Volume 7

Bim

Arts for the 21st Century


Bim

Cover Image

CHATTEL IN RED by **Dr. Raymond Maughan**

This is a disappearing part of our history. Many that I have taken are no more. As a photographer we like to see them old with the paint peeling and the roof rusting. This one was painted but I was still able to record an interesting composition.

BIM: Arts for the 21st Century VOLUME 7

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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 twice each year and publishes creative works, essays and critical expositions that meet the needs of the 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.

Manuscripts should be forwarded in double-spaced format, preferably with an accompanying electronic text file in Microsoft Word format. Endnotes are preferred. Photos should, at a minimum, be 300 dpi in quality. Submissions should contain the name of the author and title of the contribution on a separate page, but the author's name should not appear on subsequent pages of the actual manuscript. Correspondence should be sent to:
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Submissions to the publication should be sent to eephillips57@hotmail.com

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The BIM Editorial Board

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Contributors

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Since retirement as Professor Emerita from the University of the West Indies (UWI), Christine Barrow has been writing short stories, three of which have been published (under a pseudonym) in Poui: The Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing. She has completed courses in Creative Writing at the Barbados Community College and at UWI, and was a participant in the residential Cropper Foundation Writer's Workshop in Trinidad and Tobago in July 2010.

Carlyon Blackman

Carlyon Blackman is a Barbadian poet whose previous and forthcoming publications include 'The Caribbean Writer', 'St Somewhere Journal', 'tongues of the ocean', 'Poui' (University of the West Indies, Cave Hill), 'Bamboo Talk Press' and 'As Us journal'. She was awarded 2nd prize in the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Awards 2012 (Barbados) for a body of work entitled Ars Poetica.

Anthony Bogues

Anthony Bogues is the Lyn Crost Professor of Social Sciences and Critical Theory and the Director of the Center for Slavery and Justice, Brown University. Scholar, writer and curator he is the author/editor of six books; numerous articles and has curated exhibitions in the USA and South Africa. His latest book is 'From Revolution in the Tropics to Imagined Landscapes: The Art of Edouard Duval Carrie' (2014). He is currently working on a book on human freedom and an international exhibition on slavery. He did his doctoral studies at UWI, Mona.

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McDonald Dixon

Born on the Caribbean Island of Saint Lucia, McDonald Dixon has been writing for some 40 years while pursuing a full time profession in Banking, Trade and Commerce. He has published poetry, prose and plays. His published work includes – 'Pebbles' 1973, 'The Poet Speaks' 1979, 'Collected Poems' 1961-2001, 'Season of Mist' 2007, 'Misbegotten' 2009 and most recently his collection of short stories – 'Careme' 2010.

Keith Ellis

Keith Ellis (Jamaica, 1935) is Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto and Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Havana. He is the author or editor of some twenty books and more than a hundred articles dealing principally with Spanish American literature and culture.

He has been honoured with the Distinction for National Culture (of Cuba) and is a Corresponding Member of the Cuban Academy of Language and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. His poetry has appeared in anthologies and journals in various countries and in several languages.

Michael Foster

Walter Michael Foster was born on 13 June, 1944 and died from injuries received in a car crash on 8 January, 1965. Only 21 when he died, Michael Foster was already showing considerable talent as a poet and had had some of his poems published in Bim magazine. Frank Collymore, who wrote the Foreword to his single collection, "Things," describes this poet as "a tortured spirit that sought expression and relief from the inescapable evils and horrors of earthly life" through his poetry. Had Michael Foster not met an untimely death, which he himself foretold, his name would no doubt, be among those of our now renowned writers.

Millicent Graham

Millicent Graham has won local awards for her poetry including the well-established Observer Literary Award for Poetry in 2005 and silver and bronze in the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) Literary Arts Competition in 2005 & 2007. Her work has been published in 'City Lighthouse Poetry Anthology' 2009; 'Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters', Vol 5 No 1, 2008, 'The Caribbean Writer' Vol. 17. and the anthology 'Bearing Witness 3'.

Joanne Hillhouse

Antiguan and Barbudan writer Joanne C. Hillhouse wrote 'The Boy from Willow Bend', 'Dancing Nude in the Moonlight', 'Fish Outta Water'; and 'Oh Gad! Musical Youth' placed second for the Burt Award for YA Caribbean Literature in 2014 and will be published by CaribbeanReads. Her fiction and/or poetry have appeared in 'Pepperpot: Best New Writing from the Caribbean', 'In the Black: New African Canadian Literature', and other journals and/or anthologies. She runs the Wadadli Pen writing programme.

Kendel Hippolyte

Kendel Hippolyte is a poet, playwright and director and sporadic researcher into areas of Saint Lucian and Caribbean arts and culture. His poetry has been published in journals and anthologies regionally and internationally as well as in five volumes between 1980 and 2005. His plays have been performed locally and regionally and three of his plays have been published in drama anthologies. Hippolyte was the winner of the 2013 Bocas Poetry Prize.

Tennyson S.D. Joseph

Tennyson S. D. Joseph holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and is currently a Lecturer in Political Science, and Head of the Department of Government, Sociology and Social Work at the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies. His work revolves around Caribbean Political Thought, Globalisation and Anti-colonialism, Sovereignty and Decolonization and the post-1945 Political History of Saint Lucia. His publications include 'General Elections and Voting in the English-Speaking Caribbean 1992-2005' (co-authored with Cynthia Barrow-Giles), and 'Decolonization in St. Lucia: Politics and Global Neo-Liberalism 1945-2010'. He is a weekly Columnist in The Nation a Barbados daily Newspaper.

Ann-Margaret Lim

Ann-Margaret Lim, a fellow of the Calabash Workshop, will forever be indebted to Wayne Brown (1946-2009) and Mervyn Morris whose workshops she attended. She's been published in both major Jamaican newspapers, The Caribbean Writer, The Caribbean Quarterly, the Journal of Caribbean Literature, the online magazines, the Pittsburg Quarterly and Calabash: a Journal of Caribbean Literature, with work in the upcoming Calabash festival poetry anthology. In 2007, her poetry manuscript received a Highly Recommended award from the National Book Development Council of Jamaica. In 2013 she was short-listed for the Bocas Poetry prize.

Vladimir Lucien

Vladimir Lucien is a writer from St. Lucia. His work has been published in several journals such as the Caribbean Review of Books, Wasafiri, Small Axe, the PN Review, BIM magazine, Caribbean Beat and other journals, as well as an anthology Beyond Sangre Grande, edited by Cyril Dabydeen. His debut collection of poetry, Sounding Ground, was published in May 2014, by Peepal Tree Press.

Dr. Raymond Maughan

Obstetrician Gynaecologist, musician (violinist/classical singer), Ballroom dance Instructor, farmer and award winning photographer. He has seen the first governors' house give way to a petrol station, Pelican Island disappear in the name of progress and his passion is now to record as much of Barbados and Barbadian life before most of it becomes a distant memory unknown to the younger generations to come.

Mark McWatt

Mark McWatt is from Guyana and has been publishing poetry for more than three decades. His first book of fiction, a collection of stories entitled 'Suspended Sentences', was published by Peepal Tree in 2005 and has won four literary prizes, including the overall Commonwealth Writer's Prize for best first book, 2006.

Winsome Minott

Two book-length collections of Winsome Minott's poetry have won awards in the Jamaican National Book Development Council's annual literary competition. She has also had poems published in 'The Caribbean Writer', 'Cultural Voice', 'Squaw Valley', and the 'SX Salon'. Poems submitted to 'Small Axe' in 2009 were adjudged the best entry.

Carl Moore

Carl Moore was the first Editor of The Nation newspaper of Barbados. His first love is radio broadcasting but he has spent most of his working years in print journalism. He heads The Society for a Quieter Barbados; was a founder member of the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment; is a former President of the Barbados National Council of Parent-Teacher Associations; former Chairman of the Barbados Broadcasting Authority, and a prolific writer of letters to the editor. Books (the paper ones), music, preservation of the environment and architecture continue to interest him in his retirement.

Mervyn Morris

a Jamaican, taught at the University of the West Indies Mona campus. Professor Emeritus, he is the author of six books of poetry, including 'The Pond', 'Shadowboxing' and 'Examination Centre' (published by New Beacon). His most recent collection is "I been there, sort of: New and Selected Poems" (Carcanet Press, 2006).

Esther Phillips

Esther Phillips gained an MFA degree in Creative Writing from the University of Miami where she won the Alfred Boas Poetry Prize of the Academy of American Poets. She won the Frank Collymore Award in 2001. Her publications are: 'La Montee' (UWI, 1983), 'When Ground Doves Fly' (Ian Randle, Kingston, 2003), 'The Stone Gatherer' (Peepal Tree Press, 2009.) Her work was recently recorded for the U.K. Poetry Archive. She is editor of Bim: Arts for the 21st Century and founder of the Bim Literary Festival & Book Fair.

Velma Pollard

Velma Pollard is a retired Senior Lecturer in Language Education in the Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education of the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. She has published a novel, two collections of short fiction and three books of poetry. Her novella Karl won the Casa de las Americas prize in 1992.

Mark Ramsay

Mark Ramsay is studying for a degree in English Literature at the University of the West Indies. He was a finalist in the 2013 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award. He believes there is a novel somewhere inside of him.

POETRY

Crossings

Carlyon Blackman

I imagine this was how Columbus felt discovering the Americas:
an olde world rediscovered looking through the looking glass
towards terrifying greens, blinding azure blues, the ululating sight of
coral sands; a virgin atlantic voyager greeted by natives in amulets of wood & grass...

During the bitterest cold of '62 pilgrims braved new passage aboard titanics
bound for coalmines, hospice wards, flagstoned kitchens. With long johns plastered
onto hips, a hardboiled egg in each pocket, nannies navigated colour-blind whelps
through the belly of Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester...

In my wonder years I am yet discovering home on a Virgin Atlantic
voyage: trawling Piccadilly Circus, ASDA, Primark, the market in Barking
collecting trinkets and tokens; riding the little red double-decker bus, frantic
to devour space and time renewing foreign relations. As memory's page darkens,
tribes abandoned, lost, displaced are still in mourning for an illusory permanence.
Enthralled by a world at once intimate and unfamiliar where misdirection, rape,
an ocean's raw beguiling power scatters seed after seed upon a shifting allegiance,
this sea anemone clings to a coral stone plotting perfidy and planning escape...

Transported by these visions of a virgin voyage over a turbulent sea
at Bathsheba (that cove in Payne's Bay where I had my first transatlantic kiss!),
crisscrossing sands and tides caught up in a net of finest introspection binds me
to a place called 'home' where what matters more than bounty lost and found, is risk.

Carlyon Blackman's poem "Crossings" was selected by the BIM Literary Festival &
Book Fair committee to represent the 2014 festival theme of Crossings.

Kicking Daffodils?

Velma Pollard

When Wordsworth (wandering
lonely as a cloud…)
praised golden daffodils
he could not mean
demeaning Kingston buttercups

he never saw them
never crossed Atlantic waters
hardly searched maps for
dots of islands
farming bloody sugar

Today wild critics knock him
blasted colonial
truth is he never said that
boys and girls should stand and
smiling elocute no host of golden daffodils

big men and women
hating schooldays
drag out from slowing memories daffodils
anti-colonial they
curse yellow flowers not Kingston buttercups

nobody's kicking lakes
nobody's kicking dales
though Wordsworth walked o'er both
to burst upon this host
Why then kick golden daffodils?

Meeting a Fake West Indian at Yale

(for Betty Neals)

Winsome Minott

"And where are you from?" Jill the traveller from Greece
asked the newcomer. "I live in Brooklyn, but I am
really from the islands."

I looked up, having established my presence
as the one quintessential island girl. For two days,
and for a while, there was Caribbean unity.

And here she come, trying to shift my sunshine. Cho!

So many abandoned the Pitons of St Lucia,
the slippery slopes of Dunns River Falls in Jamaica,
the clang of pan in Trinidad -- each an excuse to come home.

Yes, they wait till sunset suit them out.
If they do come, they cold as stone, light as ashes
with no shiver, no reggae left in their bones.

I let Betty talk her talk, I know her type.

They take Jesus off the cross when it suit them,
seh they are West Indians through and through;
after quoting scripture, they sing the verse out of tune.

I asked Betty, "So when last you visit chile?" It was then
she confessed, "is one time I ever visit the islands, only
after Papa died. "I went to find family, those he left behind,

for that is how Papa put it, before he shut his eyes."
Now you see my trial, though I want to vex with Betty
I can't, she only trying to find a place to warm a frost bitten heart.

So I small up myself, and share the space,
especially after Betty said, "Is like a island *spirit tek me*."
And *spirit tek* is one sure test to know if we belong.

Penelope's Response to Calypso

Winsome Minott

I is the girl who live up the rocks
beyond you, and yes, after 20 years
I still did tek him back; you only
know 'bout seven. So long he was
gone, I had to see the scar on his
thigh to know him. Buffeted
by sea savages, any man would be glad
to have someone bathe and 'noint him
with oils. So you play your part,
and as for the seven years, much respec'.
During that time I fell for
a beautiful able-body fisherman
from Little Bay, but
another impossible situation.
Anyway, Odysseus is like driftwood;
long before he met you and me
he belonged to the sea.
When driftwood wash up,
they make interesting furnishings
and conversation piece, if you into
that sort of thing. So when 'Dysseus
drop in and we walk, the sands
don't bear no grudge.

Politician Nightmare

Mervyn Morris

I'm in a meeting
sorting out

an everlasting list
of supplicants

and suddenly
I'm flying

low
above the city

and a mob
is reaching up

trying to drag me down

Communion

Mervyn Morris

eyes no longer
altar-focused
light upon
a ragged stranger
peering through
a window at the side

and monitor
what we perceive
as a potential threat

a robber maybe
or a man unhinged
who probably
will crash the service
and disturb the peace

unless he is
an angel

Another Yard, Summer, 2014

Millicent Graham

Neighbors paddle in a triage pool, a ball
loses its way – lands in our bed of weeds
and lays sick as once puffed air bleeds.
Then like a hero rescuing lost toy
I watch you care to fold deflated joy
and hand it to the youngest of the pair
I start to feel, we could grow something here

The pear tree curves to a head of leaves,
holds taut the clothes-line that rattles peg-teeth
In its strain the yard looks bare
the gangrene steps, a plastic chair
tipped towards a starving table.
The kitchen window frames you; beaten stare—
I start to say, we could grow something here

We cook, eat, walk on the heads of nails
on a space that a workman failed to tile
The soles' flesh ignores unfinished floor
un-purposed cupboard, undone kitchen door.
Entering you see too empty, I see full.
I see the modest ends that need repair
and ache to say, we could grow something here

A Usual Thursday Morning

Ann Limm

A usual Thursday morning in the tropics:
sun – lots of it, and cars in traffic.
Perhaps in one of them a child counts
all the red cars; all the white ones
like I used to.

And I'm on my way to work
with the sun, the cars and traffic light
on red. Then the car shakes.
There's no earthquake
but a man pasted to my window
with charcoal skin, electrocuted hair.

The light is still on red.
He goes closer to the bonnet
but still by my window, and jerks
jerks his penis – the whites of his eyes
skyward, till the light turns green
and I? drive on.

Guinea Hen Weed

Ann Limm

I smell of guinea hen weed today –
green like the weed my feet trample;
the weed dogs toss and roll their heads
about, in frenzied, happy, dog-gesture.

I smell like guinea hen weed today.
I had the tea
so maybe, perhaps, any moment now
I'll find an open window and toss
my fingers through
and they'll molt, root in the ground
sprout guinea hen leaves.

Lizzie

Velma Pollard

Francina saved the
"humpbacked turtle with the shell-fish eyes"
woman too poor to keep
"she body an' soul-seam together"
saved it from big bulldozers tearing up to build
"a dance hall and a barbecue"

The Bajan bard took note
and made her History

Here coastal concerns
get summed up "nothing to protect...
bare land rockstone and trees"
and then "two lizad an so aan"

selector smartly chose Lizzie
harmless but hugely hated here
playing the popular
feeding folk phobia

selector, surely you know better.
Wheel and come here Francina

Endangering Species

Carlyon Blackman

Sea turtles have a delicate gamy meat,
tastes like a cross
between fish and beef.
Girls who have turtle flesh
bear knowing,
they have secrets enough
to give away a few.

They found one
on the beach last night
on her back
barely breathing.
Maybe she came
up too soon for air,
it upset her equilibrium.
Maybe a loose propeller
spinning out of its axis
impaled her soft centre,
kept her fixated there.

By tomorrow she will be covered
in newspapers.
The guy with the digital camera
who captured her
will get to be the hero
for releasing her back into the wild.

The Language Situation in Puerto Rico

Loretta Collins-Klobah

Dos Pescadores en un bote pequeño cerca de la Playa Santa en Guánica
Two fishermen in a fishing dinghy near Guánica

¡Míralo!

Hijo 'e Puta, esa pendejá…

Mira, mira esa e' la Orca,
esa es la Orca.

