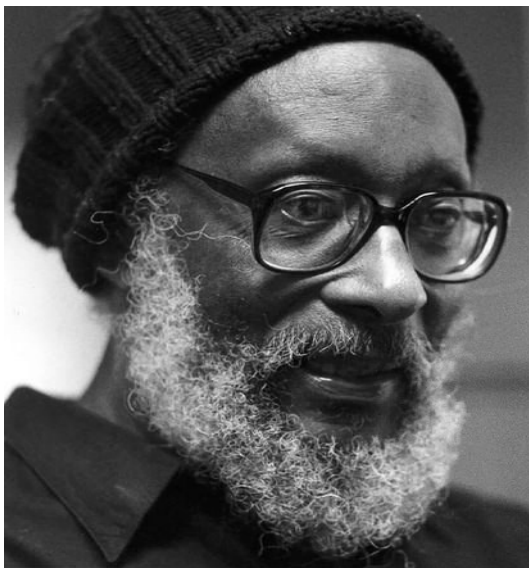


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FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

WINTER 2017



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The Match Factory

by *Emma Hughes*

Are you troubled by SPIRITS? Call FRANÇOIS, GIFTED MEDIUM, on 07812 678321.

The advert was in the back of a folded-up newspaper someone had left on the bus, between the personals and furniture for sale. There was a little sketch underneath of praying hands with waves of rainbow light coming off them.

I stared at it for a long time. Then, just as we turned into my road, I tore it out and stuffed it into my bag.

Paul and I had met in an art shop six weeks earlier. It was such a happy and unexpected beginning that right up until the end, I couldn't believe anything but good could come out of it.

It was a Saturday morning. I was fishing around in one of the high racks with a foot up on the bottom shelf, trying to get hold of a sketchpad that was just out of

reach.

'Can I help?'

The very tall man who'd been flipping through a book of swatches next to me leaned over and pulled it out. He was wearing a run-of-the-mill shirt and jeans with Converse hi-tops, but there was something about the way he carried himself – a kind of self-contained held-togetherness – that struck me.

'You're contractually obliged to do this kind of thing when you're six foot six,' he said as he handed it to me. 'They make you sign something.'

I'd been living in London for almost a year, working in a succession of over-lit, under-ventilated offices and doing art classes in the evenings. I hadn't made many friends, and a lot of the time I felt totally untethered, like I was drifting out to sea. I desperately wanted to be fixed in place by something.

'The height of a standard door,' I said.

'I'm sorry?'

'Six foot six. That's how tall they make doors.' My voice sounded unnaturally high. 'Generally.'

He laughed. 'I'll remember that.'

For a second he looked like he might be about to say something else – but he didn't. I watched him as he walked out of the shop, then went up to the till to pay for my sketchpad. The day stretched ahead of me, shapeless.

When I got outside I saw him standing in the

doorway opposite.

'You were right!' he called out to me across the road. And he went slightly up on tiptoes so his head touched the frame. He was grinning with what looked like relief – as though he'd jumped into cold water and come up, smiling, for air.

The next night we went to an old-fashioned Italian restaurant near Charing Cross Road. I arrived in a new dress I had bought that afternoon. Paul was already there, sitting at a table, packing up a camera bag

'Sorry about all the clutter.' He stood up to kiss me on the cheek, and I thought how nice he smelled – like bonfire-smoke on a cold day. 'Most of my weekends are working ones.'

'You're a photographer?'

'Food, mainly. I used to do people, but they're very...'
He smiled at me. 'There's only so much that can go wrong with a sandwich.'

We had ravioli in butter that smelled of almond biscuits. I let him look at pictures of the drawings I'd done in class the previous week, and when he said he really liked them, I knew he meant it.

As the plates were being cleared away, Paul told me he'd recently got divorced. His ex-wife, who made

sculptures of animals from scrap metal, had gone to live in Ireland. They'd just sold their house, and he was renting while he looked for somewhere new.

'It wasn't so bad,' he said, picking up his dessert spoon and flipping it from side to side. 'We didn't have any children. Which makes it easier, in some ways.'

There was a waxy indent on his finger where his wedding ring had been. I nudged my hand alongside his, and he stroked my thumb gently, without looking at me.

'Shall we get some more wine?' I said.

Outside, we kissed properly, and I realised how long it had been since I'd touched anyone, or anyone had really touched me. 'I'd, um, like to see some of your photos,' I said. 'You know. At home.'

I felt him go tense. Instantly, the happy, carried-along feeling I'd had all evening evaporated. I glanced up. He looked terrified.

'I don't...' He pulled away. 'Look, this is going to sound completely mad, but there's something there.'

'What?'

'In my flat. It's like...' His shoulders sank. 'The building used to be a match factory, in Victorian times. The women who worked there got really sick from the chemicals. Some of them died. When the agent told me about it I said I didn't believe in ghosts. But you can feel it. I've got used to it now, but other people...'

I felt like I was watching something precious

wobbling on the edge of a high shelf. It was up to me, I realised, to stay very still and make sure it didn't topple off.

'It's ok,' I said, quietly. 'I understand.'

We went back to my flat. Undressed, he was much thinner than I thought he'd be – when he held me his collarbones pressed almost painfully into my forehead.

The next morning he brought me a mug of coffee in bed. When I went downstairs after he'd left I saw the cafetiere and teaspoon he'd used to make it had already been carefully washed and dried.

By the time I got into work he'd texted me. *That was lovely. You are lovely. Are you free over the weekend?*

We settled into a routine quickly. On Saturdays we would go to the cinema or have dinner by ourselves, and we always stayed at mine. His didn't talk about his flat, and I didn't ask. When he left in the mornings there was never any sign he'd been there. Sian, who I lived with, called him The Man From UNCLE.

'What's his place like?' She was hunched over on the sofa, painting her toenails the colour of Irn-Bru and drinking a milkshake.

'I haven't been there yet.'

'Why not? It's been ages.'

I walked into the kitchen and started washing up a

bowl from breakfast.

'Well?'

'He's renting,' I called out over my shoulder.

Sian snorted. 'You're renting.'

There were hard flecks of porridge on the bowl that wouldn't come off. I scrubbed at them for a bit, then went back into the living room and sat on the arm of the sofa.

'He says it's haunted.'

Sian laughed so hard that her milkshake slopped onto the carpet.

'What does it feel like?' I asked Paul in bed. That evening we'd been to see a play about solitary confinement, and as we were walking to the station afterwards he'd reached for my hand. It was the first time he'd ever done that.

'What, this?' He gave me a squeeze, and we both laughed.

'No – I mean the thing. In your flat.'

He rolled onto his back. Out in the street, a fox shrieked.

'I don't really know how to explain it.'

We lay there not saying anything for a long time. The music from the bar over the road started to die down and I closed my eyes, but I couldn't sleep. Eventually,

Paul got up and went into the bathroom. He shut the door, and after a while I heard him crying.

I found a picture of him and his ex-wife online. It had been taken at the opening of an exhibition a couple of years earlier – they were standing in the middle of a big group, nearly touching, smiling at each other like nobody else was there. She had a glass of water in one hand, and the other was resting on the slight but definite swell of her stomach.

We didn't have any children.

I put my phone down and shut my eyes, willing it away.

The next Sunday, after Paul had gone home, I stayed in bed with the curtains still drawn, reading about match factories.

Victorian matches were made using highly toxic white phosphorus, and deposits of it built up in the jawbones of the workers – usually young women – in the factories. “Phossy jaw” led to abscesses, severe disfigurement, brain damage and, eventually, death.

There was a knock on the door, and I jumped. Sian came in with a rolled-up towel under her arm. I

slammed the lid of my laptop.

‘I’m going for a swim. Fancy it?’

‘Thanks, but I think I’ll stay here,’ I said.

‘Sure?’ She frowned. ‘Bit gloomy in here, isn’t it?’

After she’d gone I took my sketch-pad to the park, but everything I drew came out mangled and wrong. On the way home I found the newspaper with the advert in it.

François the medium asked me to meet him at a Mexican restaurant. He was fiftyish, with a stubby ponytail. When I arrived he was drinking a cocktail with palm fronds poking out of it.

‘Tell me how I can help you, Claire,’ he said. He didn’t sound French. I wondered if François was his real name, and why he’d chosen this line of work. I wondered how on earth I’d ended up there.

As I told him about the match factory, and the phosphorus, and all the workers who’d died, he stared at me over the top of his glass.

‘How long have you been living in this flat?’

‘Oh, no – it’s not mine. My...’ an image of Paul dressing in his usual slightly distant way the previous Sunday morning swam in front of my eyes. I blinked it away. ‘Someone I know rents it.’

