

## DEREK WALLCOTT'S ONE ENDEAVOR

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In 1970 Derek Walcott dedicated a collection of his dramas, *Dream On Monkey Mountain And Other Plays*, to his twin brother Roderick also a distinguished playwright. "For my brother, Roderick," the dedication reads, "engaged as long in the one endeavor." What was that endeavor? Thirty-four years later in *The Prodigal*, his most recent book length poem, Walcott seems to provide an answer to this question. "What was our war, veteran of three score years and ten?" he asks Roderick, and the answer he gives for Roderick, for Roderick is now dead, "To save the salt light of the island, to protect and exalt its small people," seems to tell us what the endeavor was that he and his brother were engaged in for so long, and, coming in what he says will be his "last book," appears to sum up the central theme of his life's work. In this paper I propose to examine critically the idea that the one or at least the main endeavor of Walcott's work so far has been "To save the salt light of the island, to protect and exalt its small people." My project in this paper is to explain the sense in which this is true.

I begin with the passage from Malraux's *Psychology of Art* which serves as the introduction to "The Divided Child," the first chapter of Walcott's masterpiece *Another Life*. Since the divided child is obviously Walcott himself we have some reason for supposing or hoping that this introduction will help throw light on what he thinks art is. I cite the concluding sentence of the passage which goes as follows: "What makes the artist is the circumstance that in his youth he was more deeply moved by the sight of works of art than by that of the things which they portray." We can suppose that Walcott is letting us know that when he was a child he was more deeply moved by the sight of works of art than by that of the things which they portray, and that he thinks this is one cause of his dividedness. But what does he mean by saying that he was "divided" and what does that have to do with being more deeply moved by works of art than by what they portray?

Let us begin with the claim that the artist as a child is more deeply moved by works of art than by the things that they portray. What does that mean? I begin my answer to this question by considering some of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's remarks on music in his somewhat neglected essay, "On the Origin of Languages." Rousseau had been engaged in a debate with the composer Rameau over the relative importance of melody and harmony in music. To help make his point for the superior importance of melody Rousseau noted that "everyone in the universe will take pleasure in listening to beautiful sounds; but unless this pleasure is enlivened by familiar melodic inflections it will not be totally delightful, it will not become utter pleasure." The reason for this, Rousseau goes on to say, is that human beings write melodies, and in a melody "sounds act on us not only as sounds but as signs of our affections, of our sentiments; that is how they arouse in us the emotions that they express and the image of which we recognize in them." And he makes the same point about painting. "Beautiful colors, nicely modulated," he writes, "give the eye pleasure, but that pleasure is purely sensory. It is the drawing – that endows these colors with life and soul, it is the passions they express that succeed in

arousing our own.” Putting his point more generally, Rousseau asks us to distinguish between “the exclusively sensory impressions and the intellectual and moral impressions we receive by way of the senses but of which the senses are only the occasional causes” (p. 282). In our terms, Rousseau’s position seems to be this: Nature that no human being has manipulated to express his emotions may very well produce beautiful colors and sounds, and we may find these to be very pleasant. But our pleasure will be purely sensory. It will never involve experience of the moral and intellectual sentiments. Sounds and colors arouse these sentiments in us only when some other human being manipulates them in such a way as to express his emotions; and since art is the manipulation of colors and sounds to express emotion, only art, never nature alone, can arouse in us the moral and intellectual sentiments.

To apply these claims to the Malraux-Walcott view of the artist, I first stipulate that to be “deeply moved” is necessarily to experience the moral and intellectual sentiments. Aristotle cites “pity and fear,” as the sentiments for which tragedy is catharsis, but there are, of course, many more, for example, dread, horror, terror, love, hatred, disdain, disgust, contempt, respect, esteem, resentment, indignation, hope, despair, shame, guilt, pride and humiliation. My stipulation is that to be deeply moved is necessarily to experience these or other sentiments. With the further stipulation that artists express these sentiments in their work, and that these same sentiments are aroused in those who appreciate their work, the Malraux-Walcott view comes to this: while all children take pleasure in the sounds and colors of nature, the future artists among them are precociously receptive to the sentiments expressed by artists in their work, finding themselves assailed and permeated by feelings that they might not understand, but desire strongly to understand. Like all other children they continue to delight in the sounds and colors of Nature, but Nature does not assail and permeate them with the feelings that art does, and in this sense they are more deeply moved by works of art than by the things that art portrays.

