

A WHOLE PEOPLE

THE 2021 DEREK WALCOTT LECTURE BY

ADRIAN AUGIER

NOBEL LAUREATE FESTIVAL - SAINT LUCIA

19.01.21

FIRST AN EPIGRAPH
(for Derek Walcott & Charles Cadet)

EVENING, SIGNAL POINT

Nothing so meek,
so immeasurably beholden as grief
which feels itself beyond relief,
and yet makes room for more;

For this gift of gentle sailing into dusk;
for his being here, with us,
sentient, silent as evening's tilt,
as oceans pivot round this december ending;

for daughters who will visit joy
and the clatter of grandchildren
upon a house grown too suddenly still
amid the cresting traffic of sea breakers;

for this porch, its shaded rim,
his greying gaze beneath its shingled brim;
for this unfolding gift of flannel sky
and the sea's wrinkled tin reflection.

Through cataracts of clouds
we watched the timeline blurring,
unhemming its horizon,
and closing on our coast,

the rheumy veils
of sea-spray, making ghosts
of far-off tankers, fading too fast,
too soon past Signal Point.

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Salutations ...

Acknowledgements

For her kind invitation to deliver this 2021 Walcott Lecture, I am irrevocably grateful to Her Excellency, Dame Pearlette Louisy, our Governor General Emerita, and Chair of the Nobel Laureate Festival Committee.

It is a singular honor to be so invited by someone who continues to hold such considerable sway as an exemplar to us all, and no less sway as my former French Teacher and School Principal.

She wrote to me several months ago, when curfews were in effect, appointments non-existent, and travel banned for the foreseeable future. Like a kid caught smoking behind the boys' washroom, my options for escape were somewhat limited.

Beyond her kind invitation, I must also credit her genius for focusing my attention on the profound and prophetic statement from which the title of this lecture is drawn. I am grateful for the boundaries that imposed, because as said in Stockholm in 1992¹ when Derek received the world's highest honor for literature, "... **Trying to capture Derek Walcott's oceanic work in a formula would be an absurd enterprise...**"

Dual Perspectives

I come to this assignment from dual perspectives. As economist and artist, I have labored in the happy shadows of both our laureates. Sir Arthur's, because he is the father of development economics which has been my métier since the age of 22. Walcott's, because of

¹ Professor Kjell Espmark: Member of the [Swedish Academy](#), Nobel Presentation Speech, Stockholm, 1992.

my love affairs with literature, theatre, painting, design, and carnival. The boundaries between these are often fluid and when they merge it is sheer magic.

In both fields, I continue with unmitigated respect, for their genius, dedication, and mastery. Many years ago, when I needed to resolve my own dilemma of being economist by day and artist by night, I drew on the fact that both had climbed to their pinnacles from the plateau of a St. Lucian landscape. That same landscape nurtures me. So, there would be no forced choice between my two callings.

Early Impressions

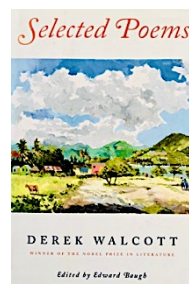
While Sir Arthur was a more distant legend, Derek was a recurring presence, riding into our lives from summer to summer, with his exotic band of multicolored, multitalented characters, better known as the Trinidad Theatre Workshop.

What struck me, beyond mere talent, was their energy: uncompressed, explored and expressed with confidence and conviction. They moved like the masters they sought to be, absorbed in their craft, built with fragments of the places they were from.

Many of those friendships still endure: with Brenda Hughes who played *Tisbea*; John Andrews, the lighting man; Adele Bynoe, always the dancer; Carol LaChapelle, choreographer; Wendel Manwarren; Helen Camps; and before their passings, Stanley Marshal who played the quintessential *Mi-Jean*, and the legendary Errol Jones, first encountered as *Makak*.

Whenever Derek rode in, our local legends emerged from the woodwork: the veterans of the old Arts Guild², an epicenter of anecdote and nostalgia, but less now as the memories die. Derek's presence would draw them out like fireflies to an evening lamp: Kenneth Monplaisir, Sixtus Jeanne Charles, Arthur "Jakes" Jacobs, Ruby Yorke, McDonald Dixon, Gandolph St. Clair, and a cast of other personalities who suddenly became larger than island life, vying to be re-engaged in his world of words and wonder.

