

Derek Walcott and the Wild Frontier:  
*The Ghost Dance*

Penny Woollard  
University of Essex\*

Does this aging Democracy  
remember its log-cabin dream [...?]<sup>1</sup>

Derek Walcott, the St Lucian poet, essayist, artist, and playwright would not at first encounter appear to be an obvious commentator on the history of the United States in the nineteenth century. His credentials for doing so are, however, easily established. Walcott's first visit to America was on a Rockefeller Foundation grant in 1957, at which time he went to the Stratford Festival in Ontario and then on to New York. From the early 1960s Walcott's poetry began to be noticed in the United States. He gained an American publisher and, under the sponsorship of Robert Lowell, became part of New York intellectual society. He was invited to visit the United States in a professional capacity on a regular basis giving readings and talks and, after temporary spells teaching at Columbia and Harvard in 1981, Walcott became a professor of Creative Writing at Boston University. Since that time, even though now retired from teaching, he has regularly lived part of the year in Boston and, latterly, New York City.

His impressions of the United States are, therefore, based on a long immersion in the country and its culture: now, in 2008 he is 78 years old. Nonetheless, his relationship with the US is not a simple one. He may come from an island that is geographically firmly located in the Americas but, as with most Caribbean islanders, Walcott demonstrates ambivalent attitudes towards the United States. The country has loomed large over the Caribbean literally from above and has flagrantly imposed its cultural influences on neighbouring countries. Derek Walcott's familiarity and engagement with the contemporary United States, however, has quite naturally led him to examine major events in the country's historical development. He is unquestionably conscious that there can be limitations to history for his *own* genesis, especially when it is investigated in a way that replays the clichéd motifs of Caribbean trauma. He is consistently critical of History (which he will often furnish with a capital letter) and by which

---

\* Penny Woollard is a PhD candidate at the University of Essex. She can be contacted at pennyw@essex.ac.uk

he means the Whiggish History which assumes the ineluctable progress of European civilisation. When you come from a Caribbean island surrounded by the sea, Walcott maintains:

Nothing can be put down in the sea. You can't plant on it, you can't live on it, you can't walk on it. Therefore, the strength of the sea gives you an idea of time that makes history absurd. Because history is an intrusion on that immensity. History ... is an insignificant speck on the rim of that horizon. And by history I mean a direction that is progressive and linear.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding those sentiments, he is not immune to the power of historical knowledge, particularly when employed by those who need to challenge their condition in an attempt to achieve some restitution. Walcott is drawn to the dispossessed of the United States in order that he may resuscitate *their* stories. His play *The Ghost Dance* is based on historical events of the frontier and through these events Walcott addresses the circumstances of those people whose history was rendered disposable by the expanding United States during the nineteenth century. With a brief snap-shot of the play I shall demonstrate how Walcott re-imagines the frontier narrative from his own Caribbean perspective.

*The Ghost Dance* is set in the Dakotas and considers the plight of the Lakota Indians in general and, specifically, the final days of Sitting Bull. It is a subject that Walcott continued to explore in Books Four and Five of his long poem, *Omeros*. The history that Walcott exposes in both the play and the chapters of *Omeros* has been subject to much needed revision by historians of the period. Anyone born before 1970 was probably fed the simplistic notion that pioneering white immigrants from Europe, who travelled to the part of North America that was to become the United States, were brave and forward-looking, held back in their expansionist plans to spread civilisation only by savage American Indians who did not even *own* the land they lived on. Popular culture in the form of books, and later, film and television, perpetuated the myth of the plucky immigrant fighting valiantly against savages to create civilisation, so that not only did the population of the United States believe it, but the rest of the world did too. Not until the publication of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970) was any serious revision countenanced by the mainstream that the American Indians as an indigenous race of people had a right to live where they were born or where they had conquered.<sup>3</sup> In the book Dee Brown, unusually for the time, tells the story of the "opening of the west" from the point of view of the native American population, ending with the Massacre at Wounded Knee where, in a state of panic, the United States Army unleashed hysterical gunfire on, for the most part, unarmed Indians including women and children. However, the period of westward

expansion was a tough and challenging period for the invading settlers as well as the indigenous people and polemical assertions favouring one side or another only advance prejudice rather than shedding insight on the events. In *The Ghost Dance*, by deepening and complicating the relationships between the fictional manifestations of the real characters, Walcott attempts an alternative perspective of the divergent historiographies and the people involved.

