

# Bim

Arts for the 21st Century



**Special Edition** • From the Bim Archives • First Nations People and Their Legacy • Enslavement and Reparatory Justice • Caribbean Dance



***Bim***

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We dedicate this issue to the life, work and memory of  
Ian Archie McDonald (1933–2026).

*Bim* was always the richer for having the poetry of  
Ian McDonald grace its pages. This poet's capacity for  
insight and feeling was truly panoramic. Ian could bring  
everything to life in his poetry: landscape, birds and  
animals, humanity in its myriad conditions, everyday life  
with its unexpected surprises and even gifts of wisdom.  
All this was a reflection of his innate understanding and  
compassion. *Bim* and the Caribbean have surely  
lost one of its prolific and treasured poets.

Esther Phillips, Editor

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*Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*

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***Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*** is edited collaboratively by persons drawn from the literary community who represent the creative, academic and developmental interests critical for the sustainability of the best Caribbean literature.

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***Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*** is produced annually and publishes creative works, essays and critical expositions that meet the needs of its literary and artistic community. It accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and cultural phenomena within the Caribbean and its Diaspora. *Bim* accepts and publishes academic articles that are of high quality, but which are not too heavy with jargon to the exclusion of the wider reading public. *Bim* accepts non-academic contributions of high quality, including book and other reviews, poetry, short fiction, photographs and cartoons. In future issues, it will also accept digital art, electronic sound and digital video files, and critical comments on these. In all cases, submissions will be subject to scrutiny by the editorial committee.

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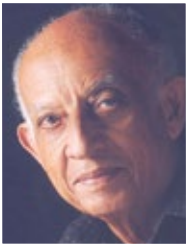
# Contributors



**Virginia Archer** is the pen name of Jean Mederick, who has lived most of her life on the island of Saint Lucia, where she also raised her daughter. She has self-published five volumes of poetry: *Tangerine Skies*, *Somewhere In Between*, *Of Dead Romance and Papercuts*, *How to Forget to Breathe*, and *The De-Peopling Affair*, all available on Amazon or Lulu. Her poem “The Leaving Affair” was published in *Bim*, Volume 10, 2020. Her poem “There’s So Much Smog I Missed It When You Put Your Shoes On” was the winner of the Peepal Tree Press Pierrot Canticles Competition in 2020. Follow her on Instagram @virginia.archer.poetry.



**Andrew Armstrong**, a retired lecturer of literatures in English, was born in Barbados and taught African literature and film, novel studies, and contemporary prose fiction at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. Featured among his work on established and contemporary writing and writers throughout the diaspora which has appeared in peer reviewed and scholarly publications are Cherie Jones’ *The Burning Bush Women* in the *Journal of the Short Story in English*; Leila Aboulela’s fiction in the essay collection *African Migration Narratives*; Ben Okri and Festus Iyawi in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*; and Moses Isegawa and Goretti Kyomuhendo’s novels in *The Journal of International Women’s Studies*.



**Edward Alston Cecil Baugh** (1936–2023), poet, biographer, actor, literary critic, essayist, and scholar, was Professor Emeritus (literatures in English) and Public Orator at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. He was recognised internationally as an authority on anglophone Caribbean poetry. Among his publications are *West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (1971), *Critics on Caribbean Literature* (1978), *Derek Walcott: Memory as Vision* (1978), *A Tale from the Rainforest* (1988), *I Was a Teacher, Too* (1991), *It Was the Singing* (2000), and *Black Sand: New & Selected Poems* (2013). Among his many awards were the UWI Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching and Administration, 1995; the Silver Musgrave Medal, Institute of Jamaica, 1998; the Pelican Award (UWI Guild of Graduates), 1999; and the Gold Musgrave Medal, Institute of Jamaica, 2012.



**Stewart Brown** for over five decades taught Caribbean literature in schools and universities in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. He edited or co-edited several anthologies of African and Caribbean writing, including the *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*, *Voiceprint* and *The Bowling was Superfine*. He has also edited critical studies of Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite and Martin Carter. His *Collected Poems: Still Mekin Foolishness* is due from Peepal Tree Press in Spring 2027. His visual poetries project, *BABEL: beautiful, unsayable, meaningless, profound*, continues to evolve. See [www.catalystpress.co.uk](http://www.catalystpress.co.uk).



**Jacinth Browne-Howard**, PhD, is a teacher at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. Her research interests include Caribbean speculative fiction, indigenous studies and women's writing. Her creative work includes her award-winning poetry collection *The Mother Island* and published short fiction. Her scholarly work appears in journals and anthologies, including the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, *SFRA Review*, and the *Routledge Handbook of Co-futurisms*. She was a writer-in-residence at Intersect ANU in 2024–2025.



**Jan Rynveld Carew** (1920–2012), novelist, poet, hobby painter, and scholar, was born in the village of Agricola in Berbice, Guyana. He migrated from Guyana in 1945 to further his education and subsequently lived and worked in the UK, North and South America, Africa, and Asia. He was married to Sylvia Wynter and taught at Northwestern University and at Princeton University. Among his novels are *Black Midas* (1958), *The Wild Coast* (1960), *The Last Barbarian* (1960), and *Moscow Is Not My Mecca* (1964). Carew also wrote several books for children, a number of plays and a collection of poems.



**Edward Lloyd "Jimmy" Cozier** (1912–1990), who is probably better known by many of the current generation as the father of the famous former cricket journalist and commentator Tony Cozier, was one of the founders of *Bim*. He was a prominent Barbadian journalist, newspaper editor and publisher, and worked quite extensively throughout the Caribbean. He was for a time managing editor of Saint Lucia's *The Voice*, founder of the short-lived *Barbados Daily News* and an influential columnist at the *Barbados Advocate*. The Media Centre at Kensington Oval was renamed Coppin Cozier Short Media Centre in his honour in 2007.



**Mac Donald Dixon** is a Caribbean writer from Saint Lucia. His writing has appeared in: *Link Magazine*, *Caribbean Quarterly (CQ)*, *Bim*, *West Indian Writer*, *Callaloo*, *Poetry International*, *Wasafiri*, *Agenda*, *RBL*, *New Wave Contemporary Short Stories*, and *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. Some of his work has been translated into French, Kwéyòl, Spanish, Danish, and Mandarin.



**Richard Georges** is the first Virgin Islands Poet Laureate (2020) and the author of three collections of poetry, as well as essays and fiction. His most recent collection, *Epiphaneia* (2019), won the 2020 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature. His debut, *Make Us All Islands* (2017), was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and his second book, *Giant* (2018), was highly commended by the Forward Prizes and longlisted for the OCM Bocas Prize. A recipient of a Fellowship from the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study, and a Pushcart Prize nominee, Richard holds a PhD in Critical and Creative Writing from the University of Sussex, and is a founding editor of *Moko*. He currently serves as the seventh president of H. Lavity Stoutt Community College in Tortola.



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**Margaret Gill** is a published poet whose work has appeared in several anthologies. Among her many awards are the Shankar's International Children's Poetry Competition, India, 1968 (2nd prize); the Frank Collymore Literary Award, Barbados, 1998 (1st prize, as well as the 2nd prize in 2007); and the Confucius Institute, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, 2019 (2nd prize). She has also been named Poet Laureate of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, and was Honorary Fellow in Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, in 2008. She is the author of *Lyric You: In Celebration of Kamau Brathwaite's 70th Birthday* (2000), *Rich Man in His Castle, Poor Ones Take the Street: Integrating a Canonical Text and Popular Culture* (a study of *In the Castle of My Skin* by George Lamming, 2021), and *Machinations of a Feminist* (2021).



**Anna Girling** is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, where she has previously taught and studied. She has a particular interest in early 20th-century literature and literary history, and her current project explores pre-Second World War Jamaican writers' interest in cosmopolitanism, hybridity, influence, and the ways that they navigated the relation between transnational and local commitment in their lives, works and literary communities.



**George Goddard** is an industrial relations consultant who holds an MBA in Management with distinction from the Cave Hill School of Business, The University of the West Indies. He has published two collections of poems, *Interstice* (2016) and *Let the Flute Lead Your Spirit* (2024). He has also had published several reviews of the works of prominent Saint Lucian writers, included among them are Mac Donald Dixon, Kendel Hippolyte, John Robert Lee, and Vladimir Lucien. George's creative writing has appeared in *PN Review* (2022), *Bim*, *Interviewing the Caribbean*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Re-Markings* and *ArtsEtc*. It has been featured as well in the seminal anthologies *Disaster Matters* (2022) and *Sent Lisi: Poems and Art of Saint Lucia* (2015).



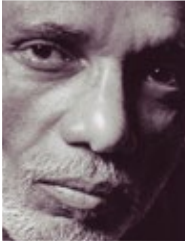
**Errol Gaston Hill** (1921–2003) was a playwright, theatre historian and former John D. Willard Professor of Drama and Oratory (Dartmouth). Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, he championed the creation of a theatre reflecting Caribbean popular culture and published many articles, plays, essays, monographs, and books. His published plays include *Man Better Man* (1964), *Dance Bongo* (1966) and *Strictly Matrimony* (1971). Hill also edited several volumes of black and Caribbean plays, as well as authored many articles on Caribbean drama. His major books include *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (1972), *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (1984), *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (1992), and (with James Hatch) *A History of African American Theatre* (2003). Hill was presented with the Barnard Hewitt Award for Outstanding Research in Theatre History in 1985.



**Keith Jardim** is from Port of Spain, Trinidad. His stories and essays have appeared in many publications in the USA, the UK, Canada, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. Jardim's first book, *Near Open Water: Stories*, was a semifinalist for the 2012 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature; later that year, it appeared on *World Literature Today's* Nota Bene List. He has fiction forthcoming in *Diaspora/Diasporas: Cross-cultural Ibero-Caribbean Texts and Contexts* and *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*. He is an assistant professor of English literature and writing at American University of Iraq, Baghdad.



**Jamal G. La Rose, LLB**, is a storyteller, singer/songwriter, actor, visual artist, short fiction writer, playwright, screenwriter, filmmaker, and poet. He has been shortlisted and longlisted for the Guyana Prize for Literature (Poetry, 2022) and the BCLF Elizabeth Nunez Award for Writers in the Caribbean (2023). He was awarded third place in the Guyana Prize for Literature (Drama, 2023).



**John Robert Lee** is a Saint Lucian writer. His *After Poems, Psalms* was published by Peepal Tree Press in 2025. He has been a frequent contributor to *Bim* for many years.



**Sir William Arthur Lewis** (1915–1991), Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics (1979), was born in Castries, Saint Lucia, to Saint Lucian parents who had immigrated from Antigua. World famous for the “Lewis Model” of dual-sector development, he held professorships at the University of Manchester and Princeton University, was the first president of the Caribbean Development Bank, and Vice-Chancellor of The University of the West Indies (1959–1962). He was knighted in 1963. His work remains highly relevant to modern studies on economic development and structural change.



**Ian McDonald** (1933–2026) was born in Trinidad, educated at Queen’s Royal College (Trinidad), read history at Cambridge (United Kingdom), was a gifted tennis player, and captained the Cambridge, Guyana, and West Indies Davis Cup teams. He went to Guyana in 1955, was director of Bookers and later of the Guyana Sugar Industry as well as CEO of the Sugar Association of the Caribbean. A long-time columnist for the *Stabroek News*, he is the author of twelve books of poetry, an internationally renowned novel, *The Hummingbird Tree*, a book on his family ancestry, along with many other publications as editor and contributor.



**Earl McKenzie** is a Jamaican multidisciplinary artist, scholar and educator. He is the author of fourteen books of poetry, short stories, a novel, a memoir, a multi-genre volume, and academic philosophy. He has had five exhibitions of his paintings, and some of his pieces are on the covers of his books. A former Head of the Department of English at Church Teachers’ College, he later taught philosophy at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus. He holds a BA in English and an MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia University, and a PhD in Philosophy from the University of British Columbia.



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**Nancy Morejón**, who was born in Havana in 1944, is an award-winning poet, translator and essayist. She has published over twenty collections of poetry, including *Mutismos* (*Silences*, 1962); *Amor, ciudad atribuida* (*Love, Attributed City*, 1964); *Richard trajo su flauta* (*Richard Brought His Flute*, 1967); *Poemas* (1980); *Elogio de la danza* (*In Praise of Dance*, 1982); *Peñalver 51* (2010); *Before a Mirror, the City: Bilingual Anthology* (2020); and *Madrigal para un príncipe negro* (*Madrigal for a Black Prince*, 2021). Her critical work includes essays on Nicolás Guillén, and she has translated the poetry of Jacques Roumain and Aimé Césaire, among other authors from the francophone Caribbean. Her poetry appears widely in anthologies and has been translated into several languages. She has received the Cuban National Prize for Literature (2001), the Alejo Carpentier Medal (2021), the French Order of Merit, the Yari-Yari Contemporary Poetry Prize for lifetime achievement (2004), and an honorary doctorate from the University of Havana (2024). Morejón is a member of the Cuban Academy of Language, which she directed between 2012 and 2016, and of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC). She has also held various positions at the major cultural institution Casa de las Américas over the past four decades.



**Mervyn Morris** is the author of eight poetry collections, including *Peelin Orange* (2017) and *Last Reel* (2024); and three books of criticism and biography, *Is English We Speaking?* and *Other Essays* (1999), *Making West Indian Literature* (2005) and *Miss Lou: Louise Bennett and Jamaican Culture* (2014). He retired from The University of the West Indies in 2002 as Professor of Creative Writing and West Indian Literature. He received the Jamaican Order of Merit in 2009 and a Gold Musgrave Medal from the Institute of Jamaica in 2018. He was the 2014–2017 Poet Laureate of Jamaica.



**Esther Phillips**, *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century* editor since 2007, has published five collections of poetry. Her sixth collection, *Plantation*, is due out from Peepal Tree Press in October 2026. Her poetry appears in several anthologies, documentaries, radio and television interviews. Esther's latest work fits into the cause of reparatory justice, and she recently addressed the United Nations General Assembly in this regard. She has served as chair of the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment, director of the Bim LitFest, director of the Bridgetown Literary Bus Tour and of Writers Ink Inc. She is Poet Laureate of Barbados and was awarded the Order of the Republic in 2023.



**Debra Providence** was born in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and is an educator and researcher. Her works have appeared in *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, *Scholar and Feminist Online*, *POUi*, *PREE*, *Callaloo*, *Sable*, and the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. She holds a PhD and currently lectures in West Indian literature, African literature and film, poetry, and contemporary science fiction at the Cave Hill Campus of The University of the West Indies.



**Robert (Bob) Ramdhanie** is a Trini-Guyanese arts activist/cultural producer who has been in arts management promoting “Black arts” in the UK for 40 years. He has travelled extensively throughout Africa, the Caribbean and Europe, and has received several awards for his contribution to arts development in the UK. He was awarded the Drum Arts Centre 1<sup>st</sup> Arts and Cultural Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011; an MBE for his contribution to dance in 2018; and in 2026 Routledge published his seminal work, *The Black Dance Movement in England 1940–2000*. He is the co-founder of the Rupununi Music and Arts Festival in Guyana.



**Kim Robinson-Walcott** is a short fiction writer, poet, book editor, and scholar who served for many years as editor of *Caribbean Quarterly* (The University of the West Indies, 2010–2023) and *Jamaica Journal* (Institute of Jamaica, 2002–2024). Among her publications are the children's books *Dale's Mango Tree* (1992), *Pat the Cat* (2018) and *Pat the Cat and the Gangsta Bat* (2024), all of which she also illustrated. She is the co-author of *The How to Be Jamaican Handbook* (1987) and *Jamaican Art* (1989, 2011) as well as the author of *Out of Order: Anthony Winkler and White West Indian Writing* (2006) and the short story collection *You Have to Harden Your Heart in Times Like These: Stories of Kingston* (2024).



**F. Gordon Rohlehr** (1942–2023) was Professor Emeritus at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus. Unquestionably one of the Caribbean’s finest critics and thinkers, his work covers both literature and popular culture, particularly calypso. His publications include: *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite* (1981); *Cultural Resistance and the Guyana State* (1984); *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad* (1990); *My Strangled City and Other Essays* (1992); *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays* (1992); *A Scuffling of Islands: Essays on Calypso* (2004); *Transgression, Transition, Transformation: Essays in Caribbean Culture* (2007); *Ancestories: Readings of Kamau Brathwaite’s Ancestors* (2010); *My Whole Life Is Calypso: Essays on Sparrow* (2015); and *Perfected Fables, Now: A Bookman Signs Off On Seven Decades* (2019).



**Thomas Rothe** is a translator and scholar of Caribbean and Latin American literatures. His research focuses on the history of translation, print and popular culture, and critical discourses. As a translator, he has brought into English the poetry of Jaime Huenún, Rodrigo Lira, Elvira Hernández, and Emma Villazón, among others. He has also co-translated into Spanish Edwidge Danticat’s *Create Dangerously* and *Claire of the Sea Light*. He is Associate Professor of Literature at the Universidad de Playa Ancha, in Valparaíso, Chile.



**amílcar peter sanatan** works between East Port of Spain, Trinidad, and Helsinki, Finland. His multilingual creative writing, interviews, and reviews of books and art have appeared in literary anthologies, journals and magazines. He is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *About Kingston* (2025) and *The Black Flâneur: Diary of Dizain Poems, Anthropology of Hurt* (2025).



**Robert Edison Sandiford** is the author of several books, among them the story cycle *Fairfield*, the novel *And Sometimes They Fly*, and graphic novels with NBM Publishing. He has been shortlisted for The Frank Collymore Literary Award and is a recipient of Barbados’ Governor General’s Award of Excellence in Literary Arts. In 2003, he founded with the poet Linda M. Deane the Barbadian cultural resource ArtsEtc Inc. Sandiford has worked as a publisher, teacher and, with Warm Water Productions, producer. His stories have appeared in journals, magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Currently, he’s busy with another novel, this time about fathers, sons and dementia.



**Monica Agnes Skeete (née Martineau)** (1923–1997) was born in Grenville, Grenada, and moved to Barbados in 1937. There she was educated at Queen's College and subsequently went on to read History at Kings College, University of London, in the 1950s before becoming a teacher. She had a keen interest in drama, and wrote plays for her school and for the annual Bimshire productions as well as short stories that were published in *Bim*. She also read her work on radio in Barbados as part of Frank Collymore's literary programmes broadcast for fifteen minutes on Wednesdays and Sundays. "The Scholarship", possibly her best known short story, was broadcast on the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* in March 1958. Thomas Nelson and Sons published her book *Time Out* in 1978.



**Obediah Michael Smith** was born in the Bahamas in 1954 and holds a BA in Speech & Drama from Fisk University. He has studied French in Paris, France, and Spanish at the Universidad de Costa Rica. Obediah has participated in writers' workshops facilitated by Lorna Goodison, Earl Lovelace, Grace Nichols, Merle Collins, and Mervyn Morris at the University of Miami and The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, as well as participated in poetry festivals in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Kenya, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Romania. He has lived in France, Mexico, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, and Botswana. He has published 33 books of poetry.



**Shastri Sookdeo** grew up in Trinidad and Tobago and currently lives in Paris, France. He has had non-fiction published in *The Squall* and *The Write Review*, and has had fiction published in *The Caribbean Writer*, *Moko* and *saltfront*. He is the recipient of a Create and Explore Grant from the Canada Council for the Arts and is currently working on a novel.



**C. M. Harclyde Walcott** has, among other occupations, worked as a theatre director and producer, filmmaker and photojournalist. His creative writing has appeared in *The New Voices*, *Arts Review*, *Bim*, *POUi*, *Calabash*, and *ArtsEtc*. He is the author of *imagining and other poems* (2015).



**Sir Derek Alton Walcott** (1930–2017), poet, playwright, essayist, and painter, was born in Castries, Saint Lucia. His first published poem appeared in *The Voice* of Saint Lucia when he was fourteen years old; by the age of nineteen, he had self-published two volumes, *25 Poems* (1948) and *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* (1949). Those were followed by, among others: *In A Green Night: Poems 1948-1960* (1962); *Omeros* (1990); *Tiepolo's Hound* (2000); *The Prodigal: A Poem* (2004); *Selected Poems* (2007); *White Egrets* (2010); and *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948–2013* (2014). With his twin brother, Roderick, he co-founded the Trinidad Theater Workshop in 1950 and in 1957 was awarded a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation to study American Theatre. In 1981, while teaching at Boston University, he founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre. He is the author of several plays, among them: *Three Plays: The Last Carnival; Beef, No Chicken; and A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1969); *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* (1970); *The Joker of Seville and O Babylon!* (1978); *Remembrance and Pantomime* (1980); *The Isle Is Full of Noises* (1982); *The Odyssey: A Stage Version* (1992). Walcott's first collection of essays, *What the Twilight Says*, was published in 1998. Among his many honours and awards are an Obie Award for distinguished foreign play (*Dream on Monkey Mountain*), a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Montale Prize, a Royal Society of Literature Award, and the Queen's Medal for Poetry. In 1992, Walcott became the first Caribbean writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, and in 2015 he received the Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry's Lifetime Achievement Award.



**Anne Walmsley** (1931–2025) was an editor, scholar, critic, author, and specialist in Caribbean art and literature. She started her career working with Faber and Faber. Spent three years as a teacher at Westwood High School in Jamaica, before returning to the UK to work with BBC Schools television service and later with Longman, where she was employed for ten years as their first editor of Caribbean-focused writing, before moving to Nairobi as publishing editor for Longman Kenya. She was awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship to research CAM, and was awarded a PhD from the University of Kent for her thesis, which was also published as a book entitled *The Caribbean Artists Movement: A Literary and Cultural History, 1966–1971*.



**John Wickham** (1923–1999), winner of the BBC World Service Competition of 1967 with his story “Meeting at Milk Market”, was a meteorologist, literary editor, short story writer, and journalist. After a career in the World Meteorological Organisation, Wickham followed in the journalistic footsteps of his celebrated father, newspaperman Clennell Wickham, and became literary editor of the *Nation* in Barbados. He served for many years as the editor of *Bim*, and his short stories have been widely anthologised. He is the co-editor of *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*. Among his published collections are *Casuarina Row* (1974) and *Discoveries* (1993).

## Editor's Note

**We once again must offer our most sincere apologies, to our contributors as well as to our readers, for the delay in the arrival of this issue of *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*.**

For quite some time now, we have nurtured a desire to in some way acknowledge the several editors of the journal over the history of its publication. Over the course of several generations, a number of individuals have with remarkable enterprise, energy and sacrifice dedicated themselves to the task of making absolutely certain that the journal not only remained very much alive but that it in fact thrived, and to them we owe a great debt of gratitude.

And so, with this issue, we wish to start a process of acknowledgement and indeed of celebration by identifying the individuals who have over the course of these great many years given freely of their time, energy and expertise to the editorial leadership and sustenance of the publication. And we thought that it would be quite fitting to initiate such a gesture of acknowledgement in the pages of the journal itself.

We therefore wish to now publicly express our most sincere gratitude to W. Therold Barnes, E. L. (Jimmy) Cozier, Frank Collymore, A. N. Forde, L. Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite, John Wickham, Elizabeth Clarke, Colin Hope, Dennis Sardinha, John Gilmore, Andy Taitt, George Lamming, Esther Phillips, Curwen Best, Gladstone Yearwood, Anthony Bogues, Maziki Thame, Robert Edison Sandiford, and C. M. Harclyde Walcott. These are the men and the women, in chronological order, who have had the responsibility of representing the editorial leadership of *Bim* and its more recent incarnation, *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*, over these many years, variously as consultant editor, editor, guest editor, associate editor, managing editor, overseas editor, editorial committee member, or editorial consultant.

This special issue aims to continue and to build on the splendid example that they set, and we anticipate that at some point in the not too distant future a more fulsome means of acknowledgement will follow.

In this edition we have chosen to feature four areas of special focus. The first features material from the Bim Archive. The second seeks to engage with our First Nations peoples and their legacy in the contemporary Caribbean environment. The third continues to take as its focus the discussion of enslavement and reparatory justice. While the fourth concentrates on dance. As we tried to make certain to clarify in our call for submissions, in spite of our areas of focus the issue

nevertheless remained an open call and therefore open to material on any topic. The only real absolute requirement being that the material submitted proves to be worthy of publication.

One may wish to note that in our “From the Archive” we have tried to be faithful in publishing the original content, except for the odd occasion where we have had to make adjustments, whether to minor typographical errors, outdated spelling and so on.

As always, we must express our deep gratitude to all of our contributors, for they are the ones who make this journal the quality journal that it is. We most sincerely trust that you will find this edition a rewarding experience.

**C. M. Harclyde Walcott** (Guest Editor)

**May 2026**

**A Reminiscence from the Archives:**

Vol. 12, No. 48, Pages 245–248 (January–June 1969)

*Jimmy Cozier*

## The Beginnings of *Bim*

**Most biographies begin with some reference to ancestry, and any story of *Bim* would be incomplete without some reference to the Y.M.P.C. Magazine, of which it is the natural successor.**

The Young Men's Progressive Club had started in late 1935, succeeding an earlier attempt at organisation known as The Young Men's Philanthropic Society. First General Secretary was Jackie Evelyn, and it was largely through his efforts that the first club magazine appeared in January 1938. The second number was published in September of the same year, but by then it was clear that a magazine was too expensive a luxury for the infant club. The outstanding amount of the printing bill was close on a hundred dollars, and the club committee felt that the only thing to be done was to cut losses and give up the idea.

This is where I came into the picture. It seemed to me that the magazine could pay for itself. Volume 1, No. 1, had appeared completely without advertisements and the second number contained only two and those at quite unremunerative rates. My arguments, however, were falling on deaf ears, and so a trump card of some sort was imperative. This was produced by promising to take over the printing debt personally and to guarantee to relieve the Club of all financial involvement in future publications. In return the Club agreed to establish a Journal Committee with complete financial freedom for itself.

Number 3 appeared in December 1938 and contained some dozen advertisements, enough to foot the bill provided the sales of copies yielded the estimated sum. Unhappily, this target was not met, and the printing bill rose by twelve dollars. The question was one for personal decision: should we call it quits, or throw good money after bad?

The Journal Committee—Kenneth Tucker, Fab Hoyos and myself—decided to risk it and Mr. Val Gale agreed to extend me credit beyond the then hundred dollars plus. This was a big debt for 1939, and *Bim* should be eternally grateful to Mr. Val for his kindness and understanding.

Number Four came out in August of that year and we were able to clear off much of the debt, in addition to meeting the printing costs of that issue. We'd collected some thirty advertisements at a more realistic rate, and were in business.

Between August 1939 and the first issue of *Bim* regular publication was maintained and when I returned from a year's duty sojourn in St. Kitts there was an appreciable sum in the kitty—this despite three cash gifts to the Club's general account, made to pacify the Executive now anxious to resume their responsibilities!

By then the editorial structure of the Magazine had gone through appreciable change. It was no longer weighted as a Club report, but had been divided into two parts, a separate section being entirely devoted to creative writing.

This division had been prefaced by a quotation which was self-explanatory—"*...and a voice said unto me: Hide not thy talent; write what thou dreamest, for it is written the young men shalt have vision, and these shall be the leaders of the people in the days that are to come...>*".

At first there was evidently some bashfulness among the budding authors. Stories, poems and articles either appear without signature or merely initialed—and at this distance of time some of the initials baffle me. W.T.B. and R.F.S. (Therold Barnes and Dick Stokes) showed early promise, and the former was to become a tremendous help, both to the Magazine and later to *Bim*.

Happily it would seem that these first efforts were well received for next issue, except for a few unsigned "fillers" that seem vaguely familiar, all creative work was fully acknowledged. O. R. Marshall (now Professor) contributed two pieces, one not surprisingly a story of the racetrack; F. A. Collymore's name appears for the first time: and there is an undoubted improvement of standards.

This particular issue carries a red cross on the cover and all profits from it were donated to the Red Cross Fund.

By 1941 the Journal Committee had expanded to five; Kenneth Tucker, Dick Stokes, Therold Barnes, Trevor Gale and Jimmy Cozier. Most of that year I was in St. Kitts and it was there that the idea of *Bim* was really hatched.

Dick Stokes, then a travelling salesman, was in Basseterre, and we discussed the possibilities. The happy state of the Magazine accounts encouraged our belief that a purely literary magazine would have some chance of survival provided it contained advertising space. In any case, we felt, the Magazine had come through despite its inauspicious start; we were entitled to use some of the money now accumulating for the new venture.

Much correspondence followed between St. Kitts and Barbados, so that by the time I got back to Barbados in December all members of the Journal Committee were agreed that the idea should be followed through. We co-opted Frank Collymore—the best thing we ever did for West Indian Literature—and set to work to plan the operation.

Many meetings were held at Myrtle Villa then the Y.M.P.C. headquarters, and preparations hammered out. We divided up the canvassing of adverts, aiming for a minimum of \$120, and this target was duly reached. But the two major decisions taken were, first, the name and second to woo contributions from non-members as well as members. We further decided—and I think this was also most important—to pay non-members for any work accepted.

For suggesting the name *Bim* I should like to take the credit, but must share with Therold Barnes. All sorts of names were being bandied around at one meeting, and I was doing my usual doodling when thinking. I'd written the word *Bim* and was experimenting with various styles of lettering when Therold saw the scribbles and asked why not that for a name. Actually, I'd been a bit diffident about making the suggestion myself, but was delighted when the others endorsed it. *Bim* has a crisp sound and has worn well. I doubt very much we could've done better.

The next step was not so easy: to persuade non-members to let us see their work. It was suggested that we could start with a short story competition, and this we did. Advertising in the *Advocate* we offered a prize of ten dollars for the best story of about 2,000 words received, intimating that we would also be willing to pay for other stories submitted if deemed suitable for publication.

The response was overwhelming, but grievously pathetic. There were over seventy "short stories" submitted, all but one far below standard. The exception was a delightful little tale called "Penny Do" by F. N. K. Mascoll, its author now lost to literature in the arms of the military. Colonel Mascoll now commands the Jamaican local forces and presumably his literary efforts are confined to Orders of the Day.

This was a disappointment, and to give the publication some better appearance of diversity, stories appeared by "Edgar Allan Chambers", "Francis Appleton", "George T. Belgrave", and sundry pen names. These we wrote ourselves. Nevertheless, a start had been made, and we got on with the job of getting out Vol. 1, No. 2.

This time we had somewhat better luck. Mascoll again came up with the lead story, "Excurshun", and other "outsiders" included I. B., John Wickham, P. K. Roach, Jane Cabriel, and Margaret Saint. *Bim* was now in business and has since never lacked contributors. No. 3 introduced Jan Williams, Lucy Norman, S. C. Skinner, Nora Stoute, William S. Arthur, Ursula Walcott, Sophie Hall.

A further word should be said about payment. Obviously we could not afford much. Seven and six pence to ten shillings for a poem, five to ten dollars for a short story, were the average payments, and it is good to record that these amounts were gratefully acknowledged by all recipients. However small the payment, the budding author is very bucked by the mere fact that somebody finds his work worth paying for, and this, I truly believe, is the very foundation of *Bim*'s success.

More famous names were to come later, for by now a far greater hand was at the controls. I had gone to Trinidad, and Frank Collymore—not without some pressure and persuasion—had taken over.

“Colly” nursed the infant to vital manhood, and the rest of us gazed admiringly from afar. It was comforting to know that we had a hand in the launching, but the triumphant voyage to greatness was Colly's doing—his, and purely his. True. Therold helped provide the pressure and the continuing persuasion, but he would be the first to give credit where it is undoubtedly due.

Colly's role as the godfather of modern West Indian Literature has now become well recognised and it was particularly pleasing to an early associate to know that the University of the West Indies so gracefully joined in deserving tribute.

It is now to be hoped that *Bim* will continue to function, for it still has an important role to play in our cultural life. Printing is an expensive undertaking these days. That is no secret. But it would be a real tragedy if this magazine which has been the cradle of so much of our cultural expression foundered up on the money rocks.

**A Public Address from the Archives:**

Vol. 13, No. 53, Pages 3–9 (July–December 1971)

*Sir Arthur Lewis*

## ON BEING DIFFERENT

*(The Graduation Address delivered at the U.W.I., Cave Hill, Barbados, on 5th February, 1971.)*

A constant theme in today's West Indies is that we should stop imitating other peoples, and do our own thing. We should be different, and West Indian. It is an attractive theme; has indeed become almost a bandwagon theme; every other public speaker takes the chance of recording his adherence to it. I too want to get into this popular stream, but I am also a little more anxious to find out just what it is all about. Obviously West Indians cannot be different from other men in everything, since we all belong to *homo sapiens*, so one has to ask where we should draw the line; in what respects should we be the same as other peoples, and in what respects should we strive to be different?

My only qualification for talking about this subject is that I have probably thought about it more than most other West Indians. Since no job was available for me here when I graduated, I have had to spend most of my life out of the West Indies. And in striving to earn my living in the great wide world I have had to try to master the highly competitive skills of my profession. In the process I have become what is now called in the West Indies an Afro-Saxon. The term is meant to be abusive, but what in practice it seems to mean is a black man who can hold his own in competition with white people on their own ground. Facing this difficult challenge, I have had to ask myself over and over again over the past thirty years what sort of person I ought to be trying to be. West Indian, yes, but just what does this mean that is intended to distinguish us from other human beings?

Obviously one must not take to its extreme conclusion the proposition that West Indians must live differently from other men. If so, it would be wrong for Barbadians to play cricket, which is an Englishman's invention; or if Barbadians do play cricket, they should make their own special rules. Taken to the extreme, the proposition would prevent Trinidadians from playing in steelbands, since the steel from which the instruments are made comes from iron ores which are not found in Trinidad.

Trinidadians should make music instead exclusively from bamboos, which grow luxuriantly in that island, and which make splendid musical instruments.

I do not wish to make fun of the proposition that we should be different, which, as I have said, I accept: I am merely emphasising the fact that the proposition is not as universal as some make it out to be. There are people who worry at the level of the commodities we use, and insist that it is wrong to use imported materials, or to eat imported food—which to me seems an economic question rather than one for nationalist emotions. Other people are [heated] up about the clothes we wear, or about our hairstyles, which seem to me to be trivial and ever enchanting phenomena hardly worth the glance of the philosopher or statesman, even though I recognise that difference in these respects gives emotional comfort to a great many people: men have fought bitterly about the wearing of a turban. That we should be different seems to me a good proposition and one which is easily nonsensical or trivial, unless one defines rather carefully what it is we are to differ in.

Before I tackle this question let me first note that the ground is not entirely occupied by Afro-Saxons and the advocates of an exclusively West Indian culture. We have in our midst a third group who advocate that we should model ourselves on the Africans, since Africa is where most of our fathers came from some two centuries ago. I will leave aside the complication that there are more Indians than Africans in Guyana and nearly as many Indians as Africans in Trinidad—and follow the proponents of this idea in arguing as if West Indians were all descended from Africa.

Even with this fatal simplification, the proposition is hardly meaningful, and always bemuses Africans who make its acquaintance. In the first place, Africa is the most diversified of all the continents in terms of strictly indigenous institutions, languages, food patterns, clothes or any other index which you care to choose. There are hundreds of tribal and national groups, very different from each other, so there is no unique African model that West Indians could imitate. In the second place Africans themselves are trying hard to get into the modern world, and are in the process shedding a great number of the characteristics which they developed in isolation. The idea that we should choose as models what they are discarding seems to them a little quaint. To use the popular jargon, the Africans are having as big a crisis of identity as we are. In stretching out to them we shall find sympathy and understanding, but hardly remedies for the condition in which we both find ourselves.

However, let me come back to my theme, the proposition that we strive to be ourselves, not Englishmen or Africans or Indians or Chinese, but West Indians.

Different in what ways? Since we are not racists, we are committed to the proposition that we are essentially the same as other men. Societies differ not in the underlying humanity, but in what they make of themselves and of their environment.

What differs is the human achievement. So when we say that West Indians are to be different, we mean that they must make something different—our achievement must be unique.

In framing the problem in this way I am automatically ruling out what is in practice the most obvious difference between peoples, namely their manners and customs, especially their clothes, language, accent, mannerisms, and food. When you meet your friend should you shake hands with him? The traditional answer is: If he is an American, Yes. If he is an Englishman, No. If he's a Frenchman, shake hands with him every five minutes. When we say that a man is typically German, or Chinese, or that we can always recognise a West Indian on the streets of Harlem, it is to these superficial characteristics that we refer.

Inevitably, manners have strong local roots and differ from place to place, and inevitably local conservatives and local revolutionaries get very excited with every new importation. Traditionally it used to be the most highly educated and well travelled who were least identifiable by these local mannerisms, since they tend to follow the precept that when in Rome one does as the Romans do; but today, thanks to records, television and films, it is the masses of the population who seem to be quickest in adopting the international lifestyles of the world's young adults, and the whole world is now coming to look and sound alike.

No doubt West Indians will and should evolve their own ever changing system of manners, but this is not what we have to examine. The charge against the Afro-Saxon is not that he does not dress like a West Indian or speak with a West Indian accent, but that he does not *think* like a West Indian. Hence our question has to be: how should West Indian thinking differ from other thinking? And to answer it we have to look at the whole realm of human thought, and to ask what opportunities it offers for national characteristics. This is a very appropriate question for a university community, since thought is our stock in trade.

The human achievement is all the product of thought, applied to work. It is rather small. Man has existed for a million years, but it is only within the last 5,000 years that we have made significant progress. This is because nature is hard and cruel, and has had to be fought every step of the way. The fight has not been led by any one nation; nations have had very little to do with it, and nationalism has been more often destructive than helpful. Individuals of many nations have contributed, each building on the work of his predecessors from many different nations at many different times. What has resulted from this is a body of knowledge which is now the heritage of all mankind. This knowledge divides into three areas—first, knowledge of how phenomena work, which includes the natural and social sciences; secondly, moral knowledge, or if you like, opinion as to how human beings ought to behave towards each other if human

society is to be tolerable; and thirdly aesthetic knowledge, or how to be creative in the arts. Each of these combines elements of universality with some opportunity for differences between national groups.

