Chapter Three
Landscape and Seascape

Perhaps Walcott, more than any other writer, is self-conscious as regards to the historic role he is playing in the evolution of the literature of the Caribbean and he observed once:

I knew I lived in a region of bewitching beauty but I found no poet opened magic casements in the way Keats transformed and Wordsworth illuminated the English countryside .... This island is full of sweet sounds but why were there no voices? (qtd. in Narasimhaiah 234)

An early sonnet of Walcott's "A City's Death by Fire" finds intersections between book "leaves" and "trees", the poet's papery "tale" and the equally tenuous "wooden world" with its visible stories, leading to his declaration: "All day I walked abroad among the rubbed tales" (5). Walcott constructs, in Irwin's pertinent terms, "a human language that is continuous with the language of nature because its elements are borrowed from that language" (Dream 33).

"Midsummer, Tobago", brings out the harmonious blend of the poet's thoughts with the landscape around:
Broad sun-stoned beaches.
White heat.
A green river.
A bridge,
Scorched yellow palms
From the summer-sleeping house
drowsing through August.
Days I have held
days I have lost,
days that outgrow, like daughters,
my harbouring arms. (1-11)

The concluding simile "like daughters" associated with "days" is perfect in the sense that it suggests the possibility of acquisition of newer, deeper meanings and feelings to certain anticipated and defined stages in the flux of time, thus ultimately underlining the poet’s imaginative power as a commentator on Nature.

Another such instance that stresses the self-acknowledged skill to comment on the order of existence in the Caribbean is found in the poem, "The Morning Moon":

It’s early December,
the breeze freshens the skin of this earth,
the goose-skin of water,

and I notice the blue plunge
of shadows down Morne Coco Mountain,
December's sundial,

happy that the earth is still changing,
that the full moon can blind me with
her forehead
this bright foreday morning,

and that fine sprigs of white are springing
from my beard. (5-14)

In "To Return to the Trees", the poet seems to be
peculiarly cognisant of the mutability of existence, in
his own role, serving as a historic connecting link:

Senex, an Oak.
Senex, this old sea-almond
unwincing in spray

in this geriatric grove
on the sea-road to Cumana.
To return to the trees,

to decline like this tree,
the burly Oak
of Boanerges Ben Jonson! (1-9)
Walcott's "In a Green Night" also dwells on a domestic scene, perceived from a Caribbean vantage point. Here, Walcott is of the view that religion, nature and art are perishable and that "each living thing" can be "doomed" and "gloried" by its own inherent mortality: "By noon harsh fires have begun / To quail those splendours which they feed" (11-12).

Walcott's idyllic paradise in the Caribbean, enjoys only a cyclical pattern of life, as exemplified by the orange tree which

... has her winters and her spring,

Her moult of leaves, which in their fall

Reveal, as with each living thing,

Zones truer than the tropical. (5-8)

Nissim Ezekiel's art also shows a great affinity for nature. The poet, for instance in "Song" from Poems (1950-1), cannot remain in the comparative stillness and safety of "the room's enclosed dark" (1) for "The heart of the day beats still in the dark / The dust of the day is eating my heart" (9-10). In "Morning Prayer" from The Unfinished Man, there is an inevitable merger of the external landscape with the internal world of the artist himself in Ezekiel too:

God grant me certainty

In kinship with the sky,
Air, earth, fire, sea —
And the fresh inward eye. (9-12)

According to K.D. Verma, the nature images are the archetypal life-symbols:

They project a pastoral vision of a fully refulgent and harmonious life, a pattern in which man enters into sacred communion with his cosmos, including objects of nature, as a metaphysical condition of his integrated humanity and of his dire need to foster a community of being. (231)

The poet pleads for "the fresh inward eye" because it is only with such a gift of imagination that he can see every object in a harmonizing, holistic light:

It is characteristic of Ezekiel to say that mere warmth of human emotions is not enough unless heavens grant — what Aristotle called — 'the greatest gift of genius' — the ability to perceive new and fresh resemblances between disparate objects. (Kurup 69)

The following lines from "Something to Pursue" bring out Ezekiel's penchant for connecting the bodyscape with the landscape. Even the shifting
vicissitudes of his moods owe their sustenance primarily to the environs that surround him. Landscape itself, to Ezekiel, turns out to be a suitable enhancement of his own inner feelings:

Out of doors, lightly clad on beaches,  
Easily amused in parks and places,  
Full length in siestas by a river, roused  
To crescendoes in sunshine or the long shadows  
Of persistent summer days, pagan  
Beside a girl or tasting freedom  
On a bicycle, ... (27-33)

Like Walcott, Ezekiel too is often preoccupied with the issue of mutability of existence in art. "Remember and Forget" opens with an admirable description of spring viewed from an aesthetic perspective:

Days of moderate warmth and cold  
In April come, with early light  
Slipping through the curtains, and the sound  
Of birds, breaking through the window-panes,  
And in the room the smell of wind and wet,  
The touch of Spring on lips and eyes. (1-6)

The poem makes a survey of the evolution of boyhood to manhood and eventually to ripe old age,
commenting thus on the mutability of existence. The reference to "... giant hopes in classrooms, playgrounds, parks" (10) refers obviously to adolescence, and the phrase, "The first vibration in the conscious blood" (15) alludes to budding adulthood with its "swift rising of the flesh above / The stream of habit" (16-17), in time followed by senescence: "Responding to a call upon the air" (18).

Mutability of existence is ubiquitous and even flowers are no exception. In "Edinburgh Interlude",

You may imagine the flowers
dancing in the breeze, etc.
That is only part
of the story. If you want
a fuller truth,
there is a case
for remembering
how soon the flowers die
after they have danced. (34-42)

The significance of these poems lies in the primary preoccupation of the poet, who is intensely alive to the issue of mutability and mortality, despite all his penchant for sensuous apprehension of life. In Ezekiel the standpoint veers on to the cosmic in "Philosophy":
The landscape in its geologic prime
Dissolves to show its quintessential slime.
A million stars are blotted out. I think
Of each historic passion as a blink
That happened to the sad eye of Time. (6-10)

The Psalmist may have seen 'the blessed man', in
the following terms: "And he shall be like a tree
planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his
fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and
whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps.1.3).

But Ezekiel, the 'Latter Day Psalmist' has a
radically different opinion on the rationale of
'blessedness' mainly because of his obsession with the
question of mutability and evanescence:

Rare is the man whose fruit is
in his season. Yet, his leaf
must wither, and that which
appears to prosper, is often
dying at the root. (11-15)

Life, in ontological terms, is paradoxically
viewed from a perspective of immanent death in contexts
such as these. The poet of the Latter Day Psalms
emerges, by and large, as an incurably rational,
realistic and radical being, in contrast to a
comparatively more gullible and garrulous Psalmist who raises few questions. Ezekiel’s protagonist finds that the ungodly are no more chaff than the godly; both shall be driven away by the wind of time and mutability.