At the centre of Walcott's play are two white characters based on historical figures who played a part in the events leading up to the death of Sitting Bull and thence the Massacre at Wounded Knee. Both in the play and in history, these two people were attempting to cross a barrier between the races: one by marrying a part-Indian woman and one by her close relationship with Sitting Bull. The first of the characters is Major James McLaughlin, head of the Indian Agency on the Standing Rock reservation at Fort Yates close by Sitting Bull's final home on the reservation. The other character is a widow from Brooklyn, Catherine Weldon, a member of the National Indian Defence Association, a philanthropic group from the east of the United States who were attempting to inhibit the exploitation of American Indians. She befriended Sitting Bull in an attempt to prevent the Indians being cheated out of their land in a deal that McLaughlin was helping to broker. In reality there was understandable tension and misunderstanding between these two people who had different aspirations for the outcome of their relationships with the Lakota people. Walcott's representation of McLaughlin and Catherine, however, connects them in a powerfully intimate liaison which complicates the official recorded reading of their relationship. Unusually for Walcott, who has not before used the same characters in both poetry and a play, the two characters cross over into *Omeros*, thus emphasising his interest in the significance of their roles in the history surrounding the last days of Sitting Bull. McLaughlin, though, is not mentioned by name but is referred to only fleetingly as "the Indian agent"<sup>4</sup>: it is Catherine Weldon who enjoys significant presence in both. Sitting Bull, although pivotal to the play, does not appear in it as a character: his presence is the guilty conscience of the white settlers. In real life, his death meant a temporary cessation of the American Indians' fight against the expansionist claims of the settlers. Sitting Bull, born circa 1831, became the chief of the Hunkpapa division of the Teton Lakota people, who were located west of the Missouri river.

By December 1890, the month of both Sitting Bull's death and the massacre at Wounded Knee, the great majority of American Indians were held forcibly within proscribed reservations which had become more and more restricted in size as the immigrants' desire for land expanded throughout the

second half of the nineteenth century. Sitting Bull was a particularly charismatic figure amongst his own people and stood out as one chief who had not capitulated completely to the white settlers' way of life. This meant he was still a potential danger to the settlers and had to be kept under strict watch, which is why the Indian Agent, McLaughlin, supported the arrest that was to cause Sitting Bull's death at the hands of Lakota policemen who had once been loyal to him.

The spread of a new religious phenomenon called the Ghost Dance (hence the title of Walcott's play) was the excuse to make acceptable the arrest of Sitting Bull and the massacre of perhaps as many as 300 Indians at Wounded Knee on Pine Ridge soon afterwards. To understand the potential power of the Ghost Dance and why its influence spread so rapidly in 1890 one only needs to look at the conditions under which the Lakota Indians were forced to survive. The land which they relied upon for hunting and therefore food, clothing and shelter was aggressively whittled away at each wave of frontier expansion. The reservation land was not fertile enough to maintain a large group of people, which forced the Indians to become reliant on rations doled out by the Indian Agency. The rations were routinely reduced and so were used as a bargaining tool to keep control of the reservation as they could be cut back to starvation levels to maintain white dominance. It was a desperate time for the reservation Indians; their customs and value systems had effectively been outlawed and the settlers were forcibly imposing on them an unfamiliar code of existence.

In the midst of this desperation came the possibility of salvation; and the Ghost Dance was the instrument of that salvation. The Ghost Dance promised its faithful believers that they would be protected throughout the winter months of 1890 until the following spring, when the restoration of their lives prior to the incursion of white men was promised. The new messiah pledging the restoration was a Paiute holy man from Nevada called Wovoka. Wovoka's message to the forlorn Lakotas was that they should dance throughout the winter and by the following spring their land would be covered by a new layer of soil; they were to be swept into the air for safety while the new earth was created. Abundant grass would grow on the new ground to feed a fresh and plentiful supply of ponies and buffalo. Furthermore, the Lakotas' dead relatives would be restored to life and white people would be eradicated completely from the land. The Indian tribes would then all live alongside each other following a doctrine of peace. While dancing, they were to wear specially made ghost shirts which would render them invisible and so protect them from white men's bullets. In this way, the Indians mixed their pagan beliefs with the religious teachings imposed on them by the white settlers to achieve an article of faith that met their immediate purposes. The

similarities with Caribbean slaves integrating remnants of West African Obeah with the Christianity of their captors cannot have been lost on Walcott. The Indians had appropriated, for their own use, the Christian story, and in the midst of impending disaster were able to muster sufficient faith in themselves, in the form of spiritual endeavour, to attempt a resistance of white men's dominion.

