

Texts for Class 3: Incandescence

Derek Walcott: *Love after Love* (1976)

The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott: *from The Bounty* (1997)

In late-afternoon light the tops of the breadfruit leaves
are lemon and the lower leaves a waxen viridian
with the shaped shadows greenish black over the eaves
of the shops and the rust-cruste d fences that are Indian
red, sepia, and often orange; but by then the light has
ripened and grass and the sides of the houses and even a
rooster crossing a yard blazes like a satrap.
The lighthouse is already on, and bulbs,
and they are saying the novena in the cathedral
and the fishermen consciously become silhouettes
in the postcard sunset.

Derek Walcott: *Sixty Years After* (2013)

In my wheelchair in the Virgin lounge at Vieuxfort,
I saw, sitting in her own wheelchair, her beauty
hunched like a crumpled flower, the one whom I thought
as the fire of my young life would do her duty
to be golden and beautiful and young forever
even as I aged. She was treble-chinned, old, her devastating
smile was netted in wrinkles, but I felt the fever
briefly returning as we sat there, crippled, hating
time and the lie of general pleasantries.
Small waves still break against the small stone pier
where a boatman left me in the orange peace
of dusk, a half-century ago, maybe happier
being erect, she like a deer in her shyness, I stalking
an impossible consummation; those who knew us
knew we would never be together, at least, not walking.
Now the silent knives from the intercom went through us.

Derek Walcott (2013)

Be happy now at Cap, for the simplest joys—
for a line of white egrets prompting the last word,
for the sea's recitation reentering my head
with questions it erases, canceling the demonic voice
by which I have recently been possessed; unheard,
it whispers the way the fiend does to a madman
who gibbers to his bloody hands that he was seized
the way the sea swivels in the conch's ear, like the roar
of applause that precedes the actor with increased
doubt to the pitch of paralyzed horror
that his prime is past. If it is true
that my gift has withered, that there's little left of it,
if this man is right then there's nothing else to do
but abandon poetry like a woman because you love it

and would not see her hurt, least of all by me;
so walk to the cliff's edge and soar above it,
the jealousy, the spite, the nastiness with the grace
of a frigate over Barrel of Beef, its rock;
be grateful that you wrote well in this place,
let the torn poems sail from you like a flock
of white egrets in a long last sigh of release.