One of François’s eyebrows twitched.

‘But you’ve felt it?’

‘I haven’t, actually,’ I said. I looked down at the sticky tabletop. ‘I’ve never been there.’ There was a knot in my stomach. ‘I don’t think he wants me to be exposed to it,’ I said finally.

‘I see,’ François said.

We sat in silence. Then François leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. ‘I can come round and take a look,’ he said. ‘But he needs to ring me, if it’s his place. It can’t be you.’

A mariachi-band cover of *Walk the Line* was leaking out of the speakers, and there was a smell of burnt cheese coming from the kitchen. I was starting to feel ill.

‘Would you excuse me for a minute?’ I said, grabbing my bag. I was halfway to the door when François called out to me.

‘Maybe he likes it.

I turned around. ‘Sorry?’

‘He might not want to get rid of it.’ He laughed, and slurped his drink. ‘Sounds very convenient.’

The restaurant was next to a busy crossroads. I stood in the doorway for a couple of minutes, watching the cars as they shot past me, and then I did something I’d never done in all the weeks I’d known him – I called

Paul.

He picked up almost straight away. ‘Claire? Is everything ok?’

There was a pan sizzling in the background, and music. ‘Fine,’ I said, trying to keep my voice as even as I could. ‘Totally fine. Listen, I was thinking – why don’t I come round?’

Paul turned the music down. ‘Tonight?’

‘I’m right by the tube. I could probably be there in about half an hour.’

The silence felt like something being stretched.

‘Look, whatever it is that’s there...’ I took a deep breath. ‘I don’t care. I’d just really like to see you.’

When Paul did eventually speak, he sounded exhausted.

‘I’m not sure that’s such a good idea,’ he said.

I moved the phone away from my ear. The traffic lights were on red, and I could see the young couple in the car nearest me nodding along to the radio together, laughing. Distantly, I heard Paul’s voice asking if I was still there. ♦

Brooklyn, Blue Moon

by *Phoebe L. Corbett*

Rumbling over Brooklyn Bridge on the M train, Mia spoke of the poet we were visiting for the night. Delilah was publishing her new book, and I had been struck with visions of an illustrious poetry recital, lost in the sounds of champagne flutes and intimidating conversations.

‘She’s like a tree elf,’ my older sister announced, guzzling Fireball whisky straight from the bottle. ‘Or a nymph.’ Despite living in America for five years, Mia’s English accent pierced through the throng of late night passengers. Eyes rolled. I took a sip and stared at the full moon spangled over the Hudson River, blurring its edges as my throat stung. The subway car was bright, a pale yellow stark in my memory, and in contrast, New York City’s skyline looked subdued. Beautiful, still, I thought somewhere through my sleepy haze.

I’d been here a mere two sweltering days, and though this city had stunned me with its huge parks and wild streets and skyscrapers and views, I had yet to unearth the culture I craved. The part of Harlem I

imagined Mia to live in, with history and community, had been swallowed up and bought out by Columbia University. In another word: gentrified. So when she invited me to a distant friend’s poetry reading in Bushwick, Brooklyn, despite a sickly blend of heatstroke and jetlag, as a poet I was curious. A literary night could be culture I was looking for.

Next to us, a man with peppered stubble swung open the carriage door. August heat and the roar of the train tracks flew in. As my eyes drew to his faded Yankees shirt curling at his waist, I watched with mild disgust as he unbuckled his belt, balancing one lumberjack boot on each carriage. Mia smirked at my frown as I witnessed him pissing over the Hudson, basking under the open sky.

‘It happens all the time here,’ she dismissed. ‘He’s just enjoying the view.’

Sliding back into the night’s waxy heat at Central Avenue station, we emerged from a flight of steps into a vacant intersection. A nearby generator hummed. Traffic lights hung under the bridge like bananas from a tree: slices of yellow flickering in the shade with green and amber and red. A strange quietness had met us in Bushwick. We hurried our footsteps towards an opening of light from a Taco Bell in front. Running my hands through my hair, I felt sticky and damp. Sweat clung to my neck as we gingerly scuttled past rows of pastel painted houses, clamped shut with metal barred

doors. Across from us, distant bass notes whirred from a dive bar as we wound up to Delilah's block.

It was a lofty, copper-red building, attached with a concrete archway. We moved past the bins and up the steps. From the shadows a burly rat coursed across Mia's shoes. She shrieked. With nowhere to turn, the rat desisted, obstructing the door with scared black eyes and a body slick with grease. We froze too, staring at him as he did us, waiting for movement. I yelped and swore, ready to run. In a woozy leap, my sister pushed into the door of the building and held it open for me. I hesitantly hopped, and then we were in, catching sight of the rat darting out of the gate from the ruckus.

At the very top of the stairwell, a small, elfin girl with a gust of silver hair greeted us at the apartment door. An endless ladder rested beside her.

'I'm so glad you're here,' she squealed, squeezing Mia.

'I'm Delilah,' she said, turning to me. 'It's a blue moon tonight, you know? What good luck...' She trailed off. I tried to ask about it without seeming naïve.

'Oh darling, spells will be cast tonight, *for sure*. Esbats are a special time – perfect for poetry.' Esbats? A later Google search taught me these were coven meetings on the nights of full moons, inspiring healing and psychic training. Blue moons – a second full moon in the same calendar month – held added power. I tried to picture holding a poetry esbat with my own friends,

but couldn't.

'She's a witch. A... pagan,' Mia whispered behind me. 'Forgot to say.'

'Can't you feel the energy in the room?' Delilah asked, grabbing my clammy hand as we peered into her cramped living room. People with pallid faces and moist brows swathed over tables and couches adorned with Moroccan throws. Wooden pagan masks, protruding with horns and beaks, were wound along the walls, and patchouli oil burned from the floor. Weed floated around us, too, as I yawned and rubbed my eyes in sync. A girl with jagged peach hair twirled in a circle alone, moving to the tinny electro-jazz music playing from the MacBook on the table. I deliberated whether jazz and Apple products still classed this event under 'wiccan,' or 'hipster.' The girl's body moved as if she were a doll attached to threads controlled from above. I murmured enthusiastically to Delilah, gulping Fireball and wheezing from the cinnamon.

'I feel the energy.' Such energy. Everyone was completely stoned.

I stood by the sink once Delilah wandered off. There were offerings of grapes and cherry tomatoes in bowls, and abysmal American-style hummus – too heavy on the tahini. I popped tomatoes into my mouth one by one to keep busy. A guy with a plaid jacket and patchy tufts of dark hair soon shuffled over to me, and I coolly struck up conversation in wilted hope he was more

alert than his stoned peers. Hugo Van Vorhansen turned out to be an academic, poet and art exhibitor, and took great delight in telling me of his new installation in a downtown, abandoned laundromat. Also prone to cemetery tours, he did readings there after dusk. I stared at his mousy face as he stuttered, fixed on a point between his eyebrows, and silently praised myself on nodding in all the right spaces, ignoring waves of nausea in my gut. From above us, a subway train drummed from the bridge, shaking the room and muffling our voices. I continued nodding.

‘That’s great! So you’ll come?’

‘Hm?’ I gaped, startled at what I’d agreed to.

‘Greenwood... the cemetery... in my neighbourhood? It’ll be super chill for your poetry. I’d love to hear it.’ I hadn’t met many academics that said ‘super chill,’ but this was America. I agreed to him, flattered, though slightly scared.

Weeks later, Hugo timidly wrote me: ‘I had wanted to write you sooner, but I have been tied down with some things I was hoping would not take as long as they did, but now they are done.’

Behind Hugo, three men hooted hysterically, as their throaty drawls crashed into each other. The men looked about thirty, dull and professional, but held themselves like rowdy seventeen year olds. A small clear baggy fell to the floor between them. One of the men, the shorter, scruffier one, folded over to reach for the bag,

guffawing as he picked it up. He quickly inspected it under the overhead lamp, sealing it shut. A white matter shone. Coke? Speed? Crystals flashed under the light bulb, and then he shoved the baggy deep into his back pocket. Poetry events I’d attended at home were waning from my memory. Crystal meth was an American development. I leaned towards my sister.

‘Is this shit normal for you? Meth?’ My eyes widened in alarm.

‘No. This is insane,’ she whispered, bemused. I breathed out. ‘The crazy thing is most of these people have PhDs... Bloody creative writers,’ she quipped, referencing my own degree subject as I feigned contempt. My work was so far from Brooklyn’s creative microculture that I was floundering in. The idea that everyone around me was more successful and scholarly, while seeming so out of touch, irked me. An escape was beckoning. My stomach ached, and I longed for my mattress over the river in Harlem. I’d stay for the poetry, I convinced myself, cradling the disappointment in my belly as I swayed to the music.

