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# The Uses and Misuses of Nostalgia in *Omeros* and *Herzog*: Struggling with Diaspora, Modernity, and Identity in Derek Walcott and Saul Bellow

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**Abstract:** Nostalgia has emerged as an increasingly theorised aspect of modernity, but its potential as a tool to examine key questions literary theorists are asking at the intersection of identity, diaspora, and post-coloniality remains underutilised. This article argues that a close reading of Derek Walcott's *Omeros* and Saul Bellow's *Herzog* demonstrates the counter-hegemonic potential of Bellow's diasporic nostalgia, in contrast with the reinscribing of imperial discourses in Walcott's post-colonial nostalgia. By integrating the conceptual work done in Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* with the ideas of key post-colonial theorists, including Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha, this article also demonstrates the gaps in the current theoretical framework of nostalgia and points towards ways in which it can be developed as a tool for further literary analysis.

**Keywords**: Nostalgia, Bellow, Walcott, Boym, Jewishness, Diaspora, Modernity, Empire, Herzog, Omeros

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## Introduction

Nostalgia is increasingly theorised, but as a framework for literary analysis it remains underutilised, despite its potential for providing new perspectives on some of the key questions contemporary literary theorists are asking at the intersection of identity, modernity, and diaspora. This article applies Svetlana Boym's conceptual approach in *The Future of Nostalgia* to two major twentieth-century works: Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, an epic poem published in 1990 and centred on St Lucia, and Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, a 1964 novel set around the breakdown of the title character's second marriage.[1] I argue that applying Boym's theory to these works both problematises her approach, raising questions about the conceptualisation of nostalgia in context's different from Boym's own, and reveals important aspects of Walcott's and Bellow's own uses of nostalgia when put into dialogue with theorists of identity like Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha.[2] As such, Boym acts as both interlocuter and tool in this article's analysis.

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[1] *Herzog* is italicized when referring to the novel itself, and left in roman when referring to the character of "Herzog".

[2] As a Russian-American writing after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Boym's work reflects on the post-Soviet experience of nostalgia.

Boym distinguishes between two modes of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. The former "proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" through the development of "invented traditions,"[3] while the latter "is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude."[4] For Boym, 'reflective nostalgia' is also a "creative nostalgia" which "reveals the fantasies of the age […so that] one is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been."[5] Close contextual readings of Walcott's and Bellow's texts — including the overlaps and differences between the two authors — complicate Boym's neat division between the two modes of nostalgia, suggesting that her schematic needs to be problematised when applied in post-colonial and immigrant contexts, while also revealing fertile ambiguities in Walcott's and Bellow's own uses of nostalgia.

## Resonances: Diaspora, Modernity, and Identity

A number of revealing overlaps link Bellow and Walcott: both are members of diaspora communities facing complex questions of identity, both are exiles from (nostalgically imagined) homelands and lost languages, and both face questions of assimilation and identity in the face of hegemonic projects of modernity. I begin with these linkages before turning to the differences that complicate Boym's theory of nostalgia: Black versus Jewish, Caribbean versus American, and a product of the era of decolonisation versus a child of the Depression.[6]

The concept of 'diaspora' foregrounds resonances between Walcott and Bellow. James Clifford suggests that "diaspora is different from travel […] in that it is not temporary" and "different from exile, with its frequently individualist focus." Instead, "the term "diaspora" is a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement but of political struggles to define the local, *as distinctive community*, in historical contexts of displacement."[7] This draws on the work of the Boyarins, particularly on identity: "diasporic identity is a disaggregated identity. Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another."[8] Stuart Hall echoes the Boyarins in the context of Black identity, writing that "the diaspora experience […] is defined […] by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*." Such complex identities can give rise to "the surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins," which can "neither be fulfilled nor requited, and hence is the beginning of the symbolic, of representation."[9] As in Boym, nostalgia is a site of creativity and transformation, a view echoed in Paul Gilroy's view of diaspora's relation to modernity: "the diaspora *temporality and historicity, memory and narrativity* that are the articulating principles of the black political countercultures […] grew inside modernity in a distinctive relationship of antagonistic indebtedness."[10] For Gilroy, diaspora temporality represents resistance to the linkage of time and space that structures the realm of the (racial) imaginary; nostalgia emerges as resistance to the spatial-temporal order of modernity.