Reunited as Derek's cast and crew, they staged such classics as *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, in the old Town Hall, and later, *The Joker of Seville* in the Geest Banana Shed. *The Haitian Earth* was staged open-air at Morne Fortune, in 1984, to mark the 150th anniversary of Emancipation, and at age 24, I had the audacity to critically review Walcott.³ These were my introductions to the infinite possibilities of Caribbean theatre from which I have yet to recover.



Primary Sources

² The St. Lucia Arts Guild was founded in 1950, the same year that Walcott staged his first play, Henri Christophe.

³ The Haitian Earth was commissioned by the Government of St. Lucia and staged in St. Lucia in 1984 to mark the 150th Anniversary of Emancipation. The site now houses the Secretariat of the OECS.

Before we launch our intrepid pirogue further out to sea, I must disclose that for the most part my references to Derek's work are drawn from **Selected Poems** (FSG, 2007) and **THE ANTILLES: Fragments of Epic Memory** (FSG, 1992).

Selected Poems is chosen for its span of Derek's work from **In a Green Night** (1962) to **Star-Apple Kingdom** (1979) to **Omeros** (1990) right up to **Prodigal** (2004). It contains most of my Walcott favorites, and its editor, Professor Edward Baugh, friend and scholar, has capped it with a wonderful introduction which greatly aids the task to which I have been assigned by a certain aforementioned Governor General Emerita.

The equable Eddie Baugh offers both a rigorous eye and a temperate understanding of both poet and poetry, and makes a masterful selection of islands from the ocean of Derek's work. If in some cruel world, you had to choose one volume of Walcott, this would be the one to keep by your bedside.

And So, to Sea

The phrase **A Whole country** is lifted from Walcott's Nobel Lecture, **THE ANTILLES: Fragments of Epic Memory**.⁴ It appears toward the end of a passionate evocation of Caribbean culture, history, landscape, where he exclaims, "**How quickly it could all disappear.**" The passage ends with his lament that "**a morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people**".

His worry is real for many of us who live here. The fragility of our microcosm concerns us deeply. We feel a need to preserve our moorings to this place, to the anchor of our being. I recall from memory rather than script, Derek's assertion in an interview that **you cannot separate Bob Marley from the mountains of Jamaica, nor any Caribbean poet from the sea.**

As a people inseparable in so many ways, from the landscape we inhabit, we depend on our environment for our physical and spiritual wholesomeness. We wish to belong. For us who are still trying to reconcile separation, transplantation, loss and restoration, it is important to belong. More so as the world intrudes, with its untraceable money and unlimited appetite.

We are afraid of this new empire. The rumored connivance and complicity. We feel betrayed, and cannot quite believe that our **government** will wake into any morning, now or in any foreseeable future, to ask what happened to forests, bays, or us. And this is tragic, because it would mean that we have already begun to die.

⁴ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY. 1992.

For us, who see beach and forest, savanne and waterfall as communal spaces, who believe in the concept of the state as custodian, it is both incredible and sad, that our battle for patrimony, relevance, identity, for holding on to those shared spaces, should bring us into such violent contention with that very state which once stood as defender and protector.

So, we must ask, how did we come to be at war with our governments, with each other, tribally divided instead of united in our common interest, against the strife and discord which dimmed her children's toil and rest⁵. It is that same strife and discord we hear returning in Walcott's warning, like the voice of the sea uncurling in an ancient conch, resonating with all the angst of recent headlines:

How quickly it could all disappear! And how it is beginning to drive us further into where we hope are impenetrable places, green secrets at the end of bad roads, headlands where the next view is not of a hotel but of some long beach without a figure and the hanging question of some fisherman's smoke at its far end.

Beyond Conflict

If we are, as we proclaim in the opening line of that holiest of our songs, **"Sons and daughters of Saint Lucia who love the land that gave us birth ..."** How is it that we cannot resolve this basic development dilemma of how to preserve our green secrets, our impenetrable places, while seeing to the economic needs of our people.