‘It’s time to make our way to the roof,’ Delilah cooed. She was so quiet I assumed I’d misheard her, until I saw the ladder we’d passed earlier tower at the doorway. Hordes of draped guests slithered into a ball by the door, huddling under the hatch opened to the stars. In the flurry, I was pushed against peach-haired-dancing girl, now curiously holding a wine glass of

grapes and ice. She stared at me blankly. I tried to make a joke, but blank stares continued. I asked her name, anyway. She started to splutter, struggling for an answer, as if the question was awful for a first meeting.

‘I don’t have one.’

‘Anything you’d like me to call you?’ I faintly asked, regretting it. She looked around the room, and peered down at her glass, shrugging.

‘Call me Grapes.’

‘-- May as well do!’ Mia cut in, calling me from the top of the ladder, which lay unattached to the hole in the ceiling. As I climbed it, whisky sailed through my bloodstream from the sudden altitude. I peered down twelve feet to Grapes’s hand barely brushing the ladder, and accepted I might die with these people. Flushed with baking midnight heat, I stumbled on the flat roof to its floor, falling back into a space where I could lean.

‘Come on, Fragile,’ my sister sighed, pulling me under her arm so I could rest. A girl wearing white silk gloves clambered to the edge of the building. Her heels brushed the air from the void behind her as she pulled out crumpled paper, giggling as her friends cheered with whoops and yells. I gazed in delirium at the Brooklyn backdrop. Even from our height, industrial buildings towered over us like forest trees. An old brewery loomed past a shabby hotel, never revived

after the Prohibition era of the twenties, as its red brick walls and crumbling chimneys solemnly eroded. The full moon glossed over us, resting as an opal in dusty clouds.

Bushwick grew louder. Car exhausts growled from the streets below, filling the air with smog. The dive bar buzzed. Trains passed every two minutes, submerging the poems as we met with gormless travellers. We only heard fragments, but it didn’t seem to matter. The poet spoke of the blue moon, and of capitalism, and groceries, and crack-cocaine. In fact, lots about crack. By the fifth mention, I assumed she, and everyone around us, were blissfully lost that night in an abstract world of socially uncool class As. Yells kept spurting from her friends, and she was shifting uncomfortably. I peered behind to watch the culprits. The earlier howling men were dangling their legs through the roof hatch and swigging San Miguels, wearing Delilah’s horned pagan masks that curled out through the darkness. One bottle tipped over with a clunk.

Mia passed me a pleading message typed on her phone. She wanted an escape route, but I was too involved now. I made her wait until Delilah crept up to the roof-stage. Sipping from a golden chalice, she waved a broom through the air. She started to chant, her soft voice barely detectable, smothered by trains and her own guest hecklers.

‘Sweep out darkness, sweep out doom... Earth be hallow, air be pure, fire burn bright... A sacred bridge this sight shall be...’ The insolent hecklers roared over her. The other guests, trying hard to succumb to Delilah’s trance in the moonlight, were annoyed. Furious glances and *shut ups* resonated from the roof-floor. The stuffy air was too tense for magic. As she read from her poetry book, the recital became jerky and paused. She stopped often to take gulps of breath.

‘Speak up, bro!’ the scruffier man called out.

‘Fuck off, Craig,’ Delilah spat, in between a line about *congealed sadness*.

Mia was tugging on my shoulder to leave, and we were receiving unwelcome looks of our own now. My sick tiredness brimmed too close to my mouth, so we crawled like street rats through the crowd of drugged hipsters – past a spellbound Hugo Van Vorhansen, and past Grapes. The hatch blocked, we brushed our knees through rat droppings, oozing beer pools and spliff butts to the ladder fixed to the building’s edge. I felt mildly unhinged. After a night meeting New York’s highbrow eccentrics, I was not convinced Delilah’s place was the cultural core I’d hoped for. But, I thought, as I clung onto the side of a four-storey building, envisaging my sweaty death ahead of me, this could have only happened once in a blue moon in Brooklyn. ♦

Self Portraits

by Jeffrey Meyers

The modern self-portrait began in Renaissance Florence when artists first asserted their identity, while playing a cameo part, by placing their own image as observer or participant into religious and historical narratives. In the fifteenth century Northern realism brilliantly fused with Italian humanism to emphasize the value of the individual personality and to place a high value on the portrait. As the artist gained social status, his image increased in importance. Sandro Botticelli’s handsome, even arrogant image – looking remarkably like Burt Lancaster – appears on the extreme right in *The Adoration of the Magi* (1475). As the artist decided to play a leading role, rather than be an interesting face in the crowd, the self-portrait came into its own and became a new genre. It was an occasion for psychological exploration, portrayal of character, projection of personality and definition of selfhood, a statement of individuality and self-awareness, an affirmation of the artist’s worth and fame, a challenge to oblivion and bid for immortality.

Instead of portraying, even flattering or satirizing, the subjects who commissioned his work, the self-portrait artist concentrates on himself and establishes a bond with the spectator. He encourages you to look at him with the same intensity as he stares back at you, and to experience a shock of recognition as the famous painter suddenly appears and comes alive. A series of portraits done throughout a lifetime can show a dramatic narrative and portrayal of personality. When Joshua Reynolds, for example, made prints of his thirty self-portraits, he displayed them on a table like the frames of a slow motion film. Though paintings are silent, their subjects speak to us.

The painter is narcissistic in the mythological as well as the Freudian sense. The self is an always available and endlessly interesting model. He uses a mirror to look at and paint himself (Parmigianino actually shows this) and the viewer confronts him directly, face to face. He has many dramatic, narrative and symbolic resources at his disposal: his facial features, expression, mood and gesture, gaze, hair style, clothing, pose, setting, background, inscription, accoutrements, action, and evocative allusions. In this imaginative conjunction of painterly skill and psychological insight, his reflection disappears and the portrait remains, a permanent image of a crucial stage in an artist's life.

Except for one picture by Francisco Goya, the ten self-portraits discussed in this essay (a representative

selection based on personal taste as well as on inherent worth) do not portray the artist with his family at home or with friends in his studio. They sacrifice dramatic interest by appearing alone, in the spotlight and isolated on the stage. These 'advertisements for myself' form three groups of three, which show the changing character of the artists' self-perceptions and radical changes from the sixteenth to the twentieth-first century.

In the first cadre, the exalted and imperious Titian is enveloped in sumptuous apparel. Parmigianino is irresistibly attractive, though encased in a distorted setting. Goya, dressed like a fashionable señorito, is industriously at work at his easel. In his second picture Goya moves from proud to pathetic and marks a turning point in portraiture. In a thank-offering for his recovery from an illness, he portrays himself as vulnerable and frightened. The next group is dangerous and defiant. Vincent Van Gogh, like a secular saint, boldly displays his self-inflicted wound. Max Beckmann's formal tuxedo is an aggressive armour-plated shield. Wyndham Lewis also confronts and challenges the anxious spectator.

In the twentieth century painters moved from the Renaissance idea of the divine creator to the portrayal of the artist as a tragic figure, displayed before and mocked by a hostile public, or as a deviant abnormal outcast, 'born under Saturn' and destined for madness

and destruction. The last three portraits, in the modern mode of self-exposure, move from the dignified to the degraded – naked, confessional and vulnerable, yet stoical in the face of adversity. Lucian Freud and Alex Colville emphasize their physical frailty and waning powers when faced with death.

In the first Self-Portrait (1560, age 72, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) by Titian, the greatest painter of the Venetian Renaissance, his majestic and luminous figure fills the frame. The Renaissance biographer Giorgio Vasari – emphasizing the idea of sprezzatura, the appearance of effortless ease, observed that Titian's method of reworking and recolouring 'is judicious, beautiful and astonishing because it makes the paintings seem alive and created with great artistry, disguising the labour involved'. Set against a dark background, the artist wears a scholar's black cap, subtly textured fur stole, purple jacket and white sleeve shimmering down his left arm. The light bounces off the triple coil of gold chains given to him by his most powerful and generous patron (subject of several of his finest portraits) the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Titian's left hand rests on his knee; his foreshortened right hand, with fingers stiffly spread, is placed on the plain white tablecloth. His head is tilted slightly backward, and he has a lofty brow, deep-set white-glinting brown eyes, a strong nose and lips barely visible beneath a thick grey beard that touches his

collar. The septuagenarian sage looks offstage to the source of light on the left, as if he were about to rise from his seat and respond to an urgent summons. Titian's lavish clothing defines the new social status of the artist who consorted with popes and kings.

