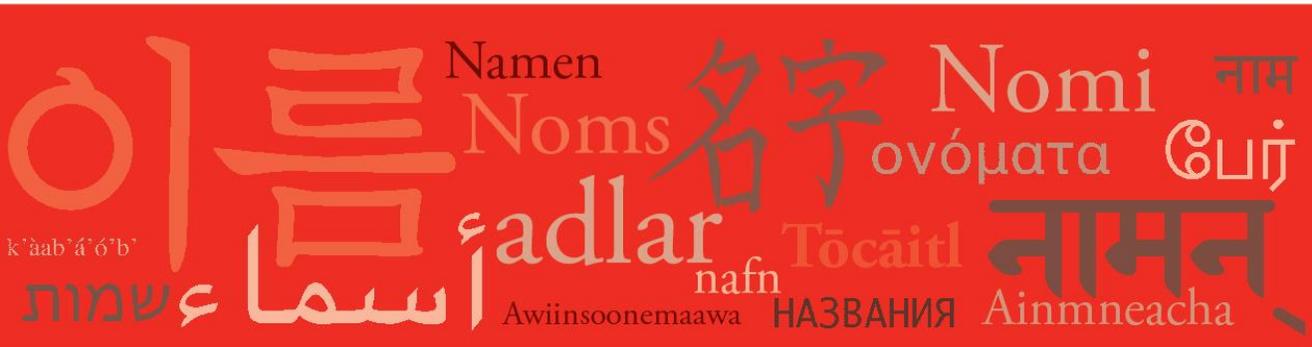# Names | A Journal of Onomastics

Names as Poetic Terms of Art: A Sustained Close Reading of Derek Walcott's "Sainte Lucie"

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Abstract

This article provides a sustained close reading and literary onomastic analysis of Derek Walcott's "Sainte Lucie", arguing that the poem presents names as poetic terms of art: sites of mimicry, misnomer, and transformation. The poem confronts the philosophical and linguistic instability at the heart of naming. By weaving together multilingual references, colonial and postcolonial toponyms, oral traditions, and etymological slippages, names are shown to act not as referential tools but as creative misrepresentations. Resisting referential realism, Walcott presents a name not as a mirror of the world but as a poetic artifact with an aesthetic value derived from its capacity to generate meaning beyond its referent. Ultimately, the article shows that Walcott's poetics do not seek to repair the inherent aporia between name and referent but to embrace it as the very grounds of art. In contrast to dominant philosophical theories (from Frege to Russell to Searle), Walcott's approach recasts the name as a transformative site of memory, loss, and aesthetic form and naming as a mode of poetic authorship that sustains cultural identity amidst historical dislocation. Within this view, naming becomes a mode of poiesis.

Keywords: literary onomastics, poetry, misnomer, mimicry, postcolonial poetics, Caribbean, Derek Walcott

Nobel laureate Derek Walcott's poetry consistently explores names and the act of naming. Scholars have analyzed how names function in his most famous late-career works, such as *Omeros* (1990) which Janet Graham observes as "a site for contesting misnaming and mourning the loss of names" (2020, 34). Maria Cristina Fumagalli (2015, 232) likewise notes how names and their referents interact during the process of creation in *White Egrets* (2010). Yet this preoccupation extends earlier in his career. "Sainte Lucie" from *Sea Grapes* (1976), named for his home island of St. Lucia, problematizes names as forms of representation. The poem uses a series of images to illustrate how names are like metaphors, it multiplies ambiguity derived from misnomers, and it puns on the Saussurean distinction between the signified and signifier. "Sainte Lucie" takes up the view that names are imperfect imitations and, in their arbitrary assignment to referents, lack the significance of that which they aim to represent. Ultimately, the poem posits an alternative to this view and relocates significance within the name itself rather than the referent.

