

A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA

Derek Walcott

*Derek Walcott (b. 1930) was a Caribbean poet and playwright. He became famous for his collection of poems entitled **In a Green Night** (1962). He is known for ironic, antithetical poetry of personal and artistic discovery. His descriptions serve as a means of taking psychological bearings. Walcott's poetry beams back racial consciousness and his sympathy for the victims. His plays such as **Henri Christopher, Drums and Colours** enact his interior exploration. They also combine with folk activities like singing, dancing and story-telling.*



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A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa, Kikuyu, quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?

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Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilization's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming-plain.

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The violence of beast on beast is read 15
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.

Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread 20
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.

Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain, 25
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love? 30
Betray them both, or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cold?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

Let's Think and Do

1. Who is happy to feed on the dead bodies?
2. Is the violence of beast on beast justified? How?
3. What light does the poem throw on racial discrimination?
4. Write in brief your views on caste discrimination in our society.