Let us take first science, natural and social. The evolution of natural science was delayed for a long time by prejudice, or as we would now say by lack of objectivity. Indeed the very notion that science should try to be objective was bitterly resisted, by those who thought that we should accept only results which seemed consistent with what was already revealed about God. Science was to serve religion, or as we might now say, to serve the purposes of history. The social sciences are fighting the same struggle today against those, including many social scientists, who not only deny that social scientists can be objective, but also argue that they should not try to be objective, since their science should serve the purposes of history. If they were right, social science would differ from society to society; but they are not right. Genuine social scientists, gathered together from all parts of the world, have no difficulty in understanding each other's concepts, and in my profession of economics we have found that any tool which is illuminating in one part of the world—like monetary theory or linear programming or the discounting of future returns—is equally illuminating everywhere, whether in the Soviet Union, or the U.S.A. or Tanzania.

I am of course talking about theory. The applied part of any science is naturally environment-related. Any scientific group is bound to contribute more to the study of its own environment, or its own history, than will be contributed by other groups elsewhere. Every colony has had to fight the battle to have its own curriculum in its schools and colleges. This is obviously right, but is also easily overdone. We make progress in science not only from studying the local environment, but also from elaborating our basic theory. This kind of theoretical elaboration frequently derives from wide comparison. Particularly, if you want to be a revolutionary in science, achieving some great new breakthrough, you have to understand the existing system which you wish to overthrow better than it is understood by its supporters, not less so. Keynes was able to invent a new economics because he thoroughly understood the old. If any new physics or sociology is going to come out of the West Indies, it will be from people who have mastered the old physics or sociology, and not just from people who have rejected the old without really coming to grips with it.

In sum, we will make our special contribution to applied science, but we must first master the basic universal theoretical principles of the disciplines we use. And our chance of contributing to those basic disciplines will depend very largely on the excellence of our secondary schools and the respect accorded to basic theoretical studies in our university colleges. In this respect, West Indians will not differ from other men.

I have dwelt somewhat on this point because there is a strong current of thought that West Indians should study only things West Indian. This is an egregious error, and a danger to the young. The old are not so easily moved, since we have learned each to go his own way; but the young are very conformist, and are easily bulldozed into acting against their better judgement.

Let me turn now to the second area of human thought, that of morals, or of what behaviour towards each other should be. This itself divides into two parts, personality and social structure. Manners could also be included here, but I have already dealt with this topic.

There is a distinct West Indian personality, marked by its aggressive nature, which in turn derives from the insecure family life in which such a large proportion of our children are reared. Not all West Indians are aggressive, but it is the quality we most admire in our leaders. This aggressive personality has some advantages; it is the chief reason why West Indians figure disproportionately in the black leadership of the United States. But it also has its disadvantages. For example, as Sir John Mordecai's book on the breakdown of our federation shows, the chief reason was the inability of our three leaders in the same federal political party to maintain normal personal relations, and compromise with each other. We also make rather poor businessmen, compared with say the Nigerian Ibos, because unlike the Ibos we are spendthrift, and not very reliable in keeping our commitments punctually.

On the whole I do not think that it is an advantage for West Indians to have a distinct personality of our own. Philosophers and religious thinkers have meditated for five thousand years on what ideal human beings should be like, and there is no reason to believe that these ideals should differ from one country to another. For my part I think our aggressive personality makes us inferior to our African brethren, who bring up their children in warm stable and secure family situations, and who therefore produce a stable personality. If we must imitate the Africans, this is what I would urge our countrymen to imitate. Also, if we continue to be unbusinesslike and spendthrift, our society will have no long-term future, since it will not survive in this Darwinian world.

In the moral area we have also the subject of social structure—family relations, the political system, class, economic relations and so on. There is an immense variety of social structures, as one moves from place to place. None embodies perfection, and all change nowadays with unprecedented rapidity. Men have imagined and written for five thousand years about every kind of social system, and it seems highly improbable that West Indians will come up with a new kind of social structure which has never been heard of before; this is no doubt why those of us who do not like our existing structures find ourselves having to import our ideas from abroad instead of trying to invent some

unique West Indian social system. If perchance we did invent something new of our own (which is admittedly possible even though unlikely) and it proved to be good, it would soon be widely imitated elsewhere, since what was good for us would be equally good for other social groups. For my part, I believe in the open, egalitarian, raceless society which we do not now have, but to which most of our leaders are committed. But when we get there we shall find ourselves in company with many other nations.

In sum, in the area of human relations, national difference is either trivial, in so far as it relates to manners, or undesirable in so far as relates to personality or to social structure. This is because the underlying principles of ethics are of universal validity; what is good for one society is likely to be good for every other. It would be nice if West Indians could have a better community life than other nations, but there is no reason to expect our struggles to be easier than anybody else's.

Finally I come to aesthetics. Music, literature and art are as important a part of the heritage of mankind as are science and morals. They differ from science in that they do not represent what is, but are products of the creative imagination. They have therefore infinite scope for variation. And yet they tend to be distinctly national in character. This is because artists live in colonies, like ants or porpoises. Some great artistic figure attracts other artists to his school; they see or hear alike; they help and criticise each other. And their product is clearly distinct from that of other schools.

It is thus of the very nature of the game that as aesthetic activity burgeons in the West Indies, our art and music and literature will be clearly distinguishable from that of other peoples. We shall have our own schools of painting and music and poetry and drama and the rest. This is the essential and most valuable sense in which West Indians must be different from other peoples. This is the contribution which above all others we know we can make to the common human heritage.

I stress the word common to avoid misunderstanding. The human heritage includes Chinese art, European art, African art; Hindu music, which is quite different from Ashanti music, which in its turn differs from the diatonic structure of jazz and the European classics. This is our common heritage, because the civilised man learns to appreciate as many of these different styles as he can, just as he learns to like French cooking and Chinese cooking and Malay cooking, which are essentially different. For any person to wish to exclude himself from any part of the human artistic heritage, in favour of his local nationalism, is simply boorish. And what is one to say of the incident in South Africa last year where three African pianists were turned away from a Beethoven competition on the ground that Beethoven is not part of African culture? Beethoven belongs to all of us.

We must also note that it is true of the arts, as it is of science, that one learns most by comparison. Our writers must study other writers—not just in English but in other

languages—when they are young, in order to have a basis for developing their own styles. Difference must be grounded in wide knowledge and not in ignorance of all except the local effort.

Fortunately we have already established the beginnings of an artistic heritage. In literature we have had the great explosion of novels since the 1950's. In art, starting also in the 50's, a steadier pace has been maintained, but we have already reached the position of having established artists who manage to make a living just by selling their works. In music we are still far behind, since despite our great contributions to popular music, we have a dearth of well trained musicians, and especially a dearth of the string players needed to maintain a symphony orchestra.

The principal handicap is of course that there are so few people who understand and enjoy the creative arts in our communities, that our artists, musicians, writers, actors and so on, have too small a market. So they have to go abroad and scatter instead of making their little colonies here, which would be very much more productive. The smallness of the market is the fault of our secondary schools, which fail to develop this part of our children's personalities.

A society without the creative arts is a cultural desert. I would commend to our statesmen that they put a lot more money into the creative arts departments of our secondary schools.

To conclude, as I look ahead at the evolution of the West Indies, I see many respects in which we should strive to be like other peoples—like having a well rounded personality, or scientists and scholars of world repute—and many respects in which we will be different—like having some distinctive manners and customs, our own curricula in schools, our own applied science, natural and social, and our own musical and other artistic achievements. The main point that I would leave with you is that our chance to make something good of our own depends on our studying carefully what other peoples have done, and learning from their mistakes and their successes. If we are going to close our minds in a box of pure West Indianness, we shall achieve nothing worthwhile.

Robert “Bob” Ramdhanie

# Black Dance: An Overview of the Caribbean and England in the Last Decades of the 20th Century

Dance can be the most sophisticated articulation of the human body as it moves through space and time. For many casual observers and dance audiences, what is being observed may or may not communicate any messages, or project any specific histories or recall ancient stories; for dance, contrary to popular belief, is not created within a universal dance vocabulary. It's an art form that has been evolving for centuries and has its own nuances, subtleties, minimalist or macro movements and meanings, depending on its environment. In the creative and skillful hands of its teachers, dancers, choreographers, and *spiritographers*,<sup>1</sup> dance practice manifests itself as performance art. However, dance can also reflect and recall much of what has been mentioned above and be very compelling and provocative: weaving stories and tales underpinned by a range of specific societal values and norms; being more meaningful and reflecting common experiences embedded in specific societies and cultural environments. But dance—its vocabulary, repertoire and presentation style—remains culture specific, in spite of its evolutions and manifestations in new environments.

Black dance, in this context, will be used interchangeably with African and Caribbean dance to refer to the dance practices from the African continent and the African diaspora, especially as the forms evolved during the last decades of the 20th century.

\*

Dance is not a recent phenomenon, either, and Black bodies in dance have been dancing for centuries. However, and especially since the 16th century and particularly when white Europeans arrived on the African continent, Black bodies in dance have never found favour with the majority of their European colonisers. White foreigners to

West Africa's coastal regions who witnessed dance gatherings reported that they were lewd, licentious, bawdy, and displeasing. Of course, within the African context, those Black bodies were self-defined: dancing bare-breasted or bare-chested, barefoot, and with stylish and sensual hip movements. Traditional dances were valued and respected; the performances at community gatherings and social occasions were inclusive, and inherent within those dance celebrations were shared community values. Dances had purpose, strengthening community bonds, and had profound meanings and messages for its specific communities. Through European lenses, the people and their dance practices were "otherised" and dismissed. The vast majority of European accounts, including the British, reported about African culture in negative terms. Those early, ill-informed writings, combined with the growth of global racism, congealed over the years to ensure that Black bodies in dance were positioned less favourably than their white counterparts in most forms of what can be considered Western "white dance".

Interestingly, as historical records inform us, there was also a subtext related to many whites who were writing about, observing and "otherising" those Black bodies in motion: the same Black bodies that displeased, publicly, satisfied both male and female Europeans privately.

Europeans, from the very outset in their expansionist roles, were interested in the continent of Africa as an outpost to exploit economically and create wealth for Europe. They were not interested in "the dark continent's" cultural or religious traditions and values. To gain maximum benefits, white Europeans created a hierarchical structure, positioning themselves and their values at the top and placing Africa's populations in the lowest echelons of Europe's world view. Unaccustomed to and uninterested as they were in African spirituality and religious and cultural practices, they positioned European cultural activities, in my parlance, as "haughty" culture, whilst to them African cultures were "naughty".

Long after the first contact with Africans, well beyond the years of enslavement and the "scramble for Africa" (Berlin Conference 1884/1885) and even up to today, the Black body in dance is still "otherised" and viewed through distorted lenses by writers with Europeanist viewpoints. In spite of this, across the dance spectrum, Black bodies in dance still have the power to engage all sections of society and, depending on one's particular vantage point, dancers continue to create and innovate, displease and seduce, anger and please, excite and entertain. Black dancers continue to distill quality choreographies and *spiritographies*, experiment and break boundaries, set new standards, create new and highly technical vocabulary, and captivate new audiences. Nonetheless, for all the individual training, skills, techniques, technological advancement, debates and analyses, Black dance practice has largely remained misunderstood and marginalised on the periphery of British society.

## **How did African and Caribbean dance traditions emerge in the UK?**

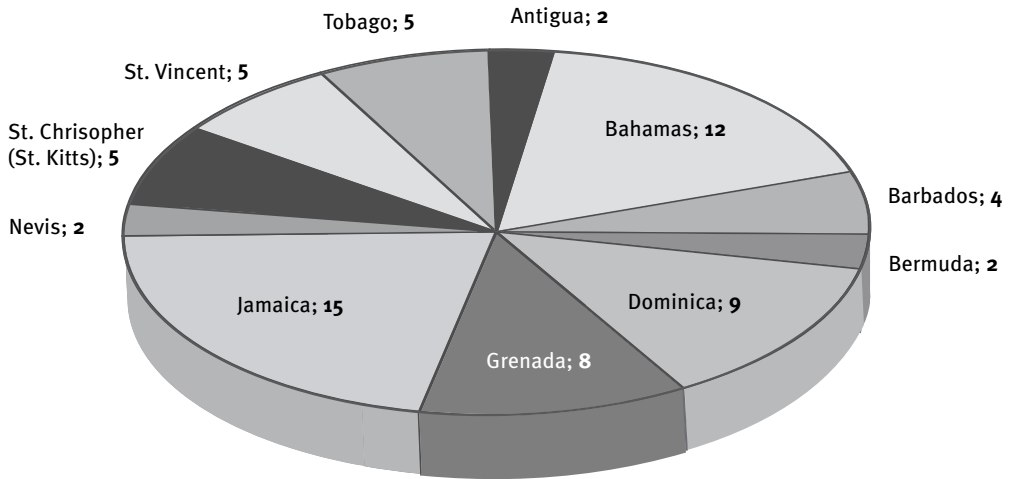
In order to truly understand the emergence of African and Caribbean dance practice in the UK, and indeed globally, one has to start on the continent of Africa, to decipher and deconstruct the misrepresentations of European historians and early writers of the continent and reappraise, reconstruct and revalue the deep meanings that dance had and has for its communities. Following enslavement and colonisation, Black people migrated within the Americas, to Europe and further afield. Many from the Caribbean focused on a new life as they travelled and settled in the “motherland”, England. Once again, history reveals that these migratory movements were not simply from *the push* to leave their islands but, more forcibly, it was through *the pull* from the “motherland” wanting a cheap pool of labour to help it rebuild its physical infrastructure and restart its economic growth following the Second World War.

Historical records confirm that there has been a Black population in the UK for several centuries, well before the 1940s. Always shunted to the periphery of mainstream society, those small communities, living mainly in London, were generally employed as servants, maids, nannies, occasionally as musicians, and some worked in the sex industry. Despite their lowly position in mainstream white society, those Black communities entertained and enjoyed themselves. In particular, they danced at sacred and secular occasions, recalling from their physical and mental reservoirs music and movement that were steeped in religious practices, from Africa and *creolised* forms from the Caribbean. Although such occasions were visible and left a legacy, the foundation for traditional and contemporary Black dance practice in the UK was genuinely and firmly laid in the latter half of the 20th century.

For Africans, music and dance were not forms separated from daily existence; these were integrated into their religious practice. As Kofi Asare Opoku noted, “It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that in traditional Africa, religion is life and life, religion.” Whilst Europe was amassing huge financial benefits from its horrendous treatment of Black bodies as cargo in the triangular slave trade, the world would later hugely benefit, culturally, from those Black enslaved bodies who would introduce a raft of innovations in music, dance, theatre, art, style, literature, science, etc. into Western cultural arenas. The resilience and resistance of enslaved Black bodies were also transporting, in opposition to the triangular slave trade, Africa’s intangible cultural traditions by creating cultural heritage circles,<sup>2</sup> especially through religious practices. African dance—and drumming—not only survived but thrived!

Across the Caribbean, one of the first lines of cultural suppression was the banning of drumming and traditional dancing by European governments, as they considered those to be dangerous. Figure 1. shows the numbers of acts passed on various islands to outlaw drumming and dancing.

**Number of Acts Passed in the Caribbean**



**Figure 1.**

The drum was considered dangerous because, in African traditions, rhythmic percussion and communal movement were weapons of communication and mobilisation. Dangerous, because African communities used drumming to call upon and engage ancestors, coordinate resistance, and reinforce social bonds beyond colonial control.

In Jamaica, the colonisers were continuously being harassed by the Maroon communities whose coded drumming, singing and dancing underpinned several rebellions. Plantation owners feared those rhythms, knowing that they were being used as signals for local uprisings. In failing to understand or value African culture, European colonisers failed to understand that dance was encoded with voice and memory, and to suppress it was to suppress identity itself—a next to impossible undertaking. Africans resisted and danced Kumina, bruckins, Jonkonnu and more.

Despite systemic repression, the enslaved and the free communities improvised, innovated and developed percussive alternatives using saws, sticks, bamboo, and clapping. In the twin-island state of Trinidad and Tobago, tamboo-bamboo and kaiso singing (early forms of calypso) emerged from hidden gatherings where movement and song blended memory with coded commentary. In Cuba, enslaved West Africans preserved their musical heritage within Catholic rituals, giving rise to *Santería*, a

syncretic religion combining Yoruba orishas with Catholic saints and with music and movement; whilst in Brazil, *capoeira*, a dynamic, highly styled martial art, combined elements of dance, acrobatics, music, and spirituality as a form of resistance and self-defence.

Enslaved Africans in Haiti wove together West and Central African spirits with Taino elements and Catholic iconography, establishing voodoo on the island, and in Barbados the Land-Ship had strong connections to British naval manoeuvres, but it was also coupled to core West African cultural traditions of community cohesion for social and economic prosperity. Dance, linked to religious practices, was central to the existence of life on all the Caribbean islands. The coloniser's attempts to ban drumming and dancing were dual in purpose, meant to stifle any resurfacing of Africa's cultural traditions in the Caribbean whilst at the same time strengthening the coloniser's political acts of control. Enslaved and free communities responded with adaptation: dance continued clandestinely, disguised within church festivals, hidden in plantation fields, and reshaped through syncretic spiritual practices.

In spite of the consistent European attack on and negation of this art form, Black dance practice across the Americas has weathered the blistering of European critics. Dance has evolved into several tangible styles that continue to share narratives of “the other” through dynamic choreographies and *spiritographies*; through dances of resistance and rebellion; and through musical theatre, in street dances and in films. Whether in social, religious or ceremonial functions throughout the African continent and around the world today, Black dance is alive and kicking! This body articulation, transformed and embodied in the souls and spirit of the enslaved, was resurrected, reformulated and re-energised in the Americas on tobacco, cotton and sugar cane plantations, and it now finds expression in theatres, art centres, concert halls, community centres, places of worship, village halls and street pavements across the Americas North and South, across Europe, throughout the current and former English, Spanish, Dutch, French, and Danish Caribbean, and the wider global stage.

As Black people of Africa and the Americas migrated to Europe and elsewhere in search of a better life, their cultural retentions manifested themselves in a range of artistic endeavours, including dance. Such was the case in the UK as Caribbean immigrants, African Americans and continental Africans arrived there centuries ago. Why and how this persecuted art form established roots in the UK several centuries earlier speak to the significance and meaning dance has for its Black communities. Who were the key players, who like their forefathers found opposition to their mere presence in the UK and an accompanying resentment of their art forms in contemporary Britain, but who overcame those to lay a foundation for the continuity of Black dance practice in the UK today? Why did they want to do that anyway, given the struggles of daily life

itself and the difficulties and racist attacks that the Black communities were facing, not only in the arts, but in their lives generally, especially in employment, education and housing? Why indeed, after all the centuries of observation of Black bodies in dance in Africa, throughout the Americas and in the UK itself, is there no published history of the contribution of these dancers to the cultural life of Britain?<sup>3</sup>

The early pioneers, in the sense of establishing formal groups and devising and choreographing theatrical dance, were Berto Pasuka and Richard Riley from Jamaica (1946), Boscoe Holder from Trinidad and Tobago (1950), Allister Bain from Grenada (1958), Elroy Josephz from Jamaica (1960), and Jeanette Springer from Guyana (1970). The Ghanaian Felix Cobbson (1965) had established the Aklowa Centre, offering training programmes and performances in Ghanaian drumming and dancing. Additionally, there were individual Caribbean entertainers, notably Cy Grant (Guyana) and Edric Connor (Trinidad) presenting concerts of traditional folk songs with calypso dancers, and informal groups of drummers and dancers who linked up to perform when the occasion demanded it. Visiting US-based companies and African American solo performers, notably Marie Bryant, a highly skilled jazz dancer, also performed “exotic African dances” in London in the 1950s.

On 30th April, 1946, a new voice emerged on the dance horizon as *Les Ballets Nègres*, and its charismatic leader and choreographer, Berto Pasuka, opened for their first season at the Twentieth Century Theatre in London. Pasuka laid the foundation for organised Black dance practice in Britain. Born in Jamaica of mixed parentage (African and East Indian), he arrived in England in 1939. His company exploded onto the London theatrical stage with four full-length ballets, unheard of during the period of Black dance development. Cy Grant, Allister Bain, Alex Pascall, Elroy Josephz, Evrol Puckerin, Jeanette Springer, Dorothy Palmer, Raymond McClean, and several others were presenting cabaret-style performances. Those performers were engaged in other forms of daily employment but continued promoting their cultural traditions, genuinely enriching and nourishing the lives of the British population who were still psychologically recovering from the recent war.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Caribbean and African contribution to the British cultural landscape increased significantly through proponents like Peter Blackman and Carol Straker (Barbados), Carl Campbell, Hermin McIntosh, Chester Morrison, Jackie Guy, H. Patten, the Andersons (Lorna, Barry, Angela, Pauline, Jamaica/UK), Ben Baddoo, George Otoo, George Dzikunu, Emmanuel Tagoe (Ghana), Julia Mathunjwa, Betty Boo, Joe Legwabe, Chief Dawethi, Elliot Ngubane (South Africa), Ginger Johnson and Ambrose Campbell (Nigeria), Jeanette Springer (Guyana), Beverley Glean (Grenada), Tony Morgan and Kif Higgins (Liverpool), Greta Mendez and Evrol Puckerin (Trinidad and Tobago), and me, a Trinidadian arts manager and co-founder of three small community

dance groups. This has been done through the continued teaching, performing and promoting of Black dance.

Caribbean and African dance forms flourished due to the desire and interest of young people; dance, our dance, was both *the* social and political framework within which Black people definitely said: I AM, WE ARE!! Shikisha, African Dawn, IRIE! dance theatre, Adzido Pan-African Ensemble, and MAAS Movers in London; Adinkra in Bristol; and Kokuma, Wantu Wanzuri and Danse de L'Afrique (DLA) in Birmingham were buzzing, and individual dancers and drummers, including Ben Baddoo, Felix Cobbson, Nicky Reid, Mario Diekuuroh, Stephen Blagrove, Norman Stephenson, Charles James, George Otoo, George Dzikunu, and Peter Blackman, among others, were offering workshops around the country.

Whereas most groups were involved in Caribbean and African dance practice—traditional and contemporary—and focusing on African dances, mostly from Ghana, the repertoires and vocabulary were added to toward the end of the 20th century with the arrival in the UK of Peter Badejo (Badejo Arts), Bode Lawal (Sakoba), both professionally trained dancers/spiritographers from Nigeria, and Patrick Acogny from France/Senegal.

Today Black bodies in dance can be seen across the Caribbean, in the UK and globally. Whatever the situation, Black dancing traditions continue, and in the UK today, Itara, a Barbadian, who has been dancing from the age of four, continues to share her limbo dancing skills!

## Notes

- 1 *Spiritographer/spiritography* are words which I have coined to reinforce the fact that many creative productions by African and Caribbean creators of dance were/are inspired and influenced by both visible and invisible sources. I introduced this in my unpublished PhD thesis, *African Dance in England—Spirituality and Continuity* (University of Warwick, 2005), and more recently in my book, *The Black Dance Movement in England 1940-2000*.
- 2 *Cultural heritage circles* were intangible spiritual connections amongst Africans wherever they found themselves. Whilst Europeans were only interested in the Black African body as an economic asset, Africa's intangible cultural heritage was being transmitted at the same time, evolving and contributing to cultural development in the Americas. Those traditions from Africa, throughout the periods of enslavement and beyond, linked up and strengthened African cultural practices in the Americas, the Caribbean and later in the UK, finally reconnecting directly with the source in Africa. Those invisible cultural heritage circles have endured for centuries, growing and expanding up to the present day.

**Nancy Morejón**

translations from the Spanish by **Thomás Rothe**

## Caliban, and Roberto, on a Horse in La Víbora

A few precise words  
drain simple truth into a palm basket  
and inhale rumors, the clearest passion for language.

Facing the sea, Caliban lowers his head  
while he accepts the downpour  
in front of his only love.

The young poet discovers a yellow-backed finch,  
perched on his brother Manuel's forehead,  
on the ancient sand of dreams.

Caliban weeps before Odysseus' fleet of ships  
and, in the real light of a woman, trembles  
like those fawns who brought him  
"she who strikes from afar", below the Achilles tendon.  
Roberto, free, joined by his own shadow,  
wanders in his everyday palace,  
while he seeks a door out  
to another new possibility.

Roberto, free, like never before.  
The stars, above, seek his transparency  
before the hills:

The towers, already risen.

The old word is the beginning of life.  
The new word is the beginning of death.

The words are mother and father and the fortune  
of globetrotters. Caliban hears  
and touches these words.  
Caliban understands them and hugs them tenderly,  
along with that boy's trembling body  
mounted, on his innocence, on his word  
pure and audacious,  
on a horse in La Víbora.

*El Cerro, August 2, 2016*

## Calibán, y Roberto, sobre un caballo de La Víbora

Unas palabras exactas  
vierten su pura verdad en un catauro isleño  
y solo aspiran el rumor, esa limpia pasión por el idioma.

Frente al mar, Calibán baja la cabeza  
mientras acepta el aguacero  
ante su único amor.

El poeta joven descubre al tomeguín,  
anclado sobre la frente de su hermano Manuel,  
sobre la antigua arena de los sueños.

Calibán llora ante las naves de Odiseo  
y, ante la cierta luz de una mujer, tiembla  
como esos cervatillos que le entregara  
«la que hiere de lejos», bajo el talón de Aquiles.  
Roberto, libre, junto a su propia sombra,  
deambula en su palacio cotidiano,  
mientras busca la puerta de salida  
hacia otra nueva posibilidad.

Roberto, libre, como nunca jamás.

Los astros, en lo alto, buscan su transparencia  
frente a las colinas:

Las torres, levantadas.

Un cántaro, a lo lejos, empuña la flor de veinte siglos:

La palabra vieja es el inicio de la vida.

La palabra nueva es el inicio de la muerte.

Las palabras son madre y padre y ventura  
de los trotamundos. Calibán las escucha  
y las toca.

Calibán las comprende, y las abraza con ternura,  
junto al temblor del niño aquel  
montado, en su inocencia, en su palabra  
pura y audaz,  
sobre un caballo de La Víbora.

*El Cerro, 2 de agosto, 2016*

**Nancy Morejón**

translation from the Spanish by **Thomás Rothe**

## Wayward Eyes

My mother squinted her wayward eyes,  
exhaling a cloud of blood,  
when they rejected her  
from the Havana Normal School for Teachers,  
one day,  
with false arguments that were nothing else but her origin  
and the colour of her skin. The doors closed  
behind her and she overcame the disgrace  
—dark alligator waters—  
with a gentle smile, always skeptical.  
And my mother would run under the bush moon,  
escaping the congregation  
until she reached the sea,  
with her expert eyes of an exceptional Chinese woman,  
returning to her country,  
like her unknown grandmother from Canton or Macau.  
Still a mystery for us.  
Who knows?... But my mother  
squints once more  
her slanted eyes, still vibrant,  
in this Havana afternoon.

*April 5, 2025*

## Ojos locos

Mi madre entorna sus ojos locos,  
echando un vaho de sangre,  
cuando le cerraron las puertas  
de la Escuela Normal de Maestros de La Habana,  
un día,  
con argumentos falsos que no eran otros sino su origen  
y el color de su piel. Las puertas se cerraron  
tras ella y ella dejó pasar la infamia,  
—agua prieta de caimanes—  
con una sonrisa suave, siempre descreída.  
Y mi madre corría bajo la luna de los montes,  
sin que el rebaño la encontrara  
hasta llegar al mar,  
con sus ojos expertos de china excepcional,  
regresando a su país,  
como su abuela incógnita de Cantón o Macao.  
Un misterio aún para nosotros.  
¿Quién sabe?... Pero mi madre  
vuelve a entornar  
sus ojos chinos, todavía asombrados,  
esta tarde habanera.

*5 de abril, 2025*

**Nancy Morejón**

translation from the Spanish by **Thomás Rothe**

## Girl Leaving Guinea

*“For we went, changing countries more often than our shoes”*

Bertolt Brecht

I am eight years old.

I was born in Guinea, like my parents.

I fell asleep waiting for the plane  
and never saw them again.

We were headed for New York,  
we weren't going through Tierra Firme,  
we weren't crossing the Darien Gap,  
we weren't swimming through the Río Bravo.

I fell asleep and, when I woke up, my parents had already left.

I saw neon lights and checked all the airport exits.

I was hungry in the morning at door 7.

I was hungry in the afternoon at door D36.

I was hungry in the evening at door C22.

I was hungry and thirsty.

On one side, a shop was selling ham and cheese roll-ups.

I ate two.

On the other side, there was a store full of  
*sneakers and jackets* that smelled like candy.

Without realizing it, I sat in the seats for hours.

I slept like a dormouse.

I fell asleep...without knowing.

A man in a uniform woke me up:

“Where are my mom and dad?

I thought you came to tell me.

Where are mom and dad?” I asked again,  
close to losing all hope.

I am eight years old and I was born in Guinea.

*El Cerro, January 1, 2024*

# Niña saliendo de Guinea

*«Cambiábamos de país, como de zapatos»*

Bertold Brecht

Tengo ocho años.

Nací en Guinea, como mis padres.

Me quedé dormida esperando el avión

y nunca más los volví a ver.

Íbamos rumbo a Nueva York,

sin pasar por Tierra-Firme,

sin cruzar el Tapón del Darién,

sin caminar sobre las aguas del Río Bravo.

Me quedé dormida y, cuando desperté, ya mis padres no estaban.

Vi luces de neón y recorrí todas las salidas del aeropuerto.

Tuve hambre por la mañana en la puerta 7.

Tuve hambre por la tarde en la puerta D36.

Tuve hambre por la noche en la puerta C22.

Tenía hambre y sed.

Al lado, vendían quesos envueltos con jamón del diablo.

Comí dos.

Al otro lado, había una tienda donde vendían

*tennis y jackets* perfumados.

Sin darme cuenta, reposé en los asientos muchas horas.

Dormí como un lirón.

Me quedé dormida...sin saberlo.

Me despertó un señor vestido de uniforme:

«¿Dónde están mi papá y mi mamá?

Pensé que usted vendría a darme noticias.

¿Dónde están papá y mamá?» le volví a preguntar,  
casi rendida.

Tengo ocho años y nací en Guinea.

*El Cerro, 1 de enero, 2024*

A Conference Report from the Archives:

Vol. 12, No. 48, Pages 233–236 (January–June 1969)

*Anne Walmsley*

## SECOND C.A.M. CONFERENCE

A year ago I wrote about a beginning: how the idea of C.A.M. was born in a Bloomsbury flat, how monthly meetings were held and largely attended at the West Indian Students Centre, how a great conference was held at the University of Kent, at Canterbury. I called the article “First C.A.M. Conference”. I almost called this one “Last C. A. M. Conference”. It almost seemed an end. One newspaper report tried to describe it so. In the *Trinidad Guardian* the sensational headline “Black Power Splits Caribbean Artists” bannered an account of Black Power enthusiasts at the Conference attacking C.A.M. from every angle, and predicted its rapid disintegration. The London immigrant newspaper, *The Hustler*, quoted as key comments the duty of members to contribute to the “international movement in the Third World towards the global overthrow of Racism”, and that “the artist must become spiritually part of the Black Community”. Just why C.A.M. exists, what it should be doing, where it should be meeting, and above all, with whom it should be communicating: these were indeed the central issues of the Conference. After eighteen months’ existence, C.A.M. was ripe for introspection and self-criticism. C.A.M. after Canterbury 1968 will not be the same. There will be, perhaps, no Canterbury 1969. But C.A.M. at an end, no. What united the Conference, and what must compel C.A.M. to continue in some shape or other, is the need for communication. This was the over-riding concern, the prime criterion, of the Conference. Between the two conferences, Enoch Powell has spoken. The necessity to communicate with and to feel part of a community in a land which had suddenly seemed very hostile gave a special urgency to C.A.M.’s continued existence: in Britain, at any rate.

A year ago I described the setting of the Conference and the way it was structured. So much was so similar, to repeat would be tedious. Eliot College last year, Rutherford this, but the architecture was identical. Two painters’ work took up the walls last year—Aubrey Williams and Clifton Campbell; this year there was also work by Ronald Moody, Errol Lloyd, Art Derry, Karl Craig, Edmund Gill, Paul Bash. Again there was a book display, but this year it was more accessible, open more often and with a far wider selection of books related to the Caribbean. Edward Brathwaite, Andrew Salkey and

John La Rose were there again, practising writers at the core of C.A.M.; but CLR James was in Africa, George Lamming in Jamaica, and Michael Anthony in Brazil. We had Wilson Harris, though; his words and personality were probably the greatest single force at the Conference. There were more critics and editors: Kenneth Ramchand and Louis James again, strengthened by Henry Swanzy. Gerald Moore and Clive Wake, too. There were fewer people recently back, or on leave from, the Caribbean: more West Indians who had lived in Britain for some time, or British people with a particular involvement in the West Indies. This in itself meant that the focus was more on communication within Britain, less on communication within the West Indies. Again, there were people from other parts of the world: Kwabena Amoako from Ghana, Cosmo Pieterse from South Africa, Daniel Moreau from Paris.

Again, it was the lectures that formed the basis of all the Conference talk. The lectures fell into pairs, two on each of the three days. The first set the direction of the Conference: “West Indians in Britain”. The Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall spoke in general terms of the confrontation of “intimate enemies”—as he called the host and West Indian immigrant communities—but he spoke with a perception that was both professional and the result of many years as a West Indian in Britain. Discussion ranged over his analysis of the West Indian personality, attitudes in Britain to West Indians, concern for the second- and third-generation immigrant. Here at the start, the overriding concern for communication was voiced. Henry Swanzy—editor of the B.B.C. programme *Caribbean Voices* in the early 1950s—asked about the role of the artist in this situation of confrontation, whether it was for the artist to explain groups to one another. The clarification and articulation of the West Indian artist’s own experience was considered most important. Richard Small picked up this point and urged more fusion between the West Indian artist and intellectuals in Britain and the “grassroots” immigrants. It was for this reason—communication with a community for a purpose—that he challenged C.A.M. to take its meetings to Brixton and Ladbroke Grove. Then, after this hot, topical session, cool academic analysis: “Aimé Césaire and the French Caribbean”. Dr. Clive Wake gave a breakdown of the Martiniquan poet’s famous *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*. The poem itself spoke, and gave depth to points already touched on in the first session: Césaire’s awakening to his own negritude, to his own people—with whom he must identify himself and to whom he must communicate. That Césaire not only voiced these feelings in *Cahier* but has in his life given them practical demonstration was pointed out by Gerald Moore. Césaire is both Mayor of Fort de France and represents Martinique in the French Government. From this session came a request to hear more of the poem. A reading of part of it happened the same evening—in French and in English translation. The quality of Césaire’s commitment closed the section:

“I have only an immensity of love burning in me. I accept totally, without reserve.”

On the second day, a similar balance of talks. Ivan Van Sertima began, with “The Void of History in the Caribbean”. It dealt with the familiar themes of the lack of a sense of history in the Caribbean, the need for a rediscovery of beginnings and roots, but with freshness and urgency from a recent return visit to Guyana after nine years. Van Sertima regretted particularly the fact that the most widely read West Indian writers in Guyana today are Mittelholzer and Naipaul. This led to discussion on style and form in West Indian literature, and its presentation of West Indian people. Andrew Salkey described Wilson Harris as the antithesis of Naipaul: the most liberated writer, the least trapped. Henry Swanzy suggested that the value to Harris of his years as a land surveyor could not be overestimated: the fact that he was away, by himself, in a society which is oral, lively and social, and where it is very difficult to be a private person. Then Van Sertima’s talk was followed by an examination in West Indian literature of just those roots for which he had urged rediscovery. Gerald Moore titled his lecture “The West Indian presence in Africa” He described the flow of West Indians to Africa, particularly of writers recently, and discussed in detail the work of two: Denis Williams and Edward Brathwaite. Brathwaite subsequently described his attempt in *Masks* to explore the West Indian past in Africa, to “rehabilitate a section of the West Indian consciousness”. A Trinidadian described his deep feelings when he first became aware of his African past; a Jamaican denied any interest in or awareness of Africa—yet after the late-night reading by Brathwaite of *Masks* and other parts of his trilogy, she was most evidently moved. And the Ghanaian poet Kwabena Amoako gave testimony to the power of *Masks* to communicate to others beside West Indians.

Finally, on the third day, we began with Wilson Harris and ended with Henry Swanzy. “The Amerindian Presence in the West Indian Novel”: the subject was entirely appropriate. Harris’ talk was prefaced by a reading of four extracts from his novels, with critical comments, by Kenneth Ramchand. Harris spoke as much on the form of the novel as of his treatment of the Amerindian character, and described his vision of a radically new art of fiction. But it was in his spontaneous answers to the questions that followed that Harris was at his most lucid and most memorable. “It is the involvement in translating something which is one’s responsibility. No one can hand you what you want.... One is deeply involved with past, present, future. One has no alternative but to accept the invisible thing that is pushing one from behind.” It was therefore to delighted laughter that Henry Swanzy quoted from his *Caribbean Voices* diary of 14th August, 1954: “Wilson Harris: *Statement*”. These diaries, or “ego books” as Swanzy called them, gave a fascinating glimpse into the beginnings of West Indian writing. It was fourteen years since he had severed direct connection with this writing but, said Swanzy, he had watched with admiration as more than he had ever dreamed of had developed. What he lamented was the fact that the better Caribbean writers just do not get through to the large British reading public.