Parmigianino's Mannerist Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) was painted in 1524 when he was only twenty-one years old. Vasari recorded that for this unusual circular picture the painter:

'had a ball of wood made, and cutting it out to make it of the same size and shape as the mirror, he set to work to copy everything he saw there, including his own likeness, in the most natural manner imaginable. As things near the mirror appear large while they diminish as they recede, he made a hand with wonderful realism, somewhat large, as the mirror showed it. Being a handsome man, with the face of an angel rather than a man, his reflection in this ball appeared divine. He was most successful with the lustre of his glass, the reflections, shadows and lights, in fact human ingenuity could go no farther.'

Both realistic and distorted – like Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) – Parmigianino achieved his trompe d'oeil effect by simulating the curve of a convex mirror on the surface of the small round panel. The young man stands near the mirror that rounds out the leaded window, bent to form a skylight, and the

coloured panelled ceiling just above his head. He has reddish shoulder-length hair parted in the middle and curled beneath his ears, pale rose-tinted cheeks, widely spaced heavy-lidded grey eyes on slightly different planes, light glinting off his bold straight nose, pursed cupid-bow lips, firm chin, curly white-silk collar, outsize sleeve ruff and fur-trimmed coat. Decorated by a coral ring, his disproportionately large hand and elongated fingers – a sign of artistic proficiency – spread across the foreground in a mysterious gesture that both invites and excludes the viewer. In this chest-length, full-face portrait, the angelic artist, looking slightly to the left at his own reflection, has a wise-for-his-years expression and a soft, gentle, innocent, dreamy, androgynous, even girlish appearance. Delicate and elegant, the picture evokes surprise and astonishment. David Ekserdjian notes that ‘the gold-framed form to the painter’s extreme left...is the portrait the viewer is admiring set up on the artist’s easel.’

John Ashbery begins his long ambitious poem of 1972, ‘Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror’ with a precise description:

‘As Parmigianino did it, the right hand Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer And swerving easily away, as though to protect What it advertises. A few leaded panes, old beams, Fur, pleated muslin, a coral ring run together In a movement supporting the face,

which swims Toward and away like the hand Except that it is in repose.’

Ashbery calls it ‘the first mirror portrait,’ though it was actually preceded a century earlier by Van Eyck’s Arnolfini Portrait (1434).

Ashbery was attracted to the picture by what Arnold Hauser called Parmigianino’s ‘virtuoso, precious, playful artistry . . . the light and gentle flow of his line, his sensuous delicacy of draftsmanship and voluptuousness of form, his feminine sensibility and erotic subtlety.’ In his 1964 review of Parmigianino’s drawings, Ashbery praised ‘the almost supernatural refinement . . . the sense of the mystery behind physical appearances.’ The beauty of the narcissistic young man reflected the poet’s ideal self. Ashbery once told me he chose this painting because he ‘thought the subject was cute.’ The portrait, a celebration of himself, is a tribute to Parmigianino’s precocious talent, brilliant technique, physical beauty and personal charm.

Francisco Goya’s self-portraits provide a striking contrast between the ideal and the real. In Self-Portrait in the Studio (1785, age 39, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid) the youthful artist stands full-length in front of a writing table, painting a picture at his tall easel and looking to the left at the viewer. An ivory-colored window, painted with visible brushstrokes, floods the room with light but leaves his

face in shadow. He wears tight trousers around his shapely legs, buckled shoes, ruffled white cuffs, and brown jacket trimmed with red embroidery and decorated with silver buttons. His high pot-hat with silver buckle on its band has metal pincers holding candles that allow him to paint at night. His alert features and confident hidalgo pose suggest a masterful artist at the height of his powers.

Thirty-five years later, when he was seventy-four, Goya painted a very different scene and image in *Self-Portrait with Doctor Arietta* (1820, Minneapolis Institute of Art). The inscription at the bottom of the picture thanks his physician and friend 'for the care and attention with which he saved my life during an acute and dangerous illness.' Overwhelmed by this mysterious sickness, which was related to his deafness, Goya lies in bed and seems about to sink into oblivion. Tilted backward, clothes in disarray, sweating, hair receding, eyes half-closed and mouth half-open, Goya gasps for a breath of air. He clutches the white sheet as if holding on to life, while the red blanket beneath it suggests an impending haemorrhage.

The faithful and solicitous Dr. Eugenio García Arietta revived Goya – rescued from death though pale and faint – and enabled him to paint this picture and to live for another eight years. Arietta's left arm protectively supports and embraces the moribund patient, whose hair touches the doctor's cheek, while

his thick, wooden right hand raises to Goya's lips a restorative cup of medicine. But the doctor's twisted lips and troubled expression suggest doubt about whether his remedy will be effective. Goya's suffering recalls Christ's anguished cry in Matthew 26:39, 'let this cup pass from me', while the doctor holds his stiff body in a *pietà*. In the background, three shadowy, cadaverous, nightmarish friends and servants wait to bury and mourn for him. After a lifetime of looking hard at horrific reality, Goya created a desperately poignant portrait of himself. This intensely dramatic scene portrays him as a wounded hero, hovering as in an opera between life and death.

Vincent Van Gogh was the first of these artists to paint without a patron or commissions and to lack recognition in his lifetime. The story behind Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe* (1889, age 36, Stavros Niarchos Collection, Kunsthaus, Zurich) is violent and notorious. In December 1888 Van Gogh suddenly rushed at Paul Gauguin with an open razor in his hand, then stopped short and ran toward the house they shared in Arles. He returned to his room in a state of excitement and high fever, suffered auditory hallucinations, 'went astray in his wits' and severed the lower part of his left ear. After staunching the flow of blood, he covered the wound with a large beret and rinsed the excised flesh. He then took it to his habitual brothel, gave it to a prostitute and told her to 'keep this

object carefully'. She unwrapped the ghoulish gift and fainted.

Van Gogh portrayed himself in three-quarter view, with the warm gold and brick red of the background clearly divided by a line that runs emphatically across the painting at the level of his red-rimmed ferret eyes. The demented artist has a sharply outlined fur cap pulled down on his forehead, rough sallow-skinned face with high-bridged nose and green buttoned greatcoat. He bites a pipe that puffs out curls of smoke, boldly confronts the viewer and wears an expression of defiant despair.

In his novel *The Revenge for Love* (1937), the artist and author Wyndham Lewis provides a brilliantly detailed description of Van Gogh's portrait:

'He was disguised in the fur cap of a Canadian trapper. A heavy white bandage, descending under the chin, covered his right ear. The pupils of the eyes were painted as a nest of concentric wedges of greens, reds, blues and yellows, with their apex inwards. The bald look of the pale eyebrows marked the base of the bony swellings. Then more wedges stuck on end, a miniature hedge of them, for the tissue of the lips. An old pilot jacket produced the weighty yoke.'

Although Van Gogh had suffered self-mutilation and psychic shock, his intense, tragic yet therapeutic painting is surprisingly concentrated, calm and composed.

Like Van Gogh, both Lewis and Beckmann endured exile and suffered poverty in their lifetimes. Both modern artists came back from the Great War to face civilian conflicts. Lewis, a Swiftian satirist, defined the Tyro, his persona in print and art, as 'a new type of human animal, raw and undeveloped, his vitality is immense but purposeless, and hence sometimes malignant.' In *Wyndham Lewis as a Tyro* (1921) the fierce and frightening artist, a self-declared enemy of society, projects his self-created image rather than his real self. (A photo of the handsome, thirty-year-old Lewis looks remarkably like the dashing self-portrait of the young Delacroix.) Lewis's violent image is grotesque and forbidding. He sports a high military collar and black suit that juts out of his chest. His heavily shadowed face has a mountain-peak left eyebrow, jewel-cut eyes, blade-like nose, grimacing red lips, sharp jutting chin and stiff-column neck. His cantilevered hat, row of gravestone teeth and jagged outline of his body stand out strongly against the bilious mustard background. Though his features are extremely stylized, they forcefully convey his abrasive personality. Menacing and ready for combat, he defies the society that refuses to recognize his achievement. In Lewis' hands, the self-portrait becomes a political statement.