It will be immediately objected that the child who is to be an artist cannot possibly be permeated by the sentiments expressed in great or even good art because he or she will simply lack the intellectual equipment to have the sentiments such art expresses. This objection makes the important point that the moral sentiments that art expresses are not simply sensations or even bodily feelings; such sentiments all necessarily possess an intellectual or moral component. To feel guilty, for example, is necessarily to have certain ideas. If a person does not have these ideas he literally cannot feel guilty. The point is not that certain ideas cause the feeling of guilt, and we must have these ideas to feel guilt. This leaves it open that guilt could possibly be caused in some other way that does not involve the ideas in question, and I want to exclude this possibility. My position, and it is widely shared among philosophers who study the sentiments, including Rousseau clearly, is that certain ideas are *parts of* or to use current jargon, “constitutive of” the sentiment, so that someone who fails to have these ideas literally cannot have the sentiment. This is clear from the way people try to explain their sentiments and distinguish them from one another. A person who feels guilt does not only feel nauseous – not every person who feels nauseous feels guilt – he also has certain ideas, for example, that he has violated a moral requirement, and it is these ideas, not his nausea, that

distinguishes his feelings of guilt from his feelings of shame, or self-contempt, or self-disgust, which involve different ideas. With this in hand, the objection comes to this: even the child who will become an artist cannot experience the sentiments expressed in great or good art because these sentiments typically involve complex, sophisticated and subtle ideas that the child cannot have.

One way to try to answer this objection is to contend that the child who will be an artist will always be sufficiently precocious intellectually to grasp the ideas in the sentiments expressed in great art. But although this is probably a part of the answer to the objection it cannot be the whole of it. The reason for that is straightforward: many, indeed most, intellectually precocious children never become artists, or show any particular interest in or talent for art. So even if intellectual precocity in a child may be a necessary condition of its becoming an artist, it is not sufficient. Further, it is not the case that the child who is to be an artist must actually have the sentiments expressed in the art that moves him deeply. Indeed I was careful not to say that. What I said was that the work of art assails and permeates the future artists with feelings that he might not understand, but desires strongly to understand. So the future artist need not have a very clear understanding of the ideas that help to constitute the sentiments expressed by the work of art. He need only have an understanding of them that is enough to make it possible for him to have feelings that in some vague and confused way resemble the sentiments the work of art expresses. But now I want to go further. It is not only not necessary that the future artist not fully understand the feelings that invade his soul when he sees a work of art; it is essential that he not fully understand them. This is what makes him an artist. I do not mean that the artist-to-be must be muddle-headed, and slower to understand things than the ordinary child. I mean that the feelings that flood his mind must be more complex, subtle and elusive than those the ordinary child feels. This complexity and subtlety, is necessary to cause his bewilderment, which is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for his determination, indeed his need, to make clear to himself the meaning of the feelings that possess him.

A second objection to the claim that the child who will be an artist is more deeply moved by art than by Nature is directed not at its meaning, but at its truth. Many thoughtful people will reject that claim as patently false. The fact is that it is not at all uncommon to find poets writing as if they were moved first by Nature, and that this experience moved them to portray Nature in art. Consider Wordsworth famous lines:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began:  
So it is now I am a man;

It seems clear to me that Wordsworth is saying that as a child he was first moved by the beauties of Nature, for example, a rainbow, and that the experience led him to write poetry expressing the feelings that were aroused in him by seeing the rainbow.