C.A.M. emerged, then, from the Conference as something very much alive, something which has already established a purpose in so many directions that this Conference can mark no end. For West Indian artists themselves, it provides a chance to discuss common points of concern, it gives a feeling of community and confidence. "So much has happened to us since C.A.M. began," said Karl Craig. "There is so much to do and so much we will do. Something in me has been awakened." To West Indians in Britain, C.A.M. has brought West Indian writing and art. Locksley Comrie—one of the most ardent advocates of a change in C.A.M.'s direction—spoke with sincerity at the last session of how Brathwaite's poetry and Salkey's latest novel "took me back home. They showed me what I did and what I might have done". For West Indians in the West Indies, C.A.M. has voiced—and where possible tried to implement—concern: for more West Indian literature to be broadcast over the radio, for a wider range of West Indian novels to be available in paperback, for the free-flow of ideas into the West Indies: and in consequence an appeal to the Government of Jamaica to lift the ban on the work of three Black Power writers was forwarded from the Conference. And for non-West Indians, C.A.M. has brought West Indian art closer, and has opened to them and fully involved them in the West Indian outlook and concern. The West Indies, Britain and the world need West Indian art and writing; West Indian artists need this audience.

Maybe it is his very rootlessness and compulsion to travel that gives the West Indian artist a universal voice. In Britain, West Indians and British alike need the channels of communication to be open to each other on the level that only art can provide, more desperately now perhaps than ever before. The confrontation in Britain described by Hall could become catastrophic, or it could become splendidly creative, for both sides.

C.A.M. must stay alive.

**A Poem from the Archives:**

Vol. 8, No. 31, Pages 163–164 (July–December 1960)

**Ian McDonald**

## The Legend of Mangamouche and La Cour Harpe

Our epics begin to form.

I know the great stickfight is one: stone pictures have been  
carved of it;

It was near Rio Claro, between the champions of the batoniers,  
The giant Mangamouche, hard bitter La Cour Harpe, the fighters.

The negro jardens with their jointed tambour bamboos, goat-  
skinned, many coloured,

Beat the news of a major bataille bois days and days ahead,  
honoured to be proclaimers.

Men came from seventy villages bare-foot or in donkey-carts  
And their women carrying melons and coconuts to sell in the  
hot afternoon;

And even three sunburnt Englishmen in white drill and brown  
cork hats came!

When the last goat-skin drum faded to silence

All was very quiet around the fighting pit and the sun very  
hot there on the charred ground.

Small boys in the surrounding plum and calabash trees watched  
with flaming eyes;

These men in khaki shorts and belts of dogs' teeth salted their  
blood.

The wary beginning, the skillful work of the stick, sweet to the eyes of the old men.

Then the heavier direct blows with their weight of knotty black muscles.

They fought all morning with hard watchful eyes

And all afternoon the hard poui sang wapp, wapp, a tinge of iron in the wood.

They rested for one hour when night was coming like a great black pig

(All the colours of the day came back to burn and praise them in the sky)

Then the women bathed their flesh with cool water and gave them to drink and corn cakes to eat

Their followers set up flambeaux on iron drums in the circle

And they fought again by orange flames in the rich furious pit,

The silence of a thousand silent men around the hard singing wapp, wapp, of the sticks.

Three stars flashed with silver tails above in the black night, a good sign of God's interest.

Mangamouche had five broken fingers and all his fingernails were torn off,

La Cour Harpe had deep injuries in his belly and his face burnt with the sweat in all the fine cuts,

But both had their eyes still to judge and hit and parry well

So they fought, calm-eyed. Men thought they would fight forever—

And indeed, as men will tell you, they fought for longer than forever.

Then Mangamouche with the giant's strength in the hot second afternoon

Swung his red poui for a thousandth time and La Cour Harpe had only bitter weakness;

The blow swung from great shining arms burst six of all his white ribs.

A shout more of general glory than of single pride for either  
man

Sprung around the fighters; two small boys fell off a calabash  
tree in excitement!

Pouches of jumby beads and pennies were cast in the scarred pit.

They sang of it after

With the sweet-harsh songs, songs of the stickmen for Man-  
gamouche and La Cour Harpe:

Oh the strong kalindas shouted by the red-sleeved hard men,  
“Je t’aime, Mangamouche, je t’aime triste Harpe, je vous aime,  
grands noirs hommes.”

From the moon of a hummingbird’s wing to the moon of a  
rich plum

The legend springs in the song, finds roots as tough as the  
nut grass.

John Robert Lee

## For Milton McCollin, Barbadian Actor (1947–2025)

*“your death is like our friendship beginning over”*

Derek Walcott

you would love Patrick St Eloi, his  
sweet zouk swing, St Eloi, gone  
like you, beyond long nights with Alwin and friends, loud laughs, Marley,  
you would love Patrick’s *“annou palé peace and love”*, gone—

that gloomy very cold January morning in my Babonneau hills  
had pushed chilly premonitions under the skin,  
and you would have understood, if I had called you,  
me uneasy wondering who was passing—

and Mackie, I got your note on Facebook,  
grainy b&w, old familiar photo, eyes direct as ever,  
you told me, you told me, friend—and am here, late night,  
St Eloi on the CD player,

trying to recall, to recollect  
more than lost, vague memories.

# Wild Edges

1.

Late-life steps around multiplying tombstones

with familiar names, fading inscriptions of memory,  
unrelenting formidable slabs that seal forever

once-warm breasts and thighs,  
mouths that laughed you to ecstasy or terror  
or were indifferent to your unfathomable desire

for one moment of attention, contrition,  
one instant of union deeper than blood heat,  
some intimacy of souls that would be epiphany

beyond existential absurdities  
consuming our brief, diurnal lives—

late-life circles accumulating obituaries, imagining its bracketed dates.

2.

Until she turns away  
from your gazing,  
the backing vocalist

on the side of the stage  
in the kaiso tent,

Bianca of the almond eyes,

cashier at a bakery  
near the bus stand—

until she walks off  
you can't stop watching her  
mouth, her plunging body repeating, repeating...

Bianca of the bespectacled almond eyes, unrequiting mystery.

3.

we meet each other  
in deepest spaces:

bowels of migrant caravels  
necropolis of battered cities  
across fingered cyber screens

through unspeakable cravings of isolation—

we meet each other  
in soft breasts of tendernesses  
bypassing inevitable distances

longing past photographs of memory—

over some forest-verged river  
a great blue heron slides on wide arms....

4.

The minor notes of street-smart  
music, blue chords of  
jazz cafés, mourning kaiso of Growling Tiger,

her open mouth as she laughs  
down into your eyes,

fireflies inside night bush, signalling —

seduction or fear or unrequited caring  
stammer without translation  
into baffling mazes of intercourse,

impossible conjunctions—  
and flailing in the filled drum of water,

to whom, and what, is the brown beautiful beetle screaming?

5.

Take wild edges  
of the sly heart

infatuated like tattered banana palms  
playing masquerade with the fitful air

that searches remembrances of you,  
your intimate confessions

trauma of a life beyond fiction—

you are loved incomprehensibly  
without compass or North Star

to plot latitudes  
of turbulent need

against forbidden desire.

Stewart Brown

## Still mekin' foolishness

*for Anson Gonzalez*

Hey Anson, w'happen'? I hear you gone an dead!  
That's a dramatic move, boy. No comin' back from that!  
An' me here mekin' foolishness again.  
I back on the island—well in truth is a different island

but you know, sun hot, breeze cool, sea chill  
an' all the res' is *pacotille*, 'nanci stories  
we all tell ourselves 'bout identity an destiny  
and who did what to who and who owe who

and who have whichsoever God on their side.  
I guess that all looks pretty sad and foolish  
from where you're sitting? From here too, truth to tell.  
Anyway, partner, as you were.

I sittin' here in the shade on a wide verandah,  
looking out over cane-field stubble, rain clouds  
teasing, an' a cold drink in my hand...  
and I thinking about you, boy....

Of course, for me to call you so is affectation,  
pure mamaguy. But at least we two  
know it's a game we're playing. A masquerade,  
a pantomime. Just like how Hector Mannix

enter a lion! (You know I like to get a Walcott  
reference in—is a kind of reverse validation.)  
So now that's out the way we can talk,  
“Mano to Mano”—(you see what I did there?)

But I forgot you gone an dead! What can I say?  
Back here the world is crazy, so nothing new.  
When we first wrote each other, Anson,  
alongside hurricanes and earthquakes,

Americans were fighting still in Viet Nam,  
Manley new in charge in Jamaica  
and The Doc just halfway through in T&T.  
Watergate unfolding...but what the hell,

Sobers was playing for the West Indies still  
and we two set up hand-cranked poetry mags  
on tiny islands, a Caribbean ocean apart,  
making contact and aiming to change the world.

I suppose there's hope in that, isn't there?  
Such innocence and energy and optimism and faith  
that the world *could* be changed, and by poetry...,  
When I try to explain it to postcolonial folk—

our belief in “the culture of the poem”  
beyond race and class and national identities—  
it just sounds dotish. But *you* know what I mean.  
Anson, man, I wish you could come back for a day

like Walcott's *Spoiler* (see, that's three!)  
and smartarse answer back again, again. And again  
I'm missing the banter, the *old talk* repartee.  
Look like this death thing serious, boy, no joke.

# Dead-water

*for Myrna, who told me the story*

Dorcas! If is suck you suck your thumb  
one more time I going wash it  
in *Dead-water* from Auntie coffin,

you hear?! Dorcas scared too bad,  
but when Mammy gone away, Denzil—  
swagger-saga boy—go and dip him hand

in the freezing melt 'round Auntie's  
ice-casket, laid out in the parlour,  
and wave it round and round, chasing

the little ones, threatening to tickle them  
with his *Dead-water* fingers. Not to be  
outdone, Malachi, feeling mannish,

scoops a fistful of *Dead-water* and drinks  
it down in one gulp! Relishing the cries  
of horror and terror and distress....

“See me! I not 'fraid for no Duppy!”  
But suddenly fearful and desperately  
hoping the old tales *are* “pure foolishness”....

# I saw Headley once

George Headley—THE George Headley.  
The man the papers called “The Black Bradman”  
(though in Jamaica, of course, they dubbed  
the great Australian just “The White Headley”....)  
Anyway, I saw him bat once, and at Sabina Park!  
Just for one ball, I admit—it was a charity game,  
West Indies Old Stars v West Indies Youth.  
He really was an old man by then,  
so the boys literally carried him out to the wicket—  
he played that one ball, *so* elegantly—  
then they carried him back again,  
the full-house crowd cheering him  
every step of the way, each of us  
treasuring the story we would tell—  
some of us, now, for more than fifty years  
...I saw Headley once....

# What's my name?

*for Fred D'Aguiar*

Muhammad Ali had to beat the clay  
out of Ernie Terrell, refusing  
to move in for the kill until the big man  
would acknowledge his new *nam*,  
*nomo*, his self-proclaimed identity,  
taunting him between volleys of swift jabs,  
“What’s my name? What’s My name?”  
Poor Ernie never forgot.

For me, pale heavyweight,  
too-much-punch-drunk maybe,  
slow to learn, reluctant to change,  
it’s Fred D’Aguiar  
(*he* rhymes it with guitar, *not* jaguar),  
who haunts and taunts my memories.  
I’m introducing him to a crowd  
(not Madison Square Garden, but all the same)  
by the name I’d heard, inferred,  
but not from *him*. He didn’t know himself!  
and my tie-tongue just wouldn’t say  
D’Aguiar (rhymed with guitar).

So now, whenever our paths should cross  
he baits me, berates me,  
“Hey, Big Boy. What’s my name?”

# The Road to El Dorado Rap

*(To be spoken aloud, to the rhythm—after the first four lines—of an actual or implied drum beat....*

*Rat-tat-tat/rata-tat-tat/rata-tat /rat-tat-tat—with occasional variation)*

*It's the road of Dread, it's a road of dreams,  
potholes, stray cows, armed robberies,  
chapels and temples, mosques and shrines.  
Welcome to Guyana, please read all the signs...*

Fat Girl Bar: Victory Baptists: Nothing Runs Like a Deer:  
Jamlal Vulcanising: Vishnu's Temple: Pestex Solutions: CRIX:  
Sweet Dream Mattress: Chow Yow Liquor: Herstelling KFC:  
Hacks Block Factory: Happiness Restaurant: Berger 404:

Pak-Lok Take-Away: Demerara Lions : Chairans Radiator Works:  
PEPSI: WILBEX: HARRIS PAINTS: Cadbury's Chocolate Milk:  
Cavecar Stockyard: Providence Primary: Back to Eden Snackette:  
7UP: WITBOI: GUINNESS: MALTA: Eldorado Farm:

Have a Banks Beer: New GPC: All Squatters Take Note:  
BUSTA: GUINNESS: HARRIS PAINTS: Li's Variety Store:  
Triskits Biscuits: Zaman Sawmill: All Type of Shoe Resoled: BRISTOL:  
FRUITA: CRIX: COLGATE: Adisa Pharmacy:

Islamic Education Exalts the Nation: Demerara Distillery:  
One Love Creation: Buddy's Auto Sales: 7UP: TEXACO: BREEZE:  
GUYSUCO Dispensary: Whang Huz Poultry: WILBEX: Squeezy Clean:  
Debs Beer Garden and Nursery School: Edun's Hatchery:

BUSTA: PEPSI: WILBEX: CRIX: Witboi Laundry: SAND:  
Dr. Persaud—Physician and Surgeon: Afar's Snackette and Bar:  
COLGATE for Cavities: HARRIS PAINTS: Brown Betty Ice Cream:  
Sagwan's Crushed Stone: Jettoo Timber: Breeze Multi-Active: BANKS:

It Is No Laughing Matter To Be Without GOD: Soca Satisfies:  
Danger Slippage: Ram Lall's Autos: Sun Da Restaurant:  
Live Pluck Chicken: GUINNESS: MALTA: Bomber Soap Creams Best:  
Hung Fat Restaurant: Diamond Water: Pleasant Journey Home:

Nice Up Guyana: Friendship Slipway: One Six Five Reach the Streets:  
TEXACO: MALTA: WILBEX: FANTA: CARIB: GUINNESS: CRIX:  
Islam Complete Solution: Good Luck Restaurant: Martin's ZION Church:  
Guyana Greenfarms: Vaj Beauty Salon: Number One Takeaway: Al's:

Full Lock Rest House: Eldorado Welding: Brown Betty Ice Cream: CRIX  
Pearl Assembly: Ceebe's Hair Salon: Vanccliffe's Vulcanising Shop:  
Accabre Farm: Wang Fat Restaurant: Plywood Industries Inc:  
Ice Cream Delight: Lorin Laboratory: Sosdyne's Nursery School:

Parts for Sale: Andy's Nightclub: The Church of Christ Meets Here:  
Mosque Land of God: Fire Bright Detergent: Lo Safari Inn:  
Main Street Pizza: Hanhat's Shirt Shop: Royal Extra: BREEZE:  
500 CABS: Bank of Baroda: Artist Alim Signs:

DiSilva's Electrical Spare and Accessories: Ashman's Trading Co.:  
Golden Height's Lumber: GUINNESS: FANTA: Sylvia's General Store:  
Ranboran Imports and Exports Ltd.: Sun Tai Lee Laundry:  
FANTA: TEXACO: GUINNESS: WILBEX: Rohman's Service Bays:

Unity Church: Banks' Shandy: Sori Kaleidoscope Paints:  
Fraser Farm: Warning—SCHOOL: Cy's Tasty Barbecue:  
Lloyd's Physique Shop: Military Area: Barama Company: GOLD:  
24 Hours: BRISTOL: WILBEX: Full Gospel Fellowship:

Gafoor—best for Building: Breeze Multi Active: Abdool Travel Shop:  
Katuk Feeds: Timehri Tropical: Orchard Products: Bees:  
E & M Meat Yard: BRISTOL: TEXACO: Islam—Solution for Mankind:  
Demerara Mutual Life Assurance: National Environment Committee:

Sagar's One Stop: Pearl Waterfront: Blended Beauty Salon:  
Roxy Fishshop: Bluestars Sports Bar: Providence Cricket Ground:  
Fabulous Homes: Friendship Oxygen: Ramdass United Lumber:  
Great China Store: Kamp Kayuka: Ice Cream Palace: MEAT:

CRIX: CARIB: BRISTOL: WILBEX: FANTA: HARRIS PAINTS:  
BREEZE: WILBEX: CRIX: BRISTOL: CARIB: TEXACO:  
HARRIS PAINTS: GUINNESS: BREEZE: BUSTA: WILBEX: 7UP:  
CRIX: WILBEX: HARRIS PAINTS: BUSTA: CARIB: BREEZE:

Lucky Su Retreat: Guyana Water Inc.: Two2 Brothers Service Station:  
JSB Investments: Timehri Prison: Open Arms Wesleyan Church:  
Industrial Minerals: Ms Holders Comfort Villa: Superstar Moving Co.:  
Wallaba Den Resort: Delicious Fried Fish: Kozy Nook Retreat:

Welcome to Guyana: Hamman Persaud's Jewellery: 7UP: Uncle D's:  
Gutter made to Order: CARIB: FANTA: Houseproud: TEXACO:  
Tricia's For Your Comforts: Seepersad Goldsmith: World Evangelical:  
Guyana National Bank: Glass Eye Fitted: Jordan's Spare Parts: CRIX:

Risaw's Photo Service: Jairam's General Store: Macaw and Parrot cage:  
Kerosene Cooking Gas: River View Welding: Baccus Dry Goods Store:  
Persaud's Furniture: Yong's Bakery: Junior Sharan's Mart:  
Myrtle Hoo's Restaurant: Kero Sold Here: Toolsie Persaud Ltd.:

BRISTOL: CRIX: FANTA: PEPSI: GUINNESS: HARRIS PAINTS:  
Happiness Restaurant: Nice Up Guyana: Open Door Bridleway Church:  
Launderette Services—Wash and Dry: Patent Medicines: SHELL:  
Mike's Pharmacy: The Legend—For Sale: 7UP: Banks Milk Stout:

Ruimveldt Police Station: The Village Store: Chubby's Fish and Shrimp:  
Ramsaran Poultry: Readymix Concrete: SARI Baking Powder:  
Richly Glory Restaurant: The Caribbean Bank: Mac's Highway Snacks:  
Prashad's Wholesale: Military Area: Wallaba Store's and Poles:

WELCOME TO GUYANA: TRUST IN GOD: Sewing Machine Repaired:  
TEXACO: GUINNESS: CRIX: FANTA: Howard's Beer Garden Stores:  
Twins Pharmacy: Celebrity Pub: Diamond Spring Mineral Water:  
Farouk's Lumber: Sari Moto's Lumber: St. Joseph's Lumber Yard:

GT&T: ORIGINAL COUNTRY: GUINNESS: Stabroek News:  
St. Peter and St. Paul Roman Catholic Church: Keep Off—No Loitering:  
Golden Harvest: A Slice of Life: New Hang Ha Restaurant:  
GUINNESS: 7UP: Peters Hall: TEXACO: Breeze Cleans Best:

Prutipall Gas Station: RENTOKIL : Shell Beach Adventures: MOSQUE:  
BRISTOL: Right Lane: Drive Safely: Son's Mini Processing Plant:  
New Building Society: FANTA: CARIB: Guyana Is A Beautiful Place:  
TECHNODOMI: Gafors of Guyana: CRIX: Ming Xing Restaurant:

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna: Chant and pass on  
El Dorado: Imported Heineken: Demerara Power Co.:  
7UP: LULU'S: Paklok Depot: Live Chicken For Sale:  
Guyana Cement: PEPSI: Squeezy: The Little Diamond Stelling:

Breeze: 7UP: Stag Beer: Bermudez: Backstreet Boys:  
Foam Bubble Detergent: St Mark's Anglican: Diamond Dispensary:  
Japan Bakery: Golden View Restaurant: Have a Banks Have a Beer:  
Texgas: GUYSUCO Demerara Distillers: SLICE FLA-VOR-AID:

Basil's Machinery: Guyana Seeds: BE SMART STAY HEALTHY:  
El Dorado: HARRIS PAINTS: The Multimedia Interactive Institute:  
Ramdas Lumber: Bharatt Machine Shop: Power Up With a BANKS:  
THALIX Planks: GUYOIL: CAT: MAC'S Hollow Block:

Till Payday Pawn Shop: Victory Tabernacle: Fen Fang Restaurant:  
GUINNESS: BUSTA: Banks Milk Stout: Lalham Tax and Accounting:  
National Dairy Development Programme: Netram and Sons Hardware:  
Greenhart Products: Ramberin Transport: One Love Creation: BANKS:

Rex Hardware—Dealer In Nails: National Insurance Scheme:  
Guyana Farewell: Diamond Swims Club: World of Gospel Mission:  
People's Palace: Party Ice: Guyana Plywood Industries:  
Triskits Biscuits: Shoe Maker Shop: Golden Grove Baptist Church:

Surrender to Almighty God: Have A Cool Day with Igloo:  
Whang Hang Restaurant—Always the Best: Jewran & Son  
Lob's Haberdashery: Vulcanising Here: BUSTA: New Town: Stock:  
Asdeas Pharmacy: Rasheed Halal: KAZAK Vodka: Sprite:

Tropical Mist: Vulcanising: Welcome to Le Chalet Country Club:  
Coverden Welding: Timiheri Supplies: Jefoor's Lumber Yard:  
Beverly's Poultry Feed—Save on Transport: Berger 404 Gloss:  
Guyana Defence Force: Fat Girl Restaurant: MACORP: CARIB: Gold.

USE A NEW CONDOM EVERY TIME: Keep Cool with I-CEE:  
Barama Ltd.: Private Parking: Hung Fat Restaurant:  
Sign Artist: Worldwide Express: Soesdyke Wesleyan Church:  
Mariat's Screen-Prints and Tee Shirt Shop: Guyana Quality Seafoods:

WILBEX: COLGATE: DHL: For Sale Pluck and Live Chicken:  
Golden Lion Restaurant: Physique Trucking: Dabydeen's Auto tuning:  
Royal Extra—the Lion Stout: FANTA: HARRIS PAINTS:  
Murphy's Hideaway and Beer Garden: Guyana Greenfarms: NEWS:

Wo Pin Slice: Experience Guyana: Local—Keep It That Way:  
Eyes Tested—False Eyes fitted: McDoom Mega Complex:  
BURY YOUR GARBAGE—STARVE THE RATS: Rhythmotion Bar:  
CARIB: Guyana's Number One Rum—ELDORADO:

Jamal G. La Rose

## The Ad Hoc Ladder

No one knew what he was doing:  
discarding his branded T-shirt,  
folding the legs of his pants,  
measuring the distance, ground to sky.

Until he started climbing outside  
the comfort of indoor chatter,  
grip by grip up the ad hoc ladder,  
eyes on the green bosoms of life.

He stretched and screwed the first;  
with a thud, it tumbled right down.  
His appetite grew larger and larger,  
till he fumbled his balance and

Body-hammered gravity into the ground.  
He stood up and dusted off his ideals,  
looked around for the common jester—shame—  
before donning his T-shirt to hide the pain.

# Westside

It's five and golden. The tide, fat  
and swelling. Traffic is easy  
like the Joker in the deck the gods  
are playing. Behold, the patchwork

of tired metal and steel, floating  
to its final kilometre, laden  
with matchboxes on wheels, gadunk,  
gadunking home. She saunters

ahead, twirling, touching the rails  
tenderly, her tresses tousling  
against the evening gale. He follows  
in silence, no grin for the wind,

no homage for the wobbling Demerara,  
but choler quickening him from behind,  
possessing the pyrrhic victory and  
wrapping his arms around her waist—

she overjoyed by the pleasant surprise—  
as he heaves them over, onto  
the wings of love taking flight,  
while the rest gadunk, gadunk westside.

**Obediah Michael Smith**

## **Blind Days**

*for Ian Chinaka Strachan*

shattered like glass—  
shattered like a windshield  
when a car crashes...

a back that has been lashed,  
a woman who has been whipped for 17 days—  
at times, several times a day...

a woman, enslaved, raped by her owner,  
by the owner of her plantation,  
whipped because she named the perpetrator

a back that was soft—was dark—was smooth,  
mutilated by whiplash/by lashes of a whip  
to force her to say that the truth was a lie...

she refused and was lashed—was whipped—  
was punished so severely that, finally,

vomiting, she dropped down and died,  
in 1827,  
on Crooked Island, in the Bahamas

# Jacked Up to Fix

come old age,  
when/by then,  
we are all patched up...

patched so many times,  
in so many places,  
in so many ways...

like an old tube in an old tire,  
punctured so many times—

patched again and again,  
to be able to keep going—

to be able to stay on the road—  
to be able to keep journeying on...

in this predicament,  
in what sharp contrast

to when we were young—  
to when we were new—

how my heart leapt,  
how my heartbeat quickened,

when I first saw a hummingbird  
appear, out of nowhere, hovering in midair

## Together Rubbing Stones

when the poem is edited and polished and fine-tuned,  
it will be running and you won't even hear it

we edit until all the hiccups and other noises  
have been eliminated and everything about it—  
the sound it makes and the sense it makes—

the sound and the sense of it are blended into one  
so well that instead of harsh there is hush

## Another Week Winding Down

I measure out my life in weeks,  
week-after-week,

weaker and weaker  
as the weeks go by,  
as they accumulate

like massive bricks of time  
until time and I crumble, tumble down

those pyramids of Egypt,  
the three massive ones  
on the Giza Plateau, still standing

after all these weeks,  
after all these years,

after all this time,  
standing strong,  
standing tall

amílcar peter sanatan

## The Hague, 2025

An ailing man weeps in the October sky.  
I am somewhere else, again.

The world is not an open field.  
I watch what was extracted  
from estates and enterprises of the Indies.

It was foolish to claim a route in a kingdom  
when monarchy is a dead end  
for me, for walking in a manner without title and surnames.

After the Dutch dance, I returned to the hotel.  
The receptionist at the front desk touched my right hand.  
Shifts turned to air, she was eager  
to guide me through the city's cobbled streets  
under the guise of hospitality and logistics.  
I declined.

Too much at peace  
with the solid ground of gold on my left hand  
and the distance I write in my diary, drained,  
but no less fixed on my world  
of despair, hurricanes and light tomorrow.

## Flâneur in Amsterdam

Autumn quickly broke  
down to mud,  
a low European country  
Césaire warned  
Antilleans of.

I barely spent time  
with Lamming,  
with Manley,  
with W H Johnson's  
summer soliloquy  
at an urban parlour  
with Parboosingh.

Commuters ran  
from one train  
to connecting train,  
and I was a walker  
at work, note-taking  
racial exploitation  
as if it were a stage.

I knew I wouldn't see  
Rotterdam  
and had an agenda  
too short to loud talk,  
to sing in diaspora, dying  
for familiarity  
on this conference trip.

In spite of my dreads  
and attire, people approached.  
They found  
my forehead full  
of mythical Finnish winters  
and Black men trotting  
in snow like fields  
of cotton.

# Binnenstad

*for Leah Jervis*

What is Dutch  
for twice removed  
from home?

The twin of *étranger*  
playing in sublingual spaces  
of the Higher Education  
that made us speak fondly  
of citizenship  
in the New World.

Why is the comb of this city darker  
than the one I use  
in my hair?

I travel with the comb  
my grandmother handed  
down to my mother,  
and she to me  
in her brown hands.

Downtown does not look like the downtown we know;  
mannequins behind glass are dressed in *ethnic prints*.

Downtown people act surprised when we laugh—  
make Black noise, smalls about  
yesteryear's dasheen and banana trees,  
the big dogs that threatened to tear our flesh  
in our own yards.

Forensic eyes trace our steps  
backward, to the point we arrived,  
just to be sure.

Just to be sure we do not form congress  
in this fogged empire  
we've passed over before.

**A Poem from the Archives:**

Vol. 19, No. 74, Page 77 (December 1992)

**Edward Baugh**

## **AT THE ATLANTIS HOTEL**

*"... this further shore of Africa"*

Derek Walcott

Once Lamming at Bathsheba looking eastward  
and night rising like a great wave widening  
across the slate grey water, I watched it  
overtake a late, lone seabird.  
"If you sail due east from here," he said  
"You'll make landfall at Dakar." I felt  
Imagination weigh anchor under me, entrust  
herself to the sable element, and as  
we hove clear of the reef I could still  
make out his spune of white hair  
leaping, could hear the echo of his voice  
returning from the other side of earth  
make one with the surf's boom.

**Esther Phillips**

## Youth

Youth is a winged thing  
meant for flight.

The map of its territories  
the worlds it will conquer  
lurk in the depths of its eyes.

The pull of the air  
the ocean  
sings in its being  
even as it strides the earth  
sure of its grace.

Who would seek to hold back  
such beauty?

I open my hands.

## Shuck 'n' Jive

*for Simone*

Momma's dancing today  
between two hospital rooms.  
In one, her daughter  
the other, her son—  
dual chambers of her heart.

She's shuckin and jivin  
to make her children merry.  
Only, there's no ripening here  
not yet—the corn is too young on the cob  
these tender shoots have yet to grow.

It's not under the massa's whip  
that she's moving. Another killer  
—this *rare genetic disorder*—  
came ducking and diving across  
deep oceans, vast continents  
bloodlines too tangled to decipher.

A crash cart stands on the corridor

but Momma's got her own thing going:

looks like she's just *soft-shoein*

but she's stepping down demons  
crushing her fear that things  
could go wrong;

clearing the air for blessings long due  
from the prayers of the mothers  
grandmothers who knew  
that the shuckin and jivin  
could divert the devil  
bamboozle the enemy  
while the real dance went on.

So, yes, Momma's dancing  
shifting the space  
following the sound  
of the old folks singing  
deliverance songs  
where the meek are the blessed  
and the weak are made strong.

Dance, Momma, dance.  
The earth will remember  
the praise in your footsteps.  
The ripening will come  
and your heart will rejoice.

**Nancy Anne Miller**

## The Angles of Rain

Like the ocean trying to  
reclaim island, the fog  
with the dense un-vision  
of days at sea, makes each

of my Morris Minor wind-  
shield wipers turn into  
a compass arc to measure  
the angles of rain. And

tawny lights, horns of  
a playful Devonshire cow  
attach, unattach to it, bump  
it along as it blusters a road.

The smear of smoke from  
a Bermuda-cedar-fragranced  
chimney, and church bell sounds  
at noon, dull as if wiped too

clean by this ragged bit  
of weather, this foamy  
curl of a wave, this cloud  
with no sky to float in.

# Magnetite

A source of attraction, found  
in the rocky archives of a seabed  
off the Somers Isles amidst

volcanoes doused by the rise  
of sea level. Sent compasses  
spinning, whirled in a magnetic

pull, like one spins a bottle  
to be kissed. Which place  
tugs at the heart? Lost as one

in love and as prone to be led  
astray into rocks that rip  
a ship apart like a smashed

box of Valentine's chocolates.  
The dunce hat of a triangle,  
a mystery to be solved could

be answered by this fairy dust,  
magnetite sprinkled in stones,  
no ballast is prepared to balance.

# I Want

I want to paint like Richter, pull all the tangled  
gestures of paint marks into a mounded surface  
like tidying a beach. Tug sea weedy strokes into

a united mass of colour *and* nuance *and* stature.  
I want the canvas to be a heard muteness, a chamber  
where a silence is curved and accented by an

underneath-ed massive speaking of tongues.  
When he goes all horizontal, kind of wild  
western, strokes like a fumed motorcycle

muffler speeding through, I want to ride that  
slash and slush with him, the gladsome giddy-  
up moment, like when a wave tumbles

somersaulting into the solid land mass. Cliffs  
standing firmly, overseeing the rush in like  
an older brother. The gasp of the tide before it

pulls back in a frothy, frisky change of mind,  
like when a View-Master rotates the slide. I  
want to pull the paint down like a velvety  
curtain on a stage, a feat of accomplishment at  
the play's end, feel it thud like an executioner's  
axe. I want the texture to be the ridged limestone

that formed my island, the exploded volcano  
a paint brush gone off all known boundaries.  
I want the vertical squeegee strokes to be

like a rainstorm offshore, coming into to patter  
everything as if angels walked there with a vision  
of a whole world, like when all edges are united.

# Salt

When a mood shifts quickly,  
happens swiftly like when  
your car signals you need

a change of oil. The feeling  
like warm swampy lava  
lights in a bar in North Devon

where an embryo swirls  
in a wrong yellow. And  
you hear Rilke say: “You

must change your life.” He,  
gazing on Apollo’s marbled  
glow. The God of poetics

made stone heavy and still.  
Lest you, too, become a pillar  
of salt, like when walking

out of sea’s sodium-soaked net,  
floating memories dizzy-ing  
you, to pull you back under.

# Crooked

Dylan Thomas' teeth, crooked  
as time-deepened gravestones,  
lean over into each other,  
sometimes touch at the top.

One thinks of his tilted  
words, the sun-drowned  
way they travel air. Gush  
guttural tones of inflection,

sometimes inflict, sometimes  
pull up sounds as deep as  
a hauled net of grunting,  
flopping fish from a singing sea.

The slipperiness of narrative  
roving and reeling, un-spinning  
tales with a vibrant currency,  
a tongue untied with a tipsy truth.

I think of the sun-slow language  
Bermudians speak, like making  
a shade for a coherence, a non-  
directed breeze blowing space.

The tongue, a hand digging  
inside a purse to grab a verb,  
noun to match the day, the heat  
that makes a banana curl yellow.

**Debra Providence**

# Letters to My Father– For Daddy, Circa June 2014

Dear Daddy,  
I am a mother, now,  
to a little girl I wish you could meet.

She is day to my night:  
an extroversion of my heart,  
charging on her own beat.

I sometimes see the me  
I used to be before  
someone stuffed Proverbs 13:24  
down my throat.

Her mien, a memory,  
my dreaming self,  
before someone welted my skin  
with Exodus 20:12.

I wish you could see her  
chart courses beyond old scripts.  
I wish you could watch  
this daring cartographer,  
who is all of us, and more,  
and who is none of us  
that came before.

I send up these prayers,  
to you and all our forebears,  
for her path to be clear,  
for her steps to always fall  
in the way that she dares.

For her wanderings  
to not be seen as sacrilege,  
but as the dedications  
of an agile spirit re-emerging,  
sorting out her own salvation  
in fearless trembling.

## Dear Daddy, Circa 2020

We've had two years of dread.  
What started as a distant threat  
landed on us casual nonchalants  
with blunt force.

Daddy, we shake our heads,  
bewildered by death tallies,  
battling shadows unfurling around  
the edges of our memories.

Time flows through us,  
blurring the edges of days  
bleeding the grief of today  
into the unease of tomorrow.

But Daddy, it is always *today*.

Our hands are chapped and  
isopropyl perfumes our ways.  
We walk in undulating circles  
forced to manoeuvre through  
closed spaces.

Fear stalks us outside,  
maskless and eyeless,  
yet eyes are all we see.

Daddy,  
a woman mistook me  
for her friend.  
She smiled and greeted me,  
a moment of misconnection,  
a burst of warmth between  
strangers, a beacon,  
a point of return  
in a sea of muddled memories  
enduring in these dread times.

## Dear Daddy, Circa April 2021

The world turned grey,  
the pigeons withdrew  
their morning quarrels.

The wild parrots  
are grounded,  
their feathered breasts  
a shock of yellow  
mottling this relentless  
bed of ash.

Daddy,  
I think about Shake Keane  
and his Empire cigarettes.  
I blink as the sulphur stings my eyes  
and rasp hello to my neighbour as he  
sweeps his porch.

I think about how you were swimming  
in Sion Hill Bay  
the last good Friday  
the mountain woke.

I think about how, now,  
I am a hundred miles away  
across a cobalt sea,  
the ash scratching my throat.

I imagine you would  
shake your head and say,  
“Life, eh?”  
its mysterious ways and  
wonders being performed.

Kim Robinson-Walcott

# Daddy

When was it that I  
lost her  
A small child finding  
her mother  
sobbing  
Her words  
Your daddy  
has a  
girlfriend

I  
shut her out  
I  
clung to you  
I  
wanted you to  
tell me that  
no matter what  
went on  
elsewhere  
you  
were still  
here

Virginia Archer

## October

the leafless trees  
unburdened by sheer ferocity,  
churning breath of the storm  
gone now,  
with only a solemn drip  
trickle of water  
waterfalls in places where yesterday they weren't.

the grass  
brown instead of green  
will grow again,  
tender blades cleaving the sun,  
flowers  
red hibiscus nodding in the breeze  
bright purple and pink of the bougainvillea  
their heads will be full.

but for now,  
blossoms scattered like lives  
and roofs  
twisted into weapons  
nails up and gleefully  
waiting for unsuspecting feet.

it will take  
a growing season,  
pain,  
before the hills  
look like hills should  
before the land takes on its green garments,  
shakes its hems at the sea.

and then we will wait again.

# They Say It's New, But It Looks Like Yesterday

This new year dawned cool and full of fireworks. The night sky is always a cathedral of stars we can barely acknowledge beyond the trend of LED brightness trickling from streetlamps. You wonder about the bird sitting on the telephone pole all night bathing in light, brown wings black in the stillness. Coolness of dry season pleasantries means you can finally sleep, without becoming a pool of nothingness, dripping in hurricanes and you go to work on dreams and herbal tea, and days of the sand being kissed over and over by the sea, that's how islands become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rocks in an ocean cradled in archipelagos. How can we say anything is ours? You want to live, so you throw on the bright colours of flagged skies and take a deep breath. This is it. Outstretched clear blue everything. You embrace the unchanged like a reliable lover.