¡Ay! Hijo 'e Puta,

diablo, cabrón, mira la ahí.

Un grupo grande, ¿oíste?
Están debajo del bote.

Ea, madre, déjame salir de aquí.

¿Dónde está?

En la punta del bote.
Vete ahí, míralo en donde está.

Ay! Sopló, mira eso ¿Qué fue eso?

Mirando el bote por debajo. Está…

Va a salir ahora.

Va a salir en el bote ahora, Negro.

Estate quieto! Tranquilo.

What do you mean, *tranquilo?*
There's a FUCKIN' ORCA
unda the boat!

Ayyy! La grabe completita!
Mira eso, la Orca.

Eaa, diablo, Negro. Hay como veinte de ellas ahí.

Missing in Translation

Loretta Collins-Klobah

Two fishermen in a fishing dinghy near Guánica
Dos Pescadores en un bote pequeño cerca de la Playa Santa en Guánica

Look at it!

Son-of-a-whore, this dumbass…

Look, look, this is the Orca,
this is the Orca.

Ay! Son-of-a-whore,
devil, bastard, look at her there.

A big group, you hear me?
They are under the boat.

Ay, mother, let me get outta here.
Where is it?

At the bow of the boat.
Get outta there, look where it is.

Ay! It spouted, look at that.
What was that?

Looking at the boat from below. There…

It's gonna come out now.
It's gonna come into the boat now, Bud.

Be quiet, calm.

¿Qué quieres decir, *tranquilo?*
¡Hay UNA PUTA ORCA
bajo el barco!

Ayyy! I recorded the whole thing.
Look at this, the Orca.

Eaa, devil, Bud. There are like twenty of them there.

“Putting Up A Resistance”

Vladimir Lucien

i
Observe first the body: how it is cupped and carried
in so many places, how its various pairs are married,
how it is lathered, gathered up for the salve and soothe,
all of it mounting and mounting into soft storeys
of smells rising from rubbery after-bath flesh. How oiled
and creamed, how gleam and clipped and shaved and fresh,
slung and tightened, zipped and hooked, tied, fastened
and so devotedly buttoned.

ii
At nights, at work on the laptop, and the sinking
of her voice like water in the face-basin, the contrail
of her last word, awaiting acknowledgement. But then the smell
of soap; bubbles gathered like grapes somewhere.
And now she is singing through water, through eyeburn
of soap, through towel-muffle and teethscrub and gargle. It is in
this that you notice the absence, when she sings her
presence faintly from far off. This is what it is.
This is how. To hear the singing in what it is you have.

iii
Tell yourself that there is disease in this business of running
around. There is death warm and brimming beneath
every thin belt, skulking low in each pelvis, communicable
and tenebrous. Consider every vicissitude, every drop
in the frequency of perfume, the body’s truer scents rising.
Consider the ultimate unknowability of a body.
Each new thing egressing like a symptom,
a rash of facts gradually appearing.

iv
A shirt unbuttoning in anger always renders the last button
dangerous. It snaps: a small explosion, a cut-eye. The end
of a thing as we know it. The cool-down bath drones
behind the door, lasts so long that you listen
for signs of life. Then the drying up, towel spending
too long over face, gathering like thoughts over head,
hair hanging wet, heavy, dark, the body pale
with powder, wanting still, your company.

Love

Velma Pollard

Searching for happiness
again
when she his
sweetheart
mistress
wife

left suddenly

Sundays
he took
one two three
women
one by one to church
not his church
theirs

But every Wednesday afternoon
he went to his
armed with red roses
flowers she loved
sat musing by her headstone
read and re-read
and never tired…
“only the actions of the just
smell sweet and blossom in their dust”

Man Without Country

McDonald Dixon

i
Can someone ask the wayward sun to shine
on this island's pain, buried under black
clouds, too lazy to rain their own weight down
on hills gone gray without night. Hoping to
change like weather, without asking for
everlasting myths to resurrect where
the dead and living account for one cause.
Inseparable as past from present; tense
lies comatose, waiting for extreme
unction. Nothing else breathes.

ii
I return, a shadow, to this callous
lump of dirt. Born here, promised rebirth.
Only in a mirror, can I see myself –
no one else sees me. No one else can hear.
Swear; we have had better days and silent
nights before the poem fried itself,
triggered by a sunset's dying flare.
Never to dazzle again in this place
where Liberas are in order; death died
here. Amen for sinners; Amen to their pain.

iii
An amber light skims across the waters,
opaque like the black veil over this land.
Hops and skips like the child over river stones
to traverse a gorge in need of a bridge.
The afterglow from this light wells this child's
head, who measures its warmth against his skin,
but does not understand the miracle
of senses. What sad music swells the air-
waves with its thick blob of tears? The rooster
returns to roost, but there are no trees.

Faces From History

McDonald Dixon

I refuse to hate because I cannot expunge
the lie even if I repeat it seldom.
Ashamed
to challenge mirrors and their curse.
Afraid I will find a white grandfather
frowning back at me –
because, I need to explain
those fetishes like chains, they bind me –
to one part.
That knack for seeing black in daylight -
everywhere else is out of bounds – still follows me.

I cannot deny I am part of what I discard.
Afraid that no one understands, the bastard
in me is still a man. None of us possess
the purity of thought to think in black and white
and cleanse the world of its malaise –
transforming hatred into art.

Black Things

Esther Phillips

Black smoke and the Kendal factory horn
sounding through our still-dreaming dark;
a row of distant trees, thick, silent,
not letting light through, keeping vigilance
on our front house window. And of all things
our father's black Morris car he cranked
one day for the last time. It never moved again.
Only the smell of damp, vinyl, mildew,
and us children taking turns at the wheel
or gear-stick, travelling to Bridgetown or
Newcastle; anywhere or just nowhere.
And my sister weeping out some grief
we never understood.

Footprint

Mark McWatt

I shuck shoes and socks and plant a warm foot
on the cold ceramic surface of the bathroom floor:
I step back, and for all of six seconds—no more—
there's this visible footprint which I capture
on camera, feeling like a scientist hunting
ephemeral proofs of sub-atomic particles
with the help of huge, expensive machines…

But everything points to the truth of disappearance.

This faint signature of being that time erases
teaches the transience of life itself, and all
material things—not to mention words, phrases,
the languages we love, that impossible 'high'
of great poetry, the beauty of nature that lends
my spirit wings… Every molecule of our 'matter'
once existed inside a sun and will probably
end up there again, however the world's age
and our own thoughts of permanence might flatter…

But whatever happens, I have no need for fear,
I cherish my footprints, though they disappear.

The Dying Day

Mark McWatt

I watch as the wild red of sunset gives way
to the somber, cloudy grey of the dying day
which vultures my head with dark humours:
whispered losses, nightfall and bleak rumours
of wasted time…can't you smell the flavour?
Yet my mind insists it's a time to savour
the spaces of longing where sweet love dies:
what do we live for, if not goodbyes?

To learn, to love, to long, to linger—lost
in the deep vulva of twilight, counting the cost
of the day-dream, wondering whether these verses
can redeem squandered time and stay the dark hearses
of night; can compensate for the wild, stolen pleasure
of strident lust…Can a poem atone in full measure
for the worthless, western drift of a dry soul
towards the trembling edge of night's dark hole…

into which the sky will fall and cover me…?

A Birthday Reflection in Verse for Fidel

Kendel Hippolyte

From the Sierra Maestra heights of your eighty-five years
what do you see when you look back
at the long journey, always uphill, that has brought you here?
This journey that began as a young man's fierce, questing track
through the unending campesino poverty and Habana's corrupt streets and palaces where
Uncle Sam's Mafia nephews gambled for Cuba with goons and profiteers.

What do you see, El Commandante, when you scrutinize
a more than half-century of *revolución*?
Green fields of schoolchildren; muralled workplaces; the shared grain of material progress;
a peasant unbending upward, exclamation mark from his own question;
and between Moncada and Playa Giron, a people finding a lost consciousness.
Such memories no doubt must fill and overbrim your eyes.

But you see too the shadows of the clouds over your island:
thunderheads swelling; a threatening nuclear rain;
a fifty-two year siege; a bomb-barrage of lies; a strangling embargo;
638 assassination plots (and even now they still would try again);
a static swarm of truth-obscuring flies; the continuing insult of Guantanamo.
Yet Cuba's history remains – imperial waves of onslaught that ebb into sand.

You faced the same devil-and-deep sea dilemmas Toussaint came upon,
determining who the ally, who the enemy.
Like him, you struggled, almost lost, then broke the rack
your country suffered on, undid the golden shackles, then when she was free,
met the irrational rage of the defeated master who wants his slave-mistress back.
It's what they all want, whether the star-spangled emperors or Napoleon.

All this must be so clear from your Sierra Maestra height
i wonder how Cuba now seems from that view:
a young woman at a mirror, beautiful, trembling with unmade decisions;
a daughter, half-wanting to leave home and aching with her fidelity to you.
In a car outside, Uncle and madam wait, with gold anklets and white, powdery persuasions.
Cuba, in a fierce trembling at the mirror, eyes searching left, then right.

i'm trembling too. Till i remind myself: You raised her. Very well.
She'll know how to keep both eyes open
to walk a path without the signposts you had, but still with your vision.
She'll show a way, for her scattered archipelago family who have kept hope in
her, in Caribbean civilization. Her history, El Jefe, has been your absolution.
Cuba, señor, is your best gift to yourself. And us. A happy 85th, Fidel.

Revolution

Esther Phillips

How to revolve harmoniously
around a fixed point has always
been our question.
You, with your Marxist stance.
Me, with my love of Christ.

You waged a patient war against
my "closed" mind. Book after book
informed me how a Marxist looked
at Jesus; symbolism, not the literal,
was the enlightened approach;
the Word was mired in politics and fable.

Again, how to resolve the question
of the body? For you, the seat of pleasure.
For me, however sweet its plunder,
still the temple.

Product of history and social formation:
the sum total, in your view, of the human.
I hold that man is his dual nature,
God-shaped, though flawed and prone to error.

***

How are we now, years on
from earlier tensions when we thought it
worth our while to strive for common ground?

I've opened the door much wider
to your deity: Reason, but find him shy
of going beyond my mind:
I've asked him what is this essential
loneliness? Why seek purpose and
meaning? Why long for certainty,
and what is the source of that longing?

Why poetry? From what abyss
does poetry spring—distilled, clearer
than thought, multi-hued, each sense held
in abeyance to its wonder?

How does Faith cast her upward beam
and re-configure stars?

But more than all, Reason remains
dumbfounded when I ask him this:
what is that greater Love
that makes me love you still?

TWIN PALMS by **Dr. Raymond Maughan**

Golden Palm trunk soon after it had rained. Turned upside down, copied and the copy inverted. The inverted mirror images present an interesting design that can be hung on opposite pillars, or at the side of a mirror or suitably matching artwork.

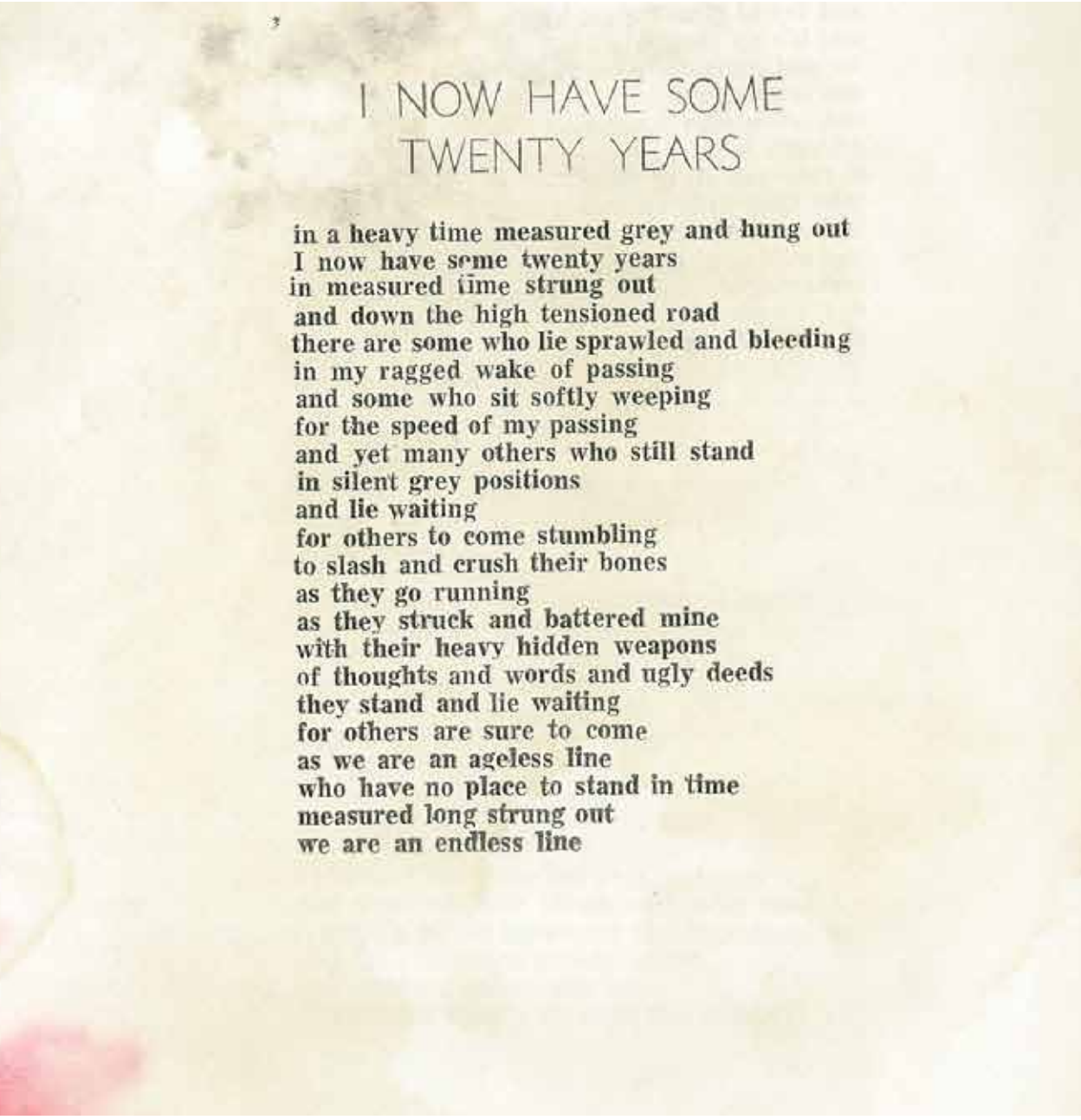
Unlife

Kendel Hippolyte

The life unlived
drains from the head, the heart
Down to the feet
and out into a shadow.
Whether a dark issue as you walk
or a thick black clot you stand in,
the life unlived
will not stop bleeding.
Behind the white noise of the days,
always: the drip of dreams haemorrhaging,
the slight lisp of a substance leaking
out of you onto the grey ways
that your feet cannot stop walking.
The life unlived
coagulates a glom of unsaid words
stuck in the throat, while each slight sentence
flits a light fizz from the mouth
that dries, lies whitely on the lips.
A tongue's flick, and the flecks
sly inward, are regurgitated. And thus fed,
the life unlived lives. Lifelong. Then
death, sliding to you, licking your shadow,
swallowing it, up to your feet,
sucks, in a few sips,
the thinned, soured essence
and leaves, strangely unsatisfied,
unsure of when,
in truth,
you died.

I Now Have Some Twenty Years

Michael Foster



I NOW HAVE SOME
TWENTY YEARS

in a heavy time measured grey and hung out
I now have some twenty years
in measured time strung out
and down the high tensioned road
there are some who lie sprawled and bleeding
in my ragged wake of passing
and some who sit softly weeping
for the speed of my passing
and yet many others who still stand
in silent grey positions
and lie waiting
for others to come stumbling
to slash and crush their bones
as they go running
as they struck and battered mine
with their heavy hidden weapons
of thoughts and words and ugly deeds
they stand and lie waiting
for others are sure to come
as we are an ageless line
who have no place to stand in time
measured long strung out
we are an endless line

and through it all
though the scars hang deep and long
my tongue has been untouched
and must silently sing out
when it will
of the quiet sounds within my mind
where no heavy club or sword
clutched in no grey hand
ever
can come near
and though it was not easy
and though the scars hang long and deep
my tongue has been unspoiled
and must silently sing out
when its hungry seeking eyes
draw out and softly touch
yet another silent ear.

for we are an ageless line
we who have no room to stand
who need no room
who want no room to stand
or lie or sit or crawl around
in a heavy time measured grey and hung out
we are a long
and endless
line
moving

Epitaph

Michael Foster

EPITAPH

....and in that year
the body of walter michael the second
passed through the ragged mountain
of collected pain
and off the face of this coveting earth
out into the plain of eternal night
and the wind of his spirit
whistled across the ancient scars of his tongue
and touched infinity with a white hand
thus . . .

