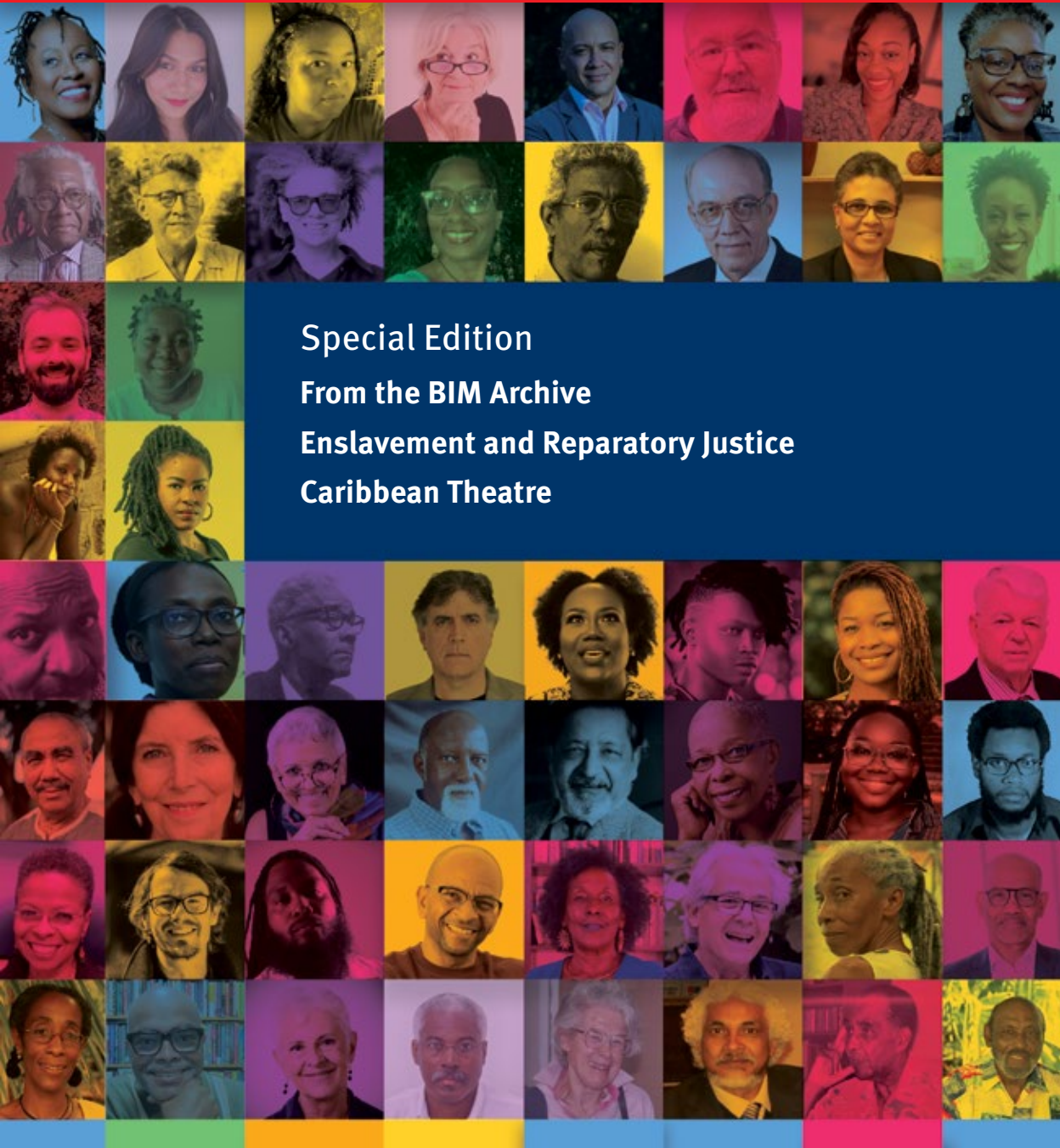


# *Bim*

Arts for the 21st Century



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Caribbean Theatre



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

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## Contributors



**Opal Palmer Adisa** writes poetry, prose, essays, and plays. She has lectured and performed her work throughout the United States, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Germany, Spain, France, England, Prague, Italy and Bosnia. An award-winner, Adisa has 25 titles to her credit, among which are *Pretty Like Jamaica* (2023), *The Storyteller's Return* (2022) and *Portia Dreams*, the authorised children's biography of Portia Simpson Miller, Jamaica's first female Prime Minister (2021). Adisa is the editor of the anthology *100+ Voices for Miss Lou* (2021) and the editor-in-chief of *Interviewing the Caribbean*, a literary/visual journal, and *Caribbean Conjunctions*, the Caribbean Studies Association's journal.



**Rayne Affonso** is a proud alumna of The University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, where she obtained a BA in Spanish and Literatures in English, and is currently pursuing an MA in Spanish. She is a 2023 Pushcart Prize nominee and two-time longlister in the Short Fiction Story Contest for the BCLF Elizabeth Nunez Award for Writers in the Caribbean. She co-authored and translated the bilingual children's book *Juanita* (2024), which highlights the ethnocultural diversity of Trinidad and Tobago, and aims to sensitize young readers to the contemporary migrant experience. She lives in Arima, Trinidad, and is working on her first novel.



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



**Christine Barrow** lived in Barbados for nearly fifty years, retiring as Professor Emerita from the University of the West Indies. Her short story collection, *Black Dogs and the Colour Yellow*, was published by Peepal Tree Press in 2018. Her work has been published in *Bim: Arts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *POUi: The Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing*, *The Caribbean Writer* and *Callaloo*. In 2023, her novella, *The Rainbow Window*, was awarded top prize in the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment competition. The anthology *Unstitching Silence* edited by Shivane Ramlochan and Lucy Evans (Peekash Press, 2025) includes her short story “The Mermaid’s Tail”.



**Tadzio Bervoets**, born in Saint Martin, holds a Bachelor’s in International Relations and NGO Management from the University of South Florida and a Master’s in Environmental Resource Management specializing in coral reef ecosystems from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His career spans coral reef conservation in Bermuda, marine park management in Tanzania, establishing Sint Maarten’s Man of War Shoal Marine Protected Area, and serving as Director of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance. Tadzio has consulted for the Inter-American Development Bank, CARICOM, and UNESCO, contributing to blue carbon strategies, climate change adaptation, and marine spatial planning. He co-founded the Caribbean Shark Coalition, leads the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund’s BlueFin Project, and chairs the Ocean Decade Task Force for Latin America and the Caribbean. An Explorers Club member and recipient of several conservation awards, Tadzio is passionate about marine research, policy, and sustainable development.



**Stewart Brown**, poet and artist, is Hon. Senior Research Fellow, Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham, and Hon. Associate Professor, Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick. Co-editor (with Mark McWatt) of *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. Co-editor (with Mervyn Morris and Gordon Rohlehr) of *Voiceprint: An Anthology of Oral and Related Poetry from the Caribbean* (1990). Published several collections of his own poetry, most recently *Elsewhere* (1999). *Still Mekin’ Foolishness*, his collected poems, is slated for publication by Peepal Tree Press. His *BABEL: beautiful, unsayable, meaningless, profound, a visual poetry project*, continues to evolve.



**Jacinth Browne-Howard** is a Vincentian-Barbadian researcher. She holds a PhD in Literatures in English from the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, where she teaches. Her research interests include speculative fiction and Caribbean women's writing. Her poetry collection *The Mother Island* won 2nd place in the 2021 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment competition and was showcased as part of the UNESCO *Transcultural Poetry* delegation, *40e Marché de la Poésie*, in Paris. Her fiction has appeared in *Bim*, *Intersect* and other publications. Her scholarly work appears in journals and anthologies, including *JWIL* and the *Routledge Handbook of Co-futurisms*. She is currently the writer-in-residence at Intersect ANU.



**Lysanne Charles** is a queer, Afro-Caribbean, feminist/womanist, artist, activist, academic, educator, and cultural/community organiser. Engaged with art from a young age, she is primarily drawn to poetry and short stories, though her creative expression also spans calypso, road march, power and groovy soca, theatre, and photography. She has also co-edited two memoirs with her grandmother. Her poetry often explores themes of love, loss, longing, marginalisation, and the intersection of politics, community, and nature. A central influence in her work is Audre Lorde, particularly the quote, "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."



**Austin Chesterfield Clarke** (1934–2016) was a novelist, short story writer, poet, journalist, and cultural attaché. Among his novels are *The Survivors of the Crossing* (1964), *Amongst Thistles and Thorns* (1965), *The Meeting Point* (1967), *Storm of Fortune* (1973), *The Bigger Light* (1975), *The Prime Minister* (1977), and the autobiography *Growing up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1980). Among his published collections of short stories are *When He Was Free and Young* and *He Used to Wear Silks* (1971), *When Women Rule* (1985), *Nine Men Who Laughed* (1986), and *There Are No Elders* (1993). His memoir *Pigtails n' Breadfruit: The Rituals of Slave Food, a Barbadian Memoir* (1999) was also later published as *Love and Sweet Food: A Culinary Memoir* (2004). His crowning achievement was *The Polished Hoe* (2002), which won the Giller Prize for fiction (2002), the 16th Annual Trillium Prize, the Commonwealth Writers Best Book Award for Canada and the Caribbean region (2003), and the Commonwealth Writers Award for best book.





**Frank Appleton Collymore** (1893–1980), teacher, literary editor, writer, poet, actor and painter, was the long-standing editor of *Bim* literary journal. The Frank Collymore Hall is named after him and the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment was established by the Central Bank of Barbados to honour his memory by recognising, supporting and rewarding literary talent in Barbados.



**Gloria Daniel**, born and raised in Notting Hill, London, is the third daughter of a Barbadian father and an Irish mother who met in 1950s London and married in 1960. Out of the racist riots of 1958, the Notting Hill Carnival was born, and the area's rich cultural tapestry profoundly shaped Gloria's early experiences. With a career rooted in history and heritage, she began as an antiques researcher and dealer before founding a successful ceramic brand in Stoke-on-Trent. Gloria, inspired by her deep connection to her ancestry and community, uses multidisciplinary arts and advocacy to confront historical erasure and demand reparative justice.



**Linda M. Deane** is a British-Barbadian writer, editor and storyteller. She is co-founder, with Robert Edison Sandiford, of the publishing and cultural entity ArtsEtc. Her writing for children and adults has earned her multiple Frank Collymore Literary Endowment awards and a Governor General's Award of Excellence in Literary Arts. Linda is a writing and learning guide known as The Summer Storyteller. Her most recent work can be found at *Preelit.com*, *acalabash.com*, *therockretreat.com*, and *artsetcbarbados.com*, and her debut poetry collection, *Cutting Road Blues: A Narrative*, is to be published later this year.



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



**Henry Fraser**, architectural historian, artist, writer, and television presenter, is a medical doctor who was the founding Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, as well as the founding Director of the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre. He is the author and or co-author of many peer-reviewed papers as well as newspaper columns. Among his publications are *Historic Houses of Barbados* and *A Life in Medicine and The Arts—An Autobiography*. Public Orator, UWI, Cave Hill Campus, 1992–2010, as well as National Orator 1998–2013, Professor Fraser has served as a senator in the Parliament of Barbados (2012–2018), president of the Barbados National Trust, chair of the Task Force on Historic Bridgetown and Garrison as World Heritage site as well as chair of the Preservation Task Force—Barbados’ Built Heritage. He was Knighted in 2014.



**A. L. Dawn French** is based in Saint Lucia and has been part of publications from the United Nations Development Fund for Women. She is included in the *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography* published by Oxford University Press, and her work has been featured at the Saint Lucia-Taiwan Tradeshow, CARIFESTA, and the World Expo in Dubai. In 2021, in recognition of her work in educating children through her stories, Dawn was inducted into the Saint Lucia 100 Women Hall of Honour. She is also the recipient of the BGWT Excellence Award (2023) and a winner of the Anacaona Prize (2024).