# There's No Breath to Fly Kites

dry season and the lawn yawns in gaping chasms,  
mouths wide for rain. there's only dust on the horizon.

i sit, eating penepis, warm ginger on my tongue  
watching the birds look for water from dried gutters

where cane toads squat in the last of the water grass  
and wait. the news talks of freak tornados, Guadeloupe

screams in the sun. each night the earth shakes a little,  
gives warning in daily bulletins of 4.8 magnitudes. meanwhile

names are released for the hurricanes. i look to see if my name  
made the list. a friend's name, a family name. as the mango tree

bends under burden of fruit, hanging limp in the air, begging for  
the beaks of bananaquits and black grackles, the occasional fowl

something is coming. soon the rain will burst from the roof  
and flood the open maw of the soil. but not quite yet.

today is only made of dust and sun. the quiet twitter of bullfinches.

Dana Gilkes

# Flight of a Golden-Tongued Blackbird

*after Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking..."*

1. A blackbird flew off the garden wall.

2. Duly impoverished wall!

Full acquittal? Or the blackbird's fury/flurry left—  
to contend  
    with?

3. Once  
a blackbird sparked such a quarrel with me  
and I lost from claw and resist,  
to a more singular tongue/  
sparring mind.

4. Where silence is grave human plea—  
that a blackbird would torture the air so sweetly!

5. Who would not exult  
at the blackbird's annihilation of me—  
trash-talking me  
    both well and good  
from the privy of my own backyard?

6. Once an old man  
stepped off the tenantry road  
and into our yard (also) with his toes splayed.

As if all his life  
he must flex the spirit  
of a blackbird  
against another man's cruel  
intentions—  
a foot-soldier in the heading  
of pingwing,  
chairman in the plaiting.

7. Once—  
and no mother about—  
I grew such a penchant for the blackbird's blue  
incandescent verbs!

8. How many years and the sky  
still on shore leave?

Between epoch darkness  
and the sun—  
how many blackbirds would it take  
to ring-in the dew-dawn?

9. I hear the blackbird  
suck his teeth,  
shredding any and all faulty syllogisms  
wrought in his name.

10. See how the blackbird  
fixes his eye on his own daily/ideally worm!

11. Although—  
what is home/hope  
without an outdoor kitchen?

A blackbird watching  
my great-grandmother  
stoke the fire  
from a forked breadfruit limb  
(and not just for the soup-sake  
of conversation)—  
smoke curling up to heaven?

12. I will not begrudge your eyes  
I will not scorn  
your piercing blackbird cries  
for that might eclipse  
one's own legitimacy—  
epidemiology  
of my own straw-song and wit.

13. Who would not know  
the blackbird's tart joy and tremulous  
irony?

It is mostly golden apples, mangoes—  
early-birding  
upon the aegis  
of my own sound wings.

# The Push Participant

I do not know  
but dawn  
favours a grey house across the street from me,  
painting it bright serene  
aka  
lighter salmon-coral  
that fades toward pink-conch.

Why is my abode of lesser resort  
and why, out walking—  
a thing of rasp  
and enough scarce breath  
as might  
impugn a horse—  
I never can come into  
its full,  
incontrovertible presence?

Nor can I slow  
to remark upon sash windows  
where I am almost sure  
to peep the allure  
of some greater pariah/  
non-pariah of existence  
gazing inwardly/rudely out at me  
(also what allusion  
to the blind spree of curtains?)  
till I have long since passed  
enchanted realty of the house—

Who's to determine  
I have not already overstepped  
all my proxy/poxy diligence,  
hard-pressed  
by my own rather-daring  
up close—  
unbearably close?

Up ahead, the road boasts tons of tramped  
dreams and bold, heading-outward silence—  
the tamped outpost  
of so much hope and dread and grief.

Morning sun sweats my eye  
to the tune  
of a bright and burning, blurring confluence of rivers.

Tomorrow owns/hones  
house and hedge and a single poking upward  
wayside bloom,  
revising heck of the hill,  
earned breath and—  
the push....

# Blackbird Aria

The dew bristles with bright tufts of grass.

The only noise for one hundred  
and sixty-six  
square miles—

the human cry of a blackbird  
although there seems  
no finer recall/recoil

than borders on religious experience,  
while you still elect  
to stand inside the squeak-way

of a narrow back door—  
the tinning of your old currency  
rarefying hope,

your tongue prophesying rickety nothing  
save stone-loaf  
after stone-loaf in a rock-steady comfort-yard,

the sweat of whose brow  
emboldening  
the guinea grass?

When will you become hip  
to the relay  
of your own contumely suffering—

the holler-perfect storm  
you harbour  
unbeknownst to all  
the raw proliferate sea air?

And then this O so enviable spill truth—  
the screeching aria of a bird

that not only confounds  
your puny bravado  
in the coy reticence of the day

but draws you ever closer  
to the agony under dispute,  
each harrowing note

reframing last evening's mischance  
redefining today's  
pitch-perfect retort—

its tireless employ/implore  
the very stevedore  
in your soul's heavy lifting.

# Blackbird-Pragmatic or Where the Blackbird Goes to Church

Ready as want to tout relief,  
Between a sigh and anxious yield,  
A blackbird calmly high-stepping  
On the trash-gold of a cane-field.

Where my backyard may counter-talk  
Morning sings of the field's adore,  
And the field may speak anywhere,  
Anything—who is now trash poor?

The field grants just enough stalking  
Room to consign the soul to grace,  
The earth cosyng up to love  
To help remove time's hard displace.

Blackbird one, blackbirds two, 3, 4,  
Decrying loud, dark aesthetic  
From lawn and wall and token gate  
Faith the field, flight from rhetoric.

**A Poem from the Archives:**

Vol. 19, No. 74, Pages 78–79 (December 1992)

**Derek Walcott**

## CASTILIANE

I

The “Golondrina” is a sour hotel,  
Redeemed, like Creole architecture,  
By its ornate, wrought-iron balcony;  
A floral asterisk to grace a lecture  
On “Spanish Art in The Last Century”.  
And though its rusty quaintness is no cure  
Against the encroaching odours of the port,  
Its fragile apertures inhale the sea.  
Besides, a wraith haunts there whom I know well,  
Having made her out of noon’s white despair.

Frail dona of another century,  
A grace of muslin, vineleaf and guitars,  
She comes at noon, guarded by black duennas,  
To flute and bandol music from the bars,  
Above the flies, molasses, donkey-carts,  
Above the clash of voices from the pier  
Of stevedores gambling over tepid beer,  
She stands as mute as old embroidery  
On an old-fashioned cushion of the heart.

II

Why should she hide against the dirty lace  
Which stirs so still its drift is scarcely seen  
From the hot street? Why is that haunted face,  
Dim as an antique faun’s, fin-de-siecle style,

Imprisoned in the grillwork's leafless green  
Who can evoke Alhambras with a smile?  
Assailed by memory, desire stirs;  
Yet that white hand against a rose cheek sleeping  
That to the idler makes a subtle sign  
Becomes a pigeon from a dark coign sweeping  
As the coarse odour from the street defers

Anticipation of dark-cellarred wine.  
Albums of lost Alhambras, swaying cypresses,  
Brooding, daggered Moors, and fanfares from da Falla.  
A sable papa munching his moustache,  
The scented note, the fearful assignation;  
"I must, I must go now..." sighing, she sweeps  
Her jewelled laces up as bells of dawn  
Shatter the crystal park. The dark  
Duennas weep,  
They know the true necessity of that sleep  
That withers centuries or the virgin rose.  
Jesu Maria, what nonsense...I suppose....

### III

I stir to smell the male, malodorous sea.  
Another trace of mine is moving water  
How would it end? A merchant claims the daughter,  
A man who hawks and profits in this heat,  
Jeering at poets with a goldtoothed curse.  
Girl, you were wise, whoever lived by verse?  
The future is in cheap, enamel wares.

Yet, Dona Maria, like a worn-out song  
That keeps a phrase of wisdom in our ears,  
Like the sad gaiety of a drunk guitar,  
Like the bright gardens which blind vendors sell,  
I watch your ancient, simple spirit where  
Its letters flake across the balcony  
From the facade of a third-rate hotel.

**Richard Georges**

## unmaking

after the screaming bombs have stopped falling  
& the rifle mouths have fallen silent  
this island you have made still reverberates  
resonates with your violence, an echo  
a cycle, the newspeople tell us a thing  
is not the thing our eyes tell us it is  
a campaign of erasure, of making  
the map tell lies of the land—

our hands betray us & above the sky  
circles its prey, how do you devour  
a planet (?)

tonight I watch a dreadlocked banana  
farmer defy a monster I talk to  
Jah he says, the machete's ebony  
blade dangling from his waist

all around him  
the naked trees stand like figures in frieze  
each stalk has been shorn clean of its branches  
an estate unmade—  
blood-rooted, salt route,  
a forest of fingers pointing to Jah (!)  
everything I see now is a temple  
a new way, to try unmake the monster  
but the rifle mouths still detest silence  
and the screaming bombs have not stopped falling

**Margaret Gill**

## Meh Countries

Today my eyes are opened.

Today I see the city as it longs to be,  
Tender, seen.

Only today is my heart wrecked  
    With a holy fire  
    That consumes the I in me.

Looking far as I can see  
I see  
Blue Mountains sweat as they lift hard  
Voluminous acres of care  
In the West,  
West Indies, Indios, Kalinago, Caribbeans.

I see isles,  
Inlets and bays, our keys;  
The hard crust of the continents  
That curve,  
That create corners of shelter.  
Maybe...

If I go far enough out (to sea? Maybe)  
I see Florida and the Guianas, Suriname;  
I see Mexico saying, "Safe."  
Today, let all the I's in Me be consumed  
For me see meh countries.

# To a shooter in a US “asset”

I take the place of the broken body washed up on some beach off Trinidad. No worries. No tourist from north America or Europe-and-other places would have their holiday spoiled, momentarily, because of my inappropriate state in their promised paradise. It is not carnival, and besides, the best beaches are in Tobago or Grenada. But I give you my broken body.

I will not, even if I could, deny my status as a trafficker in women or drugs. If I was rotten to the core, so be it. As it rots offensively alongside painted fishing boats with quirky names like *Who Cares* or *I Could Not Give Two Wuk Ups*, my soul-case is so clearly unlike yours.

It is fitting you should do me so. It equalizes us, somehow. See, I cannot so much as beg your mercy now. And hey, you cannot give it.

We are not so much unlike. Your children are happy, and so, too, probably, are mine. Now. Nobody gives a shit anyhow about a rotting body, blown to smaller and larger evil bits by your most effective armory, mah brother. Pity we personally could not have done a deal—you sell the guns, we buy you “poison”, as your bossman calls it.

But what more to say? Buzzards drop in occasionally. My face is tasty, I hear. Have no fear. Paradise will not be interrupted this year, and maybe I will not be let near anyway. (Just asking: Do you think He heard the drone’s whistle as a small small prayer? I meant it for my count....)

Jah Guide,  
My broken, blown and pecked

# Rain, Rain

Prophets swelter in box houses  
And beg rains to return.  
Water our lives with gully washers,  
Hammer galvanize roofs relentlessly,  
Beat without mercy on  
Mishappen slopes of umbrella beaches  
Till we beg forgiveness for our collective sins—  
For sinned we have  
And sin we do, unmistakably:

When the lone child is droned out  
Of the last broken city,  
When our neighbour's lividity  
Shreds, shreds and flutters,  
Soaked rags, soiled and sodden,  
Round our remorseless boots.

Our revelries still ring out,  
But (oh, rain!) unleashed vibrations only  
Shatter the thin stalks of Moko Jumbies.  
(They point their gracious ululations  
To the One Healer,  
But who strains to hear?)

Oh, Heaven rain!  
Let torrents in the mountains  
Shock dry rivers into whirling dervishes,  
Let even the astonished sea be astonished!  
Let loose fabric of the forest  
Unravel  
And boulders bolt like unleashed monuments  
Down riversides for our collective resurrection,  
Our collective rebirth.  
Rain, rain!

Our anger now evades its own reach,  
Hatred has loosed a vampire  
Of thin ancestor-worship,  
And our voices can no longer  
Teach any "Our"  
Father.  
Let it rain, do.  
For our holy chants are now howls,  
While thin reed voices simmer,  
"Rain, rain, go away and do not come another day."  
They seek to drown down singers  
With their converging and relentless laughter.  
It sounds and resounds like drought.  
Oh, Heaven, rain, do.  
And then rain....

George Goddard

## Ingathering

This shrouding quiet. Despite the funereal bell,  
the distant indiscretion of a backyard cockerel,  
the measured shuffle of feet, the rustle  
of attire appropriately dark.

And the quaint village church gathering  
us in supplication, our number small  
and intimate, joined in mourning  
the matriarch still binding the clan,  
bridging a withering divide (we hope),  
her withered body in a plain coffin.  
Black and Brown skins crawl,  
hearts hark back to when  
privilege graced the front pews, dutiful  
bondservants in the back, dispositions penitent,  
remorseful of the ignominy of their estate.

But we gather now, ostensibly, to celebrate  
her passing and an era that might  
have bridged the divide between  
the tributary bloods that streamed her veins.  
And ours. So together here, in the sobriety  
of the moment, quiet tears by some  
soft reflections by a few, and by others  
a bored disquiet—symptoms  
of the disconnect from an era  
of distant tales, the l’histoire of another time.  
We file past her remains for the final time.

There's a quickening of the pulse,  
a thudding not explained by the benediction  
of the bell, or the homily that seeks  
to draw the clustered gathering closer  
within the little church,  
the cloistered reticence of its aging stones.  
It is a pondering of the tortured path,  
the travelled distance to the village  
to this shoulder of hill. Sentiments uncertain still.

And so the poignancy of final rites.  
Uneasy embraces, awkward partings  
of estranged kin as evening thickens and  
the relief, thank God, when they turn and leave.

# The Bookkeeper

Tall brown & gaunt each day at 6  
he would enter the Trou Rouge gap  
stride with purpose to the pastel pink house  
with a bar downstairs say “good evening”  
hoist himself up on one of Ma’ Charles’ bar stools  
& call for a rum with 3 cubes of ice.

He would sip, stirring his drink with a  
disinterested finger now & then &  
engage in small talk with the 2 or 3  
regulars on and off his stilts of legs  
crossed as if reflecting a mind cross-  
wired, befuddled within itself.

Between shards of small talk wry smile sometimes  
he wandered off the edge in reverie  
staring into the melting cubes refracting  
the going-down sun riffled  
through mango leaves & over the roof  
of the old *Caille Haute* across the road.

He did this even on Sundays &  
you wondered whether this teacher-turned-bookkeeper  
had a home with warmth & laughter & yes  
*halé-casé chikann* & mending hugs  
    & when Ma’ Charles could no longer tend the bar  
he retreated to “the Square” in town.

Alone now    starved of drink    drink & the soft  
dimpled smile of Joanna behind the bar  
the animated banter of erstwhile friends  
no books to do    to earn the money  
for that drink, the diurnal baptism  
In which he sought    redemption    I thought.

He passed    I heard    wife and children somewhere  
In the diaspora    his indiscretions  
perhaps not too egregious    but  
of course they were never mentioned    & who  
could speak ill of a most peculiar man  
obituaries terse    no life    in photos?

# The Day After

Where do we flee to now    from Rafah?  
Deir al-Balah?    Jabalia?  
To mass graves in yards of wasted hospitals?  
To gutted streets, rubbled homes, emblems of denial  
of the right to return?  
To sands of Al-Mawasi, where the searing sun on sea's relentless  
in daylight and nights are desert-cold  
hearts of fascists in the Knesset.    To a coast  
where missiles over water tear into flesh,  
a merciless mediaeval pestilence,  
and the Strip becomes the mother of all killing fields.

Where to now    from Rafah?  
Hunger emaciates the limbs of little ones,  
eyeballs staring out of starved skulls, truly  
this is Golgotha, the place of the skull—  
30 thousand    and counting  
      where the black horse and the pale horse  
ride abreast, roughshod on the land, their riders  
armed with an apocalypse's lances....

In whose fires are these lances forged?  
In whose fires those helicopter gunships, those Bradleys,  
and who are they who seek to absolve themselves  
of Europe's sins  
by underwriting new holocausts;  
the ones who mask themselves with deceptions  
of liberal democracy, its feigned morality...?  
That same morality that writes rules for others,  
      not for themselves,  
that morality that makes a people invisible,  
declaring their lands a land without a people  
and their patrimony for the taking,

that same lynch-mob morality  
that plants knees of occupation on necks and squeezes  
breath from Black and Brown bodies.  
That same morality—

Where to do we flee now?  
Again to carpet bombings in safe places,  
to mournful eyes in lost faces of orphans,  
a father cradling the shrouded body of his 2-year-old, his  
tears Allah's benediction of a life snuffed out so soon.  
To running sewage, thin dogs that forage  
for morsels of bodies blown to bits—  
meanwhile they will “not support an operation in Rafah” no  
walk back on this they will “not support a *major* operation in Rafah”.

And if genocide is admitted after all it will be  
the day after!

**Earl McKenzie**

## Marley Wept

An Ethiopian archbishop on TV  
Told the story of Bob Marley's baptism;  
The cleric said the singer-songwriter  
Saw him as a kind of father.

After the ritual,  
The priest told the interviewer,  
Marley wept profusely  
For a long time.

Philosophers do not agree  
On why we cry and laugh;  
They may signal a loss or gain of values,  
Some say.

What Marley may have felt he lost or gained  
After that rite  
We may never know;  
And he himself might not have known  
How to express it  
Even in song;  
For there are things  
That neither life nor art can say.  
Was it his anticipated liberation  
From too many troubles in the world?  
The trauma of road blocks?  
The Babylon System?  
Not enough One-Love on his island  
And in the world around him?  
Was it finding a room, finally,  
In his father's house?

In one of his best-loved songs  
He asked his woman not to cry;  
But now he cried,  
And it is not recorded  
That anyone asked him not to.

## The Corn-shellers

Stories came from the corn-shellers  
On our dark verandah;  
Bits of experiences  
Arranged in pleasing patterns  
Now being passed on;  
As grains of corn fell from the husks in our hands  
Into pans, basins and baskets;  
And with the aroma of food cooking  
Coming from the kitchen behind us.

Anansi stories  
Ghost stories  
Big-Boy stories  
Rasta stories  
Parson stories.

Etiological tales that explained with jokes  
Things we did not know.

Riddles tested our deductive skills  
And made us ponder those in our everyday our lives.

Songs remembered from school or church,  
Tunes to make the shelling easier.

The moon was high in the sky  
When our visitors left.

We would do the same at other homes  
In the nights ahead.

# The Door

I wanted to transfigure that door  
Into a work of art,  
As a ready-made,  
By putting it in a golden frame  
And hanging it in our living room.

I remember that Sunday morning  
When my father pointed at it  
And told me it had been a gift  
From his grandfather,  
Who knew he was likely to be the first grandson  
To build a house  
And would need it.

It had been the front door  
Of the house in which I was born;  
It was now the door to the bedroom of my parents.  
My father said he had insisted on using it again,  
Against the suggestions of his fellow carpenters  
Who wanted him to make a modern one, partly with glass.

My father and I were sitting on the verandah  
The morning after my return from studies.  
Seeing that he had aged, I asked him  
If he liked the rather sporty shirt that I had brought him.  
He replied by showing me the gifts  
that people had given him over the years,  
Which he had kept and treasured for life.

Including that door.

I asked about that great grandfather of mine  
About whom he had never spoken before;  
I became aware of an ancestor I needed to know more about,  
Including more of my African, European and Korean beginnings  
In those hills.

That door was the only one in the world  
That I could knock on at any time  
And could expect to be admitted.

I began wondering what I would do with that door  
After my parents passed;  
Concluded it belonged in the sanctification of art.

When the time came, I hired a van and went for it:  
Found the house vandalized, and the door gone.

I insisted on preserving its sacred memory  
By making a painting of it.

# Dancehall Topiary

A gardener entered the lawn  
With a ladder under his arm.

He hummed a dancehall piece I did not know,  
Sometimes he chanted and sometimes he whistled.

He raised the ladder before a decorative shrub,  
Pulled a clipper, and began pruning the plant.

Slowly I saw a human head emerging,  
With locks of protest sticking out.

I knew I had seen that hairstyle someplace before,  
It seemed like the fashion all around.

The gardener descended from the ladder,  
Stepped back and admired his work.

Then, with the ladder back under his arm,  
He left the lawn, still chanting his song.

# Reaching for Poetry

Searching for good, but finding only evil,  
Job reached for poetry:  
And heard it coming out of the whirlwind.

Jesus, on a Roman cross,  
Charged with a sedition denied,  
Reached for the poetry of the forsaken:  
Found it in a Psalm.

After having an adult education imposed on him  
As a child,  
John Stuart Mill had a breakdown  
And reached for poetry:  
He found it in the healing words of  
Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Absorbed in logic and mathematics,  
Bertrand Russell reached for poetry:  
He heard it in an unknown person reciting Blake's "Tyger",  
And felt so dizzy he had to lean against a wall  
To let these memorable words work on him.

W.H. Auden, a practitioner of this art,  
Said whenever the travails of the world assailed him,  
He always found help  
In a poet  
Or God.

Edward Baugh, reaching for goodness,  
Found part of it waiting for him  
In poetry.

**Mervyn Morris**

# Deadyard

sometimes  
composing  
what to say

without committing  
platitudes

the burden grows  
oppressive

and you feel  
like yuh pretending  
that yuh care

but cross mi heart  
I care

\*

Compute my presence.  
Feel the vibe.

# Studio

I'm trying to read  
the music

of our silences

# Template

All the awardees, all of us,  
acknowledge and respect  
the legacy of predecessors;

and all of us  
have been concerned to share  
the bounty of our gifts  
and our discoveries.

We ask you to accept  
from all of us

our heartfelt gratitude.

**Mac Donald Dixon**

## A Cautious Passion

Not knowing if there will be tomorrow  
for us, I open my eyes knowing,  
from somewhere, you'll be there  
fussing over breakfast or  
greasing your son's unruly hair—

More than in some mirror's bold embrace  
you are here, captured in more than smiles.  
There is no other face I want to see  
on mornings, faults, or no fault. There's nothing  
I can say or do, miracles like this  
don't happen every day.

Contented knowing that you care much more  
than about your hair getting frazzled in  
a squeamish drizzle. I wish there was some  
instrument to foretell futures, to let  
me know under what moon change we'll meet  
and if we do, will everything be neat—

# There Is Always You, Regardless

You bring me back to years blotted from old, discarded  
calendars. Everything fitted into prescribed slots  
Christmas menus jam-packed with ham and pork recipes.

You enter scripts, rearrange plots, love and pain, my twin  
companions undermine my self-imposed abstention.  
Pretence and guile inspire the mind to unzip.

Thoughts hover; pasts framed in guilt frames like yesterday's  
portraits I've refused to forget. Loving you is not  
as simpleminded as it seems to strangers looking in.

I have not forgotten what it takes to prise those fond  
endearments from your plain unvarnished lips, then swipe  
the sickening sadness from your eyes—

your one recurring curse.

## A Birthday Greeting

Your thirty-seventh year comes at a strange juncture  
though unprepared, I expected it to happen  
without change as the years kept piling on.

Soon you'll be forty but that doesn't mean  
you'd be loved any less than today. The waistline  
will sag, a crease here and there around the neck.

Don't fuss, I bit and chewed over this  
long before you and accept unwelcomed changes  
cannot alter what we are from deep within.

It's commonplace to shower you with gifts  
but then they're worn until they fade, until next year  
so, I decide to write you a poem instead.

Everything I've said these last four birthdays  
after I broke the ice with a bar of Cadbury's—  
remains safe, always friend, and something more.

Stripped of candlelight,  
                                perfumes, and  
other sweet-smelling things,  
your face smiles  
from its social media platform,  
stripping thoughts bare.

Your eyes dig through skin  
Retort; my answer is thin.

Having lived without  
your nagging presence lingering  
like cobwebs in selfish corridors  
where your scent still breathes,  
despite leaving; it's more than  
twenty years.

I've always loved you  
yet confused  
by this compulsion  
to harness life  
on this typed page you always saw  
as rival—

A glimpse of you brings  
back the smiles I've forgotten  
to forget,  
your absence makes it easier  
to say things

I'd normally regret—

**A Short Story from the Archives:**

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*Monica Skeete*

## THE SCHOLARSHIP

Sonny Boy lifted the lid of his desk cautiously and peered at the big ripe mango which was resting on his reading book. There was a great gnawing in his stomach as he had not eaten since lunch time and it had been only split peas soup with two dumplings in it. That was since 12.30 pm. He wondered if he dared take two quick bites before Mr. Callender returned from the toilet. He put out his hand to take it, then drew it away again. It was too big a risk, he decided. The juice would be all over his fingers and, besides, Mr. Callender would smell it. It was a quarter to five. He would wait until five, when he hoped Mr. Callender would let him go home.

He bit another piece from the pencil he was holding and his eyes wandered listlessly round the room and finally fastened on the open door before him from which Mr. Callender's plump figure would emerge at any moment. He was writing an essay on "Birds" and there seemed so little he could say. He did not know many birds anyway. There was only the blackbird and the sparrow, and perhaps seagulls. Why couldn't Mr. Callender give him a composition on something he knew about—crabbing, for instance. He could write pages about that. His mind was brought back abruptly to the present as Mr. Callender appeared.

"Finished yet? You don't have to take the whole evening to write one piece of composition."

"Yes, sir," he said. He had only written six lines which were really only a list of the few birds he knew, and some like the nightingale and the swallow that he had read about. It was better to get it over, though. To wait longer was only to prolong the agony.

"Bring it here!"

He rose slowly and pushed back the chair with his right calf. It scraped harshly and tottered for a moment, before it crashed to the floor.

"Put some life in you, boy. That's all you can do. This can liven you up, you know," and he stretched out his hand towards the leather strap which remained either curled up like a lazy snake on his desk, or hung languorously from his shoulder. No one would suspect that there was such a deadly sting in its tail.

Sonny Boy picked up the chair smartly and walked with a sinking heart towards the head teacher. He handed him the exercise book half-closed. Mr. Callender snatched it from his hand and glared at the few lines. Their smudged inkiness looked so pitifully inadequate against the vast expanse of white unused paper.

“So that’s how you waste my time! Think you can win a scholarship like that? Well, you go back and fill up that page, or else your back will know why not.”

Sonny Boy’s lips trembled. His stomach was really folding up now and the wall clock pointed to five to five.

“I don’t know anything about birds, sir,” he whispered, the front of his left canvas shoes rubbing on the laces of the right.

“Oh, you don’t? Well, it is time you learnt.” He flung the exercise book back at him and walked towards a cupboard at the back of the room. He unlocked it and, after a moment’s fumbling, picked out a slim, red book. It was worm-eaten and he blew some fine dust from it before handing it to Sonny Boy.

“Read the first chapter of this and then make a summary of what you have read.”

Sonny Boy took the book in his inky fingers and through tears, he read the title—*Birds of Western Europe*. He stumbled back to his desk and hastily wiped away a tear with the back of his hand. He was glad the other boys in his class were not here to see his weakness. He never cried, no matter how hard that strap played his seat. But now, he was so hungry.

It ended eventually. He had struggled through a maze of difficult words and had understood, only imperfectly, what it was all about. Still he managed to fill the rest of the page and his letters became noticeably larger as the composition lumbered towards its close.

“You may go now. Stay again after school tomorrow.” He suspected that Mr. Callender let him go only because he himself was tired.

Sonny Boy leapt down the stairs two at a time as he dug his teeth into the mango. There was only one week left. He would be glad when this wretched scholarship exam was over. He had known no peace since he had been chosen with four others for special coaching. Every afternoon, at 3.30 when the other children had gone, they had to remain behind to be subjected to a relentless drill in arithmetic and composition. There had been a gradual weeding out, and now only Sonny Boy remained to face the full blast of Mr. Callender’s erudition. Sometimes Mr. Francis, the assistant teacher, took the lessons, then Sonny Boy enjoyed it. He made him write about exciting things like carnival and space ships. Mr. Callender always grumbled afterwards that this scholarship exam was a serious business and there was no time for such foolishness. Sonny Boy would be twelve in November and this was his last chance.

It was not only Mr. Callender who was after him. That is what made it so bad. Ma and Nennen were just the same. Home used to be such a happy place where he could do as he pleased. Now he could no longer take his bag of cashew nuts and go next door to play “Jacks” with Roland and Carl. He was forbidden to play cricket in the gap, or go down to watch the boys tune the pans and beat steelband. Usually it was nearly six o’clock by the time he came home nowadays. Ma and Nennen would fuss around him and as soon as he had eaten, they would light the big kerosene lamp, which was normally used only when visitors came. He had to sit at the table and do more sums from the Longman’s Arithmetic which Mr. Callender had told Ma to buy. He liked Arithmetic but there was a limit to it. Sometimes he would write little compositions about jets, or cricket on the beach, to amuse himself but Ma always hovered anxiously over him and she disapproved of his mere writing. Sums she could see and understand a little. They looked impressive on paper and she felt he was really working when he was doing them. Sometimes he merely copied out numbers on the book and wrote down imaginary answers. She would pat him on the back fondly and say, “That’s right, me child. You get what I didn’t get.”

He could not understand this concern. There was always an anxious look in her eyes when she spoke about the scholarship. It hovered about the house these days like a sinister spirit. Even the neighbours regarded him as something special and frequent enquiries were made about when “it” was. Ma was always talking about how good education was and you could not get on without it. She was not educated, he thought, and there was nothing wrong with her. As for Mr. Callender! He launched into long exhortations which Sonny Boy never really heard. The one thing he understood was that he was expected to bring credit to St. Patrick’s Boys’ School, St. Patrick’s parish and most of all to Mr. Callender himself.

Ma was fussing as usual. Sonny Boy stood stiff and clean from head to toe. Ma had ironed his shirt a week in advance and it seemed to have more starch than usual. His new shoes squeaked as he walked and they pinched his toes.

“You have your pen and pencil?” She pulled at his tie for the umpteenth time.

“Yes, Ma.” He wondered how much longer his toes could stand this. They had to walk down to the end of the gap to catch the bus. The exam was held in town.

“I will carry the ink and the ruler.” Ma was wearing her best clothes too—the white hat and dress she had bought last Christmas for the church outing. Sonny Boy could tell that she was proud of him. She held the ruler awkwardly, but in some vague way it shed a gleam of academic glory over her. Many of the neighbours would be at the stand-pipe. They would see her taking her son to sit the scholarship exam. Sonny Boy wished he could do something about his feet.

“Ma, I could take off my shoes till I get to the bus?”

“What!” She turned on him so sharply that he almost fell over. “Boy, you must be mad! Come on. Walk fast. It must be nearly nine o’clock. The sun getting high.”

She held his hand and pulled him along. They were late.

The other candidates had already taken their places. A lady was standing at the door with a list in her hand.

“You are late. What name?”

“Sendall Thomas,” Ma answered nervously.

“Yes.” She ticked the name off on her list. “Well, hurry along; on your toes! The gentleman will show you where to sit.”

His stomach seemed to be contracting suddenly. He held out his hand for the ink and ruler and Ma clung to his shoulder.

“God bless you, me child.” Her voice trembled, and he was not sure that he did not want to remain out there with her, but the lady pushed him forward impatiently.

“Hurry on!”

There must have been about three hundred boys and girls in the large main room of the Town Hall. A gentleman who seemed to stand at the other end of time, beckoned him down the aisle. Like a robot he progressed down the room. He did not know whether the beat of his heart or the squeak of his shoes was the louder, but he reached the shadowy beckoning figure at last. A hand moved up like a signpost and pointed to a seat. Two boys had to stand up to let him pass in and he bounced against his desk so that the ink spilled a little. However, the arithmetic paper was in his hand at last.

They were not bad really. He had done sums like that dozens of times and he had to write about cricket, so that was not so bad either. He still could not see why Ma and Mr. Callender made such a fuss.

They were out in the courtyard. Boys and girls from all over the island milled about between mothers and schoolmasters. He spotted Ma’s hat and shouted.

“Ma!”

He bounded towards her and stopped short. There was Mr. Callender. He too had come to be present at the kill.

“The papers were quite easy. You should do well,” he said. Sonny Boy had never noticed him so relaxed before. He wanted to tell Ma all about it but Mr. Callender’s presence overawed him. Before he could say anything a bespectacled gentleman strutted up and thrust out his hand.

“Hello Callender! You here too? You country fellows are vying with us these days. How many have you got?” He gave a swift scornful glance at Sonny Boy whose shoes had begun to hurt again, and he was fidgeting. He remembered now. That was Mr. Tallboy, headmaster of Colville School, the largest elementary school in town. His school got nearly half of the sixteen government scholarships every year.

Ma had been ill at ease and she took the opportunity for them to slip away.

Life was good again. For the next three weeks Sonny Boy could enjoy cricket in the gap to his heart’s content. He came to the house now, panting and hugged a homemade bat under his arm. His shirt tail flapped against his khaki shorts as he burst into the room. Nennen was standing by the table and Ma was bending over a newspaper. He had never seen her with one before.

“Me boy name in the paper,” she sobbed. Sonny Boy looked over her shoulder. There was a spot of grease on a list of words where her finger still rested.

At the top he saw his own name.

## *Shastri Sookdeo*

# Protect Yourself

**I never saw a gun firsthand until I was a teenager. It was unexpected. Guns always would be in a country without regular recreational usage. However, it was the extreme end of unlikely for someone to pull a gun at the cricket field during village cricket on a Saturday, when we were meant to be playing less seriously in low quality leagues as a form of preparation for club matches on Sunday.**

None of us were even from the village we were nominally representing. It was very much just practice. We had two helmets and one pair of left-handed gloves amongst the entire team, so I couldn't bat at the same time as my cousin, the only other left-hander. We also didn't have neutral umpires and that was the problem.

The villages can be strange places. Some are extremely insular, known to us only by odd stories seeping out occasionally. Articles hidden in the newspaper about horses biting off some child's arm, or feuds and murders for property, or mythic creatures like bucks and lagahoos terrorizing these near-forest communities.

There was crime out there, of course. Police never went there, and almost no one else did either. I didn't know it at the time but there was no better place to hide anything. You never knew who was involved either. Our team's keeper for the previous season was one of the few real village boys in the squad, and he lived deep in the bush near the reservoir. But he wasn't available to play that season on account of being in jail, having made the career transition to a hitman. Unsuccessfully, clearly, since he had managed to get caught in a country where the conviction rate for murder was below 10%. But he hadn't managed to kill anyone either. And I don't know the conviction rate for attempted murder.

So, anybody could be a problem. There had always been the reputation of violence in the villages. Long before drugs and smuggling, and even before guns. Few of us were from the villages, but we were all the first generation to not be. All of our parents had grown up there, and most of our grandparents still lived there. We knew the stories. Of people drinking too much and going home to beat their wives and children. Of jealousy leading to the use of the cutlass in the need to protect their property, which meant their woman. And the expectations of how "real men" thought and behaved, combined with the inability to express oneself, and the abhorrence of the feminine trait of resolving things through words. All of this resulted in the legacy of targeted murder, as compared to the urban idea of indiscriminate violence. As in the wrong place at the wrong time, because it was always the wrong place there, no matter what time.

My left-handed cousin Devan wasn't a good umpire. It was the year before he started wearing his glasses regularly. We already knew he couldn't see. But he was fighting against the idea that he needed the spectacles. He held almost no catches that year and didn't make any runs either. But that was the same as every year. Could spin the ball a mile, though. It was why we kept him in the side, as well as familial loyalty. He was indeed struggling to see, but even when he could, like all the years before and after, he still wasn't a good umpire. He had the habit of being bullied into a bad decision, and then afterward not giving the right decision, as if to make up for it.

Cricket is emotional. We weren't going to win that match. There was no chance. Nothing was at stake either. We were almost at the bottom of the league, and the opponents were stuck in the middle of the table. But that didn't stop someone from running home and coming back with a gun in his hand to threaten the umpire. It took minutes for him to leave and get back, which tells you the size of the village. We didn't even notice he had left the field. Nor did his teammates.

Lalchan saw him first. He was a true left-hander, but he played the game right-handed because he learnt from watching his brother. Despite his old-man's name, he was our age. Rail thin, already going grey by fourteen, sparse moustache already when the rest of us couldn't even grow sideburns. He'd had a hard life growing up on the periphery of the swamp, between the fishing and farming communities, but not a part of either. Almost the stereotype of being intelligent and talented against all the odds stacked against someone who didn't have electricity until high school, and really did have to study by hurricane lanterns. But he still topped all his exams, while coming to school often tired after helping working on fish ponds, and sometimes bruised if his father drank too much.

We knew all of this about Lalchan though not too much of the details. The swamp wasn't a place we hung around a lot. Even when we went to pick him up for matches, our parents didn't linger. I'd known him for years, but I didn't realize till that day that I didn't really know him at all. You never really know who's ready for a crisis. Because they have to be. Because they're used to it. Because they've seen worse. Violence isn't something they're unfamiliar with.

From behind square, where he was the other umpire, he saw the trouble coming. To be fair, we all saw the trouble coming. Devan had given not out to some obvious decisions with the justification of "It don't look good", without even adding the "to me" at the end, which sometimes waylaid discussions of bias.

"That's it. I done. Me ain't bowling no more. Them only theifing," the man who had left the field said, a few overs earlier. He had good reason to be annoyed, too. He punctuated his reaction by pulling the ends of his moustache so it stuck out from either side of his face.

It was a valid reaction. But as bad decisions continued it seemed he reached his limit. By the time Lalchan caught up to him around mid-pitch, he already had the gun in his hand and was waving it about and shouting. From where I was, I couldn't hear anything clearly.

I saw Lalchan trying to reason. He was a calm person, even as a teenager. The only calm adolescent I knew. Most of our team froze. Though I got up, as well as the captain, we didn't actually move. We didn't know what to do. It wasn't a situation we had experienced or prepared for ever.

The bowler with the moustache, now the gunman, was yelling and pointing at Devan with the non-gun hand. None of his own teammates went near him. They were all gathered in the outfield, even the keeper. It didn't seem to be a good sign.