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[3] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41–42.

[4] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

[5] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 351.

[6] Walcott was born in 1930 and came of age in the post-war period, while Bellow was born in 1915 and vividly remembered the 1930s.

[7] Clifford, *Routes*, 251–252. My emphasis.

[8] Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and Ground of Jewish Identity," 721.

[9] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235-236. Emphasis in the original.

[10] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 191. My emphasis.

Diasporic memory as temporal resistance leads onto the theorisation of time itself. Clifford follows Gilroy in arguing that, for those in the diaspora, “linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future”; for those in the Black Atlantic the Middle Passage represents a key break,[11] dramatized in *Omeros* through Achille’s return to Africa in Book 3.[12] In *Herzog*, too, the past is constantly (re-)erupting, unbidden, into the present, a fact Herzog self-consciously reflects on, describing himself as without “the strength to shut his heart” to the past.[13] Nostalgia’s emergence was itself coeval with early-modern ideas of time as legible, universal, and categorised;[14] beginning as a description of a medical phenomenon in 1688,[15] nostalgia went “from medical malaise to chronic angst,”[16] representing a desire for “the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history.”[17] Alistair Bonnett argues that this means “nostalgia opens up room […] to question modernity,” so that “seemingly melancholic ideas and practices are not just reactive responses to change but can also *be forms of action and activism*.”[18] Nostalgia emerges *from* modernity, while also offering the tools for a critique *of* modernity. Conceptualizable as both Black and Jewish, diasporic nostalgia therefore brings Walcott and Bellow together in two ways: by disrupting the norms of identity and by providing alternative models of modernity.

Identity can now be reintroduced as a complicating factor. Nostalgia/memory and identity are interpolated within each other: “identity formation […] involves memory of past selves, awareness of the present self, and anticipation of future selves.”[19] Following Hall, I see this relationship as one of constant dialogue: “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”[20] Nostalgia represents an attitude towards the past, but a potentially unsteady one on which to base identity. After all, as Walder reminds us, “many of the oppressed have had a strong and understandable nostalgia for what they have perceived as *a lost unity and coherence*.”[21] Here, we can glimpse how Boym’s ‘reflective’ nostalgia can begin to shade into its ‘restorative’ form. She associates restorative nostalgia primarily with projects of hegemonic nationalism, but in the diaspora context narratives that “build on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offer a comforting collective script for individual longing” are tempting ways to construct an identity that otherwise must constantly navigate hybridity and flux.[22] It is on the terrain of identity that the ruptures in Bellow’s and Walcott’s uses of nostalgia can be located.

## Derek Walcott: History, Art, and Empire

For Walcott, as a member of the Black post-colonial diaspora, nostalgia offers alternatives to modernity, but risks an idealisation of either the pre-colonial (African) past or of empire itself. I argue that while Walcott is alive to the risk of idealising the pre-colonial past, *Omeros* is suffused with the, nostalgically conceived, language and imagery of the British empire in a way that undermines its radical intentions. A key interlocuter here is Paula Burnett, who has a more sympathetic reading of *Omeros*, as showcasing "Caribbean people's lived reality […] that historical discourses are sites for the inscription of power" and who argues that Walcott is able "to take control of the discourse to express a different community's subjectivity."[23] I argue precisely that Walcott's work is unable to reinscribe power *because* he is entangled in imperial discourses. My reading of *Omeros* also undermines Boym's two-fold conceptualisation of nostalgia, suggesting that reflective nostalgia can end up serving a restorative purpose.

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[11] Clifford, *Routes*, 264.
[12] Walcott, *Omeros*, 133–152.
[13] Bellow, *Herzog*, 143.
[14] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 8–13.
[15] Starobinski, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” 85.
[16] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited*, 50.
[17] Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*, 8.
[18] Bonnett, *The Geography of Nostalgia*, 6–7. My emphasis.
[19] Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*, 59.
[20] Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 225.
[21] Walder, “Writing, representation, and postcolonial nostalgia,” 940. My emphasis.
[22] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 42.