Walcott’s poems connect often the microcosm with the macrocosm. For example, in "Dark August", "So much rain, so much life like the swollen sky / of this black August. My sister, the sun,/ broods in her yellow room and won’t come out." (1-3)

The protagonist seems to be more than willing to reconcile with her, despite the yawning difference in their present states of mind:

... But I am learning slowly
to love the dark days, the steaming hills,
the air with gossiping mosquitoes,
and to sip the medicine of bitterness,
(12-15)

The imagery of light that defines objects in the macrocosm, is not only exploited to connote the inner realities of the mind in Walcott, but also to suggest universal truths, such as mutability. Walcott finds mutability even more strikingly inexorable and dramatic, on account of its matter-of-fact reticence. In "Endings", he affirms,
Things do not explode,
they fail, they fade,
as sunlight fades from the flesh,
as the foam drains quick in the sand,
..............................................
it dies with the sound
of flowers fading like the flesh. (1-4, 7-8)

Walcott employs such a simile for a loud assertion of a passionate or emotional truth, rather than for mere rhetorical flourish: "even love's lightning flash / has no thunderous end" (5-6).

In the poem, "Oddjob, a Bull Terrier", the protagonist points out the paradoxical similarity between life and weather. There are moments in life when our readiness turns out to be unreadiness: "You prepare for one sorrow, / but another comes. / It is not like the weather" (1-3).

A similar effort at acceptance and readiness for reconciliation is presented in the following lines of the same poem:

We shall get ready for rain;
you do not connect
the sunlight altering
the darkening oleanders
in the sea-garden,
the gold going out of the palms. (13-18)

These lines make a distinction between microcosm and macrocosm, underlining human indulgence at existential struggle and ennui.

At times, the effort in Walcott, is to establish a tension between the plainness of surface and actual complexity at the core. In "A Tropical Bestiary", for instance, the sea crab is envied, "obliquely burrowing to surface / from hot plain sand" (3-4) and the "Tarpon provokes the question: "Can such complexity of shape, / such bulk, terror, and fury fit / in a design so innocent ...?" (40-43). The movement in the poem tends towards "the style past metaphor" (10), "the passion of / plain day" (12-13), towards acceptance of the ordinary for itself: "Everything Is" (14), "All styles yearn to be plain / as life" (49-50).

Sometimes, the emphasis in Walcott, is laid on the transforming power of imagination of an extraordinarily receptive mind, approximating transcendence, as in "Guyana": "He was a flower, / weightless. He would float down" (58-59).

Both in Walcott and Ezekiel, landscape expresses different moods, provokes varied thoughts and calls for
diverse similes. Ezekiel has his own stock of metaphors to express profound truths. In the poem, "For Her", associational devices are used to manipulate the reader's point of view. The controlling metaphor or conceit is of burning, with its concomitants — wood, ash, smoke, brightness and glow. Initially, at least, love is contrasted with wood:

I know that wood if burnt
Produces ash and smoke.
...........................
With love it is not so.
...........................
... The more you love
The less you burn away. (1-2, 5, 8-9)

Interestingly enough, what follows appears to be a contradiction in terms, for love is not as permanent as the idea of it is: "It is the analogy that burns, / But staying bright, makes the eyes glow" (13-14). The idea of love in the poem is, thus, associated with the concrete hardness of wood. The same image of "ashes" appears again in "At Fifty": "I do not want the ashes / of the old fire but the flame itself" (15-16). The protagonist here longs for his youth rather than all the digested but dispassionate experience of old age.
Humans are more fortunate than nature because they can enjoy freedom and variety which the latter cannot:

Try to rise, sunnyboy, rise
before I rise —
You'll never succeed!
I'll always rise earlier,
I can rise when I please.

It's not your fault.
I sympathise.

I don't have to follow
a fixed pattern. (1-5, 11-12, 15-16)

The very informality of the tone of the above poem, "To the Sun" sets the message of the poem, as the persona's affinity towards nature is expressed through the teasing tone of familiarity.

In his "Song for Spring", Ezekiel feels the presence of spring all around him, symbolizing rebirth and a new beginning of life. According to Northrop Frye, "the consciousness of spring and life is inclusive of the consciousness of winter and death" (158). Armed with such a comprehensive vision, Ezekiel, the man and lover, prays to the freshness of the spring in "Song for
Spring": "And let my body's love be clean. / So much must die that I may live / Spaciously" (23-25).

In Ezekiel's "The Child", the protagonist travels down his memory lane, recalling how he once used to wake up to the wind and the sun, images of regeneration and light, and receive even kisses from "the constant newness of the world" (4). Juxtaposing the past with the present, and remembering his first experience of words fresh as rain, he declares:

And now again the simple thrust
Of all that lives is love within me, reaching
Down for water
Up for sunlight
Sprouting greenly in the fragrant air. (16-20)

The poem "A Morning Walk" expresses Ezekiel's innate serenity, through subtly embedded mythical imagery:

The garden on the hill is cool,
Its hedges cut to look like birds
Or mythic beasts are still asleep.
His past is like a muddy pool
From which he cannot hope for words.
The city wakes, where fame is cheap,
And he belongs, an active fool. (36-42)
Chacko analyses the imagery in the above poem in the following manner:

The issue of the relationship between the individual and racial or the collective conscious reverberates throughout the stanza. The allusions to garden and city instinctively recall the Garden of Eden and the City of God. The contrast between the city of vision and the city of history "Where fame is cheap" is revealing and startling. (75)

Ezekiel's metaphysical poem "Two Images" presents the poet's idea of freedom and bondage in paradoxical terms:

From the long dark tunnel
of that afternoon, crouching, humped,
waiting for the promised land,
I peeped out like a startled animal
and saw a friend flapping his angelic wings.
I welcomed him.

Fish-soul in that silent pool
I found myself supported
by the element I lived in,
but dragged out with the greatest ease
by any fluttering fly
at the end of a hook. (1-12)
In the first stanza of the poem confined in the "Long, dark tunnel", the soul is presented as an anxious prisoner struggling for release, when any rescuing agent will appear angelic in his eyes with the words "crouching", "humped", "startled" suggesting the soul's frantic efforts, confinement and anxiety. However, the "fish-soul" in the second stanza suggests the situation of a happy victim utterly in tune with the elements around being startled by the sudden release from the hook. The poem, as a whole presents the paradoxical perspectives of freedom-in-slavery and life-in-death in existence. It is a typical kind of yo-yo feeling that the soul experiences in life which is presented by Ezekiel here, nourishing a strong will to escape while being thoroughly apprehensive at the outcome of such an escape.

Walcott feels so intimate with the Caribbean that he does not need any romantic cloud to idealize/idolize it:

The romanticized, pastoral vision of Africa that many black people hold can be an escape from the reality around us. In the West Indies, where all the races live and work together, we have the beginnings of a great and unique society. The problem is to
recognize our African origins but not to romanticize them. (qtd. in Taylor 85)

Nevertheless, Walcott uses language with a keen individual sense of its full, visual potential, as can be seen in Chapter Ten of Another Life:

The beach

is plagued with flies, at the lime edge

Of channel, their black hymn

drones in the ear. (7-10)

Often, Walcott also employs a photograph-like realistic imagery. Commenting on the present West Indian literature, Louis James states:

Here Caribbean flora and fauna are no longer emotive decorations as they tend to be in earlier Caribbean poetry, but they are integral to the poet's act of creation. They show poets true to their experience, making no compromise for the sake of European readers who have never broken a sappy twig of poinsettia, who have never seen, lying motionless in a coral cave, the huge obscene mass of a grouper fish. (34)

Unpleasant images crowd in Walcott's "Tales of the Islands":

"Maingot", the fisherman called that pool
blocked by
Increasing filth that piled between ocean
And jungle, with a sighing grove
Of dry bamboo, its roots freckled with light
Like feathers fallen from a migratory sky.
Beyond that, the village. Through
urine-stunted trees
A mud path wriggled like a snake in flight.