**Kacy Garvey** is an award-winning poet who has performed at various concerts and conferences as well as on radio and television programmes across Jamaica. She self-published *Undone* and *Water Jar* in 2014 and 2018, respectively: the first and only Christian poetry albums in Jamaica. She was the event coordinator and moderator of the Poetry Society of Jamaica, and was a presenter at the 2023 Rex Nettleford Arts Conference. Kacy is the founder of JAiku, a non-profit organisation that aims to establish and empower a cadre of professional poets to sharpen, market and deploy their skills for a wide range of clientele.



**Paul Robert Gilbert** is a reader in Development, Justice & Inequality at the University of Sussex, where he teaches political ecology, critical approaches to development economics, and development history. He is a co-editor of the open-access image-centred volume *Entangled Legacies of Empire: Race, Finance & Inequality* (Manchester University Press, 2023). His current research project is concerned with understanding the role of for-profit actors in international development, and tracing aid flows through the private sector.



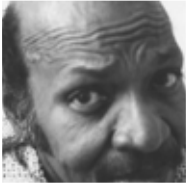
**Millicent A.A. Graham** lives in Kingston, Jamaica. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Damp in Things* (Peepal Tree Press, 2009) and *The Way Home* (Peepal Tree Press, 2014). She is a fellow of the University of Iowa International Writing Program, 2009, and an awardee of the Michael and Marylee Fairbanks International Fellowship to Bread Loaf Writer Conference, 2010. Her work has been published in: *Jamaica Journal*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Bim*, *So Much Things to Say: 100 Calabash Poets*, *Yonder Awa*, an anthology of Scottish and Caribbean writers for the Empire Cafe Project, and most recently *A Strange American Funeral*, edited by Freya Field-Donovan and Emmie McLuskey and designed by Maeve Redmond.



**Joanne C. Hillhouse** has authored eight books (*The Boy from Willow Bend*, *Dancing Nude in the Moonlight*, *Oh Gad!*, *Musical Youth*, and the children's books *With Grace*, *Lost! A Caribbean Sea Adventure*, *The Jungle Outside*, and *To Be a Cheetah*). She writes the award-winning Caribbean art and culture column CREATIVE SPACE and blogs at <http://jhohadli.wordpress.com>. Joanne founded Wadadli Pen to nurture and showcase the literary arts in Antigua and Barbuda, and offers workshops through her Jhohadli Writing Project. Among other accolades, she was selected as the arts and letters laureate by the Anthony N. Sabga Awards—Caribbean Excellence in 2023.



**Nisha Hope** is a former teacher, actor, playwright and entrepreneur from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. A graduate with a BFA in Creative Arts, she has been an integral and dynamic force on the theatrical landscape for 20-plus years. Known for her storytelling, Nisha's work explores identity, heritage, and the human condition. In 2019, she won Best Playwright for *Jumbie Leggo*, a play rooted in Caribbean folklore. As the founder of HOPE Creative Events and Consultancy, Nisha blends her artistic vision with entrepreneurial skill to inspire and uplift her community.



**Slade Hopkinson** (1934–1993) was a teacher, actor, playwright, director, newspaper editor, and a government information officer. Among his publications are *The Four and Other Poems* and the plays *The Blood of a Family* (1957), *Fall of a Chief* (1965), *The Onliest Fisherman* (1967), and *Spawning of Eel* (1968), rewritten as *Sala and The Long Vacation*. In 1976 the Government of Guyana published two companion collections of his poetry, *The Madwoman of Papine* and *The Friend*. During his life, Hopkinson's work appeared in *Bim*, *Savacou*, *New World* as well as the anthologies *Anansesem*, *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse*, and *Voiceprint*. *Snowscape With Signature*, a selection of poems written between 1952–1992, was published by Peepal Tree Press in 1993.



**Nicola Hunte** is a lecturer in the Literatures in English at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. She teaches Caribbean diasporic literatures and serves as the editor of *POUI* Cave Hill's journal of creative writing. Her research interests tend toward Caribbean speculative fiction and Barbadian popular culture.



**CLR James** (1901–1989) was a cultural historian, writer, novelist, playwright and political activist who was a leading figure in the Pan-African movement. Among his publications are *The Life of Captain Cipriani* (1932; revised as *The Case for West-Indian Self-Government*, 1933), *Minty Alley* (1936), *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953), the seminal *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), and probably his most notable work, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), a Marxist study of the Haitian slave revolution of the 1790s, which won him international acclaim.



**Keith Jardim** is from Port of Spain, Trinidad. His writing has appeared in many publications, including *Denver Quarterly*, *Mississippi Review*, *Kyk-Over-Al*, *Wasafiri*, *The Antigoniish Review*, *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings*, *Southeast Asian Review of English*, *The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories*, *Seepersad & Sons: Naipaulian Synergies*, *Short Story*. His first book, *Near Open Water*, was a semifinalist for the 2012 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature; later that year, it was included on *World Literature Today's* Nota Bene list, among other honours. His second book, *Dreams of the Jungle and Sea*, is due out in 2025. He has fiction forthcoming in *War, Literature & the Arts* (USA) and *Connecting Worlds: Ibero-Caribbean Narratives and Cross-Cultural Diasporas*.



**Cherie Jones** is a Barbadian writer. A former fellowship awardee of the Vermont Studio Centre and the International Writers Programme of the University of Iowa, she is an alum of the Sheffield Hallam University, where she was awarded the Archie Markham Award and the AM Heath Prize and completed her PhD at the University of Exeter. Her first novel, *How the One-Armed Sister Sweeps Her House*, was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2021, the OCM BOCAS Prize in 2022 and the International Literaturpreis Prize in 2023. The French translation won the Prix Carbet des lycéens 2023.



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



**Sasky Louison** is a playwright, singer and songwriter who currently resides in Saint Lucia. Born in Barbados and raised in both Barbados and Saint Lucia, Sasky has bachelor's and master's degrees in Theatre Arts, Creative Arts, and TV Writing & Producing. She taught high school theatre arts and English before becoming a jazz, soul and blues vocalist. Her musical *Dario et la Diablesse: A Caribbean Musical* was produced in Toronto. In 2019 she collaborated with Jamie Lonsdale and co-wrote five of the nine songs on his *Footprints* album, which reached Number 10 on the UK Classical Charts. Her work as a playwright is deeply influenced by the folklore and myths of her childhood.



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



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



**Nancy Anne Miller** is a Bermudian poet with twelve collections. Her latest is *Selected Poems* (Valley Press UK, 2024), and *Missing Hurricanes* is forthcoming (Valley Press UK, 2025). She has been published in journals such as *Edinburgh Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Salzburg Review*, *Agenda*, *Magma*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *PREE*. She has an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow, is a MacDowell Fellow and a Bermuda Arts Council Grant recipient.



**Jacqueline Mittelholzer** is the second wife of Edgar Mittelholzer and the author of *The Idyll and the Warrior (Recollections of Edgar Mittelholzer)* (The Caribbean Press, 2014).



**Pamela Mordecai** is a poet, novelist, short fiction writer, and playwright. *de book of Joseph*, her most recent book of poetry, was a finalist for the 2023 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature. Mordecai's children's poems have been widely anthologised and used in language arts curricula all over the world. *de book of Mary Magdalene* on which she is working will extend her New Testament trilogy in Jamaican Patwa into a tetralogy. A video collection of her poetry is archived at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning and the Digital Library of the Caribbean. She lives in Toronto.





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



**V.S. Naipaul** (1932–2018), novelist and essayist, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001. Among his earliest books are *The Mystic Masseur* (1957); *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958); *Miguel Street* (1959); *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961); and *The Mimic Men* (1967). His *In a Free State* (1971) won the Booker Prize and was followed by *Guerrillas* (1975), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), and *A Way in the World* (1994). Naipaul published several other books, both fiction and non-fiction, including *Half a Life* (2001), widely considered among his most important. He was knighted in 1989.



**Esther Phillips** has been the editor of *Bim: Arts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* since 2007. She is the author of *La Montée*, *When Ground Doves Fly*, *The Stone Gatherer*, *Leaving Atlantis*, *Witness in Stone*, and is currently working on her new collection, *Plantation*, which focuses on the experiences of enslaved African women brought to the Caribbean during the transatlantic slave Trade. Esther is the founder of Writers Ink Inc., co-producer of the CBC programme *What's That You're Reading?* as well as co-producer of the Bridgetown Literary Bus Tour. She is Poet Laureate of Barbados.



**Iana Elizabeth Phipps** grew up in a small rural community in central Jamaica. Her poetry draws upon her experiences as an Afro-Jamaican woman collaborating with and belonging to nature. Alongside her creative work, she is pursuing a BA in the History of Science and Medicine program at Yale University, where her research uses the imaginative praxis of critical fabulation.



**Victor Questel** (1949–1982) was a poet, critic and the author of *Score* (1972), *Near Mourning Ground* (1979), *Hard Stares* (1982) and *Collected Poems* (2016). His writing also appeared in *Tapia*, *The New Voices*, and *Kairi*, which he co-edited with Christopher Laird.



**Kim Robinson-Walcott** is a short fiction writer, poet, book editor, and scholar who served for many years as editor of *Caribbean Quarterly* (University of the West Indies, 2010–23) and *Jamaica Journal* (Institute of Jamaica, 2002–24). Among her publications are the children's books *Dale's Mango Tree* (1992), *Pat the Cat* (2018) and *Pat the Cat and the Gangsta Bat* (2024), all of which she also illustrated. She is the co-author of *The How to Be Jamaican Handbook* (1987) and *Jamaican Art* (1989, 2011) as well as the author of *Out of Order: Anthony Winkler and White West Indian Writing* (2006) and the short story collection *You Have to Harden Your Heart in Times Like These: Stories of Kingston* (2024).



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



**Amílcar Peter Sanatan** is an interdisciplinary Caribbean artist, educator and activist. He is from Trinidad and Tobago and currently works in Helsinki, Finland. His multilingual poetry, essays, short fiction, interviews, and book reviews have appeared widely in regional and international literary magazines and anthologies. For over a decade, he has co-created and led spoken word open mics, literary publics, and communities for social change. He is an alumnus of the Cropper Foundation and Obsidian Foundation writers' residencies. He was a Promundo Writing Fellow. Most recently, he was selected as a Bocas Breakthrough Fellow.





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



**Mayra Santos-Febres** is an award-winning poet, novelist, essayist, and scholar. She has published over twenty books, including *Urban Oracles*; *Sirena Selena*; *Any Wednesday, I'm Yours*; *Our Lady of the Night*; and *Boat People*. She holds a PhD in Literature from Cornell University and currently teaches at the University of Puerto Rico, where she also heads the Afro-Diasporic and Race Studies Program. Her most recent publication is *La otra Julia (The Other Julia)*, a novel that explores the connections between the author and Julia de Burgos, one of Puerto Rico's most important poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Lawrence Scott** is a prize-winning novelist and short story writer from Trinidad and Tobago. He published his first collection of poems in 2024. He was awarded a Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1998 and a Lifetime Literary Award in 2012 by the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago for his significant contribution to the literature of the country. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (UK) in 2019 and made an Honorary Doctor of Letters (DLitt) by the University of the West Indies in 2023. He can be found at [www.lawrencescott.co.uk](http://www.lawrencescott.co.uk).