One reply to this objection is that the experience Wordsworth reports is consistent with his being more deeply moved by works of art than of the things that they portrayed, even if he was also deeply moved by those things. But I do not find this answer satisfactory. For one thing I take seriously Rousseau's position that while Nature's sounds and colors, a babbling brook and a rainbow, for example, may please us, they do not move us because the pleasure they cause is purely sensory, and we are moved only by the experience of the moral sentiments. Nor am I happy with the idea that Wordsworth experienced pleasure of a purely sensory kind, but that this pleasure was so intense as to be mistaken for the experience of moral sentiment. Before I give what I think is the right answer, let us sharpen our focus by setting irrelevancies aside. First, let us admit at one that Nature can arouse certain sentiments. Fear is the obvious example. Nature – a storm, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption, may certainly arouse fear. Another example is the feeling of the sublime, at least as Kant understood it. Naturally we are awed by and fearful of the vast and seemingly irresistible forces of Nature. But, argues Kant, by conquering our fear we enliven our sense of our moral freedom, and this triumph of reason over sentiment is sublime. But we are not speaking of such cases. We are speaking of those occasions where Nature stirs the sentiments in a way that works of art do, and I am not aware that any work of art is directly threatening in a way that a storm, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption is directly threatening. Finally we can also set aside those occasions when Nature, the sounds of a babbling brook, for example, reminds us of a work of art, like a piano sonata, and thus indirectly arouses moral sentiments. (Although even in this case it should be noted that the adjective "babbling" which is the language of a baby already indicates that the listener hears the brook as expressing innocence.) Such cases set aside, we can proceed.

Let us grant that when Wordsworth was a child he was deeply moved when he beheld a rainbow. Or in the terms we have been using, let us admit that when, as a child, Wordsworth beheld a rainbow, he was experiencing strongly though yet obscurely, certain moral sentiments that he later tried to express when as a man he wrote poetry. My suggestion is that he had that experience as a child only because as a child he imagined the rainbow to be a work of art created by the great artist God himself. Presumably his religious training had taught him that God had all human virtues to an infinite degree so that by seeing the rainbow as God's work of art, Wordsworth sees it as expressing those attributes and has experiences that are very similar to those he would have if he viewed a work of art in the ordinary sense, that is, a work of art created by a human being. If in the latter case he sees the work as expressing certain sentiments which are communicated to his own consciousness, in the former case, that is, when he beholds the rainbow, he sees it as expressing the infinite power, wisdom and divine love of God. Though those sentiments cannot be communicated accurately into his own conscious, for they are beyond his understanding, he is filled with powerful but obscure feelings, vaguely akin to, but not the same as familiar feelings of awe, dread, gratitude and love.

In support of this view it is worth noticing that when artists write of being moved by Nature, as distinct from being merely pleased by its colors and sounds, they almost invariably refer to mysterious phenomena that defy our efforts to understand them, though they seem purposeful and well-ordered, and therefore almost compel us to

suppose, or at least imagine, that they were created by a God with infinite power and intelligence and a taste for beauty. This attitude is pervasive among poets and artists, at least at some periods, both when they are confronted by vast and beautiful structures like mountain ranges and oceans, and when they contemplate natural objects of incredible beauty. Thus we have Blake who wonders aloud whether the “HE” who made the lamb could also make the “fearful symmetry” of the tiger; and Kant himself who is struck with wonder by the incredible beauty of a leaf, partly because, I maintain, he insists that even the merest blade of grass cannot be understood without appeal to teleology, that is to ends and design, and that, more generally, that it is a necessary feature of our minds that we have to assume an infinite designer if we were to make sense of Nature at all.