(85-91)

The description is unmistakably realistic. The predicament of the human beings here is like almost that of the tadpoles in "the tea-coloured pool" where they "Must breed, drink, rot with motion" (98).

In "The Castaway", Walcott articulates, "In the sun, the dog’s feces / Crusts, whitens like coral" (16-17).

Neither can the following picture of Saint Lucia presented in "Guyana" be called quite flattering:

if nothing comes,
if no one ever escapes,
.................................
there is nothing left for us
but to make these coarse lilies lotuses,
for filth to contemplate its own reflection.

Cycle bells startle the pigeons.
The air has been cleared of hawks, and the bourgeois gurgling like canals reminisce over carrion.

Spires walk the sea-wall.
The wind unwraps them to wires.
They recede, skeletal, skeletal
the streets have grown ordinary as heroes.

"Sabbath, W.I.", presents a scene where everything has gone dry, after a volcanic eruption:

the burnt banana leaves that used to dance
the river whose bed is made of broken bottles
the cocoa grove where a bird whose cry sounds green and
yellow and in the lights under the leaves crested with
orange flame has forgotten its flute
gommiers peeling from sunburn still wrestling
to escape the sea
the dead lizard turning blue as stone
those rivers, threads of spittle, that forgot
the old music. (6-13)

The degradation of the island, thanks primarily to
indiscriminate commercialization, is presented in the
following manner, devoid of all the idyllic pristine
purity depicted in "Watteau" in Midsummer XX:

The amber spray of trees feather-brushed with
the dusk,
the ruined cavity of some spectral chateau,
the groin
of a leering satyr eaten with ivy. In the
distance, the grain
of some unreapable, alchemical harvest,
the hollow at
the heart of all embarkations. Nothing
stays green
in that prodigious urging towards twilight;

(1-6)

The allusions in Walcott's poems to figures from
the hellenic myth like Satyr and Cythera serve only to
stress the stark degradation that has come over the
Caribbean. The protagonist's frustration finds
expression in his rhetorical question, referring to
Cythera, the Greek Goddess of love, beauty and
fertility: "So where is Cythera?" (9).
Being a metropolitan poet who has spent his entire lifetime in Mumbai, it is only natural that Ezekiel’s poems convey indelible marks of the city. During a highly imaginative phase of his career, Ezekiel lived in London for three years and still could not bring himself to write a single poem during that period. Perhaps this explains why the poet could not identify himself with London, the way he later identifies himself with Mumbai. Despite all its drawbacks, Mumbai is Ezekiel’s own city, though he finds it often "Unsuitable for song as well as sense" (1) in "Island". The city in "Healers" is in all probability, Mumbai, being an unplanned city which has an immortal death-wish: "everybody is in the business, buying cures, / so the healers come in droves" (2-3).

In "A Morning Walk", there is the picture of a monsoon-lashed city, thickly populated with penurious wretches:

Barbaric city sick with slums,
Deprived of seasons, blessed with rains,
Its hawkers, beggars, iron-lunged,
Processions led by frantic drums,
A million purgatorial lanes,
And child-like masses, many-tongued,
Whose wages are in words and crumbs. (15-21)
Being so keenly aware of the darker side of the city, it is doubtful whether Ezekiel does love the city of Mumbai at all. Certainly, Ezekiel is incapable of celebrating Mumbai, the way Walcott celebrates Saint Lucia. Walcott is so much attached to his island that he says in Chapter Eight of Another Life, he and Gregorias

... would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of a hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect, the ropes of mangroves,
from which old soldier crabs slipped
surrendering to slush. (95-102)

In his affirmation of his commitment to his Caribbean heritage, Walcott shows that he is committed to both the contents and the forms dictated by historical and contemporary realities of his home island and by extension, the Caribbean. However, Ezekiel never grows sentimental while writing about Mumbai as Walcott does. In "Urban", "The hills are always far away" (1), and "The river which he claims he loves /Is dry, and all the winds lie dead./ At dawn he never sees the skies" (5-7) and "His landscape has no depth or height" (12).
The same ironic vein runs through the following description in "A Morning Walk":

... The morning breeze
Released no secrets to his ears.
The more he stared the less he saw
Among the individual trees. (22-25)

Like Walcott, Ezekiel too allows uninhibited entry of the "unpoetic" in his poems. In "Hymns in Darkness", he writes:

wet, green leaves
patterned flat
on the pavement
around dog-shit:

one ragged slipper
near an open gutter,
three crows
pecking away at it. (50-57)

In the eyes of Ezekiel, even Rangoon city does not fare better than Mumbai. In "Letter from Rangoon", he complains,

City still unmapped
Food exposed to flies.

.........................
Pavements unpaved
And refuse in heaps. (5-6, 11-12)

In "Psalm 151", the poet finds no solace from his immediate environs:

Light rebukes and sky abuses,
Streets are empty, houses jaded,
Girls are doubtful, one refuses,
Colours of the earth are faded. (1-4)

The whole scenario, in fact, is so disgusting in Ezekiel’s eyes, that he feels prompted to pray to God:
"Change the drink for me, O Lord. / Lead me from the wailing wood" (15-16).

In the eyes of Ezekiel, even the beauty he spots in the city cannot be unalloyed and in "Edinburgh Interlude", his poetic art does not fail to register, with a wry sense of humour, unpleasant images:

From the squalor of a narrow lane leading to a slum, she walked out — like one of the Maharaja’s air hostesses.
She stepped briskly
over pools of gutter-water
and dog-shit.
............................
Her blue-yellow-green sari
sparkled as she swept along. (43-51, 58-59)

Walcott, tends to fuse the outward scene with
inward experience, with his painter's eye as Norton
notes: "... he has taken a particular delight in
transforming paintings into poems, a splendid instance
of the cultivation of two talents" (qtd. in Kovalchik 1).

In Another Life, "Homage to Gregorias", Chapter
Eight, art and life are pursued mainly in the company of
his painter friend and drinking companion Gregorias.
Guided by Harry Simmons — "that astigmatic saint" (94)
— they vow never to leave the island until they record
it in art: "For no one had yet written of this landscape
/ that it was possible" (124-25). Besides, the poet
clearly realizes in Chapter Nine of the same poem that
his talent does not lie in the direction of painting;
"... I lived in a different gift, / its element
metaphors" (109).
In the following stanza from Chapter Twenty-three, he addresses Gregorias, his companion, recalling the high calling and mission of their lives:

Gregorias, listen, lit,
we were the light of the world!
We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world
with Adam's task of giving things their names,

(84-87)

Analysing his own failure as a painter, Walcott recognizes the importance of metaphor to his poetic art in Chapter Nine of Another Life:

in every surface I sought
the paradoxical flesh of an instant
in which every facet is caught
in a crystal of ambiguities. (102-05)

In Chapter Four, Walcott views his island of Saint Lucia, as a Renaissance painting: "a cinquecento fragment in gift frame. / Italy flung around my shoulders like a robe / I ran among the rocks howling 'Repent'" (6-8).

