

MA ENGLISH

semester 3

COURSE: NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

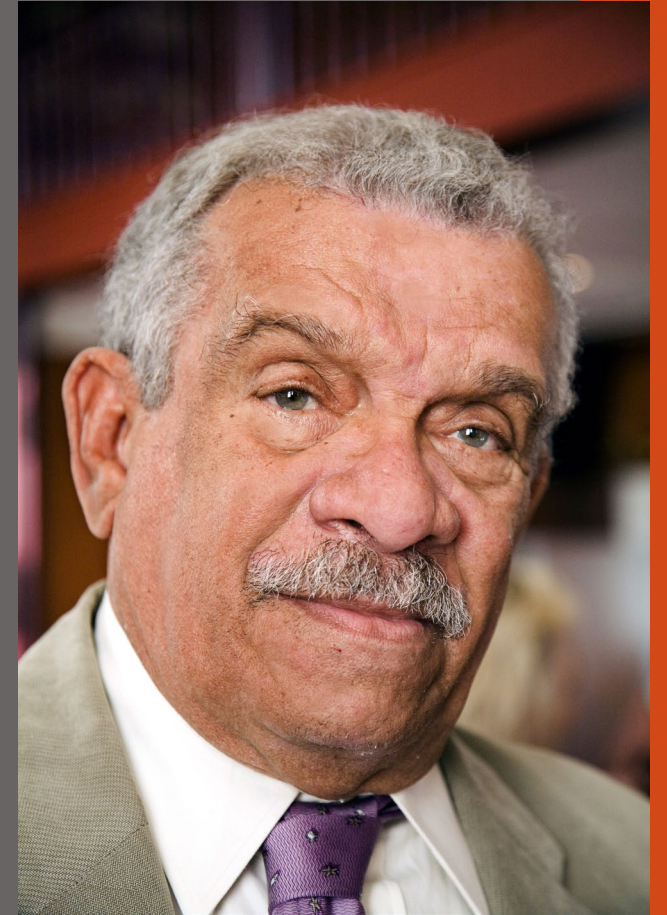
COURSE CODE: ENC 030

# DEREK WALCOTT

Saint Lucian poet and playwright

# Profile

- From a family of English, Dutch and African descent
- Walcott's poems show the influences of French and English as St. Lucia was colonised by France and England
- strongly influenced by modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound
- Founded the Trinidad Theatre in 1959
- Walcott taught literature and writing at Boston University for more than two decades, also founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre in 1981
- was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, the second Caribbean writer to receive the honour after Saint-John Perse, who was born in Guadeloupe, received the award in 1960



# Major works

- **25 Poems (1948) and Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos (1949)**
- **In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 (1962)**
- **The Castaway and Other Poems (1964)**
- **The Gulf and Other Poems (1969)**
- **Another Life (1973) Autobiographical poem**
- **Omeros (1990) a translation of Homer's Odyssey**
- **The Bounty (1997)**
- **Tiepolo's Hound (2000)**
- **The Prodigal (2004) and**
- **White Egrets (2010)**

# A Far Cry From Africa

From *In a Green Night*

1962

# A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA

drawn from accounts  
of the Mau Mau  
Uprising, an extended  
and bloody battle  
during the 1950s  
between European  
settlers and the native  
Kikuyu tribe dual  
heritage

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt  
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,  
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.  
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.

Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:  
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"  
Statistics justify and scholars seize  
The salients of colonial policy.  
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?

# A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA

Theme of Split  
identity and  
Anxiety of  
dual heritage

To savages, expendable as Jews?  
Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break  
In a white dust of ibises whose cries  
Have wheeled since civilization's dawn  
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.

The violence of beast on beast is read  
As natural law, but upright man  
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.  
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars  
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,

## **A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA**

**The “gorilla”  
represents black  
Africans and  
the “superman,”  
white Brits**

**While he calls courage still that native dread  
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.  
Again brutish necessity wipes its hands  
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again  
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,**

**The gorilla wrestles with the superman.  
I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose**



## **A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA**

**Walcott appears as  
torn about his  
identity as both  
animal and human  
as his identity as  
both African and  
European**

**Between this Africa and the English  
tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what  
they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be  
cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?**

# A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA

Theme of Split  
identity and  
Anxiety of dual  
heritage

- **The opening stanza focuses on the carnage of Mau Mau rebellion, the Kenyan uprising in 1950s**
- **Walcott discusses his divided loyalties between his ties with Africa and Britain**
- **Ironically Walcott rejects the British culture – the colonial ideology – but accepts the Colonial Language, English as superior and shows his divided self facing inner turmoil**
- **The title “A Far Cry” reflects the impossible dream of the poetic persona to see Africa as a paradise**

# A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA (1962)

- A painful and jarring depiction of ethnic conflict and divided loyalties
- The opening images of the poem are drawn from accounts of the *Mau Mau Uprising*, an extended and bloody battle during the 1950s between European settlers and the native Kikuyu tribe in Kenya or indigenous African people (Maroons or aboriginal Africans)
- Kikuyu / Gikuyu are compared to flies feeding on blood
- The ongoing in Kenya magnified an internal strife within the poet concerning his own mixed heritage
- Walcott opposes colonialism and would therefore seem to be sympathetic to a revolution with an anticolonial cause, he has passionate reservations about Mau Mau: they are, or are reported to be, extremely violent—to animals, whites, and Kikuyu perceived as traitors to the Mau Mau cause

# ANALYSIS

- uses images of genetic hybridity and cultural diversity to express the extremity of his identity crisis