FICTION

Instructions for Deboning a Fish

Mark Ramsay

The dolphin quivered, its gills fluttering, its mouth gaping and shutting in the sight of something unseen. The silver sheen of its body was offset by the beaten copper of dried fish blood that stained the pier around it. Its tail flopped once, twice. Its gills stopped fluttering. Boy watched as those scales turned grey and the inside of the single eye that he could see, was sucked down somewhere and put out. Boy felt the soft sting of salt breeze and wiped the back of his hand across his eyes. He cleared his throat and whispered.

"You ever catch de soul of a fish?"

The deboning knife in the woman's hand gleamed; it slipped in, under the still gills and pulled open the dolphin's stomach. Fresh blood ran, adding the rank metal of a thousand one cent coins to the sea-smell.

"No."

Boy leaned forward, his index finger hovering above the fresh pool. He traced the crimson contours, watched as drops slipped in between the cracks in the pier. He frowned.

"But it... not here." He whispered, "I can't see no fish soul."

"I tell you so already." The woman rocked back onto her heels. Her face was wrinkled- Boy knew about wrinkles. His mother had them. She rubbed her face with cocoa butter and left it to dry in the night air. He wondered if this woman knew about cocoa butter. Cocoa butter made his mother's skin smooth, shiny, like a single fish scale.

"But where it gone then?"

"Maybe it never was. You think 'bout that, Boy?" She hung her head over the dolphin, the scales turned black in her shadow. Slice – the head gone. Snick – the tail. She picked the thick steaks of pink flesh up with her bare hands and put them into a metal bucket.

Boy looked over the rim, “How come you don’t use de fish market?”

“De fish must be cut and clean here, like so. My mother show me in this same spot.”

“Where she now?”

“Not sure.”

“How you mean you not sure!”

“She dead, Boy.”

The woman rested back against a metal pylon, her bloodied hands sagging beside her. Boy wanted to tell her something nice. Boy wanted to put her hand in his and squeeze tightly, tightly enough to unlearn her mother’s death – but the blood on her hands reminded him of his question.

“You mother tell you ‘bout fish soul?”

“Boy… Ain’t nobody studying de soul of fish.” Her voice had that wearied tone it sometimes adopted when talking to Boy and the new girl who ran the facility, with her clipboard and ponytail.

“But, if fish have soul, how you can jus’ kill it?”

“Soul or no soul, Boy, fish is food.” She picked up the head, the tail; the internal fish-refuse and threw it all into the ocean. She leaned over to wash her hands in the salt water. Boy moved forward when she disappeared for a moment and found a small lump of blue-purple flesh. He picked it up, and sized it in his palm. It was coated in a thick layer of fish-blood.

“Dis de fish heart?” He asked when she resurfaced.

“… Yes.”

“Fish do have soul, den!”

“Just cause fish have a heart? You know palm trees have hearts?”

“Not real hearts, though. Fish have a real heart – see?” He held the bluish lump up for her inspection. She didn’t look at it.

“What make dat heart real? Maybe palm heart is a real heart – fish heart fake.” She was staring at the pool of blood before her; interspersed with fish scales – she scraped her knife back and forth through the filth, “Maybe all our hearts fake, maybe only palm trees have a soul, den!”

Boy didn’t listen to her; he was fixated on the heart in the middle of his outstretched palm.

"If fish have souls, den why it can't be in the scales, in the eyes, in the tail? Is the tail that push the fish through the water."

Boy studied the small organ in his hand, "Is like you can still see fish-soul in it…" He whispered to himself.

"What about gills…what about… de fin! Why the heart so important!"

Boy glanced up. A long shadow fell against her brow and dripped down blackening out her nose, her lips. Her eyes were rimmed with water.

"Boy, sometimes hearts is overused, hear me? Overused."

"In school they teach us that heart does keep you alive."

"I know that. You think just cos I ain't go school I can't see that?"

"No, if it keep you alive, it must keep you soul inside."

"No. Soul got to be more than dat. Got to be something deep, right? Like God squat down and breathe right inside of you and me." She pursed her lips and exhaled, mimicking creation. But her eyes weren't smiling, they were still dead.

"That not right at all…" Boy said, his voice low.

"It is written."

Boy's face had creased up, but then relaxed under some fierce internal self-will. His eyes melted at the corners, he began to cry silently – with just his eyes. Woman shifted uncomfortably.

"What wrong?"

"My grandmother say heart contains de soul – what if she wrong?"

"She ever cut open fish belly? She ever *see* the soul of fish in this?" She pointed with her knife towards the drying film of blood, "Maybe the fish soul is in the water boy, maybe the fish soul is in the seaweed dem eat… What wrong with thinkin' dat?"

"My father couldn't swim."

"What dat have to do with anything? Plenty people can't swim."

"Where his soul is if he wasn't in de water? He ain't had no scales neither…" Boy began to rub his thighs, up and down, his eyes distant, dark horizons. "She say when my father get his chest cut open, that she did see his soul leave out through his heart when it stop beating. She say that whenever I ask 'bout him," His voice began to crack "…So I figure fish-soul in de same place."

Woman stopped scraping at the blood. She looked down at what she'd done; the

bright, spread stain had dripped in between the crevices of the pier. She dropped the knife.

"Throw dat heart into de sea."

Boy shook his head furiously.

"You don't see? You find fish-soul after all. Now let it loose in the ocean, let the ocean have de… soul."

Boy slid his hand out over the water; he slackened his palm and felt the organ run down the length of his fingers. He caught it in the well of the tip-most knuckles in his right hand. He paused, took a breath, and loosened his knuckles. The heart fell. It bobbed for a brief moment, and was sucked down. Woman leaned over the water with him, and together they watched the line of breakers that buried the fish-soul. She covered his hand with hers.

That night, with the fish blood darkening his fingernails, he crept to the edge of the cliff above the bay. The full moon was rising just behind the lighthouse; he scrunched his left eye shut and pressed his thumb over the moon, to see which was bigger. Boy stretched out his index finger and watched as it covered up the entire horizon. He drew his finger back from his face and was amazed at how much of the sea he could make disappear. His thumb was the size of the moon, his index finger an entire ocean. Boy put out his pinkie and measured the distance between the sea and the moon. It was a single knuckle wide. He knew that just beyond the moon was heaven. So his father, swirling in the ocean with fish-soul, with all souls, would get there soon. He was sure of it. It was just a knuckle wide.

Cut Glass

Christine Barrow

Three days of five-star tranquility. She has given herself three days. It's time enough, not long enough to change her mind.

The bellboy, *Je m'appelle Anton Bienvenue à Martinique,* on his nametag in gold letters, is busy with the remote control for the air conditioning and another for the TV, less than half the size of her husband's latest flat screen.

She waves her ring-less fingers towards the glass door leading out onto the balcony, "Monsieur, er … Anton, if I may, open, er … la porte, s'il-vous-plait. Quelquefois, les portes comme ça, elles, er … jam, stick." She presses her hands together.

Anton tilts his head and raises his eyebrows, turns and flicks off the air conditioning, taps a metal switch on the door, bends to remove a strip of wood fitted into the metal groove on the floor, slides the door open and concludes his perfect performance with a bow, his hands curved upward like an opera star. "Voila," his smile radiant, so young. "I advise that you close it, perhaps an hour before the sunset. Sometimes the mosquitoes, at this time of year…"

I am passing for an English tourist, she thinks. Thank you, Mom, for the accent, and the whiteness.

She hands him a ten Euro note, unsure about the exchange rate. "Merci, Mademoiselle," his voice sings. He smiles that smile again. "If there is anything else?" a hint of something she hardly remembers, his eyes shining soft like amber as he nods and closes the door behind him.

She lies across the big king bed, arms and legs spread wide, her head heavy on the pile of cool white pillows, Mademoiselle, rolling her tongue around each syllable, staring at the small round lights embedded in the low ceiling, gently stroking her fingertips over the burgundy, satin bedspread. Her heart has been numb for a long time, but she cannot escape the throbbing in her ribs, on the soles of her feet.

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His wife for nearly two years, but with nothing between them for over a month, she had performed her one bold-face modeling act in the black camisole with discrete

lace inserts, her only purchase for herself, for himself, and her first and worst mistake, the back of his hand across her jaw, pelting her across the bedroom floor, "Whore."

Hold your breath, bite your lip. Lie still.

After he leaves, tyres screeching on the tarmac driveway, she shuts out the glare of his white walls, his white curtains, his white burglar bars, and curls up in a corner of the shower, howling like a pet dog left out in the rain. What did I do to make him so? she asks herself.

She never knows which side of him will come out, the get-up, all-your-fault or the wasn't-thinking, won't-happen-again, but it did, the love-beat swing of threats, slaps, choking, burning, then his sorry-tears flowing with hers, another honeymoon makeup, showers of diamonds real in his world, glass in hers, each one cutting sharp into her fingers, her ears, her throat. Until she has nothing left to lose, except the secret she guards in her blood, her very own shame growing to destroy them both.

She wakes. No mosquitoes in this cool, dark room. It would remind her mother of a plush English country inn decked out in woodland colours, deep reds, greens and browns, lampshades fringed and tasseled, thick carpet, heavy lined curtains. She pulls them back as far as they will go, switches on the light and steps out. The balcony is small, with one step she crosses to the bars, set waist-high in a wooden frame, only about three inches wide on top. The frame looks newly painted. It doesn't shake when she tests it with both her hands. There is room for the little table and one chair. The table is low and has a glass top, but the chair seems sturdy enough. Her room is on the top floor. She looks down onto an oval swimming pool that shimmers in the artificial lights around the edges. Just a glimpse and she feels giddy.

Looking up, she sees the nearly-full moon set into the dark sky, reflecting gold. I have become you, she thinks.

She turns and refills her glass. "So unusual to find a whole bottle of champagne in a mini-bar, n'est-ce pas?"

"Je t'en pris, cherie."

"Bien sur, I forget where I am," she giggles and empties the bottle into Anton's glass, slips into the bath and leans against him through the overflowing pink foam like cherry blossom, as he strokes her shoulders with soft soap, a vague scent of roses. Flinching as he touches her ribs, she moves his hands to her breasts.

"My name used to be Joanna, she says, Jo to my friends."

"Zho," he softens her name. "I shall call you Zhosephine, la belle Zhosephine." His lips on her neck are as light as silk. She feels him hard against her lower back. It's been so very long, but she will not harm him. As he shrugs, no smile, and slides away, she holds on to the image of his sleek back like polished mahogany, a dollop of pink froth on his shoulder.

No, not Josephine, not the Empress. Her larger than life marble statue in the town square, posing to look pregnant, is headless, red paint daubed over her shoulder, over her puffed sleeve and down the front of her long, white gown.

She sinks down into the water and counts to twenty-seven before surfacing. She goes under again, this time for thirty counts. And rises, choking, gasping for air. This is what it's like. She steps out of the bath. In the mirror, she remembers her slim shape. She winds a towel around her wet hair, "You must never cut it," he said. The muted lights flatter, no sign of anything, her feet cool on the sleek tiles, no one would know. I could still go back, she thinks.

But later that night, she plays the game, her survivor's game. She stands with her feet apart, one hand against the wall for balance, and closes her eyes. She sheds her scorched skin, peels off her branded soles, scrapes away bruises, breaks off broken bones and pelts it all over her own shoulder, and when there is nothing left but her face dangling in mid-air, the face he never touched after that that one time, she forces herself to go one step further, to turn around, open her eyes and look, and look again, at the raw, red, oozing, festering mass that once was her. Then she knows she can bear anything.

She was sitting under a manchineal tree on the beach with her book when he found her. "You shouldn't sit here," he said. "The leaves blister, especially your kind of skin."

She was about to tell him, only when they're wet, and that she was born and raised here, lived here all her life, when he said, "I've been watching you." So young, she was only eighteen, not caring how she looked or how she spoke, a future somewhere out there, to become somebody and make a difference, carrying her mother's dreams, when he began to remodel her, this poor, pass-for-white girl, when she wasn't looking. "Your eyes change colour in the light, green to blue to grey. They are mine," he said. Bewitching her through a whirlwind romance, the wedding, the honeymoon in springtime Washington.

"Darling, how absolutely lovely," her new, carat crystal voice rang out. "Do ask that man to take our photo." He indulged her then, as they stood hand-in-hand, a moment under the pure, pink clouds of cherry blossom.

"They'll be dead, cluttering up the pavement by next week. Come, we're late for lunch," he said, stubbing out his cigarette on the cherry tree trunk, crushing it to shreds under the sole of his shoe. Small signs, that she denied. Like the rings he chose, the large sapphire enclosed in a circle of diamonds, the matching white gold wedding bands, around her finger. She didn't know then that he owned the air she breathed, that she'd lost herself in this man she knew so little about.

"Children, one of each would be perfect," he said. All planned, his family plan. She smiled, of course, though she knew it could not be so.

———

She had never made big plans before, not like this, not on her own. At first, it was stop-go, then it spiraled, faster than his swinging fist out of nowhere. Fly away, fly away, her mantra, overflowing into panic.

"St. Lucia? No, no, someone will recognize you. Martinique, incognito. Three days, it'll take him longer than that to find you. He won't trace the money, bit by bit, from his weekly housekeeping allowance. Your passport can't be out of date. If it is, it's all over. God, help me. Can't get your ticket on line, he'll trace the card transaction. Pay for everything in cash, at the airport. Check, make sure the flight's not full. Drive there, no take a taxi, a different taxi. Change money there. Breathe, breathe again, another pill, calm down. Take basics, carry-on only, your very own runaway bag. Soft-sole shoes, you'll have to walk all the way through both airports. Underwear, three cotton tops, nothing dressy, no one must remember you. Take off his rings, hide them in your bag. Flush all the pills down the lavatory, where to put the boxes, your name on the labels, burn them, no dump them in a garbage can on the way. He will never know if you infected him. Sweet Jesus, I can't do this."

Her mother had questions: "Where to? How long? Does he …? Do you want me to come with you?"

"Oh, Mom, I'm fine. Really." The lie slips out. "Just taking a little break."

Fly away. No note. No loose ends.

Now, she has to be careful, to act normal. She knows how. On the first day, she goes down to the ground floor, to the restaurant for breakfast, smiling, "Bonjour." On the second, for lunch and to the hotel boutique where she spends the last of her money on a long, silk kimono, smooth and cool as coconut water, "Delightful, merci." It's pale pink, irresistible, reminding her of herself, as a child. His colours for her were black, burgundy and gold.

———

She would smother her body heat, craving more of him, gasping to her own

secret rhythm, as he slept. And she suppressed the viral worms breeding inside her – since that last free, senseless night before she married him, no names, no contacts, hit and run – with a little, yellow pill, one-a-day forever, on an empty stomach. Taken at night, to avoid the nauseous, drowsy, dizzy side-effects, but she still got the full, vivid nightmares. She hid them with all the others for sleeping, for birth control, the pain-killers, the anti-depressants, locked in the closet, behind the extra towels on the top shelf, in the guest room, they never had guests, the key zipped up in her purse.

"We can reduce your viral load, but it's not a cure. Condoms, every time. And you must disclose to your husband."

"Yes, doctor," she said, as she thought, Disclose? For him to get tested? He had no idea.

She played the wife to perfection, hid the whore, and the victim, and the vector, as voices clashed in her head. Her own insisting he's different today, he loves me, today will be better than yesterday, try again, try harder. Her mother's, don't make the same mistake I did, the trophy wife locked inside her respectability trap. His, we belong together, I will look after you. The voice of her mother's God, Be Still and Know.

It is early morning on her last day here. She dials the number imprinted in her memory, the one number she has dialed every Sunday. She will make it short, I love you Mom, try to understand. She drops the phone after two rings. There is no rush. She has hours before check-out time.

She walks through the glass door and blinks in the sunlight. She sits on the chair, leans back and closes her eyes. The sun glows blood-red behind her eyelids, warm on her skin, like a healing balm. She could sit here and drift into gentle oblivion, but she knows she must act.

She stands on the chair and balances her bare foot on the narrow wooden ledge above the bars. She hears the muffled ring of the telephone in the dark room. For a moment, it seems she could go either way. But she, Mademoiselle Joanna, will not look down. She shakes her hair loose and opens her arms. The winged sleeves of her kimono spread like pink clouds. Diamonds spark and explode in the oval swimming pool.

What's in a Name

Joanne C. Hillhouse

Mathew Henry Luke was, at seven, an odd looking boy; small for his age, but with a man-sized head. From the settled look of him there wouldn't be much more growing either, not in his body any way. The head looked like it was just getting started.

Everybody called him Big Head. Not particularly imaginative nor particularly kind, but it didn't bother him. He'd heard the name all his life; it was as normal as breathing to him and really not unusual for Cox Village where you had a Humpback Helen, Slab-up Sandy, Club Foot Carl, Loose Louise, Squeeze, and, in the case of Pastor George's illegitimate grandson, Accident. Big Head was almost a kindness considering the circumstances of his young existence, circumstances which had brought him under his grandmother's care and which she grumbled about as she eked out their living selling sweets – sugar cake, tamarind balls, guava cheese, and tamarind stew – as a roadside vendor.