Agent McLaughlin, although realising that the Ghost Dance *per se* was not an immediate threat, saw it as an excuse to be able to call for Sitting Bull's arrest. If left *in situ* Sitting Bull was a constant threat as an example to other American Indians that they need not bow to submission of the settlers. Sitting Bull had offered to travel west with McLaughlin to visit the supposed messiah so that they both could judge his reliability but McLaughlin refused to go and certainly would not have wanted Sitting Bull to travel outside the reservation. In the play, McLaughlin states that he would not travel all those miles to share a vision that he was not sure Sitting Bull actually believed in. Most importantly, he feared that "the Ghost Dance [was] a way of regathering the tribes / under [Sitting Bull's] leadership."<sup>5</sup> A further concern for the real McLaughlin was the vestige of respect shown to Sitting Bull by both Indians and some of the settlers which undermined McLaughlin's authority as agent. He could never be the true controller of the reservation while Sitting Bull was around to provide the focus for possible rebellion. More worryingly, if the Indians believed the ghost shirts made them invisible and therefore immune from the soldiers' bullets, there was always the threat that they would attack at random because their lives were not felt to be threatened.

The problems for Sitting Bull and the Lakota that Walcott's play addresses began when the settlers attempted to coerce the Indians into giving up even more land. They tried to split their reservation, which comprised of half of what is now South Dakota, into six separate reservations. Catherine monitored the situation from Brooklyn and tried to help by writing to Sitting Bull, sending him maps of the proposed split of the reservation and indicting what would be a fair price for the land. By showing Sitting Bull the maps Catherine had demonstrated the potential threat she could be to the settlers: the Indians, in fact, had not been aware in spatial terms of just how much land the new act was attempting to procure for the settlers. In the spring of 1890 Sitting Bull invited Catherine and her son to live with him on the reservation, which they did, and were considered extremely odd for doing so by the settlers. When she finally left the Dakotas in late October 1890 it was chiefly because she could not prevent Sitting Bull from allowing the Ghost Dance to flourish in his camp and felt that, in her opposition to it, she had lost the trust of his people.

Catherine Weldon is only briefly mentioned in history books before she disappears completely with the death of Sitting Bull. It is tempting to construe her as one of those interfering but well-meaning white women of a certain class who take up a cause because of a perceived injustice but often do not quite understand the background to it. Walcott, however, treats her character with great respect and it may be that her bravery in cutting herself off from other white folk and risking disapprobation from her own class by *living* between two cultures holds some resonance for Walcott and his own experience of existing between worlds. Catherine made a stand for the underdog in the Dakotas just as Walcott supports and champions the underclass in St. Lucia.

Catherine came to the Dakotas from Brooklyn but Walcott has her originate in Boston.<sup>6</sup> In the play Catherine compares her rough life on the farm with the comfort of Boston and, although out of place, she does not pine to return to the city, “to streetlights and carriages, / long white gloves and concerts, and velvet waiters / drawing back your chair” (*WGD* 125). But in *Omeros* Walcott feels her physical presence intensely while he is alone in Boston, as if there is a connection between his loneliness at the departure of his wife and Catherine Weldon’s isolation<sup>7</sup>:

November. Sober month. The leaves’ fling was over.  
Willows harped on the Charles, their branches would blacken.  
Drizzles gusted on bridges, lights came on earlier,

Twigs clawed the clouds, the hedges turned into bracken,  
the sky raced like a shaggy wolf with a rabbit pinned  
in its jaws, its fur flying with the first snow,

then gnawed at the twilight with its incisors skinned;  
the light bled, flour flew past the grey window.  
I saw Catherine Weldon running in the shawled wind. (*O* 212)