"Sainte Lucie" is a poem centered on names and naming, where names are missing or perpetually missing something of their mark. The title uses the French-language name *Sainte Lucie* rather than the English-language name *St. Lucia* or the Kwéyòl-language name *Sent Lisi*. This choice is significant for multiple readerships. Walcott's regional readers in St. Lucia would be familiar with the French and Kwéyòl names, given the lasting French linguistic influence. Global readers in the 1970s would have recognized the English name, with the French title signaling the island's post-contact colonial history. Had he used the Kwéyòl name, it might have been misunderstood by his wider audience. Collectively, these factors suggest that not only do place names change, but also that, in the act of naming a referent, something is "always being missed", as the poem describes it (Walcott 1976, I.15; subsequent citations identified by line). Different readerships risk missing what others perceive.

A name thus lacks something of its referent. The poem's central metaphor likens a name's imperfect representation to the shape of a shadow cast by a house on the surrounding sand or the imprint of a church bell's impact on a shack wall (I.3–7). That which makes the mark in the shape of a name is missing from the name itself, which recalls how Adam named the world before ever tasting the fruit of knowledge. Much like I. A. Richards' (1936) theory of metaphor, Walcott's poem positions the referent of a name as a tenor transformed by its vehicle, the act of naming. The images of the shadow and dented wall establish this relationship. The sand covered in the house's shadow is transformed, its radiance diminished. Children play house within the shade, creating a doubled mimicry. They seek out crabs but catch none, suggesting a vain search for meaning which escapes capture. This aligns with the speaker of the poem who is "no nearer / to what secret eluded the children" (I.11–12). This search is like a "sea-net / of sunlight trolling the shallows / catching nothing all afternoon" (I.8–10). Walcott repeats the image of a net; "a net rotting among cans" re-appears as a simulacrum in "the sea-net" which is not a net at all (I.8). Like a net, a name might contain some of what it seeks to hold, but by its very definition, much escapes through its holes. As the speaker says, there is "something always being missed / between the floating shadow and the pelican" (I.15–16).

The poem also suggests that a name is more shape than substance. Walcott begins with the specific coastal towns of "Laborie, Choiseul, Vieuxfort, [and] Dennery", but as he ages, the speaker understands less and less the significance sought between name and referent when he says, "I am growing no nearer / to what secret eluded the children / under the house-shade, in the far bell, the noon's / stunned amethystine sea" (I.11–14). The place names are attempts to represent places, but they are mutable. For instance, *Laborie* memorializes the eponymous French governor of the island but was formerly L'Islet à Caret 'Isle of Sea Turtles'

and L'Anse Kawet 'Cove of Sea Turtles', so called after the sea turtles which inhabited that part of the island. Likewise, Choiseul was previously Anse Citron 'Lemon Cove', while Dennery was previously Anse Canot 'Bay of Canoes' and Le Grand Mabouya prior to being renamed after a British governor-general. Under the contemporary names are older ones, implying yet more names underneath those; names all the way down. The speaker is no closer to the bottom of this infinite regression than to knowing "whatever the seagulls cried out for / through the grey drifting ladders of rain / and the great grey tree of the waterspout, / for which the dolphins kept diving" (I.19–22). Like the children chasing crabs, the gulls and dolphins search for something elusive, perhaps because what appears at first sight is illusive like the appearance of a waterspout, mentioned at the stanza's end. While a waterspout throws water from the spray ring surrounding its vortex, its fluid comes from the condensation in the cloud above it, not from the water on which it forms. This suggests that Walcott views a name as more form than content.

The poem posits the non-identity of a name and referent through the phrase "the noon's / stunned amethystine sea" (I.13–14). Walcott's use of "amethystine" introduces ambiguity because it can mean both green and purple though it is more often associated with purple. The noon sea should appear green, but the gem-derived term evokes the purple of amethyst, the color of the midnight sea; the sun's ultraviolet rays change the sea's appearance to the eye. The ambiguous color of amethyst gems, which turn from purple to green when heated or exposed to ultraviolet light, mirrors the dual colors of the sea, demonstrating that there can be two non-identical senses of the same word.