Walcott's imperial imaginary can be accessed through the character of Plunkett, a former British Army Major, with whom Walcott links himself through romantic nostalgia:[24]

> [w]hy hallow that pretence
> of preserving what they left, the hypocrisy
> of loving them from hotels, a biscuit-tin fence
> smothered in love-vines, scenes to which I was attached
> *as blindly as Plunkett*[25]

Here, Walcott presents an image of self-aware nostalgia, "a biscuit-tin fence smothered in love-vines," and notes "the hypocrisy" of his own positionality relative to the islanders through this nostalgic image, explicitly comparing it with Plunkett — foregrounding their shared ambiguous relationship to St Lucia's people and history.

Plunkett also provides a window into another key issue for Walcott: the relationship between art and history. Early in *Omeros*, Plunkett voices his desire to give St Lucia "its true place in history,"[26] just at the moment Walcott is tasked, by his father, with giving the forgotten people of his boyhood "a voice."[27] By placing these moments together, Walcott highlights the intertwined nature of art and history, a theme that engaged Walcott throughout his career. In 1974, he wrote that "the Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new,"[28] and in 1992 he argued art should be done "with real faith, mapless, Historyless." Yet he also recognised that "[a]ll of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory," and "[i]t is not that History is obliterated" in the Caribbean.[29] In *Omeros*, he writes that "Art is History's nostalgia, it prefers a thatched roof to a concrete factory"– this suggests that art automatically takes a nostalgic view of history, an instinct Walcott wants to resist.[30] Burnett clarifies this when she says that Walcott "reinscribes the presence of history precisely in the place where amnesia is sought"[31] – Walcott wants to use his art not to *escape* history, but to highlight history's oppressions without falling into a nostalgic echoing of the imperial discourse.

I depart from Burnett over Walcott's success in centering the marginal and post-colonial,[32] which has been contrasted by Edward Baugh with Plunkett's reinscribing of St. Lucia into European colonial history.[33] The relationship in *Omeros* between imperialism and art, and Plunkett and Walcott, is not as straightforward as this suggests. While Plunkett laments that "[history] will be rewritten by black pamphleteers, History will be revised, and we'll [the British] be its villians, fading from the map,"[34] elsewhere he recognises that "Empires were swinish."[35] Troublingly, for a reading of *Omeros* as creating "a countermyth" to the Western hegemonic narrative,[36] Walcott gives Plunkett plenty of mythologically-inflected art in his elegiac lament for the British empire:

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[23] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 67.
[24] Walcott appears as both author and character within the poem — in this case both versions are linked to Plunkett.
[25] Walcott, *Omeros*, 228. My emphasis.
[26] Walcott, *Omeros*, 64.
[27] Walcott, *Omeros*, 76. Walcott's father also, as we will see, becomes linked to Plunkett.
[28] Walcott, "The Muse of History," 8.
[29] Walcott, "Nobel Lecture."
[30] Walcott, *Omeros*, 228.
[31] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 89.
[32] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 34.
[33] Baugh, *Derek Walcott*, 189–190.
[34] Walcott, *Omeros*, 92. Sic.

> The flag then was sliding down from the hill-stations
> of the Upper Punjab, like a collapsing sail;
> an elephant folded its knees, its striations
> wrinkling like the tea-pavilions after the Raj,
> whose ebbing surf lifted the coastlines of nations[37]

The master metaphor in these lines is the sea: the British flag becomes a sail and the Indian Raj an ocean slowly withdrawing to reveal new post-imperial nations. This metaphor is not an innocent one — it frames empire as natural, like the sea, and beyond individual responsibility. It also overlaps with the British empire's own discursive strategies — presenting the British as a 'plucky' band of seafarers rather than a powerful economic-military power — and complicates Walcott's later linkage of his art, and St Lucia, with the sea, as in his claim that "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea."[38]