*I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?*

- The first two stanzas refer to the Kenyan conflict, while the second two address the war within the poet-as-outsider/insider, between his roles as blood insider but geographical outsider to the Mau Mau Uprising
- Walcott condemns such an attitude by comparing the Mau Mau Uprising to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)
- cynical view of the Mau Mau Uprising as just another colonial conflict where gorillas (negatively animalized Africans) fight with superman (a negative characterization of Europe)

# ANALYSIS

- The struggle of a postcolonial self for whom it is impossible to choose one identity and ignore the other, is emphasized in this poem
- Walcott struggles to find himself and expresses that struggle in a specific local context thereby accepting the multiplicity of human experience
- He describes a different way of living in, perceiving and understanding a 'changed' world, from a Caribbean perspective

# IMAGERY

- The wind “ruffling the tawny pelt of Africa” refers to the Mau Mau Uprising
- “The gorilla wrestles with the superman.” The “gorilla” represents black Africans and the “superman,” white Brits
- Walcott considers both sides of the conflict reprehensible: that Africans, like gorillas, are not civilized, and that Brits
- This image suggests that the men that carry out the atrocities may as well be animals
- At the end of “A Far Cry from Africa,” Walcott appears as torn about his identity as both animal and human as his identity as both African and European

# FURTHER STUDY

- **Edwards, Norval. “Derek Walcott: The Poetics of Two Margins”. *Mississippi Review* 24.3 (Spring 1996): 12-35. JSTOR. Web. 1 June 2014**
- **Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott. Ed. Robert D. Hamner. Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1997. 45-50. Google Books Search. Web. 27 July 2014**
- **Dickey, James. “The Worlds of a Cosmic Castaway.” Rev of *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, by Derek Walcott. *The New York Times* 2 (1986): n pag. *The New York Times on the Web*. Web. 22 July 2014.**

# *The Almond Trees*

*(from Castaways)*  
(1960)

Derek Walcott





# Overview of the poem

- Speaks for Afro-Caribbean identity
- Expresses the brutality faced by the blacks under colonialism and defines the West Indian identity
- attempts to acknowledge the colonial past, tries to weld the past and the present, the historical and the modern, the European and African together
- Addresses the cross-cultural transformation by referring to Greco-Roman myths of metamorphoses (Greco-Roman white Daphne image and brown girls in bikinis)
- Develops the theme of universality by juxtaposing history & memory to powerful images of slavery

# *The Almond Trees*

**Describes West  
Indies being a  
mulatto of  
cultures had no  
history**

**There is nothing here  
This early;  
Cold and sand  
Cold churning ocean, the Atlantic  
No visible history;**

# *The Almond Trees*

Walcott calls for maturity  
in accepting old wounds  
and multiple heritages of  
history as part of the joint  
West Indian identity

Such growth is epitomized  
in the sea-almond trees

Except this stand  
Of twisted, coppery sea-almond trees  
Their shining postures surely  
Bent as metal, and one  
Foam-haired, salt-grizzled fisherman,  
His mongrel growing, whirling on the stick  
He pitches him; its spinning rays  
'No visible history'  
Until their lengthened shapes amaze the sun.

# *The Almond Trees*

The West Indian  
shore is addressed  
as “this further  
shore of Africa”  
calling back to its  
African ancestry

Brown daphnes  
refer to both their  
colour, and their  
shamelessness

**By noon, this further shore of Africa is strewn,  
With forked limbs of girls toasting their flesh  
In scarves, in sunglasses, Pompeian bikinis  
Brown daphnes, laurels, they'll all have  
Like originals, their sacred grove,  
This frieze  
Of twisted, coppery, sea-almond trees.**

## *The Almond Trees*

With the images of  
furnace, fire, and  
rebirth in mind,  
Walcott delineates  
the pride in owning  
a hybrid identity

The fierce acetylene air  
Has signed  
Their writhing trunks with rust, the same  
hues as a foundered, peeling barge.  
It'll sear a pale skin copper with its flame.

# *The Almond Trees*

**Depicts the  
suffering &  
tragic life of  
African women**

**The sand's white-hot ash under heel,  
But their aged limbs have got their brazen  
sheen**

**From fire. Their bodies fiercely shine!**

**They're cured,**

**They endure their furnace.**

## *The Almond Trees*

**Depicts the  
tragic history**

**Aged trees and oiled limbs share a common colour!  
Welded in one flame,  
Huddling naked, stripped of their name,  
For Greek or Roman tags, they are lashed  
Raw by wind, washed  
Out with salt and fire-dried  
Bitterly nourished where their branches died,  
Their leaves' broad dialect a coarse, enduring sound  
They share together.**

# *The Almond Trees*

In Greek mythology,  
Dryad is a female tree  
spirit

Hamadryad is a nymph  
pursued by Apollo, who  
was turned into a  
laurel, female tree  
spirit by the river God,  
Peleus

**Not as some running hamadryad's cries  
Rooted, broke slowly onto a leaf  
Her nipple peaking to smooth, wooden boles  
Their grief  
Howls seaward through charred, ravaged  
holes.**



# *The Almond Trees*

**Derek Walcott uses the dualities between man and nature as the central metaphor to develop his perspective in showing “the grove grieves in silence like parental love”**

**One sunburnt body now acknowledges  
That the past and its own metamorphosis  
As, moving from the, she kneels to spread  
Her wrap within the bent arms of this grove  
That grieve in silence, like parental love.**

# Conclusion

- Walcott uses to Almond trees to represent the African women who endured many hardships but were able to survive
- The metaphor is one of enslavement, suffering, endurance and the ultimate triumphant - metamorphosis into strong black women
- Significantly, The Almond Trees is a metaphor for the enslavement of the African race

# Important Questions

- Symbolic significance of the Almond trees
- Theme of root and rootlessness