Note finally that poets have often seen the advance of science, with its explanation of previously mysterious phenomena, as undercutting their inspiration and therefore as dangerous to their work. If my view is correct, this is because scientific explanations of previously mysterious phenomena tend to push God the designer further and further into the background, even if they do not ultimately eliminate his necessity entirely. This is true in particular of the rainbow. The rainbow had been a mysterious thing until Newton discovered the laws of optics, and explained why it appeared. Some poets seemed to be devastated. Keats and Lamb, for example, complained that Newton’s discovery had “destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to prismatic colors” (p. 303). It is another story why Wordsworth, who of course, also knew of Newton’s discovery, continued to be moved by the rainbow, but it should be noted that he too seemed to regret the effect of scientific understanding on poetic inspiration. Remember his lament that because “Little we see in Nature that is ours,” it “moves us not,” and that to make himself “less forlorn” he would rather be a “Pagan” who could have “glimpses” of “Proteus rising from the sea.”

If all of this is at least more or less correct we can begin to understand what Walcott means by suggesting that as a child he was “divided.” Supposing that he meant that he was divided into two parts, it seems that we can describe one of these parts as composed of the obscure but powerful sentiments that works of art aroused in him. What were these works of art? By his own account they seemed to be overwhelmingly English or more generally European. Some of this art was visual. *In Another Life* he writes of examining in his “father’s small blue library,” “volumes of *The English Topographical Draughtsmen*, Peter de Wint, Paul Sandby, Cotman, and in another sky-blue book the shepardesses of Boucher and Fragonard,” but clearly, most were literary, and specifically English. Thus he writes in *The Muse of History* that, “like any colonial child I was taught English literature as my natural inheritance.” Further as the passage from Malraux suggests, he was more deeply moved by these works of art than by the tropical Nature that surrounded him. We have his word on that. Thus, as if anticipating the hackneyed complaint that he could not have been moved by English literature because it was far foreign to him he writes, “Forget the snow and the daffodils. They were real, more real than the heat and oleander, perhaps, because they lived on the page, in imagination, and therefore in memory” (p 62). Some may find this a damaging concession, and proof that Walcott is one of those “mimic men” that Naipaul refers to, always trying, despite their tropical origins and black or at most off-white skins, to be Englishmen. For what other

conclusion can we draw if the “heat and oleander” that surrounded him were less “real” than the “snow and the daffodils” he had never seen?

In “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott admits that this criticism was true of him when he wrote his “first poems and plays.” “My first poems and plays,” he writes, “expressed this yearning to be adopted, as the bastard longs for his father’s household. I saw myself legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton, but my sense of inheritance was stronger because it came from estrangement” (p. 28). This yearning was, of course, never satisfied. As he continues, “I would learn that every tribe hoards its culture as fiercely as its prejudices, that English literature, even in the theatre, was hallowed ground and trespass, that colonial literature could grow to resemble it closely but could never be considered its legitimate heir.” In desperation, it seems, he tried to write about local things using the majestic English language he had learned from English drama and poetry, but this failed. He reports, “when I tried to talk as I wrote, my voice sounded affected or too raw,” and though West Indians “proclaimed him a prodigy” because he “insisted on a formality which had nothing to do with their lives,” this led him to believe that “twilight had set me apart,” and then naturally to the “heresy” that “landscape and history” had “failed” him.

We are to suppose that with maturity he came to see through that heresy; St. Lucia history and landscape had not, after all, failed him. But how was that possible? If, as seemed to be the case, there was no art portraying St. Lucian landscape and history and if art alone moves deeply, expressing, and flooding the soul with human sentiment, it seems to follow that St. Lucian landscape and history had failed him. Of course the oleander was beautiful and observing it could cause pleasure, but it could not occasion the human sentiments that penetrate deeply into the soul, and eventually seek clarification and expression in art. Was Walcott then as a child deeply moved by European art simply because there was no other art for him to see or read or hear?