Those circumstances notwithstanding, Big Head was as normal as any of the boys running around in raggedy short pants, their shirt tail flapping in the breeze as they pushed tire rims with bent wire, kicked around a partially deflated football on unpaved roadways, or ran the length of the pasture flying kites made of used up newspaper and coconut spine glued together by the fruit from the *turkkleberry* tree.

Big Head especially enjoyed playing pick-up and marbles. Pick-up was all about reflexes, a stone on the back of your hand, a grab for another, palming both before the airborne stone touched the ground. They could do this for hours. Marbles took much more skill, and patience, and the spoils of victory were more marbles for his collection. Big Head's bag of marbles – really the scuffed remains of the Chinese Checkers game his *mammy* had sent for him several Christmases ago mixed in with the even shabbier ones he'd won as the Cox Village champion – was among the very few toys he actually owned. He approached the game like a high stakes chess match – though he didn't yet know what chess was, he had all the moves; psyching your opponent out, seeing two moves ahead, strategy backed up by accuracy and power when play called for it.

Big Head's main rival was also his first crush, Cheri, a spunky *manjohn* who wore dresses and knee socks only when her mother made her, on Sundays. But that was Sundays for you. Every Sunday, his grandmother bathed, white-powdered, combed and

greased him – ashy elbows, knees, heels and picky head – into some semblance of respectability too. Sunday mass and Sunday school were rituals endured by every child in Cox Village, even the ones whose fathers opened the rum shop every day and closed it every night.

More often than not, though, Cheri and Big Head slipped out of church right around the time Pastor George, seduced by the sound of his own voice, closed his eyes and started shaking his body as people started waving their hands and swaying. If not then, then during the break between mass and Sunday school when adults slipped away for Sunday breakfast and children settled in for another hour or so of stomping and shouting.

The boy and girl would crouch under the church, a wooden building mounted on cement blocks in an otherwise empty pasture, giggling and shushing each other as they flicked the marble, trying to out-play each other; a small pile of wrappers from the sweets they sucked, sweets bought with Cheri's collection money, growing alongside them.

This was their routine as many Sundays as Big Head could remember.

Until it ended.

That was the Sunday Ms. Hodge showed up early to pick up her daughter, prissy Marie-Louise Hodge with her ringlets and ribboned socks, and had the urge to pee and the inspiration to stoop behind the church steps to do it. Ms. Hodge was stooped with stockings down when she saw the ghostly shadows bright-eyed and blinking at her and let out a squawk that sounded like the clucking of a disturbed fowl, the sound that comes out of a fowl when her feathers are up and she's getting ready to peck. Big Head ought to know as his grandmother sent him to disturb the fowls in their back yard coop to clean it every Sunday morning before church, and he had the peck marks on his arms to prove it. At the sound, he jumped up and promptly banged his head against the underside of the church.

By the time he and Cheri crawled out, and Ms. Hodge with them, him still rubbing his head, his precious marbles abandoned, Pastor George and the whole Sunday School class had poured out of the church to investigate the mêlée.

After that, it was "that Big Head boy" this and "that Big Head boy" that, "*not fit to be 'round decent people*", "a whoring mother and a *jail bud* father, what you expect", "bad, top to tail".

And for the first time, Big Head felt like there was something wrong with him.

After that, and the beating he got from his grandmother for scudding Sunday school, Cheri wasn't allowed to play with him anymore.

Church was no longer fun.

Without her, and with people whispering about what they had been up to up under the church on the Lord's good day, Big Head preferred being by himself; even with all the beatings he suffered from his grandmother for scudding church – never school, where his big head actually did him some good. Alex Haley's Roots was popular that season, it being Black History Month in nearby America and the Caribbean being good at mimicking all things American; so the others, people in the neighbourhood, took to calling him Kunta after the hard-headed African who refused to accept that he was a slave and wore the stripes on his back to prove it. His grandmother didn't beat with anything that would scar permanently, a strip from the tamarind tree, that he was expected to fetch himself, usually; and when he refused, as he did sometimes, her worn rubber slipper or maybe an extension cord or her tongue which was the worst of all. When her temper was at its highest that's when words rained down like a deluge: the frustration she felt at being saddled with him, her disappointment in her offspring – his *"no good dutty foot mother who na even look back fu she pickey-head picknee"* and "*the less said*" about his father, the better, apparently.

As with the name Big Head, it never occurred to Matthew Henry Luke to be upset at being called Kunta, the African had a stout spirit the boy actually admired. In fact, one of his favourite scenes in the whole movie was the scene where they tried to get Kunta to change his name. Well, he didn't like the end of it so much where he gave in, accepting the Toby they dropped on him like he was a newborn baby instead of a full grown boy; but he didn't blame him, he himself had been known to promise anything to get a beating to stop and knew it wasn't weakness but strategic retreat.

Big Head or Kunta, take your pick, didn't realize he didn't know his true name until the first day of secondary school. He was the only boy from his village fortunate enough to win a scholarship to the Grammar School in town. It was two buses and many more miles away from Cox Village, where teachers knew and called the boys by the same name they were called around the village. So, the boy who knew himself only as Big Head or Kunta sat staring out the window at the sprawling lawn and line of trees on the perimeter, the cars zipping along the highway beyond that; and the teacher, a man whose name he hadn't yet bothered to learn, was on the third go around, every other boy accounted for, as he called out from the register, with increasing stridency, "Matthew Henry Luke!"

Big Head didn't come back to himself until a long and heavy ruler came down sharply on his desk causing him to jump into the air like a startled cricket – which is how he came to be known as Jiminy Cricket or just Cricket, a name that stuck all through secondary school; especially after his precision at finding his target, a holdover from

his marble playing days, landed him a spot as a feared pace bowler on the school's cricket team.

But that was the future, and right now the teacher was in his face yelling, "what's your name? What's your name?" And as Big Head called Kunta later to be known as Cricket looked up into the man's stormy eyes, he honestly couldn't think what that might be. He drew the proverbial blank, more confused than anything as to what he'd done wrong, this time. It was always something, and he wasn't always sure what.

It wasn't like he liked beatings. But who could make sense of what adults were mad about half the time.

And this particular adult only got madder as Big Head sat there with that blank look on his face. But the expected beating didn't follow. No, this was secondary school, so he was dragged to the principal's office and handed his first ever detention slip. One of the other boys explained to him that it meant he was expected to come to school on Saturday to do yard work. And he found he didn't mind that at all. The other boys – only a handful as it was the first week of school – griped as loudly as they dared and would sit on the ground for a rest every time the principal disappeared into his office. But, Big Head, once he was able to tune them out, found he quite liked it; fresh air, work to be done, and no grandmother frowning on with disapproval while he did it, no village people shaking their head and whispering that he was just getting practice for when he ended up on the prison work gang doing hard time like his father. After that, he did everything he could to get into detention, and managed to get out of the beatings he would have surely gotten for getting into trouble by signing the detention slips on his grandmother's behalf and lying to her, apparently convincingly, about having been selected for the school drum corps and needing to attend regular practice on the weekends. She was proud of him, he could tell, though she didn't say. What would happen when she didn't actually see him, come Independence, marching with the drum corps across the Antigua Recreation Grounds, in his crisp whites, was a problem for another day.

But, for right now, life was good and he looked forward to Saturdays as he hadn't looked forward to anything since Sundays under the church with Cheri.

These two worlds collided one Saturday as he made his way home from detention, whistling a little something to himself, and pulled up short right in front of her at a bus stop where she stood waiting with her mother. It wasn't the same stop he used to get home. Cheri and her mom had long ago moved from Cox Village and he hadn't seen her in years.

She looked different, more like prissy Marie-Louise Hodge than the tomboy he remembered. He blushed at the memory this evoked of Ms. Hodge stooped behind the

church step with her stocking and panty around her ankles. And, as if she remembered too, Cheri's face reddened; she'd always stood out with her fair skin in Cox Village and now it gave her away, gave away that he wasn't some random boy trying to make time with her. She remembered him, and the small upward curl of her lip was further proof. His lips curled instinctively in response and his hand did a half wave all on its own, and he opened his mouth though he didn't have anything planned to say.

After all, he didn't understand, even then, that she had been his first crush and that the loss of her had changed his relationship with himself and those around him. Maybe in time, but for now their little reunion was cut short as the mother finally registered the boy standing in front of them and making eyes at her daughter "*with his fresh self!*" She wouldn't have recognized him as Big Head. He hardly looked the same as that boy with the oversized head, and she liked to pretend to herself that she had never lived in Cox Village and so tended to be forgetful when it came to the identity of her former neighbours.

But he couldn't have known that, could he?

He couldn't have known that when she snapped – "*what you looking at, big head boy!*" –it wasn't at all personal; just the natural instinct of a mother trying to shelter her twelve year old girl, for as long as she could, from boys and all the trouble they would bring.

But just like that she put Big Head back in his place, the place he'd been led to since the day of that scene under the church with Ms. Hodge and Cheri. The day he was made to understand that people had value, the way ten cents meant more than five cents, and twenty-five cents meant more than them both. The day he'd learned that he was a *ha'penny*, if that, and not fit to hold a dollar, and certainly not fit to play with the likes of Cheri, still the best marble player he'd ever come across. The day he'd started to understand that Big Head wasn't a good thing to be when you were as small as he was.

"What you looking at, big head boy!" Cheri's mother squawked, making a shooing motion with her hand. And Cheri dropped her eyes, like she didn't know him at all, and Mathew Henry Luke broke out of his daze and kept walking, feet dragging a bit more than they had been before and no longer whistling, but his once too-big head standing tall on his now much broader shoulders.

Nickname For Christmas

Esther Phillips

Pa Johnson claimed to be of a certain denomination, which made it all the more strange that he should keep pigs. Such a technicality was lost, however, in the envy some neighbours felt towards Pa Johnson who boasted of having the largest "boar-pig" in the village.

The creature was awesome, measuring almost six feet long from snout to tail. Its flanks were lean and strong-looking, the forehead narrow, the eyes small and glinting. Two long tusks protruded beyond the hairy snout.

As far as appearances went, Pa Johnson and his animal had much in common. The man was long and lean, his small eyes glinted with pride especially when villagers spoke about his prized possession. The two remaining teeth he had protruded from his mouth.

Man and animal also shared a special quality of malevolence. Small children grew fearful on those evenings when Pa Johnson had not fed his boar-pig on time. Long bellows of rage would resound throughout the village and echo through the nearby gully.

Some villagers felt convinced that this animal was the lone survivor of the biblical herd of swine into which the demons had been cast. The belief was that the boar-pig had been the biggest of the lot and therefore had the capacity and resilience to house the beings who were unwilling to meet their demise. Every last one of them had found a lodging in Pa Johnson's animal.

Meanwhile, Pa Johnson's shouts and curses were almost as loud as the animal's cries, and some again wondered if the man himself were a reincarnation of the Gadarene and felt some compulsion to keep up his association with familiar company.

Anyway, Christmas was coming and Pa Johnson had fallen on hard times. Pork was a popular Christmas dish and would be in great demand. Pa Johnson decided he

would ask the men in the village to help him butcher the animal. He would give them a generous share of the meat in return.

During the days following, the question on the lips of the villagers was the same, "How anybody gwine kill dah big-able brute?" This question seemed only too pertinent particularly on the night before the proposed slaughter when the animal's vehemence surpassed all previous record. Men who had agreed to despatch the creature fled to their rum bottles for courage.

Early in the morning on Christmas Eve, the men prepared themselves for the task ahead. Several had drunk a good deal more sago and linseed than usual. Most had swallowed an early snap of rum.

It was five a.m., the time arranged for the butchering. After a tormenting hour, the men managed to tie the animal down. Now the sticking would be done. It was only right that Pa Johnson should have that honour. Some of the men disappeared as Pa Johnson, with the utmost concentration, brought the knife down.

There are still several versions as to what happened next. The most common is that the boar-pig, eyes glinting with outrage at Pa Johnson's intended treachery, bounded for its owner's throat knocking him down instantly and pinning him under its weight. Pa Johnson's shouts after a while became intelligible to the terrified men peeping from behind the paling, "Tek 'e off! Tek 'e off!"

A death-struggle was well on the way between master and animal when somewhere in Pa Johnson's mind sprang the memory of the envy which the men had felt regarding his prized animal. Out of his mouth flew a last-minute appeal, "Tek 'e off and tek 'e!" and indeed, though it was certain that no one now wanted the beast, the note of generosity seemed to have galvanised the men into action.

With big rocks, sticks and whatever else they could lay their hands on, the animal was prevailed upon to halt the destruction of its master. The crazed boar-pig bounded towards the nearby gully, fell down a ravine and broke its neck.

No other animal in the village ever took on quite the same characteristics as Pa Johnson's boar-pig. It was felt that the hapless spirits, provided they had escaped in time, had either left the village for good or had been converted to better ways.

Pa Johnson was, however, never able to extricate himself from the nickname which he kept to his dying day: Tek 'e off and tek 'e.

Death of Christmas

Esther Phillips

Christmas came to the village but no one knew. She entered through the cart roads that intersected the remaining cane fields; skirted the gully where a few sheep grazed and the healing cerasee was overgrown by vines and other wild bush. She walked through the grass piece where multicoloured butterflies were once in abundance and children played in the evenings until sunset.

Had anyone been perceptive enough, they might have heard her deep sighs clearly distinguishable from the wind as she passed through the gaps and along the main road. Year after year she came, hoping that the villagers would welcome her as they once did. She was losing hope.

It seemed that each time there were newer and bigger houses completely fenced in; no longer just a backyard paling. Cars were everywhere. Not even a single pot-starver came out to greet her walking amiably at her side; the breed had long been replaced by rottweilers and ridgebacks who barked at her from behind locked gates.

Yet it was not these outward signs of so-called progress that caused her distress, for she had already spanned several ages and had seen how cycles began and how they ended. It was not what the people in the village had gained but what they had lost that troubled her.

She had loved this village; had sat in many a humble chattel house in times past relishing the activities leading up to the special day in which she was to be celebrated. It was not a matter of vanity, for Christmas knew that she was merely a symbol of something greater than herself.

She loved the smell of freshly-cut khus-khus grass that was dried for stuffing mattresses; the pungency of thyme, chive, onions and pepper pounded in the mortar and pestle to make seasoning. She liked to watch the women grating cassava and coconut for the pone and sweet bread that would fill larders with their scent for days ahead. She knew it was the wood-stove that gave Aunt Lil's pudding a particularly special aroma.

She was not over-idealistic. She understood well enough that permanent innocence was not possible. The purest ideal contained the seed of its own destruction. Hadn't

the sinless Jesus in his mystical atonement become sin for all; crucified like a common criminal?

She was conscious that life was not perfect in the village. Not infrequently, two of the village women had to run to a neighbour's house in order to escape the blows of their drunken husbands.

A good number of boys and girls still walked barefoot to and from school carrying bakes, fishcakes and ground provisions for lunch. A bottle of homemade mauby, "swank," lemonade or cocoa left over from morning were the beverages they were used to. Patched trousers and hand-me-down dresses were the order of the day. Wages were small and scarcity was the norm.

But it was that same scarcity that made sharing as normal as breathing. Nobody would go hungry as long as breadfruit was in season and a neighbour still had yams and sweet potatoes stored under the cellar. A meeting-turn would be shared once there was a need. The village men would dismantle a chattel house that was to be relocated and erect it again by evening with no thought of payment.

But progress had come to the village mainly through education which was of great benefit but created separation where there had been none before. The people had become self-seeking and preoccupied with material possessions. Her spirit could not thrive in this environment.

As Christmas turned to leave, she took one last look at the massive effigy that towered over the village; this the people had erected and called by her name. The creature stood covered from head to toe in glitter, its myriad hands loaded with what looked like splendid gifts. She knew better.

What she could hardly bear to look at, however, were the creature's eyes. Did the people not see what she could? The leering cynicism, the unassuaged greed?

But what Christmas also recognised in that look was her own demise. And as she walked away, she knew she would not be returning. She would enter the world of shadows to join the other spirits whose mission it had once been to enlighten and enrich the human experience.

BARBADIAN AUTUMN by **Dr. Raymond Maughan**

It was a beautiful day; not a cloud in the sky. Perfect sky blue.
As I drove down Spring Garden there was an almond tree,
leaves turning colour and falling. Camera in hand and lying flat on the
ground I recorded our very own “Barbadian Autumn”.

ESSAYS

Rex Nettleford:

Maroonage and the Public Intellectual.

Anthony Bogues

The creative acts of our people forged collectively over time …have thrown up classic expressions …all such expressions emanating from social interactions now serve as living archives…signifying the germ of a definitive civilisation.

Rex Nettleford.