Walcott cannot resist the wish to participate in the epoch-making moment of Caribbean Renaissance of art. Nevertheless, he considers art also as a "noble treachery", for what art preserves is, after all, only the "second best".
The poem *Midsummer* XXVII is a poetic medium in which Walcott employs vivid imagery to present a graphic picture of his island. Lines such as "the grey, metal light where an early pelican / coasts" (5-6) suggests both the grey metallic colour of an aeroplane, the grey light of dawn and even the grey light of the sea over which an early rising pelican is soaring. The sea is all a "pink fire" (6) which readily conjures up images of a bright sunrise over the water. The sea, on the other hand, is still cold, after the passage of the night. Lines such as these from "The Hotel Normandie Pool" can be visualized easily as a painting of a sunset, over the actual waters of the Caribbean:

At Dusk, the sky is loaded like watercolour paper with an orange wash in which every edge frays—a painting with no memory of the painter—and what this pool recites is not a phrase from an invisible, exiled laureate, where there's no laurel, but the scant applause of one dry, scraping palm tree .... (19-25)

Rei Terada analyses these lines in the following terms:
There is a kind of Zenlike ecstasy in the perfect circularity of pool and sky, the ecstasy of "one palm clapping". Nature is authorless — there is no "invisible, exiled laureate" — yet somehow seems like representation even so. The poet cannot express total immanence; even his reference to an "invisible, exiled laureate" who does not exist clings to a remnant of anthropomorphism. Nature looks to the poet's eyes more like an unconscious representation — 'a painting with no memory of the painter' — than "originality" or unpainted reality. (141)

Ezekiel's poems are almost devoid of landscape paintings, though several women have been presented as paintings in his art. He is not preoccupied with the landscape as Walcott is, as a poet. However, the rare descriptions of wind and rain, in Ezekiel, are highly evocative, as for instance in "A Word for the Wind":

I cannot find a word for the wind,
Another word, a phrase full of it
Like a sail, verses
Moving smoothly like the wind
Over grass, or among the trees
Rustling down the leaves of meaning,
Sound evoking sense, a sudden
Heavy thud of fruit
And long silences
Over and under the surface of the wind. (1-10)

The above lines are remarkable for the poet’s mastery over the rhythm and flow of words. The following stanza describes the renewal of life in nature under the magic spell of rains. It is interesting to contrast the change in the tempo of words between the stanza above and the one given below from the poem "After Rain". The former is a fine example in Ezekiel, for the easy and powerful flow, while the latter illustrates the poet’s prowess in reigning his own words and make the rhythm move in a more deliberate and thoughtful vein.

And so I went, as the weather cleared,
Walking on the wet road, to know
If the scene had taken on a novel glow,
Lamplight, moonlight, dripping branches, wet road
Purer, sweeter. And now I know,
It is just so. (8-13)

To Ezekiel, rain has a calming as well as purifying effect and the deliberate movement of his verse conveys the very cleansing spirit of the rain.
Ezekiel's "Midmonsoon Madness", also suggests through its controlled rhythm, a fine blend of thought and word, as the closing line in the following stanza shows:

and when it rains
incessantly upon the night,
I listen to my own madness
saying: Smash it up and start again. (12-15)

Poems such as these bear an eloquent witness to the virtuosity of Ezekiel as a mastercraftsman who exercises an absolute control over the movement of his verse. For, with the sleight of hand, Ezekiel is capable of making his verse speed up with a select bunch of words, making them mount to a sudden crescendo and with the same mastery and skill can rein in the flow of words and make them slow down to a fine cadence at will and even make them come to a halt, only to resume the flow again at the next instant, and move them forward again on a trot at a totally different but desired velocity.

In "Townlore" too the rain succeeds in bringing about a soothing impact on the poet's mind:

This large sprawling town is able
To cool itself, soothed by the rain.
The wayside trees expectantly
Have filled the air with green
And hope of love. (1-2, 5-7)

In the poem "The Prophet", the poet is "Stirred towards November's ending, vaguely, by mist and rain" (1-2). Somehow, the rain seems to trigger him off to take on a journey into his inner self.

If the rain turns out to be mild and pleasant, it has a purifying, soothing effect on the poet's mind. On the other hand, if it turns violent and stormy, the poet too grows callous and indifferent in his stance towards humanity, as the following lines from "Occupation" illustrate:

I looked upon the night,
I listened to the rain.
It was a stormy scene:
Thunder, lightning,
A multitude of ghosts among the trees,
Darkness, cold and restlessness,
A screeching owl, bats,
Many strange voices,
Someone crying, perhaps a child,
A woman on the slippery road,
Church bells, far away,
Two men, several men,
A long stretch of light shooting up at me,
And then a rope of silence round my throat.

(1-14)

On the other hand, for Derek Walcott, rain is either a source of threat as in "Volcano", "Joyce was afraid of thunder" (1), or a common factor "So many take thunder for granted. / How common is the lightning" (34-35), but never a pleasant phenomenon.

Walcott too has a great mastery over the rhythm of his verse as the slowing pace of words in "The Walk" conveys the gradual cadence of the rain:

After hard rain the eaves repeat their beeds,
those trees exhale your doubt like mantled tapers,
drop after drop, like the child's abacus beads of cold sweat file from high-tension wires,
pray for us, pray for this house ... (1-5)

In "Dark August", the troublesome rain is compared with his sister's troubled mind:

So much rain, so much life like the swollen sky
of this black August.
Everything goes to hell; the mountains fume
like a kettle, rivers overrun; still,
she will not rise and turn off the rain.

(1-2, 4-6)

The poet is waiting for his sister to part "the beads of the rain" (17) and he counsels her to learn to love "the black rain" (23).

In Midsummer XXVII, Walcott paints the rain in a more picturesque manner: "... This / drizzle that falls now is American rain, / stitching stars in the sand" (21-23). Now the rain is American, indicating a new wave of conquerors in the island. Walcott does not actually feel comfortable with the rain. He fears "what the migrant envies; / the starry pattern they make — the flag on the post office — / the quality of the dirt, the fealty changing under my foot" (24-26). "The American rain" with its associations with acid rain, implicitly suggests his fear that his native island is increasingly coming under the threat of pollution and domination of America.

The poem, "Map of the New World", employs a cyclical imagery of rain. The poem opens with "At the end of this sentence, rain will begin. / At the rain's
edge, a sail" (1-2) and closes thus: "The drizzle tightens like the strings of a harp. / A man with clouded eyes picks up the rain / and plucks the first line of the Odyssey" (10-12).

The use of the cyclical imagery, suggests life's power to resurrect itself. Ironically, the poem opens from the last glimpse of destruction and closes with the first glimpse of resurrection.

Walcott wishes to portray the desolation of a West Indian village in "Return to D'Emney, Rain":

There in a belt of emerald light, a sail
Plunges and lifts between the crests of reef,
The hills are smoking in the vaporous light,
The rain seeps slowly to the core of grief.