One way to respond to this is to protest that there was an art that portrayed St. Lucian history and landscape, namely, the oil paintings of Harry Simmons. But, while I do not underestimate the influence of Simmons on Walcott, which Walcott repeatedly acknowledges, I believe that something deeper though less obvious was at work. One possibility is suggested by Chapter 3 of “The Divided Child.” (Which is Book One of *Another Life*.) After telling us of himself as a child in his “cotton nightdress,” going to bed with *Tanglewood Tales* and Kingley’s *Heroes*, he goes on to portray, apparently through the eyes of the child who was reading stories of Greek myths and heroes in the books he took to bed with him, an alphabetized list of St. Lucian “derelicts,” from “Ajax,” both a “cart-horse” and a “thoroughbred on race-days, once a year,” to “Zandoli,” the “mosquito-murderer.” Now as we saw earlier, Wordsworth as a child responded to the rainbow as to a work of art, because by an act of imagination he saw the rainbow as a work of art created by God. It seems possible that Walcott was doing something very similar. As a child he responded to the derelicts as works of art – he calls them “the stars of my mythology” – because by an act of imagination he saw them as expressing the sentiments and attributes of the Greek myths and heroes.

It may be objected that this maneuver could not succeed because he could not take the Greek myths and heroes seriously enough to see their sentiments and attributes expressed in the derelicts. Wordsworth might have preferred to be a pagan so that he could have glimpses of “Proteus rising from the sea,” but he cannot will himself to believe the pagan’s “creed outworn,” and so Nature does not “move” him and he remains “out of tune” with it. In other words, he cannot be inspired and moved by Nature as by a work of art. But this objection overlooks that we are speaking now of a child who uses Greek myths and heroes to create a mythology out of the derelicts around him, and as Walcott observes in “The Muse of History,” to him, “The World of poetry was natural and unlimited by what no child really accepts as the actual world.” In other words, the child can take the Greek myth and heroes seriously enough to fashion a mythology out of the derelicts around him that can move him as a work of art. But now the problem is that we now seem to be forced back to the old complaint that Walcott is basically a European poet who attempts the impossible task of portraying St. Lucian fishermen and peasants as Greek gods and heroes.

We must remember, however, that we are now speaking of Walcott as a child, and he has already admitted that as a young poet he “yearned to be adopted,” and consequently “insisted on a formality that had nothing to do with” the lives of those around him. We must consider now whether in his maturity Walcott came eventually to discover that there was an indigenous poetry in the people and landscape of St. Lucia. I think that we can say that he did. First, he noticed or discovered on reflection that the derelicts he had dramatized in terms of Greek myths and heroes were not as artistically inert as he might have supposed. This is clear in “What the Twilight says,” where he listed again many of the same derelicts he listed in *Another Life*. As he put it, these derelicts “mimed their tragedies.” They were “satirists,” they “improved absurd monodramas,” and their “determined self-destructive desolation was performed” (p 20, 21). I can vouch for what he says here, for like him I grew up observing the derelicts he described. I think too that I can explain why they “performed.” These people knew that they were being closely observed, far more closely than the other people in the town. But they were not fakes. They did not perform in order to be observed. It went the other way. Their agonized confused feelings led them to behave oddly, this behavior led them to be closely observed, and then, becoming aware that they were being observed, and wanting to communicate and express what they were feeling, they went at it seriously, and in this sense, “performed.” If I am right about this, there was no dearth of indigenous works of art in St. Lucia. If a work of art is an expression of sentiment, the derelicts were self-created works of art, and they were everywhere. And there was more. There were “vampires, witches, gardeurs,” a “whole, unstarred mythology of flaming, shed skins,” and “Best of all, in the lamp lit doorway at the creaking hour, the stories sung by old Sidone, a strange croaking of Christian and African songs,” sung in a “terrible whine” and telling of children “lost in the middle of a forest...”