Catherine’s presence accentuates the narrator’s melancholy at the inevitability of the impending winter. In the penultimate line Walcott introduces the idea of the inter-changeability of flour and snow; a metaphor for whiteness in all its forms that he employs emotively throughout *The Ghost Dance*. The first two minimalist scenes of the play occur on a sparsely-dressed split stage, almost filmically cutting between the warmth in Catherine’s kitchen and, outside, to where a cold Kicking Bear, who is rendered white by the snow, waits and watches. There is no verbal communication between the two: Walcott merely establishes the presence of Catherine on the inside in her warm kitchen and Kicking Bear outside in the cold. Throughout the scene Catherine handles whiteness in the form of flour while

baking, signifying her unwitting collusion in the role of white men's domination of the Indians and their complicity in the Indians' near starvation.

The Catherine that Walcott reveals is a sensible but sensual woman. In the play she consents to a physical relationship with McLaughlin ostensibly to find out what the Agency was going to do about Sitting Bull. She promises Kicking Bear that she will "find out whatever [she] can to help" Sitting Bull (*WGD* 131). That promise, however, is made before she has her first encounter in the play with McLaughlin and before their powerful mutual attraction is experienced. It is not apparent that she has any intention of trapping McLaughlin into an affair to find out this information.

In undertaking the journey westward alone, Catherine demonstrated immense courage and it is this bravery that gives Walcott licence to imagine her in the play as a whisky-drinking sexual equal to McLaughlin. She publicly invites him to her house for dinner during an official meeting of the Indian Commission. Catherine is impressed by what she sees as McLaughlin's unexpected response to the relationship of the Agency towards the Lakota. Walcott's McLaughlin tells the Commission that "[t]he agency exists for the protection of the Sioux, /not for their enslavement to our principles, / which principles are based on Christian altruism" (*WGD* 159). His statement is significant for Catherine who, in an earlier scene with McLaughlin, asked him: "[w]hy for that matter, couldn't we become Indians? / Why do the Indians have to turn into us?" (*WGD* 150). Catherine exits the scene after provocatively asking him, "What kind of gravy with the sweet potatoes? / Never mind. [she says playfully] You'll like it" (*WGD* 162). The dinner McLaughlin is invited to by Catherine is a Thanksgiving meal with all the attendant connotations of close family love that the day came to symbolise for white North Americans. Walcott is surely emphasising the contrast that, for the Indians, the day is a remembrance of genocide, land theft and violently-won submission to the early settlers. Catherine offers McLaughlin whisky, and urges him to feel at home in her house. McLaughlin notices a wooden hobby horse in the parlour belonging to Catherine's absent son Josie, who is staying further down the Cannonball River with an imagined character, Sarah Quinn. McLaughlin invites Catherine to take an imaginary ride with him on the horse, and it is this ride that Paula Burnett claims is a symbolic sexual ride counter-pointed with "the role of the horse in the history of the Great Plains, for transport and war."<sup>8</sup> But by stressing the "ride" on the hobby horse as sexual imagery, she is at variance with what appears to be Walcott's less sexually-charged intention with the scene.<sup>9</sup> Josie's hobby horse is a child's toy and therefore represents both the potency and protection of familial love within the home; exactly the love that Walcott has

become estranged from, that Catherine has lost and McLaughlin is unable to recreate with his Indian wife.

Catherine's real-life son was called Christie and he was twelve or thirteen when he moved with his mother to live on the reservation with Sitting Bull and his family. While there he was wounded from stepping on a nail and his foot became infected. The wound appeared to heal "but on the boat he got cold in it & spasms & lockjaw set in & he died, suffering the most terrible pains."<sup>10</sup> The boat was taking Catherine and her son away from the reservation to Kansas City where she stayed with her nephew and niece for some time after leaving Sitting Bull once she realised there was nothing she could do to stop the influence of the Ghost Dance. Walcott's Catherine learns of the death of her fictional son, Josie, from her friend, Sarah Quinn. Sarah asks Catherine to teach her to dance as the story of Josie's death slowly evolves. And in an ironic response to the power of the Ghost Dance, Catherine and Sarah use the dancing lesson as a means to deal with their grief. Catherine begins the lesson:

And a one, then a two ... Did he suffer, Sarah, did my little boy suffer, then a turn, ah that's right, now the gentleman's arm, and ...  
(SARAH *collapses in her arms*. CATHERINE *holds her*.)  
Like them, nothing must prevent us from dancing. Let's learn that from them. Straighten up, arm out, Sarah, Arm out! (WGD 176)

The real Catherine's anguished letters to Sitting Bull illustrate her desolation at having to leave him. She felt suicidal at the death of her son, and she had, furthermore, lost all her personal belongings with her luggage on the boat. She had nothing left but she still cared about Sitting Bull's and the Lakotas' fate:

I wrote to Washington and stated how small the Indians rations are. Your wife showed me what she received & I wrote everything to Washington, also that the Uncpapas do not get clothing ... I fear that my poor Indians must suffer for opposing the Gov't. & fear for you.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly in great distress, she tells Sitting Bull that she wished her son could have died on the Cannonball River, "for then I would have buried him there & remained near my Indians, which would have been some comfort to me."<sup>12</sup> Walcott uses this exact quotation from Catherine's letter in the play (WGD 220). But Sarah Quinn has previously revealed Josie's death from cholera, possibly caught from the Indians. Sarah states, "they forced me to bury him quickly in the chapel cemetery close to the Cannonball" (WGD 174). So Walcott directs that the fictional Catherine could bury Josie with her beloved Lakotas, but adheres to the accurate historical narrative by leaving her real son, Christie, buried in Kansas



City. This anomaly appears to have been overlooked during the writing and rehearsal process of the play, however, which leads to the possibility that Walcott simply forgot he had already committed Catherine's fictional son, Josie, to the Dakota earth.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to fathom whether the Indian agent, Major James McLaughlin's recorded history renders him a hero or villain of the story. He was complicit in the arrest of Sitting Bull which makes him complicit too in Sitting Bull's ignominious death at the hands of policemen who were under his command. In fairness to the real McLaughlin, there is no clear evidence that he wanted Sitting Bull dead. To have him imprisoned and out of the way where he could not influence others was his main ambition. McLaughlin's career in the Federal Indian Service began in 1871 and continued until his death in Washington in 1923. "Major" was an honorary title bestowed upon Indian agents to help assert their authority but would cause a tension with bone fide military men. His seven-year battle with Sitting Bull resulting in the latter's death was seen by contemporaries as an inevitable outcome and not an action to undermine his exemplary career as a paternalistic Indian Agent. In 1895 he became a United States Indian inspector and went on to be thought of as the government's wisest and most experienced official working with Indians.<sup>14</sup>

In the preface to his autobiographical book *My Friend the Indian*, McLaughlin claims that: "For thirty-eight years I have lived among, or had official dealings with, a race of people little understood by the whites who have displaced them in carrying out *the immutable law of the survival of the fittest*."<sup>15</sup> By employing that starkly Darwinian term, he does introduce a note of caution to readers of his autobiography as to how they may view his brilliant career. His antagonism towards Sitting Bull is staggering. In his chapter detailing Sitting Bull's death, he calls him, "[c]rafty, avaricious, mendacious, and ambitious" and goes on to say that "Sitting Bull possessed all of the faults of an Indian and none of the nobler attributes which have gone far to redeem some of his people from their deeds of guilt."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, wherever Sitting Bull is mentioned throughout McLaughlin's book his name is coupled with an insulting comment.

Early on in *The Ghost Dance* Walcott economically introduces the paraphernalia of manifest destiny that McLaughlin was a leader of; the encroachment of the railways and rolling wagon wheels. Kicking Bear picks up a doughnut baked by Catherine and, because of its shape, intones the words 'wagon wheel' (*WGD* 126). Manifest destiny was predicated on the myth of there being empty tracts of virgin land in the west just waiting to be taken by land-hungry

pioneers. More recently, Toni Morrison has shown up the absolute illogicality of a country that could combine the agenda of freedom (as enshrined in manifest destiny) against the “devastating racial oppression” required for its success.<sup>17</sup> Walcott introduces the actual phrase “Manifest Destiny” into *Omeros* – complete with capital letters – but it is with a realisation that the remnants of the chimerical American dream, “like the Sioux” after Wounded Knee, are lost in the frozen snow (*O* 175).