According to the poem, names may seek to contain and to represent a referent but fail to do so. Walcott's "stunned amethystine sea" alludes to Homer's *Iliad* and its epithet *oínopa pónton* (Ancient Greek: οἴνοπα πόντον) which has often been translated into English as meaning 'wine-dark sea'. This well-known epithet has been the subject of many theories as to what color is meant, if any color at all. As an oral poem recorded and an amalgamation of dialects from different regions and times, the *Iliad*'s transcription can vary, as it would have also done when performed by recitation. The lesser-known variation on the epithet, *apeírona pónton* (Ancient Greek: απείρονα πόντον), can be translated as meaning 'limitless sea'. Both formulas share the formal purpose of enabling spontaneous composition in hexameter, but they have different meanings. This is Walcott's paradoxical point: names are always, at least partly, missing that which they seek to hold.

Ambiguity between a name and its referent creates confusion. The poem presents an unbridgeable gap between a name and its referent, demonstrated through a blend of English, French, and Kwéyòl names to suggest that this occurs no matter which language is used. The gap is epitomized by a missing phrase: *de terre* from the French *pomme de terre* 'potato'. Walcott lists additional names to open part two, but this time, rather than place names, they are the names of fruits that can be found in St. Lucia and what they are called there—"pomme arac, / otaheite apple, / pomme cythère, / pomme granate, / moubain, / z'anananas" (II.1–6). The speaker continues his list, saying, "the pineapple's / Aztect helmet, / pomme, / I have forgotten / what pomme for / the Irish Potato" (II.7–12). This catalogue of proper names complements the use of "amethystine" by illustrating how one referent can take multiple names. For example, the Kwéyòl *pomme arac* is also called an *otaheite apple*. The repetition of *pomme* and *apple* makes the referent unclear, to the point that the speaker forgets what *pomme* names the potato. The confusion is understandable given that the pomme arac or otaheite apple has a pear- or guava-like shape, the pomme cythère bears resemblance to a golden plum but is also called a *golden apple* in some parts of the Lesser Antilles, and a pomme granate resembles none of the aforementioned fruits. This confusion, of course, stems from the use of *pomme* in French, borrowed from the Latin *pōmum*, to mean many kinds of fruit.

The poem connects forgetfulness to the borrowing of names across languages. Perhaps the speaker forgets the French for potato because Kwéyòl does not borrow it. Instead, the Kwéyòl for potato, usually referring to a sweet potato, is *patat* which is much closer in sound to the English-language name, *potato*, but also the Irish-language name for it, *práta*, because both come from the Spanish word *patata* which descended from the Taíno (Arawak) word *batata* (Brand 1976, 353). The speaker's forgetfulness thus reflects a historical distance between the common languages of St. Lucia of Walcott's time and its early colonial history; Kwéyòl also forgets the name. Even French has borrowed *batata* in the form of *patata*, a non-standardized form meaning 'potato' or, depending on the region or level of informality, 'sweet potato'. When used idiomatically or colloquially in French, *patate* can also mean *idiot* and having something weigh heavily on a person as in the expression *en avoir gros sur la patate* 'to have a heavy heart'. Like the multiple names for a single fruit, the potato's name is transformed in its travels across languages, changing phonemes, losing syllables, and acquiring new meanings.

The missing *de terre* represents the absent ground between name and referent, and the speaker's forgetfulness creates irony on multiple levels. First, it ironizes the potato's transatlantic history of imperial trade and transplantation from the Americas to Europe and Ireland, the latter of which the potato is closely associated. This kind of historical amnesia forgets the potato's travel as a result of imperial trade markets and the transportation of plants, animals, and people, even though the transiting of *batata* across languages bears this circum-colonial travel. The etymological source of the word *práta* in Irish was most likely supplied by Spaniards who brought potatoes from the Americas. Written history in English tends not to tell this story and

instead commonly claims that Walter Raleigh took the potato to Ireland. Oral histories in Irish, however, say otherwise (McNeill 1949). One theory posits that Irish potato varieties descend from potatoes native to Barbados because of their likeness to each other, whereas English potatoes are more similar to the varieties native to the Virginia area (McNeill 1949). Second, the omission of *de terre* makes the tuber seem like a fruit, and third, irony is compounded in the recognition that *de terre* literally names the ground that separates what is named from the speaker recalling the name itself.