(17-20)

While commenting on this poem, Cameron King and Louis James find fault with Walcott:

Walcott's writing about the Caribbean has little of the area's experienced presence. There is no hint of heat and intense light: they are filtered out in the "green night" of Walcott's intelligence. (291)
However, the fact remains that Walcott is true to nature. Sometimes he might highlight his experiences of mild light and at some other times, he may dwell on its intense heat, as illustrated in Midsummer VI:

Midsummer stretches beside me with its
cat's yawn.
Trees with dust on their lips, cars melting down
in its furnace. Heat staggers the drifting mongrels. (1-3)

In "The Liberator" also, action is carried out in intense heat. "The jungle is steam" (10), "For half an hour I, Sonora, sit in the sun / till my face turn copper" (20-21). Dwelling on the heat of the sun, in "Guyana", Walcott sighs: "The sun has sucked his brain pith-dry. / His vision whirls with dervishes, he is dust" (6-7). In Midsummer XXV, one can almost feel the unbearable burning heat of the sun:

The sun has fired my face to terra-cotta.
It carries the heat from his kiln all through the house.
But I cherish its wrinkles as much as those on blue water.
Gnats drill little holes around a saw-toothed cactus,
a furnace has curled the knives of the oleander,
and a branch of the logwood blurs with wild characters. (1-6)

In moments of such a sweltering heat, no action is possible and everything goes limpid and static: "A stone house waits on the steps" (7); the muse of this inland ocean still waits for a name and "I wait" (19).

Significantly, nature is such a vast storehouse that a poetic eye sees poetry, language and his own self in it. Walcott declares in "The Castaway":

Godlike, annihilating godhead, art
And self, I abandon
Dead metaphors: the almond's leaf like heart,

The ripe brain rotting like a yellow nut
Hatching
Its babel of sea-lice, sandfly, and maggot,

That green wine bottle's gospel choked
with sand,
Labelled, a wrecked ship,
Clenched sea-wood nailed and white as a man's hand. (23-31)
The Castaway’s claim to "abandon / Dead Metaphors" is followed by a list of metaphors to be abandoned. Rei Terada deals in detail with these lines:

The elaborate, familiar plot of Christian mythology "hatches" from nearly nowhere, apparently spontaneously generating. True, Walcott marks each element with a minus sign: the gospel is "choked with sand" and cannot speak, what is "nailed" is only driftwood, and so forth. Yet to staple "Dead Metaphors" with minus signs is not the same as to "abandon" them. As the Castaway’s hope to escape the frenzy of culture is a lying hope, his wish to abandon dead metaphors (to evacuate them, to cast them away) is haunted by their return, as "Labelled" by Cliche as the wine bottle by its brand name. Like the return of the repressed, whatever is cast away comes back. (155)

In "Wales", Walcott explores and questions the empathy between the Welsh landscape and the Welsh language:

Those white flecks cropping the rides of Snowdon
will thicken their fleece and come wintering down
through the gap between alliterative hills,
through the caesura that let in the Legions,
past the dark disfigured mouths of
the chapels,
till a white silence comes to green-throated
Wales.
Down rusty gorges, cold rustling gorse,
over rocks hard as consonants, and
rain-vowelled shales
sang the shallow-buried axe, helmet,
and baldric
before the wet asphalt sibilance of tires.
A plump raven, Plantagenet, unfurls its
heraldic
caw over walls that held the cult of
the horse.
In blackened cottages with their stony hatred
Of industrial fires, a language is shared
like bread to the mouth, white flocks to
dark byres. (1-15)

In "The Stuffed Owl", Ezekiel feels that without a
creative perspective, the poet is nothing but a bore who
writes "a song about the sea" and

Tears his hair and tries again,
Suffers sky and wind to fill his blanks
With feeling, sun is always there,
Cypresses or roses add the final touch
To non-existent landscapes, a rhyme
Or two preserves proprieties. (12-17)

As an editor of Poetry of India and the Poetry Page of The Illustrated Weekly of India, Ezekiel was exposed to so much bad poetry that he must be quite familiar with the "stuffed owl".

In "A Poem of Blindness", Ezekiel declares "All things are hostile to the seeing eyes" (1), because there is always something more to things than what the outer eyes can see. However, in moments of creative insight, the poet often surmises that there exists something more than what meets the eye:

Across the clearest landscape some disguise
With subtle fingers drawn, to melt
And mould the vision,
Twist, disturb, distort the vision
None in what I do can recognise. (3-7)

This statement seems to border on the confessional, conceding the fact that certain experiences lie beyond his grasp. It needs a singular creative strength and confidence indeed on the part of a
creative writer who can admit to the frontiers of his own perception.

Ezekiel expresses in "A Time to Change", that a poet lives on dreams because "Flawless doctrines, certainty of God / These are merely dreams" (66-67); nevertheless, it is out of such unearthly stuff, that a poet has to evolve and attain his true identity:

... Subsided by dreams alone
The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens Soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits Patiently for grapes or figs and even Finds, on a lucky day, a metaphor Leaping from the sod.
If this is not a miracle Then I am God. (72-79)

Just as a land tilled by a peasant produces fruits, a poet creates his metaphors. In "Song for Spring" Ezekiel invokes spring to bless him with the gift of writing poetry as perfect as nature:

Freshness of the first spring green
On turf unnoticed, wash my words.
Let something sprout, let colour be,
Let gestures flaunt like banners.
And like flowers let them wear perfection.

Interestingly, in "Crusoe's Island", Walcott seems to take stock of his life as a whole. Having run away from the possible shelter professed by any rigidly defined ideology or dogma, the protagonist stands equally at a loss with himself as he is increasingly coming under the menacing shadow of eternity, utterly racked by an inward angst:

Past thirty now I know
To love the self is dread
Of being swallowed by the blue
Of heaven overhead
Or rougher blue below.
Some lesion of the brain
From art or alcohol
Flashes this fear by day:
As startling as his shadow
Grows to the castaway. (20-29)

Terada avers,

The poet believes his ideological position to be somewhere between Christianity — "the blue / Of heaven overhead" — and nature — the "rougher blue below". Dreading both the
extremes, he simply does not dare to look up or down but loves the self justifying himself exactly where he stands. (58)

The poet expresses his longing for community all the same: "He watched his shadow pray / Not for God's love but human love instead" (50-51). Walcott's persona also voices the inner existentialist dread of the isolated protagonist. However, the stanza quoted from "Crusoe's Island" stands poised holding a balance between the existentialist protagonist's yearning for independence and separate individuality on the one hand and his fear for his own ultimate destiny in the absence of the assurance of any faith on the other. In contrast, the following lines from the same poem seem to be more heavily loaded with a sense of guilt and heightened conflict and, consequently, a considerably greater degree of unavailing despair. He cries:

I have lost sight of hell,  
Of heaven, of human will,  
My skill  
Is not enough,  
I am struck by this bell  
To the root.  
Crazed by a racking sun,  
I stand at my life's noon,
On parched, delirious sand
My shadow lengthens. (84-93)

Ezekiel too has his own problems with regard to his rootlessness as regards ultimate vision of life or ideology. In a self-castigating vein much similar to Walcott's persona, the poet spells out his insufficiency in "Transparently":

Compared to my mind
rocks are reasonable,
clouds are clear.
It makes me mad
but that is how it is.

How many times
have I felt free?
How many times
Spontaneous?
It's fantastic
what a slave
a man can be
who has nobody
to oppress him
except himself. (9-23)

A victim of impulses and indecision, Ezekiel's worst tormentor has been his own self and yet, this very
oppressive self turns out to be the source of his poetry.