Max Beckmann's *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo* (1927) was painted during the economic and political instability of

Weimar Germany. The monumental and elegant Beckmann, who liked formal attire, stands in front of a folded red curtain and grey background. He wears a black tuxedo and tie, offset by a stiff white shirt front and white cuffs. His right arm is bent onto his waist, his left hand, with protruding veins and bent fingers, holds a dangling cigarette while his thumbs extend toward each other. His eyes are obscured in a shadow that runs from his wide brow to his protruding jaw. With massive flat-topped head and frightening flat-faced countenance, he looks like a cross between Winston Churchill and a bulldog. Ready for more than a night out on the town, he stares directly at the spectator in a brutal and aggressively self-assured pose, part revelation, part disguise. Beckmann's forceful, jagged outlines convey chilling cynicism and ironic detachment, exude status and confidence, and project ferocious energy and psychic power. In her novel *Henry and Cato* (1976), Iris Murdoch describes Beckmann's place in the tradition of 'metaphysical objectivity'. Murdoch's Henry admires the painter's vast self-confidence and commanding egoism, and is writing a book on the tormented images of the 'two-wived Beckmann, treading underground paths of masculine mysticism which linked Signorelli to Grünewald, Rembrandt to Cézanne.'

The last three self-portraits reveal the artists stripped naked: Egon Schiele's self-loathing and

despair, Lucian Freud's pride and aggression and Alex Colville's confrontation with mortality. In two scandalous court cases the young Austrian Schiele was acquitted of sexually assaulting a fourteen-year-old girl, but convicted of showing his naked drawings to children. In a witty poem, Robert Graves clarifies the difference between Schiele's nakedness and the idealized nude: 'The naked, therefore, who compete / Against the nude may know defeat.'

In the thickly painted *Self-Portrait in Black Cloak, Masturbating* (1911), Schiele stands before a plain beige background and portrays a sexual act never before publicly exposed in high art. He has a tilted bulbous triangular head, protruding red ears, large sad eyes, thin nose and twisted lips. His open black cloak hangs heavily on his narrow fragile shoulders, exposes his naked body and falls below the open crotch of his thin spread legs. His two spindly hands join at the genitals, revealing the crest of his pubic hair and touching the oval bottom of his scrotum. His penis is concealed rather than erect. His contorted expression suggests he has not yet reached orgasm and is not getting much pleasure from his provocative behavior. Deviant and defiant, nervous and intense, he portrayed the repressed sexuality in Freud's Vienna and reversed Freud's dictum to mean: where ego was, there id shall be.

Schiele, following the precise linear tradition of Hans

Holbein and Albrecht Dürer, transcends his subject matter with superb draftsmanship. The adolescent appearance and compulsive act by the Kafka of Expressionism evoke not shock and shame, but compassion and tristesse. He expressed his agony in a desperate letter of January 1911: 'Will things go any further? I can't. I haven't been able to work for days. . . . Who will help me? I can't buy a single canvas; I want to paint but have no colours. I am sick.' Schiele died in the epidemic of Spanish influenza, at the age of twenty-eight, before he could fulfill his promise.

In his blurry portrait, *Painter, Working, Reflection* (1993) Lucian Freud looks like he had been roughly moulded by an unseen hand from clay into man. His uncombed hair has a white streak, his forehead is corrugated, his nose long and expression desperate. His old man's emaciated body shows his neck tendons, skeletal structure and sagging veined flesh. His genitals are sketchy, his knees knobbly, his heavy open unlaced soldier's boots show his bare feet and seem more fit to trek through mud than pace the artist's floor. He stands naked and alone in his messy studio, holding – like a shield and sword – a palette knife in his actively raised right hand and a smeared dark palette in his weakly lowered left hand. This brave display of decrepitude shows an impressive determination to continue his work. Once handsome and now ruined, Freud provocatively declared, 'the task

of the artist is to make the human being uncomfortable, and yet we are drawn to a great work by involuntary chemistry, like a hound getting a scent.' He also explained how he created this self-portrait: 'Now the very least I can do is paint myself naked. You've got to try and paint yourself as another person. With self-portraits 'likeness' becomes a different thing. I have to do what I feel like without being an expressionist.'

Studio (2000) by the Canadian realist Alex Colville is a vertical version of Hans Holbein's stark *Christ in the Tomb* (1521) and a variant of the tormented nudes: Dürer's *Self-Portrait for Consultation with a Doctor* (1507), where the artist points to pain in his abdomen, and Stanley Spencer's *Double Nude Portrait* (1937). It is an astonishingly brave self-exposure of the aged artist, who had precariously survived several gruelling operations for cancer and for open-heart surgery to replace a defective valve. In this depiction of human frailty and the approach of death, Colville faces the spectator with a naked, full-frontal glare, balding dome, thin arms, crooked legs, and bony torso cut and scarred from throat to pubis. His hands are crossed (like Schiele's) in front of his genitals, with the bottom of the scrotum showing just below the fingertips. His glasses and glinting watch emphasize his nakedness, the inexorable passing of time and his own vulnerability, and evoke pity for his illness and lament

for his pain. But this great painting also has a positive aspect. The green leaves fluttering above the skylight symbolize the renewal of life. The materials in the artist's studio that protrude from the edges of the frame suggest that his work continues in adversity and will survive: *il faut durer*. His stoic theme is fortitude in the face of disaster and a firm commitment to his art.

These modern self-portraits display what Laura Cumming calls 'their wounds as marks of heroism and sanctity in images designed to have the power to harrow, inspire and arouse compassion.' They all illustrate a great range of aesthetic possibilities: portrayed with or without brushes and palette, smooth or rough brushstrokes, full-face or three-quarter view, establishing or avoiding eye contact, decorated or unadorned, elaborately dressed or naked, exalted or tormented, heroic or wounded. They reveal a radical transformation throughout the centuries from the dignified and impressive Titian, Parmigianino and first Goya to the dying Goya, wounded Van Gogh, lonely and onanistic Schiele, furious Lewis and Beckmann, stripped and saddened Beckett-like Freud and Colville, who abandon all finery and wear nothing more than old boots and a wristwatch.

This brief pageant of self-portraits justifies the claim of the fifteenth-century architect Leon Battista Alberti, who wrote that they bestowed eternal life and fame by

preserving the image, memory and virtues of the subjects: 'Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, but makes the dead seem almost alive. Even after many centuries they are recognized with great pleasure and with great admiration for the painter.' ♦

Meeting Derek Walcott

by *M. Lock Swingen*

When I realised that I was going to teach English for a year in Fort-de-France, Martinique, I brought with me three books to keep me company in a strange and foreign land. Two of the books were books from my early childhood, two writers from the United States, like me, but the other book stashed in my suitcase between my work clothes and swim trunks was the Selected Poems of Derek Walcott. I grew up intrigued by poetry – the way in which the words seem held together by pain and mirrors – and reading Walcott left an indelible mark on my young imagination when I discovered his poetry at the age of sixteen. Ten years later, on the verge of leaving for Martinique, I knew that I could not experience the Caribbean in any real way without reading his poems again.

Upon stepping foot in Fort-de-France I struggled to adjust to the tropical heat and humidity of the island. On my first day of work I showed up to school drenched in back and armpit sweat and retreated to the

bathroom to dab my forehead with Kleenex. After introducing myself to my students, it took a few minutes of laughter and snickers for me to realise that bits of tissue were stuck to my forehead. In Martinique school begins in the rainy season, but that year it did not rain. During those first few months of sweat and exhaustion the locals would tell me that the white glare of the sun began to blister even them. After work, I kept cool by taking shelter in the shade of the single rum shop that also housed an air conditioning unit, propped and purring in the front window that looked out onto the sea, and there I would read Walcott's poetry. Walcott's poems at once comforted me and made me feel elated, as if I could see into the heart of the landscape that surrounded me. For Walcott, the Caribbean and its landscape seemed almost to be made up of language, as if the sheer verbal torque of Walcott's poetry proved more real than reality itself:

*... I seek,
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;
Yet, like a diarist, thereafter
I savour their salt-haunted rooms.*

The power of Walcott's poetry lies in the extraordinary freedom of his images, which seek to stack and multiply metaphors in order to achieve a kind of magical thinking or synesthesia. Anything in Walcott's world can be linked to anything else, but Walcott especially delights in metaphor and figurative language that translates reality from one real into its opposite – the concrete into the abstract, the visual into the tactile or the auditory:

*I met History once, but he ain't recognise me,
a parchment Creole, with warts
like an old sea-bottle, crawling like a crab
through the holes of shadow cast by the net
of a grille balcony; cream linen, cream hat.*

The constant cross-pollination of metaphors never lapses into incoherence – or crosses the border into surrealism – because the central aim of Walcott's poetry is never disruption but a sort of radical integration. For example, while sitting in that tiny rum shop I read again my favourite collection of Walcott's poetry, *The Fortunate Traveller*, where he writes, 'I think of Europe as a gutter of autumn leaves / choked like the thoughts in an old woman's throat.' Here, we have a triple metaphor, where a continent transforms into a gutter, and the leaves become thoughts, and the thoughts clog the throat. And yet the emotional tenor of

the image remains clear. We sense the burden of the European past, its strangling weight, and the poet's desire to free himself of it. For Walcott, the true masters were to be found in the Caribbean landscape around him. *In Another Life*, Walcott's autobiography in verse, he writes:

*Verandahs, 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.*

After reading in that tiny rum shop next to the air conditioner, or whenever I walked down to the cool harbour for an early morning swim, the sea would always be indelibly marked by the magical thinking of Walcott's poetry.

