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DEREK  
WALCOTT

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*Collected  
Poems*  
1948–1984



## COLLECTED POEMS

1948-1984

Derek Walcott was born in St Lucia in 1930. He was educated at St Mary's College and the University of the West Indies, and has taught at the universities of Columbia, Yale and Harvard. Currently, he is Professor of English at Boston University, where he teaches writing courses in poetry and drama. Among his many plays are *Dream on Monkey Island*, *Pantomime* and *The Last Carnival*. Since his *Collected Poems*, he has published two further volumes, *The Arkansas Testament* in 1987, and his epic *Omeros* in 1990.

Derek Walcott divides his time between Boston and the Caribbean.

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## *Names*

[for *Edward Brathwaite*]

### I

My race began as the sea began,  
with no nouns, and with no horizon,  
with pebbles under my tongue,  
with a different fix on the stars.

But now my race is here,  
in the sad oil of Levantine eyes,  
in the flags of the Indian fields.

I began with no memory,  
I began with no future,  
but I looked for that moment  
when the mind was halved by a horizon.

I have never found that moment  
when the mind was halved by a horizon—  
for the goldsmith from Benares,  
the stonecutter from Canton,  
as a fishline sinks, the horizon  
sinks in the memory.

Have we melted into a mirror,  
leaving our souls behind?  
The goldsmith from Benares,  
the stonecutter from Canton,  
the bronzesmith from Benin.

A sea-eagle screams from the rock,  
and my race began like the osprey  
with that cry,  
that terrible vowel,  
that I!

Behind us all the sky folded,  
as history folds over a fishline,  
and the foam foreclosed  
with nothing in our hands

but this stick  
to trace our names on the sand  
which the sea erased again, to our indifference.

## II

And when they named these bays  
bays,  
was it nostalgia or irony?

In the uncombed forest,  
in uncultivated grass  
where was there elegance  
except in their mockery?

Where were the courts of Castille?  
Versailles' colonnades  
supplanted by cabbage palms  
with Corinthian crests,  
belittling diminutives,  
then, little Versailles  
meant plans for a pigsty,  
names for the sour apples  
and green grapes  
of their exile.

Their memory turned acid  
but the names held;  
Valencia glows  
with the lanterns of oranges,  
Mayaro's  
charred candelabra of cocoa.  
Being men, they could not live  
except they first presumed  
the right of every thing to be a noun.  
The African acquiesced,  
repeated, and changed them.

Listen, my children, say:  
*moubain*: the hogplum,  
*cerise*: the wild cherry,  
*bate-la*: the bay,  
with the fresh green voices  
they were once themselves  
in the way the wind bends  
our natural infections.

These palms are greater than Versailles,  
for no man made them,  
their fallen columns greater than Castille,  
no man unmade them  
except the worm, who has no helmet,  
but was always the emperor,

and children, look at these stars  
over Valencia's forest!

Not Orion,  
not Betelgeuse,  
tell me, what do they look like?  
Answer, you damned little Arabs!  
Sir, fireflies caught in molasses.