There is a dedication in the 1985 edition of Rex Nettleford's *Dance Jamaica,* the first major text on the history of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica which reads:

> "To the artists of the Caribbean and the mass of the our people from whom we draw creative impulse, ancestral wisdom and aesthetic energy."[1]

It is remarkable because it sums up the philosophical stance of Nettleford, one which marked his intellectual, cultural and artistic practices. His was a stance in which all the expressions of the ordinary Caribbean person were the touchstones and sources of what constitutes this Caribbean civilization. It is not enough to list the achievements of Rex. And I say Rex with careful deliberation gesturing to the peculiar familiarity with which he was known all over the Caribbean. It is not enough because contrary to what Naipaul wrote, for the colonized, history is not simply about achievements nor its lack thereof but rather it is about, as Walcott puts it, the "new naming of things." It is this naming and creating in what Lamming would call in *The Season of Adventure* "the language of the drum" which was both the catalyst and oxygen of Rex's life work. So we will not list conventional achievements in this essay, rather we begin briefly by dancing with him as he did, often commanding the stage at the Little Theatre in Kingston, Jamaica, his lithe movements of body and feet twisting and turning, shaping a new grammar for us to look at ourselves, to "liberate" us as he would often say "from the obscurity of ourselves."

1 Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery, the National Dance Company of Jamaica 1962-1983*. (NY : Grove Press, 1985)

Rex was born in rural Jamaica in the Western end of the island five years before the water-shed events of 1938. It was a time in rural Jamaica in which as Sylvia Wynter argues the "plantation and plot "dominated all around it. Both were the results of racial slavery and colonialism. It was the time when colonial power still held sway. Rex, like many of the region's 20th century leading thinkers, artists and writers, grew up under British colonialism. So plantation, plot and colonialism were the orders and practices which shaped him. Two things about colonialism in the Caribbean we should note. The first is what Michael Manley stated in 1974 to a university audience in Trinidad. Noting that colonialism in the Caribbean was not simply about economic and military conquest, he says that colonialism was "literally the mid-wife of our history." As the "mid-wife" of our history, colonialism developed technologies of rule in which one key element was about what Lamming would call a subjugation rooted in the "terror of the mind, a daily exercise in self-mutilation."[2] This was a subjugation in which the majority of the Caribbean population were not constructed only as the colonial native but as the *black native*, a special category of species under colonial classification, one who Fanon said lived in a zone of "non-being".

Colonialism and the Body

The colonial encounter as Fanon makes clear is one of bodies. To make colonialism work, colonial power operated through difference and in that operation the body was a crucial site. The last 500 years or so of the history of the body is in part about its re-inscription into a classification schema in which the body is a social force that needs to be managed. Marcel Mauss in his essay, "Techniques of the Body" observes that the various motions of the body are constructed through habitus and action which is "imposed from without. From above."[3] Thus one crucial matter for colonial power in the Caribbean post 1838 was how to construct new black bodies who were now subjects, not slaves. It was a delicate operation but colonial power at that time decided that its most important technology of rule was the creation of black bodies of Victorian Christian respectability. I have argued elsewhere that this drive created a new terrain of struggle in the Caribbean around questions of subjectivities.[4] What would the ex-

2 George Lamming: *Sovereignty of the Imagination* (Philipsburg: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2009) p. 7.

3 Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body" in Jonathan Crary & Sanford Winter (eds) *Incorporation* (NY: Zone, 1992) pp 455-477.

4 For a discussion of this process see "Liberalism, Colonial Power, Subjectivities and the Technologies of Pastoral Coloniality: The Jamaican Case." In Wayne Modest & Tim Barringer (eds) *Victoria Jamaica* (Duke University Press, Forthcoming) Also see for a very good historical discussion of this period, Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects : Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination (1860-1867) (University of Chicago Press, 2002)* as well as see Brian Moore & Michele Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven* (University of the West Indies Press, 2004) j

slave be? What could he or she be? How were they to be? But it also did something else. CLR James once insisted that the Caribbean people were the most rebellious people not revolutionary. The specific historical form of colonial power in the Anglophone Caribbean created in the late 19th century a context where while rebellion was always around the corner and would flare up, the matter of regular contestation in the society occurred on terrains which were explicitly cultural and integral to the symbolic order of the society. This contestation, Rex called the "battle for space" and it would be the site on which he practiced most adeptly, naming a new language and forms of maroonage. It was there that he brought to the fore into the mainstream the cultural expressions of the ordinary Jamaican and it was there that his remarkable choreographic talents showed the historical tales of the Caribbean experience creating at each performance a forum of public history and cultural exploration.

In his practices of maroonage, Rex deployed the body and therefore the dance as one primary site in which acts of decolonization would occur. It was in the realm of culture that he understood that the Caribbean people had wrought new forms in their efforts to humanize the landscape of the society into which they came first as slaves, then as indentured labor. He understood that it was through cultural practices by which a different self was reconstituted. This was not culture in the common sense in which we loosely deploy that word; rather, it was about the work of the creative imagination. He would write in perhaps one of the most incisive Caribbean texts on the politics of culture, "The Caribbean has long found these areas of inviolability to lie in the exercise of the mind and the creative imagination. These became the scared groves … the inner landscape, the metaphors of actual living which form the very essence of culture ."[5] But as we all know, there is no homogeneous culture and that it is a contested terrain. So Rex, recognizing that at the core of the popular were contested creative expressions, devoted his artistic life to understanding the complexity of the popular and then staging it nationally.

Returning Home

It was something he grasped very early when he returned to the Caribbean from Oxford, instead of attaching himself to a formal academic department at the University of West Indies, Mona Campus; he accepted Sir Philip Sherlock's offer of working at the then newly founded Extra Mural Center. There the program became the site of interaction between the Jamaican community, the university and scholars. It was at the Extra Mural Center in Kingston, Jamaica, as a high school student, where I went to hear lectures on Marcus Garvey and learned from the late Denis Daley about human rights abuses against the urban poor in post- colonial Jamaica. These lectures were attended

5 Rex Nettleford, *Inward Stretch, Outward Reach.*(London : MacMillian, 1993) p. 84.

by individuals from both the middle classes and popular classes and always striking were the voices of the ordinary people who attended and eloquently intervened in these discussions.

But the move to Extra Mural was more than the creating of a venue, site and a strategic way for the university to develop different kinds of programs. The move was one which would become replicated throughout the region and then emerge into the school of Continuing Studies, the Trade Union Education Center in Jamaica and now the Open Campus. For Rex it was about creating a base from which he could engage in the practices of operating as a *maroon intellectual*. At the core of the "battle for space" were the concept and practices of maroonage. Rex gives us this extensive definition of maroonage. He writes:

> "In a society like contemporary Jamaica the effective creative artist mirrors the style and strategies of the former Maroons. Secrecy and cunning with fugitive sensibilities are critical success to an art form."[6]

"Fugitive sensibilities." What could that mean? It does not mean a fleeing practice; rather it suggests an engagement from outside the conventional and the norm which seeks to undermine and displace, but to do so without being entangled. It is thus a practice of mobility. In this practice developed within the framework for the "battle for space" there is no frontal assault on the levers of power in the society but rather an attempt to carve out new spaces which over time may become the symbolic order of the society. Working from the Maroon tactic of guerrilla harrying of the colonial power, this "fugitive sensibility" works from the margins, out, to over time displace the governing orders of the imagination. Lamming once wrote, using the felicitous phrase, the "sovereignty of the imagination," that within the colony and neo-colony the "imagination resists, destabilizes and transforms the status of the word in action."[7] Rex's overarching practice as an intellectual and creative artist was about this transformation. In doing this, I suggest that he marked a distinctive way in which we may define the work of the critical intellectual in the Caribbean.

The Critical Caribbean Intellectual

There has been not much debate and discussion about the character of the Caribbean intellectual although there is an increasing body of work on Caribbean intellectual history. In reviews about the intellectual in the Western tradition, three thinkers amongst many stand out: Antonio Gramsci who posited the notions of the organic and traditional intellectual; Edward Said, who argued that the intellectual was

6 Ibid . p. 92 .

7 George Lamming, *Sovereignty of the Imagination,* p. 48.

a social critic and Nettleford's tutor at Oxford, Isaiah Berlin, who argued that the notion of the intelligentsia emerges with the rise of the 19th century Russian intellectual. In discussing the character of the Caribbean intellectual, I would submit that the critical intellectual in the Caribbean has to engage in a series of operations which make his/her function distinctive from the above accepted notions. To elaborate this briefly, we return to the ways in which colonial power constructed the black native. The process of subject formation was one in which, as Walcott puts it,"snow and daffodils … lived in the imagination and therefore in memory "and were more important than the "heat and the oleander." The critical Caribbean intellectual first has to engage with the oleander to begin a process of *epistemic decolonization*. He / she has to confront the categories which shape the various knowledge regimes about Caribbean life as part of trying to understand the Caribbean on its own terms. For those of us steeped into the categories of the West as the universal categories of human experience and human livity, the Caribbean is an opaque place as we twist to stretch categories to fit life. Many radical Caribbean intellectuals have recognized this and made remarkable efforts to establish new categories particularly in poetic language in order to create new ways of seeing the Caribbean. What is critical in this operation is a gaze, one which focuses on the ordinary Caribbean person. This is not a call for Caribbean essentialism; rather it is to understand one of the central problems in the history of thought and politics for our times – What are we? It is not a matter of identity as it is oftentimes thought, but rather what we are is about grappling with historical reflections upon ourselves and our present. It involves doing an inventory of what Kamau Brathwaite calls the "inner plantation." Aime Cesaire once noted that colonialism equated "thingfication." How to resist this thingfication has been central to the critical Caribbean tradition and perhaps one matter which remains for us today is to create the necessary archive of this tradition.

The creation of new archives and reframing the nature of what we commonly understand as the archive is a central element of the Caribbean critical tradition. In this regard Rex operated as a fine archivist. The staging of "folk "dances on the national stage from the 1963 *Pococmania* onwards was not only to draw our attention to these forms but to archive them. For Rex choreography was a method of archiving forms as the dance steps and the body became the source and then the resource of constructing memory. Working with Rex we can discern that the critical Caribbean intellectual has to engage in the following processes: epistemic decolonization; an inventory of the "inner plantation" and the creation of new archives. In Rex's case he did all three while operating as a maroon intellectual. What is significant about Rex is that he did this on the public stage of the entire region. His was a life of public engagement, one in which over time the maroon intellectual performed many adroit balancing acts.

Conclusion

There is a peculiar phenomenon in the Caribbean where speech is deployed to both evoke and intervene. It produces an art of speech in which the critical Caribbean intellectual raises his/her voice in a series of speech acts that become an aspect of intellectual life in the region. Rex delivered hundreds of such speeches.[8] There are many themes in these speeches but a consistent one was about the region and its possibilities. Having grown up in the throes of the making of the 20th century Caribbean, Rex in life became the ancestral African voice urging us onwards. It was a strange paradox but one which he embraced as he combined university learnt erudition with Jamaican "folk" wisdom. The results were memorable phrases culled from the linguistic creativity of the ordinary Jamaican. In a 1987 speech to Caribbean economists, Rex made it clear that the post-colonial Caribbean was in crisis and that the crisis was only soluble if "our economists and other decision-takers … trust and respect the people form below." He continues, "they, after all, have been responsible for the designs for social living wrought over three centuries of struggle and survival ."[9] For Rex the life of the public intellectual was about making sure that the presence of the ordinary Caribbean person would become the center of Caribbean life. That's still something we need to do in all aspects of our Caribbean civilization.

8 For a collection of some of these see Kenneth Hall (ed) *Rex N; Selected Speeches* (Kingston: IRP, 2006) .

9 *Inward Stretch, Outward Reach* . p. 191.

Four Among Those Who Really Know the Caribbean:

Walcott, Mir, Glissant, Guillén

Keith Ellis

Poets, like people in general, often define themselves in opposition to others and sometimes show their real attachments in the context of feuds. The feud may entail a direct personal relationship, or it may see the poet pitted against a concept or theory embodied in an individual, or it may be against a social convention or something as overarching as a system of government. In any case, the poet, propelled by a sense of rectitude, indignation, pride, self-esteem or even survival, attacks or defies the antagonistic position and, in so doing, reveals his or her attitude to a phenomenon and the bases for that attitude. This general practice can be seen to function with regard to how four outstanding Caribbean writers, in different circumstances, – Derek Walcott, Pedro Mir, Édouard Glissant and Nicolás Guillén – have defined themselves, while elucidating important facets of the culture of our region. The items on Guillén and Glissant will appear in a later number of this journal.

Derek Walcott

In his indications of his attitude to the identity and character of Caribbean culture, the celebrated novelist V. S. Naipaul has known how to test Derek Walcott's patience. As a happy consequence, Naipaul elicits some of the great St. Lucian poet's clearest expressions of his own views of the role of the poet in Caribbean society and exposes his links to front line Spanish American poets. In his essay "History and Picong… in *The Middle Passage*" (1962) came the first manifestation of what was to become a long feud. It was continued inescapably in a second essay "The Caribbean: Culture or

Mimicry?" (1974). In both of these Walcott deals with issues deemed by him to deserve the treatment he gives them from time to time, until 2008 when at the Calabash International Literary Festival in Jamaica, in an apparent response to comments Naipaul made about him in a new book, he adopts a different mode of attack and employs a new vehicle. In the manner of John Dryden, but more trenchant, he reverts to rhyming couplets to level witty and caustic abuse at Naipaul. This represents a generic shift in the dispute with which the famed novelist cannot easily compete. The virtuosity shown in the verses may be admired as they are read; but also as performance art they occupy a high place in the tradition of satire in a West Indian setting, for performance satire has broad appeal and enjoys a wide range throughout the islands, from the mischievous "war" subgenre of the calypso to the much more warlike Jamaican "trace." Walcott took the trouble, or welcomed the pleasure, of going to Jamaica to perform his poem "Mongoose" at its well-publicized, well-attended, high energy festival of music and poetry. The poem's title bears symbolic value that is readily recognized in Jamaica and beyond.[1] Brought from India by the British colonial authorities to the island in 1872 to deal with an infestation of rats, the small carnivorous animal with its stubbornness and stealth soon carried out the task intended for it and then, in order to survive, applied its natural predatory endowments to other species. When these species came to include domesticated animals, chickens especially, the small Indian mongoose came to be regarded as a pest.

The poem "Mongoose" is a succession of swats that all indicate a deep underlying emotional nexus of umbrage and commitment. The reasoned pillars of this position are to be found in Walcott's practice of a different genre, the essay, including the interview. In "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" a concept of Naipaul comes to be examined. It was introduced by his novel *The Mimic Men* (1962), a title that encapsulates the author's characterization of West Indian men. The novel appeared within a period of time during which the persistent question, asked to still unsettled answers, was: are we ready for independence? Naipaul, whose protagonist in the book is, among other things, a politician, clearly answers no. Walcott is incensed by the characterization, all the more so because it seems to have surprising acceptance in the Caribbean. He might have noticed, for instance, that Eric Williams, politician and scholar (like Naipaul, an Oxford-educated Trinidadian at an impressionable age), whom many in the region would have delegated as their representative, their voice, had called Naipaul's portrayal 'harsh but true' (501-02). For Walcott this is inexcusable 'masochistic' ('The Caribbean' (53) tolerance of Naipaul's disrespect, ample grounds for a feud in which he takes a stand on behalf of the Caribbean community, necessarily including himself as a writer. Naipaul's role in the feud is to attempt to defend a position as aggressor, that is to say, to prolong and intensify the aggression. Perhaps he will have found another of his feuds, the fifteen-year one with Paul Theroux, a U.S. citizen he had met

in southern Africa and made into his well-known protégé, to be less explosive. Naipaul simply stopped engaging socially with him, because he had criticized him and his work; and the quirks of English social life caused the pouting to be dragged out until Lady Naipaul, as they call Naipaul's second wife in Great Britain, commented that enough was enough of this purely personal feud (Lo Dico).

Naipaul's feud with Walcott, however, had a whole regional people potentially involved in it, with some ready to hang the tag "racist" on Walcott's antagonist. But which "race" would he be seeking to uphold while aiming his disparaging irony at Caribbean men who are not white? Or when he points out that his masterful creation *A House for Mr. Biswas* was achieved in England, and not in the Caribbean, should his reminder be construed to mean that he is attaching his achievement to an English identity to which he wants to adhere as being superior? It could be, absurd as it is. We know that littering English society at all levels are people who display weird idiosyncratic behaviour. Some individuals arriving from abroad at impressionable ages are not immune from being infected with some of these pathologies, such as fearing contact with black people, as I observed and was confirmed to me in the case of a young Nigerian student at Cambridge University. A few remain messed up for life.

Walcott is remarkably gregarious within his West Indian community, feeling nurtured by it and imposing on himself the obligation to teach, thus continuing a trend found to be necessary in an environment in which a literary culture is recent. He has singled out Frank Collymore, founder of *BIM*, for the discreet and sensitive manner in which he guided to excellence writers such as himself and George Lamming. They have reciprocated: Lamming continuing to find the energy to generously pass on to younger generations his vintage knowledge on which he has based his discerning assessment of contemporary developments, hence teaching others to think.