There is some ironic significance about Ezekiel's poem, "I Told the Thames", which evokes memories of Spenser's nuptial song addressed to the Thames. The poem makes not only a confirmation but also an assertion of passion on the part of an individual, thus suggesting the need for mutuality and commitment in relationships.

I told the Thames
That I was free,
Love can never
Altered be.

I told the Thames
I was afraid,
Attracted to
Another maid.

Beside the Thames
I watched the waves,
And I was one
Of passion's slaves. (1-12)

Ezekiel's poems abound in similes of seasons and climates. In "Episode", a girl who is drenched in rain is "Like a truant ray of sun" (5). In "Something to
Pursue", the poet-persona pats himself saying "That I may see myself / No longer unresolved / But definite as morning" (6-8). In "A Morning Walk", "His will is like the morning dew" (35). In "Love Sonnet", "Our love has formed like dew on summer nights" (5). In "Psalm 151", while the image of morning connotes clarity and definiteness, "Evening comes like Samson, blind" (5). "The Recluse" refers to "the clouds of drum-emotion" (3) which fail to awaken the poet-persona, not allowing him to share "The daring stream of common passion" (5). Flowers and horticultural imagery in Ezekiel are associated with excitement of and indulgence in sensual passion. In "Something to Pursue", "Harlots flaunt the jazzy cheerfulness of sunflowers" (150). In his "Song" from New Poems, the persona cries in a dream with delight: "I gave myself prosperity" (17), "Summer blossoms on a tree" (12).

Walcott's poetic art brilliantly captures the colour and sunshine of the Caribbean islands, echoing the very beat and rhythm of the waves that pulse and pound against their enchanting shores. In a recent tribute to Derek Walcott, Ned Thomas comments that one of the delights of Walcott's poetry is "its rendering of seascape and landscape, islands on long horizons, hands on oars and the keels of schooners cutting the water,
sunlight and space and the open beach" (qtd. in Aiyejina 72).

To the editors of Remapping Culture,

The tangy sea-breeze breathes new life into his poetry, and the slapping of waves resonates in the rhythmic clapping of Calypsonian song and spectacle. Walcott epitomizes the verve and vigour of the New World. (Vijayasree 111)

However, more often than not, Walcott's artistic eye focusses not inward towards himself or his island home, but outward towards the immense and ageless Caribbean sea. Further, Walcott's art not only records the beauty of the seascape as it meets the eye at the present, but also registers the magnificent depth of its appeal with a sound knowledge of its chequered history. He has gone on record:

The blue of some of the bays in the Caribbean is incredible. You really believe that if you went down there and put your finger in it, your hand would be stained. And if you are painting the intensity of that blue, or the intensity of that light, which is extremely difficult, then you are doing a whole new
thing. And it affects the way you do your art

Most of the history of the Caribbean — the physical history — took place on the sea. The battles for the islands, the forts at the edge of the sea — it’s just a fringe kind of history on the edge of these islands. And the inside part of it is not where the original sin in the landscape took place; it took place on the water — right in the battles and stuff like that. And so these things keep getting more and more quickly erased. There’s a big difference between a sea culture like the Caribbean and, say, a plains culture or mountain culture. And we are a sea culture. So this renewal of the sea is a strong thing for me. (Carib. Writer 2)

The sea just happens to be Walcott’s first love. The poet identifies the sea with his own self in "The Schooner Flight": "I’m just a red nigger who love the sea" (40). The sea and the poet are simply inseparable: "I couldn’t shake the sea noise out of my head" (113). There is a curious swing of moods in Walcott’s relating himself to the sea, moment to moment. He is all love one instant, and stark indifference on the very next: "My first friend was the sea. Now, is my last. / I stop talking now" (464-65).
Suffice to say that for Walcott, the sea is an ubiquitous, all-pervasive and undeniable influence. He goes to the sea naturally and, at times, quite involuntarily, seeking to realise his own self as in "Islands":

As climate seeks its style, to write
Verse crisp as sand, clear as sunlight,
Cold as the curled wave, ordinary
As a tumbler of island water; (7-10)

In Chapter Twelve, Another Life the sea figures in Walcott’s psyche as a human individual: "a boy became a blow / from a burnished forehead, / the sea’s grin stupefied" (67-69). The sea breathes like and behaves like a human being in Chapter Thirteen: "... The thick sea heaved like petrol" (1) and again in Chapter Twenty-one, "as the sea is a question, chafing, / impatient for answers, / and we are the same" (52-54).

In "Early Pompeian" Walcott attributes superior knowledge and moral strength to the sea, like a child would do "the smell off the sea is your mother" (71) and "I stare into black water by whose hulls / heaven is rocked like a cradle" (73-74).

Writing after the death of his daughter, Walcott observes: "... the sea / is black and salt as the mind
of a woman after labour" (61-62). In Chapter Ten of Another Life,

He hoists his youngest seascape like a child, 
kisses, cradles it, opens the window 
of the village night, head tilted seaward, 
grey gaze serenely clamped, 
lean fingers waving, "Listen!"
As if the thunderous Atlantic 
were a record he had just put on. (81-87)

There are also moments when Walcott puts the sea 
on the high pedestal of a morally superior being and 
asks for forgiveness for his escapades, like a 
Wordsworth would do. He is penitent in Chapter Twenty-
three of Another Life:

Forgive me, ...
... sea, with the mouth 
of that old grave keeper 
white-headed, lantern-jawed, 
forgive our desertions. (63, 67-70)

Walcott’s affinity towards the sea is so much that 
even the horrifying sights appear beautiful and becoming 
in the eyes of the poet in the poem "The Schooner 
Flight":

... fog coil from the sea
like the kettle steaming when I put it down
slow, slow, 'cause I couldn't believe what
I see:
where the horizon was one silver haze,
the fog swirl and swell into sails, so close
that I saw it was sails, my hair grip
my skull,
it was horrors, but it was beautiful.
.................................
and all you could hear was the ghostly sound
of waves rustling like grass in a low wind
.................................
dredged from the deep; my memory revolve
on all sailors before me, then the sun
heat the horizon's ring and they was mist.
(202-08, 220-21, 226-28)

Walcott draws an ineffable comfort after a stormy
moment at sea:

There's a fresh light that follows a storm
while the whole sea still havoc, in its
bright wake
I saw the veiled face of Maria Conception
marrying the ocean, then drifting away
in the widening lace of her bridal train
with white gulls her bridesmaids, till
she was gone. (423-28)

White clouds tend to stitch the sea and the sky
together and this cloth which gets washed in turn by the
rain and pressed by the sun is sufficient for the poet
to cover his own nudity as well:

Fall gently, rain, on the sea’s upturned face
like a girl showering; make these islands
fresh
as Shabine once knew them! Let every trace,
every hot road, smell like clothes she just
press
and sprinkle with drizzle. I finish dream;
whatever the rain wash and the sun iron:
the white clouds, the sea and sky with one
seam,
is clothes enough for my nakedness. (432-39)

Walcott employs the ocean as a recurrent and
fertile metaphor suggesting its multifarious functions:
a ceaseless, natural agent of change; a dark
impenetrable mirror of mystery; an open inviting book of
promise etc. For the West Indian artist, the Caribbean
sea stands for an inexhaustible and complex metaphor. In
"Crusoe’s Island", the clamour of the bell seems to beat
the very ocean into submission:
The chapel's cowbell
Like God's anvil
Hammers ocean to a blinding shield;
Fired, the sea grapes slowly yield
Bronze plates to the metallic heat. (1-5)

In "The Schooner Flight", Walcott plunges headlong into the sea and comes up with an awareness of another hitherto unknown dimension of the sea. The unpredictable sea in this poem stands as a metaphor for life and its vagaries. The protagonist wavers, his spirit almost separating from body. The moment of his leave-taking is fraught also with an overwhelming, but secret, desire to linger awhile, still. This results in "the sea heaving up and down" (45).