Plunkett's positioning within this imperial symbolism makes it striking that Walcott, towards the end of *Omeros*, admits that "[t]here was Plunkett in my father."[39] Shortly after this comparison, the Walcott figure in the poem meets Plunkett and 'remembers' serving under him in the (British) army cadets, dramatizing his emotion over their shared, now lost, past: "'Nice to see you, sir,' said my old Sergeant Major, *and my eyes blurred*." Walcott ends this meeting by acknowledging "the wound of a language I'd no wish to remove" — the language is English, imposed on St Lucia, but now being claimed as Walcott's own.[40] That Walcott's reconciliation to English comes in connection with Plunkett, the poem's symbol of British imperial memory, showcases the extent to which Walcott's own poetic (English) language emerges from within a nostalgic constellation enmeshed with empire.

This linkage between empire and language can be seen in Walcott's use of metaphor. Despite Walcott's claim that by *Omeros'* end "the mirror of History has melted," leaving "a wide page without metaphors,"[41] the entire poem showcases his use of historical metaphors as a device for "circl[ing] [… the] island with […] art."[42] For example, Walcott ends Chapter XXII with the claim that the dusk "had no historical regret for the fishermen beating mackerel in their seine."[43] Yet that line has been proceeded by lavish historical imagery, filtered through the mind of Plunkett — and, therefore, through metaphors of a nostalgically (re)imagined Britain:

> sometimes cicadas
> past the edge of the pavilion burst into applause
> for a finished stroke. By five, the fielders' shadows
> on the slanted field were history, and the light
> for that moment turned as tea-tinted as the prose
> of old London journals[44]

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[35] Walcott, *Omeros*, 63.

[36] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 61–62.

[37] Walcott, *Omeros*, 30.

[38] Walcott, *Omeros*, 320.

[39] Walcott, *Omeros*, 263. The father who also gave Walcott his artistic mission, suggesting another overlap of history and art.

[40] Walcott, *Omeros*, 270. My emphasis.

[41] Walcott, *Omeros*, 296–297.

[42] Walcott, *Omeros*, 291.

[43] Walcott, *Omeros*, 120.

[44] Walcott, *Omeros*, 119.

St Lucia is (re)captured within imperial imagery, reinscribed as British: cicadas become cricket spectators; St Lucia's light becomes both "tea-tinted" and linked to "London," the imperial capital.[45] Ultimately, it is for the reader as much as for Plunkett, that the nostalgic imperial imagery "alchemiz[es] the bananas near the coal market."[46]

Burnett has rightly connected Walcott's nostalgia with childhood, which Walcott contrasted with "a present (America-oriented) materialism."[47] This instinct can be seen in Walcott's Nobel Prize lecture: "to be still in the nineteenth century […] may not be such a bad deal."[48] Walcott also gives this nineteenth-century nostalgia to the Plunketts, with Major Plunkett saying of his wife that "[s]he was framed forever in the last century […] this formal affection for candlelight on the brass buttons of his Regimental mess-jacket."[49] Yet Walcott worries that St Lucia, his nostalgically conceived refuge from modernity, is becoming increasingly similar to everywhere else, so that "'Home' […] becomes a concept under siege."[50] The threat comes particularly from tourism, lamented by Walcott in gendered terms: "the village did not seem to care that it was dying in its change, the way it whored away a simple life that would soon disappear."[51]

Burnett frames this lament as resistance to neo-colonialism, as tourism "reinscribes the colonial discourse of exoticism as part of its realpolitik of exploitation."[52] It is revealing, however, that Walcott's resistance is based on nostalgia for a childhood in which St Lucia was a British colony.[53] The contrast Walcott draws is, ultimately, not between pre-historical isolation and modern neo-colonial domination, but between a British, imperial past, and an American, capitalist future. Walcott is conscious in *Omeros* of his use of imperial nostalgia, wondering if "I want the poor to stay in the same light so that I could transfix them in amber, the afterglow of an empire."[54] Walcott's use of imperial motifs as (flawed) resistance emerges from his own privileged position; his middle-class, English upbringing means that he is subject to the force of what Homi Bhabha describes as colonial mimicry, "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*"[55] By this Bhabha means that the colonial discourse wants the colonized to be *like* the coloniser, but not precisely the same, as that would undermine the hierarchy on which the colonial authority is built. However, when applied to Walcott, what is important is the sameness, the way in which the colonial discourse reforms the colonial subject to match the colonists' own standards. Gayatri Spivak is also helpful here, particularly her claim that "[t]he subject implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counter-possibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups. The post-colonial intellectuals *learn that their privilege is their loss.*"[56] Walcott attempts to escape this knot by linking himself to the St Lucian people through their shared slave history: "Privileges did not separate me, instead they linked me closer to them by that mental chain whose eyes interlocked with mine, as if we all stood at a lectern or auction block."[57] The comparison, however, rings false — there *is* a difference between the lectern and the auction block — and Walcott remains conscious to the end of the poem of his distance from the islanders, reflecting on whether he has not "made their poverty my paradise?"[58]