In the play, Catherine tries to persuade Kicking Bear to eat something before drinking her whisky. He refuses her offer of food made from the white flour that is plentiful for her but not for the Indians’ meagre rations and Walcott repeats the flour/snow metaphor as Kicking Bear intuits the outcome of Wounded Knee. He tells her that the Indians will be buried in “a whiteness with no memory, like deep snow. / They will fade like weevils in a bag of flour / denied us by the agency” (*WGD* 130).

Catherine’s final speech in the play responds directly to Kicking Bear’s situation. She chants the tribes’ names in an elegiac chorus, as she prophesies the return of the Indians to their own lands:

[T]hey will come back galloping, quiet as clouds,  
[...]  
I believe they are always there, always approaching,  
like thunder without sound, on hooves of smoke,  
those whom the land that gave them life belonged to –  
Sitting Bull, Kicking Bear, and the leaves of the tribes,  
The Blackfoot, the Sioux, the Oglalas, the Cheyenne.  
(*WGD* 246)

While she speaks, through a scrim she watches as a drunken Kicking Bear falls in the snow, (perhaps to replicate the image of the iconic photograph of Chief Big Foot, frozen in the snow after the massacre at Wounded Knee). Then, in a final repetition of the snow/flour metaphor, the cast throw flour over his body before leaving him alone in the snow, apparently dead.<sup>18</sup> In spite of Sitting Bull’s bungled arrest and death, Walcott concludes the play on a note of magical optimism. The Indians appear on their stage horses, galloping through the scrim towards the audience, who believe they are witnessing the promised resurrection, allowing for the possibility that Wovoka was right all along and the Ghost Dance had worked its magic.

In *The Ghost Dance*, by creating a forum for the characters’ real and fictional selves to speak, Walcott has suffused the received historical narrative with invented possibilities. Walcott’s telling of the stories surrounding Sitting

Bull's death, without recourse to *judgement*, examines the events neither as simply white men's heroics in the face of unremitting hardships, nor as the history of the American Indians' genocide. The reader is directed not to a precise conclusion, but rather is exposed to Walcott's ambivalent version of frontier history.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Derek Walcott, "The Arkansas Testament," *The Arkansas Testament* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), 114.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. White, "An Interview with Derek Walcott 1990," *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990), 182. Further references will be indicated parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as *O*.

<sup>5</sup> Derek Walcott, *Walker and The Ghost Dance* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002), 159. Further references will be indicated parenthetically in the text, abbreviated as *WGD*.

<sup>6</sup> It may be that Walcott is simply conflating Brooklyn with the almost identically pronounced area of Boston where he used to live and work, Brookline.

<sup>7</sup> Around the time of writing this section of the poem Walcott was suffering the break up of his third marriage to the actress Norline Metivier. The Catherine that Walcott constructs in *Omeros* shares an intensely intimate relationship with the author. She is there in his empty house as an alternative presence to his departed wife and she acts as a counter to his grief. It is the author, in tandem with Catherine, who writes "our final letter to the Indian agent" (*O* 182).

<sup>8</sup> Paula Burnett, *Derek Walcott* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), 273. Paula Burnett is one of the very few commentators on *The Ghost Dance* who had access to the script before it was first published in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Timony, who played McLaughlin in the original production of the play at Hartwick College, New York, points out that they avoided "any overt sexual innuendo while staging the hobby horse scene." This may have been because the actress who played Catherine was much younger. Personal email correspondence with Hugh Timoney, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Vestal, *New Sources of Indian History 1850-1891: The Ghost Dance, The Prairie Sioux – A Miscellany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 103. Letter from Catherine to Sitting Bull dated 20 November 1890.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-108.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>13</sup> I have discussed this point with Robert Bensen, Duncan Smith and Hugh Timoney at Hartwick College, all of whom experienced the development of the play for its only performance, and none of them, including Walcott, had noticed the discrepancy.

<sup>14</sup> Biographical details are taken from Robert M. Utley's introduction to James McLaughlin, *My Friend the Indian* (1910; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), vii-xiv. My italics.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xv (My italics).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>17</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>18</sup> The real Kicking Bear lived until 1904. Shortly after Wounded Knee he travelled to Europe with (Buffalo) Bill Cody's circus where he re-enacted the Ghost Dance for white people's entertainment.