The sea in Walcott can also stand for a metaphor for contrariety, for it is both opaque and transparent. The primordial history of the islands has been swallowed up by the sea and got obliterated. However, ironically enough, it is the sea which mirrors back this history lying deeply buried in oblivion.

Walcott suggests in "Names" that flux is the way of life for his people, a transplanted people who began "with a different fix on the stars" (4). All they had was the malleable shape of their lives, the sky, the sea and history:
... foreclosed
with nothing in our hands,
but this stick
to trace our names on the sand
which the sea erased again to our
indifference. (30-34)

Walcott’s genius for internal rhyme is revealed in several contexts of his voluminous art, as for instance, in the description of the schooner’s "bow that scissor the sea like silk" (64) in "The Schooner Flight". The hull of the schooner surges forward, dividing the sea in the way the traveller is divided in his desires, divided from his home and family he loves, "as poets love the poetry / that kills them, as drowned sailors, the sea" (68-69).

The sea turns out to be a multi-dimensional symbol in Walcott. Perhaps it is the only symbol that most constantly and appropriately corresponds to the portrayal of the life experiences presented in his poems. In a curious sense, it is everything and nothing at one stroke as it continues to write and rewrite. It nurtures and kills and like a child’s palimpsest it writes and erases what it writes, on whose surface the poet inscribes the shifting emotions, whims and fancies of a people in transition.
The Caribbean sea has taught Walcott that all beginnings are illusory and secondary. As the crashing waves keep continually altering the shoreline, Walcott turns this simultaneously destructive and creative natural phenomenon into a fitting objective correlative of his art, with each wave of the sea and each line of his poetry churning with the undertow of his disparate past, indelibly embedded in his ancestral tongues. Considering the effect of the natural environment on the Caribbean consciousness, Walcott says,

To me there are always images of erasure in the Caribbean — in the surf which continually wipes the sand clean, in the fact that those huge clouds change so quickly. There is a continual sense of motion in the Caribbean — caused by the sea and the feeling that one is almost traveling through water and not stationary. (Critical Perspectives 74)

The strong likeness between Walcott and the sea is outlined in "Names": "My race began as the sea began, / with no nouns, and with no horizon, / with pebbles under my tongue" (1-3). Despite the names the colonizers might have employed to refer to the people and the places, the Caribbean and its history have turned out to
be like the writing in the sand "which the sea erased again" (34).

Chapter Ten of Another Life also uses the central paradoxical image of the sea as the palimpsest, preserver and destroyer of memories:

But I tired of your whining, Grandfather 
in the whispers of marsh grass,  
I tired of your groans, Grandfather,  
in the deep ground bass of the combers,  
I cursed what the elm remembers,  
I hoped for your sea-voices  
to hiss from my hand,  
for the sea to erase  
those names a thin,  
tortured child, kneeling, wrote  
on his slate of wet sand. (136-46)

As an interesting variety, the sea also figures as a book in Walcott. His voluminous autobiographical poem Another Life opens with the lines:

Verendahs, where the pages of the sea  
are a book left open by an absent master  
in the middle of another life —  
I begin here again,  
begin until this ocean's
a shut book, and like a bulb
the white moon's filaments wane. (1-7)

Nevertheless, in "Home Coming: Anse La Raye", the sea remains to the poet, an undependable ambiguous record like life itself, with all its thrill and ennui:

for once, like them,
you wanted no career
but this sheer light, this clear,
infinite, boring, paradisal sea,
but hoped it would mean something to declare
today, I am your poet, yours. (32-37)

In "Codicil", there is something interestingly resistant, and, at the same time fascinating, about Walcott's relationship with the sea, though he identifies himself totally with the Caribbean:

... I trudge this sickle, moonlit beach
for miles,
tan, burn
to slough off
this love of ocean that's self-love. (3-6)

It is only to an avid lover that the sea would unlock her pages as in "Lampfall": "All day you've watched / The sea-rock like a loom / shuttling its white wool, sheer Penelope!" (26-28).
The fascinating variety of moods of the sea are an enthralling source of perennial delight to the poet, intent on recording its infinite vicissitudes:

I never tire of ocean's quarrelling,
Its silence, its raw voice,
Nor of these half-lit windy leaves,
gesticulating higher
"Rejoice, rejoice ...". (7-10)

In Chapter Twenty-three of Another Life, the sea is almost like a chronicle in the hands of a shaman or a witch doctor who, refers to it from time to time, whenever it is needed for diagnosis and treatment:

... the moon
will always swing its lantern
and evening fold the pages of the sea,
and peer like my lost reader silently
between the turning leaves
for the lost names
Of Caribs, slaves, and fishermen? (56-62)

In a sense, the sea is also a finished product of many little, nameless skills of workmanship, essential for the rigging of a sturdy native boat, which also serves like a book, conceived and described as a
fulfilment of several literary skills. Walcott writes in "The Schooner Flight",

... Well, when I write
this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;
I go draw and knot every line as tight
as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech
my common language go be the wind,
my pages the sails of the Schooner Flight.

(71-76)

To Jim Wieland,

If the sea is 'a book left open' (AL 3), it is
to be read, and the story which evokes from
Walcott's vast ocean is a comprehensive and
continuing fiction of the place of his people
in some larger order. (119)

In Chapter Twenty-two of Another Life, the sailor
boy protagonist without history washes his cheeks in
salt water and sunlight, "puts the shell's howl to his
ear, / hears nothing, hears everything" (68-69),
reminiscent of the Indian Shunya zero, because the West
Indies lost the Arawaks its early inhabitants along with
its language, but still enjoys the privilege of
recasting its history in the present. The boy plays a
chantey on his mouth-organ, a skill learnt from his
grandfather, "And when the music rises like smoke, everything is sacred, every act is worship" (80). At this point, Walcott’s autobiography itself becomes one with music. Commenting on Walcott’s skill, Robert Graves remarks, "He handles language with a closer understanding of its inner magic than most poets born to it" (qtd. in Narasimhaiah 240).

In "The Castaway", the sea is a "Tophet" from which there is no escape, again curiously resembling the human predicament: "That green wine bottle’s gospel choked with sand, / Labelled, a wrecked ship, / Clenched seawood nailed and white as a man’s hand" (29-31). The imagery of the cross evolves as a natural corollary to "Tophet".

Moreover, the sea is the key to the riddle, that is, life. In "The Castaway", the purer the protagonist’s apprehension of nature, the greater is his realisation of its prison-like confinement:

The starved eye devours the seascape
for the morsel
Of a sail.

The horizon threads it infinitely.

