Catherine and Omeros.

⁴ At Wounded Knee Creek the US Army killed some two hundred Indians, including women, children and old people. The massacre followed the attempt by the Army to arrest Sitting Bull, who was accused of having supported and contributed to the spreading of the Ghost Dance religion (which the US government attempted to repress), during which the Lakota chief was killed. Catherine had predicted what would happen if he did not refrain himself from adhering to the Ghost Dance religion (about which more will be written in the course of the paper), namely that it would be used as an excuse by the US Government to attack him and all the Indian tribes. Sitting Bull refused to listen, since, as the chief of the Lakotas, he was supposed to support his people rather than a white woman coming from the East. She left the reservation, aware of the fact that there was nothing she could do to make him change his opinion or prevent the last act of the Indian genocide.

⁵ When Sitting Bull died and the Massacre at Wounded Knee took place she was actually in Kansas City (Pollack 2002: 279).

⁶ The notion of “end focus” referred to here follows Douthwaite’s (2000) theoretical framework rather than Halliday’s.

⁷ I wish to thank Prof Derek Bousfield, who chaired the session in which this paper was included, for having inspired this comment during the presentation of this paper at the PALA 2008 Conference in Sheffield.

⁸ It might be argued that the deployment on the part of Catherine of this culture-bound concept, in the quotation recalled in the title of this paper in particular, is, in actual fact, a stereotyped formula meant to describe the Indian tribes as “exotic” people. I believe, however, that this is not the case. Walcott, as a writer typically considered to be postcolonial, and who, beyond labels, has experienced colonialism first hand, writes about and against many and diverse forms of imperialism and colonialist quest and conquest. The native population of Walcott’s home island was exterminated during French and English colonialism in the Caribbean. The native American tribes were pursued, forced to travel westwards and leave the places they had been living in for hundreds of years, or, to paraphrase Catherine, hundreds of winters (in some cases, as during the so-called “Trail of Tears”, the forced trip westward provoked the death of thousands of Indians); their number has been reduced dramatically and their identity has been almost completely erased by the US government, namely by an ex colonized country which has “inherited [its] empire’s sin” (Walcott 1990: 354), by colonizing and forcing another people to live in small reservations, because Americans were afraid of its “incivility” and, more importantly, wanted to take possession of its lands. Catherine, however, is not presented by Walcott as being part of the latter group, in spite of the fact that Walcott believed her to be an American woman coming from Brooklyn. He presented her first in *Omeros* and then in *The Ghost Dance* not because she was part of the colonizing group, but because she tried to oppose that very same colonizing group, siding with the Sioux, living in the reservation with them, helping Sitting Bull to understand the exact nature of the government’s “proposals” to purchase their lands, acting as his interpreter and his secretary (Pollack 2002). The deployment on her part of the Sioux “tongue” in Walcott’s works is the confirmation of her deep understanding of their style of life, of her will to help, support and, possibly, save them, not the evidence of her exotic idea of them. I am indebted to Prof Geoff Hall for having prompted these observations during the presentation of this paper at the PALA 2008 Conference in Sheffield.

⁹ In order to help Sitting Bull, Catherine performed a number of actions which were considered aberrant at the time, from leaving her son in Brooklyn the first time she travelled to the Dakotas to living in Sitting Bull’s cabin with the rest of his family and wives. For these actions Sitting Bull gave her the name “woman walking ahead”, while the press of the time labelled her as ‘Sitting Bull’s white squaw’ (Pollack 2002).

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, in 2007 the American HBO produced a film entitled *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee*, broadcasted on American TV and watched by millions of people, in which the events going from the Sioux’s victory over General Custer at Little Big Horn to the massacre at Wounded Knee are reported. In spite of the great attention devoted to the figure of Sitting Bull in this film, no mention is made of Catherine Weldon, although the character of another white woman, who worked as a teacher in another reservation and did not challenge white morality as Catherine did, is given great emphasis. Catherine’s role in the Sioux’s struggle for their preservation continues to be hidden, even in non-official historiography, which, by dint of being broadcasted on TV, still represents a powerful means of communication and diffusion of historical events.