---

## Bibliography

Baer, William, ed. *Conversations with Derek Walcott*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996.

Baugh, Edward. *Derek Walcott*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Bensen, Robert. "Catherine Weldon in *Omeros* and *The Ghost Dance*: Notes on Derek Walcott's Poetry and Drama." *Verse* 11.2 (Summer 1994): 119-25.

Brogan, Hugh. *The Penguin History of the United States of America*. London: Penguin, 1990.

Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970.

Burnett, Paula. *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.

Forsyth, Susan. *Representing the Massacre of American Indians at Wounded Knee, 1890-2000*. Lewiston: Edward Mellen Press, 2003.

Hamner, Robert D., ed. *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.

McLaughlin, James. *My Friend the Indian*. 1910. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Mooney, James. *The Ghost-Dance and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. 1892. Abr. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Pollack, Eileen. *Woman Walking Ahead: In Search of Catherine Weldon and Sitting Bull*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002.

Utley, Robert. *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1993.

Vestal, Stanley. *New Sources of Indian History 1850-1891: The Ghost Dance, The Prairie Sioux – A Miscellany*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934.

Walcott, Derek. *The Arkansas Testament*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Omeros*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Walker and The Ghost Dance*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002.

White, Jonathan. “‘Restoration of our Shattered Histories’: Derek Walcott, the Middle Passage and Massacres of Native Americans.” *Agenda* 39 (2002-2003): 295-318.

In *Ghost Dance*, first performed in 1989, Walcott turns a story with a foregone conclusion -- Sitting Bull and his Sioux followers will die at the hands of the Army and Indian agents -- into a portrait of life at a crossroads of American history. In *Walker*, an opera first performed in 1992 and revised for its revival in 2001, Walcott shifts his attention east, taking for his subject David Walker, the nineteenth-century black abolitionist. In Walcott's hands Walker becomes a classical hero for his people: a leader who is also a poet. Product Identifiers. Derek Walcott's familiarity and engagement with the contemporary United States, however, has quite naturally led him to examine major events in the country's historical development. He is unquestionably conscious that there can be limitations to history for his own genesis, especially when it is investigated in a way that replays the clichéd motifs of Caribbean trauma. Early on in *The Ghost Dance* Walcott economically introduces the paraphernalia of manifest destiny that McLaughlin was a leader of; the encroachment of the railways and rolling wagon wheels. Kicking Bear picks up a doughnut baked by Catherine and, because of its shape, intones the words "wagon wheel" (WGD 126). Photo Caption: Derek Walcott with David Rudder at the Walcott family home in Santa Cruz, Trinidad, 2013. Photo: Mark Hardy (Poem dedication :for Earl Lovelace). Copyright : The Derek Walcott Estate [www.DerekWalcott.com](http://www.DerekWalcott.com). #derekwalcott #DavidRudder #tijeandhisbrothers #morningparamin #NobelPrize #fsg #trinidadandtobagocarnival #griot. See More. Arrowsmith Press, in partnership with The Derek Walcott Festival in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, presents the annual Derek Walcott Prize for Poetry to be awarded to a full-length book of poems by a living poet who is not a US citizen (green card holders welcome) published in the previous calendar year. King, Bruce Alvin, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama: Not Only a Playwright but a Company*, the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, 1959-1993, Oxford University (New York, NY), 1995. Olaniyan, Tejumola, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama*, Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 1995. *the Ghost Dance*, p. 81. *Literary Review*, spring, 1986. *London Magazine*, December, 1973-January, 1974; February-March, 1977. Today, Boston Playwrights' Theatre is mourning our founder, Derek Walcott. We wanted to offer the following memory for Derek's past students of playwriting at Boston University. The invited audience was treated to selections from his work including *The Ghost Dance*, *The Joker of Seville*, and many others. We shared essays about Derek in the program for the event, and want you to have the opportunity to read them too. Enjoy! For Walcott, as for Césaire and Perse, this multifaceted legacy on the frontiers of empire fostered elation, an awakening to new possibilities in what Walcott has called "the tidal advance of the metropolitan language" (œMuse 51).