The poem suggests that no language can supply this missing ground, though desire for it persists nonetheless. The poem's speaker, like the seagull heard crying, calls out for a missing language, which extends his forgetfulness of a particular word to the loss of an entire language. "Come back to me my language", he says (II.20–21). What language does he mean here? Russell McDougall identifies the speaker's plea as pertaining to Kwéyòl (1992), and this interpretation is convincing in the respect that the speaker's consciousness centers the language even if much of the poem is written in English. But this is not the only possible or convincing interpretation; the speaker's lament is followed by two more names: the first, *cacao*, of Nahuatl origin meaning 'cocoa bean', and the second, *grigri*, of West African origin meaning 'amulet' or 'charm' (also spelled *grisgris*). Thus, "my language" could refer to African and Amerindian sources in addition to Creole ones. But it is possible, moreover, that Walcott has in mind no particular language and only the desire for a medium that closes the gap between name and referent. For postcolonial writers, this gap in all languages has been too often confused with the gap between experience and expression that is created by a colonial language, but there is no language which can close it, according to Walcott.

The poem also shows how a name can proliferate ambiguity rather than disambiguate meaning. Walcott's speaker calls out, "Come back, / cacao, / grigri, / solitaire, / ciseau / the scissor-bird / no nightingales / except, once, / in the indigo mountains / of Jamaica, blue depth, / deep as coffee, / flicker of pimento, / the shaft of light / on a yellow ackee" (II.22–35). In doing so, he is calling for a return of meaning that has taken flight. *Cacao* names a tree and its seed (otherwise known as *cocoa*), but it may also refer to birds: a cocoa woodcreeper (*xiphorhynchus susurrans*) (Winer 2009, 224), a cocoa thrush (*turdus fumigatus*) (Raffaele et al 2004, 192; Hoyo et al 1992d, 667), a white-lined tanager (*tachyphonus rufus*) (Winer 2009, 224), or even a cacao-headed tanager (*tangara gyrola*) (Winer 2009, 224), all of which are found in the Caribbean. *Cacao*, because of its introduction to the Caribbean by the Spanish, has become a proliferate name of many objects. Similarly, *grigri* can refer to a charm as it means more broadly, but it can also refer to a few kinds of tree that are found in the Caribbean—*buchenavia tetraphylla*, *bucida buceras*, and *virola sebifera* (Grandtner 2005, 120–121,956)—and within Guyana, it can also mean a kind of toucan (Count de Buffon 1812, 132). If by naming something, a primary objective is to disambiguate meaning and reference, Walcott's poem points to the opposite: that a proliferation of names generates ambiguity, contrary to the goal of identification.

The poem also highlights misnomers. Walcott identifies the Jamaican nightingale which is actually a mockingbird (Kaplan 1976, 18). Similarly, "scissor-bird" may refer to a scissor-tailed flycatcher (Hoyo et al 1992c, 184, 424) or, more convincingly, the red-billed steamertail, a hummingbird found in Jamaica (Hoyo et al 1992b, 572). Less likely but nonetheless possible, *ciseau* might refer to the black skimmerbird known in French as *bec-en-ciseaux* (Hoyo et al 1992a, 676). Walcott's use of these names may cause readers to assume referents other than those he intended, which highlights the variability of names. Ackee is a fruit but is prepared like a vegetable, its color shifting in the course of ripening. The poem also includes the misnomer "indigo mountains" to refer to Jamaica's Blue Mountains; they are not actually blue but appear that way to the eye because of the bluish tone of the mists surrounding their peaks. This misnomer is implied using the term *indigo* (etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek *ἰνδικόν*, meaning 'of India'), which invokes yet more misnomers, the *West Indies* from the Spanish *Las Indias Occidentales* and *Las Indias* (Newton 1934, 195).