This is an old, outdated conflict between development and conservation which only the unenlightened still endure. There are examples aplenty of how to achieve balanced development, how to attract and retain responsible developers. There is global best practice in our history books, new models in our own heads, and a reservoir of human decency in our hearts.

With these at hand, finding solutions to the dilemma of a degrading environment is merely a matter of wanting better, demanding more, and having the mutual respect and resolve to bring solutions about. There is no real conflict here, only the illusion of false choices. Sensible resource utilization is driven essentially by the most fundamental principles of self-preservation.

People who have thrived through five centuries of adversity do not now favor their own demise. They do not suddenly become a senseless, reckless, spineless species, unable to choose between a dollar today for the few, and good fortune tomorrow, for the many. So, we must reverse this madness.

⁵ National Anthem of St. Lucia: "... gone the days when strife and discord dimmed her children's toil and rest".

For inspiration, we can return to Walcott who opens the argument for substance over pretense, for reality over the postcard illusion that seems now to be our cage. He reminds us all that:

The Caribbean is not an idyll, not to its natives. They draw their working strength from it organically, like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights.

A Hopeful Love

I have to be hopeful that the wholeness and entirety of a people still ranks above real estate in the grand scheme of global development. I am hopeful that we are not too late in the debate of lives and livelihoods to return to good old-fashioned notions like equity, social democracy, and people-centered development, which in this era of Black Lives Matter, I translate into a larger conversation about **economic dignity**.

I am even optimistic - and that is not easy for poets who move downhill from elation to despair in a metaphoric second - that we are not yet at that juncture in our journey which Walcott foresaw, when people though living, might cease to be whole, in terms their daily celebration of soul and spirit and shared consciousness, and therefore no longer “**a people**” in any meaningful sense of that word.

Walcott danced with dichotomy throughout his personal and professional life, and was not discouraged by the coexistence of optimism and despair. He acknowledged the outpouring of poetry as a kind of dawn, the reward after the insomniac journey through the long night of history:

For every poet it is always morning in the world. History a forgotten, insomniac night; History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.⁶

It is with this love in spite of history, in spite of everything we would change about our island circumstances, that we must keep faith in the collective wisdom of the Caribbean. As disparate as we may seem, as oblivious as we sometimes choose to be, there are many who still feel that better can and will be done, and feel a burning urgency regarding the need for fundamental change in our development trajectory.

No matter how insufficiently observed, how inadequately expressed, there is still a healthy disquiet that craves equity and dignity, that drives us through insomniac night toward dawn.

⁶ Derek Walcott, from THE ANTILLES: Fragments of Epic Memory, Nobel Lecture, December 1992

This is why we stay, why we choose this place, as much for its promise as its ruinous embrace, the risk of its Midas touch. As Derek says in THE ANTILLES:

**the secret is not to ask the wrong thing of it,
not to demand of it an ambition it has no interest in.**

Perhaps, that is our disconnect. The vision on the virtual drawing board, our promised transformation wind-drift sand to pearl of the Caribbean, demands an ambition we have no interest in.

The prospect of employment has not delivered its promise. For many it has neither reduced poverty nor increased happiness. More likely, it has divided our spirit between what we must do to survive, and what we must do to recover, to reclaim, to restore. Even a whore must rest.

Beyond Nostalgia

There are those who might argue that poets and painters are indulgent dreamers, disconnected from the imperatives of filling empty bellies. But clearly, Walcott's concerns transcend nostalgia, sentimentality, even art. His belief in the magic and mysticism of the Caribbean and St. Lucia, does not blind him.

In fact, our flawed fragility is fundamental to his view of our paradoxical world as something sacred, noble, precious and worth preserving. Walcott helps us to see the embodiment, and sometimes the resolution of his own conflicted sense of history, identity and purpose. He was our poet, and saw more in us that we might care to see in ourselves. Such was his gift to us that while **"Marley was rocking on the transport's stereo"**, he discovered us over and over again and what he saw moved him to weep and write:

***"... the beauty was humming the choruses quietly... the light on the planes of
her cheek... the head was nothing else but heraldic... like a statue, like a black
Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People... O Beauty, you are the light of the world!"***

His is a painful joy. It is that way with poets and with islands. The seductive beauty of the thing is its fatal flaw. In *Light of the World*, Walcott is not simply talking about one woman on a Gros Islet bus. He is talking about the collective us, a whole island, a whole people, his Caribbean, and the source of and solution to his own divided identity. To that world, he gives himself completely, as to his heraldic figure, who unites in her unassuming statuary, all that is indescribably noble and elegant, fragile and fleeting. This is the fate of any earthbound beauty, and all the more precious and tragic for being so.