Walcott, serving as great poet and great dramatist, is an active teacher of how to wed the two arts, inspiring poets to lofty heights and to read their poetry with respect for those heights. As poet he demonstrates the importance of the phonic aspects of the text and as theatre director that of the acoustic effects of voices. From his early days he coached actors such as Lloyd Stanford to stellar performances in Jamaica; he did the same with Trinidadian actors and actresses in his Trinidad Theatre Workshop. Later, at home in St. Lucia and among his progency one finds Kendel Hippolyte, one of those who has certainly learned how to "speak the speech," while he performs superbly his own excellent poetry, in the way that Walcott would have it in his quest for lifting the level of Caribbean poetry and its presentation. And one does not have to converse at length with Hippolyte without hearing him give credit to Walcott, who has refuted in many ways, the allegation that "nothing was created in the West Indies," another of Naipaul's slanders.

In the early 1950s Walcott produced a poem dealing with events in Africa in which he manifested desperate ambivalence but which was ultimately weighted in favour of the British in their effort to put down the Mau Mau rebellion. It would seem that the weighting, discoverable by keen analysis, is due primarily to two factors: the torrent of propaganda unleashed by the British in those comprehensively repressive colonial times and against which we were compelled to offer little or no opposition or defence. The propagandistic version unravelled fifty years later in the face of honest research and discoveries produced by lawsuits, exposing the brutal British terror.

The second factor may also be seen to be susceptible to change in the course of time. It has to do with language, with a Caribbean poet's attitude to the substance of his craft, his language. At that time, in the colonial era in which he wrote that poem, "A Far Cry from Africa," to have penned the phrase "the English tongue I love" as one of the counterbalancing emotions that prevents his full embrace of the Kikuyu cause was to have made to the English a warm gesture indeed, heated considerably by the use of "tongue" that has ineludible synecdochical connotations. The result is a powerful statement of loyalty. It also contains, read today, the excessive modesty of a suitor, because given Walcott's dominance of poetic language in English, a dominance in force for many decades now, "the English tongue I command" would seem appropriate.

This St. Lucian poet has achieved in English what the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío achieved at the end of the nineteenth century, when he became the acclaimed leading writer in the Spanish language. Walcott reminds us that Spanish American poets too have paid great homage to their language. The Uruguayan poet Juana de Ibarbourou, for example, has done so repeatedly. But the finest of these homages remains one that appeared in a Spanish grammar book used at Calabar High School in Jamaica in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one of the very few Spanish American works to be allowed into our curriculum. Strangely, that sonnet, and its author, the Argentinian poet Leopoldo Díaz Vélez, are scarcely known in Argentina or elsewhere in Spanish America and came into significant public cognizance only in 2005 when the outstanding Argentinian poet Juan Gelman quoted the poem on receiving the Queen Sofía Ibero-American Poetry Prize. The sonnet begins:

Claro y límpido raudal	*A clear and limpid stream*
es la lengua que yo adoro….	*is the language that I adore….*

Comparing the second line with "the English tongue I love," we find the word "lengua" in Spanish that has the possibility of meaning tongue both as language and in the physiological sense; but here the latter meaning is nullified by the initial metaphor that in effect limits the meaning to language. Yet, as I have said, the Caribbean writer has shown a mastery of poetic language in English that makes redundant any declaration of love.

The breadth of Walcott's poetic space leads him to other contacts with Spanish American writers. His aversion to the attribution of mimicry suggests that T.S. Eliot's view that the poet is himself and previous poets would please him much less than Jorge Luis Borges's formulation in an essay on Kafka: "Cada autor *crea* a sus precursores" [each author *creates* his precursors]. The Argentinian writer who usually attracts with his flair for paradox, but is not always sound or consequential in his pronouncements,[2] is valuable here. In six words, and with his emphatic "*crea*,' Borges dismisses, favourably to Walcott, the two issues brought by Naipaul, mimicry and absence of creativity, that have riled relations between him and Naipaul. Another of Walcott's frequent declarations, that of the need to leave behind the tired old metaphors, has in practice contributed strongly to his unequalled stature. In this too he calls to mind another Spanish American poet, a Caribbean one, the Cuban José Martí. Several of the poems found in his *Versos libres* [Free Verses] are artes poéticas that proclaim and illustrate this credo, taking much of his imagery, as Walcott does, from the rich and varied reality of the Caribbean.

In insisting on the idea of the practice of the poet as hard, diligent work, Walcott uses the metaphor of the carpenter, coinciding precisely with Pablo Neruda, who in 'V,' his ode to his Peruvian peer César Vallejo, writes of the two of them as 'dos pobres carpinteros' [two poor carpenters]. And the solemn devotion with which Walcott has indicated that he approaches the actual writing of poems seems to be illustrated in heightened form in 'Mi poesía' [My Poetry], the final poem of José Martí's *Versos libres*. This book, alongside Walcott's *White Egrets*, reveals, in two of the great books of Caribbean and world poetry, the similar capacity of the two poets to magically enhance the importance of familiar objects, landscapes and seascapes. The books demonstrate, as well, the compatibility of their authors' sensibilities.

Walcott, besides, has displayed his will and ability to Caribbeanize works from other climes, as he does in his superb adaptation of Tirso de Molina's play, *El burlador de Sevilla*, a genre in which he deserves greater recognition, making the work Sevillian, Spanish and unmistakably Trinidadian. "I am primarily, absolutely a Caribbean writer," he, who has lived and practised his craft in St. Lucia, Jamaica and Trinidad, has said (Hirsch 73). What, in their everyday Caribbean lives, others have casually experienced, carelessly stated, vaguely heard, loosely possessed, seen without focus, too greedily tasted, Walcott, with his command of language and his dramatic sense, has sharpened and made enduring.

Pedro Mir

The feud that has defined the character of Pedro Mir's writings has broad dimensions. His native country, the Dominican Republic, where he was born on June

3, 1913, as well as the community in which he spent the years of his childhood, San Pedro de Macorís, a sugar-producing centre in the south of the country, brought him face to face with the economic conditions from which would arise political determinants that would bring him into conflict with his environment. His family ties broadened that environment, giving it a Caribbean regional character. His father had come from Cuba to San Pedro de Macorís to take up a position in a sugar mill, in that industry that for centuries typified agricultural production in the Caribbean and that engendered similarities between Cuba and the Dominican Republic, often producing a political phenomenon that usurped the economic one, that of dictatorship.

It was Mir's misfortune that the years of his early manhood coincided with the imposition on his country of one of the vilest and longest-lasting of these dictatorships, that of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, which lasted from 1930 when he seized power, until 1961 when he was assassinated. Mir's literary development made a clash with the dictatorship inevitable. He had been encouraged to write social poetry by Juan Bosch, one of the leading intellectuals and internationally recognized creative Dominican writers of the time. To live with a sense of social justice – in a country in which the ruler was responsible for the murders of tens of thousands of people, seized for himself and his family most of the wealth of the country, littered conspicuous parts of the country with monuments to himself, changed the name of the capital city from Santo Domingo to Ciudad Trujillo, had a system of surveillance and espionage that blanketed the country internally and could rely on the external support and protection of the powerful United States – would soon be unbearable for Mir.

In 1944 he visited Cuba and got to know his father's relatives in Guantánamo. At that time, during World War II, when Cuba was showing a relatively benign face and several of the neighbouring countries were aspiring to the democracy that was the announced aim of the countries that were fighting against Fascism led by Hitler, Cuba seemed to him attractive compared to his own country, as a possible ally and site from which to launch an effort to bring about the downfall of the dictatorship that was plundering his country and ethnically cleansing it of Haitians by murdering tens of thousands of them. He returned to Cuba in 1947, this time in exile. The Second World War had ended with victory for the anti-Fascist Allies – the Soviet Union and the West – and it might have been thought then that the United States would not oppose an effort to oust a tyrant so internationally notorious as Trujillo, whose teams of assassins had been active in the U.S. itself. The time seemed right for that effort to be launched, and when an expeditionary force was assembled on Cayo Confites, situated in the Atlantic Ocean as part of the Camagüey Archipelago, Mir, newly arrived in Cuba, enlisted. He joined hundreds of fellow Dominicans, Cubans and others that included, as a leader, Juan Bosch, and, as an eager volunteer, the twenty-year-old law student, Fidel Castro.

But not all the members of the planned expedition shared the sense of mission of those named here, nor could the U. S. authorities be counted on to refrain from throwing their support to even the foulest of Fascist butchers. It should be remembered that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose twelve years as president coincided with twelve of the years of Trujillo's rule, and who is widely thought of as a good president, had said of Anastasio Somoza García, a counterpart of Trujillo in Nicaragua: 'Somoza is a sonofabitch, but he is ours' (73), a quote that has made its way into poetry in the work, 'Hora O' [Zero Hour], of the great Nicaraguan poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal. Cardenal immortalizes another trait held commonly by Trujillo and Somoza with his epigram titled 'Somoza develiza la estatua de Somoza en el estadio Somoza' [Somoza unveils the statue of Somoza in the Somoza stadium] (16).

The new president of the United States, Harry Truman, was agile in his shiftiness. Such an influential participant in the planned expeditionary force as was the head of the Cuban armed forces accepted an invitation to Washington along with some of his colleagues from Trujillo's military and, as a result, forced the abandonment of the expedition, imprisoning many of the participants, including Mir. Fidel escaped, swimming away from Cayo Confites. Mir's brief prison stay was an inauspicious beginning of his long exile, at a time when he was not yet quite established as a writer. He made his way to the Guantánamo of his grandmother, his brother and other relatives, who all struggled to make a living, as well as to Santiago de Cuba. His training as a lawyer and a journalist afforded him some employment. He hardly made any attempt to meet the local writers. For years he lived in the same neighbourhood as Regino Boti, one of eastern Cuba's most distinguished writers, without apparently being aware of it (Pérez Shelton 39). He did write to Nicolás Guillén, revealing a deep preoccupation with his native country, a gesture that has been seen to presage the writing of his celebrated long poem 'Hay un país en el mundo,' which he wrote in Cuba in 1949 (Álvarez Estévez 1). Before that, he had noted in Cuba the stark display of the kind of government-ordered crime that was prevalent in his native country, underlining the bitter commonality of his Caribbean experience. On January 22, 1948, Jesús Menéndez, the leader of Cuba's singularly important sugar-workers' union, was fatally shot in the back by a Batista soldier as he got off a train in Manzanillo, eastern Cuba. Mir had expressed profound admiration for him, for the way in which he, in logical and sincere speech and deeds, gave real hope to workers in the Cuban sugar industry. So that for Mir his assassination was not just another painful reminder of a Caribbean pathology. He, like Guillén, who had accompanied Menéndez on several of his political campaigns and who wrote one of his great elegies to commemorate his death, felt a keen personal loss which also brought forth an elegy, titled 'Tren de sangre' (Blood Train). Such atrocities made Mir add an anti-Batista struggle to his anti-Trujillo one. On the other hand, the Batista security agencies hardened their defense of both criminals

and, recognizing Mir's loyalties, pursued him so intently that he had to leave Cuba in 1958, when killings and tortures by the security forces intensified.

With the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, he returned to Cuba, to Havana now, involving himself deeply in central activities of the Revolution, as a journalist with Agencia Prensa Latina, the Cuban news organization, and alongside one of the great Cuban writers of prose fiction, Alejo Carpentier, at the Cuban National Printery. When the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples was founded in that same year, he collaborated with it, working for the achievement of Latin American and Caribbean solidarity. At this time too he met Ernesto Che Guevara who told him that he had come to know about him and his work while he was in Guatemala, during the brief period of democracy in that country. They had both stayed at the same guest house: Mir, in 1952, when he travelled to Guatemala to publish his 'Contracanto a Walt Whitman,' (Countersong to Walt Whitman), another of his major poems, written in Cuba, and Guevara, in 1954, prior to the overthrow, perpetrated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, of the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz.

Mir was able to return to his home country after Trujillo was assassinated in May 1961 and the wild orgy of killings ordered by his relatives in revenge for his death had subsided. Juan Bosch won the elections in December 1962. As a member of the Central Committee of Bosch's Partido Socialista Dominicano, Mir must have looked forward to realizing some of the hopes that he held for his country. However, Bosch's government was overthrown in September 1963 by an alliance of the army, the hierarchy of the Catholic church and the upper social classes, guided by the U.S. government, when he showed resolve in carrying out a programme of land, education and other reforms. A restive period ensued, resulting in the outright occupation of the country by U.S. marines in 1965. Mir's poem 'Ni un paso atrás' [Not a Single Step Back] of 1965 indicates his determination to confront the invasion that by 1967 had resulted in thousands of lives lost. Nevertheless, he was forced to leave his country again, returning finally in 1968.

The formidable adverse circumstances that Mir encountered during the years when his worldview was being shaped, significantly impacted his activity as a writer who was concerned about the course of his nation's life. Hope became for him an instrument of survival, a steadying presence in his consciousness; and since his situation resembles in great measure that of his alert compatriots not only in the Dominican Republic but in the Caribbean in general, a reliance on hope as a very present help in time of need emerges from his work as a Caribbean trait. The word "esperanza" [hope] is omnipresent in his poetry, sometimes in the titles of poems. In fact, the poem "Solo de esperanza" [Solo of Hope] may be seen as an *arte poética*, the poet declaring and demonstrating the need for hope:

La esperanza es la esperanza	*Hope is hope*
convertida en ley	*transformed into the law*
de los pueblos,	*of the peoples,*
el pueblo convertido en ley	*the people transformed into law*
y la esperanza en Gobierno.	*and hope into Government.*
La esperanza es un Estado	*Hope is a State*
de muchachas escribiendo	*with girls writing*
un plan quinquenal de niños	*a five-year plan for children*
y una constitución del soneto.	*and a constitution for the sonnet.*
(*Countersong*…. 154-55)	

In his most greatly acclaimed poem, 'Hay un país en el mundo' [There is a Country in the World], adopted by his compatriots as a hymn to his country, he leaves ample room for hope. The poem attracts by the love for the people and the land exuded in it, by the luxuriance of the landscape captured in the brightly illuminated imagery that is on the verge of becoming entrancing when the reader is roused by an obstacle, in this case by 'The Company,' the distorted latifundist heart of his nation's sugar economy. The two words are repeated in anaphoric insistence, signifying 'The Company's' obstinate imposition of itself on the people as a barrier to their enjoyment of freedom and development.

A similar circumstance and artistic structure prevail in one of his other grand poems: 'Contracanto a Walt Whitman' [Countersong to Walt Whitman]. Here a strong voice of the United States, Whitman's, is ultimately challenged by our poet's voice on behalf of the Americas. Whitman's voice has been strengthened by the recognition he has received from those in the Americas who have admired his amplification of the idea of democracy, those such as Nicaragua's Rubén Darío. When in his poem 'A [Theodore] Roosevelt' (1904) he excoriated the U.S. president just after he had stolen Panama from Colombia in order to build the canal, he did so invoking ' voz de la Biblia, o verso de Walt Whitman' [word of the Bible, or poetry of Walt Whitman] (Darío 720). Nevertheless, Roosevelt's act in itself is a reminder of what was proffered as a warning by Simón Bolívar in 1829, formulated as a question, and that has pinpointed a real source of grief and division since then. Bolívar's question is: '¿Cuánto no se opondrían todos los nuevos estados americanos, y los Estados Unidos que parecen destinados por la providencia para plagar la América de miseria en nombre de la libertad?' [Would not the opposition be great between all the new countries of the Americas, and the United States which seems destined by providence to plague the Americas with misery in the name of freedom?].

Mir comes to see this sad augury as fulfilled; and in his "Contracanto a Walt Whitman" he establishes his American opposition after giving Whitman's optimistic perspective a fair chance, conveyed in generous, bright, expansive imagery that colours both the United States and the Americas. The divisive element in this case comes to be money, the quest for its acquisition by the North at the broad expense of the South, leading to conditions that undermine Whitman's inclusive democratic proposal. By taking this stance in this poem of 1952, Mir extends his Caribbean perspective and the case for his feud to all of the Americas, the region for which he feels the responsibility to protect. He reaffirms this breadth in his poem "Si alguien quiere saber cuál es mi patria' [If Anyone Wants to Know Which Is My Country] of 1958, making it echo José Martí's concept 'Patria es humanidad' [Homeland is Humanity]. He thus plots the course that political developments would take with the creation in Caracas in December 2011 of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. It is noteworthy too, and a further indication of the constructive intimacy achieved between literature and politics in the Caribbean, that Hugo Chávez Frías, the principal creator of this regional body, visited Mir in the Dominican Republic in 1999, arriving at his home reciting lines from 'Si alguien quiere saber ' (Pérez Shelton 37). The great tribute paid to Mir was his having been granted in 1984 by the unanimous decision of his country's legislature the title of 'National Poet.'[3] The people of the Dominican Republic will no doubt sing more and more lustily his 'Hay un país en el mundo' while they work to lift their country to accompany those few other Latin American and Caribbean countries that have attained – Chile, Cuba and Argentina (United Nations Index for Human Development, 2014) – or are clearly on their way to attaining the highest levels of human development.