Part two of the poem situates a name as a kind of mimicry, shifting meaning in the process of word formation. The regional Caribbean term *candlefly* (a bioluminescent beetle, not a fly) is a misnomer formed by compounding. Looking out on a landscape, the speaker comments, "evening opens at / a text of fireflies, / in the mountain huts / ti cailles betassion / candles, / candleflies" (II.42–47). Visible to the speaker are the two sources of light: artificially produced by candles lighting homes in the hills and naturally produced by candleflies. There is mimicry on multiple levels in this scene: the candlefly mimics the luminescence of the lit candle and the group of candleflies themselves mimic the stars in the night sky. Everywhere the speaker looks, he finds mimicry and its attendant transformation of meaning. It is evident in the mountain huts themselves, *cailles* being a term used to name a style of rural home in Haiti that uses the construction techniques of Ara

wak, northern French, and central and west African homebuilding (Vlach 2004, 352). He sees mimicry, too, in the shared Latin etymon behind *important* and *imported*: "this is important water, / important? / imported?" (II.51–53). The speaker of the poem repeats *important* five times within the stanza and connects it to coffee, which mimics the etymological relationship that connects trade, significance, and consequence. This relationship is then connected back to the evening's coffee-like darkness that opens the stanza, "the evening deep as coffee / the morning powerful / important coffee" (II.57–59).

Walcott's poem meditates on the idea that names mimic their referents much like a child resembles a parent, punning on the homophones *sun* and *son*. "In the empty schoolyard / teacher dead today," the speaker says, adding, "still waiting in the sun / for my shadow, / O so you is Walcott? / you is Roddy brother? / Teacher Alix son?" (II.63–64 and 71–75). That the speaker is waiting on his own shadow implies that he is childless, which is reinforced by the repeated presence in the poem of children who are not his and are seemingly without a father: the children playing house (I.7), the "generations / of daughters" (II.116–117), Iona's two children who are not Corbeau's own biological descendants (III.14–21 and IV.15–22), and the unaccompanied "boy banging a tin by the river" (V.II.38). Because the speaker is childless, the most proximal imitation of himself is found in his brother, their twinness contributing to the poem a kind of repetition with a difference not unlike the sense that Gilles Deleuze (1968) theorizes. This part of the poem is indisputably biographical, Roddy being Walcott's fraternal twin brother and Alix their father. Both brothers worked in the arts and theatre and shared a physical resemblance in addition to their parents and some of their DNA, but they were not identical; while they shared the same surname, each brother had his own first name and nearly identical middle names, Roderick Aldon and Derek Alton, which are variations of the same personal name. Walcott's poem is thus saying that names come and go like passing generations, and this idea is repeated in a line of women—"Martina, or Eunice / or Lucilla"—walking down steps the way spring water flows down mountains, "with other generations / of daughters flowing / down the steps, / gens betassion, / belle ti fille betassion [. . .] generations going, / generations gone" (II.102–103, 116–120, and 130–131).

But just as a child is not a copy of a parent, a name cannot completely imitate its referent. The poem advances the position that no language can overcome the aporia between name and referent, and so the cry for language to return to the speaker—"Come back to me / my language" (II.20–21)—can be read not only as a lament for a particular language but also as a wail expressing a desire to repair the symbolic break between name and referent. Where language fails, Walcott finds that poetry, when it is tonally true and articulated in rhythm, provides a resolution to the old philosophical problem of name, referent, and identity. His theory of a name's signification differs from that of John Stuart Mill's (1868) pure denotation and direct reference according to which a name means nothing more or less than the object which it references. Walcott's views differ from Gottlob Frege's ([1892] 1949) "dualism of sense" in which two names can have the same referent but must have different senses. Walcott's views are also distinct from Bertrand Russell's (1905, 1919) "description", where a name indicates descriptions of a referent, and John Searle's (1958) "proposition", where a name raises a set of propositions about a referent. For Walcott, a name is ontologically distinct from a referent and, as such, a name can mean more than a referent, can have different non-identical referents, can fail to describe a referent, and can lack any proposition about a referent. Walcott approaches names as terms of art that mean something different to poets than they mean to others.

