

# Derek Walcott

1930–2017

Derek Walcott is a West Indian poet and playwright, who won the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature. Check out this biography to know about his childhood, family life, achievements and other facts related to his life.

- Birthday: January 23, 1930
- Nationality: Saint Lucian
- Age: 90 Years, 90 Year Old Males
- Sun Sign: Aquarius
- Also Known As: Sir Derek Alton Walcott
- Born In: Castries, Saint Lucia
- Famous As: Poet
- Family:
- Spouse/Ex-: Margaret Ruth Maillard (M. 1962), Norline Metivier (M. 1982), Fay Moston (M. 1954–1959)
- Father: Warwick Walcott
- Mother: Alix Walcott
- Siblings: Pamela Walcott
- Children: Anna Walcott, Elizabeth Walcott, Peter Walcott

Derek Walcott was born in Castries, Saint Lucia, the West Indies, on January 23, 1930. His first published poem, "1944" appeared in The Voice of St. Lucia when he was fourteen years old, and consisted of 44 lines of blank verse. By the age of nineteen, Walcott had self-published two volumes, 25 Poems (1948) and Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos (1949), exhibiting a wide range of influences, including William Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.

He later attended the University of the West Indies, having received a Colonial Development and Welfare scholarship, and in 1951 published the volume Poems.

In 1957, he was awarded a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation to study the American theater. He published numerous collections of poetry in his lifetime, most recently The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013 (Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

2014), *White Egrets* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), *Selected Poems* (2007), *The Prodigal: A Poem* (2004), and *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000).

The founder of the Trinidad Theater Workshop, Walcott also wrote several plays produced throughout the United States: *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (1992); *The Isle is Full of Noises* (1982); *Remembrance and Pantomime* (1980); *The Joker of Seville and O Babylon!* (1978); *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970); *Three Plays: The Last Carnival; Beef, No Chicken; and A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1969). His play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* won the Obie Award for distinguished foreign play of 1971. He founded Boston Playwrights' Theatre at Boston University in 1981.

His first collection of essays, *What the Twilight Says* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), was published in 1998.

About his work, the poet Joseph Brodsky said, "For almost forty years his throbbing and relentless lines kept arriving in the English language like tidal waves, coagulating into an archipelago of poems without which the map of modern literature would effectively match wallpaper. He gives us more than himself or 'a world'; he gives us a sense of infinity embodied in the language."

Walcott's honors include a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Montale Prize, a Royal Society of Literature Award, and, in 1988, the Queen's Medal for Poetry. In 1992, Walcott became the first Caribbean writer to receive the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature, and in 2015, he received the Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry's Lifetime Achievement Award. He was an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Derek Walcott died on March 17, 2017, in Saint Lucia.

## Poetry

*The Poetry of Derek Walcott: 1948–2013* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014)

*White Egrets* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010)

*Selected Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

*The Prodigal: A Poem* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)

*Tiepolo's Hound* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001)

*The Bounty* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

Omeros (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990)  
The Arkansas Testament (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987)  
Collected Poems, 1948–1984 (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986)  
Midsummer (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984)  
The Fortunate Traveller (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982)  
The Star-Apple Kingdom (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979)  
Sea Grapes (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976)  
Another Life (Jonathan Cape, 1973)  
The Gulf and Other Poems (Jonathan Cape, 1969)  
The Castaway and Other Poems (Jonathan Cape, 1965)  
In a Green Night: Poems 1948–1960 (Jonathan Cape, 1962)

## **Major Works**

- ‘Omeros’, a book-length epic poem, containing a total of sixty-four chapters divided into seven "books", is probably Derek Walcott’s most talked about work. Although the main narrative of the poem takes place in his native island St. Lucia, it loosely echoes Homer’s epic poem ‘Iliad’.
- In the poem, fishermen Achilles and Hector compete with each other over the love of Helen, a housemaid. The cover for the book, which depicts some of the main characters in the sea, riding a boat, was painted by Walcott himself.

## **Awards & Achievements**

- In 1971 he received Obie Award for Best Foreign Play for ‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’.
- In 1972, Walcott was elected an Officer of the Order of the British Empire.
- In 1988, he received Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.
- In 1990, he received Arts Council of Wales International Writers Prize and also W. H. Smith Literary Award, the later for his epic poem, ‘Omeros.’
- In 1992, Derek Walcott received the Nobel Prize in Literature "for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment".
- In 2004, he received Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Lifetime Achievement.
- In 2011, he received T. S. Eliot Prize and Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, both for his poetry collection ‘White Egrets’.

- In 2016, he was made a Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Lucia.

### **Personal Life & Legacy**

- In 1954, Derek Walcott married Fay Moston, who came from a wealthy Jamaican family. With her, he fathered a son, Peter Walcott, who later became a famous painter and now lives in St. Lucia. The marriage ended in divorce in 1959.
- He then married Margaret Maillard, with whom he had a live-in partnership before marriage. She was an almoner in a hospital in Port of Spain, but was equally active as a dancer and painter. They had two daughters; Elizabeth Walcott Hackshaw, and Anna Walcott Hardy.
- This marriage too did not last long. From the middle of the 1970s, he started having an affair with Norline Metivier, a young dancer in one of his plays. He married her in 1976, but it too broke up before long.
- In 1987, during one of his readings at Pittsburg, Walcott met Sigrid Nama, a Danish-Flemish-American art dealer. They have been living together since then.
- Walcott now divides his time mainly between New York and St. Lucia. He has a passion for traveling and has visited different countries around the world.
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### **Trivia**

- The Nobel Committee announced Walcott's selection for that year's prize on October 8, 1992. Incidentally the year marked the 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing in the Caribbean.