Endnotes

1 Two years before his death at age 94, I asked the popular Cuban musician and educator Compay Segundo whether he had learned any music from Jamaicans who had worked in Cuba during many years. He answered, accompanying himself with his "armonica" guitar, as he sang the popular Jamaican song, "Sly Mongoose."

2 See my essay on him, 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' de Jorge Luis Borges: teoría y práctica que se bifurcan' in my *Nueve escritores hispanoamericanos ante la opción de construir* (pp. 203-24).

3 Something similar to the title Poet Laureate accorded first and posthumously to Thomas MacDermot (Tom Redcam) (1870-1933) in Jamaica and now held by Mervyn Morris.

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Ploughing in Hard Soil:

Hilary Beckles' Intellectual Struggles in Barbados[1]

Tennyson S.D. Joseph

Introduction

> I was a rare survivor of the black community in Birmingham, U.K, in the sense that as a teenager who was radical in his thinking I was able to get through the education system and enter university. These issues are all related; the desire to go to, university was in order to prepare myself for the public work I wanted to do in this regard… Horrendously high black failure rates had a lot to do with the racism of teachers; black teenage unemployment and imprisonment became the norm. I wanted to prepare myself for a life of opposition to this and related systems of injustice (**Hilary Beckles).**[2]

The above reflection by Principal of the Cave Hill (Barbados) Campus and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, on the motivations which spurred him into the life of a public intellectual, suggests strongly his consciousness of himself as an organic intellectual of the Black working class in Barbados and the Caribbean, and in his current evolution, the entire globe. It is very significant as a statement of explanation of his understanding of his social responsibility and as a contextual background of his work. As *a,* and indeed even *the,* leading Barbadian radical intellectual, Beckles provides a useful subject for the study of the Caribbean intellectual. This presents a preliminary attempt at systematizing his ideas and work.

Historical and Contemporary Basis of Barbadian Anti-Intellectualism

When Hilary Beckles returned to his native Barbados as a lecturer in history at the Cave Hill Campus in 1984, he was immediately struck by the backwardness of the ruling

class which dominated the economic, social and cultural life of the country. Having spent his late teenage and early adult life in the United Kingdom, Beckles no doubt had been socialized into an expectation of ruling classes as culturally sophisticated, intellectually broadminded and socially responsible and, though expected to defend their economic interests, Beckles had anticipated that they would honour their responsibilities as patrons of the arts and sponsors of social development through an investment in education, sport and culture. At the very least, he did not expect the ruling class to be crudely anti-intellectual.

In a 1989 interview, Beckles made it quite clear that his expectations of a progressive bourgeoisie in Barbados had been brutally shattered by the reality of what he encountered:

> I have no social or intellectual respect for this ruling class in Barbados, because it is a culturally and socially bankrupt one. It is a ruling class whose domination is based solely on the majority ownership of resources for over 300 years... They had the leisure time and resources, but they made no intellectual or artistic contributions... They were wealthy that was all, but uncouth, uncultured and anti-intellectual.[3]

Beckles' observations correspond very closely to the reflections of writers who have studied the development of the West Indian intellectual life. Gordon Lewis for example, in one of the earliest such attempts, exposed the dismal record of a ruling class whose pre-occupation with establishing crude systems of labour control, and whose racist consciousness militated against the nurturing of an intellectual tradition. Lewis acknowledges a prevailing view of the Caribbean as,

> an anti-intellectual society. In Pére Labat's lament, everything was imported into the West Indies except books. The Caribbean slavocracy never learned the lesson, as did the slave owning class of the ancient world, of combining slavery with the arts.[4]

Thus, the tourist-brochure view of the Caribbean as a place exclusively of sea, sun and sex, is a direct reflection of the image of the traditional ruling class.

Significantly, the cultural opposition of the planter class to ideas revolved around the existence of the West Indies as a place created exclusively for the exploitation of labour. Lewis emphasizes the fact that the Caribbean society was "not only a mercantilist-based capitalist society...it was also a racist society". He observes that all of these developments combined to "paint the negative stereo-type of the Caribbean African person as lazy, irresponsible, mendacious, sexually aggressive, mentally inferior, and biologically retarded".[5]

These infertile, anti-intellectual conditions found full expression in Hilary Beckles' Barbados. Historical circumstances conspired to ensure that the Barbados planter class emerged through the period of decolonization with its privileges largely unshaken, and with little cultural incentive or urgency to integrate fully into a new society. Nowhere was this seen more clearly as it was in the hardening of the anti-intellectual tendencies of the Barbadian ruling class and, more importantly, in the percolation of these tendencies into the entire fabric of the Barbadian education system.

Thus, the education system of Hilary Beckles' early years and the one into which he would return as a radical intellectual, was a mixture of all the inherited cultural weaknesses of the slave and plantocratic era. Thus, whilst Barbados made significant strides in education provision in the post-colonial period, these achievements were proscribed by the inherited anti-intellectual tendencies, and coloured by class and race prejudice. Education was valued only as a tool for individual self-advancement rather than for collective liberation. According to Gordon Lewis,

> For the Barbadian, pride in that system was in reality the pride of a snobbery that graded the school pupil on the educational ladder in terms of his class position... [I]t meant the subjection of the school population to a murderously competitive steeplechase only a chosen few could hope to win, and producing, in those few, the well-known phenomenon of the colonial Oxonian only too often made unfit, by experience, for creative service to his community.[6]

It is into this planter-dominated, elitist, superficial, conservative, and anti-intellectual world that Hilary Beckles sought to make his contribution as a historian and as an academic. Given his rejection of the traditional view of the "educated" West Indian, Beckles found himself in the position of a man ploughing in rather difficult terrain. What distinguished him from many of his academic peers was his absolute determination to pursue the kind of interventions which he felt was his duty as a black intellectual in a post-slave, post-colonial polity. Coupled with this sense of historical responsibility has been Beckles' fertile awareness of the personalities, traditions and influences like CLR James, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon and Eric Williams who shaped his consciousness, and his focused determination to apply their ideas to his time and place.

Relatedly, much of Beckles' time as an education administrator has been spent consciously building alliances with the traditional monied groups in Barbados, encouraging them to reverse their historical distance from intellectual life and to understand the role of the university and their place in its development.

Barbadian Revolutionary Intellectual

A close reading of the ideas and work of Hilary Beckles, reveals a close link between his academic productions and his social activism. This trait distinguishes him from the ordinary academic who writes books as a mere exercise in bourgeois intellectualism with no aspiration for social transformation, but only as an avenue for occupational promotion. Beckles' approach established him firmly in the tradition of the revolutionary intellectual, a category both exemplified and clarified by Walter Rodney. Rodney, in a published interview, recalls an episode from his student years when he attempted to apply the category of the revolutionary intellectual as a tool for contextualizing V.I. Lenin, much to the horror of his academic supervisors:

> I was doing some paper on the Russian revolution when it struck me that this Lenin was a person who had a tremendous capacity for intellectualizing and at the same time doing. In my own naïve way, I called this phenomenon "a revolutionary intellectual". But the professor was very hard on this statement. He said: "There is no such thing. One can be an intellectual or one can be a revolutionary. You can't combine the two. Lenin may at one time have been a revolutionary, at another time an intellectual, but the moment he moves into practical activity he must abandon intellectualism". This was a most curious argument... I just sensed that something was wrong about it. And I felt that somehow being a revolutionary intellectual must be a goal to which one might aspire...[7]

The life and work of Hilary Beckles has validated Rodney's youthful conviction that the roles of thinking and doing can be successfully combined. The close relationship between his activism and his intellectual productions could not have been accidental. Nearly all of his major intellectual productions can be linked to a particular political project with which he was involved, suggesting a close interplay between his activism and his writing.

Three examples will suffice. First and foremost is *The Mutual Affair* in which Beckles documented his struggles for economic empowerment of black Barbadians, an idea which has formed a central part of his intellectual discourse. The second is the series of publications on West Indies cricket, in which he has married his experiences of practical management of a sport which is central to West Indian nation building and identity, with his own application of the theoretical insights of CLR James on the role of cricket in West Indian national liberation. Finally and most recently, Beckles' publication of *Britain's Black Debt* [8] has provided firm proof of his continued link between practical action and academic endeavour. Having evolved from young lecturer fearlessly condemning the economic inequities of Barbados, to visionary campus principal, Beckles' work on

reparations is a demonstration of his capacity to use the space offered by his elevated platform (or despite of it), to sustain his radical activism.

These interventions represent only an illustrative snapshot of his intellectual contribution. To these can be added his works aimed at fostering female liberation;[9] his research on the self-liberation of enslaved blacks;[10] his research into white servitude in Barbados;[11] his writing on tertiary education in the Caribbean which reflects his practical engagement as a university administrator; and his series of plays around the lives of the National Heroes of Barbados which captures his involvement in the selection of Barbados' National Heroes.

The Mutual Affair, Cricket, Education and Reparations

The Mutual Affair

One of Beckles' principal research concerns has been the question of the absence of economic ownership amongst the black majority population. In keeping with this concern, he identified three aspects of black emancipation and empowerment, fought over and resolved in three separate epochs of Barbadian development. The first was the battle for social rights, the right to be recognized as human, which was waged during the slave period and resolved with full emancipation in 1838 (1627-1838); the second was the struggle for political rights, the right for representative government and universal adult suffrage and political sovereignty and independence (1838-1966), which was resolved during the period covering the 1930s labour upheavals, the granting of universal adult suffrage and formal independence in the 1960s. The third struggle, the fight for economic empowerment, according to Beckles, is the task of the post-independence period.[12]

Having developed this concept as an academic framework, it was an act of supreme bravery on Beckles' part, and an indication of his deep commitment to revolutionary activism, that he flung himself into an actual struggle for breaking the control of the traditional ruling elite over an enterprise which was financed by the savings of the black majority. The "Mutual Affair" therefore provided an ideal practical platform to apply his thinking.

The central issues of the "Mutual Affair" have been conveniently summarized on the outside back cover of similarly subtitled text:

> Towards the end of 1988, Barbados experienced a major (inter) national crisis which resulted from the actions of a group of visionary persons. They encouraged and organized fellow citizens to seek control of the financial and economic institutions which they own. The Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society (BMLAS) [was] one

> such institution... A campaign was waged by policyholders to place democratically progressive and responsible black directors on the white dominated board of their multinational corporation. The white corporate elite considered the initiative as striking at the root of its economic dominance of the company, and the country in general. They reacted negatively and aggressively, and the contest ensued.[13]

In this struggle Beckles was thrust into a vanguard role, leading a population of mainly black shareholders who appeared, in some cases, not only fearful, but as a consequence of this fear, hostile towards Beckles for shaking up the accustomed order. As vanguard therefore, Beckles found himself performing a political education role in the middle of the actual struggle, taking great pains to explain to a reluctant society that "the fundamental principle governing the functions of the BMLAS was that it was a 'Mutual' Society, meaning that all policyholders were joint owners since no stocks were issued to any shareholders, and "all profits then belonged to the policyholders, who were the owners".[14] In other words, the black majority appeared not only ignorant, but doubtful of their capacity as economic owners.

In addition, Beckles was forced to utilize history as a tool for clarifying the necessity of the struggle in which they were engaged. This historical analysis led him to the conclusion that in the "specific case of small, economically less developed, post-colonial independent states such as Barbados where ownership and control of large scale economic resources has historically been the privilege of Euro-creole, agro-commercial elites, the conflict over resources will be characterized also by the continuation of "inner" and anti-colonial resistance, and determined to a large extent by the rising social and nationalist consciousness of the historically disadvantaged majority".[15] In short, it was this "inner anti-colonial" struggle which Beckles was waging.

It was in such a context therefore, that the "Bussa Committee" was formed, and effectively transformed the routine incestuous selection of interlocking white directorships on the board of the Barbados Mutual into a mass popular campaign for black empowerment. Despite the fact that the traditional elite mounted a series of counter-strategies which blocked Beckles' selection,[16] a qualitative shift in public consciousness had occurred as a result of his academic and political effort. In a direct sense, he had tested, tried and illustrated the efficacy and the utility of the model of the revolutionary intellectual.

Cricket

Given Beckles' prolific academic output, it was inevitable that he would rise to the highest levels of his chosen profession. With his elevation to Campus Principal and

Pro-Vice Chancellor, it was expected that his radical intellectualism would have been stymied. However, one of Beckles' distinctive features has been his ability to carve an anti-systemic space for himself, from whichever social location he finds himself. This is seen first in his pursuit of a research agenda around West Indian Cricket, and later in his spearheading of a reparations campaign for West Indian slavery and Amerindian genocide, at CARICOM level.

Beckles' research on cricket might have appeared to his detractors as his deliberate adoption of a "safe" academic project, with sufficient distance from more overt politically charged concerns. However there is much in his work on cricket which confirms rather than overturns his commitment to a revolutionary agenda. For instance, Beckles was attracted to C.L.R. James's unlocking of the revolutionary potential of cricket beyond the narrow context of sport, and applied it to his own work. For this reason, he supports Searle's view that in the Caribbean, cricket

> became an area of revolt; the heroic figures that occupy the crease being made from the same politicized material as C.L.R. James, George Lamming and Edward Brathwaite. For him, cricketers and artists alike contributed to the 'same anti-imperialist momentum' that resides at the centre of the West Indian radical tradition".[17]

Beckles' cricket research therefore, was not a depoliticized, "safe" bourgeois intellectual undertaking, but was an extension of his radicalism. Through his adoption of the Jamesian method, he has been able to demonstrate that "no matter how many times and how we toss the coin of West Indian History, more often than not it comes down on the side of resistance rather than accommodation".[18] Cricket, to Beckles therefore, is a field of liberation struggle, rather than containment.

Like his struggle for economic empowerment, Beckles' research on cricket represents both an academic project, as well as a practical program. Thus, his multi-volume work on the development of West Indies cricket reflects and seeks to resolve the challenges of the West Indian self-determination, sovereignty and development currently bedeviling West Indian life.[19] In effect, Beckles has sought to "extend the debate on cricket, national society, and nationalism initiated by C.L.R. James into the age of globalism".[20] His cricket research has revealed the connection between the crisis of the post-colonial order, and the crisis of West Indies cricket, and exposes its revolutionary implications:

> Perceptions of a crisis in West Indies cricket reflect the general tone and texture of contemporary West Indian society… Everywhere in the region there is talk of intellectual emptiness, mass unemployment, youth lawlessness and indiscipline, and increasing criminalization of the poor. Cricket draws heavily upon the structurally impoverished

> communities now accused of generating antisocial, nonproductive mentalities… Public institutions that served the anti-colonial liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s well are now considered by the excluded social majority as the oppressive systems of today.[21]

There is therefore no cricket academic agenda to Beckles, independent of and isolated from his efforts to ensure the economic empowerment of the West Indian majority.

The Struggle for Free Education

This concern with the failure of the independence project is a constant current running through Beckles' work. In writing on "independence and the social crisis of nationalism" in Barbados, he condemns the failure of the post-colonial elite to sustain elements of the radical agenda embarked upon by the founding father, Errol Barrow. This concern has assumed new urgency since 2013, given a decision by the government of Barbados to terminate Barrow's policy of tax funded "free" tertiary education at the UWI to all eligible Barbadians. This decision has allowed Beckles to continue his critique of the failure of the nationalist project in a more directly political way, and to bring to bear his various roles of public intellectual, historian, social activist and education administrator to a project of defending state-funded education.

Typically, he uses history as his main weapon. Thus, in response to a newspaper article by this writer which posited that the removal of free education signals the dissolution of the Barbadian "independence social contract",[22] Beckles responded in the following way:

> I found your article today to be of special interest against the background of many conversations I had with Errol Barrow during the 1986 election. He made it clear to me that when he assumed office as Premier in 1961, the economic state of the black community was so awful that he needed a social contract in order to bring them into the economy at a level other than cheap labour… He did not see a way to nationalize anything in order to redistribute wealth… He decided however to develop a fiscal strategy in order to fund a state sponsored education policy from primary to tertiary that would enfranchise the poor, lift them out of poverty, and give them a chance as owners in the national economy… What we are witnessing is a dismantlement of the Barrow social contract on the basis of fiscal fear and myths about affordability".[23]

Given his historical research on this question, his interventions, contrary to narrow partisan assumptions, were not knee jerk responses by a frustrated university

administrator. Instead, they were consistent with his long-standing commitment to black empowerment and with his habit of pressing historical knowledge into the service of liberation struggles.

The Struggle for Reparations

If Beckles' academic work on West Indies cricket had opened discussion on his commitment to radicalism, then certainly his publication of the work *Britain's Black Debt*, should have closed all such discussion. Unlike the work on cricket which escapes a more direct political action program, Beckles' campaign for reparations has seen him adopting a more clearly discernible political programme.

Given the controversy associated with a reparations campaign, the historical reluctance and hostility from local elements unable psychologically to shake off their identification with European imperialism, as well as the unavoidably problematic international law and international relations dimensions of the reparations demand, there is little doubt that it represents a significant step in Beckles' intellectual radical commitment.