As the holidays approached I booked a flight out of St. Lucia, which proved cheaper than flying out of the Martinique Aimé Césaire International Airport, due to its predilection for flights and itineraries directed toward mainland France and the European continent. Despite having lived in Martinique for four months now, I still hadn't visited another island. I packed my bags. As I waited in the downtown port of Fort-de-

France to board the ferry for St. Lucia there was a predawn chill in the morning wind. It was a couple days before Christmas Eve, and in the boarding station St. Lucians chatted with holiday cheer as they waited for the return passage home. They had traveled across the blue channel to Martinique, one of the neighbouring French islands, to buy Christmas presents to bring home to their loved ones and families. Martinique has an Antillean reputation for sophistication, and St. Lucians carried with them bags full of chocolates in pink boxes, transparent cases of artisanal pastries, and wine bottles with elaborate crests on their labels. I, too, carried with me gifts of French wine to bring home. The boarding station where I chatted with the St. Lucians overlooked the bay that led to the blue channel that divided the two islands.

It was late at night when I reached my bed & breakfast. Despite the twilight hour, my host Martha was lively and almost electric when she opened the front door. She laughed and sometimes clapped as she gave me a tour of her small mustard gabled house in the quiet outskirts of the capital. Martha had just published a children's novel, she told me, which she displayed on the end table by the couch in the living room where we talked. I asked her if she had ever read Derek Walcott, who was also from St. Lucia. She was friends, she laughed, with Mr. Walcott's partner Sigrid

Nama. Martha got up from the sofa, headed for her old rotary dial phone, and called up Sigrid. Unable to comprehend what was exactly happening, I remained seated on the sofa and sipped the ti'punch she had served me. After a few seconds Martha's eyes widened. She mouthed that Walcott himself was on the other end of the line. Martha explained to Mr. Walcott that a young man wished to speak with him. She passed the phone to me. Dumbfounded, my opening remarks sounded as cliché as any star-struck tourist accosting a Hollywood A-lister in the streets of L.A. 'Derek Walcott, is that really you?' I asked. The conversation went on exactly like that.

The next day Martha and I spent the entire morning and early afternoon crafting an immaculately-phrased email that inquired if I could meet Mr. Walcott in person. I write book reviews for a small literary magazine, published out of the United States, and in the email Martha and I explained – or maybe connived – that the meeting would serve as an opportunity to interview him for the magazine. Martha was adamant that Mr. Walcott be addressed as 'Honourable Sir Walcott' in the email, since he had recently been awarded the title of Knight Commander of the Order of St. Lucia. We sweated out another draft and added the epaulets to his name. Just the day before, while on the ferry crossing the eighty kilometres of waterway that separated Martinique from St. Lucia, it never would

have occurred to me to call up Walcott, despite the basic fact that his phone number is listed in the St. Lucian phone registry, and even if the idea had occurred to me, I never would have done it. It's not in my nature. And yet Martha kept persisting that I meet him. We sent off the email and spent the night at the Caribbean cinema and watched *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. How could it be, I wondered in the cool darkness of the cinema, that I might meet a childhood hero? Outside of the cinema now, purple light still out, Martha checked her email on her phone. Walcott had sent a reply. He told me to swing by in two weeks after New Year's Eve.

Back in the United States, while white blizzards raged across the East Coast that year, I researched and prepared for the interview with a sort of ferocious intensity, predicated less upon diligence or single-mindedness and more on something resembling blind animal terror. After all, how to prepare for an interview with a writer of this calibre? Sir Honourable Derek Walcott, a Nobel Laureate, is indisputably one of the lions of world literature. In the first decades of his career, a large part of Walcott's ambition aimed to bring his native St. Lucia into the world of literature for the very first time. Growing up on a tiny island on the outskirts of the British Empire, Walcott's childhood education meant that he studied the English and European literary classics. And yet the glorious oak

tree he encountered in the poetry of Keats did not correspond to the breadfruit tree he saw outside his own bedroom window. Many of his poems aim to show that the Caribbean – its people, landscape, history – belongs in English poetry no less than England itself. 'Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?' Walcott imagines being asked in *The Sea Is History*, and he replies by pointing to the sea:

*These groined caves with barnacles
pitted like stone
are our cathedrals.*

The sea caves of the Caribbean, Walcott claims, rival the nave and whirling spires of Notre-Dame. From this private sensibility evolves an oeuvre – eighteen poetry collections, nine volumes of drama, and a book of essays – of an imagination unparalleled in the magical gift of rendering the Caribbean into the permanence of poetry.

When I met Derek Walcott after New Year's Eve he was already very old. For some reason, I had pictured him as I saw him in photographs from the 1980s, as if time stops for lions. But time does not stop, even for Walcott. I helped Derek position his wheelchair around a table under the verandah outside his home that looked out onto the sea. Just like in Martinique, I dressed myself in a button-down dress shirt with a gold

pin dot tie and slacks. Derek wore shorts and a loosely-fitted t-shirt with a pen sheathed in the breast pocket. Back in the United States, I had prepared around two dozen high-minded questions – the sort of questions one would think to ask a man of this stature – that focused on subjects like post-colonial thought, Caribbean politics, the hottest trends in academic literary theory, or the ultimate signification of his work. To kick off the interview, I asked if I could read aloud a poem of his, perhaps one of his more widely anthologised pieces like *Ruins of a Great House*. ‘I would hate that,’ he replied. Dumbfounded, I asked why. ‘I don’t know,’ he laughed. ‘What’s the point of all this?’ I didn’t know how to respond. The tape recorder recording silence. Feeling that I had to drop all pretences, I confessed that I had found his poetry early on in life and that his work had left an indelible mark on me. We sat outside at the table under the verandah in the dying light and began to talk about Hart Crane, Emily Dickinson, and Paul Cézanne. Walcott explained how Cézanne, renouncing the pretence of recreating reality, selected instead one element from reality – light – to interpret all of nature. I showed him a poem I had written about skiing in Montana. After I had read the poem aloud, he asked me from where I had stolen the phrase ‘blue snow.’ When I told him I hadn’t found the phrase anywhere, he told me to come back tomorrow morning, and we would talk some more.

The next day, and in fact over the next several months, we met and discussed how to write better, how to see more clearly, and how to depict landscape in language the way Cézanne painted landscape on canvas. Eventually, Derek was kind enough to introduce me to his friends and integrate me into his literary circle. Under the verandah outside his house we circled around Derek, like moons orbiting a planet. Every one of us had somehow in our own way been deeply marked by Walcott. For me, it felt as if I was sixteen again reading and rereading the biographies of writers and artists whose lives seemed inextricably linked with each other. For whatever reason, Derek allowed me into his world of like-minded people whose very blood coursed with the fresh morning wind of literature. Although Derek never ceased to treat his friends with un-bounding generosity and spirit, he was also a tough and merciless teacher. What mattered most to Derek always seemed to be the hard work required in order to succeed at the difficult craft of poetry, which he called ‘perfection’s sweat.’ In *White Egrets*, Walcott writes:

*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.*

When I returned to Martinique after my meetings with Derek, my writing would always change. There was always a way to get better. There was always a way to see how a white heron was the same colour as clouds or waterfalls. There was always a way to see better how the early morning light lengthened the shadows of trees and noon took them away.

The last time I saw Derek it was only a few months before he passed away. It had been only a little over a year since we first met. He was much weaker and his health had deteriorated since I last saw him. With Sigrid, I stood beside Derek's bed where he lay and greeted him. Sigrid and I discussed the upcoming events for Nobel Laureate Festival, a weeklong celebration of St. Lucia's two Nobel Laureates, scheduled to take place over the next several days. Suddenly, Derek perked up and asked me: 'How's the work?' Taken aback, I told him that I had spent the past few months preparing some new poems for him. 'Do you have them here with you?' he asked. Although I didn't expect to show the poems to Derek due to his frail health, I brought them with me because I knew that the the price of admission to Derek's world charged poems and hard work: perfection's sweat. I pulled up a chair next to the bed where he lay, and I handed over the poems and a pen. It took him a few minutes to position the pen in his hand and set the pages of the poems against his upraised thighs. As he

began to mark up and approve certain aspects of my poem while tearing other parts to shreds, I watched Derek breathe in that fresh morning wind again. In the borrowed hospital bed next to the oxygen tank in his bedroom we worked for a long time. The man never stopped working. His work lives on. ♦

Side by...