The voice that acknowledges her fading beauty, “*gradually even that was going in the dusk*”,⁷ is the same voice that exclaims “*How quickly it could all disappear*”. That same voice heralds in aftermath of the 1948 Castries fire, that *the hills were a flock of faiths*. From his first published collection in 1961, he proclaims:

*This island is heaven – away from the dustblown blood of cities;
... For beauty has surrounded /Its black children, and freed them of homeless ditties.*⁸

Walcott’s love of the Caribbean has almost always been painful, profound, prophetic. He was no blind poet trying to suspend a fading world in some single timeless frame.

Who We Wish to Be

Three decades after *Green Night*, his 1992 evocation confirms his determination that we should make the most of what history has, however accidentally, left us; a history which does not so much make us, but it empowers us to make ourselves into who we wish to be, by reassembling our “**fragments of epic memory**” into some loveable whole.

There is no pretention, no apology when he asserts in his Nobel Lecture, our ability to condense, and in a sense defeat, hegemonic notions of history and relevance and value:

Consider the scale of Asia reduced to these fragments: The small white exclamations of minarets or the stone balls of temples in the cane fields, and one can understand the self-mockery and embarrassment of those who see these rites as parodic, even degenerate... These purists look on such ceremonies as grammarians look on dialect, as cities look on provinces, and empires on their colonies... in other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. No people there... no people. [Just] Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken.⁹

The question for us, three decades after Stockholm, and with one less soldier standing, is whether we also have come to think of each other with the same disregard, the same disdain, that combination of arrogance and ignorance which leaves us **illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized**. And if so, how the hell did we get here.

⁷ The Light of the World. The Arkansas Testament (1987)

⁸ As John to Patmos. In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960 (1961)

⁹ THE ANTILLES: Fragments of Epic Memory.

In an article entitled the State of the St. Lucia Carnival (2019), I argue that when the Festival was moved out of its traditional pre-Lenten time slot, there was no discernable strategy to also transfer its cultural and creative soul:

As such, the Festival grew without a clear rationale, remaining true to its roots for a few good years, and then becoming gradually unmoored and increasingly adrift... Since then, the Festival has succumbed to its darker, more lascivious and self-indulgent ego, losing sight and knowledge of its parallel potential for beauty, spectacle, art, creativity and culture.

The Suspect State

I suspect this is the sort of state sponsored degradation to which our culture has succumbed, believing that the value of celebration can be measured by the size of an event budget, however profligate, however oblivious to the history and humanity out of which the soul of the thing once sprung, before government intervention modified its DNA.

This leads to the unfortunate notion which I can never accept, that citizens must seek permission from some authority to celebrate, to congregate, to sing loudly in daylight streets, to beat their repurposed bottles and spoons, to sound the percussive base of recycled plastic drums. That right is already won. We will not regress.

What now looks like defiance, is the assertion many messengers have cried out and died for. Many messengers indeed, including Walcott's fellow Laureate, that other distinguished son, **Sir William Arthur Lewis.**



Sir Arthur also grappled with these themes, and was recently honored in art with a doodle by google appearing worldwide on December 10, 2020. It is worth a small detour here, to note that Lewis also held the view that:

A new breed of West Indian [needs] a creative arts curriculum in secondary schools. A society without the creative arts is a cultural desert ...If we are going to close our minds in a box of our pure West Indianness, we shall achieve nothing worthwhile.¹⁰

So, an inward myopia will never be enough. In that respect, the views of our two scholars are

¹⁰ <https://www.caribbean-beat.com/issue-19/lewis-model#axzz6jzvsO4g8>

aligned: in order to appreciate that treasure which is the Caribbean, we must understand the provenance of that treasure.