**A-dZiko Simba Gegele**, of Jamaican and Nigerian parentage, is a prize-winning writer, storyteller, spoken word performer and workshop facilitator. Her work reflects her Pan-African perspective and spans multiple genres, including poetry, fiction, screen, and playwriting, and has been published in diverse international anthologies. She is a recipient of the Institute of Jamaica's Bronze Musgrave Medal for her contribution to literature. Her debut novel, *All Over Again*, won the inaugural *Burt Award for Caribbean Literature*. Ms Simba Gegele's recent book, *Justin, Justina and the Money Master*, commissioned by the Jamaican Deposit Insurance Corporation, introduces financial literacy to Grade 4 students.



**Alan Smith** has been First Church Estates Commissioner of the Church Commissioners for England since October 1, 2021. Prior to that, he had a 27-year career in international banking. Born in the Bahamas, Alan grew up in Barbados, attended Harrison College, the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, and represented Barbados at the Under-19 Level in Cricket. In 2015 Alan co-authored the book *Dreaming a Nation*, which was shortlisted for the Frank Collymore Literary Award. The book charted the story of Barbados's journey to Independence.



**Celia A. Sorhaindo** was born in the Commonwealth of Dominica. She migrated with her family to England in 1976, when she was eight years old, returning home in 2005. She is co-compiler of *Home Again: Stories of Migration and Return* (Papillote Press, 2009), and author of the poetry collections *Guabancex* (Papillote Press, 2020), *Radical Normalisation* (Carcenet Press, 2022) and *ABiYA* (2023).



**Patrick Sylvain** is a Haitian-American educator, poet, writer, social and literary critic, and translator who has published widely on Haiti and Haitian diaspora culture, politics, language, and religion. He is the author of several poetry books in English and Haitian, and his poems have been nominated for the prestigious Pushcart Prize. His work has been published in several anthologies, academic journals, books, magazines, and reviews including: *African American Review*, *Agni*, *American Poetry Review*, *Callaloo*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Transition*, and *The Caribbean Writer*. Sylvain has degrees from the University of Massachusetts (BA), Harvard University (EdM), Boston University (MFA), and Brandeis University (PhD, English), where he was the Shirle Dorothy Robbins Creative Writing Prize Fellow. Sylvain has served as a lecturer at Brown University, Harvard University, and Brandeis University. He is an Assistant Professor in Global/Transnational/Postcolonial Literature at Simmons University, and also serves as a member of the History and Literature Tutorial Board at Harvard. His poetry chapbook, *Underworlds*, was published by Central Square Press in 2018, and he was a featured poet on Benjamin Boone's Poetry and Jazz CD *The Poets are Gathering* (2020). Sylvain is the lead author of *Education Across Borders: Immigration, Race, and Identity in the Classroom* published by Beacon Press (2022), and his academic book—*Scorched Pearl of Antilles: A Critique of Haiti's Political Leadership*—is under contract with Palgrave Macmillan. His most recent bilingual poetry collection, *Unfinished Dreams/Rèv San Bout*, was published by JEBKA Editions (2024).



**Sarah Venable**, writer, visual artist, actor, and educator, calls herself a “dot-connector”. She has over the years contributed feature articles to *Ins & Outs of Barbados*, *SkyWritings*, *Signature Barbados*, *Select Barbados*, and *Maco*. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in *POUi*, *Anansesem*, *Bim: Arts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and in the anthology *The Truth About Oranges*. Sarah, whose work will also appear in the forthcoming issue of *The Caribbean Writer*, has received NIFCA Bronze and Gold awards, and her poetry collection *The Tropic of Sweet and Sour* won an Honourable Mention in the 2019 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment competition. She has taught creative writing in the National Cultural Foundation’s WISE programme, the Writers’ Clinic and at Barbados Community College.



**C. M. Harclyde Walcott** has, among other occupations, worked as a theatre director and producer, filmmaker and photojournalist. His creative writing has appeared in *The New Voices*, *Arts Review*, *Bim: Arts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, *POUi*, *Calabash*, and *ArtsEtc*. He is the author of *imagining and other poems* (pomme-cythere, 2015).



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



**Humroy Whyte** is a poet, musician, playwright, and educator. Born in Jamaica, he is a graduate of the Jamaica School of Drama and the holder of a Master of Arts. Whyte currently resides in London, England, where he specialises in teaching Drama in Education & Theatre Arts. He is a recipient of the Jamaica 50 Award, in recognition of outstanding dedicated service to the Jamaican community in the fields of education and performing arts, from the Jamaica High Commission to the United Kingdom. Humroy now serves as Chair of Directors for an Academy Trust of Schools and is the author of the recently published book *Journey to Discover*.



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



**Edison T. Williams** is a retired hotelier whose interest in writing started as a teenaged student at Harrison College but had to be set aside because of the demands of career and family life. On approaching retirement, he took the decision to attend creative writing classes at the Cave Hill Campus of The University of the West Indies and at Barbados Community College. He has since published two books, *Facing North—Tales from Bathsheba*, a collection of short stories, and *Prickett's Well—Who the Body Is?*, a murder mystery. *Tales from Ichirouganaim*, another collection of short stories, is forthcoming.

## Editor's Note

**First, we offer our sincere apologies, to both our contributors as well as to our readers, for the delay in the arrival of this issue of *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*.**

Second, we are very happy to let you know that *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century* will now appear as a somewhat larger edition once a year. The journal will appear in May of each year in our print version, with which most readers are familiar, as well as in our more recently introduced online format.

*Bim* has introduced and nurtured several generations of Caribbean writers and artists since its inception in 1942. In 2007, we saw its redesign, rejuvenation and relaunch as *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century* with the same basic objectives: the nurturing and enjoyment of a contemporary generation of writers and readers. This special issue, the May 2025 edition, aims to continue to build on this splendid tradition.

In this edition, we have chosen four areas of special interest. The first features material from the *Bim* Archive. The second points to enslavement and reparatory justice. While the third concentrates on the theatre.

The fourth, while not necessarily fitting into any of the above three, fulfils our only real absolute requirement, i.e., quality work that proves to be worthy of publication.

In our "From the Archive" material, we have been faithful in publishing the original content except for occasional adjustments to minor typographical errors, outdated spelling and so forth.

By very happy coincidence we are able to welcome to this edition writers from as early as *Bim*'s "pioneer" stage to a more recent generation of writers who, we anticipate, will feature prominently in the future development of *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*.

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

**C. M. Harclyde Walcott, Guest Editor**

**May 2025**

A Reminiscence from the Archives:

Vol. 10, No. 38, Pages 68–72 (January–June 1964)

Frank A. Collymore

## The Story of *BIM*

I have often been flattered, touched, gratified, embarrassed, and, I must confess, at times amused by the numerous congratulatory remarks and references made about my part in editing “the only literary magazine in the (British) West Indies.” I should like in this foreword to the story of *Bim* to state emphatically that whatever success the magazine may have had was due to no conscious direction on my part, that it was not the child of my own invention, and that its publication simply happened to synchronise with a spontaneous outbreak of creative writing in the British Caribbean, a phenomenon which coincided with a sympathetic programme from the B.B.C., *Caribbean Voices*, under the editorship of Henry Swanzy, to whom these emergent writers owe an everlasting debt of gratitude. In short, *Bim* just happened, and it is mainly, as I hope to show, owing to the encouragement and assistance given by its contributors and well-wishers over the years that I have been fortunate enough to ensure its continuance.

That’s all very well, you will say, but you are being much too modest: think what you have done to help West Indian writing. So let me state, without shame, that I have played my part as editor simply because, being temperamentally unfitted to give all my time wholeheartedly to any one vocation, and having acquired the art from an early age of having a good deal of spare time on my hands, I loved to flirt with other temporary occupations, and the idea of playing about with scissors and paste together with seeing some of my own attempts at writing in print has given me a satisfaction I could have obtained in no other way. The setting-up of the dummy copy still provides me with the thrill I first experienced some twenty years ago.

I have been accused at times of not being serious enough in my editing of *Bim*, of being too casual and haphazard, of too sparing a use of the blue pencil. All these criticisms I acknowledge unhesitatingly. If *Bim* has any policy other than that of fostering creative writing, it has been one of encouragement. If at times some contributions did not merit such encouragement, little harm has been done. At least they did not deprive better writers of a chance. In any case, I didn’t print everything that gave me pleasure. I am still haunted by some offerings which never got beyond the

waste-paper basket. I remember in particular a doom-driven story about a damsel with “richly purple eyes,” and a poem that began:

*The wind was blowing from below  
And frogs were hopping to and fro;  
God’s mighty thunder rent the skies  
With lightning (as the name implies).*

So much for introduction. Now let us get on with the story.

Sometime during the early thirties there came into being an association, the Young Men’s Progressive Club. One of its founders, William Harcourt Carter, was a colleague and dear friend of mine. Forever interested in the welfare and improvement of youth, he was chiefly instrumental in the establishment and growth of the organisation, which, owing to the many interests offered, soon attracted quite a representative following. Being neither young nor of a particularly progressive nature, I did not become associated with the club until 1942 when I was invited to take part in their annual revue, *Sky High*, at the Empire Theatre. The theatre was another of my loves, and I hadn’t been on the boards for longer than I cared to think about. Thus it was I came to meet the enthusiastic group of young people who formed the nucleus of the Club.

Up to that time they had been producing a slim magazine, *The Y.M.P.C. Journal*, more or less a chronicle of the club’s activities, and I had occasionally contributed ‘things.’ Now, certain members, E. L. (Jimmy) Cozier, Therold Barnes, and Hal Evelyn in particular, were eager to publish something rather more substantial, since they felt there would be no lack of contributors among the club members and other interested persons. So *Bim* came into being. I remember hearing them discussing the appropriateness of the name. As I have had frequent requests to explain its meaning (very often letters reach me with the cryptic initials B.I.M.), perhaps it might be relevant to mention that the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* lists the word “Bim” as “a native or inhabitant of Barbados.” And there, I fear, the explanation ceases. From time immemorial Barbadians have referred to their island home affectionately as “Bimshire” (for isn’t Barbados an English county adrift upon a tropic sea?), and its inhabitants must obviously be Bims.

Number One appeared in December 1942, and was well received. Indeed one weekly newspaper devoted a whole editorial column to two of its stories with promise of continuation, a promise which, for some reason or other, was never fulfilled. But the venture prospered, Jimmy Cozier collected material for No. 2, drew up an elaborate series of account books, files, etc., and then, obtaining a post on the staff of the *Trinidad Guardian*, sailed away, leaving Therold Barnes and myself to look after the infant. I should mention that Hal Evelyn, the designer of the first cover, had previously emigrated to Canada.

I was rather pleased. Depositing Jimmy's books, indexes, files and what not in a cupboard where they remain to this day, pleasant curiosities of the past, we saw the publication of No. 2 through, and then set about to get a third number ready.

But from here on the going wasn't so easy. Many of the Y.M.P.C. contributors had either left Barbados or lost interest, so Therold and I decided to continue to keep the magazine going even if it meant writing the whole thing ourselves. It must be remembered that at that time printing costs were very cheap and continued to be so for the next few years. We could afford to sell at a shilling a copy and make some profit. I may mention that from the first eight numbers we were able to contribute a couple of hundred dollars to the Y.M.P.C. funds. So No. 3 appeared in June 1943 with its two editors contributing three quarters of its contents.

But it was obvious we couldn't continue this two-man business, and we were lucky that from time to time some writer or other appeared on the scene to assist and encourage us. I should like to mention particularly Jan Williams and Edgar Mittelholzer. The former, an Englishwoman, gave us her unstinted help until she left the island, and the latter (who I did not know at the time had already had a novel, *Corentyne Thunder*, published in England) took a liking to *Bim*, and continued to supply us with his stories regularly for a long period of years. And there were other contributors who helped us along: Karl Sealy, a short story writer of great promise, and Geoffrey Drayton, still a schoolboy, to mention a couple. So *Bim* continued to appear at odd intervals for the next four years.