While the poem's first two parts foreground the way a name is always missing something of its referent, the final two parts suggest that this imperfect resemblance, despite its shortcomings, is nevertheless sufficient. Part three recites a Kwéyòl *conte* (a folk song sung following a death) about a woman named Iona, who has children by another man, and her lover Corbeau, who adopts them. Corbeau dies, after which the singer encounters him by a river where he explains that the sound of a saxophone—which he had acquired but never played while alive—puns on a cuckold's horns. A saxophone, however, is a woodwind instrument, not a horn. The singer then quotes a proverb: "Nous tous les deux c'est guitar-man, / Pas prendre ca pour un rien, / C'est meme beat-la nous ka chember" which Walcott translates as "We both are guitar men, / Don't take it for anything, We both holding the same beat" (III.42–44, 44–46, respectively). This reflects Corbeau's reaction; though he knows Iona's children are not biologically his own, he examines them and says, "'They may or may not be mine, / I'll mind them all the same'" (III.21–22). Corbeau's adoption suggests that resemblance alone is sufficient for a name to hold meaning as the adopted children are his in name, if not in blood relation.

Ultimately, the poem's final sections reverse the valuation established earlier, arguing that the name holds more significance than its referent because names are sites for human reflection on aesthetic form. This point is made more explicitly in part five of the poem, when the speaker revels in the mimicry of a name, finding it better than its referent in a reverse order of Plato's theory of forms. He recognizes a series of ends and returns—"after the deaths / of as many names as you want, / Iona, Julian, Ti-Nomme, Cacao" (V.III.4–6). Here Walcott lists personal names, the penultimate of which literally means 'little-named' (or nickname), using the diminutive form within Caribbean Creoles. If one were to return to Roseau Valley, St. Lucia and to the church along the coast and the bay, Walcott's speaker says, "between adorations, one might see, / if one were there, and not there, / looking in at the windows / / the real faces of angels" (V.III.18–21). Walcott's equivocation and nearly contradictory conditional statement ("if one were there, and not there") tells the

reader that the highest plane of art, like prayer, manifests what is visible but otherwise unseen and that the imitation (the "not there"), in providing sight of the angels, shows the place of humans within the universe. One need not stand before agents of a higher order to understand a terrestrial humanity, the speaker suggests, because there is art which gives one the capacity to represent something and reflect on its form.

The poem's turn inverts the idea of names as imperfect representations, locating meaning in the name itself rather than the referent it denotes. If it is God who brings the created world into being, it is Adam's dominion over naming, prior to his fall from grace, that imposes order upon creation; in "Sainte Lucie," this gesture is reimagined as a human counterpart to divine creativity. Naming becomes next to godliness, a restorative practice that counters human fallibility by shaping meaning out of silence. The poem's final section contrasts the "cursed" (V.I.22) Roseau Valley of St. Lucia with biblical paradise: "the valley of Roseau is not the Garden of Eden / and those who inhabit it, are not in heaven" (V.II.33−34). Within this fallen landscape, the poem's speaker frames "the two who could be Eve and Adam dancing" (V.I.27,V.II.12) as replicas of "the real Adam and Eve" (V.II.14), just as the parish altar contains within it a miniature of the church itself (V.I.25−26). This doubling recurs throughout the final section which opens with a reference to the Florentine artist Giotto (V.II.2) and closes with an allusion to Dunstan St. Omer, the St. Lucian painter whose mural within the Roseau Valley Church the poem's final section contemplates (V.II.44−46). Through these nested imitations, Walcott aligns naming with art as parallel acts of creation that give life meaning, even if they fail to "break that silence, // which comes from the depth of the world, / from whatever one man believes he knows of God / and the suffering of his kind // it comes from the wall of the altar-piece / ST OMER AD GLORIAM DEI FECIT / in whatever year of his suffering" (V.II.40−46). He made the glory of God, the poem tells us in Latin. Walcott elsewhere describes this "elemental privilege of naming the New World" and asserts of Caribbean letters, "Now began the new naming of things" (Walcott 1998, 40, 48), situating any common noun as a kind of name. For Walcott, naming is more than a linguistic practice; it is a foundational form of poiesis, and names are poetic terms of art through which meaning can be restored.