The term **provenance** is used in the art world to describe the origins of a piece, to verify its worth. Without such verification, a valuable object may be sold to a gullible novice who knows little and pays too much, or a conniving speculator who knows much and pays little. At any rate, knowledge will always be power, and as Marley says: in the abundance of water the fool is thirsty. Walcott also puts it well:

Sadly, to sell itself, the Caribbean encourages the delights of mindlessness, of brilliant vacuity, as a place to flee not only winter but that seriousness that comes only out of a culture with four seasons. So how can there be a people there, in the true sense of the word?

Sadly, we continue to dismantle the already incomplete understanding of ourselves. How else to describe the castration of so many aspects of our culture, the chronic underfunding of the arts, archives, libraries, the National Trust, the Folk Research Centre, the closure of museums and bookshops, the pittance spent on education, the pimping of cultural traditions into events.

Entitlement

If we are not to be fools in our own house, and if we are not to be evicted, we need to understand our own provenance. In order to do this, we need history. We need all our fragments, all our languages: Inyeri, Aruák, Lokono, Akan, Ibo, Hindi, Papiamentu, Kwéyôl. We need to stubbornly trace all our tributaries, from source to surging sea. As Walcott says:

Survival is the triumph of stubbornness... spiritual stubbornness.

I would argue that same stubbornness, that determination to survive and indeed to prosper, allows us to claim those tributaries as our own, as part of the geography and history that has landed us here: Walcott says this of the festival he observes in the village of Trinity, on the edge of Trinidad's Caroni plain:

I was entitled to the feast of Husein, to the mirrors and crepe-paper temples of the Muslim epic, to the Chinese Dragon Dance, to the rites of that Sephardic Jewish synagogue that was once on Something Street. I am only one-eighth the writer I might have been had I contained all the fragmented languages of Trinidad.

That entitlement is important because it empowers us to collect the scattered fragments that make us whole, to repurpose our pieces into a reassembled whole, fit for the infinite possibilities of our own determination: This oft' quoted line is nonetheless fitting to this argument:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole.

We must see and assert ourselves as a whole people not caricatures called taxi drivers, hotel workers, entertainers... all those obviating words which perpetuate a kind of economic anonymity. We must be whole people, whole lives, a whole nation, whole futures. Nothing edited by circumstance or market jargon into a pretty postcard.

We also need our assembled fragments in order to dance without losing our souls in the *gwan* won of power and money and knowledge. Walcott's warning fully unfurls not just above us, but over the entire Caribbean:

Every day on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favourable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the mountains to their roots. A morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people.

False Choices

Derek was torn for most of his life. Torn between painting and writing. Between blood lines. Between being *just a red nigger who love the sea*, a **nobody**, a **nation**. But he made an industry of it. Not quite a seamless whole, which would have been just another unproductive stasis, but a tensioned bow in a celebration of memory and ritual and enigma, like an Asian arrow sailing over the village of Felicity.

As much as his writing played lead, his painting was its twin, an alter ego in a supporting role. Consider Eddie Baugh's assertion that:

...for a brief time he had hesitated between painting and poetry as his calling... he never abandoned painting... His painter's eye for color and light informs his poetic descriptions and painting has been one of his themes.

I raise this because I am at great odds with this modern practice of forcing children to choose: between Literature and Language. Between History and Geography. Between Spanish and French. Between left brain and right brain. Between one side or another of their soul, opting for banality instead of the ambidextrous, trilingual, creative exoticism to which we are so obviously predisposed.

What use is this conversation of we are raising generations of compliant, uninquisitive, regurgitative people. By age 11, that damned and dreaded common entrance exam, will have determined which minds will be successful while others will simply not.

Like so many of our development choices, this diminishes the imagination and robs us of that one most important attribute derived from our multicultural past: that potential to be mavericks, hybrids, exotic intelligences surpassing the world's pejorative expectations of who we are supposed to be. And who will be, if we have no further use of history, or as Walcott asserts, the fragments of our own epic memory.