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[45] Tea, of course, is not only a key symbol of British identity, but was a key driver of imperial expansion.

[46] Walcott, *Omeros*, 120.

[47] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 51.

[48] Walcott, "Nobel Lecture." A surprising claim, given that slavery was still taking place across the British empire at the century's opening, and that St Lucia was under British control for almost its entirety.

[49] Walcott, *Omeros*, 303.

[50] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 53.

[51] Walcott, *Omeros*, 111.

[52] Burnett, *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, 54.

[53] St Lucia only achieved final independence in 1979.

[54] Walcott, *Omeros*, 227.

[55] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86. Italics in the original.

[56] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 82. My emphasis.

[57] Walcott, *Omeros*, 210.

The past is deployed in another way during Achille's journey back (in time and place) to Africa in Book 3. This enacts the possibility of a return home to a nostalgically conceived moment before slavery and the diaspora. Walcott views this as an impossible, and undesirable, dream and has Achille return home reconciled to his diasporic St Lucian identity: "I'm coming home with him, Homeros, my n[*]gger, my captain, his breastplates bursting with happiness."[59] In this he is following Clifford and Gilroy in seeing "attempts to recover direct connection with Africa" as "both escapist and ahistorical."[60] Yet, at the poem's conclusion, Walcott makes explicit the function of the swift motif that has appeared throughout as "sew[ing] the Atlantic rift with a needle's line, the rift in the soul."[61] Walcott wants to close the wound of slavery, reintegrating the African past into contemporary Caribbean identity — writing, in 1974, "I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning *and soldering* of two great worlds."[62] Yet, by nostalgically grounding his poem in the language and imagery of his imperial childhood, the identity he is attempting to integrate this slave past with is itself unable to escape the imperial wound. Diaspora as a source of "counterhistories" against "hegemonic modernity" is closed off by Walcott's approach;[63] the diaspora is integrated into modernity by the totalising power of imperial nostalgia, even though Walcott himself understands that nostalgia as a tool against (American) modernity. Boymian reflective nostalgia ceases to generate creative possibilities for the future and becomes sterile, a dead end. There is nowhere left to turn in Walcott's poetry of imperial nostalgia.

## Saul Bellow: Memory, Jewishness, and Diaspora Identity

Bellow also faces challenges in navigating nostalgia's pitfalls, although in his case they arise from the tensions created by his Jewish immigrant identity. I draw here on the work of Andreea Ritivoi, who has argued that for immigrants "nostalgia can both facilitate and hamper the transition to a new environment, depending on how it can be integrated with a specific view of personal identity."[64] Bellow was not straightforwardly an immigrant, but his early life was lived in a Jewish environment that replicated aspects of a Jewish Shtetl and which functioned in memory similarly to Eastern Europe for the other immigrants Ritivoi examines.[65]

*Herzog* dramatizes this immigrant tension through Herzog's attempts to construct a satisfactory hybrid identity for himself. Herzog has been viewed as suffering from an inability to "live up to his Jewish, nineteenth century ideal of a man"[66] — early on in the novel, for example, he laments that "it was painful to his instincts, his *Jewish* family feelings, that his children should be growing up without him."[67] Like Walcott, he not only "derives his standards from childhood, he also longs to return there: it is a golden age for him."[68] Yet, while Herzog recognises that "[a]ll he ever wanted was [in childhood]," at the same time he fights "the insidious blight of nostalgia […] – softening, heart-rotting emotions, black spots, sweet for one moment but leaving a dangerous acid residue."[69] Here the seventeenth-century idea of nostalgia as illness remerges, reframed now through modern ideas of mental illness:

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[58] Walcott, *Omeros*, 228.
[59] Walcott, *Omeros*, 159. Even in this moment of homecoming to St Lucia Walcott cannot avoid a textual homage to poetic tradition in this echo of Walt Whiteman's *O Captain! My Captain!*.
[60] Clifford, *Routes*, 264.
[61] Walcott, *Omeros*, 319.
[62] Walcott, "The Muse of History," 27. My emphasis.
[63] Clifford, *Routes*, 264.
[64] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self,* 4.
[65] Bellow was born in Canada and lived there until he was nine, growing up in Jewish communities in and around Montreal.
[66] Clayton, *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man*, 202.
[67] Bellow, *Herzog*, 23. My emphasis.

> To haunt the past like this – to love the dead! Moses warned himself not to yield so greatly to this temptation, this peculiar weakness of his character. He was a depressive. Depressives cannot surrender childhood – not even the pains of childhood. He understood the hygiene of the matter.[70]

Herzog's experience of nostalgia as sickness arises because he sees modern values as inherently antithetical to personal memory: "you must sacrifice your poor, squawking, niggardly individuality […] to historical necessity."[71] Modernity, in this conception, is arrayed against the individual and against idiosyncratic expression; nostalgia becomes anti-modern, an indulgence and a failing according to the central principles of modernity. That is why Herzog describes his nostalgia as a "weakness": from the perspective of the modern values that Herzog has internalised, this kind of self-expression *is* a weakness, a weakness that can be understood as a symptom of a deeper sickness. This is truer for Jews than for other groups, as the Shoah becomes the ultimate expression of these depersonalising modern values: "What happened during the War abolished Father Herzog's claim to exceptional suffering. We are on a more brutal standard now, a new terminal standard, indifferent to persons."[72]

Despite his internalisation of these perceived modern values, Herzog is also critical of the outlook this kind of thinking gives rise to, describing "*the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness.*"[73] Herzog attacks some of the key tenants of Modern*ism* — alienation and inauthenticity — as represented by T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Yet, as an academic and intellectual steeped in the Modernist tradition, Herzog is also critical of his sentimentalising attitude, of his constant return to outdated, and nostalgically framed, values: "would you deny them [the masses] the right to exist? Would you ask them to labor and go hungry while you enjoyed delicious old-fashioned Values?"[74] Here, we see that Herzog expresses the same kind of concerns as Walcott, that only the privileged have the luxury of indulging in views and poetic imagery that can do nothing for ordinary people.

Herzog associates his sentimental instinct with "potato love," which he describes as "amorphous, swelling, hungry, indiscriminate, cowardly," and which is linked with Herzog's love for friends and family.[75] Like Walcott's *Omeros*, early in the novel Herzog seems trapped by nostalgia, stuck with a set of outdated ideas that offer no route out of modernity. Bellow, however, ultimately has Herzog make positive use of his nostalgia to escape the trap of privilege by harnessing the diaspora's counter-hegemonic force, following what Ritivoi has described as an immigrant's "process of self-fashioning largely structured around […] nostalgic reveries."[76]

Returning to his Ludeyville house at the novel's end, Herzog reflects: "Monument to his sincere and loving idiocy, to the unrecognised evils of his character, symbol of his *Jewish*

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[68] Clayton, *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man*, 203.
[69] Bellow, *Herzog*, 140–141.
[70] Bellow, *Herzog*, 143.
[71] Bellow, *Herzog*, 93.
[72] Bellow, *Herzog*, 149.
[73] Bellow, *Herzog*, 75. Italics in the original (as always when Bellow writes from Herzog's first-person perspective).
[74] Bellow, *Herzog*, 201.
[75] Bellow, *Herzog*, 91.
[76] Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self*, 6.