Action breeds frenzy. I lie,
Sailing the ribbed shadow of a palm,  
Afraid lest my own footprints multiply. (1-6)

The castaway experiences the seascape both as a victim and a victimiser; the hunted and the hunter. At times, the pursuit seems futile: "Nothing: the rage with which the sandfly's head is filled" (12). However, the persona grapples with nothingness as a positive presence, and such a grappling pushes him along in certain directions and he realizes the hard fact that it is in isolation, a greater imaginative activity and increased awareness of the natural world are possible. "If I listen I can hear the polyp build, / The silence thwanged by two waves of the sea./ Cracking a sea-louse, I make thunder split" (20-22).

Thus, the castaway may still make something out of "nothing" as the poet desires in Chapter Twenty-two of Another Life, "facing the wind / and nothing, which is, / the loud world in his mind" (219-21).

Walcott is an islander, while Ezekiel is an urbanized plainsman. Though a Mumbaiite, the sea proves to be just one of the several images and symbols, and an insignificant symbol at that, in Ezekiel. Neither Walcott nor Ezekiel overcomes the sense of guilt and sin caused by their connection with the flesh. In the piece
rightly titled "Penitence", Ezekiel conveys through the symbolic 'wave' and 'sea', the relentless urges of passion in him, though he is quietly conscious of the 'muffled tumult' of sin within him and longing for penitence:

I will be penitent,
My heart, and crave
No more the impulse
Of a wave.

But I am still a sea
And hold within
The muffled tumult
Of a sin. (1-8)

Walcott expresses his cogitation and feelings of penitence in a similar vein employing the same metaphor in "The Schooner Flight":

When I thought of the woe I had brought
my wife,
When I saw my worries with that other woman,
I wept under water, salt seeking salt,
..........................
... flesh of my flesh! (126-28, 130)

While in Ezekiel, the sea figures as almost a traditional poetic metaphor, in Walcott, the passion
felt gets communicated with a sense of immediacy and urgency, for the simple reason that Ezekiel’s references to sea are always rather distant and unemotional and his poems are in general dialectical. In "Love Sonnet", the sea for Ezekiel serves as a mind-boggling background for a fleeting love affair, that knows neither commitment nor devotion:

The wind has ruffled up your hair:
We look in consort at the distant sea,
And feel it turbulent and salty there,
A passionate and perpetual mystery. (6-9)

In the poem "Enterprise", the 'leader' smells the sea of the future, the sea that liberates and answers the quest. The element of ecstasy associated with the sea is also evoked in the leader, after all his bitter experiences of a long quest. Unfortunately, however, the enterprisers achieve nothing. Once again, the sea remains a delightful symbol of a possible but distant promise.

In "Lamentation", the ebbing sea stands for the vacuity of the poet’s life: "The season comes and men bring forth their fruit / But I am bare beside the abounding sea / Rivers feed my roots yet I do not prosper" (6-8).
In "A poem of Dedication", Ezekiel refers to the haunting mysteries associated with the sea, while referring to the uncontrollable nightmares he suffers from within:

I close the eyes to see with better sight
There is a landscape certainly, the sea
Among its broad realities, attracts
Because it is a symbol of the free
demoniac life within. (12-16)

In "Subject of Change", the metaphor of the sea stands symbolic for the nightmare of death.

The people walk, and eat. The waves
Rise and fall like nightmare graves
That cannot hold their dead. The sky
Is smaller than this open eye. (17-20)

Psalms after Psalms glorify the macrocosm, its flora and fauna, created by God. Nevertheless, Ezekiel is unfavourably disposed to look at them and in Latter-Day Psalms, he even dismisses the sea cheaply thus:

The sea is his; we may drown
in it. He formed the dry land,
on which many millions thirst
to no end. (156-59)
Ezekiel's "Song of Desolation", presents the image of the sea as a powerful force of ignition and extinguisher of man's inner life:

Know, I went walking alone.
Record it that I sat upon a rock
Heard the sea moan,
Felt the inner block. (1-4)

In "Advice", a life of activity and fruitfulness is compared to the sea, while a life of inertia is little more a desert, offering nothing but burning thirst: "The Saragosa sea is quiet / But they call it dead, in the desert / There is only sand and a sordid thirst" (14-16). Life gains meaning only when it is lived like a voyage — sailing and reaching a haven — sailing again and reaching again another new haven.

In "Drawing Room", Ezekiel portrays the sea as a gritty fighter:

Grain of sand stays
soft in its proper place
beneath or beyond
the repetitious sea-wave.
But in my eye it's
gritty as a new idea,
burning the white
of my view to bloody red. (1-8)

The scanty and sketchy references to the sea in Ezekiel perhaps indicate that to the poet, the sea is the last resort. He expresses in "Subject of Change" thus:

The sea is calm, flight of birds
Fills the sky with a million words.
A gentle wind blows them away:
Evil enough unto the day. (13-16)

In stark contrast, Walcott finds in the sea his mainstay and support, the very elixir of his life and aesthetics.

To Walcott, the Caribbean seascape forms part and parcel of his very being, as phrases like "my harbouring arms" would suggest. The very movement of Walcott's verse reverberates with the pounding thud of the waves of the sea that surrounds him. The sea, in him, is the primary passion, everlasting obsession and the organic extension of his self and art. Ezekiel's employment of the sea in his art, is colourful though, by and large, conventional, and he does not bother bearing on his shoulders, the mystery and the history of the waves kissing the Mumbai shores, like a Walcott would do. The
sea figures as a delightful image in his poetry, and an objective correlative for his thought and vision. The theme of mutability is common to both the poets who underline its surreptitious reticence. As regards the sea, what is often an emotional truth in Walcott, turns out to be no more than a passing occasion for a dialectical turn of thought in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's art celebrates the regeneration associated with the sunshine and the seasonal rains, though it does not necessarily point to any final resting place. In contrast, Walcott finds his home and haven in the Caribbean.

Both the artists can be ruthlessly realistic, being capable of exposing what could pass as unseemly, cheap or vulgar elsewhere. The places and times presented in them, come alive on account of the uncompromising authenticity of their art.

Walcott's art is straightforwardly confessional as regards his uncomplicated devotion to the Caribbean, while Ezekiel does not express any such affinity towards his native Mumbai. If Ezekiel returns to Mumbai, preferring it to any other city in the world, his connection with it has something intriguing and subterranean about it, like an illicit, nocturnal tryst.
Some of Walcott's poems make splendid paintings of the Caribbean of his soul's delight. Ezekiel too shows tremendous prowess as a painter with words, especially in respect of capturing the delectable dynamics of the monsoon winds and rains that lash the Mumbai metropolis, year after year.

Both the poets have an amazing virtuosity over the rhythm of the English verse and can make it dance to the tune(s) of their choice, being extraordinary masters of prosody. There is music pulsing in their very bloodstreams.

The Caribbean sea is the ultimate source of solace and comfort in Walcott, while Ezekiel makes no mention of any such final stay. The sheer volume of Walcott's art devoted to the sea is so overwhelming that vouches for his principal love in life. The sea is everything to him, his palimpsest, his book, his final mystery, his home, the very "flesh of my flesh!" Ezekiel's art, despite all its greatness and variety, points to no such haven or capacity for obsession. Thus, a comparative study of the landscape and seascape in Walcott and Ezekiel proves to be quite valuable, for making an assessment of their achievements in finer terms.