If Walcott achieved a distinguished excellence, it is because he did not flee the discomforts of his internal, societal, racial, duality. Instead, he but found ways to acknowledge, express, embrace and sometimes briefly resolve his own fragments, so that, like the reassembled vase, his was a great, sad, triumphant love and memory, more precious than the broken original. It is therefore no surprise that Eddie Baugh claims with a sense of triumph, I think, that Derek will:

... always figure commandingly in any consideration of the grappling with that legacy which has been a major contribution of his generation of Anglophone Caribbean Writers ... Through his imaginative immersion in great art, he has spoken to major issues of his time, of self and society.

Being Enough

Figuring commandingly in the world is exactly what we must aspire to. The wider Caribbean still looks to St. Lucia as a kind of mecca for the arts. What's more, if we look to the very pinnacle of achievement, we will see that there are worlds of fashion, film, art, design literature, music, theatre and animation which would welcome great art from us.

The Prize Motivation, the official rationale for Walcott's Nobel Award by the Swedish Academy, is instructive and reads:

"... for a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment."

His excellent writing is a given. But it is not enough. His **sustained historical vision** and **multicultural commitment** are equally rewarded, his embrace of fragments, reassembled, made whole, and globally relevant. We too, have that potential.

Raw, unformed talent flourishes briefly and flounders here each day. It is never going to be enough. What is soca without its carnival? Mere titillation. What is voice without its own story to tell? Imitation. What is symbol without substance? Nothing.

If we do not reform soon, we will be like **Achille** in **Omeros** who returns to his ancestral home as a shell washed up on a shore. The edited conversation between old world and new world runs thus:

Afolabe: In the place you have come from what do they call you?
Achille: Achille.
Afolabe: What does the name mean. I have forgotten.
Achille: I too have forgotten. Everything was forgotten... the deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave us.
Afolabe: A name means something ... the qualities desired in a son... even a girl child... unless the name means nothing. Then you would be nothing. Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom ... No man loses his shadow except it is in the night, and even then his shadow is hidden, not lost.

Partial recall is not enough. Silent acceptance is not enough. As I said to a hotel guard who wanted to search my car: I will not assist you in my own enslavement. It is not enough to forget and carry on. It is not enough to want a job and a mortgage. This small gathering of the few and the favored can never be enough. The pitiful sum devoted to the celebration of our greatest sons can never be enough.

Our thought, which provokes our art, our creativity, our cultural expression of deepest self should be as energetic as those actors I first admired. Aggressively uplifting and inspiring, first to us, and then to others. We must shine as brightly as we possibly can. To do otherwise is to surrender, to imagine a struggle over which is not yet won.

George Lamming speaks of “**a tragic innocence**” to which it seems, we are in danger of returning. He identifies a **dimension of cruelty that seduced black people into lasting bonds of illusion**:

It was not a physical cruelty... It was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation. Black versus black in a battle for self-improvement. This was the breeding ground for every uncertainty of self.¹¹

It would seem that uncertainty of self, that terror of the mind, is still with us, and will only deepen if we continue to dismantle the already incomplete understanding we have of ourselves. Walcott is hopeful that:

deprived of books, a man must fall back on thought, and out of thought, if he can learn to order it, will come the urge to record, and in extremity, if he has no means of recording, recitation, the ordering of memory.

But he comes to that truth with his “**sound colonial education**” and the luxury of being able

¹¹ The Guardian: Article on George Lamming and his novel *In the Castle of My Skin*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/24/artsfeatures.poetry>

to say, “**I read; I travel; I become**”. That was never universal, not then and not now. The struggle cannot be while I can recall one student at the nearby secondary school telling me she did not need to pass Literature because it was theatre arts she wanted to teach.

Reform

Our allocation to tertiary education is a quarter of what other developing countries typically spend. We are under-investing in research, innovation, and development. So, it is entirely possible that we are only building two-dimensional citizens; characters in the postcards we peddle to tourists.

There is more to that process than benign neglect. Our development strategy has failed to create conditions for advancement of our people in their own countries. Indeed, by most indicators, we are under-delivering in all major aspects of state responsibility: education, health, security, environment, social and economic infrastructure. With limited options, we are trapped in spirals of dependency. Here is Walcott’s take:

This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-pitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile.¹²

With such limited internal prospects, we end up exporting our brightest citizens to the very countries on which we already depend for trade, investment, aid and debt. In essence, a perversion of Sir Arthur Lewis’s model of development. We are becoming trapped in a downward spiral of low wages, low growth, high debt and high dependency. If there is anything sustainable in that formula, I will take a vow of silence now, and the state will be finally free of this meddlesome priest.