What Beckles achieves with *Britain's Black Debt*, is to capture the overt intellectual radicalism of the Mutual affair, only this time pitched at a global issue. It is written within the scholar-activist tradition, bringing to bear his roles as a historian, member of the Barbados delegation to the UN World Global Conference against Racism, pan-African activist, and ordinary citizen seeking personal catharsis for the slavery experience. Reparations is pursued both as part of a corrective to the injustices of slavery and also because it is a reasonable demand.

Perhaps due to the reluctance of the black bourgeoisie to support his earlier struggles, Beckles makes an appeal which addresses the personal and moral dimension of the injustices of slavery, in addition to the more dispassionate historical and international law arguments. To strengthen his case, the revolutionary intellectual assumes a humanist hue:

> Slavery and genocide in the Caribbean are lived experiences… I chose to write a text that reflects this reality within the context of my personal and professional experiences as a historian and concerned citizen… It is an account of known features of British colonialism; its terrorism of adults and ruthless sexploitation of children; its maddening material poverty; and the racial brutality it bred within the prison known as the plantation.[24]

Perhaps aware of the reluctance of a large segment of the Caribbean population to accept the legitimacy of the reparations demand, on grounds of the remoteness of

slavery, Beckles introduces his book by emphasizing the personal impact of slavery upon himself and by extension, the wider population:

> I was born and bred in such a prison: a plantation village inhabited by men, women and children who performed lifelong hard labour for sugar planters who owned everything of worth around us… My maternal great grandmother spoke freely about her enslaved grandparents who worked these fields. Slavery, for her, was still alive in the present. It filled her consciousness and dominated her reflections. It was the "devil doing", she would say, and the "Englishmen" who rode horses while driving them to work were the devil's horsemen. She would say that if her enslaved grandparents were to return, they would fit right in.[25]

Conclusion

Hilary Beckles' intellectual interventions into Barbadian political life have been undoubtedly radical and revolutionary, fitting him neatly into the Gramscian category of an "organic intellectual". In developing this category, Gramsci sought to determine whether intellectuals constitute an autonomous social group or whether every social class "has its own specialised category of intellectuals".[26] Gramsci concluded that all classes produce their own intellectuals, and thus, the working class produces from out of its ranks its own organic intellectuals who think and write on behalf of their class.

From his early years, Beckles developed a consciousness of the world as structurally built on the exploitation and oppression of colonised peoples. He lived these experiences daily as a child in Barbados and a teenager in the United Kingdom. Blessed with a keen intellect and deep sensitivity to human suffering he saw his education as useful mainly for the collective liberation of oppressed groups, and at the very least, for the development of his society and region:

> When I saw American bombers eliminating barefooted peasants in Vietnam, I thought of my own background in St. Andrew where white plantation owners and white Anglican priests terrorized labourers in the tenantries. When I shouted 'black is beautiful' in the streets, I thought of life as it was in Rock Hall. We were poor, hardworking but 'beautiful' people.[27]

Not surprisingly, Beckles' intervention into Barbadian political life, has often placed him at odds with the black petty bourgeoisie. Whilst hostility from the Euro-Caribbean beneficiaries of colonialism was expected, the reaction from the black petty bourgeoisie was a result of more complex historical circumstances. Their dominant

tendency of obsequiousness to the ruling elite out of fear, opportunism and instinctive conservatism, mixed with their historical anti-intellectualism, presented Beckles as a "problem". His organic radical intellectualism also proved troubling to the ordinary academic historian for whom, "up to this time, the history of Barbados was the history of an elite class and not that of the working masses."[28]

What then has kept Beckles' shoulders pressed to the plough, despite the difficulty of the terrain? An easy answer may be the rightness of his cause, and his sense of mission. Whilst this paper has focused on his interventions with respect to black marginalisation, his intellectual struggles against oppression extend beyond his empathy with the descendants of enslaved blacks. It should not escape notice that amongst his most noted historical productions are his studies of the liberation struggles of enslaved women, aimed at contributing to a gender discourse of Caribbean slavery.[29]

Finally, it is often forgotten that his earliest published works were on the experience of white indentured servitude in Barbados. In short, therefore, Beckles' scholarship and activism has not been confined to blacks, but has extended to all oppressed communities and groups.

Perhaps, however, the best answer to the question of what has motivated Beckles in his continued struggle against oppression, is his belief in his ability and his determination to win, honed from an active life in competitive sport and from childhood struggles in difficult circumstances in Barbados and the UK. In a public lecture delivered on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Nation Newspaper, Beckles hinted at this ethic with his declaration that when he encountered the oppressive social conditions of Barbados, he was determined that either the society would adjust to him or he would leave.[30]

Thankfully, Beckles has neither left, nor accommodated himself to oppression. Instead, through his work as academic, education administrator, cricket administrator, playwright, public intellectual, and social activist, he has waged his battle on several fronts. There is little doubt that he has improved the condition of the oppressed majority through his various efforts. There is little doubt as well, that as the post-2008 existential crisis of the Caribbean deepens, he will continue to serve as rich fertilizer, preparing the soil for future generations.

Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Mrs. Kaydeen Beckles for her research assistantship.

2 Kaydeen Beckles interview with Hilary Beckles, March 2nd, 2014

3 Margaret Prescod-Cisse. "Hilary Beckles: Another voice to be heard". *The New Bajan*, Feb. 1989, p.15.

4 Gordon Lewis. *Main currents in Caribbean thought: The historical evolution of Caribbean society in its ideological aspects, 1492-1900*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1983, p. 26.

5 Gordon Lewis. *Main currents*, p. 5-7.

6 Gordon Lewis. *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*, New York: Monthly Review Press. 1968. p. 231.

7 Walter Rodney. *Walter Rodney speaks: The making of An African intellectual*. Trenton: Africa World Press. 1990. p. 19.

8 Hilary Beckles. *Britain's black debt: Reparations for Caribbean slavery and native genocide*. Kingston: UWI Press, 2013.

9 See for example, Hilary Beckles. *Natural Rebels: a social history of enslaved black women in Barbados*, London: Zed Books, 1989 and Hilary Beckles. *Centering woman: Gender discourses in Caribbean slave society, Oxford: James Curry, 1999*.

10 Hilary Beckles. "Caribbean anti-slavery: The self-liberation of enslaved blacks" in Aaron Kamugisha ed., *Caribbean political thought: The colonial state to Caribbean internationalisms*, Kingston, Ian Randle, 2013. P. 157-69

11 Lost in the popular view of Beckles as a champion of black empowerment, is the fact that his earliest research projects were concerned with exposing the oppression of white indentured servants in Barbados. See Hilary Beckles, "White Labour in Black Slave Plantation Society and Economy: A Case Study of Indentured Servitude in 17th Century Barbados" (PhD Dissertation: University of Hull, 1980) and Hilary Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados 1627-1715*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.

12 Hilary Beckles. 'Independence and the social crisis of nationalism in Barbados', *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs*, 17 (3) 1992, p. 4.

13 Hilary Beckles. *Corporate power in Barbados: The Mutual affair – Economic injustice in a political democracy*, Bridgetown: Lighthouse Communications, 1989.

14 Hilary Beckles. *Corporate power in Barbados*, p. 4.

15 Hilary Beckles. *Corporate Power in Barbados*, p. 7.

16 In a cynical twist, one of the outcomes was the election of two black directors who had remained outside the Bussa Committee. Beckles responded to this with typical historical clarity: "My grasp of history…has shown… that those persons who initiate the struggle are frequently brushed aside by those who came through the back door, appeal to the oppressors, and are given assistance in their rise to positions of power" (in *Corporate Power*, p. 192).

17 Hilary Beckles. "The political ideology of West Indies cricket", in Hilary Beckles and Brian Stoddart ed., *Liberation Cricket: West Indies Cricket Culture*, Kingston: Ian Randle 1995, p. 148.

18 Hilary Beckles. "The political ideology of West Indies cricket", p 149.

19 See Hilary Beckles. *The Development of West Indies Cricket*, (Vol. 1 The Age of Nationalism and Vol. 2 The Age of Globalisation), Kingston: UWI Press, 1998

20 Hilary Beckles. *The Development of West Indies Cricket*, p. xii

21 Hilary Beckles. *The Development of West Indies Cricket,* vol. 2, p. 1-2.

22 Tennyson Joseph. "Dissolved contract" *in Daily Nation*, Sept. 3rd 2013, p.8

23 Hilary Beckles. Personal email to Tennyson Joseph, Sept. 3rd, 2013

24 Hilary Beckles. *Britain's black debt*, p. 2.

25 Hilary Beckles. *Britain's black debt*, p. 2-3

26 Antonio Gramsci, "The Formation of the Intellectuals" Chapter 4 in Sean P. Hier ed., *Contemporary sociological thought: Themes and theories*, Canada: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005, p. 49

27 In Margaret Prescod-Cisse. "Hilary Beckles", p.15

28 Margaret Prescod-Cisse. "Hilary Beckles", p.15

29 Hilary Beckles. *Natural Rebels* 1989; *Centering Woman,* 1999.

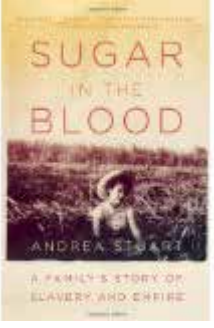
30 Hilary Beckles. "The Nation within our nation: Media and people power" Public Lecture, Nov. 11th, 2014, Bridgetown Barbados

The Sugar In Our Blood

Review of 'Sugar in the Blood' by Andrea Stuart

Carl Moore

WHILE THE ENGLISH Civil War was raging and Charles the First was having his head removed and Oliver Cromwell's protectorate was in full swing in England, George Ashby had already settled into his nine-acre plot of land and growing tobacco in the parish of St. Philip in Barbados.



He and several others had set out about twenty years earlier to seek their fortunes in the unknown world of the Americas. While some stopped off on the eastern seaboard of what is now the United States, George and others pressed on to Barbados and other Caribbean territories.

By ignoring my grandmother's advice "Never judge a book by its cover", I delayed by several months reading Andrea Stuart's tour-de-force *Sugar in the Blood*. As a certified Type-2 diabetic since 2006, I had misread the book's cover as yet another tome about the disease that sooner or later prevails and ends the lives of thousands all over the world.

When I did start reading – after noticing the subsidiary title *A family's story of slavery and empire* – I could not put down the book and on reaching Page 352 I left a note on the last blank space for anyone who might stumble on it. My note says: "Every Barbadian should read this book if for no other reason than to establish context for their reality."

Andrea Stuart describes George Ashby as her great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather. She met him in the reading room of the Barbados Museum.

She had no such luck with her paternal grandfather. He was a slave, and no such meticulous record was kept of the enslaved. Indeed, as soon as they landed in the "new world", emaciated and disoriented, they acquired new names – the names of their owners – and lost forever their African names.

The name Moore, I'm told, for example, is an indigenous English surname and was established in Ireland by the Anglo Normans after the invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century and the best known of the clan was Thomas Moore, the poet, (1799-1852).

George Ashby came to Barbados soon after the settlement. Like most of the early settlers, a lack of prospects caused him to risk that treacherous journey. Clearly he had to be made of stern stuff – or he was "desperately foolish" – to travel on a boat for months under cramped and crowded conditions. He arrived at last at Bridgetown, then the pivotal port in the entire region.

Life in England was rough for members of the lower classes – and let's face it, the British have never had any difficulty with such social demarcation – during the early 17th century. There was nothing left for those who hoped for a better life to do but sail away either under duress, or freely. For those who went of their own free will, like George Ashby, the motivation was "God, gold and glory".

The author Andrea Stuart

Those who sailed under compulsion hoped to survive long enough to pay off their transit debt and then eke out a comfortable existence after indenture, planning to return to England. The Atlantic voyage was long, cramped, unclean, lonely, fearful and unsafe. For both groups, the Americas were a "succulent maiden to be seduced, deflowered, and plundered by a virile Europe, which basked in her treasures".

Ashby arrived in Barbados before sugar did. After hacking his way through dense foliage and forest, he eventually began to plant and produce tobacco employing a small group of white indentured workers. The Barbados tobacco turned out to be of much lower quality than that produced on the North American mainland forcing on the landowners their first challenge of diversification.

It was Dutch Jews who were being expelled from Spain, Portugal and Brazil who came to Barbados as one of their last resorts and brought with them the kind of financial knowledge, shipping experience and farming technology needed to make sugar production a going concern.

As they perfected experiments in the tricky process of growing sugar, the trickle of slaves (black and white) became a torrent. By the 1650s, Barbados had become a big business enterprise and not as a place to raise a family; or as it is today, a vacation get-away.

The cultivation of the sugar crop changed Barbados and its topography forever. The planting of vast fields of sugar cane devastated the indigenous flora and fauna. The

greatest cost, however, was human. And the effects of it live on in this 21st century.

Sugar demanded a vast and steady stream of expendable labour to make the crop financially viable. The flow of indentured servants to the island was finite, and was drying up as time went on. Add to that their inability to handle the hot sun while cutting canes.

Enter mass slavery from Africa driven largely by economics: acquiring an African labour force was more convenient and cost effective. I regret that Ms. Stuart did not here allude, even in passing, to Eric Williams's path-breaking *Capitalism and Slavery*, to expand her narrative.

Ms. Stuart's description of the Middle Passage is devastatingly vivid.

On the island – not only Barbados, but Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, as well as Haiti and Brazil – she dissects the realities of race, class, and sex, as played out in the pursuit of riches afforded by the "white gold" of sugar plantations. In this family history, rich in detail, Ms. Stuart tells the story of immigration, the harsh realities of Caribbean slavery and sugar production, and the ambitions of black West Indians that have driven their own immigrant journeys to the U.S.(the Carolinas particularly) and Europe.

The writing of an historical genealogical book that includes all the workings of the British sugar empire is a daunting task, but this author attacks the challenge with refreshing enthusiasm and candour. (After all, she had behind her the impressive "The Rose of Martinique: A Life of Napoleon's Josephine", a masterful tome of story-telling). The historical part of the book including the delicate race relations and relationships is well done. It can be really hard to recover some of the personal detail of the ancestors, especially when they are the enslaved.

After several pages of rich conjecture and imagination surrounding the early struggles of George Ashby, the genealogical record allows Ms. Stuart to zero-in on and stay with the family tree from George Ashby through Robert Cooper right up to the present.

Through Robert Cooper's story, we learn about the plantation class in Barbados, including the vast slave system that allowed Barbados to exist and produce sugar for the rest of the world.

It is a nuanced history that does not use broad brush strokes, but uses detailed diary accounts, concrete historical references, and informed speculation about motivations of both white and black men and women of the time. It also throws much illumination on what it meant – and perhaps still means – to be mulatto in the Barbadian context.

Ms. Stuart acknowledges frequently the support of Barbadian authors and historians like George Lamming, Kamau Brathwaite, Sir Hilary Beckles, Robert Morris, Prof. Pedro Welch and Dr. Karl Watson, among others.

The sage advice of Frederick Douglass, the American slave turned abolitionist, comes up regularly. A few vignettes:

"No man puts a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck."

"The soul that is within me no man can degrade."

"The slaveholder, as well as the slave, is the victim of the slave system."

Then, with Robert Cooper's descendants, we see the impact of the eradication of slavery from Barbados in the early half of the 19th century and the subsequent trajectory that Cooper's offspring will follow, which varied depending on Cooper's inclusion (or omission) of the children in his will.

Cooper's story informs the reader about how men moved up the social ladder in Barbados, about the horrors of slavery – not only in Barbados, but the entire Caribbean – and why it was even more brutal than some of the American slave experiences, about the pros and cons for a female slave being forced into a conjugal "relationship" with a white planter, and the impact on her children.

Ms. Stuart's tale ends – for the time being, I suspect – with the present day reality of a Barbados still attached to the plantation paradigm as a management system and the family's continued ownership of Plumgrove plantation, where she grew up and from which she holds fond yet ambivalent memories.

She is the daughter of eminent Barbadian and world citizen Sir Kenneth Stuart and resides in Britain.

As a nitpicking proof-reader I noticed a few slips-ups, the main one being the sex of the late Shirley Chisholm. I'm sure she'll correct that in the next edition.

I agree with a reviewer who said that the book is at its strongest when Ms. Stuart writes about what she knows best – her early familial history and more recent information about closer members for which good documentation exists. Where the book falls short is near the end where Stuart seeks to blend her family's history with broader social movements.

Andrea Stuart ends her story with this truism: "Somewhere in all our family stories is a George Ashby, and we are all the descendants of migrants – those resilient souls making the best of history's terrible twists of fate, or those brave opportunities taking a chance on the future and striking out to forge a life for themselves in a new world."

An excellent book.

Bim
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Submissions

BIM, seminal Caribbean journal now revived as BIM: Arts for the 21st Century, is published 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.

Manuscripts should be no more than 5,000 words and should be double-spaced format, preferably with an accompanying electronic text file in Microsoft word format.

Correspondence should be sent to:
The Editor, BIM: Arts for the 21st Century,
Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination,
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Cave Hill Campus, PO Box 64,
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Submissions may be sent by e-mail to The Editor:
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