In August 1947 I was awarded a very pleasant holiday in the United Kingdom (my first trip to Britain) by the British Council. I still wonder why this delightful mark of favour was granted me: no explanation was given. My only means of appreciation was writing some impressions of my tour which appeared in Nos. 9 and 10.

On my return I was conscious of a change in outlook: the West Indies had come into the news. The conference at Montego Bay seemed to point to a federation of the British West Indies. I found myself enthusiastic for contributions from the islands, and I was not disappointed. Our list of writers widened. During the years that followed we were publishing material from Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guiana, St. Vincent, St. Lucia.

And at this point I must make special mention of George Lamming. In the early forties George had been a schoolboy under my tuition, a rather happy-go-lucky youngster with the vaguest of literary aspirations. I had published a poem of his in an early number. On leaving school he had gone to teach in Trinidad. We had kept up a vigorous correspondence, and he had been selling *Bim* for us in Port-of-Spain in more ways than one. The English periodical, *Life and Letters*, had just brought out a West Indian number, and I was gratified to see his name amongst its contributors. He had also had much of his work read over the B.B.C. It was George Lamming who encouraged



Trinidadian writers to send their work to *Bim*, and from this time on the names of Sam Selvon, Cecil Gray, Cecil Herbert, Andrew Carr, H. M. Telemaque and others began to appear with increasing frequency.

I have already spoken of the encouragement received from certain contributors and well-wishers: this, I think, has been the main factor in the continuance of *Bim*. It is difficult to list all these names with the passing of the years, but I should like to mention especially: John Harrison, the Arts Officer of the British Council in the early fifties who introduced *Bim* to a wide circle of his friends abroad, and whose drawings and articles, despite his departure from the West Indies, have never ceased to adorn our pages; Derek Walcott of St. Lucia, always ready with helpful criticism and advice (I shall never forget a letter of his written from New York to the Editor of the *Guardian* when he heard the news that *Bim* had ceased publication) and many of whose poems from our pages I was glad to re-read in his *In a Green Night*; John Figueroa of Jamaica, and John Wickham, L.E. Brathwaite, Harold Marshall, and A. N. (Freddie) Forde, four Barbadians, scattered abroad, returning now and then, who have been among our staunchest supporters over the years.

But we had our set-backs and disappointments. Firstly, local reviewers didn't seem to think much of the magazine. We were persistently snubbed. But it must have been good for us. We survived somehow, and much of the material so caustically reviewed has since been published in Britain and some of the writers have gained international recognition. But we always got reviews. Those from Trinidad and Jamaica were kinder. Secondly, and far more alarming, was the financial problem. Printing costs increased with each number, and in December 1958 we bade a reluctant farewell to our readers.

Fortunately, thanks to the good offices of Oliver Jackman, the then Government Information Officer and the newly-constituted Arts Council, we were helped to survive. And Freddie Forde, returning home to take up an important post in the Secretariat, joined our editorial staff.

During the past five years we have managed to carry on. We have been fortunate in attracting some new writers, and I should like to mention especially Michael Anthony and Austin Clarke, both of whom have recently been successful in having novels accepted for publication. We have been more fortunate in our reviews lately: we have been complimented on our "staying power," we have come to be regarded almost as an institution. But for all this our sales remain depressingly low, and were it not for the kind consideration of our publishers, *The Advocate*, and of our advertisers whose constancy we can never thank sufficiently, we must have ceased publication.

Such, then, is the story of *Bim* to date. To ensure its survival may we ask you, dear readers, to become regular subscribers, and/or, should you be philanthropically inclined and favoured with some superfluity of ready cash, send us a donation. We shall remain eternally grateful.

**A Public Address from the Archives:**

Vol. 14, No. 55, Pages 121–124, (July–December 1972)

*CLR James*

# THE WEST INDIAN

**Address at the Graduation Ceremony at the Cave Hill Campus, the University of the West Indies, Barbados, on 1st February, 1972**

Mr. Chancellor, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I feel very much at home here. Maybe later I will be able to tell you in personal terms why I do, but I wish to say that since the federation has gone—and federations come and they go and we hope they will come again—I have always referred to myself as a West Indian, a member of that community which produced, among others, George Lamming and Garfield Sobers. There are other distinguished West Indians whom I would speak about at other times and in other places. I speak about those two because I refer to them always as friends of mine and people who belong, or I belong to their nationality and nothing will ever prevent me from saying that.

I want to say here this evening a few words about this extraordinary nationality to which we all belong. It is one of the most curious and the most extraordinary national entities that the modern world has ever seen, and what I intend to do is, first of all, to say what it is. I find repeatedly that people do not know what we are. Secondly, I want to make a historical reference to some others who care not what we are and the possibilities of what we will become in the future. To begin with, since the French Revolution, the modern world has lived differently from how it lived for centuries and we of the Caribbean have taken an extra-ordinary and notable part in the development, not only of the Caribbean but of civilization as a whole. In the French Revolution itself Toussaint L'Ouverture led the movement for the freedom which resulted in the independent state of Haiti—one of the great political events of that remarkable period. But Napoleon took France and held Europe in the throes of battle for many years and afterwards in France began the literary movement, the Romantic Movement, which followed the years of the Napoleonic war. Victor Hugo himself has told us that the persons who were responsible for that first Romantic Movement in France after the Napoleonic War were himself, Theophile Gautier and Alexandre Dumas, who was a West Indian, not born and bred, but his work and his general attitude was completely West

Indian, and I am looking forward to the day when in some of the University campuses here, some people will do some work on him and let West Indians know what he represented.

After the Romantic Movement in France there came the movement of the Parnassians and at the head of that movement were two West Indians. One was Le Comte de Lisle who was brought up and educated in Cuba as well as in France. The other was Le Jose Maria de Heredia from the island of Reunion which is, socially speaking, a West Indian type of island. They were white men, but for me they were West Indian. “Black” is beautiful but white is also very beautiful sometimes.

I pass on next to another great movement, another great intellectual movement in France, the Impressionist Painters, who broke completely with four hundred years of following the movement of painting that began with the Italian Renaissance. One of the great Impressionist painters was Camille Pissarro. He was a West Indian boy, educated at home, went to France, came back home and then went back to become one of the great Impressionist painters. Cezanne, perhaps, as far as I can judge, the greatest painter of the 19th century, used to call Pissarro his master, such was Pissarro’s mastery of the needs and requirements of the Impressionist painting—that great movement at the end of the nineteenth century. I have one more name to mention before 1914, that is Saint Jean Perse who grew up in Guadeloupe and who became a man well placed in the French Government and who has won a Nobel Prize as a French poet. But from the very first beginning to the end of the work that he has done, Saint Jean Perse feels himself and writes as a genuine West Indian, and we have no reason to let them take him. He belongs to us; we produced him.

Now I come on to something nearer home, the tremendous development of the West Indian and people of the West Indian community as political leaders of world events. I begin with a man from the French island of Martinique, René Maran. He won the Prix Goncourt in 1921 with a novel called *Batouala*. It is not only of importance itself. A few years afterwards, Andre Gide went to Africa and wrote *Voyage au Congo*, in which the French intellectual expressed his concern and his sadness of what he saw happening to the African people. But today, when we read those books we can see that Rene Maran, who wrote the novel, *Batouala*, saw far more deeply into the needs and requirements and possibilities of the African people than his much more famous collaborator, Andre Gide. Then we have a list of men whom you cannot write the history of the modern world without being aware of. We begin with Marcus Garvey. Then we go to George Padmore, who was the father of African emancipation. Then we go to Aimé Césaire, the founder of the concept of Negritude, a great poet, dramatist and a great Africanist. Then we go to Frantz Fanon, one of the great political leaders of the day, and Stokely Carmichael and the rest. You cannot write the history of the last fifty years

of the world without noticing that West Indians play a tremendous part. They cannot possibly be left out or put into footnotes—they have to be placed right at the very head of all the work that has been done.

I want to say a word or two about what is happening today. For my part, Fidel Castro, whether you are for or against, is a most notable political West Indian. I also refer to three writers, George Lamming, Vidia Naipaul of Trinidad and Wilson Harris of Guyana, and I want to say that I know no other country where they speak English and write it that can produce today three novelists of the quality that those men possess. When you look at these insignificant little islands and you begin to see the quality of the men they produce, you are astonished. Mr. Chancellor, I respect you, I do not meddle with the law. I do not express opinions about it in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, but I have been to various places in England and I have been to Africa. I have travelled all over the United States and the question comes up periodically of distinguished West Indians and you will allow me to say, Mr. Chancellor, that repeatedly I have heard people say to me: “By the way, you have in Trinidad one of the most distinguished of living lawyers.” I was not able to form a judgment on that, but they have said it so often that I keep on saying it myself.

So, that is where we are; that is what we have done and the question is—how? How the hell has it happened that from these insignificant little islands, not having more than three or four million people, very backward in many respects—I will not go into that now—how is it that we have produced this realm of distinguished men who are in the very front rank of those who have helped to make the modern world what it is? I was talking about this in Trinidad some time ago and a man told me, “Mr. James, you have only given a list of distinguished men, but that is no real testimony as to the qualities of the West Indian people.” I told him: “My friend, I have two things to tell you. One—A body of backward peoples does not persistently produce a body of distinguished men. Two—If you go to England you will find there are parts of England where the medical services would fall apart were it not for the West Indian doctors and nurses who are holding them up, and furthermore, still more importantly in the educational system of London in particular, if the West Indians were to withdraw themselves, God knows what would happen to them. So that we are not only producing distinguished men but [in] important spheres of existence such as medicine and the care of children. In an advanced civilisation like Great Britain our people are holding their own and showing that the qualities which the distinguished men show spring from the general quality of the community to which we belong.” The question now arises, how did this happen? Now there are many ways you can say it happened. You can say that we are bright people, etc. But I have not been thinking in that way for many years, and I have been trying to find out how did it happen and what were the circumstances that from these backward and, in many respects, insignificant islands we should produce men of this

quality. I believe I have found something which a body of graduates as you are now, persons of some intellectual quality and achievement if not distinction—achievement at any rate, the distinction is up to you—will find too.

I want to say now one or two things which I want to ask you to remember. I want to refer you to an intelligentsia very much like ours, the intelligentsia of Russian society during the nineteenth and late eighteenth century. Peter the Great pulled Russia into the modern world and had to find a body of intellectuals to educate, doctors, lawyers, administrators, officials, etc.—and he could find them only among the Serfs. So he got them from among the Serfs, but the French Revolution had taken place and after one hundred years these men were all educated in the principles of the great revolution and they formed a certain body of men in the Russian society but they despised the Serfs from which they had come and they were not able to mobilise and penetrate into the Russian czarists, into the Russian aristocracy, into the Russian generals, into the Russian church. So, they were stuck between the Serfs from whom they came and the Russian aristocracy into which they could not penetrate. They were a body of intellectuals such as Europe has not seen and they produced a body of most distinguished men; the novelists—Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky; the originator of modern painting—Kandinsky; the originator, or one of the originators, of modern music—Stravinsky; ballet—Diahgilev and Nijinsky; and stage-organisation, stage management, one of the greatest names in the history of stage management—Stanislavski; and Chekov was the one who wrote what you may call the Existentialist plays and short stories which distinguished Russia before 1917. Where did these men come from? I believe, and I think it is fairly clear that they were stuck between the Serfs from whom they had emerged and the leading aristocracy into which they could not penetrate. I believe, with your kind permission, that the average West Indian intellectual, for some time, has been in exactly that situation. He has been able to learn the most advanced ideas of British liberalism, the British labour movement and the ideas that the Russian revolution has spread. He has come from the slaves whom he has turned his back on, those who have remained or who are descendants of these slaves, but he cannot penetrate fully and completely into, or for years has been prevented from getting among those who are rulers and masters of the country, so that he is in the position the Russian intellectuals found themselves in and has had to make his way using these things. At the beginning, he used them abroad with great distinction; he has won distinction among the great intellectuals that have shaken Europe and Africa and it seems to me that today his future depends on whether he can do at home, what he has done abroad in the past. That is what is in front of him now: how to use this particular situation that he finds himself in and realise where he must go, what he must do, the tremendous advantage which he holds, and which he will use or not use as the case may be.