We can now explain the sense in which Walcott describes himself as a “divided child.” He was divided in the sense that he was deeply moved by two very different artistic traditions, one European and the other St. Lucian. I must point out that I am not repeating the commonplace that Walcott was influenced by both Europe and the

Caribbean. I have explained the precise sense in which this is so. On my account, for example, Walcott was far more deeply divided than the rest of us, the overwhelming majority, who did not grow up to be artists or poets. We were influenced by Europe and the Caribbean too, and were not necessarily without aesthetic sense, for we might well have been taken by the beauty of the oleander, and the colors of the sea and the sunsets. But we were not deeply moved by the snow and the daffodils in the English poetry we were compelled to read or even by the derelicts, though we might have thought them comical or frightening, and consequently the sentiments expressed by these works of art – the poetry and the derelicts – did not flow into us and perplex us, and fill us with the need to express them in turn and make sense of them. My way of thinking of the divided child also tells us why we should dismiss the hackneyed complaint that it was a kind of betrayal for Walcott to be more moved by English poetry with its talk of snow and daffodils that he had never seen, than by the heat and oleander. This complaint misses the point that though the colors of the oleander might have been pleasant, they were not art, and consequently could not express sentiment, could not be deeply moving.

This conclusion is, I think, sound, as far as it goes, but it does not explain why Walcott became a West Indian poet, and he writes emphatically in “The Muse of History,” that “that was the only thing I could see myself becoming, a West Indian poet” (p. 63). Granted that he was flooded and moved deeply by the sentiments of two artistic traditions, one of them English and the other West Indian, why did he choose to be a West Indian poet? Was it simply because the English would never let him become an English poet? While I believe that this is part of the explanation it is not the whole or the most interesting part.

I think it will be useful in coming to grips with this question to consider a well-known debate in political philosophy between liberals and communitarians over the nature of the self. This debate is sometimes described as the debate between the view of the self as unencumbered, which is the liberal view, and the view of the self as embedded and encumbered, which is the communitarian view. The liberal view derives from Kant who maintained that the self is free only insofar as it is able to hold at a distance, all the roles obligation and relationships given to it by history and society and judge them according to the requirements so reason. John Rawls, the contemporary Kantian, compresses this view into the maxim that “the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it” (p. 560). Communitarians reject this view as radically mistaken. The self they argue is formed by its social position and its history and is always encumbered by roles and obligations that it cannot stand back and judge in some impartial light of reason. In particular it is not “prior” to its ends, as Rawls, says, but is at least partially constituted by these ends. Thus, according to Michael Sandel, a prominent communitarian, the self comes by its ends not by “choice” but by “discovery,” by reflecting on itself and inquiring into its constituent nature.” My suggestion is that viewing Walcott on the liberal Kantian side of this debate will prove illuminating.

Let us begin by considering more closely the communitarian account of how we come by our ends. The communitarians, remember, say that we come by our ends by discovery, by reflecting on ourselves as we have been formed by our history and society. Although this

process may go smoothly in many cases it is easy to see that in some cases it will not. One such case is where the individual is “divided” by radically different artistic traditions as Walcott reports that he was. In such a case, the individual clearly cannot come by his ends simply by discovery because his ends may be conflicting. Either then, he must remain stymied, frozen into inaction, or he must choose. In the light of reason he must reflect on his conflicting ideals and choose which he thinks best.

He cannot avoid having to choose by appealing to history. This is so for several reasons that Walcott emphasizes. First, history is often simply made up. Our historical knowledge is full of gaps, history as he put it is “subject to a fitful muse, memory,” and the gaps must be filled in by “invention.” Second, there simply cannot be any complete, objective history from which we can read off our ideals. As Walcott notes repeatedly, “history is written,” it is a kind of “literature without morality,” and “everything depends on whether we write” it “through the memory of hero or of victim.” In other words, we cannot avoid choosing by appealing to history, for every written history is necessarily selective, told from some point of view, with some interest in mind, and consequently, for all of us, there are many different but equally valid histories. If we try to appeal to history to discover our ends we therefore still have to choose. That is, even if we could discover our ends in history, we would still have to pick one among our different and equally valid histories to discover what our ends are.

Finally, Walcott signals his most radical rejection of history as the source of our ends, in a sentence from Joyce that introduces his essay “The Muse of History.” The sentence reads: “History is the nightmare from which I have been trying to awake.” In other words just as a man having a nightmare does not want to wake up from it and continue having the nightmare, we can and should simply refuse to look to any of our many possible and equally valid histories to discover the direction in which we should go. According to Walcott, the “patrician writers” of the New World saw this clearly. Their vision of man, he reports, is not of a “creature chained to his past,” but of a creature set in a new “Eden,” which is, of course, without history, and therefore without a past that man can use to discover what to do.