We never got into serious trouble. Small things, like scuffles at school or parties, more posturing than anything serious. No one finished anything. It wasn't part of how we lived. Those who had a reputation for finishing fights, they were serious people.

When I saw Lalchan walking up to the man, I thought he was going to try to play peacemaker. He had experience from living at home with his parents. For the rest of us, stopping fights was a martyr's role. We all had heard of people who had been stabbed parting fights.

"Better two people dead who looking for it, than you dead looking to be hero" was something my father had said more than once. His village also had a reputation for roughness that stuck to it. Even though it had become a place for old people, populated by alcoholic leftovers, who had collected a severance package when the sugar industry shut down and were now drinking away that money spending it on the same alcohol they had produced. It came full circle. Anyway, he probably knew what he was talking about. Much more than we did.

Lalchan walked up to the man, who was still shouting. I could see him talking. This was before I needed glasses to see even the other side of the room. The man was still shouting and pointing, and he turned to point at Devan, who had not moved from the umpire's position (frozen in fear, I assumed). As the gunman turned his head, Lalchan hit him in the neck with his forearm, took the gun from his hand and, as in a film, popped open the cylinder chamber and shook the bullets out onto the ground.

After that, chaos ensued. As if there was a signal to move. The opposing team ran in and took their player away off the field. We ran onto the field, half of the team going to Lalchan and the other half to Devan, who hadn't moved except vertically, now sitting next to the stumps. It took about thirty minutes to get things back to normal. By then it was almost dark and the idea of finishing the match, floated but never seriously so, was impossible. I don't know how they put it in the scorebook. Maybe "Home team

won, combination of bad light and firearm threats". Probably not, it would set a bad precedent on winning tactics.

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Later that day we were at the bar after the match. We always went with the older players on our team, since they were the ones who drove and we had to go with them, even though most of us wouldn't drink. Not because we were underage. There were many teenagers who drank, which was easy in a country where old enough to look the barman in the eye was good enough to be served. It was more because we often had matches on the following day, and had too much respect or fear to show up in any state less than perfect. We were then still young enough to see cricket as a viable career step. When we were slightly older, and dreams of going pro faded, though we were still not yet of voting age, we would all be as drunk as anyone else. Except Lalchan, who, understandably from his circumstances, had a healthy fear of the destructive power of alcohol.

"You see down where I living, people behaving mad now. Fisherman ain't bringing back just fish. Is all kind of things they carrying across from the next side. Things dangerous. You does have to know how to handle things early. Otherwise when it start to get out of hand, it done too late," Lalchan said. "You doesn't want to have to get involved, but they does force you. Just because you around. It don't have nobody checking nothing in the swamp. If they feel they could just come in your house, they go come. You have to make sure they know not to play up."

This was the only explanation we got for the day's events. Lalchan never wanted to discuss further what he had seen or was used to, being where he was from. We saw him differently from that day. Even as we started seeing him less. First injuries, and then family responsibilities took him further and further from us. Especially after high school when, despite his excellent grades which were high enough for a scholarship, he chose to go into the public service. Initially with the intention to study part-time, but more pressing was the need for money to support his mother and sister, after his father passed away, predictably, from heart and liver disease.

He never got around to it. We hadn't yet finished university when we got the news he, too, had died. They found him in the swamp, not far from the house, within view of the porch. Apparently, he had drowned. But we knew it didn't make sense. He could swim like a fish, and anyway, the water was barely knee high. We didn't say anything, me or Devan or anyone else, but we all figured it had something to do with knowing how to protect yourself. Because you couldn't protect yourself from everything. But we didn't tell his mother or sister, because it would have been worse for them to think that, if they didn't already.

*Jacinth Browne-Howard*

# White Noise

**When you come from a place where the sun is always shining, no one expects you to be familiar with cold darkness. All you know is unrelenting yellow pouring over the sloping hills and punishing heat that cooks the gleaming marl-rubble streets beside your wooden house. When a Rasta man makes his way up the hill, gunslingers crunching against the marl, you decide you agree with the lyrics blasting from the boom box perched on his bare, sweaty shoulder. You set your elbow on the window sill and hum along, concluding that Chronixx and Protoje are right. You do like to live in the West Indies. You do enjoy the cool breeze and the warbling, bright-breasted birds. The roar of the foamy emerald waves crashing against the scorching shore still arouses your childhood nostalgia of church picnics on the beach.**

But when you live in the hills, far from the tourist-studded sea, in this room, your waving, sunlit drapes mean nothing. You can't think of the sea when your flaccid breasts and stretch-marked belly, still sadly sagging from childbirth, act as an affront to a polka dot bikini. With your matchbox-sized bedroom and your sky-high bills, no matter how much you squint, all you see is darkness. It's only a matter of time before you take matters into your own hands. You make something for yourself.

Eunoia.

A word you'd swallowed whole from the moment it first sallied across the yellowed, dog-eared novel you'd read over and over while waiting for your husband to come home.

Eunoia - (n) A happy mental state.

You chew this meaning like cud, until the words sound funny in your head and grind up so fine that they become pointless. You want to believe, but you don't get to wear the amber lenses that outsiders know so well. You don't get powdered oceans with the soothing release of waves. You must make do with the whirl of the Lasko standing fan in your face as you rock each boy, on the old wooden chair, year after year, until you all escape the throes of infancy.

It is that white noise that comes up from the ocean, that sound that this fan impersonates. It has come to live with you on this little island of your own, like a lullaby sung by a hoarse grandmother. That familiar white noise keeps whistling through your head, right up to this moment when it is interrupted by a wretched cough to the left, a ragged exhale to the right and a frustrated moan ahead of you.

“Go to sleep, Rohan.” You whisper You don’t know if it is desperation in hopes that your youngest won’t wake up. You’re surer that your voice has gone raspy from the scream building on the inside. The one you cannot let out. The one that barely squeaks out of your half-open mouth when you snore for two minutes at night before the baby’s wailing swallows it up. It swallows the scream that you suffocate with a smile, to make the children believe that all is well.

You eventually find out that children are not foolish. Over time, the little oracles read the tension in your neck, the irregular rate of your breathing, the slight tremor in your hands, the darkness of your eyes. They recognise the darkness that the light of their laughter cannot always reach, they acknowledge it like a classmate in a cohort with whom everyone politely refuses to play. *They swear it off.* It remains because you embrace it, dubbing it some sign of your conviction, to raise them strong enough, to foster in them laughter, to encourage light like fireflies from their bosoms—bright and ubiquitous—out into their clear futures.

Rohan is fidgeting. He is waving the thermometer in the air, the thermometer you spent half the savings on last month. It is an electronic one for accuracy or for whatever the sales assistant talked you into believing this time. It is a must-have. You pray each time that the shrill beep will strike a lucky number, that like a trill of magic it will break his fever. A wand to cancel a curse. But today you will remember that not every expensive thing is useful. Not every gamble pays off. It lands on the ground with a clatter and then a beep. You hope that it isn’t the last one it makes.

“It’s too hot outsiiiiide.” Rohan bellows as loudly as any six-year-old might after a series of consecutive whines that “mean mommy” will not play with him. After he has sneezed a waterfall on you with a vengeance. After he has thrown two stuffed bears at you in quiet rage that you no longer look at him, the way that you gaze into the bright eyes of the new baby. Without guilt, on a good day, you let baby Stephan’s bubbly gurgles exfoliate your face.

Samuel is still moaning. He usually displays the stoic silence of the eldest child for the others. But now he can only lead by giving in to the pain now ravaging his body. He cannot move. Rohan is now tossing toy trucks at his brother’s seven-year-old frame. Rohan takes one pitiful breath before he finds strength to hurl another toy. The baby coughs again. You collapse, prostrate on the bed, the sweltering sunlight spilling like fresh honey all over your tanned arm. You acquiesce for a moment, wondering if your husband ever intends to return. It’s so bright that you almost miss the vibrating of the cellphone beside you. It remains face down so that your miserable children will stop complaining about the glare that it shoots into their eyes. You decide to answer this once. Surely, the caller must either be in a terrible bind. Not that you are in any position to help them. Thirteen missed calls. Your eyes widen and your heart races. They’re Vincent’s.

“Hello?” You breathe after punching a speed dial.

“Carla, you know I’m flying today. It’s not like you have to pick me up. I’ll get Dorothy to give me a ride. The least you could do is answer the phone. What have you been doing anyway? How are the boys?”

You bite your lip, carefully crafting your response. You’ve seen every hour of their suffocating nights. You have entertained their Roblox obsession. You have fallen asleep while they watched God-knows-what at 2 a.m. Your self-righteous, indignant claim that the TV will never babysit them floated over the sea of laundry in the living room and through the dusty window sills years ago. Your mother would have reminded you to feed them home-cooked meals to help them recover. Instead, the pizza boxes are sprawled on the floor. They jeer at you, as evidence that the boys had happily vetoed cleaning when you became too tired to police them. And too weary to do it yourself. These days you settle for clearing enough Legos, Nerf guns and throw cushions to avoid breaking your leg.

“They’re okay.” You decide. “I will take them out for some air.”

“All right. See you all soon. Dorothy will pick up the boys later and make sure they good, so don’t stay out too long.” His steady voice vanishes with a click.

You know better than to expect a “How are you?” It would be followed up with a “Take them to Dorothy if you’re that tired.” Dorothy is your husband’s sister. She does anything for family. She has four children for a good-for-nothing man who has run off with a high-brown, curly-haired tourist lady from the Virgin Islands. He does not remember his children now, but he is the type to still expect them to bury him after his tourist lady has sucked him dry. Nevertheless, Dorothy is running her legal practice. She is recovering from a back injury. She is always smiling. Her bright, pearl teeth open wide when she laughs, and her rotund breasts shake with humour as she sets her plump arms akimbo for support. So pleasant, everyone says. She is good to your boys.

But you do not want to bother her. You do not want to interrupt her feng shui with your chaos. You cannot keep up with the demands for oxtail soup that trail in with your boys after each visit with Aunt D. She is too full of advice. You do not want to hear Dorothy’s fifteenth angry rant about how silly it is to believe in the coronavirus. How her boys are never ill. How your boys have a little head cold and need some Vicks, Alcolado and a pot of hot water. How ground food—some good dasheen and tania—is all children need to be strong. How if you could mash some plantain and blend it up for the baby, he would not get sick while fighting every day to draw all the life out of your drooping breasts. How a little brown-skin girl like you—come from town side with a little linguistics degree, an office job that pays next to nothing and a ridiculous dream of running a bookshop—just “not sure ’bout life yet”. How if the children came over a

little more often, they might pick up some manners like her boys—who score at the top of the class every term. Because boys need a firm hand. And yours are wanting. Don't mind that there are only four children in each of their classes—that's how uppity private schools are run, after all. Her boys are a shoo-in for scholarships to help them leave this backward island life behind and admit them to the great gates of the United States. They will do it without their useless father because of their mother.

You do not want to hear about how lucky you are that your husband devotes all his time to earning money on his long business trips to support your children. You do not want to hear her coo when your husband picks up the slack on the rare occasions that you cannot manage the thankless tasks you perform every day. You do not want to hear that you must visit more often and stop being a stranger. You do not want to hear, when you do visit, how much her mahogany centre table costs every time one of your own boys drags the doily off it, after cackling his way out of her kitchen with four of her homemade cookies. You do not have the energy to carry the weight of Dorothy's glowering judgement. You do not want to bear witness to how easy Dorothy makes things look.

You learned long ago that complaints are for novices. You have learned to leave your limbs on autopilot as you tug a fresh T-shirt over Samuel's head, or you squeeze Stephan's blue booties on for the tenth time or beg Rohan to come and brush his teeth because it has been twenty-four hours. And you would certainly take the tantrum over him blowing swampy breath up your nose while clinging to your arm every night. You have learned to cycle through your days listening to the white noise in your head each time someone notices the bags under your eyes and jokes that those late nights with kids come after late nights of pleasure. Each time they whisper that if you enjoy having your legs in the air, then you should prepare to do it again to deal with childbirth.

You dwell in the white noise, each time Rohan screams at you to look at the television to see a cat falling into the tub, then rages that you missed it because you turned too slowly. You meditate there each time a stranger wants to tell you how beautiful your boys are, how much they must look like their father, because they certainly do not look like you. You wonder if it would be so bad if they did. You are gearing up to "stonewall" them upon your departure, your mind like a washing machine is rotating practiced smiles and responses when the inevitable questions and recommendations come.

You are hustling the boys out the door now. You are dreading it but as you gingerly tie the laces of each boy's sneakers, you prepare yourself for a trip to the polyclinic. You brace yourself to hear Samuel grumble about being too old for *PAW Patrol* branded shoes and that he hopes his next pair will be more grown up. You wait for Rohan to lament the tightness on his feet. You resent that their next pairs must come from

Dorothy, in the barrel in two months, and that Vincent will proudly pay her back. You wait for the tears to come as you stare at the tattered shoes, hoping that their tongues cough up a budget to help you please your children. When responses do not come, you usher the boys into the front of the house.

You almost stomp on the thermometer on your way out. For a moment you consider kicking your two-hundred-dollar investment aside. Your husband will explode when he finds out what you have done. You, who claims to be levelheaded and responsible. Perhaps this purchase is your small cry for help. Perhaps it will result in a quarrel. Perhaps you will both home in on each other's flaws instead of trying to rectify the stagnant pool you both voluntarily sit in—a helmless, boatless marriage.

He does not know what you are about to do with his children, but you are more afraid of losing a chance to nurse them back to health than you are of Vincent's brewing reprimands about how you could possibly let his children get this unwell. You hook Stephan's arm in the crook of your own and yoke the remaining children to your waist and left hand. You then guide the tangled human chain down the dusty street to the bus stop. You keep your thoughts to yourself about the missing car. Your husband had instructed you to leave it with Dorothy until his return because gas was becoming impossible to afford. You glance at your phone before setting off. Dorothy is calling. You ignore it.

You seat the children on the big, old, yellow bus. You go to the doctor. You sit through the litany of complaints and unending exchanges of slaps and whines among the siblings. You grind your teeth as the line, more akin to a crowd before the judgement seat, hardly dwindles in two hours. Eventually, you actually get to the doctor. You gather a prescription and medication. You nod at each heartfelt concern the pediatrician voices for your boys.

"Dehydration," she mutters with sloping doe eyes, brimming with pity. "They'll need intravenous treatment. Just some saline."

You sit through three sets of squirming and screaming. It does not matter that you regale them with your own brave-faced experiences. Nothing will convince your boys to willingly have a needle shoved into their veins. Stephan, of course, does not let his brothers one-up him with tears, although his oral medication went down minutes before.

Throughout the course of the day, you present your trained smile for three versions of the same pointless interrogation—by a lady from church, a girl you used to go to high school with and a woman from the PTA. You distribute two sets of cheese sandwiches accompanied by two apple box juices, shove a bottle of pumped milk into the noisy chasm of Stephan's mouth, and swallow your spit for lunch. You are on your way back

to the bus stop now, counting ten cent pieces to make the fare. You walk slowly to accommodate the loosening, weakened straps of your sandals from one of the Syrian stores in town. The children are obediently hinged upon your pink flamenco skirt tail. They are too tired to do otherwise.

The bus is here. You ask Samuel to hold his baby brother so that you can help Rohan up the steps and into the vehicle. Rohan is squalling about a toy he has forgotten at the doctor's office and stretching against you like a thin star across the doorway of the bus. Stephan is bawling in Samuel's arms for what you can only imagine is milk straight from the "bubub" as it cannot be a wet nappy. You have already changed him twice.

Somebody in the background is stressing in a gruff voice that you are moving too slowly. Someone else is murmuring that these single mothers really get themselves in over their heads. The grumbling continues. You do not know when those voices switch from impatience to panic. The white noise is humming, and your thought laundry is spinning faster than you can manage. You are not sure which boy keeps screaming, "Mommy!" The white noise whirs like a hurricane. You are not sure when all the voices join the thought laundry. You are not sure when everything stops.

When you awaken, voices pick up where they have left off. There are overlapping utterances. Noise without meaning. Voices without words. You do not know where you are, but you feel enough biting cold between your legs to know you are in a dress. Perhaps a nightgown? Regardless, it does not belong to you. The bandana you had wrapped your hair in to hide the fact that you had not styled it in weeks is missing. Your thick, messy kinks stick out in every direction.

You try to lift your hand then feel the world forcing it back down. Your head is as dense as stone. At least your eyes are as foggy as they've always been. You tense, too tired to cry. You're faced with the reality that if you die, life will go on without you. The spaces you once filled will be glossed over and lost in the stream of eternity. Nice words will be sung over your head and meaningless remarks will accompany them. And after all that—you cannot afford to die when you simply do not have enough money to bury yourself. If Vincent heard you going on about death, he would roll his eyes and ask you if you must always be this dramatic.

Your eyes clear for a moment to greet those of a man you do not know yet is saying something about being lucky to get you to the emergency room. You think you hear someone saying something about needing to take matters into his own hands because she's just not as responsible as she needs to be.

"You need to take better care of yourself, Carla. Somebody said they saw you wandering about barefoot with my children on the road. Carla. You going off or what?

They soon call the madhouse for you. In fact, I going get Dorothy to call she psychiatrist friend.” You know you hear him this time, but his voice is distant, disembodied. Is he reprimanding you? Is he concerned? Is he simply role playing so that the nurses swoon because somehow this girl snagged such a composed man?

You cannot tell. You cannot protest like you usually do. You are not convinced anyone will listen if you do. You are ready to bet any quantity of money (yes, the money that you don’t have!) that the “somebody” who saw you was Dorothy.

Your lips feel the same way your feet do when you sit on the toilet for too long. Your whole body feels a variation of this. You are not sure if your hands are balled into the fists that you wish them to be. Fists protect you and take tight control of the situation. Fists to hit anyone who dares to separate you from your beloved children. Fists to give you a brief respite, to make you look braver as you lie here beneath the dim, pale luminescence of the buzzing, white ceiling lights. You shudder in this sterile tundra, wishing for a moment for the morning’s sun. That Caribbean radiance, that burnishing heat, that paradisial yellow. You’re squinting because you know it is dark. You try to place a picture in your mind—a gleaming idyll, where you wake up to your loyal spouse and the gorgeous children who have his face. Yes, you’re sure that this is eunoia. But then—you ask yourself—why does it feel like hell?

**A Word on Caribbean Aesthetics from the Archives:**

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*Errol Hill*

# THE EMERGENCE OF A CARIBBEAN AESTHETIC

*(An Address to the Conference on African Diaspora in the Americas—Caribbean Expressions sponsored by Visual Arts Research and Resource Center, Relating to the Caribbean, New York City, September 1979)*

**The role of Africa and its New World manifestations by Caribbean artists, writers and intellectuals in the 1920s, particularly as these expressions contributed to major political and social changes.**

At the start of the 1930s the anglophone Caribbean remained hostage to Great Britain under a colonial system of government. As a direct consequence of that form of political dispensation, the West Indian artistic and cultural scene was fractured three ways. One segment consisted of those few diehard expatriate groups that sought to maintain a racial exclusivity in their artistic pursuits, oblivious to the mounting evidence that the days of privilege and prestige based solely on skin colour were numbered. Those groups passed into history and would concern us no more, were it not for the legacy they left behind.

Of greater significance, because it represents a division in the blood, is the relationship between the two other segments of the West Indies cultural scene. One writer has referred to this relationship as the great cultural cleavage between fellow West Indians. On one side stood the educated middle-class, for the most part coloured and black West Indians, who had accepted the civilisation of the European colonisers as their model, and who sought by their artistic efforts to win approval of the supposed arbiters of high culture that would soon pass from their midst. On the other side were the large masses of working-class West Indians, black (and in some territories Asiatic) who had created their own customs and social institutions in order to regulate lives that were spent in miserably poor circumstances.

I said that the black populace had created their own customs and modes of social behaviour; it would be truer to say that traditional modes of behaviour brought by

their forefathers from Africa had been modified and adapted by them to suit the new conditions of life in the Caribbean. For in truth it was this segment of the population that kept alive manifestations of African culture, not in the form of art products consciously produced for exhibition or commerce, but as a functional and treasured way of life that had sustained generations of black men and women through the deprivations of slavery and the ensuing struggle for human dignity and equality. While the middle-class, eyes fixed on Europe, denied the existence of an African heritage, the labouring class preserved it and passed it on. Freedom had long been won, but the would-be leaders of free people were themselves culturally enslaved. A people cannot thrive living in the shadow of an alien culture. Rejection of one's heritage leads to hatred of the self. One can make no meaningful contribution to one's people if one communicates with strange tongues and foreign symbols.

The problem for the West Indies at the threshold of the 1930s was (and to some extent is today) to integrate culturally the black and coloured intellectual and the black labourer, to convince the black artist that his materials lie close at hand in the experiences and expressions of the large majority of West Indians who have not assimilated the ways of the coloniser, and further, that beyond those masses lies the root source of their cultural traditions, which is Africa and not Europe or North America.

Manifestations of African-derived culture among West Indian peoples have been clearly established. As a practitioner of the theatre arts, I tend to emphasise aspects of performance in the folkways of our people, recognising that we who call ourselves artists can discover indigenous modes and styles of presentation that could give our work a validity and vitality it would otherwise lack, were we to continue always to emulate Euro-American models. Moreover, I am aware, as Addison Gayle has convincingly argued, that "form and structure, style and manipulation of language, are only vehicles for forwarding political and ideological positions", and so I look too for meaning in these folk expressions that have helped to strengthen and elevate the human spirit over so many decades of crushing adversity.

Let me, by way of example, mention just a few areas of West Indian folk culture rooted in traditional African experience that provide rich source material for the creative and performing artist:

i) First, religion: Shango and Rada in Trinidad; the Shango ceremony allegedly being found in its purest form in that island; Kumina and Pocomania in Jamaica; Cumfa in Guyana. All of these and other similar rituals found throughout the West Indies involve music, singing, dancing, pantomime, and ceremonial modes of presentation. As regards meaning, there are the elements of surrender of the self to a higher power, visitation by the gods, divination, sacrifice, healing and purgation.

(ii) Secondly, ceremonies associated with rites of passage, i.e., birth, puberty, marriage and death. While many of these ceremonies have been vitiated with the passing of time, death rituals continue to be most pronounced, doubtless because of the strong African belief in ancestor-worship. Again music, special dances, traditional games, role playing and speechifying accompany these rituals, with a general air of rejoicing even in death. For the departed person, having lived a long and useful life, goes to the realm of spirits where he/she joins those honoured forbears who continue to serve as protectors of the community. Thus the traditional African way places the communal welfare above that of the individual; reward for the good life is not a crown in heaven but the respect and homage of one's countrymen and the opportunity to continue service to them.

(iii) Thirdly, associated with ancestor-worship and the worship of nature spirits (denoting a reverence for all living things and standing as a corrective against the wanton destruction and pollution of our natural resources in the pursuit of profit) are, of course, the masquerade and masquerade performances. Use of the mask to represent the essence of the departed spirit still prevails in many parts of Africa today. Here again, though much of the primal meaning has been lost, new significances have emerged in masquerade exhibitions in the West Indies. The Trinidad carnival is the best known of these festivals, but there are also the John Canoe of Jamaica, Belize and the Virgins, the Speech Mas' of Tobago and the Leeward Islands, the Tramping Bands of Guyana. These with their concomitant ritual combats in the form of song, dance, word or deed represent traditional festive enactments that, notwithstanding transformations in time and as a result of severe repression from hostile authorities, have endured as ways of celebrating the triumph of the human spirit, in harmony with nature, over the forces of evil. I include in this category the crop over festivals still practised on some estates that closely parallel the yam festivals of Nigeria.

These are but a few general examples of popular West Indian cultural expressions that represent in greater or less degree continuities of the African experience. The list could be lengthened considerably but time does not permit. I have not mentioned the vast array of folk songs and folk tales to be found throughout the region nor their manner of performance; the penchant for improvising songs of praise or of satire when merited; the African tradition of the griot or oral historian who held a titled place next to the king and his chief warrior—a position reserved today in the popular mind for the king calypsonian. I do not suggest that West Indian folk (with the possible exception of members of the Ras Tafari cult) who indulged in these cultural manifestations were consciously preserving the African traditions. Africa was a long way away in the 1930s: her destiny and the destiny of West Indians, even those who did not reject her heritage, seemed unalterably severed.

The man who shattered the complacency of West Indians regarding Africa was the Jamaican Marcus Garvey. He did it not merely by transplanting the headquarters of his

Universal Negro Improvement Association from New York to Kingston, by publishing *The Blackman* newspaper, and by holding two international conventions in Kingston, but also by recruiting the theatre in support of his campaign for black liberation. As is well known, Garvey intended his movement to embrace black people worldwide, the central goal being the creation of an independent black nation state in Africa that would become the spiritual home and protector of all African and African-derived peoples.

In 1930, as part of a regular series of dramatic presentations at his open-air theatre at Edelweiss Park, Kingston, he produced three great dramas, written by himself, depicting the experiences and aspirations of the black man as he saw them. The first play, entitled *The Coronation of an African King*, crystallised Garvey's world struggle for a free African nation and reached its climax in the enthronement of a black monarch in a new African kingdom. The second play, *Roaming Jamaicans*, portrayed the conditions under which migrant Jamaicans worked in foreign lands. The third play, *Slavery from Hut to Mansion*, described the horrors of slavery and the slave traffic, the agitation for and winning of freedom, and the progress of the race thereafter. Garvey was astute enough in his polemical writings and speeches to avoid the call to violence, but in his dramas it is clear that he saw bloodshed as an inevitable occurrence in the march towards black liberation. [A] newspaper review of the first play described a battle between imperialist armies and liberation fighters under African generals:

“guns belching flame, thunder and sudden death; the voices of black orators sounding above the thunder of the guns, inspiring their countrymen on to victory over the dead bodies of their comrades; and the screaming voices of women and children as the bleeding bodies of their relatives passed them on the bloodstained streets.”

Audiences, we are told, came in their thousands to these productions, but they were drawn from the working classes only since the literate Jamaicans spurned the Garvey movement and would not be seen fraternising with his followers. One of the rare members of the coloured Jamaican middle class who attended Garvey's theatre was Archie Lindo, playwright and critic, who in the next decade would score a popular success with his dramatisation of Herbert de Lisser's well-known novel on Annie Palmer, the white witch of Rose Hall estate. In this play, perhaps for the first time on the Jamaican stage, Lindo gave dignity and authority to a black slave, speaking the Jamaican dialect, who with a fatal blow struck down the white witch in the name of freedom and justice for his people. Lindo has gone on record stating that the class bar that existed in the Jamaican theatre of those days was broken in the months following Garvey's productions when Ernest Cupidon, a celebrated comedian and one of Garvey's protégés, adapted and performed another of de Lisser's novels in the prestigious Ward Theatre in Kingston. Crowds of all classes flocked to see the show and “thereafter”, quotes Lindo, “the stage was open to all”.

Another important theatrical event of the 30s was designed to make West Indians aware of their true position as black communities in the Western world. *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, a drama by the Trinidad writer and scholar CLR James, was produced in 1936. Material for the play was drawn from the author's considerable researches into the epic story of the San Domingo slave revolution of 1801 [1791-1804]. Despite an impressive cast that included Paul Robeson, the Guyanese Robert Adams, and Orlando Martins of Nigeria, the play had minimal impact since it was presented in London in a special showing by the Stage Society, and not picked up by the commercial producers. It was, however, presented in a revised version of Nigeria in 1967, while bitter civil war still raged in one part of that nation. The spectacle of black leaders struggling for power over the bodies of their bleeding countrymen on the stage of the Ibadan University Arts Theatre must have provided a grim parallel to the unhappy situation then current in Nigeria. James' historical book, *The Black Jacobins*, published in 1938, remains an outstanding work of scholarship that continues to serve both as a warning and an inspiration for black people who seek to control their own destiny in a world increasingly controlled by the great military powers.

To turn from drama to music and song, we must pay tribute first to the pioneering work of Walter Jekyll, an English clergyman, who migrated to Jamaica in the early [part] of this century, and began the first systematic collection of folk songs and stories which he published in 1907. His book contained lyrics and melodic scores of a wide variety of folk tunes for singing and dancing, as well as a number of Anancy stories which are still great favourites among young people in and out of the West Indies today. In his verbal transcriptions, Jekyll attempted to capture characteristic Jamaican speech idioms, an approach that gives his work the ring of authenticity. Doubtless Jekyll's book inspired the Jamaican musician Astley Clerke, who in 1910 published a monograph [titled] *The Music and Musical Instruments of Jamaica*, being a compilation of three lectures he had given in the city, illustrating them with lantern slides and musical renditions. Among the types of music he discussed were African tribal music and the music and musical instruments of the Maroons, that community of blacks who escaped enslavement and set up their own government in the mountain redoubts of Jamaica.

These seminal studies of the native music, combined with a 1929 book on Jamaican folk life by the American Martha Beckwith, caught the imaginations of a number of accomplished West Indians. By the 1930s, lectures and concerts of indigenous music and folktale[s] were not uncommon, the Cudjoe Minstrels had been organised in Kingston, and even a band of Maroons was invited to demonstrate their musical talents on the stage of the Ward Theatre. I am satisfied that these pioneering studies and the propagation of Jamaican music that followed upon them are responsible for the important place that indigenous music and story hold in Jamaican cultural life today. Indeed, appreciation of the native music, song and folktale clearly influenced the growing nationalism among black Jamaicans in the decade under review.

Over in Trinidad, the line of demarcation between the coloured middle class and the black working class—such as obtained in Jamaica and Barbados, in the 1930s—was blurred by several factors. First, the heterogeneity of the population, instanced most notably in the replacement of black labour by indentured East Indians on the sugar estates. There was an even greater racial admixture among the small group of artists and intellectuals, which included people of African, Portuguese, Chinese, French and English extraction (James, Gomes, Achong, de Boissière, Minshall, Mendes). The annual masquerade festival brought all these classes and colours together temporarily to celebrate their survival according to their separate inclinations. Curiously enough, despite its multiracial character, Trinidad probably felt the African presence stronger than its sister islands. This was due in part to its comparatively recent colonisation and the fact that free Africans had been brought to the island after emancipation to supply the need for cheap field labour. An English visitor to Port-of-Spain, in 1928, heard “songs and dances of African origin introduced by Yorubas” in different sections of the city; the Shango religion continued to flourish underground, the calypso, “an African retention of the purest type”, in the opinion of the noted anthropologist Melville Herskovits, still preserved its traditional right to speak out fearlessly on current affairs, defying government attempts to stamp out its trenchant criticism by the imposition of police censorship.

It was in the 1930s that the calypsonian made his first great stride from the status of folk singer to that of a national artist. He began to travel annually to the United States for recording sessions, and sang in the classy night clubs of the metropolis. Some went to Hollywood. Calypso topics moved from the parochial to the global. More and more the calypsonian was regarded as the authentic mouthpiece of the people whose views were seldom aired in official councils. Eventually his support would prove crucial in bringing the present government to power in 1956, and keeping it entrenched for many years.

In 1933, the centennial year of emancipation, Atila the Hun, dubbed by one writer “the Shakespeare of Calypso”, asked the

“Sons and daughters of Africa  
What are you doing for your future?”

And he reminded

Every coloured man in this colony  
No matter what his position may be  
Whether lawyer, doctor or minister  
His ancestors he should remember  
And offer love, homage and eulogy  
To those who fought for their liberty.”

Solidarity with Africa against imperial aggression was expressed in a number of calypsoes condemning Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Of these, the Growling Tiger's composition remains a classic with its exalting melody whose opening measures have been compared with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. (See Appendix A for calypso lyric.) It was Tiger again, in 1936, who gave the most cogent warning of imminent labour unrest in the Caribbean region. His "Workers' Appeal" can stand repetition in full. (See Appendix B for calypso lyric).

Tiger's entreaty went unheeded; or perhaps it was already too late for palliatives. The year following disturbances erupted spontaneously throughout the West Indies resulting in several deaths and over a hundred wounded. The nationalist movement was on the march, as Eric Williams concluded. The 1930s also witnessed the birth of the steelband which was destined to revolutionise musical participation and appreciation among West Indian peoples. It created a new musical form; it enlarged the melodic structure of the calypso; and it directly promoted the total integration of the population at the annual carnival street parades. In addition, the struggle to gain acceptance of the steelband forced a number of people to take a closer look at its origins and won many adherents to the cause of an African heritage.

Under the threatening workers' revolt of 1937-38, Norman Manley of Jamaica, then attorney for the Banana Producers' Association, was able to extract from the United Fruit Company one cent for every bunch of bananas exported from the island. The money was used to found a welfare organisation aimed at social and economic reconstruction in rural communities, with self-help being a guiding philosophy. The benefits derived from this broad development programme, which was later funded by the British government, were incalculable. Cultural officers attached to Jamaica Welfare, as the organisation was called, encouraged the formation of singing, dancing, and play-acting groups in the countryside. The traditional lore of the rural areas began to surface in abundance, was shaped and exhibited on urban stages and at nationwide festivals. Finally, the cultural gap between peasant and sophisticate was narrowed as Jamaicans of all classes began consciously to take command of what had always been their birthright—an African cultural heritage. I am pleased to acknowledge that Miss Louise Bennett, who is here tonight, played a significant role in that cultural renaissance.

As I conclude this address, I must confess to a feeling of unease. In a short presentation such as this, there are inevitably many omissions, but one in particular leaves me troubled. I have spoken of West Indian drama and music, song and folk tale, masquerade and ritual, but I have not mentioned the dance as an art form. To do so I must seek your permission to peek just beyond the decade of the 30s with which we are primarily concerned; but it would be a disservice to a courageous, talented and noble-spirited West Indian artist to end this lecture without reference to Miss Beryl

McBurnie of Trinidad. Trained in this country, where she appeared professionally for a short time under the stage name of La Belle Rosette, Beryl (as she is familiarly known all through the Caribbean) returned to Trinidad in 1940, and timidly presented her first programme of dance theatre entitled *A Trip Through the Tropics*. Timidly, because this was the first time that a trained dancer/choreographer had dared to put West Indian dance movements on the stage. It was fine for the King Sailor to exhibit his graceful convolutions on the masquerade streets, but it would surely offend aesthetic sensibilities to put him on the concert stage. So Beryl was forewarned that she risked becoming a laughing stock of city audiences. Instead, the audience at that first performance greeted her work with resounding cheers. From that moment on Beryl's life has been dedicated with missionary zeal to spreading the gospel of Caribbean dance at home and abroad. She has labouriously researched Caribbean and Latin American dance forms with appropriate music and rhythms, has choreographed dances from many regions, producing in the process a number of talented young performers who have graduated to successful professional careers. (Geoffrey Holder, director/choreographer of the Broadway musicals *The Wiz* and *Timbuktu!*, is only one of many.) Beryl has built the Little Carib Theatre in Port-of-Spain brick by brick and heartbreak upon heartbreak, and is now in semi-retirement. All dancers in the West Indian idiom stand in her debt.

Africa is still many thousands of miles away but a good deal closer to us in spirit because of the work of those pioneering artists of the 1930s. I can think of no more appropriate way to end these remarks than with the lyrics of the Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley:

Oh, natty, natty,  
Natty 21,000 miles away from home,  
Oh, natty, natty,  
And that's a long way  
Don't care what the world seh,  
I and I couldn't never go astray,  
Just like a bright and sunny day  
Oh, we're gonna have things our way,  
Natty dread, natty dreadlock  
Dreadlock congo, bongo I,  
Don't care what the world seh,  
I and I gonna have things our way,  
If a egg natty, ina the red.

## Appendix A

### THE GOLD IN AFRICA (calypso)

by The Growling Tiger

Chorus:

The gold, the gold, the gold, the gold  
The gold in Africa  
Mussolini want from the Emperor.

Verses:

Abyssinia appealed to the league for peace  
Mussolini's actions were like a beast  
A villain, a thief, a highway robber  
And a shameless dog or a dictator.

He crossed the boarders and added more  
The Emperor had no intention for war  
That man I call a criminal  
The man destroyed church and hospital.

He said expansion he really need  
He has 45 million head to feed  
Why he don't attack the Japanese  
England, France, or hang on 'pon Germany.

The man want to kill Haile Selassie  
To invade his territory  
They begin to cry for food and water  
In that burning desert of Africa.

We have diamond, ruby and pearl  
Platinum, silver, and even gold  
I don't know why the man making so much strife  
I now believe he want Selassie wife.

If he want gold as a dictator  
Try—in Demerara  
Venezuela, or Canada  
Russia, or else in America.

## Appendix B

### WORKERS' APPEAL (calypso)

by The Growling Tiger

Anywhere you go you must meet people sad  
They search for employment, none can be had (repeat)  
They start to drop down dead in the street  
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep  
Our kind-hearted employers, I appeal now to you  
Give us some work to do.

We are not asking for equality  
To rank with the rich in society  
To visit their homes in their motorcars  
Or to go to their clubs and smoke their cigars  
We are asking for a living wage  
To exist now and provide for old age  
Our kind-hearted employers, I appeal now to you  
Give us some work to do.

Many a day people haven't a meal  
They too decent to beg, too honest to steal  
They go looking for work mostly everywhere  
But see signboard marked "no hands wanted here"  
The government should work the wastelands and hills  
Build houses, factories and mills  
Reduce taxation and then we would be  
Really emancipated from slavery.

The legislators only quarrel and fret  
About unemployment, but don't relieve us yet  
There is no vision that we can see  
To take us out from tribulation and misery  
We can't fight physically, for we wouldn't prevail  
On account of ammunition, cruel laws and jail  
But every man was born to be free  
From this oppression and tyrannic slavery.