I want now to conclude by saying two things. A friend of mine, Professor George Roy, has written a volume on the history of slavery and in it he says that two persons have been most notable in the attitude that they have had in the history of black people in the United States. He says Dr. Martin

Luther King in “Black Reconstruction” and C. L. R. James in countless speeches, articles and essays have insisted that black people in all the great movements of the United States’ development have been foremost, and he hopes that conception will also guide the future historians of the people in the United States. Now I have said where the intellectual is. I do not tell you what to do. It is not my business to do that but I tell you where I have been going all the time and what has been the result, not only in the Caribbean, but in a tremendous country like the United States which is in ferment, and I am glad to say that the work I have done and the attitude that I have to the mass of the black population is making great claim among all types of people, not only among the black people but among the white students there. That I think it is necessary for me to say. What you will do, you will do as a result of your personal subjective attitudes and impressions of history. It is not my business to talk about that, I only say what I have done and what is the result that is taking place today as a result of that work. And the last thing I wish to tell you is that my mother was born in Barbados.

# Yarico

(In memory of Yarico, a young Amerindian woman sold by her white lover, Inkle, to a slave owner in Barbados)

Under a cold half-moon  
you cross the road to gaze again  
at your reflection in the nearby pond

“Where is my body?”

“Where is my body?”

Have your gods failed you?  
Can the ancient Tamosi Kabo-Tano  
not hear your cries? The benevolent  
Sigu not come to your help?

Once more you call to Allatseura  
but she is Mother of moving waters  
seas oceans

                  springs rivers  
she will not come to this stagnant pool  
where ducks sully the surface  
and lilies have stopped growing.

Ah, Yarico! How could you know  
your lithe, brown body was the colour  
marked for conquest?  
How could you know in those moments  
of passion you were nothing to the ardent Inkle  
but native, primitive, exotic cannibal  
merchandise—never fully human  
a woman worthy of love?

Now, here at Kendal\*  
your last sojourn in captivity  
only this memento of you remains—  
a small stone head hardly seen  
among the tangled weeds  
far from your coastland of fresh  
breeze, azure seas and sky.

Only this head  
that speaks of women  
traded bartered  
sold four centuries long  
forever severed  
from themselves.

\*A small monument of a head representing Yarico's is placed near the entrance of Kendal Plantation yard in the parish of St John, Barbados.



*Alan Smith*

# Accounting for Our Past— How a Responsible Investor Interrogated Its Historic Links with Transatlantic Chattel Enslavement

**December 2024**

Many shook their heads in disbelief when the *Church Commissioners' investigation* into its (the Church of England's) involvement in transatlantic chattel enslavement made headlines in January 2023. And many were downright livid when they learned that, in response, the Church Commissioners' board approved a £100 million seed investment in a new fund dedicated to fostering a “better, fairer future”. It also committed to using its influence to encourage others to co-invest to raise at least £1 billion.

The objections came thick and fast.

Wasn't the Church Commissioners for England by statute required to restrict its support of the ministry and mission of the Church of England to *England* itself? So why reflect on the Caribbean and Africa?

And shouldn't we consign the past to history and concentrate on the pressing issues of today? Wouldn't the £100 million be more judiciously allocated to ease the significant financial and logistical burdens faced by clergy and church volunteers who are currently operating food banks, leading youth initiatives, visiting the infirm and elderly, and delivering a myriad of services for the vulnerable?

Clearly—this was “wokeness” gone too far.

A deluge of complaint letters ensued, with a couple so extreme they were referred to the police. Some parishioners threatened to withdraw their financial contributions to their parish churches.

Media misrepresentations of the Church Commissioners' motives and actions proliferated, and there were relentless attacks on the experts advising the Church Commissioners. A support helpline was established for Church Commissioners' employees who felt overwhelmed by the vitriolic response.

As First Church Estates Commissioner and chair of the Assets Committee that stewards the Church Commissioners' £10.4 billion endowment fund, I am in a good position to set the record straight.

### **Why this decision by the Church Commissioners?**

This was not a matter of “wokeness”. Our Board concluded that as a 320-year-old in-perpetuity endowment investor, addressing transatlantic chattel enslavement was an essential, strategic action core to the purpose, values, identity, and long-term flourishing of the Church Commissioners. Above all, it was a non-negotiable act of responsible investment and risk management.

It was back in 2019 when it was first suggested to the Audit and Risk Committee that the Church Commissioners needed to explore the origins of its endowment fund and determine whether there were any links with transatlantic chattel enslavement.

There were important risk management reasons for this—and other institutions and endowment funds on both sides of the Atlantic were asking similar questions. The Audit and Risk Committee thought deeply about the issue and came to the unanimous conclusion that, yes indeed, the Church Commissioners needed to ask questions of its own.

The Church Commissioners is an independent charity that supports the mission and ministry of the Church of England in England through responsible and ethical management of our endowment fund. A key mission of the Church of England is to “transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation”.

As a leading responsible investor, the Church Commissioners is committed to supporting and promoting the flourishing of every human being and the planet.

Our future as a responsible investor depends on effective risk management. And all risk management models are, at their core, exercises in interrogating historical data sets. Investors need to understand their history in order to illuminate the complex forces at play in the present so they can make good decisions today, and decisions that are faithful to their vision and mission in the future.

The reality is that transatlantic chattel enslavement has irrevocably shaped the society, economy, and faith of modern-day England. Yet, despite its profound impact, this regrettable, brutal history remains poorly understood.

A deeper, more accurate understanding could perhaps equip us all to better navigate the challenges and risks we now face—in particular, the existential risks we face from climate change and artificial intelligence.

This understanding would almost certainly equip investors like us to support the mission and ministry of the Church of England in England more effectively.

Moreover, as a leading responsible investor, we had a duty to hold ourselves to the same high standards of fairness and justice that we expect from the companies in which we invest. We knew that our own organisation was falling short. We needed to examine ourselves and develop the understanding to be the change we wanted to see.

The Board of the Church Commissioners unanimously agreed with the Audit and Risk Committee and initiated an investigation in late 2019.

## **Methodology**

The board did not approach this task emotionally. Challenged by the Audit and Risk Committee, they did so clinically and objectively, and ensured that it was CEO-led.

Our CEO opted for a forensic accounting approach of the kind one would adopt to determine any financial irregularity. Debits and credits can reveal profound truths, focus on hard facts, and avoid suppositions. A team of specialist accountants from an independent auditor, Grant Thornton, and historians with deep expertise in this history *meticulously examined our archives*. The team employed detailed transaction analysis, account reconstruction, and asset tracing—a monumental task involving approximately 12,000 transactions spanning 150 years.

## **Findings**

Unsurprisingly for a 320-year-old fund, we did indeed find links to transatlantic chattel enslavement. The Church Commissioners' predecessor fund, Queen Anne's Bounty, was a scheme established during Queen Anne's reign in 1704 with the moral purpose of tackling the most extreme examples of poverty among the clergy of the Church of England.

In the early decades following its establishment, it invested significant sums in the South Sea Company, one of the most dominant players in transatlantic chattel enslavement during the early eighteenth century. Queen Anne's Bounty accumulated investments in SSC annuities estimated to be equivalent to hundreds of millions of pounds sterling today.

Additionally, it received numerous financial benefactions from individuals linked to transatlantic chattel enslavement.

## Early insights that shaped our response

Our journey yielded enough revelations to fill a volume of respectable length. However, three key insights emerged early on which enabled us to reflect deeply and strategically on a response that was substantive rather than merely performative, as so many racial justice initiatives have been in the past.

We did not want to respond in ways that just played to “the optics” of only benefiting a relative few (possibly already well-heeled) Black people and white people again, as has been previously so often the case. We wanted an outcome that helped to heal, repair, and do justice for all who have been made vulnerable today by the legacies of transatlantic chattel enslavement.

We were encouraged to think deeply about how our organisation, given our myriad statutory, fiduciary, and practical constraints, could exercise influence at institutional and systemic levels so that the benefits could be widespread.

As responsible investors, we recognised that transatlantic chattel enslavement was at its core a profoundly immoral act of capital allocation. It involved labelling men and women as commodities—inputs into an industrial process. This labelling of certain human beings as subhuman led to the deliberate choice to torture, traumatise, and destroy millions of souls. As the *Archbishop of Canterbury* aptly stated, “The abomination of transatlantic chattel enslavement was, and has always been, blasphemy.”

Our response as responsible investors needed to encourage our business and investment community to act on the understanding that every human being on the planet was created in God’s image and is worthy of being treated with compassion, dignity, and respect.

We needed to encourage capital to “do good”.

Secondly, we recognised that the mindsets, ideologies, and justifying of false narratives—the toxic legacies of transatlantic chattel enslavement—continue to influence our county, our world, and our church to this day. They are embraced by many of all backgrounds, colours, and ethnicities around the world, including in the Caribbean. Across the globe, we continue to commodify and exploit human beings, prioritise profit over people, and inflict widespread human misery so that a relative few can profit and flourish.

Our response must include a strong focus on education to intentionally address these toxic mindsets, ideologies, and false narratives.

Thirdly, no amount of money can compensate for the immense human suffering caused by transatlantic chattel enslavement. We cannot change the past. But we need

to be intentional about learning from the past to address the immense challenges we face in the present. We must not run the risk of taking our eyes off the very significant threats we face today that could erode and destroy the descendants of transatlantic chattel enslavement every bit as much as such enslavement did.

## **Complexity**

We recognised also that we cannot and must not treat this centuries-old history as less complex than it actually is. Solutions need to be substantive rather than performative and must not ultimately benefit just a relatively few Black people. This has happened all too often in the past.

The complexity stems from the fact that transatlantic chattel enslavement took place in the context of a wider exploitation and destruction on a truly global scale. Some call this “colonial capitalism”. It bequeathed toxic mindsets, value systems, and behaviours to the descendants of oppressors and the oppressed alike. This makes addressing the legacies of this history in substantive ways uniquely challenging.

Dr Jack Davy in his book *We, The Oppressors* notes that once colonial capitalism encountered those people, it warped their ways of life, sparking/setting off a scramble for wealth and power that destroyed entire cultures.

How does one begin to address these toxic legacies that have become so entrenched?

The Independent Oversight Group appointed to make recommendations on how we addressed our report findings touched on this issue when commenting about our work:

*We have never properly questioned the capitalist systems that colonialism benefited from and later imposed on the descendants of enslaved Africans and other communities. New interventions must address the power imbalances inherent in extractive economic systems. Otherwise, they will fail.* (para 2.12)

These are big considerations. How could we, given the myriad statutory, fiduciary, and practical constraints of our own organisation, influence change in the right direction?

## **Our response**

Our considered response was to commit to investing £100 million in a new in-perpetuity fund to facilitate further research, investment for good, and grant-making—a strategic and catalytic investment of seed capital in encouraging capital to help create the better, fairer future we want to see. Our hope is that other corporates, institutions, and responsible investors co-invest so that collectively we raise £1 billion.

We consulted widely in the Caribbean, Ghana, and in the UK. We then appointed an independent oversight group of 14 members through a blind CV process to advise on how best to deploy the £100 million funding. As it so happened, four of that group were either Barbadian or of Barbadian heritage. This Oversight Group suggested that the fund should be called *The Fund for Healing, Repair, and Justice*, and made 41 recommendations. These recommendations are helping to shape the Fund's investment and grant-making criteria.

