

21L.315, Prizewinners
Prof. Mary Fuller
Lecture 8: Derek Walcott, *The Castaway, The Gulf*

A Map of Europe

Anything that needs to be glossed?
Lacrimae rerum – the tears of things (from Virgil)

Vermeer – half of everything is in shadow; many paintings have maps in the background

Does Leonardo's idea refer to a specific map?

Why did you like this? The power of the last two stanzas, especially the first two sentences. Seeing these everyday objects for what they are, not objects to be pitied.

Poem about vision, about seeing.

What does it mean to say "in this light, everything IS"?

It's not that these are beautiful because they look like a Vermeer. What is being asserted here?

Vermeer's paintings take ordinary objects and people, quite plain, and make them into something beautiful.

A hierarchy of genres – religious (St. Jerome), then Canaletto, then Chardin and Vermeer

So maybe separated into high and low genres – at first the objects are "like" the high genre, then they become themselves in the paragraph with the low genre.

Tarpon

The poem catches your attention immediately.

The vivid image of the eye staring at you, can't tell from the eye whether the fish is alive or dead.

Boundary between life and death is unclear – the thrashing movements of the fish seamlessly transition into the fisherman hacking.

Child's drawings, both large and on each individual scale

"slowly sought design": what is it?

- Has to do with its maker/creator?
- Stops being a living thing, becomes a pattern

Does this fit into a design? (From a Robert Frost poem – is there a sinister design behind this?)

In its death, it becomes characterized in terms of these simple shapes. But it had to die – be stilled – to be seen as beautiful.

What might you expect the fish to divulge? Almost like waiting for the fish's last words, but it's just more blood.

What's going on with the son shaking his head?
Upset, terrified, wanting to kill it faster? Something else?
Seems like the father is having more trouble with it than the son
The father looking through his son's eyes, setting up the simplicity of the rest of the poem

"Could I have called out not to look" – it's easy to read this as "should I", what's the difference in shading?
Can't keep this knowledge from him, of how the world works
The father is trying to keep the son from "looking simply", not trying to prevent him from looking at all

There's a lot of deliberate syntactic ambiguity in these poems – makes it more complex.
Hard to figure out how the last stanza relates to the rest of the poem
One possible reading: can these two representations, the complex and the child-simple, fit together such that the resulting "it" can move?
(Moving where? What kind of moving? Physical, imaginative...)

Coral

The last line (starting at "It dares my hand") is hard to put together
Maybe it means current lovers – very literally, those who currently do hold breasts in their hands, maybe they hold the physical object but not its nature
Or maybe this is a pretty, dramatic line that isn't necessarily substantial.

Whitening – used throughout this volume to indicate aging, decay