



The Prodigal: A Poem

Derek Walcott

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Do not diminish in my memory
villages of absolutely no importance,
... Hoard, cherish
your negligible existence, your unrecorded history
of unambitious syntax, your clean pools
of unpolluted light over close stones.

The Prodigal is a journey through physical and mental landscapes, from Greenwich Village to the Alps, Pescara to Milan, Germany to Cartagena. But always in "the music of memory, water," abides St. Lucia, the author's birthplace, and the living sea. In his new work, Derek Walcott has created a sweeping yet intimate epic of an exhausted Europe studded with church spires and mountains, train stations and statuary, where the New World is an idea, a "wavering map," and where History subsumes the natural history of his "unimportantly beautiful" island home. Here, the wanderer fears that he has been tainted by his exile, that his life has become untranslatable, and that his craft itself is rooted in betrayal of the vivid archipelago to which, like Antaeus, he must return for the very sustenance of life.

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