

Derek Walcott, "Adam's Song" (1976)

Text from *Derek Walcott, Collected Poems 1948–1984* (pp. 302–303), Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1986. "Adam's Song" first appeared in Walcott's 1976 volume *Sea Grapes* (p. 13), also published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

- 1 The adulteress stoned to death
- 2 is killed in our own time
- 3 by whispers, by the breath
- 4 that films her flesh with slime.
- 5 The first was Eve,
- 6 who horned God for the serpent,
- 7 for Adam's sake—which makes
- 8 everyone guilty or Eve innocent.
- 9 Nothing has changed,
- 10 for men still sing the song that Adam sang
- 11 against the world he lost to vipers,
- 12 the song to Eve
- 13 against his own damnation;
- 14 he sang it in the evening of the world
- 15 with lights coming on in the eyes
- 16 of panthers in the peaceable kingdom
- 17 and his death coming out of the trees,
- 18 he sings it, frightened
- 19 of the jealousy of God and at the price
- 20 of his own death.
- 21 The song ascends to God, who wipes his eyes:
- 22 "Heart, you are in my heart as the bird rises,
- 23 heart, you are in my heart while the sun sleeps,
- 24 heart, you lie still in me as the dew is,
- 25 you weep within me, as the rain weeps."