...by side

Two Poems

Edward Kamau Brathwaite¹

THE CABIN

1

*Under the burnt out green
of this small yard's
tufts of grass
where water was once used
to wash pots, pans, poes,
ochre appears. A rusted
bucket, hole kicked into its
bottom, lies on its side.*

Versek

translated by *Tárnok, Attila*

A KUNYHÓ

1

*Ennek az apró udvarnak
kiégett-zöld
fűcsomói alatt
ahol egykor vízben mostak
lábast, edényt, kikötőket,
megjelenik az okker. Egy rozsdás
vödör hever feldöntve,
berúgott fenékkal.*

¹Edward Kamau Brathwaite 1930-ban született Barbados szigetén. Egyetemi tanulmányait Cambridge-ben végezte, ezt követően hét évig Ghanában majd az egyetlen karibi egyetem, a University of the West Indies történész-oktatójaként működött. Számos irodalmi díj jutalmazottja. Itt közölt versei a *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (A beérkezettek) című trilógiájának a *The Rights of Passage* című kötetéből származnak. A címválasztás szójáték, a "Rites of Passage" (Beavatási szertartás) 'elírása', ami így azt jelenti: Az áthaladás (az út, a távozás) joga. Versei fordítói szempontból különösen nehéz feladatot jelentenek: stílusát szaggatott, a dzsessz vagy esetleg a reggae ütemét mintázó hangsúlyeltolások, soráthajlások, töredezettségek jellemzik.

*Fence, low wall of careful
stones marking the square
yard, is broken now, breached
by pigs, by rats, by mongoose
and by neighbours. Eucalyptus
bushes push their way amidst
the marl. All looks so left
so un-lived in: yard, fence and cabin.*

*Here old Tom lived his whole
tight house no bigger than your
sitting room. Here was his world
banged like a fist on broken
chairs, bare table and the side-
board dresser where he kept his cups.
One wooden only door, still latched,
hasp broken; one window, wooden,
broken; four slats still intact.*

*Darkness pours from these wrecked boards
and from the crab torn spaces underneath the door.*

*These are the deepest reaches of time's long
attack. The roof, dark shingles,
silvered in some places by the wind, the finger-
tips of weather, shines still secure, still
perfect, although the plaster peels from walls,
at sides, at back, from high up near the roof: in places*

*Kerítés, alacsony fal óvatos
kövekből jelzi a négyzet alapú
udvart, most betörve, a réseken át
malacok, patkányok, mongusz
és szomszédok iszkolnak. Eukaliptusz
bokrok törnek utat a márgás
talajon. Mind oly elhagyott,
oly nem lakott: udvar, kerítés, kunyhó.*

*Itt élt Tamás bátya: az egész
ház nem nagyobb, mint a te
nappalid. Világa össze-
zúzva, ahogy ököl tör székeket,
csupasz asztalt és kredencet,
hol bögréit tartotta.
Egy tiszta faajtó, reteszre zárva,
tört retesz. Egy zsalugáter,
törött, négy lécz még ép.
Sötétség ömlik e roncs deszkákból
és az ajtó alatti szüette résből.*

*Az idő hosszú harcának ezek a
legmélyebb ráncai. A szél-
ezüstözte tető csillog, még hibátlan,
a zsindegyeken sötétlik az idő
lenyomata, és a vakolat hullik a
falakról oldalt, hátul, magasról a tető*

*where it was not painted. But from the front,
the face from which it looked out on the world,
the house retains its lemon wash as smooth and bland
as pearl.*

*But the tide creeps in: today's
insistence laps the loneliness of this
resisting cabin: the village grows and bulges:
shops, super-
market, Postal Agency
whose steel spectacled mistress
rules the town. But no one knows
where Tom's cracked limestone oblong lies.
The house, the Postal Agent says,
is soon to be demolished:
a Housing Estate's being spawned
to feed the greedy town.*

*No one
knows Tom now, no one cares.
Slave's days are past, for-
gotten. The faith, the dream denied,
the things he dared
not do, all lost, if un-
forgiven. This house is all
that's left of hopes, of hurt,
of history ...*

*alól, ahol nem volt festve. De elöl,
ahol mint arc a ház a világra kinézett,
még sárgállik a mész, puhán akár egy gyöngy.*

*De lopakodik a hullám: a jelen
akarata nyaldossa e kitartó kunyhó
magányát: a falu nő és dagad:
üzletek, szuper-
márket, a Postahivatal
acél szemüveges kisasszonya
uralja a városkát. De nem tudja senki
hol fekszik Tamás bátya törött mészkő
téglalapja. A házat, jegyzi meg
a postamester, nemsokára lebontják:
egy lakótelep serken,
a város telhetetlen.*

*Senki
nem ismeri az öreget már, senkit
nem érdekel. A rabszolga-
ság a múlté, elfeledve.
A hit, az álom megtagadva,
amit félt megtenni, mind elveszett,
de nincs bocsánat. E ház az, mi
reményből, ráncból, régi időkből
még megmaradt...*

Winter 2017

2

*But how can we go on
how can we go on
growing as these houses are*

*these supermarkets are --
picks pecking stones
back breaking bone --*

*if this first link is lost
the broken chain tossed
on the doorman's heap?*

*It was not shame that built this hurt,
collected local stones
to build the fence*

*conceived the plaster,
reared the tamarind tree:
its brittle leaves, green speechless*

*fritters, only mock
this shack's dilapidation and the hopes of one
whose life here, look*

2

*De hogyan tudnánk tovább
hogyan tudnánk tovább
nőni ahogy ezek a házak*

*szupermárketek
– csákányt csípő kövek
hátat hajlító csont –*

*ha ez első kapocs elveszett
az elszakadt lánc
a portás púpjára dobva?*

*Nem a szégyen építette e fájdalmat,
gyűjtött a környéken köveket
hogyan kerítést építsen*

*ötlött ki burkolatot,
ápolta tamarinduszfát:
törekeny leveleit, szótlán,*

*zöld vágatait, csak gúnyolták
a düledező kunyhót és reményét
annak, kinek az élete itt, nézd*

*how snapped, how
broken, will not be
recorded on our cenotaphs or

books.*

THE EMIGRANTS

*1
So you have seen them
with their cardboard grips,
felt hats, rain-cloaks, the women
with their plain
or purple-tinted
coats hiding their fatten-
ed hips.*

*These are The Emigrants.
On sea-port quays
at air-ports
anywhere where there is ship
or train, swift
motor car, or jet
to travel faster than the breeze
you see them gathered:*

*hogy roppant meg, hogy
tört össze, és nem lesz nyoma
sem síremlékeinken, sem könyvek

lapjain.*

EMIGRÁNSOK

*1
Így láttad őket
kartonbőröndöt szorongatva,
nemez kalapban, eső-
köpenyben, zsírosodó
csípőjű asszonyaikat
szegényes, halványlila
kabátokba
rejtve.*

*Ezek az Emigránsok.
Kikötők rakpartján
légi kikötőknél
bárhol ahol hajó
vasút vagy fürge
gépkocsi, dzset vár
szélnél sebesebb utazásra,
látod őket összegyűjtve:*

*passports stamped
their travel papers wrapped
in old disused news-
papers: lining their patient queues.*

*Where to?
They do not know.
Canada, the Panama
Canal, the Miss-
issippi painfields, Florida?
Or on to dock
at hissing smoke locked
Glasgow?*

*Why do they go?
They do not know.
Seeking a job
they settle for the very best
the agent has to offer:
jabbing a neighbour
out of work for four bob
less a week.*

*What do they hope for
what find there
these New World mariners
Columbus coursing kaffirs*

*útlevélben pecsét
az utiokmány régi
lejárt újságpapírba
csomagolva: türelmes sorokban.*

*Hova?
Nem tudják.
Kanada? A Panama
csatorna, a Miss-
issippi fájdalomföld, Florida?
Vagy partot érni
Glasgow sistersgő
füstjébe veszve?*