Walcott’s emphasis on our freedom from history may suggest that his view is existentialist, but he denies that it is. “Adamic, elemental man,” he writes, “cannot be existential. His first impulse is not self-indulgence but awe, and existentialism is simply the myth of the noble savage gone baroque...Existentialism is as much nostalgia as is Rousseau’s sophisticated primitivism.” His point I take it is that although Rousseau’s natural man, the solitary primitive we meet in “The Discourse on Inequality” is Adamic he is so in a different sense from the man of the New World. Rousseau’s natural man is Adamic in the sense that he literally has no history, and consequently cannot even conceive of blaming it for his choices; he is free, but does not understand that he is free. The New World man is Adamic in the sense that he has a history, and could in “bad faith” blame it for his choices – the pastoralists of the African revival do – but he refuses to do so; he is free and he understands that he is free. Yet the theory of the Adamic New World man is not existentialist either, although on the existentialist view man understands that he is free. In that view man understands that he is free, but he feels

oppressed and burdened by his freedom. That is why he often succumbs to “bad faith,” and tries to deceive himself that he is not free, and can blame history for his choices. The Adamic New World man on the other hand is not oppressed and burdened by his understanding of his freedom; he is “awed” and “elated” by it. This view is more appropriately Kantian than existentialist. It was Kant who wrote that the two things that filled his mind with “ever-increasing wonder and awe,” were “the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”

But although the Adamic New World man is free and is “elated” by his freedom, his choices, made in freedom, must still make sense, be reasonable. Walcott as a child was divided by the sentiments expressed by European and St. Lucian art and infused into him. He chose to be a St. Lucian, or a West Indian poet. This choice was free, but if it was reasonable, what made it so? One possible explanation is negative: he would not be allowed to be an English poet. But this explanation does not I think account for his elation at the choice that he had made to be a West Indian poet. The better explanation lies in the closing lines of “The Muse of History.” “To you, inwardly forgiven grandfathers,” Walcott writes “I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seemed its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift.” In other words, just as poets imagine a divine artist as the creator of Nature and are thus moved by it as by a work of art, by a stupendous act of imagination Walcott sees the Antilles as his “Eden,” the gift of his slave and slavemaster grandfathers, and himself as Adam; or at other times, the Antilles is “given” to him by God (p. 64). And not only to him, but to all other West Indian artists. Thus referring to himself and Gregorias in *Another Life* he writes,

Gregorias listen, lit,  
we were the life of the world!  
We were blest with a a virginal, unpainted world  
with Adam’s task of giving things their names

This view of the New World man as “Adamic” does not encompass only the artists and patrician writers. The slaves too, Walcott reports, in time “surrendered to amnesia.” In other words, history no longer provided direction, and the slave therefore forgot it, and fell back on his own creative resources to live in his new environment. Indeed, according to Walcott “The act of imagination” that began “our poetic tradition” the “new naming of things,” was “the creative effort of the tribe.” P48. The New World poet who accepts the Antilles as the gift of his grandfathers only repeats the effort. The “process of renaming, of finding new metaphors,” Walcott writes, in “The Antilles” is the same process that the poet faces every morning of his working day, making his own tools like Crusoe, assembling nouns from necessity, ... even renaming himself. The stripped man is driven back to that self-astonishing, elemental force, his mind” (p.70).

Finally since the St. Lucian poet is flooded by and deeply moved by the sentiments expressed in the art which is the small people of the island, not only the derelicts, but the peasants and fishermen too, and in turn tries to understand, clarify, and express these

sentiments in his own poetry, one can see how Walcott can suppose that his work exalts those people. As he put it himself, these small people “do not read, they are there to be read, and if they are properly read, they create their own literature” (p. 81).