*struggle* for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America."[77] What does this struggle consist of? Herzog remains aware of the dictates of capitalism, of the realist outlook represented by his brother Will, whose "eyes were quietly and firmly shrewd, not dreaming," and his other brother's judgement about "sink[ing] so much dough into this old barn." Yet Herzog no longer dismisses family feelings as "potato love," acknowledging that "he loved them all, notwithstanding."[78] Herzog now rejects, in a letter addressed to Nietzsche, the dismissal of mankind as a "thieving, stinking, unilluminated, sodden rabble"[79] and recognises a common humanity: "I am simply a human being, more or less."[80] Crucially, however, Herzog's transformation is framed through a distinctively Jewish lens: "[w]hat a struggle I waged! – left-handed but fierce. But enough of that – here I am. Hineni!"[81] As Wirth-Nesher has noted, the Hebrew word 'Hineni' was Moses' "reply to God's call from the Burning Bush," making explicit Herzog's connection to his "biblical namesake." This placement of the Hebrew after the English reverses the translation order of the rest of the novel, representing a final victory of the "Mosaic collective 'I', the Hebrew 'Hineni!'" over the individualist, "romantic American Emersonian spirit."[82] Herzog has integrated Jewishness, represented through the intergenerational framework of the Torah, into his present, reframing diasporic nostalgia from sickness to a source of joy and resistance against the harsh dictates of modernity, so that "Herzog's brown eyes, so often overlaid with a film or protective chitin of melancholy, the by-product of his laboring brain, shone again."[83]

By the novel's end, Herzog's immigrant family can hold both modernity, business, capital (represented by Will/Shura), and resistance, Jewishness, love (represented by Herzog) in one. Herzog stops writing his letters "to people in public life, to friends and relatives and at last to the dead."[84] The reaching out to the past that these letters represented is no longer needed, as he has successfully integrated his past into his present. In combining modernity and diasporic nostalgia, Herzog has begun to construct what Homi Bhabha has described as a hybrid 'Third Space,' which "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives."[85] Herzog can now rebuild connection from the base of this new, hybrid, identity: "I didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life. I am glad of that. I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible."[86] This is what the diaspora, and the hybrid identity that comes with it, can offer against an atomising modernity: connection, community, humanity. Herzog understands the past, his 'golden' childhood, not as a model to return to but as a foundation for his future.

## Conclusion

Both nostalgia and diasporic identity represent potential sites of resistance and counter-hegemony to modernity. Walcott consciously advances his project in *Omeros* with this in mind; he situates himself *against* modern American values (represented by tourism), against the legacy of empire and slavery, and *for* a new hybrid Caribbean identity. Ironically, however, it is Bellow, who has not traditionally been situated in the critical literature as a counter-hegemonic voice, who advances the more compelling vision for an alternative to modernity, integrating Jewish memory into an ideal based on community and shared humanity. Walcott's more ambitious project is trapped by an inheritance of empire that inheres in his very imagery and language, so that his desire to reintegrate the African past into the present can only ever end up by reaffirming an imperial identity. This reading collapses the distinction Boym wants to make between restorative and reflective nostalgia, highlighting the ways in which Walcott's reflective nostalgia ends up in a restorative project. Bellow is a better fit with Boymian reflective nostalgia, with nostalgia in *Herzog* readable as resistance to modernity; yet *Herzog* also introduces complexity, showing the pitfalls and opportunities around nostalgia in the context of a hybrid, immigrant identity. Only with this reshaped awareness can we begin to map alternative modernities on the shifting terrain of a present that is increasingly diasporic, hybrid, and nostalgic.

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[77] Bellow, *Herzog*, 309. My emphasis.
[78] Bellow, *Herzog*, 329–330.
[79] Bellow, *Herzog*, 319.
[80] Bellow, *Herzog*, 317.
[81] Bellow, *Herzog*, 309-310. Emphasis in the original.
[82] Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English*, 113–120.
[83] Bellow, *Herzog*, 313.
[84] Bellow, *Herzog*, 1.
[85] Rutherford, "The Third Space," 211.
[86] Bellow, *Herzog*, 322.

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