

21L.315, Prizewinners  
Prof. Mary Fuller  
**Lecture 7: Derek Walcott, *In a Green Night***

These poems were selected partly to show his range (variety of meter).  
Comparisons to Heaney: more colorful, less four-square  
Does it sound different?

### **A Sea-Chantey**

How is this poem constructed?  
Long lists of things (parataxis – saw this briefly in Heaney)  
Default blank verse ends on a hard beat (stressed); this ends with a soft beat (unstressed).  
In a different geography of language, compared to Anglo-Saxon

Mostly nouns – feels like a lack of narrative or action  
Starts out with the “I” sounds  
Then needles – an allusion to Penelope, embroidering while waiting for Odysseus to return, keeping faithful  
“Refracted embroidery” – no possessive or comma right before, so can’t tell for sure what part of speech. Is it action or state?

The listing is like a litany, or rosary.  
The poem is set on Sabbath, ships entered into baptismal register.  
On sea, in faith, you feel exposed in ways you wouldn’t on land. By trusting something other than yourself, you are taking a huge risk.

[reading of Psalm 107]

So the seafarers are particularly exposed, having to confront death.  
The chantey is a poem within the poem, with many of the same features.

Rosaries are repetitive, rhythmic, cyclical  
The repetition which constitutes prayer; the cycle of returning to the calm of the Sabbath

### **A Lesson for This Sunday**

Also a Sabbath poem  
Walcott’s Paradise Lost – is this the first evil for them, or must we look further back to find that?  
Within the peace of the Sabbath, this evil is found.

### **Islands**

A love poem, the grace with which she does these everyday things  
Diarist in the sand, writing in a medium that won’t survive

Is the poem worried, or guilty? And yet it reads as something beautiful and tender.

### **Return to D'Ennery; Rain**

Ending: is that a reference to Plato's cave?

Five years ago, this was the place where verbs were unnecessary. What changed?

Human action as a waste – this is how *Islands* ends, too

Second stanza is much more passionate and angry

And then retreat from that "passionate hatred" to a heart hardened to stone

The "you" in this poem definitely sounds like he's talking to himself.

### **A Far Cry From Africa**

One of Walcott's most famous poems

Animals are also violent to one another.

The gorilla and the superman – it's a dangerous, provocative line (identifying one and the other)

What about "cool" in second-to-last line? Contrasts with the hot blood of slaughter.

Can't choose sides, but also can't turn away

Also the hint of colloquial speech, in "cool" – can perhaps also see that in the title.