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*Jan Carew*

# THE FUSION OF AFRICAN AND AMERINDIAN FOLK MYTHS

**My formal studies of the fusion of African and Amerindian folk myths began when I recreated six folktales I had heard in my childhood for a British Broadcasting Corporation programme. I wrote the six folk stories in dialect and broadcast them on the *BBC 3rd Programme*. They were entitled: “The Legend of Nameless Mountain”, “Anancy and Tiger”, “The Coming of Amalivaca”, “The Legend of Kaietuk”, “The Children of the Sun”, and “Kaie and Ichillibar”.**

I wrote the stories in dialect because they belonged to an oral tradition and I was convinced that writing them in literary English for a broadcast would rob them of a pristine eloquence and clarity.

The dialect of Agricola, my village, was close to singing. In their original form, the stories had to be acted, danced, sung impregnated with hypnotic cadences and tonal magic as the storyteller spun them out for his audience. A good storyteller had to be an actor, a dancer, a bard, a magician with words. Great storytellers, on the other hand, became legendary figures—archetypes looming large between men and gods, the urbane and the demonic, terror and ultimate redemption—they created enduring images in the minds of those who came under their spell.

Agricola, pressed between a wall of rain forest and the muddy east bank of the Demerara River, was a village of 1200 when I was a child. In its small circumference lived the descendants of African slaves, Indian indentured labourers (Hindus and Moslems), native Amerindians, Portuguese from Madeira, a sprinkling of Chinese, and Creoles who were mixtures of all the polyglot races living in Guyana.

Agricola was more than a village, it was a world in microcosm. In the midst of its varied cultures presided over by the official British colonial one, it is remarkable that African and Amerindian folk myths could have fused and survived.

There were two extraordinary prophet-storytellers who hailed from Agricola—Prophet Wills, an ex-schoolmaster and renegade lay preacher, and Jordan, a shoemaker who was the founder and Christ of the Jordanite sect.

Prophet Wills was a wanderer, a nomad, he went from village to village prophesying, denouncing the evil ways of the villagers, making rain in seasons of drought or shouting back floods when the rain gods were too prodigal with their showers. He told his stories obliquely, resurrecting secret gods and devils from a forbidden Afro-Amerindian pantheon. Jordan seldom left Agricola. What he had in common with the Prophet was this: he never hesitated to bring biblical characters into his pagan mythopoetic folk legends—Judas, Amanja, and the Amerindian Kanaima were fused into one, Elijah, Legba, Master of the Crossroads, and Amalivaca, the Christ of the Arawaks, became a composite character. Jordan and Prophet Wills, with their wild and untrammelled eloquence, brought legendary figures close enough to the villagers for listeners to feel the breath of characters like Anancy or Pia on their faces as the voices of these two prophet-storytellers brought them to life.

Jordan spun tales of redemption and escape. His serpent-tongue created a promised land which no Elysian Fields could rival, no Garden of Eden could match. He was a masterful creator of images. The reality he invented became more palpable, more real than the tawdry reality of Agricola itself, with its poverty and sickness; its collective claustrophobia induced by a vast forbidding forest pressing the village against the narrow, muddy riverbank.

The prophet was long-legged, wide-shouldered, a towering figure with red eyes that seemed to be fed perpetually by the burning cinders of his private obsessions. Jordan was small and deceptively quiet. He was forever concealing his power like a coiled snake. His voice was usually as gentle as the flutter of hummingbirds' wings, but there were times when without warning it could thunder like the roll of Apinti drums.

They were both born storytellers and the tales they told were like fantastic coats of many colours adorning austere traditional themes. The themes were the eternal ones of the struggle between the forces of good and evil. The two, the wanderer and the one who never strayed far from his village, were troubadours, archetypal messengers, culture bringers and inspired interpreters who stood between God and the villagers. They were the maestros of the storytelling profession, the spellbinders who attracted crowds of listeners, not in Agricola but everywhere in Guyana that they choose to go. In the village itself, however, there were many anonymous practitioners of the storyteller's craft, for folk legends were an intrinsic part of the extended family and its culture. In Agricola, with its semi-feudal economy, the extended family was not merely something we had inherited and took for granted, it was a necessary social unit for survival. The family storytellers were invariably older folk—grandparents, great-aunts and uncles or

old friends of the family. The children would assemble at bedtime and the tales would be spun out by the Old Ones. The tales would amuse, instruct and at times fill the young listeners with a delicious sense of terror, for the family storytellers were like the maestros, educators handing down cultural secrets from one generation to the other, and instructors in the basic moral and ethical canons by which the family was supposed to live. Many of the tales showed how wrongdoing was punished and virtue rewarded.

When he was a boy, my grandfather told me there were older people who were well known as storytellers, and one of them (they took turns) would walk down the main street of the village after sunset calling the children by their family names to come out. All children of six years and older would answer the summons and assemble under a silk cotton tree (every village had its silk cotton and in the gloaming, its lofty crown seemed to scrape the skies while its vast, buttressed roots provided an almost magical backdrop for the storyteller). In my time, this tradition had been discontinued. I heard my stories from my great-aunt, my douglah nurse (Afro-Amerindian) or at forbidden sessions which Jordan or the Prophet held in cathedral depths of the forest.

It became apparent after I had written *The Legend of Nameless Mountain* that the story had evolved out of a tradition that was neither purely African nor Amerindian, but essentially Guyanese. Therefore, the Guyanisation of the African and Amerindian folk legends was a phenomenon that I, as inheritor of the end product, had overlooked until I transposed one story from an oral into a written form and examined its symbols, its structure and its meaning for the first time. But let us, at this stage, examine some important elements in the mythopoetic traditions of the two parent cultures—the African and the Amerindian—from which the Guyanese folk myth derived.

The African survivors of the Atlantic crossing, disoriented by the experiences of violent capture, a forced march to the coastal assembly point, the brutal waiting period in barracoons and the crowded journey for two months or longer in the dark, heaving holds of slave ships, arrived in the New World like a person who was born again. The gods they had appealed to had been mute; day and night, light and darkness, time and space had been transformed irrevocably for these dark survivors. The only certainties they knew were that they were still alive after the trauma of being violently uprooted; that sea-drums pounding in their brain for months had wiped out every familiar sound that they had ever known. In the New World, the newcomers had to reconstruct the entire fabric of myth and reality for themselves. Fortunately for the uprooted African, their folk myths, with very few exceptions, are impregnated with realism, and myth and religion were fruit from the same tree. Their gods, devils, mythological archetypes were in a profound sense organic entities in a Human World, and, in the African tradition, they were held accountable at all times to the communities that acknowledged them. This symbiotic relationship between people, gods and folk archetypes gave to the New

World African a cultural resilience that made a significant contribution to his survival. Besides, the African brought with him, regardless of the mosaic of cultural groups from which he derived, a built-in ethic which bound him first, as a stranger in a strange land, to study and respect the host culture before he established elements of his own. This gave to the children of the African diaspora a means of surviving anywhere in order to do this. When the African arrived in the New World, he knew that the European who had brought him there was a usurper who had seized the land of the Indians, desecrated the graves and the altars of their ancestors, and sent countless of the ones who had welcomed them to the Forest of the Long Night. It was clear to the African slaves that in order to escape the terrible retribution that was certain to overtake their masters, they had to make peace with both the living and the dead in this new land. Their meeting with their Indian hosts was, therefore, a matter of profound cultural importance. The African had to recreate his vision of himself in the universe after being violently uprooted and brought to the New World as a slave and he knew that without the help and active collaboration of the Indian this would not have been possible. To use his master's eyes to see himself and the world and to even appear to be an accomplice in his atrocious deeds would have left him, the African, with a permanent heritage of self-hatred, distorted self-images and guilt. In order to reconstruct his ontological system, the African was compelled by the logic of his own cultural past to establish relations with his Indian host independent of the white man. But it was the white man who created the meeting-points. At the beginning of the Columbian era, both Indians and Africans were enslaved.

In 1502 Ovando, the Governor of Hispaniola, introduced the first Africans to the domains he ruled. In 1505 Herrera, the New World's first Spanish historian, tells us there was a major slave rebellion in which Indians and Africans joined forces against a common enemy. That this kind of united effort should have taken place after having known each other for only three years seems extraordinary, and it certainly baffled Herrera. Ovando, reacting to this and to other rebellions in nearby San Juan de Puerto Rico, wrote home to Spain suggesting that no more Wolofs (a general name given to Africans who were Moslems) be sent to the New World since "they walked rebelliously through the land" and no sooner had they set foot in the Indies than "they [began] to disaffect the Indians". Neither Herrera nor Ovando seemed to have been aware of the fact that the African and Amerindian cultures were complementary ones; that for both of these peoples the land, the fields, the mountains and valleys could never be the object of private ownership; the life of the people was determined by the life of plants and animals, that is, by the life of the environmental surroundings which are in turn ruled by the rhythm of seasons. The Nature they conceived of was one animated by vital hidden forces of which man is but a part that must abide by their harmonious order. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians of North America could have been speaking for Africans

and Amerindians everywhere when he said,

The earth was created by the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was...the measure of the land and the measure of our bodies is the same.... The one who has the right to dispose of land is the one who created it....

It was from this united vision of man and his environment that Africans and Amerindians created their profound cultural accommodations.

Both Amerindians and Africans saw themselves as part of a Human World which existed in stasis, and in the quietude of this state, future time hardly existed at all. If people occasionally erupted out of stasis, they disintegrated only to be reborn into the world-balanced-in-suspense which they left.

In the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, one of the most lucid and sophisticated genesis myths of the Americas, the states of stasis, disintegration and rebirth are clearly defined.

This is the story of how everything was in suspense, everything becalmed, wrapped in silence, everything immobile, silent and empty in the vastness of the sky.

This is the first account, the first reasoned utterance. There was neither man, nor animals, nor birds, fishes, crabs, trees, stones, caves, ravines, herbs nor forests; only the sky existed.

The surface of the earth had not appeared, there was only the calmness of the sea and the sky stretching into infinity.

Nothing made a sound, nothing moved or shifted or made any noise in the sky.

There was nothing standing erect, only the water sleeping, the sea, becalmed, solitary and tranquil. Nothing had the gift of existence.

There was only immobility and silence in the darkness, in the night. Only the Creator, the Originator, Tepeu, Gucumatz, the progenitors, were in the water surrounded by an indefinite translucency. They were concealed under green and blue feathers, that is why they called Gucumatz. It was their nature to be great and wise men, great thinkers. In this way the sky came to be and also the Heart of Heaven which is the name of God and the way he is called.

Then the word came into being. Tepeu and Gucumatz met in the darkness of the night, and they talked to each other and meditated; they reached an agreement, marshalling their words into thoughts.<sup>1</sup>

At this stage, when words were put together to create thoughts, the gods then abandoned the silence and their contemplative posture and set revolutionary changes in motion. But they were all creative changes. The Mayan worldview in this genesis myth is one that conceives of change but not of destruction. The story continues:

Then while they meditated, it was clearly manifested to them that at dawn man should appear. So they decided on the creation and the growth of trees and bees and the birth of life and the creation of man. This was resolved in the darkness and in the night by the Heart of Heaven called Hurricane.

The first is called Cacuhla Hurricane. The second is Chipe-Caculha. The third is Ruxa-Caculha. And the three are the Heart of Heaven.

Tepeu and Gucumatx then came together, and they conferred about life, and the light of existence; they decided on how daylight and dawn would come to pass and who should produce food and nourishment.<sup>2</sup>

The Mayans saw the creation of earth and the creation of man as almost simultaneous events.

“Let it come to pass! Let the emptiness be filled! Let the water recede and empty the space. Let the earth break forth and settle.” Thus they spoke. “Let day come. Let the dawn break in the sky and over the earth! There will be no glory or greatness in our creation and formation until the human being exists, until man is formed.” Thus they spoke.<sup>3</sup>

The *Popol Vuh* continues in measured mythopoetic tones to show how all living creatures came to live on earth. It tells of how Man was first made the equal of the Creators, the Heart of Heaven and the Heart of the Earth. But, because this left Man knowing and seeing all things, it made him indifferent to the challenge of new creations, of propagation and the knowledge of change. Therefore

Heart of Heaven blew his breath in their eyes which misted as when one blows upon the surface of a mirror. Their eyes became blurred and they could only see what was near to them.<sup>4</sup>

This then was the first cataclysmic change to overtake Man, the first in what was to be an eternal cycle. The Africans, after one examines a great variety of their myths, do not on the whole share the almost universal preoccupation of Amerindians with the creation of the world. But the *Popol Vuh*, nevertheless, is close to African mythopoetic traditions. For African myths are impregnated with realism and in them gods and men are never far apart, and the former are eternally responsible to the people they both rule and serve. The genesis myth of the Amerindians around Lake Titicaca, for example,

who saw the world beginning when the Great Serpent stirred in the depths of the sea, makes the whole conceptual framework of creators and creation far more abstract than that of the *Popol Vuh*. One of the West African myths which tells of the creation of men and not of the world was preserved by the Maroons of Jamaica.

Once the earth was created, the story goes, Damballa, one of the senior members of the pantheon of gods, created men by baking cakes. The burnt cakes were the ancestors of black men, those that were neither well baked nor underdone were the ancestors of brown men, while white men were sired by cakes Damballa neglected to bake at all. This story is also told by Amerindians in Guyana, but in their version they claim that the brown cakes, the most perfect ones, were their ancestors. One suspects that this particular version could well be Carib since Caribs are obsessed with a persistent fantasy of being a chosen people.

The *Popol Vuh* with its muted abstractions and its mythopoetic statements made with the clarity of a message sent by talking drums, was perhaps one of the first profoundly successful attempts to make the universe coherent and intelligible by the children of an Asian diaspora who had been wanderers in the Americas for so long.

The African, coming from a continent in which *Homo sapiens* made his appearance, had a longer and more continuous experience of belonging to a homeland than any other peoples. He carried in him mankind's original memories. To have survived the savageries of slavery in the New World, to have retained essential elements of his African culture while at the same time quickly adjusting to and assimilating new ones—Amerindian, European, and in some instances Asian—remain a unique and miraculous achievement.

The slave from Africa and his descendants assimilated elements of European culture rapidly enough to ensure not only his own survival in the New World but also that of Amerindians and, later, of the minorities of colour like East Indians, Chinese, Afro-Portuguese from the Azores and others like the Indonesians in Suriname as well.

The legend of the Third Gift offers profound insights into the role of cultural intermediary and, in some cases, culture bringer that the African played in the New World. This legend was brought to the Canje River district of Guyana by members of the Ejau tribe. The Ejaus, an extraordinarily creative and gifted people, lived mostly in the Niger River basin in what is now Nigeria. They are fishermen, farmers, hunters and are famous for their skills in making weapons. It was a source of pride that the Ejau could have his weapons for hunting made to order—a stabbing knife, a cutting knife, a spear with the balance and feel of a precision instrument, or bows and arrows shaped like living extensions of the body, the arm the mind's eye.

The Third Gift really deals with the symbolic and actual transition from a nomadic stage to one of permanent settlement. The legend tells us of a weary, itchy-rooted

people driven by epochs of drought, hunger and destitution to a green place at the foot of a high mountain. The prophet who leads them there dies as soon as they begin to settle down. But, before he dies, he tells his people that they must send all the men of the tribe up the mountain, and the one who climbs to the highest point and brings back a gift for the people should be made Chief. In the young men's first sally up the mountain, the one who climbed the highest brought back a shining stone—a marvel of indented surfaces and colours, and this stone was the symbol of the gift of work, for with it they could shape and sharpen their tools. The second gift that a young man brought back was a flower, symbol of beauty. But, implicit in this legend is the suggestion that, between the gifts of work and beauty was language, and language was not a gift but a necessary skill tied to the work-act. The spoken word becomes necessary when group activities—like ploughing, sowing, harvesting and the other varied and complex communal tasks—have to be coordinated.

In the legend, too, beauty and function were synonymous—girls wore flowers in their hair, the prows of canoes and doors had flowers sculpted on them. But, after having received the gifts of work and beauty, the people were still restless. They were still vulnerable to the primordial impulse to wander that nomads have buried in their beings. So, when the young men set out up the mountain for the third time, they knew that the one who climbed the highest had to bring back a gift that would be the most important of all. The winner of this contest of endurance and skill brought back the gift of fantasy, of imagination, of faith. He breached ramparts of Heaven above the clouds and reached the snow-capped peak of the mountain. Once there, he tried to bring back a handful of snow. But it melted on the way down to the warm plains. So, using words creatively for the first time, he painted a picture of the wonders he had seen, and the magic he imparted to the word made it possible for his people to share vicariously in what only gods had had a divine right to experience before the telling of this story.

In the legend Ika, the bringer of the Third Gift, tells us,

“I went up to the clouds and over and above them, and I don't know how long it took because past the clouds was a brightness that blinded my eyes. Then, there came a time when all I felt was a soft carpet under my feet, and when I breathed in the mountain air, it was like drawing knife blades up my nostrils. When my sight came back, I found myself on the mountain top...”

“Lord! You must have seen the whole world from there, Ika!” a young man exclaimed.

“Yes, and while I stood up there, a soft white thing like rain started to fall...and yet it wasn't rain because it fell like leaves when there is no

wind. I gathered this downy whiteness in my hand, but the further down the mountainside I ran, the less of it I was holding, so I went back for more and ran down the mountain again. Four times I did this, and every time I was heading for home bird-speed, this magic thing melted in my hand. All I bring with me now is the memory of it, the feel of the sky and the bite of the wind...and the fire and ice burning my hand.”

And the people listening believed, for this quiet young man, when he did speak, could warble like singing-birds-sweet, and when he spoke, his words would grow inside your head like seeds.

Ika became prophet of the Jubas, for he had brought the best gift of all, the gift of Fantasy, of Imagination and of Faith. So, with the gifts of Work and Beauty and Imagination, the Jubas became poets and bards and creators, and they live at the foot of Nameless Mountain to this day.<sup>5</sup>

Fire and endless movement were eternal realities in the Amerindian cosmology and also constant factors in both the Amerindian myth and actuality. The bringer of fire to man in Amerindian myth, however, is not a cosmic figure like Prometheus, but Wao-uno, the white crane, a fragile and vulnerable creature.

When we delve into the primordial memories buried deep in the most ancient culture-stratum in the Americas, we discover Pia and Makunaima, the Children of the Sun, at once the most typical and most universal creations of Amerindian mythology. Paul Radin, commenting on this, writes:

the Children of the Sun! It is clearly recognizable despite many transformations. How, we may indeed ask, did this favourite story of the Southwest of the United States, of the Pawnee and Arikara or Nebraska and North Dakota, of the Winnebago of Wisconsin, come here?<sup>6</sup>

And by “here” he meant the Guyana Highlands, and the sacred mountain Roraima-of-the-red-rock. Perhaps the answer is that, in the millenniums that go back into prehistory, the original inhabitants of both North and South America had discovered how accessible these continents had always been from within, so that the migratory waves that carried the myth with them had woven it into a broad, cohesive and indestructible cultural matrix which remains miraculously intact to this day.

Pia and Makunaima, the legend goes, learned the art of making fire from Crane, having seen him strike his beak against a flint and the friction send off a shower of sparks. So, in the instant of seeing this almost capricious act of Crane’s, the Children of the Sun discovered the gift of Fire, and set out to perform gigantic tasks as builders, creators and culture-heroes.

The brothers placed huge rocks in all the rivers to detain the fishes: the rocks thus placed caused the great waterfalls. Crane was at first accustomed to catch his own fish, but finding Pia and Makunaima more successful fishermen after the river had been dammed, kept near to them and took their fish.<sup>7</sup>

Having brought the gift of Fire to man, and having tamed the rivers, Pia and Makunaima set out on a long journey with their mother, and when she became tired they took her to the vast and spacious tableland on the summit of Roraima, and this became her final home. After leaving his mother at the top of Roraima, the legend continues,

[t]hen came a change of occupation for Pia. He abandoned the hunt as the sole or principal occupation of his life, and travelled from place to place teaching the Indians many useful and good things.<sup>8</sup>

It is at this point that Pia assumes his stature as a culture hero. He evolves from the hunting stage, and having done this, he begins to codify the gains that have been made and to advance toward new achievements. He becomes a teacher, a prophet, a magician. But, in the midst of all these transformations, he must remain close to the roots of life. He does this through his Earth Mother. For, although he disappeared finally from men, he first remained a while with his mother on Roraima. And when he was about to depart, he told her that all her wishes for good would come true if she bowed her head and covered her face with her hands while she made her wish. This she does to this day, for

[w]henver the mother of these two heroes of our race is sorrowful, there arises a storm in the mountain, and it is her tears, that run down in streams from the heights of Roraima.<sup>9</sup>

Pia then became the father of all prophet-priests in the Americas. He is the ancestor of the piaimen. They are his spiritual descendants, the inheritors of this mythopoetic dreams. It is significant that Pia and Makunaima, the original culture-heroes of all the Americas, built the culture of this hemisphere on foundations of creative labour. Their first mission as culture- bringers was to transform the world for the benefit of all, and in the process to change their own natures. The acts of creative labour which they performed made it impossible to sit idly on the heights of Roraima with their mother. So, they returned to the human world where they would remain forever.

They thus established forever indissoluble links between the spiritual and material worlds.

Marx, in Volume I of *Das Kapital*, described labour in a way that would have made the Children of the Sun qualify as the first Heroes of Labour in the Americas. He wrote:

Labour is in the first place a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls between himself and nature. He opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms, legs, heads, the natural forces of his body in order to appropriate nature's production in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.<sup>10</sup>

It is against the background of the primordial myth of the Children of the Sun that the cruel and fantastic reality of the Columbian history of the Americas unfolded itself. And yet this myth, buried under borrowed cosmologies, must be resurrected if a genuine liberation of all classes and races in the hemisphere must take place. The indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Africans who joined them, at a stratum of destitution which pressed down upon them both like an incubus, shared at a psychic level a respect for the sun which bordered on terror. In the cosmologies of both peoples, the sun was cruel and the darkness kind. The symbols of the two peoples—black and white, darkness and light—were the opposite to what they had become in the European cosmology. White was for Africans and Amerindians alike, the colour of devils or of nemesis. On the other hand, it was in the cool darkness of the womb, the Forests of the Long Night, the Rivers of Night that men and gods found peace and sustenance.

In the plethora of Amerindian tales about the Children of the Sun, neither Pia and Makunaima nor their mother are acknowledged by Father Sun as kith and kin. Mother and sons live in the Human World while Sun lives in the wide indifference of the sky.

But, although Sun remains aloof from his sons and their mother in the myth, his organic links with man and his endless seasons of creative labour remain a constant. For Sun, even though he is distant, remains a pivotal and living element, the embodiment of movement and fire and a fantastic reality in the endless cycle of seasons. The Amerindian worldview is shaped by a dominant cultural impulse to merge with all living things around him. His art and crafts, his religion and ritual are collective enterprises that link him to a world within a cosmos. It is in this context that his links with Sun are established. Sun journeys daily across the sky. "Sun," says the Guyanese poet A. J. Seymour, "is a burning fire turning on air," and then the poet adds: "Sun's in my blood today." Seymour is, in his poem to the sun, echoing the Akan belief that the original life cell

is a divine element—a created thing which God has made for man and which he gave him as a gift, as it were[,] they believe that God, whom

they sometimes call Nyankopon, shoots a particle of the sun's fire into the bloodstream of the child, thus bringing the blood to life.<sup>11</sup>

Sun is, therefore, a dialectical entity in Amerindian and African beliefs: it is distant and yet it's in the blood: It is a godlike being, and yet it has anthropomorphic links with the human world; and with the Amerindians, its most fundamental links are created through its eternal cycles of movement and its offspring Pia and Makunaima. The legend tells us, too, that the godlike remote Sun sweats, and that gold is the Sun's sweat. Gold, for the Amerindian, was not in itself a sacred metal; rather it was a soft and plastic metal which could be used to sculpt sacred objects. The value of the gold lay in its being transformed through man's genius and his reverence for the Sun into objects of worship.

The conquistadors melted down the sacred sculpture of the Amerindians with such greedy haste that the spiritual heirs of Pia and Makunaima, the priests and the magicians, accused them of "raping the sun". It is interesting that the principal setting of the legend of El Dorado, the Golden City, was the Guyana Highlands, which extend to all points of the compass from Roraima. Roraima-of-the-red-rock—the ever fertile source of streams—is how the Amerindians address the sacred mountain in their poem-hymns.

From the summit of Roraima, it is as if all the vast spaces of the South American Continent are willing to reveal their secrets to you. One sees the limitless vistas of the heartland—the Llanos, the Pakaraima, Kanaku, Rupununi and Akarai sierras, and the forests like a petrified green ocean leading to the secret junction of the Orinocco and Amazon rivers.

This region, the Amerindians say, devours men and their dreams when the dreams are out of tune with the spaces around them.

It was in this region that Pia and Makunaima came to the parting of the ways. Pia became the prophet of hope, the purveyor of all things positive, the spiritual ancestor of the priest, the magician, the piaman. Makunaima, his twin brother, on the other hand became the archetypal figure of evil, the spiritual ancestor of Kanaima. Kanaima is in the Amerindian cosmology the ultimate embodiment of evil, a symbol of terror, nemesis stalking human beings in cool forests of the night; he can transform himself into an animal, a reptile, a bird or a ball of fire.

This dialectical situation of the good Pia opposing the evil Makunaima is common to the foremost mythological archetypes of both the African and the Amerindian. The African equivalent to Pia and Makunaima is B'ra Anancy, the Spiderman. He is the embodiment of both good and evil, for in African religion and philosophy good and evil are in the eyes of the beholder and not necessarily in separate persons, objects or

things where one is juxtaposed against the other. But Anancy as a trickster, the other side of Anancy the godlike figure, the rainmaker, the lightning rod, the thunder-axe, the guardian of the rainbow, is more benign than Kanaima, and it was as a benign and supremely clever trickster that he was brought by West Africans to the New World. For the uprooted slave the hard-pressed post-emancipation black peasant and those Amerindians whose destinies had become inextricably bound up with the black peoples—the black Caribs, the Seminoles, the Caribs of Dominica and those Afro-Amerindian communities on the vast littoral from Peru on the Pacific to Southern Brazil on the Atlantic—Anancy, with his agile brain and his invincible instinct for survival, became the foremost symbol of wish fulfillment. For Anancy the trickster, no matter how impossible the odds against him seemed to be or how mighty his opponents, inevitably came out on top, winning for himself food, women, land, respect and liberty without the cruel tasks that those escaping with him vicariously were compelled to perform for such trifling rewards.

B’ra Anancy, the Spiderman, God or Trickster, is an African archetype who finally linked man to all things in the universe. The choice of the spider as an archetype fits perfectly into the cosmological visions of the African peoples. The spider is shaped like the sun or like a wheel. The sun is a giver of life whilst the wheel is the most important of man’s inventions. Thus the spider is a symbol of man’s link with time, space, the mysteries of Nature and man’s creative labour. Wiener writes:

In Africa the spider is connected with an enormous number of tales. And among the Hausas, the rainbow is called “bakan gizzo” literally “the spider’s bow”, which indicates the relation which the divinities that came down from heaven bear to the spider. Indeed since the spider is the king of cunning and craftiness, all fables are told in his name.

An important point to note about Anancy, is that his bow, the rainbow, is called “Gajjimare”, god of rain and storms which has the shape of a snake “and is double gendered, the male part being red, the female blue...it lives in the storm clouds but is supposed to come out at night and is also said to inhabit all watering places...so a pot is kept full in every house.”<sup>12</sup>

Anancy, the trickster or god, was a para-symbolical figure, and hence a mythological archetype that could be transplanted in spite of the most daunting challenges. Anancy, the king of all cunning, linked as he was with all things human and divine, could stretch his bow, the Rainbow Serpent, across the Atlantic, and find there new watering places.

Anancy's Rainbow Serpent had the same symbolic and mystical meaning for the Hausas, the Mandingos or the Bambara peoples of West Africa that Quetzalcoatl, the Shining Serpent, had for the Toltecs or the Mexicas of Mexico. The snake, a symbol of fertility, strength, mystery or terror, threads its way through the myths of Africa and the Americas. The Amerindians around Lake Titicaca believed that the world was created when the Snake God, stirring in the murky depths of the ocean, raised the earth on his back.

In parts of the Guyanas and the Caribbean islands, Anancy the godlike figure merged into the Amenindian piaiman, the Patamoona Blow-man and sorcerer, or else he fused with West African gods, like Legba, Master of the Crossroads, Shango, Damballa, or Obi-Myal. For the sons and daughters of the African diaspora, there was no single figure like Kanaïma embodying the ultimate in evil, but there was Obeia, an aberrant cult of evil whose practitioners were regarded as pariahs and outcasts in Guyana and the Eastern Caribbean, although the original West African god Obi was a symbol of both evil and good. The myal cult in Jamaica is the more positive side in the Obi-Myal religion which was transplanted in a sundered form in the Eastern Caribbean and Guyana.

Anancy the trickster became the most popular folk hero for black peoples everywhere south of the United States. Afro-American adopted Brer Rabbit and Brer Tortoise, mythological archetypes from East Africa. There is even a folk tale in the American South in which Brer Rabbit wins out in a contest with Anancy, as if to mark, symbolically, the boundary beyond which the King of Tricksters could not trespass.

Language played an important part in forging the powerful links that were to bind the Amerindian and black peoples together. The African, creating functional oral languages out of the sophisticated and class-oriented European ones, was able to give to the Amerindian enough of the colonizer's language to ensure his survival. The Caribs of Dominica, the only survivors of this courageous people in the Caribbean archipelago, no longer speak their own language. Only the older people have retained some words and phrases, but they all speak a French patois, taught them not by the French or the English, but by the black peoples of Dominica and the neighbouring islands with whom the Caribs have been in continuous contact for more than four centuries.

Caliban, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, accused Miranda, "You taught me language," and indeed he could well have explained that the initial teacher of a language is in a position to make it an inheritance for bondage or for liberty. And Prospero the cunning, the cruel, the eloquent colonizer and his daughter Miranda were interested in a monopoly of liberty for themselves at Caliban's expense. The Calibans of the Americas made of Prospero's language an inheritance for liberty, not only for themselves but for Amerindians and all the oppressed races and classes that were to settle in this hemisphere.

For the African slave in the New World the myth became more heightened, more palpably real, more necessary to his survival. Somewhere in his psyche was an eternal dream of returning home and rejoining the spirits of his ancestors, and because of this his mythological archetypes were transformed to meet the new challenges.

Brer Rabbit and Tortoise were important folk archetypes from East and Central Africa which took root in North America. Brer Rabbit was in his African homeland Sungura the Hare. It is interesting that a millennium earlier Aesop, an African slave who had won his freedom because of his wit and his agile brain, had immortalized the Hare and the Tortoise in one of his fables.

Aesop's original name was Luqman. He was a famous creator of fables in the Arab world, and is mentioned with respect by Muhammad in the twenty-first chapter of the Koran. Luqman was said to have been an Ethiopian, that is, a Negro slave. His stories were passed on to Greece where he became known as Aithiops. Aesop is the end product of the false assumption that Luqman's name and country of origin were the same.

The mythological archetypes which took root in the Americas, Brer Rabbit and Tortoise in North America and Brer Anancy in the Caribbean archipelago and parts of South and Central America, were symbols of cunning and invincibility in the face of terrible odds.

A vivid symbol of this invincibility can be found in the Tar-Baby, a famous character in the Uncle Remus stories of the Afro-American. Tar-Baby is an archetypal symbol of the oppressed—black and indestructible, endowed with the strength and powers of resistance of both the male and the female. Its tormentors were themselves worn out raining blows upon its head and in the end the aggressor becomes the victim. Tar is black, plastic, capable of being poured into any mould; the harder it becomes, the more vulnerable it is, the more easily it can be pounded into dust; its strength lies in appearing to be soft and yielding. Finally, after it is pounded into dust, it can be melted down and returned to a pristine plastic form.

The Tar-Baby tale type, we have often been told, is of Amerindian origin, but it is one of those tales that has prototypes in both African and Amerindian folklore. The Africans brought to the New World as their particular prototype a wax-girl. Professor Van Sertima tells of how the Temme of West Africa believe that Anancy, the Spiderman, owes his grotesque shape to an encounter with the wax-girl. He became stuck to her and had to be forcibly detached.

The wax-girl and the Tar-Baby fused into one and the same symbol for both Amerindian and African in the face of the coloniser's depredations.

For slaves anxious to conceal their persistent longing for freedom, the animal story was a perfect vehicle. To those unschooled in the subtleties of an oral tradition in which speech inflections, facial expression, gesture and the infinite variety of feelings that wove themselves in and out of the storyteller's narrative, animal stories could easily be dismissed as infantile, but because of this, political, historical and cultural messages could be more safely woven into a seemingly amusing or innocuous story. The storyteller could also implant in every tale the idea of the moral right of the weak to struggle against the mighty by any means necessary.

For the slave the rabbit was a communal creature, swift, fragile, cunning, its habit of procreation legendary. It had survived down the ages when stronger and more ferocious enemies had in their pride rushed into extinction. The rabbit, too, was gentle, loyal, loving. Although each warren was a fortress unto itself, it lived and survived in groups. Its fear was so terrible that it could cause its death. On the other hand, this habit of fear made it acutely sensitive to all vibrations in air and land and sky. And whenever it conquered its fear and fought back, its rage was so sudden, so unexpected that predators with ten times its strength would pull back and in that instant of hesitation give it a final chance to escape. And finally it could adapt to any conditions of climate or geography and become an organic part of the rhythms of life, procreation and death in any environment in which it found itself.

The most important feature about the tortoise is its hard protective shell into which it can retreat and hide from most of its enemies. It is slow but has phenomenal endurance on land or in water. It is most vulnerable when it is uprooted. The eagle, its most formidable enemy, must carry it aloft and dash it to pieces on the rocks. It is a plodding, secretive creature, slow to anger, and deliberately acting the part of a buffoon so that its enemies could leave it alone or underestimate its strength and cunning. The only time that it is swift and graceful is when it is swimming underwater. But on land it is a creature of the Antaeus legend, strongest when its feet are planted firmly on the earth. Sometimes its whole bearing gives one the impression that it is immeasurably sad, as though it was burdened with the griefs of all other living creatures.

The folk archetypes etched on the palimpsest of my mind were the creations of gifted storytellers—the maestros and the family practitioners of the craft—and these stories form an important part of the spectrum through which I view the modern world.

When I took my swift journey from Agricola into the twentieth century, one that spanned a distance in time of three centuries, these stories helped me to survive the awesome psychological and social pressures that beset me. Today, the extended family in Agricola is dissolving, and smaller, disconnected and impersonal family units are taking its place. In this changing situation, the traditional storyteller is becoming an

endangered species. There are still a few old people who remember the stories but the youth, preoccupied with other concerns, no longer listen to them.

Ivan Forrester, a poet, painter, musician and storyteller, is probably the last great exponent of the dying art. He is nearing middle age, and, in the tradition of Prophet Wills who died decades ago, wanders restlessly up and down the country, but in a very real sense he is prophet without honour in his own country and after him it is unlikely that there will be other storytellers of the same genre.

The Amerindians, who until recently functioned from isolated and often nomadic communities in the Guyana hinterland, are now having their forest sanctuaries violated. Their journey into the twentieth century, a longer one in time and distance than the people of Agricola had to take, is equally precipitate, and as far as the survival of their folk myths is concerned, disastrous. The extended family, which was also a built-in fact of life in their communities—one made up traditionally of families, clans and tribes—is also dissolving, and what is crystallising is an aberrant social growth.

The fusion of Afro-Amerindian folk myths, a matter of enormous cultural significance in the New World, offers us an opportunity to view the entire Columbian era through a spectrum of the Human World. The storyteller and the story were synonymous when the oral tradition was the one through which the indigenous culture was handed down from generation to generation. The stories now have to be transposed into a written form not just as dull ethnographical material for scholars but as living artistic creations.

1. Suni Paz, *Popol Vuh*. Unpublished translation.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Jan Carew, *The Third Gift* (Boston: Little Brown, 1975).
6. Radin, *Indians of South America*.
7. Radin.
8. Radin.
9. Radin.
10. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*.
11. James H. Neal, *Ju-Ju in My Life* (George G. Harrap & Co).
12. Weiner, *Africa and the Discovery of America*, Vol. 2.

*Keith Jardim*

# Dreaming of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Kuwait, April 2014

*for Gilberte O'Sullivan, in memoriam*

Every time I read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I learn more about sadness, horror, history, writing, people, civilization, man and woman relations, race, joy, freedom, the author herself, power, corruption, hate, love, hate again, terrorism, paranoia, mystery, lies, revenge, hate, *again and again*, cruelty, torture, jealousy, insanity, beauty of humanity, beauty of sea, beauty of blue, beauty of woman, beauty of land, beauty of trees, beauty of being in a green night—sacred beauty of green and blue and black—beauty of prose, of painting, colour, life, music. I see, too, in the prose colours of sunlight and blood, of red wine and bruises. I learn so much, I weep; I choke up talking about the book, and I must cough to hide my feelings from the students. I make a bad joke, something about those crazy white Creoles of the Caribbean. Look! I say: One of them stands before you! He is your teacher! We laugh. But we can only escape history for a few seconds, perhaps a minute, if we are lucky.

Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I save myself, and each time this happens I learn about what the most important of the arts—literature—can do. It saves me. It has saved me. It will continue to save me. Literature is the only true salvation. It holds the history of humanity to account.

We need better readers.

I say all of this to my students, all young women. Read, I say. Save the world.

They do not complain. It will be enough if they save themselves.

People who read can do anything, I say. Some readers can even save the world.