In July 2024, the Archbishop of Canterbury issued a heartfelt apology for the Church's involvement in transatlantic chattel slavery in his *sermon* in Jamaica's National Arena at the service for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

## Impact

The £100 million which we are able to commit, given our very particular statutory, fiduciary, and practical constraints, is of course a mere drop (albeit an important drop) in the ocean.

What is far more significant is the influence we can exercise. Ours is one of the largest endowment funds in the United Kingdom—and a highly respected one, which won the *Environmental Finance 2023 Impact Award for Endowment/Foundation of the Year*. We are uniquely well positioned to seek to convene other actors in the investment community, and to encourage capital to do good.

We have been engaging widely.

Other investors, many non-faith-based, have been approaching us quietly, wanting to learn from our journey. They realise that it is one many among us will have to go through. In December 2024 the *City of London Corporation* announced that it is about to commence such an investigation of their links to enslavement. The *Bank of England* has also completed such an exercise within recent times. There is an inevitability that corporations and institutions must face their past.

Through wider engagement by ourselves and our archbishops in particular, we have seen a new desire for dialogue, understanding, healing, and reconciliation coming out of Barbados, Jamaica, Tanzania, and Ghana. We see this coming out of the Catholic Church, the Jesuits in America, and other religious bodies that have approached us wanting to learn from us.

At a grassroots level, our work has inspired innovative *Community Theology Thursdays* for leading theologians, clergy, and congregants of global majority heritage to explore the theological implications of our work as well as other issues. One of the objectives of these Community Theology Thursdays is to encourage more persons of global majority heritage to pursue advanced studies in theology.

Finally, we have become more intentional within our own organisation, and can truly say we are now an example of the change we hope to see more widely in our business and investment community.

It is noteworthy that even in 2019, when 26 of the 27 members of the Church Commissioners' Board were white, and the senior executive leadership was all white, there was *unanimous* approval of this investigation and strong support of this journey by all despite the considerable pushback and hostility. I very much doubt this would have been the case ten years ago.

It speaks to remarkable progress.

The Church Commissioners now has a First Church Estates Commissioner of African heritage, the first time that has been the case since the post was created in 1850, approximately 20% of the Board is of African heritage, 20% of the Assets Committee is of African heritage, and 40% of our Securities Group that makes capital allocation decisions is of African heritage.

These changes did not take place through any racial justice initiative as such; they took place through the Board genuinely seeking excellence and casting its net more widely and intentionally in pursuit of professional excellence and experience in its composition. It enables better, more informed, and expert decision-making.

### **Learning from transatlantic chattel enslavement in an age of climate change and artificial intelligence**

We have learned two lessons from our journey, which will improve our due diligence processes and the quality of our investment decisions going forward.

#### ***We have learned to ask better questions.***

What was striking about transatlantic chattel enslavement was the way in which much of the British public was kept ignorant by obfuscations, justifying false narratives, and pseudoscience dished out by a range of actors, including corporates, museums, universities and, of course, the Church.

The disinformation and misinformation we all complain about today is by no means new. We have learned to ask better questions to unearth how we may now be kept aware in our age of artificial intelligence and climate change so that the rich and powerful can't avoid transparency or accountability.

Academics and civil society are sounding the alarm. Too many of us are unaware of how the economy and the architecture of artificial intelligence are constructed. How many know that it is in reality built and powered by a vast army of *human* labour in the Global South—particularly Africa—doing the mind-numbing drudge work of labelling

data and monitoring content in inhumane conditions for hours on end? All for a relative pittance to maximise the profits of a handful of trillion-dollar tech companies.

And too many of us are unaware of the widespread use of bossware, algorithmic surveillance that forces workers to work longer and harder in ways many consider inhumane—not only in the Global South, but also in the West.

The AI-Big Tech complex that is increasingly dominating our lives runs the risk of echoing colonial exploitation. We run the risk of devaluing human capacity and agency, and eroding lives and livelihoods in ways that mirror the past.

The same is true of climate change. Dr Keiron Niles at the University of the West Indies in a 2023 article entitled “*Climate Change and Transatlantic Slavery: Uncomfortable Parallels, Uncertain Futures*” outlines six ways in which our current climate situation mirrors the injustices observed in transatlantic chattel enslavement: tragedy of the Commons; energy transition; lack of representation; disproportionate distribution of benefits and costs; loss of culture and identity; and compensation—injustices all.

### ***We have learned to “follow the money”.***

Our CEO’s decision to open our 300-year-old ledgers to forensic accountants *Grant Thornton to determine the nature and extent of our involvement* with transatlantic chattel enslavement was groundbreaking, world-leading—and highly revealing.

Debits and credits can reveal truth more accurately than words. Or, to quote again the Archbishop of Canterbury, they are “theology in numbers”.

We will henceforth scrutinise debits, credits, and market disclosures far more intentionally. They will tell us more than the words or actions of seeming benevolence by fossil fuel companies or the AI and Big Tech industry.

### **Our vision for the £100 million fund**

Setting up a fund of this nature is unprecedented and will be difficult and complex, especially for the Church Commissioners, which is constrained by very particular statutory, fiduciary, and practical considerations. We are determined to focus on effectiveness, to be substantive and not performative, and take our time, if necessary, even as we seek to be urgent and intentional.

As of the time of writing, the Church Commissioners is still waiting for the Charity Commission of England and Wales to fully consider and approve the set-up of the fund.

In parallel, we are learning as much as we can, consulting with a range of distinct financial and investment experts across the Caribbean, UK, US, and EU to ensure that



we build a fund that is best in class. We are answering *several questions* that we are being posed.

One vision is that by 2034, 200 years after the enactment of the Slavery Abolition Act, the Church Commissioners will have in place a fully operational, profitable Fund for Healing, Justice and Repair: a catalytic ecosystem of investment, returns, and capital allocation which in some measure repairs and heals individuals and communities made vulnerable by the legacies of transatlantic chattel enslavement.

The fund would meet the highest responsible investor standards with rigorous and disciplined risk management. There would be effective collaboration across all key stakeholders and communities in a transparent and intentional manner. We would engage external, independent, expert scrutiny to ensure the fund is at all times faithful to its core purpose, and substantive and not performative in the outcomes we seek.

We would continually be asking the question, “How do we ensure that in one hundred years’ time, we have not created new harm, and we are not complicit with the seeding or perpetuation of the profit-before-people mindsets, ideologies and justifying false narratives that underpinned transatlantic chattel enslavement?”

### **The journey ahead**

James Baldwin once said, “Not everything we face can be changed but nothing can change until it is first faced.” What if our institutions, our corporations, and our churches faced rather than obscured this history a long time ago? What if they had long recognised and repudiated the mindset and values that underpinned the enslavement of others—the widespread commodification and exploitation of human lives so a relative few could profit? Would we still be struggling with these toxic legacies of transatlantic chattel enslavement to the same extent today? Would we be better positioned to manage the existential crises we face through climate change and artificial intelligence?

We hope many with historical links to transatlantic chattel enslavement face and learn from this history now. Each institution’s journey, responsibility, and response will be different, but by learning together and working together we can accelerate change in significant ways, despite the pushback and backlash we see out there.

The journey ahead will be difficult, complex, and inevitably imperfect.

But necessary.

*Gloria Daniel*

# The Transatlantic Trafficked Enslaved African Corrective Historical (TTEACH) Plaques Project

It is an honor to contribute to *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*, a journal deeply rooted in the Caribbean, where the legacies of enslavement continue to shape our collective consciousness. As a descendant of Barbadian ancestors, I feel privileged to share the story of the Transatlantic Trafficked Enslaved African Corrective Historical (TTEACH) Plaques Project—an initiative born out of a profound reckoning with history and a refusal to let the memories of our ancestors be erased.

Creating TTEACH plaques is an act of agency. It is a demand for justice and an assertion of truth in the face of institutions and systems that have benefited from centuries of denial. The most recent exhibition at Ashton Court Mansion in 2024, a site so indelibly linked to families enriched by the enslavement of others, was both a powerful confrontation and a deeply reflective moment.

To sit in that space, surrounded by plaques bearing the names of those who received compensation for enslaved lives, was to feel time collapse. The air itself seemed to hold the memories of the destroyed lives that had made such wealth possible. In that silence, the void of erasure began to fill. It became a sacred act to reclaim these histories, to use our names as tools of accountability, and to demand that justice be done—not just for the past, but for the present and the future.

By our names, we will know you. This has become the rallying cry of TTEACH plaques. Each plaque is both a memorial and a challenge, inscribed with the names of enslavers who profited under the grotesque terms of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. These names are reminders that the abolition of slavery in Britain was not a moral victory; it was a financial transaction. Compensation was paid not to the enslaved, who had endured unspeakable violence, but to the enslavers who had profited from their suffering.

The exhibition's second installation at Goldsmiths University in March 2024 marked a significant step forward. Installed at Deptford Town Hall, this site was deeply symbolic. Owned by Goldsmiths, Deptford Town Hall has been a focal point for activism. In 2019, students held a significant sit-in demanding accountability for the building's connections to the transatlantic trade in enslaved people and its enduring legacies. In 2024, the students held another sit-in, this time in solidarity with Gaza, demonstrating their continued commitment to challenging injustice.

The site of Goldsmiths at Deptford Town Hall was nominated by Dave Okumu, songwriter, producer, and honorary fellow of Goldsmiths, in a powerful act of support for the student body and their activism. His nomination was part of the *50 Plaques & Places project*, in which artists, poets, academics, and descendants selected sites of significance and wrote powerful testimonies to support their choices.

This became the first site to permanently install a plaque from the project.

Among the contributors were Esther Phillips, poet laureate of Barbados; Alissandra Cummins, director of the Barbados Museum & Historical Society; and my cousin Katherine Kennedy, an artist and writer-practitioner in Barbados. These personal testimonies added depth to the exhibition, further amplifying the call for accountability and justice.

At Ashton Court Mansion, the third exhibition site in 12 months, we confronted Bristol with a five-metre illustrated wall listing the 96 Bristol recipients of compensation for enslaved people in 1834. This powerful display revealed the local beneficiaries of enslavement's legacy and opened a space for necessary dialogue. Remarkably, 95 percent of visitors expressed their support for the work, welcoming the truth that has been denied to them as well.

One of the most powerful moments in this journey came with the installation of a six-foot memorial at Bristol Cathedral on October 9, 2024. After more than four years of campaigning, this memorial, dedicated to my great-great-grandfather John Isaac and 4,424 enslaved people whose lives were commodified by the Daniel family of Bristol and Britain (who imposed their name on our family—as did all the receivers of compensation and plantation owners), was finally erected.

It stands as a testament to our ancestors' resilience. Unveiled by two of John Isaac's great-grandsons, my father and uncle, both members of the Windrush-recruited generation, the memorial bridges the past and present, reminding us of the unbroken thread of history that ties us to our ancestors.

The successes of TTEACH stand as milestones in this ongoing struggle. From the first exhibition in London in 2023 at The Tabernacle in Notting Hill blessed with a reading by Esther Phillips of "My Ancestors Gifted Me Their Silence" to the unveiling of

the plaque at Goldsmiths University, and from the transformative exhibition at Ashton Court Mansion to the accession of a TTEACH plaque at the Bank of England Museum in November 2024, the project continues to expand its impact.

These acts of remembrance are not merely symbolic. They are declarations of intent. The TTEACH project insists that the names we carry—imposed upon us by enslavers—are the key to holding the past to account. We honour the 780,993 enslaved individuals who were alive on August 1, 1834, when Britain enacted the Slavery Abolition Act. Their survival ensured our existence, and their stories demand that we continue to fight for the justice they were denied.