"Sainte Lucie" is notable for its meditation on naming and also that it follows a poem titled "Names" which Walcott dedicates to Edward Brathwaite, better known as Kamau. Walcott wrote the poems that would be included in *Sea Grapes* between 1970 and 1973, during which time Brathwaite changed his first name from Edward to Kamau at the recommendation of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's mother in 1971 (Quayson 2025), leaving behind a colonial name for an endogenous Gĩkũyũ name in order to refuse interpellation as a colonial subject subservient to the British Crown. It is possible that Walcott wrote and published "Names" without knowledge of Brathwaite's name change, but given that *Sea Grapes* was first published in 1976, it seems more probable to this author that Walcott could have edited the dedication prior to publication to reflect Brathwaite's chosen name. In this way, Walcott's dedication seems to be mimicking the cyclical erasure and replacement of names that his poem "Names" identifies as particularly Caribbean, perhaps inserting Brathwaite's colonial name in the dedication as a point of contention or as a trace to be erased by Brathwaite himself. Whatever the case, part one of "Names" opens with the conceit that its speaker's "race began as the sea began, / with no nouns" (I.1−2). Part one then ends by replacing the noun with the first-person pronoun: "A sea-eagle screams from the rock, / and my race began like the osprey / with that cry, / that terrible vowel, / that I!" (I.23−27). This first-person pronoun is a kind of self-naming, its elongated shape mirroring that of a stick which the speaker of the poem says is all they have: "this stick / to trace our names on the sand / which the sea erased again, to our indifference" (I.32−34).

Walcott's invocation of Brathwaite's colonial name can be read as an observance that self-authorized names, in comparison to the sea's longevity and the empire of worms which rules the decomposition of organic life, are transmutable. A name is no more a monument than is a sandcastle. "Names" asks instead what motivates naming when names are arbitrary: "And when they named these bays / bays, / was it nostalgia or irony? // In the uncombed forest, / in the uncultivated grass / where was there elegance / except in their mockery?" (II.1−7). In this way, the poem identifies mimicry as the site of the origin of life, which the poem associates with a Western and European mentality that would be imitated in the Caribbean: "Being men, they could not live / except they first presumed / the right of every thing to be a noun. / The African acquiesced, repeated, and changed them" (II.24−28). Walcott then catalogues three Caribbean Creole names for hogplum, wild cherry, and bay: *moubain*, *cerise*, and *baie-la* (II.30−32). The poem "Names" ends by portending that even these names, which have been repeated and changed, will become unrecognizable to future generations who will invent their own names. The poem's speaker asks a group of children to look at the stars in the sky, in which they do not see the Orion constellation or even the bright star Betelgeuse, and they reply that they see "fireflies caught in molasses" (II.49). This image is then repeated in the form of the candleflies and houses in "Sainte Lucie".

"Sainte Lucie" shows that names are never perfect mirrors of their referents, yet it is precisely the ambiguity, mimicry, and misnomer that animates our human encounter with language. Across the poem, names shift as shadows, palimpsests of colonial memory, metaphor, and migratory language, testing the limits of representational form. They emerge not as failures but as creative, poetic terms of art. For Walcott, poetry stakes its claim in the misalignment between name and referent, presenting names as aesthetic embodiments marked by absence and transformation. They move across languages, histories, and referential slippages, foregrounding an irreducible gap between word and world. Far from resigning itself to failure, the poem affirms this gap as the locus of creative energy, offering a postcolonial onomastic aesthetic where lack is generative. Walcott's poetics do not seek to repair the aporia but to reimagine it as that missing ground, the very grounds of art.

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