Then there is the dream, a few days after that class. Alone at night in my big apartment in the desert, I dream of Jean Rhys sitting in an elegant rocking chair on the verandah at Granbois estate. She rocks back a little bit, and forward a little bit, hardly a sound in the bluest hour of the late blue afternoon. Her cotton dress is long and white, cool, and she is at ease, her face expectant of something, or someone. And here she is, Christophine, tall and straight as a golden sunbeam in the forest; she, too, is in white, long and flowing, her head tied with a cloth of red and black. Her arms and neck are

bare, the colour of dark rum and dark honey. She has an ornate silver tray with two cups of bull's blood coffee, and she gives one to Jean Rhys. She leans the silver tray against the railings of the verandah's banister. Together they sip, looking at each other; they hold hands, they stroke one another's necks, smiling, sipping the coffee. I can taste it: hot, sweet, and black.

Then something strange and unexpected: Christophine puts her coffee on top of the banister, where it balances miraculously, she takes the silver tray in her strong hands and hefts it, and with a powerful twist of her upper body and arm, her bare shoulder tensing and her white dress dancing briefly, the tray leaves her flicking right hand that shapes into the *adieu* the hand can give, the sign of farewell, the greeting for eternity. The tray slices and cuts through the green leaves of the island's forest, sounding like the hiss and crackle of fire.

Then something stranger and miraculous and sad promises to happen, *if*. In the dream I know that what may happen will change everything, the world will change so much that even human imagination will cease to be as it is. There is a dangerous promise of even the stars going out, of no more stars bursting into existence. A monster will eat us all, with a mouth so vast that mountains will disappear, all the mountains of the world. Then the monster will cough their dust against the stars.

Jean Rhys and Christophine wait, still cool, still elegant, and quiet. They look out over the verandah at the trees, the sloping hills and the greenest mountains, to the sea, its blue the sweetest purest hope any human heart could wish for.

The women gaze into eternity. They yawn once or twice.

Then: "They coming, Mistress," says Christophine. "Don't fret. Of course, the men will arrive first. That is the order."

Jean Rhys smiles, her eyes laughing. She lifts the obeah woman's hand high, squeezes it, and brings it to her lips.

Andrew Armstrong

# Looking Askance: A Commentary on Modes of Observation in the Letters of John Wickham

John Wickham's "Letter from Ferney", "Notes from New York", "Dutch Excursion", and "Letter from Geneva" form an epistolary "mailbox" of work from a Caribbean man of letters writing from abroad on places, faces and things from a way of seeing whose narrative "mode" can best be described as looking askance. They represent both Wickham's expression of the self abroad and his "reading" or writing about these public places. Wickham had already published his early short stories in the *Bim* of the early 1950s: "Blood Brothers", "The Blue Dress", "Christmas is for Children", and "Call It a Long Farewell", all in 1952; "Theresa", 1953; "Galvan and Calliana", 1954; and "All of Which Past", 1958, after the first of the letters examined here, "Dutch Excursion", 1957. The four letters under discussion were published in the collection *Casuarina Row* (1974), and all references are taken from this edition.

In this essay, I am reading Wickham as the modern artist; his modes of observation, and the spaces/places he portrays are reminiscent of CLR James' "essays" in *Letters from London*. Both James and Wickham write with a certain detachment from the place; something that can be termed "isolated marginality", which seems a necessity for this type of writing. James' two Bloomsbury essays, "The Bloomsbury Atmosphere" and "Bloomsbury Again", "The Houses" and "The Nucleus of a Great Civilisation" portray what Wickham elsewhere calls a "cynical sophistication". I am less interested in why Wickham is in these places than I am in the position he adopts in writing about them, as a West Indian writer/spectator/commentator with the discerning "I" of a Caribbean man of letters. Here the essayist meets the touristic observer; the general philosopher meets the short story writer; the pragmatist, the idealist. The small-island observer encounters the "bigness" and wealth of New York, Holland and Switzerland. I am interested in how he sees them as one "passing through" especially as one informed

not only by a colonial education but also by the streets of Bridgetown and Port of Spain. He refers to both Barbados and Trinidad often in these letters. How does this direct his way of seeing? I am “reading” here the use of address and anecdote; of the rhetorical question; of allusions to “back home” and an admiration for the “new” and foreign. My approach in this commentary is simple: a “reading” of each letter individually (in chronological order) identifying the tropes and form that demonstrate the “look-askance” in Wickham’s modes of observation of place, time and people.

“Dutch Excursion”, published in *Bim*, Vol. 7, No. 25 (July–December 1957), shows events narrated during the summer of 1956 in a journey across parts of Europe. Here we have Wickham as travel writer; observer; commentator and spectator. So much of travel writing is about border crossings both literally and literarily; the excursion across the countryside with the stopover at various places; and the movements through language, word choice and registers of address that show the reader what the writer, as travel writer, sees. In a sense, the whole article is a narrative excursion in what the writer sees, experiences and “reports”. Setting out from Charing Cross Station, London, on “a search for something I should more easily have found at home” (95). In Bruges, Belgium, the excursion took in a “braderie”, which Wickham describes as “much like Carnival in Port-of-Spain without the costumes and dancing in the streets” (99–100). Wickham, the spectator, becomes the spectacle: the curiosity of the people of Bruges at seeing a Black man walking along their streets is met with the wonderful understatement “but I could have wished they were more tactful and less obtrusive in their curiosity” (101). This is the “look-askance” in the title of the commentary; the use of understatement; that rueful look at the lookers as they gaze on the Black man.

The border crossing into Holland and the excursion through the towns of the country: Bergen-op-Zoom; Amsterdam, Rotterdam: journeying by bicycle and then by train: “We were no sooner in Rotterdam than out, and there was nothing there to fix the memory except that it was raining and a bowler hatted man with an umbrella showed us the way to the bicycle entrance of the railway station” (103). Travel, destination and memory all rolled into this pithy declarative statement. As John moves on, so, too, does the narrative flow: “Rotterdam-Leyden-Hague-Haarlem, then Amsterdam in the rain.... Next morning as we went out of Amsterdam a long queue was waiting to enter the Rijks-museum for the Rembrandt exhibition, but time was so precious that we had to forgo that pleasure” (103–104). Again, the reader is caught up in travel and time; time and narrative; this is both clock time and narrative time; the telling of a sequence of events in a journey that takes Wickham and the reader back to London, through the Belgium border and on to the English Channel. And in many ways Wickham has been working (writing) the literary channel in this piece as in his other travel journals. This is an excursion, as the writer titles the piece, and not a peregrination or wandering journey across this part of Europe, and the narrative accommodates or facilitates the manner

of the journey. In other words, this is not a long, rambling discourse but a studied commentary by an astute author.

An informed man of letters, a man of the world, Wickham concludes his “report” of the excursion with two events which had occurred during his travels, on his return to London: the newspapers were “referring to something called Laker’s Feat” (110) and, Wickham noted, “while I had been away Nasser had been busy” (110). Two historical events of the year 1956: Jim Laker’s feat of all 10 wickets in a test match innings in the Ashes match against Australia at Manchester in July (with a match haul of 19 wickets, having taken 9 in the first innings); and the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser as President of Egypt after having served as Prime Minister from 1954. These events, as he said, were part of “another story”.

We see admiration and scrutiny, a detached scrutiny, in his “Notes from New York” published in *Bim*, Vol. 9, No. 34 (1962)—a piece that seems to be guided by what he calls “one’s eavesdropping search for the elusive paradigm of the country” (93). James also engages in such in his Bloomsbury essays in the “notable” writers he meets; listening in to the “asides” and whispers while participating in literary “conversation”.

The writing in this “letter” captures the styles and idiom of what the writer caught of the New York that he experienced as city-walker, observer. Some of the writing here is seen in the Suttle Street scenes in his *Bim* 1967 short story “Meeting in Milkmarket”, which was later collected in *Discoveries*: the young narrator describes the sights, sounds and smells of the street and reaches a crescendo with “the girls of the town, their mouths filled with gold and curses, slutted and strutted along the narrow wet street” (125). Here, in his New York perambulations, we have Wickham as the urban observer with his linguistic “camera” capturing the many angles, turns, corners of the vibrant New York scenes. Yet he stops to question if this is the “authentic” city or the one made up for the travellers, the passersby. In this essay, we see him as the modern artist, his modes of observation, and the spaces/places he portrays. All the while playfully querying about finding “the authentic America”, knowing that it cannot be found in the variations of dialects and speech patterns, the music, the people, the club, or the cultural performance of the city. He cites a “friend”, a “cynical young man” for whom New York is not a city but an “arrangement of contiguous villages” (91). And, of course, there is the rhetorical: “But whatever it is, one is constantly being reminded that if it is not the United States, what then is?” (91–92) And writing this, as I am in 2026, it seems to address so much of what is the United States today!

In his own musings, Wickham (or his persona) is aware that “neither the effusions of Hollywood nor the brought-back-home tale of the American Wonderland had proven an adequate preparation” (88–89). And despite the many displays along the streets, even in the parts of Harlem he visited, he understands that “beneath all this surface

smoulders a massive antagonism hardly concealed by the hymn-singing contralto coming from a first floor window. Everything, from the remarkable singleness of expression on the faces (a mixture of fright and petulance) to the scribbles on the advertisement posters contributes to the impression of latent antagonism” (89). Why the “latent antagonism”? It is the early 1960s, and the civil rights discussion and rhetorics are ongoing; so, too, are the responses by the anti-civil rights officials. Wickham is aware that, amid much of the Black performance he sees, the music, the role-playing, there is the pain and anger of the American people. He recognises what he terms “the snarl” of some of those he meets in his journeys: a snarl “masked sometimes by the merest veneer of politeness but often blatant on street corner or in supermarket, strident and aggressive on the television commercials, as part of the vernacular” (90). And it is the variety and variegated nature of this “vernacular”—of language, style, sound and gesture—that Wickham’s hermeneutics “captures” so effectively in his “notes”. This is John Wickham’s interpretation of what he sees of New York.

In his ambulatory narrative through 49th Street, near Broadway: the actors rehearsing their lines, making their gestures; all the variety, the disjointed variety: “One can’t help thinking that all these disjointed scraps and scenes, these snatches of sentences, caught...in mid-air outside their frames of reference, are all part of a phenomenon that is substantially more than the arithmetical sum of its parts, all part of the idiom of this city” (91). The latter phrase is used in the 1967 short story “The Old Man and the City” in which John the narrator speaks of the idiom of Port of Spain. The observing writer/narrator and the language of the place. And there is a language of place here; it is what one might call a Wickhamesque idiom that seems specifically crafted to describe or even inscribe the images of the place represented. This appears a distinctive feature of his writing in these letters and in his short fiction as well. Then there are the allusions to back home as in the lady who wanted to hear his Bajan accent, to which he replied “not in this cold blood!” (93)

How to “read” New York and its racial politics? Wickham does not avoid the question which comes up in the essay’s conclusion, in his attendance at a performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Claudio’s response to Leonata when she asks if he is determined to marry her brother’s daughter. Claudio replies: “I’ll hold my mind were she an Ethiop.” To this Wickham critically avers: “At which it seemed as if a great hush descended upon the audience. Did one read too much in what might merely be a missing of the words or was there quietly at work a troubled tribal conscience whispering of integration and freedom riders and peace corps?” (94). The sarcasm here is conveyed with a level of cynical sophistication and should perhaps take the reader back to the essay’s opening paragraph in concluding this section: “...America and, thus, the individual American now find themselves, for better or for worse, caught

in the full glare of a world scrutiny in which no gesture goes unnoticed and no word unanalysed" (85). Published over sixty years ago, this is still so vital today.

**"Letter from Geneva", *Bim*, Vol. 10. Number 39 (1964)**

In this letter we have the Caribbean man of letters looking ruefully at what he sees of this wealthy European city. From the early ironic gesture on the emerging sun in the afternoon city to the decorated Genevois shop-windows and strolls along the neat pavements, the writer portrays a people, not without some sarcasm, in "an active act of possession" of what is theirs to have and enjoy. The opening lines of the letter says much about the writer's "look" and attitude here:

Last Sunday the sun emerged and shone for an afternoon upon the city. In the distance the peaks of the Jura glistened, and those Genevois who did not take their skis to the mountains came out to inspect the shop-windows and stroll along *their* pavements. *Their* pavements, because they walk along as if in fact they possess every square centimetre of them, *their* striding or *their* sauntering an active act of possession (111, emphases mine).

He observes the "composed etiquette" of the people, in their various faces and guises—for example, the interface between the "Professor" and the "Legionnaire" as required by the etiquette of the day; there is the "old" Mademoiselle and her younger Italian boyfriend as part of the urban spectacle.

A note of admiration at the high standard of living of the city; but he wonders at a feeling of depression on seeing this wealth on display. Perhaps a look back at his West Indian social conditions: "I had not expected the tidiness, the cleanliness, and modern high-standard-of-living efficiency to strike so depressing and dreary a note" (112). He writes with wit and sarcasm about this wealthy place and its people, aware of its history at the heart of Europe and its current role as "facilitator" of the migrant rich:

In the newer section of the town blocks of flats and offices are going up against the skyline as the international bodies proliferate, and the conference and permanent delegates cry you hungrily for lebensraum. The hotels go up, the bankers pull down their barns and build greater, until the Swiss economy cries out "Surchauffé!" and the government attempts to cry halt before havoc overtakes the whole fabric (112).

Wickham's use of the German word *lebensraum* here is "interesting" and perhaps doubly intended. On the one hand it denotes making more room for living and working space, but on the other it was a term used by Nazi Germany for more space for the German-speaking people. In addition, there's the idea of the Swiss economy

overheating. He employs the term “surchauffé” in emphasising the point. Here again, we have the rueful irony of the “glancing” eye! But Wickham continues:

All this growth has increased the transient and immigrant population until in the city crowds it is not an easy thing to find the Swiss who, one is told are somewhere quietly in their counting-houses counting up their money. And so the streets of the new town swarm with a well-fed and clearly prosperous but essentially faceless population who wear an undeniable look of not belonging. They indicate by virtue of a palpable, rather coarse curiosity, that they are not of this place and will, in time, when they have secured what they are seeking, go back to where they really come from, as the small islanders in the famous calypso were defined some years ago. They do not yet know that that time of return will never come, and perhaps it is as well that they don't (112–113).

There is so much to focus on in the above statement, not least of which is the caustic yet brutal truth it offers; the tone of mockery continues but this time with a deeper politicophilosophical look. The immigrants have “descended” on this “neutral” domain in the aftermath of postwar wealth and accommodation, like vultures seeking what they can find of leftover European largesse. They have brought their wealth with them to deposit in this safe haven. This is not the writer's chic but rather the open-eyed pragmatist as observer/commentator.

We see Geneva through the roving eye of the “narrator”, much like the Baudelarian flâneur—we encounter the faces, the l's and idioms of the place. However, having said this, I think Baudelaire's flâneur too inadequate a figure, in his ambulatory leisure and indifference, to effectively portray what Wickham is doing in this letter—as also in “Notes from New York”, and in “Ferney” and “Dutch Excursion”. This is probably the most “complete” of the letters “read” here and deserves a more comprehensive treatment/analysis than the brief and rather hurried one given here. Its sheer rhetorical force alone warrants a full essay.

In “Letter from Ferney” published in *Bim*, Vol. 11. Number 43 (1966), Wickham's observing “I” turns on the small town (village) of Ferney, in rural France. He writes not only of its small shops and exciting festivals but also of its sometimes quirky people. Whoever the addressee, he writes in the opening sentence: “This morning as I waited for the bus I *noticed* that they were cutting down some of the trees lining the Avenue de la Mairie which runs past Voltaire's statue and the post office” (78, emphasis mine). A simple, declarative sentence conveying casual observation, but also signalling the mode of observation that will dominate this letter. He goes on, “Saturday is market day in Ferney and the little square is transformed early in the morning into a scene which

makes me think of Maupassant's story 'A Piece of String'" (82). Perhaps unavoidably, as a writer/reader, Wickham turns to literature and Maupassant's astute observer. Wickham's observing "I" sees the various "actors" on the social stage: "the butchers put[ting] up their horse meat stalls", "the flower seller...next to the Café de la Mairie", "butter, eggs, poultry come from the outlying farms. The tiny street rings with 'Ca va, monsieur?' 'Bonjour, madame'" (82). The scene, a *tableau vivant*, captured with the painter's brush or the cinematic eye of the roving camera.

"Sunday morning is not much different. Then the cafes are full and the shops are full" (83).

"Ferney has its characters ..." (83). Again as readers we are drawn to his depiction of the *tableaux* created in stories like "Meeting in Milkmarket," "The Old Man and the City," "Lunch Hour", and the early scenes in "Christmas is for Children". In all of these, Wickham's use of language creates a vivid visual conveyance of the scene (seen), whether it be Suttle Street, Bridgetown or Port of Spain, or, in this case, Ferney.

But Ferney is also about history, France's cultural history and its celebration thereof. Wickham had obviously been staying there for a while and recalls: "One Sunday afternoon last September, Ferney and its little square, dominated by the statue of Voltaire, 'le patriarche de Ferney', were the centre of a gathering of brass bands [that] came from all the villages around—Thoiry, Gex, St Genis, Preveysin and there was even one from Divonne—fifteen or twenty of them" (79). One reads in this letter little of the at times biting sarcasm that there is in the New York "Notes" or "Letter from Geneva". There is an almost endearing feeling for Ferney conveyed in these lines, and this is perhaps best done in the closing paragraph:

The name of the village is really Ferney-Voltaire to commemorate its connection with the philosopher who lived here and loved the place.... It is not hard to understand the attraction Ferney had for the philosopher: it was near to the safety of Geneva, it was France and it was far from the turbulence and hazards of the Paris court. Something of this ambivalent attraction clings to the village still" (84).

The four letters "read" in this essay, each deserving separate and full-length treatment, show the Caribbean writer/observer/commentator at the height of his powers as travel writer, keen observer and intellectual (whatever this fraught term means today). Ultimately, it is about representation: to see a foreign society not as strange but as part of human society, while not being so naive as to ignore the economic and sociocultural differences between affluent Euro-America and the West Indies. Wickham's epistolary performance here shows that the way we *represent*

ourselves in the world, the way we *read* the world, is crucial to the way we live in it.

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## AFTERTHOUGHTS

Since this [earlier] article was first published, I have received a number of comments from friends and associates. Two said that they liked the article itself much more than they did the material which it attempted to “vindicate”. Now, I wasn’t really trying to vindicate anything, and, in fact, have stated where I myself would not have chosen all of the material which appeared in the issue. What I was doing was simply an attempt to join a growing debate about the nature of the West Indian experience, and to describe the *context* of contemporary West Indian poetry, as I see it. This is probably why I spoke more about what was happening in reggae and in the folk-urban jazz of Jamaica than about the magazine itself. Mr. Roach’s article convinced me that a number of people in the West Indies are prepared to talk about literature without understanding much about the context out of which such writing grows. If my article was attempting to do anything, then, it was to sketch in some of the background relevant to an understanding of the material in the *Savacou* anthology.

Another comment which I ought to reply to has been the feedback on the last paragraph of the article, where I said that most of today’s strident youth will be little different from last generation’s once angry, now tired rebels, after twenty years have elapsed. This last paragraph was taken as a sign of my own despair. So it was. In my short life, I’ve already seen so much fraudulence and erosion of spirit through folly, absurd politics and naked dishonesty on all levels of existence, that I cannot with any honesty be anything but a pessimist. Also, I feel that a great deal of West Indian writing is pessimistic, for much the same reasons that my last paragraph seems to be particularly so.

That paragraph was meant as an answer to Mr. Roach’s question as to the future of today’s youth. What I wanted to stress was that there would be a continuity of the folly, deceit and grief which one can easily see in the people from Mr. Roach’s age. If the rest of my article stressed the fact that there was a great deal of creativity in the West Indian people, it also stressed that this creativity existed in spite of Caribbean politics. I view with particular disgust the attempts which politicians are making throughout the West Indies not to enhance but to exploit art on all levels. This sort of thing can

become tragic when a folk art begins to be used solely as a tourist attraction, or to gain a few more votes for a party in office. Recently here in Trinidad, Derek Walcott has been making a similar point. If in everything I've written I've affirmed a kind of faith in our capacity for survival, I've never underestimated the corrosive nature of absurd politics.

This is why I've seen the experience of Martin Carter as a paradigm of what will be the fate of most of the rebels in the West Indies. Because, if a finer spirit emerges from the carrion of our present, it will be won at the expense of individual defeat, sacrifice, tiredness of spirit and the sickness unto death, attenuation of faith and despair. This seems to me to be the meaning of both Carter's life and Walcott's. It also seems to me to be the experience of many a man who walks the street. I know that young people here feel it to the bone, and that most of them will simply seek one way or another of opting out of whatever struggle presents itself. This is not to say that nothing will be created, but to stress the price at which such creativity will be achieved. In a recent article, "Calypso and Politics", *Moko* No. 73, October 29, 1971, I tried to show how what is happening in Trinidad has produced a complex range of responses from a large number of calypsonians. On the other hand there is the fact that 1970 has accentuated the youth's rejection of the calypso and of most things Trinidadian, for Lord knows what. Anyone who has lived through 1971 will recognize tiredness and despair as inalienable parts of the landscape here. My feeling is that they will increase, until the society creates new means of dealing with them, a new kind of indigenous soul equivalent to Jamaica's reggae, recognising both the similarities and the differences of the American thing. There are signs that the calypso is trying to adjust, to inject a deeper sense of blues into its traditional gaiety, to tackle the problems of this complex generation. I don't know, however, how long this will survive against the tourist-oriented Carnival season, onslaughts of sick Euro/American music and sicker films, the break-up of the lime, and the growing drugs racket. At present, the forces of decay seem to be so much stronger than those of creativity.

Jamaica is a different case. The forces of despair and erosion are even fiercer than those in Trinidad. But Jamaica has a more coherent people and a more continuous line of history. Hence the dismay is counterbalanced by a tremendous vitality. Contemporary pressures in Jamaica seem to me to produce two types of responses from the man on the street. The first is a rebellious urge to shatter the whole social framework, best seen in the rhetoric of Rastafarianism, the music of Rudyism, and more recently in the dread tunes of Kingston. The second is a desire to retreat into the self, and the dream of a land "Far far away where there's no night, there's only day". This is best seen in the hymns of Rastafarianism, and in more secular hymns such as the reggae tunes "Jordan River", "Selah", "Satta Massagana", "Mabrak", and many others.

But these two responses are not opposites as some seem to think. They complement each other, intersecting at several points. The rebel is shot down or beaten and imprisoned. After a few years of this, his response is to retreat within himself, and search for new strength to counter this despair. The result of this retreat, this excavation in the ground of being, is a grounded music, whose basic beat, the ground-beat of survival itself, is as solid as the earth. Each new weight of pressure has its corresponding effect on the music, and the revolution is usually felt first as perceptible change in the bass, the basic rhythm, the inner pulse whose origin is in the confrontation between the despair which history and iniquitous politics inflict, and the rooted strength of the people. When such innovation takes place in the ground-beat, the whole trivial stream of popular appeasing which increases the dread and tension in the whole society, because the beat *dominates* the city; the rhythm of the basic bass is the grounded heartbeat of the city. So when the rhythm goes dread, the whole city feels the tension; and why not? After all it was the cruel tension which determined that the beat should go dread in the first place.

Hence the retreat to Ethiopias of the spirit returns to the sufferer the image of his own bleeding face. The inner journey takes him back to the outer hardship. It is this that the music of dread reflects. Hence in “Jordan River” we have first the dream of final release from horror:

I saw Selassie—I stretch forth his hand  
to take I cross  
Jordan River  
I’m on my way to Zion.

Then there is the other side of this dream.

The man that hear the word of Jah  
and harden his heart  
shall burn with fire....

The dream of a final journey of the spirit is counterpointed by a dream that the wicked shall one day burn with fire. The same thing is true for “Let the Power Fall on I for I”, which is prayer for inner and outer strength. A later stanza begins “Let the wicked burn in flames for I.” The apocalyptic sense of the Jewish psalmist and his intense yearning for a final justice, a final vengeance, and ultimately transcendence of the whole sorry scheme, informs today’s dread sounds from Kingston.

The image of a refining fire recurs in Jamaican music with a frequency which cannot but alarm those whose aim it is to preserve the historic scheme of things. One hears

tunes with names like “Blood and Fire”, “Brimstone and Fire”, successors to “What a Fire” and “Babylon Burning”. Incidentally, “Babylon Burning” is the same tune as “Woman a Hebbly Load”, and recently “Nyah Man Story” carries the tune of this traditional folk song again. In other words, a folk song is carrying the burden of the folk-urban rebellion. This is an important point because it underlines the difference between Trinidad and Jamaica. It would be almost unthinkable for a calypsonian to attempt to use a folk-song in order to convey his message. Calypso departed from those folk roots about three decades ago. While there was a sort of lime going in the towns, while legendary people like Polycar [Policar] met in groups all over the city and created a style and a rhetoric all their own, the calypso retained its basic roots, or such basic roots as a small town is capable of providing. Today, however, Port-of-Spain is wide open to the world, and the character of the lime has changed. A lot of the rhetoric is imported, and the calypso, which depends on the richness of local idiom, imagination and gesture, and on the sense of a vital urban spirit in the lime, is suffering.

In Jamaica, the phenomenon has been one of urbanisation, a shift from the country to the towns. In Trinidad it has been more one of immigration, and almost automatic squatting in the towns, automatic unemployment, and loss of original roots in the process of becoming not so much Trinidadian as a citizen of Port-of-Spain. This is why although there are so many roots in Trinidad, it is difficult to get to them. French eroded much of the Spanish influence, though evidence of it remains in the Parang. English education was first aimed at destroying the French substructure of language and the African basis of folklore and religion. The Church played a major role in destroying continuity in Trinidad culture, though the loss of the original language of Creole culture, that is French Patois, has had a lot to do with the sense of void and discontinuity in Trinidad culture. This accounts in part for why the calypso has today moved so far away from what were regarded as its roots. In so doing, it has simply conformed to the general drift of things in Trinidad. Discontinuity is part of the national experience.

Jamaica, however, because of the greater integrity of its population, has begun to lay the foundations of a vital folk-urban culture. This is why Afro-Jamaican religion, mythology, rhythms rhetoric and music have begun to saturate the whole consciousness of the place. This accounts for the sound of *Savacou* 3/4, which I can see is simply a beginning. The folk-jazz group called The Mystical Revelation of Rastafar-I is another such beginning. When I heard the group in December 1970, they sounded like the most frightening awesome energy that I had ever heard in music. Marrying the agony of Coltrane and Sanders to the rooted cool and menace of Rastafarian drums, the Mystics, as they were then called, constructed the bridge between tropical and temperate zones. It was good to hear that Marina Maxwell was

able to include them in her *Bongo Man a Come* programme of poetry and music. All sorts of things are jelling in Jamaica, which one needs to understand before he can begin to speak intelligently about consciousness or art.

All of these folk-urban manifestations have their roots in the syncretic Afro-Protestantism of Pukkumina, Bedwardism, Garveyism and Rastafarianism. At all times in the history of Black Jamaica, culture has had a religious basis. So also have politics, and the reaction of people to the depredations of politics and politicians has always had a nearly mystical basis. This is why it is difficult today to separate religious music from the music of open rebellion.

Take, for example, Bob Marley's "Duppy Conqueror" which was popular late in 1970. The singer begins by describing his release from prison:

Yes, me fren,  
Dem set me free again  
Yes, me fren, me fren,  
Me deh pan street again.

The next few lines are a statement both of defiance and religious affirmation:

The bars could not hold me  
Walls could not control me  
They tried to keep me down  
But God is still around.

He goes on to say that he has to make a journey to "Mount Zion" and that no force either material or supernatural is going to stop him. "If you're a bull-bucker, well let me tell you I'm a duppy-conqueror." Normally, people in using the phrase "duppy-conqueror" deny that they are themselves "duppy-conquerors". Duppy-conqueror, which today simply implies "hooligan", used to have a much stronger meaning, which Bob Marley seems to be trying to recapture in his song of defiance and faith.

A duppy is the spirit of the dead, whose burial rites have been incomplete. The spirit then wanders in a sort of limbo, and cannot take its place as an ancestral voice or protector of the group, but rather, if caught by an evil obeah-man, can be used against the group. In other words, duppies exist because one has failed to make amends with the past. In Marley's song, the whole oppressive system, which remains intact because of corrupt justice, becomes a duppy, a malignant spirit of the unplaced dead. This duppy of history has been captured by the judge and the politician, evil obeah-men, necromancers (or, to use Sparrow's word, negromancers) who employ their energies to destroy and gain personal power, rather than to make amends with the past, to heal history's wounds, or to increase the strength and coherence of the community.

The perverted leaders of the society, then, become the duppy which the man in the street must overcome. The duppy-conqueror is in this instance more than hooligan. He is the myal-man, the folk-priest who always appeared at critical moments in Jamaica's history. He usually claimed to have power over life and death, to be the true houngan, whose function had been perverted by the corrupt obeah-men. In Marley's song, then, the man on the street is prisoner, sufferer, but also shaman, myal-resurrected victim, who, because he lives within the grace or the Most-I (Most-High), cannot be suppressed by the gates, the bars and the prison walls which the privileged are compelled to raise up against him. In "Duppy Conqueror", the common man assumes the role of healer, defender of faith and consciousness, conscience, in a society which still consists of masters and slaves, judges and prisoners. In "Small Axe" the same spirit can be seen. I'll just quote a few lines to illustrate this point:

Why beasteth thyself, Oh evil men?  
Playing smart without being clever  
So you working iniquity to achieve vanity  
But the goodness of Jah Jah I-ndureth for I-ver.

Now, this attempt to see the "criminal" as redeemer, as measure of the society's wound and power to transcend, is by now a commonplace occurrence in West Indian literature. It is there in Mais, in Lamming's *Season of Adventure*, in Harris, too, and appears as major element of *Savacou* 3/4. The Guyanese Marc Matthews' *For Cuffy* is addressed not only to the slave rebel of 1763 but to Clement Cuffy, a convict whose jailbreak in the late Fifties resulted in a relentless manhunt in Guyana's backlands. Moreover, both Cuffys, the rebel and the convict (same thing in the West Indies), are associated with the common man, the eccentric, the grotesque.... "Bald head Barney", Top Hat, Charley, Banja Mary. In addition, all these people are seen as the true preservers of conscience and sacrifice, the real revolutionaries; and they are associated with their counterparts in Jamaica or Harlem.

It is with these that the poet, himself going mad, identifies, because he can recognise the fraudulence of those who lead the society, the degree to which they preserve the inhumane values of the original slave masters, whom Cuffy of 1763 made the fatal mistake of trusting, as Toussaint was to do later on.

This desire to reclaim the "criminal" on the part of middle-class writers is partly an attempt to exercise a guilt at having grown away from roots, or an emptiness at having never known them. It is also a positive attempt to create and deepen conscience in sections of society whose traditional response has been an automatic impulse to repress, beat up, execute and imprison. As such it is to be welcomed. Half in guilt and half in self-vindication, the West Indian writer is declaring his identity with the West

Indian people; in their shame, in their degradation, in their in-search, in their mythical eternal journeying, which so many Pukkumina hymns, Baptist hymns in Trinidad, and popular music in Jamaica are today celebrating.

Finally, then, this self-acceptance is the important thing. It is what Césaire's return really meant, a terrible affirmation in the face of an almost total despair, which, however, is how Kierkegaard would have defined real faith. Real faith, for the West Indian, will continue to grow out of despair, and in spite of the eternal recurrence of the betrayer, the bossman, all those bald-headed attorneys general of repression. Césaire's great act of affirmation will continue to be made, even when it changes little or nothing:

I accept...I accept...entirely, without reservation ....  
my race which no absolution of hyssop  
mingled with lilies can ever purify.

my race gnawed with blemishes  
my race ripe grapes from drunken feet  
my queen of spit and leprosies  
my queen of whips and scrofulae  
(80)

At the end of the small hours, lost pols,  
stray smells, stranded hurricanes, dismasted  
boats, old wounds, rotten bones, buoys,  
chained volcanoes, ill-rooted deaths, bitter cries.  
I accept! (83)

It is this which is beginning to sound in the poetry of the "Commonwealth" Caribbean. Not surprisingly, some of us cannot recognise or accept the sound. On the political level, all over the West Indies, the laws of censorship are being invoked, or, as in Trinidad, grim laws of sedition are being passed to kill this acceptance. On the level of literary criticism, one can still find the critic who believes that a thorough grounding in F. R. Leavis, an understanding of how he rescued English criticism from Bradleyan doldrums in the Thirties, will save us here, and help us to understand why Bongo Jerry writes as he does. But one will have to study the Caribbean people and to listen to them, before one can learn to make important or relevant critical statements on the new writers. The critic's business is first to understand the contexts out of which the work that he is examining grows. Our context is simply not Leavis's. The critic, like the writer, will have to learn the meaning of self-acceptance.

Anna Girling

# Recovering the Writers of the Foundational Generation

*Lost and Found: An A-Z of Neglected Writers of the Anglophone Caribbean*, written and edited by Alison Donnell, with contributions by Chris Campbell, Ronald Cummings, Marta Fernández Campa, Joanne C Hillhouse, Aeron MacHattie, Winsome Minott, Nalini Mohabir, Evelyn O’Callaghan, and Jeremy Poynting. London and Trafalgar: Papillote Press, 2025. ISBN: 978-1739130312. 300 pp. Paperback.

When the Jamaican writer Vera Bell (b. 1904) died in 1984, her death was not publicly noted, either in Jamaica or in the UK, where she and her husband had moved in 1955. Yet Bell is a poet whose work has been widely anthologised, whose well-known poem “Ancestor on the Auction Block” (1942) was quoted by Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller in her 2014 Emancipation Day address, and whose career culminated in an experimental long poem, *Ogog* (1971), recently described by Jason R. Marley as “a poetic novel” which aims “to reimagine a human civilisation free from colonial domination”. Bell was also the first female chief clerk in the engineering department of the Jamaican Water Commission, and, through her friendship with Edna Manley, was part of the wider political, social and cultural networks of the early PNP. Her first published writings were the short stories she was commissioned to produce for *Public Opinion* in the 1940s, and she went on to publish her short fiction and poetry in *Focus* and *The Gleaner*. Bell’s 1944 pantomime *Soliday and the Wicked Bird* has been called “the first one that was really Jamaican” (in part because of its inclusion of Anancy), and her story “The Immigrants” was broadcast on the BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* in 1956. After migrating to Britain in the mid-1950s, Bell, like Beryl Gilroy, became involved in challenging how children of Caribbean ancestry were treated in, and represented by, the British education system. She was, Alison Donnell writes, “a writer and literary influencer at a foundational moment for Jamaican writing [who merits] a place in any future literary histories of the nationalist era....” And yet Bell was “seemingly unrecognised as a writer in her own lifetime, and “the fullness of [her] career is yet to be attended to in detail”.

In many ways Bell is exemplary of the “lost and neglected writers” recovered and showcased in Donnell’s *Lost and Found: An A-Z of Neglected Writers of the Anglophone*

*Caribbean*, compiled and largely composed by Donnell. Some, the lost, as Donnell calls them, were well-known in their day and have subsequently fallen out of public and critical view, while others, the neglected, never received the attention that their works warranted. The reasons for these literary losses, and this critical neglect, are part of the story that Donnell tells here about 20th-century Caribbean writing, and the ways it comes to us now, in the 21st century.

Donnell is a foundational and inspirational figure in the field of Caribbean literary studies as it stands today. Across her career, she has been part of a generation of scholars who have worked to expand and reorient how we think about modern Caribbean literature—particularly that from the first half of the 20th century. Her work has always been rooted in painstaking and patient archival research, and her aim has been to change how we think about histories and canons of Caribbean writing.

Donnell's authoritative *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (2006) laid the groundwork for much critical work being done today on modern Caribbean writers. In this book, Donnell argues that dominant narratives about the emergence of nationalist Caribbean literatures through a mid-20th-century London-based (and largely male) “boom” had obscured from critical attention much pre-1950s Caribbean writing which could not be “folded neatly into the pages of a nationalist teleology”. Ten years earlier, in their influential *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (1996), Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh had invited readers to reevaluate Caribbean literature, presenting the works of a number of then lesser-known writers, including Una Marson, J.E. Clare McFarlane and Bell, alongside texts by better-known greats of Caribbean literature—working “against the consolidation of the few (writers) which has led to the neglect of the many”. And, in the last two decades, Donnell has published numerous books, essays, chapters, and articles which have continued her significant contribution to the study of multiple aspects of Caribbean literature and culture.

In *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature*, Donnell links prevailing critical narratives about the development of cultural nationalism to a lack of curiosity in archival work, or in looking beyond existing dominant canons, on the part of many late-20th-century critics. In contrast, her own aim in this book is “to try to open the archive of pre-1950 writings that the vast majority of literary histories simply do not want to reckon with”. One might say that Donnell's whole career has been the work of opening that archive—and, through this, of expanding those literary histories.

*Lost and Found* is a culmination of this work. A collection of 26 biographical and critical introductions to Caribbean writers whom you have probably not heard of—and whose work Donnell will persuade you of the compelling value of, from Phyllis Shand Allfrey to Zee Edgell. All were born between 1892 and 1942. Women writers are

particularly well-represented (making up 17 of the 25 included individuals), no doubt because it is they who have suffered most from patterns of critical neglect—and the anglophone Caribbean is well-covered geographically, with writers from Antigua, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad. This book is intended as an entry point for readers unfamiliar with Caribbean writing and literary history of the early to mid-20th century beyond the well-trodden ground of Claude McKay, CLR James, Louise Bennett, Vic Reid, Roger Mais, Sam Selvon, et al. And, although some of the writers included here are better known than others, I suspect that very few readers will have encountered more than a few of them before. Eileen Hall, Barbara Jones, W.G. Ogilvie, Edwina Melville, Eula Redhead, Ada Quayle, Inez Knibb Sibley, Monica Skeete, Claude Thompson—these are not familiar names to many of us.

