

Derek Walcott

Poet Description:

Derek Walcott was born in 1930 in the town of Castries in Saint Lucia, one of the Windward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. The experience of growing up on the isolated volcanic island, an ex-British colony, has had a strong influence on Walcott's life and work. Both his grandmothers were said to have been the descendants of slaves. His father, a Bohemian watercolourist, died when Derek and his twin brother, Roderick, were only a few years old. His mother ran the town's Methodist school. He studied at St. Mary's College in his native island and at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. Since the 1950s Walcott has divided his time between Boston, New York, and Saint Lucia. In 2009, Walcott began a three-year distinguished scholar-in-residence position at the University of Alberta. In 2010, he became Professor of Poetry at the University of Essex.

Exploring the Caribbean and its history in a colonialist and post-colonialist context, his collection *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960* (1962) attracted international attention. His play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970) was produced on NBC-TV in the United States the year it was published. In 1971 it was produced by the Negro Ensemble Company off-Broadway in New York City; it won an Obie Award that year for "Best Foreign Play". The following year, Walcott won an OBE from the British government for his work. He was hired as a teacher by Boston University in the United States, where he founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre in 1981. That year he also received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in the United States. Walcott taught literature and writing at Boston University for more than two decades, publishing new books of poetry and plays on a regular basis and retiring in 2007. He became friends with other poets, including the Russian Joseph Brodsky, who lived and worked in the US after being exiled in the 1970s, and the Irish Seamus Heaney, who also taught in Boston.

His epic poem, *Omeros* (1990), which loosely echoes and references characters from The Iliad, has been critically praised "as Walcott's major achievement."

Walcott was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, the first Caribbean writer to receive the honor. The Nobel committee described his work as "a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment."

Race/Ethnicity:

African ^[1]

Picture:

**Gender:**

[Male](#) ^[2]

Sexuality:

[Straight](#) ^[3]

First Name:

Derek

Last Name:

Walcott

Birth & Death Dates:

Thursday, January 23, 1930

School of Poetry:

[Other](#) ^[4]

Birth Place:

Castries

Saint Lucia

See map: [Google Maps](#) ^[5]

LC

Group visibility:

Public - accessible to all site users

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[5] <http://maps.google.com?q=%2C+Castries%2C+%2C+%2C+lc>