Yet the denial persists. While the United Nations and Caribbean Leaders emphasise the necessity of reparations, Britain’s government remains defiant. As recently as the October 25/26th Commonwealth Summit in 2024, calls were made for an official apology and reparations to be discussed. The UK’s Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, echoing his predecessors, stated he wanted to address “current future-facing challenges” rather than “spend a lot of time on the past”.

This refusal is emblematic of a legacy of evasion. This hypocrisy is what TTEACH confronts, one plaque, one name, one space at a time.

*By our names, we will know you.* These words are not just a rallying cry; they are a call to action. The TTEACH Plaque project compels all to confront the institutions and systems that continue to benefit from the exploitation of our ancestors’ and their legacy. It demands that we use the power of our names to insist on accountability and reparative justice.

We, the descendants, will not be silenced. We are witnesses. We are storytellers. We are truth-tellers. Through TTEACH, we reclaim history and demand a future that acknowledges and rectifies the past.

Tadzio Bervoets

## To My Son, Yet to Be Born

My sweet boy  
As you grow

Floating in your mother's  
Swelling Sea-belly

As my soul swells  
With this new feeling  
Blossoming in my heart

Like the July-tree  
Humming into red twilight

There are some things  
One or two really

That I need to shed  
My Iguana tail

Telling of the years I have lived  
And the things I know

Under the gaze  
Of our Insular Sea

Men like me  
Like you will be  
Yearn to know

The sight  
Of the turtle

With her wrinkled  
Old-man accordion neck

And her  
Sweet salt-tears

Shedding the weight  
Of her cherished clutch

On the sparkling black sand  
Of *Rosalie*, of *Madura*

And that of  
The Cachalot

The sperm whale  
Our Caribbean Giant

Whose saucer-eyes  
Glitter  
Like the loose eye of God

And the eyes of the tiger shark  
Black like that of a doll

As she travels through  
*Mare Nostrum*

Her striped saddle  
Heavy with pups

You will know them  
My sweet boy

And they will sound  
Like the tern's sad laughter

Or the misty exhort  
Of the baby humpback

You will know  
The sweet good-morning

Of the *bois canelle*

Or the wet pimento tree  
Of your mother's soil

While the coral gardens  
Our aquatic cathedrals  
Await your worship

And you will know  
My Sweet boy

The finger roots  
Of nervous mangroves

Looking wearily  
At the African Coast

While the seagrass meadows sway  
In currents unforeseen

Like a siren's emerald hair

You will know the Pelican  
With their belly-beaks

Twirling above your father's  
Acrid sandbank home

And the pink promise  
Of the conch shell's

Curling lip  
Queen of the Sands

You will know  
The mischievous grins  
Of spinning dolphin

You will swim  
With squadrons  
Of melancholic eagle rays

The Caribbean Sea  
*Mare Nostrum*

Our islands  
String of pearls

Emerald Amnion

But as our waters warm  
And our cathedrals bleach

And the winds  
That tick-tick  
palm fronds

Spin into  
Destructive Fury

And as you learn  
This sea

With her moods and her  
Blinding Colours

She is yours  
She is My  
Our  
Eternal womb

*Lanmè Nou*

Which has shaped us  
Formed us

Since the day  
Pirates fell in love  
With corpulent manatees

This Caribbean  
You shall know her well

With her smell of sea-grapes  
And her groundswell

But more than knowing  
It is up to us  
West-Indians

To embrace and  
Ensure that her blue bosom  
Will continue to  
Nurture

Because just as you now  
Swim in your mother's  
Belly-sea

Our Caribbean  
Is the belly-sea

Of all of humanity

# Do You Lie Alone?

Do you lie alone?  
Also in your empty bed,  
That stretches to the hovering horizon?

Do you lie alone?  
Also under that hollow roof  
That catches the silent singing  
Of the melancholy stars?

And, outside your window,  
Do crickets chirp quietly  
Into the boiling heat  
Of these faceless islands?

Do you lie alone?  
With your window open  
Letting in the sound of the surf  
Licking the cold hard sand?

Do you lie alone?  
Hearing the heartbeat of raindrops  
On the bitter oleanders  
That give you back your diamond tears?

And do insomniac gulls  
Sing to desperate sleep  
That has left you  
Warm and empty?

Do you lie alone?  
Hearing the silent crabs scuffle  
As the fan above your head hums  
Your spreading solitude?



Or do you lie, like me,  
Surrounded by that vision  
Of you

Dancing like a hummingbird,  
A smile swimming softly  
On your too perfect face?

Do you lie, like me,  
Lulled awake  
By that misty memory  
Of your glances under the doming sky,

While I prayed drunkenly  
Into the red night

For more than just  
A bag of memory  
And the wide moon smiling?

Or do you lie alone,  
Oblivious to the truth:

That the soft singing stars  
Sing softly to you  
Their blinking admiration

That the crickets chirp  
Into the dying night  
Praising your soft embrace

That the bitter oleanders weep  
Until they bloom at the smell of  
Your fragrant promise

That the surf licks the quiet sand  
To be close to your  
Moon-stained face

That the fiddling crabs count  
The grains of emerald sand  
To occupy their lovesick little hearts

That the worried eyes  
Of the sleepless seagulls  
Are softened as they alight  
Next to your stretching bed

And that I  
In my groundless hope  
Also  
Lie alone.

# Ti Whale An Nou

On our mighty chariot  
The dancing *Balaou*  
We set out merrily  
A motley crew

For in the Caribbean  
We need to keep  
Protected our kin  
Of that wondrous deep

So we looked for the thrones  
Of the Lords of the Blue  
Being more like a family  
Instead of just crew

From Sint Maarten's  
Soft Emerald shore  
We set off for Saba  
Landlubbers no more

In the long shadow  
Of Mount Scenery's peak  
We towed our hydrophone  
To hear the Cachalot speak

And onward we sailed  
To Montserrat's glory  
Still belching  
Her volcanic story

For three days nothing  
Did we see  
But on the third day!  
A shout of glee!

From the for'd watch  
Finally! A whale!  
But alas we lost them  
'Twas just a mermaid's tale

Then on the morrow  
Of that fifth day  
Off of Gwada  
The Pantrops did play

But nothing prepared us  
For Dominica's glory  
Where mama whale  
Told her calf a story

Of eight souls  
Set out to seek  
On the dancing *Balaou*  
To hear the sperm whale speak

And I think I may speak  
For our motley Crew  
That we will always remember  
*Ti Whale An Nou*

*Paul Robert Gilbert*

# Metaphors of Underdevelopment

The latest UN Climate Change Conference held in Baku (COP29) resulted in an agreement to commit US\$300 billion per year in “climate finance” from developed to developing nations by 2035. Developing countries organised under the rubric of the G-77 had asked for \$1.3 trillion per year in climate finance, and this is included in the COP29 agreement as an “aspirational” target. That agreed \$300 billion goal, however, is not expected to come from developed country governments but *“a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral”*. In other words, governments in the Global North are tasked with “mobilising” or “catalysing” private sector investment, a process which often entails “de-risking” private investment in climate adaptation or mitigation initiatives by *providing various forms of guarantee*, such as subsidising returns to private investors via the public purse. In addition, as G-77 members noted at Baku, including *multilateral* development bank spending and guarantees within the \$300 billion total means that Global South nations are *themselves* paying for putative transfers from the North, via their subscriptions to multilaterals like the World Bank.

Through Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley, her adviser Avinash Persaud, and their Bridgetown Initiative, Barbados has become central to articulating and broadening a Global South narrative on climate finance since 2022. The Bridgetown Initiative has unfolded through three iterations in three years (termed Bridgetown 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0). While *much has changed across the three generations*, Persaud has been consistent in articulating the dual injustice of countries in the Global South requiring far greater financial resources to deal with climate vulnerability yet being forced to borrow the capital they seem to need at far higher interest rates than less vulnerable countries of the North. Outlining a framework that was *not yet termed the “Bridgetown Initiative”* in August 2022, Persaud highlights the devastating vulnerability of the Caribbean to extreme climatic events: “When thousands die tragically in scorching European summer, five million die from extreme temperatures elsewhere. The worst floods in living memory in Germany and Belgium knocked off 0.1% of GDP. When Category 5 hurricanes Maria and Irma slammed into the Caribbean a few years ago, it wiped off 200% of GDP.” Why, *asked Persaud in 2023*, should those rich countries borrow for ten

years at 1.4% interest rates, while developing nations pay 11% to 20% for borrowing the same amount, for which the need is far greater?

This is indeed a staggering injustice, and Point 4 in *Bridgetown 3.0* calls on Credit Rating Agencies, which determine how much countries pay to borrow, to “increase the transparency and consistency of their methodologies in order to make ratings outcomes more predictable for both market participants and issuers”. But this does not seem to adequately address the inequity Persaud highlights: Why should poorer states, more in need of finance to address a greater climate vulnerability, be charged more? And we could be forgiven for wondering if it is a lack of predictability that is wrong here—it is precisely the predictable inequity that Persaud himself points out. A number of anthropologists and political economists have explored why countries in the Global South seem to be subjected to punitive borrowing costs even when their “economic fundamentals” do not seem to justify such high interest rates. After the end of apartheid in 1994, European and American investors’ judgements that a Black African government would fail—sanitised as the “*market’s assessment of risk*”—resulted in a devaluation of the rand that caused a self-fulfilling economic downturn. More recently, Ilias Alami has *interviewed Treasury officials in South Africa* who are aware of the constant need to “demonstrate to the world...that an African country is capable of running its own macroeconomic policy”, and that higher borrowing costs that they face reflect the fact that “[c]apital is pretty racist in the way it deals with a Black government”.

The higher borrowing costs demanded of African, Caribbean and Latin American countries are not just a problem of transparency or inconsistent methodology. To the contrary, the methodology is perfectly consistent. North American and Western European states’ government borrowing is treated as effectively “risk free” in modern finance theory (regardless of attempted coups and economic crises), whereas government borrowing in former colonies is treated as politically risky and *a justifiable source of investor anxiety*. The narratives, imaginaries and methodologies through which climate vulnerable states are lumbered with high borrowing costs comprise what Jemima Pierre might call a *racial vernacular of development* that locates economic “stability” in Europe and North America, and troubling uncertainty and ineffective “governance” in Black Africa—and the Caribbean.

Kamau Brathwaite, who began publishing in the pages of this journal, expresses this putative relation in his own vernacular. His “*Metaphors of Underdevelopment: A Proem for Hernan Cortez*” outlines the centrality of catastrophe to his understanding of Caribbean history and seeks a “literature of catastrophe to hold a broken mirror up to broken nature”. In the segment “mont blanc”, Brathwaite writes:

*mont blanc is, to me, the centre of europe. it is their holy mountain: this  
hub of white around which european history revolves...*

*now, as long as mt. blanc is “passive”, “static”, a white glacial statue,  
resting in its own state of equilibrium, everything else around the  
mountain, naturally, remains in place...*

*but these are the miners of empire  
they burn, they eat the land  
they vomit it up  
they leave lakes of desolation; plantations of dark and dead  
plankton*

Europe is stability; and it is the home of the avaricious miners of empire who leave in their wake depleted plantations. The seat of stability is also the home of the catastrophe that Brathwaite saw unfolding through the “*enormity of slavery*”, the Middle Passage, and through extreme climatic and oceanic disasters in the present. Persaud, too, is concerned with catastrophe in his own way, and with a certain relation between stability in Europe and vulnerability in the Caribbean. Writing just after COP29 in *Al Jazeera*, Persaud states that “if vulnerable countries are not to sink under oceans of debt, they also need new international levies to cover loss and damage”, and asks: “What are we waiting for? A category 5 hurricane in the English Channel?” Or, as Brathwaite might put it, for mont blanc to crumble? Persaud’s piece is in effect a response to *Keston K. Perry’s salvo* against Persaud and the Bridgetown agenda published a few weeks prior. Perry takes aim at the Bridgetown Initiative’s emphasis on disaster clauses in debt agreements. Persaud has been clear that climatic disasters are uninsurable: but catastrophes still occur and take an enormous toll on the indebted nations, particularly those in the Caribbean, which may have to mobilise in response to a disaster that causes 200% of GDP worth of damage—while still making payments on their outstanding loans.