In a sense, this is a group intellectual biography—a portrait of a particular generation and of a dispersed, diverse and incalculably rich literary moment. This was a generation of writers marked not only by great energy in literary production, but also in a multitude of other fields: Vera Bell's work for the Jamaican water board; Barbara Jones' as a plant geneticist; Vivian Virtue's as a civil servant; Monica Skeete's as an educator. This was, as Norval Edwards puts it, "the foundational generation" in more senses than one—and a generation for whom, as Donnell writes, "the project of writing creatively was intimately connected to building localised imaginaries and closing the gap between the everyday lived reality of Caribbean places and people and the 'literary'".

The work of W.G. Ogilvie (1923–1992), for example, "represented how the dynamics of class, gender and racialised social structures impacted on Jamaican lives during three monumental decades of the island's history, from 1938 to 1973, as national, decolonial and postcolonial struggles for sovereignty unfolded". His two 1953 novels, *Cactus Village* and *The Ghost Bank* (both published by the Pioneer Press), depict in detail the social, emotional and economic dynamics of Jamaican rural life "from the rituals of ninth night and banana day to the swift and severe punishment for a man caught thieving from his own neighbours". Ogilvie was deeply aware of the significance for Jamaica of the historical moment at which he was writing, and he saw literature as playing a key part in shaping how the nation imagined itself as it moved towards independence: "We are ancestors at a very important point of our national history.... We must show our descendants the road we have travelled, in order that they may have some notion of whither they are going.... I have sought to paint life and people as they were". These novels continued the work begun by his numerous short stories, published in venues such as *Public Opinion* and *The West Indian Review* from the 1930s onwards, which gave voice to the continuing colonial injustices faced by Black Jamaicans—and, in stories such as "Half a Fork" (1950), emphasised the need for solidarity in the face of capitalist imperialism. It is almost unbelievable, therefore,

that Ogilvie and his works have been so completely lost to Jamaican and Caribbean literary history—and Donnell suggests that this may have been due to the unassailable influence of London-based publishing networks on Caribbean literature in this period. A mid-20th-century Jamaican writer who lived on the island and was published by a Kingston-based publisher is, ironically, far less likely to have her works read today than writers whose works were published elsewhere.

The Trinidadian poet Barbara Jones (1936–1969), in contrast, seems to have been on the cusp of greater literary recognition when she died at the age of 32. Jones was a plant geneticist who studied in Trinidad and the US (at Cornell) before becoming a professor at McGill University in Montreal. Jones described herself as a “geneticist by vocation, poetess by avocation”, and she wrote and performed poetry alongside her successful scientific career. She was also a key figure in 1960s Black Montreal—writing and speaking about anti-Black racism in Canada—and she was involved in organising the 1968 Congress of Black Writers in Montreal. Jones’ main published work was the irresistibly titled collection *Among the Potatoes* (1969), written during her PhD (which focused on the breeding habits of wild potatoes). This work is available electronically and rewards close attention. Donnell describes the “strongly articulated women’s poetics” of Jones’s work, and notes the depiction of “domestic pleasure” in Jones’ poem “The Laundromat”, in which washing machines “shake/ great orgasms/ of cleanliness”. Jones was also clearly deeply engaged with the 1960s civil rights movement in the US, and her poem “Mixed Emotions” responds to the 1965 Selma marches: “let now the black man free/ let know the white man free/ from those he f---ed and sucked/ and kept beneath his feet”. At the time of her death Jones was working on a collection that has yet to be published. She also left behind a number of seemingly lost works, including the collection *Mango Season* (1968). Donnell forcefully demonstrates the significance of Jones’ life and work to a number of literary movements and moments, and her appearance here hopefully marks the beginning of Jones receiving some of the recognition which was denied to her in her lifetime.

Monica Skeete (1923–1997), who was born in Grenada and moved to Barbados as a child, had numerous poems and short stories published and broadcast between the 1940s and 1970s. Her first published work was a poem, “Two Pigs Going to the Slaughter”, in *Bim* in 1946, and almost all of her known short stories were subsequently published in the magazine. Skeete’s writing drew on her experience as a teacher, in Barbados and London, and a number of her stories explore the diasporic experience of migration to the UK, and, in some cases, a return to the Caribbean. Her story “Larry” (1978) follows a teenager’s negotiation of the limited opportunities offered by the English educational system—and starkly registers the harms and hostilities endured by children of the Windrush generation. “The Return” (1960) tells the story of a middle-aged woman’s alienating return to her Barbados, “home”, four decades after leaving as

a child: “She hated herself; hated illusion, memory, all that had contributed to the big deception with which she had smugly surrounded her ego all these years. She had been old enough to remember. She had known and yet—this.”

Donnell suggests that Skeete’s “stories can be read productively alongside those of Lamming and Selvon”, noting that “if it were not for the distance set between them by the production and marketing strategies of educational and literary publishers in the 1960s and 1970s, they would likely have been enjoyed by Caribbean adult readers and discussed by Caribbean literary critics in the same way”. Skeete’s work, like that of a number of the other women writers included in *Lost and Found*, has been widely anthologised in school textbooks. One might think that this would have kept her work in the public eye, but, as Donnell notes, it has instead contributed to her “critical neglect”, because such books “have not commonly been regarded as suitable sources by literary critics”. Donnell’s archival method of seeking out literary works by Caribbean writers in locations ‘beyond scholarly sight’—textbooks, school anthologies, Christmas annuals, little magazines, newspapers, radio archives—is revelatory, yielding a wealth of writing and writers which will reshape understandings of Caribbean literary history. It should also reshape approaches to literary recovery work and archival research, both in studies of Caribbean literature and beyond. How many lost and neglected writers might there be in school textbooks from other parts of the world, for instance, waiting to be found?

*Lost and Found* concludes with a hefty bibliography of all of the known creative literature published by each of the featured writers. This will be invaluable to future researchers, and, as Donnell notes, should ideally lay the groundwork for many further critical studies and acts of literary recovery. Indeed, Donnell points to immediate work that might be done by current researchers in her “X” chapter, the title pointing to “mid-twentieth century Caribbean women writers still unfound”, and which includes lists of over a hundred women whose work featured on the BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* programme, and in *Bim*, *The Beacon*, *Kyk-Over-Al*, *Focus*, and *Poesy Anthologies* between 1931 and 1973, but whose works remain “unexplored”.

*George Goddard*

# Compulsions to Freedom, Dignity

*Season of Mist: Vendettas Bittersweet* by Mac Donald Dixon. Vero Beach: Strategic Book Publishing, 2018. ISBN: 978-1948858106. 272 pp. Paperback.

**Mac Donald Dixon is one of a number of Saint Lucian (and Caribbean) writers who have emerged in the postcolonial period, a generation or so after fellow countrymen Nobel Laureate Sir Derek Walcott and the less well-known novelist Garth St Omer. Along with contemporaries John Robert Lee and Kendel Hippolyte, as well as Jane King, Adrian Augier and, more recently, Vladimir Lucien, he is a clear affirmation (if any more was needed) that the Saint Lucian lexicon is to be taken seriously in Caribbean and world literature.**

Although MacD, as he is fondly known in the small Saint Lucia writing circle, has been writing since the Sixties, he has not gained as much prominence outside of his native Saint Lucia as Lee, Hippolyte or the younger Lucien. The locally prestigious M&C Fine Arts Awards or local acclaim accorded to plays like *Kesnoe* are hardly reflective, in my view, of the breadth, depth and import of his literary work.

The photographer, actor, playwright, poet, and novelist demonstrates this in his first novel (revised edition), *Season of Mist: Vendettas Bittersweet*. In this compelling bit of writing, he sets out to do what many novelists have found difficult: to write a piece of historical fiction that is believable and authentic. This is a particular achievement especially when one considers that he is engaging with a period some two hundred years removed from the present.

The story is set in late 18th- into 19th-century Saint Lucia, in the midst of the French Revolution, and in the social and revolutionary foment that it helped generate in the French Caribbean colonies, of which Saint Lucia, like Haiti, was one. The universality and the international appeal of this narrative is found in how a 238-square-mile island is drawn into the maelstrom of the revolution for *Liberté, Fraternité* and *Egalité* taking place in Europe—into the struggle for human dignity and freedom. Here, the enslaved population of African descent, people of mixed heritage, free people of colour and republicans rose up to challenge the status quo.

The intricate threads of Dixon's story are all the more sensitive because this social upheaval is melded into the struggle of two colonial world powers, Britain and France, for military and economic pre-eminence.

While *Season of Mist* is the story of a revolutionary epoch that engulfed France and its Caribbean possessions, it is not only a story of heady slogans and political passion. It is also a very human story of the interpersonal relationships honed in such an environment. It is a story of love, hate, passion, the pursuit of revenge, compassion, appreciation of beauty, as much as it is of daring raids, the struggle to exist, murder, mayhem, revolutionary justice, reactionary reprisals, and brutal suppression.

The main protagonist in Dixon's *l'histoire* is Madlienne Des Voeux, a freeborn woman, an *affranchie* leading a band of young rebels in the forests of La Soufrière in the Island's southwest. Madlienne, a natural-born leader and daughter of Desolée, Leader of the Camp, is unwittingly drawn into the larger fight for freedom having lost the innocence of her early teen years through the brutal murder of her father and the wiping out of the elders of their Camp by the Royalists. At first, it was essentially a matter of survival and of avenging the slaying of their forebears. It, however, became the necessary joining up with *L'Armée Française dans Les Bois* (the French Army in the Woods) who sought to overthrow the Royalist order. The story seems to be fashioned after the legend of Flor Gaillard-Bois, a Black woman warrior who is reputed to have led a band in the Brigands War, making common cause with the French Army in the Woods. This was an alliance of Republicans and Black and Coloured freedom fighters, who were fighting the French; and then the British, who sought not only to recapture this island strategically placed in the centre of the island-arc, but to shore up the colonial slave economy. This, of course, meant the reimposition of slavery in the small colony of Sainte Lucie.

The alliance of Black and Coloured freedom fighters along with French Republicans had forced the French Governor of Saint Lucia to declare the freedom of the enslaved people in 1794, only for slavery to be reimposed less than one year later. The insurrection continued in 1795 with the support of French Republicans.

One wonders whether Madlienne, who emerges as an icon, a veritable Jeanne d'Arc in a society where everything saintly and sacrosanct is white, is a reflection of the powerful influence that Dixon's mother clearly had on his life and on his view of the world, as well as of the legend of Flor Gaillard-Bois that remains misted in the uncertainties and closely guarded intelligence of that revolutionary period. A period that witnessed the birth of the Republic of Haiti, the first land liberated from settler colonialism in the New World.

Madlienne seems to have slowly accepted the imperatives of the revolution, rising in the ranks to command a company in the revolutionary forces, all the while keeping a

longer, parallel mission at the forefront of her mind—that of avenging the brutal slaying of her tribe. At first her freeborn status did not seem to allow her to understand the urgency of the cause espoused by the revolutionaries, especially given that most were White Frenchmen, many of whom still seemed to carry the same condescending attitude toward those of her skin colour.

In the course and aftermath of the revolutionary insurrections, in victory and defeat, and the eventual final capitulation of French colonialism to British colonialism, the all-consuming obsession of forty years to get even with M. Gimat, her father's murderer, is eroded by the intricate relations that she cultivates. The story moves through the familial love for her tribe, the apparently erotic love for Louise, which clashes with her feelings for Theodule, the sexual relationship between Louise and Theodule, her eventual softening up to Gimat, whom she waits a lifetime to deliberately murder, as he had done her father. Her discomforting discovery after everything is that Gimat is actually likeable, and she flees his Moulin-a-Vent estate as a means of resolving the contradictions.

The plot is authentic. It is based on the real story of the attempt to liberate Saint Lucia from Royalist France, and the substantial role played by Black freedom fighters in the cause, their freedom being the condition of their participation. While Dixon's descriptions and metaphors are often a bit mellifluous, and while his language cannot be critiqued for being spare and stark (as in the case of his compatriot Garth St Omer), *Season of Mist* has an authenticity to it that is the hallmark of a good story. The minute detail with which he treats day-to-day living in the towns and settlements, Madlienne's visits to la Convention or Castries, life in the great house at Moulin-a-Vent in Gros llet, the smell of molasses and the manufacture of sugar at crop time, the sadistic whippings meted out to those who dared infringe the rules of plantation life, the dining and partying of the privileged few at Moulin-a-Vent, the tranquility of her home at Trois Pitons, and the goings-on and intrigues of personal relationships all ring true. Madlienne's visit to Guadeloupe, Dixon's attention to the physical detail of scenery and geography as she enters the harbour, give the narrative an authenticity and believability that many an author of such a work would envy.

This tale makes Caribbean history come alive, and the role of Caribbean people in making their history is placed at the centre of it. Moreover, Madlienne's *Season of Mist* shows us that the passions of love, hate, the need to avenge, the compulsion to freedom and dignity are universal across time and geography. Dixon is perhaps not a perfect craftsman, but he is indeed a Master Griot who should be taken seriously. His novel makes a good companion read to the late Michael Aubertin's *Neg Maron*, also of Saint Lucia, recently reviewed for Caribbean Literary Heritage by John Robert Lee.

Robert Edison Sandiford

# How We Got Here

*The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart* by Astra Taylor. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781487011932. 344 pp. Paperback.

Every day, all around us, it feels like things are falling apart: as if the world of rules, restraint, honour, reasonableness, kindness, caring, and yes, good taste, is fast collapsing. It doesn't matter if we live in North America or South America, somewhere others might perceive as "in-between" or "elsewhere", like the Caribbean and Latin America, Asia or Africa—though Chinua Achebe's classic 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* can't help but come to mind in its attempt to remind us, as W.B. Yeats first suggested in his 1919 poem "The Second Coming", of the ongoing challenge humanity faces of getting the centre to hold while not giving in to desperate acts.

All this and plenty more remain ripe for reflection in *The Age of Insecurity* by Astra Taylor. Three years on from the presentation and publication of her essay as part of the 2023 CBC Massey Lectures, two since being nominated as a finalist for the Writers' Trust of Canada's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, her book, subtitled *Coming Together as Things Fall Apart*, still very much has us asking the question: How did we get here? The terrains we're navigating and the people we're dealing with seem so different to what we expect or like—or what we claim to expect or say we would like. After all, who are we dealing with if not our counterparts? Who are they reacting to if not our own energy and demands?

In his celebrated Davos speech at the World Economic Forum in January 2026, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney noted, "We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition" and "if we're not at the [negotiating] table, we're on the menu". It's easy to blame Trump, Americans, and an unabating authoritarian age certain leaders the world over are doing their best to take advantage of. Yet Carney didn't; at no time in his speech did he mention the US President's name. And I've always thought Saul Bellow's judgement—let's call it that—in his essay collection *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future* (1995), a just prescription: "It is *we* who set up and *we* who knock down. If we are imposters, we are also those who expose imposters. This 'being human' is our very own shown."

And what a spectacle we've made of it. Especially when you consider, as Taylor does from age to age and various viewpoints, that our lives needn't be so harsh or siloed or as insecure as they are. The Winnipeg-born filmmaker, writer and political organiser/activist, who is based in the US and is also the author of American Book Award-winning *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (2014), opens with the myth of the Roman goddess Cura, noting how it "reflects on the human condition. Care and anxiety, concern and worry—the multiple meanings of the Latin word *cura*—are part of what makes us who and what we are. It is hardly a self-aggrandizing narrative". Cura, unlike her fire-stealing "counterpart" Prometheus, "doesn't give us any special traits or tools to ease our troubles. Instead, she worries over us and cares for us—she acts thoughtfully and ponders, the story says—and so fates us to worry and care and ponder in return".

But Stoics of Ancient Rome, such as Cicero and Seneca writing during the first century BCE, "extolled imperturbability in the face of chaos and uncertainty. 'What is the blessed life?' Seneca asked. 'Security and perpetual tranquility,' was his reply". And this has been humanity's pursuit: a state of calm amid all the anxiety.

This raises many thoughts. One is about the true state of humanity. To be falling apart, repeatedly, seems to be our recurring, dominant theme. Mind you, this may be more of a Western view than, say, African or First Nation. "In their dedication [to their philosophy], the Stoics revealed a fundamental contradiction: *securitas*, care's absence [or anxiety's banishment] can only be achieved with effort. That is to say, with care [or anxiety]."

Taylor believes "[to] be human is to be perpetually insecure". She calls this condition, which endures unto death, "existential insecurity". This is all the result of our dependence on others, our vulnerabilities and our mortality—our lack of control over our reality and its trajectory, i.e., our destiny or fate. We all "orient our lives toward the pursuit of security.... But how to conceive of security in our era of unprecedented inequality, when eight billion people call our precious and collapsing planet home", is increasingly unclear. Presumably.

★

It should be understood that long before the COVID-19 pandemic, or any pandemic; authoritarian regimes; the day's wars; natural or economic disasters; or the loss of social cohesion brought about by digital connectivity, "insecurity was everywhere", a fact of life, a state of being or existence. We have felt "insecure in our schools, in our homes, in our relationships.... And...about our very selves..." and each other. No one, wealthy or wanting, public servant or private citizen, is immune from feeling "on guard, anxious, and incomplete", a feeling that is "on the rise" in the Caribbean alongside gun

violence, foreign debt, education systems failing our boys, climate-change resilience, bad roads, poor food security, overburdened healthcare, and pompasetting politicians.

The term *insecurity* gained currency in the 1600's, "just as our [Western] market-driven society was coming into being". Our sense of insecurity in the West and elsewhere has "intensified" noticeably with "the decline of the welfare state over the past fifty years". Built on the need for needs, on wanting to want, "capitalism thrives on bad feelings". Our consumer societies—and all of our societies are consumer societies, or at least *consuming* societies—thrive on "making us all insecure by design".

It might not be the world that needs changing, rather us. A recurring theme in *The Age of Insecurity* is that "insecurity results as much from expectation as from deprivation". Research shows that "[l]iving in a highly competitive and consumerist society...makes everybody more status-conscious, stressed out, and sick". Today's "manufactured insecurity", Taylor argues—long ago traded for the commons (i.e., a healthy mutual regard for the environment that freely sustains us all) so as to benefit a classed few economically—is neither "ineradicable" nor "inevitable".

Nothing is "preordained" when it comes to where we are now or might be in a number of years. "Insecurity can also inspire a more hopeful response" than the prejudice and fear-mongering we've been witnessing in too many democracies, let alone those that have never sought to hide their policy of persecution. Thankfully, that inspiration can be found in many sources.

Taylor is clearly partial to history and mythology, apparently less so to other similar forms of storytelling. I disagree with her take on the lessons fairy tales, fables and folklore impart. Even if their emphasis appears to be on "individualistic" action, the lessons to be learned are for the benefit of all. Maybe her view is very much a Western one, which explains her perception. As a student of mine put it—in his early 20s, an undergraduate in graphic design, sitting in a Research Methods classroom in Barbados Community College—everybody wants change, but nobody wants to change themselves first. His perspective was more, say, Anansi than history lesson, and all the more instructive for that.

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If this being human is our very own show, that includes "market forces". We can trace much of our insecurity in our own homes, nationally and abroad to the loss of the notion of the earth being "a Common Treasury of relief for all, both Beasts and Men", when "private property became a cornerstone of the new liberal capitalist state" post King Charles I (1600-1649). The result was the control of land, labour and laws by a privileged few.

Women and children bore the worst of the new world order, “forced to work in the dangerous new factories and commercial mills”. Pauperism was identified as “a dire form of poverty previously unknown” in 1735. This “new liberal capitalist state” would go on to birth or aid and abet all kinds of other dangerous, racist views, which would then be exported to the New World by colonisers, enforcers, and imperialists of all persuasions claiming to civilise, incentivise, modernise. “Enclosure was thus a kind of trial run for the dispossession of Indigenous peoples” the world over.

It’s not about romanticising commoners or our agrarian past, rather about being clear-eyed about how our capitalist cultures and economies have cultivated insecurity, encouraged it to grow and take root like so many choking weeds. The desire of most of us is to survive, be happy, thrive, on our own terms, by our own means, not to be rich. Enough is indeed enough if more control of our destiny is in our own hands. That was—and for many still is—the natural order. It’s just that most days we do what we have to do for ourselves and our family to get by, not so much what we want to do, or ought to do. We proceed “with the imperative to earn a living”, and all the unnatural insecurity that can bring.

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In the last 50 years, we’ve seen “corporations and their allied politicians”, as Taylor puts it, trying to erode or erase the social, employment and trade union gains of a century with everything from contract jobs (gigs with great pay and few benefits) to service sector jobs (positions with “middling” pay and “non-existent” security). “This means that many people work multiple jobs or live in households where everyone of age has to work.” Much of this is indeed “out of necessity, not choice”, with “insecurity...used to pit worker against worker, usually along lines of race, immigration status, and nationality”.

Political scientist Ronald Inglehart describes a leaning toward authoritarianism as “the closing of ranks behind strong leaders in reaction to perceived threats and grievances”. In other words, “[t]he insecurity of an unequal and volatile economy tilts some people rightward”. Taylor mentions terms like “creative destruction” and “disruption”, which can be fuelled by foreign war games or attacks on valued homegrown institutions—both have been part of President Donald Trump’s playbook. Caribbean leaders, past and present, have not been above their own tactics of distraction and destabilization, often still executed along party, class, colour, and gender lines. They are meant “to keep people compliant, anxious, and striving”. When people are fearful, or insecure, “it is easier to convince them” of the worst and present yourself as Auntie Saviour or Brother Daddy.

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“Insecurity gnaws at the people on the very top, too.” The need to realise bigger profits “keeps them scrambling ever upward”; but toward what when all “[o]ur very imaginations...been enclosed”? Taylor’s list of the damages related to “[i]nsecurity and misguided pursuits of security” is substantial: “the revival of fascism”; the neglect of security as a fundamental human right; the prioritizing of negative/prohibitive rights over positive/enabling rights; global homelessness; the avoidance of a universal basic income (a Black Panther Party proposal dating back to 1966); the fuzziness of meaningful goals; self-esteem battered by social media; the loss of biodiversity. *The Age of Insecurity* is not a gloomy book, however. Where we are now, in our state of “disequilibrium”, is not where we need to stay forever. Taylor encourages us to “recognize the trick being played on us. Manufactured insecurity encourages us to amass money and objects as surrogates for the...kind of security we can find only in concert with others,” she contends, through “connection, camaraderie, meaning, purpose, contentment...”.

Many of us are encouraged to do the wrong thing ethically or morally despite having the means *not* to. “Our possessions, monetary and otherwise, have a way of possessing us and turning us into people we may not actually want to be.” But it’s more than that. “We live in a world today where people call out people for everything, for misogyny, for sexual assault, for all kinds of behaviour,” noted Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley. She was speaking at a conference in Ghana in June 2026 to advance Africa’s efforts for reparatory justice from former colonial powers and other enslaving institutions. “But yet we have not found the moral courage to state unanimously across humanity that this grave crime against humanity that persisted for centuries ought to be declared so by all.” Our prospects for a sustainable future, particularly for our young in places like the Caribbean, may be worsened by a pandemic, climate crises and global conflicts, but all these situations highlight is the need for us to come together at last and *not* fall apart.

Contrary to the message of so many government and business “leaders” and their acolytes, “There is no growth...without emotional vulnerability.” Understanding, caring, kindness, concern, a sense of unity—these are the kinds of constructive human responses certain groups wish to suppress since they do nothing to advance their anxious agenda or to help them maintain power. What Taylor reminds us throughout her very timely book is that “[s]olidarity, in the end, is one of the most important forms of security we can possess”. For this to hold as it should, “[o]ur concern must extend beyond our personal equanimity.”

**A Word of Refutation from the Archives:**

Vol. 19, No. 73, Pages 29–31 (June 1990)

*John Wickham*

## THE BIRTH OF THE BLUES

**When Herman Griffith died in 1979 a news report of the death and burial informed a generation mostly ignorant of the contribution of the man or its significance in the social history of the country that claimed him as its own. But the information was grossly in error in one important particular: Herman Clarence Griffith, born in Trinidad, was said to have been a member of the Spartan Club. Those who knew Herman and had any idea of the genesis of cricket clubs in Barbados or of implications of membership of one or the other were aware of the monstrosity of that error and would be sure that the old fast bowler and tyrant captain of Empire Club turned in his grave. The author of that story had got the whole thing wrong, upside down and wrong. To correct the mistake it is necessary to begin at the beginning.**

The story of the Empire Club, the Blues, must begin with the story of its linchpin, Herman Griffith, at Combermere under the legendary G.B.R. Burton, at Constitution Road. Herman was, confessedly, no great scholar, he had got to Combermere after private lessons from the headmaster at Dalkeith primary school who had taken a fancy to him. His attachment to Combermere was instant and deep. What made it so was the headmaster's idea, almost revolutionary in those days, that no boy's talent or interest was inferior. Classroom brilliance was not the only requirement for the good Combermerian: if you were a good scout or good at games, then you were making a good contribution. That message was like a blessing to the young Herman and 70 years after he was still singing the praises of old Burton.

Frank Collymore was an exact contemporary of Herman. I once asked him what games the latter excelled at as a schoolboy. "Everything," Colly said. "He was a born athlete." And Colly recalled a school sports meeting at which Griffith won every event except the shot put.

When the young athlete left Combermere he was lucky to land a job, a very minor one, as a junior clerk at the General Hospital on Jemmotts Lane, where he came under the supervision of Julian Cumberbatch, the father of Graham, Wenty, Chester and Hugh, all of them dyed-in-the-wool Spartan men, all of whom had played for the Harrison College first eleven.

After he left school, life for Griffith loomed very dull indeed, for there was no cricket club for him to join, no outlet for his undoubted talent as a fast bowler. He had already caught the eye of Lionel Gittens, a Spartan man, who used to put together scratch teams and organise match “friendlies” which were often played on Saturday afternoons and bank holidays at the Garrison. So impressed was he by Herman Griffith’s cricket, especially his bowling—he bowled fast by instinct—that Gittens determined to put the youngster’s name up for Spartan membership so as to ensure his advance into the senior ranks of the game. He must have been as shocked as Griffith himself that the young promising cricketer was blackballed.

It was this rejection that led directly to the founding of Empire and to the bitterness of the rivalry between the two clubs. Nowadays when the social distance between these clubs is virtually indistinguishable, it astonishes the younger people to learn that it was not always so and that the Spartan-Empire enmity was of Jewish-Samaritan proportions.

If Herman Griffith had been accepted by Spartan in 1914, then Chrissie Brathwaite and Lionel Gittens and B.I. Gilkes and G.C.A.B. Williams would have had no cause to leave their club in Belleville and set up a rival one. What indeed, as CLR James asks, do they know of cricket who only cricket know?

How different Barbados cricket and, indeed, Barbados social history might have been if Barbados class prejudice had not shown its face at the time. The legend of Empire-Spartan contests would not have come into being, nor would the development of Empire into a breeding ground for Barbados fast bowling as well as an almost natural nursery for the Combermere players: Martindale, Foffie Williams, Pampie Spooner, “Barabbas” C.T. Lewis. The equation went Combermere was to Empire as Harrison College was to Spartan, and everyone knew it and understood all its implications and refinements.

The acquisition of the Bank Hall ground is another chapter of the story. Bank Hall was in 1914 a sugar plantation and it struck Chrissie Brathwaite, blunt, aggressive Chrissie, that the owner of the place, a Mr. Wright (so far as I remember from Herman’s story), should be confronted with the simple demand, no less, that he provide an area of land for a cricket ground. To the question, “What money do you have?” Chrissie had no hesitation in replying that he had none, but that he expected Mr. Wright to do the right thing. And so it was that the foundation members of the new club had a ground which they could set about to prepare themselves.

But even after there was a ground to play on, the cricket establishment of the day found it impossible to accept Empire as a participant in the first eleven programme. Year after year the application would be turned down, first on the grounds that the players were not up to the required standard and then for the reason that the ground

was not adequate for accommodation of the standard boundaries. It is still not adequate, 75 years after. The story of that battle to be allowed entry into the senior competition is instructive and amusing.

There were four clubs in the programme: Spartan, Wanderers, Pickwick, Harrison College. Spartan, Pickwick and Harrison College could be depended on to vote against admission of Empire and so it went on for some years. Until Mr. Somers-Cocks became the Harrison College Representative. Spartan and Pickwick voted as usual, Wanderers and Harrison College assented and Mr. Somers-Cocks, as chairman, exercised his casting vote in favour of Empire. And so the blood matches started: by the 30s Martindale and Griffith and Spooner and Williams were tearing away on a Bank Hall wicket shining like glass against Lawson Bartlett and Chester Cumberbatch.

But things have changed and now it is possible to be a member of both clubs, a practice which was unthinkable in the early days. This, I suppose, is all to the good—the old enmity and prejudice seem more than a trifle silly at this distance, and yet it ought not be forgotten that it once existed. Only by remembering or by appreciating that things were not always as they are is a true understanding of our society possible.

*C. M. Harclyde Walcott*

# The Dream, the Dreamers, the Dreaming...

**It all started with a dream.**

Indeed, it was in fact there that he saw her for the very first time, or as folks a generation or two older than he would say, “it was when he first laid eyes on her”. Technically, this of course would have been quite impossible. But as he would often tell the story, it all started with a dream.

In his telling, she had been sitting at a table alone, having dinner when he entered the room. But his progress across the room was brought to an abrupt halt, by what he characterised as being stunned by the aura that seemed to emanate from her presence. He apparently, from his telling, just stood stupefied and very much like the play between a flying ant and a lighted candle, found himself drawn in to her.

He walked straight to her table, apologised for any disturbance that his intrusion may cause her and enquired as to whether she would be kind enough to allow him to join her. To which she, without a hint of demonstrated surprise or suspicion, gestured to him to have a seat, and he did.

He would later say that it was “as if she had in fact fully expected him to join her”.

In retrospect, certainly to the casual observer, it would have seemed as though they had been sitting silently for hours. She, eating in a fashion that suggested that she had made of this ordinary activity an elegant, though not elaborate art. He, very slowly drinking her in with each sip of the Cabernet Sauvignon which she invited him to share with her.

All of this before the first words were spoken, though by now quite a great deal had been said.

“Are you a virgin?” he asked in a manner that could be described as politely enquiring. “No, I am not a virgin,” she replied in a rhythm that suggested that she understood all of what he had tried to ask, and then she smiled and he thought for sure that he knew what would happen next. But as it turned out, he did not know what would happen next.

It was an action that seemed to have happened so incredibly slowly that he found himself lingering behind the actual movement on her lips long after the moment had passed. She had daintily dabbed the corners of her mouth. Then she had folded the ever so slightly soiled, lace-trimmed cotton napkin into a triangle, which she then gracefully slide slightly under the rim of the plate which still had at least half of the meal left on it. Then she stood, stepped around the table, took him by the hand and led him out into the night.

“She was simply beautiful and her beauty radiated from every fibre of her being.” This he thought as they made their way along the brightly lit narrow lane, hand in hand like two young lovers too connected to each other to notice that other people in the lane were looking at them with a kind of knowing look and whispering things to each other, and giggling like young children sometimes do when they are embarrassed or are what the old people would characterise as being “just too happy”. But clearly, they were too connected to each other to have noticed. But had he not been, he would have noticed that he was not alone in this regard, for everyone they passed felt the sheer beauty radiating from her.

They had walked and walked and walked.

And after an hour or two or maybe even three (he had completely lost track of time and had no sense of how much time had elapsed), navigating many of the several quaint little lanes and alleys, stopping to look into just about every single shop window, and later on at least two occasions stopping to buy ice cream, they arrived at the front of the home of a friend of his.

Initially, he was surprised by the fact that she led him there. He did not know she had known anyone that he knew, and here she had led him right to this gate. More interestingly there was a party being held there that night, a party to which he had been invited, and he found himself assuming that she must have been invited also. It was at this point that he said to her, “This is quite a coincidence.” She, smiling what he had come to recognise as one of her radiant but rather enigmatic smiles, silently mouthed, “There are no coincidences.”

The party, which apparently had been organised for no special reason other than to acknowledge and celebrate the fact of being alive, was now at the point where most of the revellers in attendance had had two or three drinks and were beginning to really relax and enjoy the music. The host, an intellectual type with lodes of acquaintances but limited friends and even more limited financial resources, had just, a couple days earlier, said to a few of those limited friends that it had been a long time since he had gone to a good party. And voilà, that was where the idea had its genesis.

And here he was now with aged-rum-infused expansive gestures, warmly welcoming his guests with glasses of champagne and an “As is pellucidly evident, a good idea needs very little encouragement, come on in.”

And in equally matching expansive gesture, they accepted, sipped and proceeded to join the others in both the rhythm and the spirit of the moment, on the wooden deck of the back patio, now claimed as dance floor. The first bars of Lord Kitchener’s “Pan in A minor” were playing as they entered; the disc jockey, as if sensing their arrival, had just put it on. Next came Black Stalin’s “Ah Feeling to Party”, and then Ras Iley’s “Inez”, and then as if to cool the tempo down a bit and allow the more aged as well as the more inebriated a moment or two in which they could, as they say, “catch their breath”, came All Stars playing their slow jam version of Scrunter’s “Woman on the Bass”.

And they danced.

Then came “Slave” by the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Invader’s “Rum and Coca-Cola” and Ras Shorty’s “Watch Out My Children” and Gypsy’s “Little Black Boy”.

And they danced on.

And then came Alison Hinds and Square One’s “Iron Bazodee”, David Rudder’s “High Mas”, and he and she danced on and on, completely in their own world. They danced as only people in love can, without really paying much attention to the others around them. And those around them could not help but notice.

Aged rum and champagne were the only alcoholic beverages available. No one complained. The golden sautéed garlic shrimp, the fresh raw pink oysters in the half shell paired with hot sauce and lime juice, and the delicately smoked marlin served on garlic bread also drew no complaints. The fare lent perfectly to the mood.

The mood was decidedly celebratory and, as the night progressed, guests in ever increasing numbers, in varying stages of dress, found themselves frolicking in the warm blue glow reflecting from the pool, with a few brave souls who could actually swim in fact in its water.

The pool, a rectangular affair, uniformly deep and without the usual shallow end, was in reality not purpose-built but rather a repurposed water catchment/water storage structure, originally built in the 1920s or 30s to supply fresh water to the house which had been built some years prior. This new repurposing, which was really still very much a work in progress, had been the work of the current owner, the host. At first it was used to grow fresh water tilapias and then one day for what appears to be no apparent reason he drained it and commenced the repurposing. His friends theorised that a human, indeed any human being, could only eat so much fish and that he clearly had had more than enough. He never refuted the veracity of their conclusion.

They partied on.

It seemed as though absolutely no one had left. The music was now decidedly more mellow and rather than dancing there were now conversations taking place, in gatherings both large and small.

He thought he had never experienced a night like this before, and what to him seemed absolutely certain was that he would not have another night like this again. That is unless she was a part of it. It was in the middle of this state of euphoria that he came to the conclusion that he absolutely needed her in his life. He wasn't quite certain as to whether she needed him, but he reasoned that before meeting her he may have been able to muddle through, since meeting her his life would not be quite the same.

Dawn broke.

The aroma of fresh espresso filled the air—ahh! espresso—as did the familiar rich fragrance associated with bacon sizzling in a frying pan in the kitchen. Soon after the garlic bread appeared on the table, next to the calamari salad, and the buljol and the boiled green bananas and the bammie and the fat slices of avocado pear and ripe halves of yellow papaw like small boats and a small mountain of Julie, Bombay and East Indian mangoes and another of yellow fragrant golden apples. The table a palette of colour, suffused with the scents of rosemary and garlic and lemon grass and ginger and Scotch bonnet pepper, eased a different kind of energy into the atmosphere and created a kind of chattiness, a kind of unpretentious gaiety, as a simple cheerfulness spread like the gentle rays of sunlight across the morning.

Midday found everyone at the beach, they had gone there en masse after breakfast had turned into brunch and a couple more bottles of champagne had been opened. No one seemed particularly keen on ending the party. It was a good day to be at the seaside. The day was bright, the sun was hot, the sand was clean and reflected that yellow-white brilliance that tourist brochures about tropical countries often speak of. The sea was calm and flat and blue, and the breeze was gentle enough to cause the leaves of the almond trees to stir a bit.

The fire had been started and the coals now gave off enough heat to roast the lobsters and the red snappers that they had bought from the fishermen, whose boat had come ashore just about half an hour or so ago, while they were making their way down to this end of the beach.

And then at 1:30 in the afternoon, it happened.

And he, as if from a long way off, suddenly close, heard the voice. A voice that he recognised, though not immediately, say, "Young man, we do not have all day, you know." And then all became silent, and then that voice again, but now in a slightly more

irritated and pronounced fashion, “Now do you or do you not take Freda as your wedded wife?” It was then that he recognised the collar and his gurgle became a gush of yes, yes, yes. To which came the response, “Once is quite enough, thank you.” And then more pointedly, “You may now kiss your exceedingly patient bride.”

And he did and she smiled that same smile that he knew.

**C. M. Harclyde Walcott**

## the invitation

it may have been somewhere in the look, clear  
and just quickening the breath, deep  
like the billowing of the hurricane's winds, hot  
like the dance of a first lust, damp  
with the cling of that thin film of sweat

it may have been somewhere in the tone, light  
and just dampening the ear, thin  
like a solitary thread of the spider's web, cool  
like the song of a first kiss, moist  
with the cling of that thin film of saliva

it may have been somewhere in the embrace, firm  
and just tensing the muscles of the thigh, thick  
like the fibres of the sun-seasoned hawser's strands, warm  
like after the poem of a first tryst, wet  
with the cling of that thin film of semen

it may have been somewhere in the scent, redolent



Arts for the 21st Century

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*Bim*, seminal Caribbean journal now revived as *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*, is published twice annually. *Bim* accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and other cultural expressions within the Caribbean and its diaspora. Short fiction, poetry and critical reviews of high quality are particularly welcome.

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