Derek and many others have spoken of this for decades, but our outcomes will not change unless we alter these trajectories. So, for those who want something new to be said, let them admit that they have, in their various positions of power, influence and subterfuge, done nothing to alter the narrative they find so boringly repetitive.

It is no crime to assert or admit that we need fundamental change. It is a crime not to pursue that change. So, we cannot have superficial conversations. We cannot be afraid to speak about a love of self and country as essential to our economic prosperity.

¹² THE ANTILLES: Fragments of Epic Memory.

The irony of our times and the nature of the global marketplace is that they level everyone and trivialize everything into clips and pixels and soundbites. It demands little of us beyond consumption and obedience and the occasional storming of a national capitol.

But we require thought and agency and determination as our defenses against that tyranny of the mind. We can return to fundamentals. We can design a new humane economy; we can power our own restoration. Derek also believed and expressed this:

Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.

Kenny Anthony once said to me, and I asked his permission to repeat this:

Adrian, if you keep telling politicians they are the problem, eventually they will stop listening.

Of course, he is right. So, as I close, I want to dispel any notion that politicians are the problem. Indeed, I want to loudly proclaim that politicians are the solution: Better politicians. Honest Politicians. Enlightened Politicians. Brave Politicians who put their people first. That is, the people who actually elect them, as opposed to the people who pay for their campaigns.

I said earlier that I have great faith in the Caribbean consciousness, our ability to rebalance, our sense of when to correct, to change course, or indeed governments when they need changing. If I am to keep that faith, I must also believe that even four decades later, our anthem is still right, calling us to **“love oh love our island home”**.

I think it is instructive that our anthem begins and ends with love as a paramount ingredient. We need love to survive, to prosper, whole, intact, conscious. So, we must rediscover and reassemble that love of self, of land, of light. Because, as Derek wrote:

“This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles”

Ladies and Gentlemen, I close as I began, with a recent piece from my manuscript, **Inverted Islands**. This piece adapted from the script of **The St. Lucia Story: Piti Z’ile, Gwan Wèv**, (Little Island, Big Dream) commissioned for Independence-40 in 2019. I think it is apt to this evening’s theme. I am accompanied, once again, by:

Mr. Lestan Celestan on Guitar
Mr Anderson Charles on Flute.

SAID THE GRIOT TO LUCIAN

Man. Child. Dancing spirit.
Enough with whimsy.
Enough with wandering.

As if this place does not
already know you, love you.
As if some other heart pulses
in its palm, while you, a stranger,
unbudding, ungrowing,
without ancestries to anchor you,
wither to subsistence,
sever inexplicably
into some other seed.

Enough.

This cradling city,
however poorly woven
out of reed and mangrove,
recovered from charred timber
and fire-broken stone,
is made more precious
by its rebirth in you.

It kneels toward the sea,
lays down its chronicles
of loss and sacrifice i
n your name,
inhales deeply at the edge-water,
matching the cadence
of each unpromised lungful
of your breath,
drawn into thinking,
stretched into speech,
made flesh with intent and reason
by your enchanted footfall
or accidental step.

Sole to earth, limb to torso,
torso to crown,
magnificently moving frame
shimmering in the fiery noon,
in the amber sigh of streetlamps
leveling the tilting path,
lightening the ascending road.

These too are your bloodlines,
your tributaries,
silvering in noon's smile
since your birth.

Enough now. Man. Child.
Dancing spirit.

Enough.

It is you who must plant yourself
into this new-island earth.

Enough
Enough
Enough

**Ladies and Gentlemen, you have been more than wonderful
And I thank you.**

Adrian Augier is a development economist, an independent senator, and St. Lucia's 2010 Entrepreneur of the Year. He is an award-winning poet and producer and a Caribbean Laureate of Arts and Letters. He has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of the West Indies for his contribution to regional development and culture, and the Saint Lucia Medal of Merit (Gold) for his contribution to art and literature. For more information on this writer and his work visit adrianaugier.blogspot.com or email adrianaugier@gmail.com