*Miért indultak el?
Nem tudják.
A megélhetésért
elfogadják az
ügynök ajánlatát
egy szomszédot fosztva meg
munkájától heti négy shillinggel
kevesebért.*

*Miben bíznak
mit fedeznek fel
ezek az Új Világ tengerészek
Kolombuszt űző kafferek*

*What Cathay shores
for them are gleaming golden
what magic keys they carry to unlock
what gold endragoned doors?*

2

*Columbus from his after-
deck watched stars, absorbed in water,
melt in liquid amber drifting*

*through my summer air.
Now with morning, shadows lifting,
beaches stretched before him cold and clear.*

*Birds circled flapping flag and mizzen
mast: birds harshly hawking, without fear.
Discovery he sailed for was so near.*

*Columbus from his after-
deck watched heights he hoped for,
rocks he dreamed, rise solid from my simple water.*

*Parrots screamed. Soon he would touch
our land, his charted mind's desire.
The blue sky blessed the morning with its fire.*

*Mely India partjai
csillognak aranyban előttük?
Varázskulcsokat hoznak
aransárkány őrizte ajtókhöz.*

2

*Kolombusz a hátsó fedélzetről
vízben itatott csillagokat nézett,
folyékony borostyánba olvadókat*

*az én nyaram légtérében.
Most reggel, hogy az árnyékok oszlnak,
partok nyúltak el előtte hidegen, tisztán.*

*Madarak kerülgették a csapkodó zászlót
keresztárbocot: krárogva félelem nélkül.
A felfedezés, amelyért vízreszállt, ilyen közel volt.*

*Kolombusz a hátsó fedélzetről
csúcsokat remélt megpillantani,
vízemből felbukó sziklákat álmodott.*

*Papagáj visított. Nemsokára eléri
földünket, térképezett eszének óhaját.
A kék ég tüzével áldotta a reggelt.*

*But did his vision
fashion, as he watched the shore,
the slaughter that his soldiers*

*furthered here? Pike
point and musket butt,
hot splintered courage, boines*

*cracked with bullet shot,
tipped black boot in my belly, the
whip's uncurled desire?*

*Columbus from his after-
deck saw bearded fig trees, yellow pouis
blazed like pollen and thin*

*waterfalls suspended in the green
as his eyes climbed towards the highest ridges
where our farms were hidden.*

*Now he was sure
he heard soft voices mocking in the leaves.
What did this journey mean, this*

*new world mean: dis-
covery? Or a return to terrors
he had sailed from, known before?*

*De vajon képzeletében,
ahogy a partot nézte,
megjelent-e katonáinak*

*pusztítása? Lándzsa-
fok és puskatús,
forró szilánkos bátorság, golyó*

*roncsolta csontok,
gyomromba vágó fekete csizma, a
korbács meg nem hajló vágya?*

*Kolombusz a hátsó fedélzetről
szakállas fügefákat látott, sárga tuják
mint virágpor lángoltak és a sudár*

*vízesés a zöldbe függesztve
ahogy szemei a hegygerinc felé
hatoltak, ahol házaink megbújtak.*

*Egyszerre lágy csalfa hangokat
hallott a levelek közül tisztán.
Mit rejtett ez az út, mit*

*rejtett ez az új világ: mit
fedezett fel? Vajon a rettegés,
mely elől hajóra szállt, visszatér?*

I watched him pause.

*Then he was splashing silence.
Crabs snapped their claws
and scattered as he walked towards our shore.*

3

*But now the claws are iron: mouldy
dredges do not care what we discover here:
the Mississippi mud is sticky:*

*men die there
and bouquets of stench lie
all night long along the river bank.*

*In London, Undergrounds are cold.
The train rolls in from darkness
with our fears*

*and leaves a lonely soft metallic clanking
in our ears.
In New York*

*nights are hot
in Harlem, Brooklyn,
along Long Island Sound*

Néztem, ahogy elrévedt.

*Aztán beleloccsant a csendbe.
Rákok koccintották össze ollóikat
és szerteszaladtak, amint ő partunkra lépett.*

3

*De most az ollók vasból vannak: vacak
vonóhálókat nem érdekel mit fedezünk fel:
a Mississippi sár ragad:*

*emberek halnak meg ott
és bűz bukéja fekszik
éjhosszat a folyó mentén.*

*Londonban, hideg a földalatti.
Sötétségből gördül be a szerelvény
félelmünkkel*

*és magányos puha fémes csengést
rejt fülünkbe.
New Yorkban*

*forrók az éjjelek
Harlemben, Brooklynban,
a Long Island Sound mentén*

Winter 2017

*This city is so vast
its ears have ceased to know
a simple human sound*

*Police cars wail
like babies
an ambulance erupts*

*like breaking glass
an elevator sighs
like Jews in Europe's gasses*

*then slides us swiftly
down the ropes to hell,
Where is the bell*

*that used to warn us,
playing cricket on the beach,
that it was mid-day: sun too hot*

*for heads. And evening's
angelus of fish soup,
prayers, bed?*

*Ez a város oly hatalmas
fülei nem ismernek többé
egyszerű emberi hangot*

*Rendőrautók búgnak
mint csecsemők
előrobban egy mentő*

*mint kitört üveg
sóhajt egy lift
ahogy a zsidók Európa gázzaiban*

*aztán lesiklik velünk
sebesen a pokol kötelein.
Hol van a harang*

*mely valaha krikettezés közben
riasztott minket a tengerparton,
hogy dél van: nap fejekre*

*túl forró. És esti hal-
leves angyali üdvözlete,
imák, ágy?*

Winter 2017

4

*My new boss
has no head
for (female) figures*

*my lover
has no teeth
does not chew*

*chicken bones.
Her mother wears
a curly headed wig.*

5

*Once when we went to Europe, a rich old lady asked:
Have you no language of your own
no way of doing things
did you spend all those holidays
at England's apron strings?*

*And coming down the Bellevueplatz
a bow-legged workman
said: This country's getting pretty flat
with negres en Switzerland.*

4

*Új főnököm
fejetlen
(női) formákra*

*szeretőm
fogatlan
nem rág*

*csirkecsontot.
Anyja göndör fejű
parókát visel.*

5

*Egyszer Európában, egy öreg hölgy megkérdezte:
Maguknak nincs saját nyelvük
dolgokat elintézni valahogy
Anglia oltalma alatt
töltötték a szabadságukat?*

*És a Bellevueplatz felé
tartó ólábú munkás azt
mondta: negres en Switzerland,
ez az ország egyre unalmasabb.*

6

*The chaps who drive the City buses
don't like us clipping for them much;
in fact, make quite a fuss.
Bus strikes loom soon.*

*The men who lever ale
in stuffy Woodbine pubs
don't like us much.
No drinks there soon.*

*Or broken bottles.
The women who come down
to open doors a crack
will sometimes crack*

*your fingers if you don't
watch out. Sorry!
Full! Not even Bread
and Breakfast soon*

*for curly headed workers.
So what to do, man?
Ban the Bomb? Bomb
the place down?*

6

*A palik akik a városi busszokat
hajtják, nem szeretik ha nagyon
csipkelődünk, sőt durcásak kissé.
Egy buszsztrájk kinéz.*

*A férfiak kik barnasört emelgetnek
dohos Woodbine-mélyi kocsmákban
nem csípnek minket.
Nem lesz ott ital egyhamar.*

*Vagy törött üvegek.
Asszonyok kik ajtót nyitnak
résnyire, néha odapréselik*

*az ujjad ha nem ügyelsz.
Vigyázat! Bocsánat.
Telház van! Se Kenyér se
Reggeli egyhamar göndör*

*fejű munkások számára.
Nincs mit tenni, öreg.
Bojkottálsz a helyet?
Vagy lebombázod?*

Winter 2017

*Boycott the girls?
Put a ban on all
marriages? Call
You'self X*

*wear a beard
and a turban
washing your tur-
bulent sex*

*about six
times a day:
going Muslim?
Black as God*

*brown is good
white as sin?
An' doan forget Jimmy Baldwin
an' Martin Luther King...*

7

*Our colour beats a restless drum
but only the bitter come. ♦*

*A lányokat kiközösíted?
Betiltasz minden
házasságot? X-nek
hívod magad*

*szakállat viselsz
és egy turbán
mossa el tur-
bulens nemiséged*

*vagy hatszor
napjában:
muszlim leszel?
Fekete mint Isten*

*a barna jó
fehér mint a bűn?
Oszd ne feledd el Jimmy Baldwint
meg Martin Luther Kinget ...*

7

*Színünk egy nyughatatlan dobot
ver de csak keserűséget okoz. ♦*