Persaud has celebrated the development of “disaster clauses” in Barbados’ debt renegotiations as a way to allow governments to respond to disasters without defaulting: to free up “fiscal space” and mobilise funds that would otherwise be going to debt repayments. Perry quite rightly points out that such schemes do more to ensure continued repayment for lenders than they do to provide relief for catastrophe-blighted Caribbean nations. The lawyers *who were involved in advising Barbados* on their 2018-2019 debt restructuring, through which the disaster clause was introduced, describe how this clause was modelled on Grenada’s initial natural disaster clause several years before. Grenada was devastated by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, and restructured their debt

in 2005 before restructuring once more in 2015 and adopting a disaster clause on the debt instruments they had to repay by 2030. This clause allowed them to defer the principal and interest of their debt if a cyclone caused a certain amount of damage—but they could only defer three times (regardless of how many disasters was inflicted upon them by a warming and volatile earth), and the deferred interest and principal sum had to be “capitalized” into the principal. As Persaud is at pains to highlight, such deals are “net present value neutral”. The creditor is repaid the same amount, at the same interest rate, that they could have expected if there was no disaster-based restructuring. The Barbados version developed in 2018-2019 included earthquakes, excess rainfall, and a lower threshold of damage to trigger the policy—but also provided “blocking mechanisms” for lenders to veto “abusive triggering”. As Perry points out, this is hard to view as anything other than expanded *“debt bondage imposed on climate-devastated countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere”*. And while Persaud and other Bridgetown advocates herald the disaster clauses as a vital climate financing tool, it is unclear how truly novel or powerful all of this is.

Returning to the Grenada case, *Jurgen Kaiser notes* that the “hurricane clause” inserted into Grenada’s 2015 agreement with Global North states “only allows Grenada to negotiate” with bilateral creditors “in the case of a hurricane of an unspecified magnitude. This, however, is something the authorities would have been free to do anyway.” It was only the clause with private lenders that was novel. We have seen from the holdouts by private investors following post-COVID debt defaults in Zambia and Sri Lanka that forcing private lenders to write off their debt or take a “haircut” can be impossible without the *right legal frameworks* in place. The bigger question, though, is this: Why do we accept that private lenders should be allowed to charge Global South governments those higher interest rates or “risk premiums” that Persaud quite rightly rails against (11-20% for climate vulnerable states in the Caribbean and elsewhere, against 1.4% for Global North states) and still demand pathways to ensuring repayment when there is a crisis that triggers default? The logic through which charging higher interest rates is justified is that those states are a “riskier bet”? Lenders want more paid back faster, because every day that goes by brings the borrower closer to an imagined political or climatic disaster. Not being paid back is the hit you must take for charging a high interest rate in the meantime.

Yet this is not how the international financial architecture works—including when it comes to climate finance. The *guarantees* agreed at COP29 to “catalyse” and “mobilise” private investment in the Global South exist to reduce the risk of non-repayment to Global North creditors and investors. Yet they are also likely to increase the debt load for Global South nations which must borrow in order to fund various guarantees, subsidies and “derisking” initiatives. So, we might ask, where does debt relief figure in the Bridgetown Initiative? It was mentioned as part of Bridgetown 2.0. in 2023, when



Persaud wrote about “cancelling official bilateral debt”, stating that “We are not against these...but their scope for moving the needle on fiscal sustainability is so far limited.” By Bridgetown 3.0, the language of debt *cancellation* is gone; there is instead an emphasis on robust debt relief to ensure countries can finance their development and climate goals in the case of default.

It is hard to see, however, what scope there is for ensuring countries can finance their development and climate goals *without* debt cancellation. Jamaica’s recent halving of its debt stock was celebrated in the European press, with calls in *Le Monde* for *French treasury officials to go and learn from Jamaica* about how its debt was cut, and much made of a paper arguing that Jamaica’s success was down to *cross-party cooperation and tight fiscal rules*. But, as *less celebratory analyses have pointed out*, this reduction in debt comes at the expense of a decade of austerity and under-investment, the consequences of which for Jamaica’s economic and social future are likely to be overwhelming. If countries of the Caribbean—and the Global South more widely are forced to choose between debt default, debt clauses that keep borrowing expensive but provide potential breaks for *some* climatic disasters, or debt reduction at the expense of social spending and public investment, it is little wonder that critical Caribbean political economists like Perry call outright for the abolition of the IMF and the World Bank. Perry’s arguments *emerge in dialogue* with scholars of the Caribbean Dependency or Plantation school, and the New World Group. The circum-Caribbean exchange of ideas between Caribbean and African dependency theorists has, *Michael Witter argues*, “receded in the face of the economic power of the IMF and the World Bank...and the generation of economists that succeeded the New World thinkers”.

As much as he was concerned with catastrophe, Kamau Brathwaite was concerned with tidalectics, the ebb and flow of circum-Caribbean exchanges; of bodies, labour, knowledge and resources across space and time. Tidal dynamics from Europe, rolling onto African shores and transporting enslaved people to the Caribbean, emerged as central to Brathwaite’s tidalectic writing. These dynamics of colonial dislocation and violence have given rise to calls for reparation in the Caribbean and Africa. Reparation is absent from the formal Bridgetown Initiative proposals, but it needn’t be—and shouldn’t be—absent from climate finance discussions. Persaud and the Bridgetown Initiative have at various times promoted the channelling of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs, the IMF’s reserve currency) to expand lending for climate action. But more lending means more debt. Other proposals have recently promoted using SDRs to fund a new “Bank of International Reparation” rather than promote more lending (and more debt). But debt cancellation should be our starting point. Persaud gets some of the way to recognising that the outlandish interest rates charged on sovereign borrowing for Global South states are an injustice, and it is only a few more steps to recognise that the accumulated borrowing by those in the South must be written off completely if we

are to approach “the other end of the maelstrom” with any kind of end to the history that Brathwaite saw unfolding as a long, interconnected series of disasters.

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*Tadzio Bervoets*

# The Great Salt Pond (3000 BCE–2005 ACE), A Eulogy

Dearly beloved, we are all gathered here today to witness the sad passing of our beloved matriarch, the late, Great, Salt Pond. She has nourished and cherished us along the banks of her salty waters for as long as there have been people living on this silted shore. She was born out of the union of shifting sands and crashing waves together with her sister the Lagoon, for whom also no one cares. She has witnessed this island's first people arrive by canoe and she has seen them slaughtered by a foreign sword. She has seen her briny treasure picked by the weary and dispossessed people shipped here to toil under a cracking whip. She offered generously by letting the hurricane rains flow from the hills into her nourishing bosom. We couldn't drown in their cruel waters because of her glorious basin.

Since 1858 she has let us harvest her precious bounty, adding wealth and fortune to Van Romondt's and Perrinon's name. Passing ships from Napoleon's fleet have loaded her salt to preserve their meat. Drunken sailors have slept in her breeze and the Queen herself enjoyed her lavish salt.

She protected our beaches from black mud washed by November rain, and because of her our golden beaches were able to gather their deserved fame. When she blew her famous salt, the people rejoiced at their coming fortune. When the sun rose over our cool green hills, shafts of sunlight would color her brilliant features. Her shades of pink and crimson dyes would bask in dawn's warm light, and stoic men would weep her salty tears at seeing colors as brilliant as hers. Shrimp would flutter in her salty waves and herons would scream at the day's delight. Children fished and old men walked in her gentle waters and she added music to the name of her friendly home: Soualiga, land of salt.

Friends, Family, and Colleagues, delve into your memory; the demise of this most precious of our own identities started in 1966 with the scarring of old Fort Willem Hill. He bled under the scathing shudder of a backhoe as his face was ripped and scarred for soil used to fill her up. Now Fort Hill mourns his sister's death, his scarred face sadly looking over Great Bay's mourning sea.

On that fateful day the beautiful and rich pond lost her luster. She was misused and abused; made to pay for her beauty like the many pond dippers working her rippling shore. It was ripped from her, what was hers, what she so generously offered. Her cancer spread as we spread on her cowering banks to accommodate humanity's encroaching scream. Waste, oil, and garbage were thrown at her as she wept and pleaded, but greed covered our ringing ears. Smoked, smelly, and hurt, she begged, but the boom of industry and modernity's sinful delights made us forget who and where we were.

Her shrimp, birds, and fish crawled, flew, and swam away but we stayed to finish our destructing jobs. Her briny breath smelled of sewage and her brilliant bright hues turned a murky brown. When she blew her once valuable salt, people scattered for fear of disease.

As she lay dying, people offered help but were turned back—not economically viable. She could have been made beautiful with promenades and parks, with shade and peacefulness. Instead, we showed our carelessness and filth now lay encroached on her crying banks. One day we all will wonder at the stinking water in our front parlors. And the mountain streams will laugh at our grievous mistake while we shovel sewage sludge.

Before she died, she cried in pain and begged us to use her as an example. The Lagoon is dying of the same festering cancer so the pond pleaded for her sister's plight. The Lagoon is being filled and killed, polluted and misused. That once pristine body, the most beautiful in the Eastern Caribbean, is being felled by greedy hands. Sewage is pumped by smiling parasites and crystal waters are turning black by drifting Feces. Sandy mountains mysteriously arise and shrink her coughing ripples. Her other sisters have already been killed or wait in line for their pending rape. As we, these island children, have lost our bleeding hearts.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you now drive along the Pond's namesake road and ponder that corpse of water, remember that once beautiful body, that result of the creative force that unites all of humanity. She has succumbed because we simply are destructive. Remember our matriarch who has left us. Remember her when our children bat away buzzing flies and wrinkle their noses at the acrid smoke, please tell them, make them remember, that there lived a beautiful body once, before she withered and died by our neglecting hands.

Two Poems <sup>1</sup> translated from the Spanish by **Thomas Rothe**

**Mayra Santos-Febres**

## For Julia de Burgos

In Carolina  
before the housing developments  
when the river would drown people  
in a breeze  
and *amanú*<sup>2</sup> was no extraordinary herb.

In Carolina  
just after the sugar mill disappeared  
before 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Avenue  
expanded into arteries  
and the pharmacies the factories  
the auto parts shop turned shoe store  
turned pizzeria on Campo Rico (fever avenue).

Right there in Carolina  
little Julia would sit  
on a tin box  
and jot down her kinky-hair premonitions.

Still with a healthy liver  
she invented work songs  
perspiring love songs  
entangled in the island's viscera.

The tadpoles watched her grow up  
unable to stop her.

---

1 From *amanú y manigua* (1991). Translated with the author's permission.

2 Also commonly known as guinea hen weed and gully root, among other names.

# A Julia de Burgos

En Carolina  
antes de las urbanizaciones  
cuando en el río  
la gente se ahogaba sin reparo alguno  
y el anamú no era yerba sorpresiva.

En Carolina  
recién desaparecida la central  
antes de que la 65 de Infantería  
se abriera las arterias  
y apareciera la farmacéutica las fábricas  
el autoparts convertido en tienda de zapatos  
convertido en pizzería de la campo rico (avenida de la fiebre).

Allí mismito en Carolina  
Julia se sentaba chiquitita  
en una caja de latón  
con su grifería pitonisa sobre la falda.

Todavía de hígado estival  
inventaba canciones de trabajo  
canciones de sudores amatorios  
enredadas en las tripas de la isla.

Los gusarapos la vieron crecer  
no pudieron detenerla.

# 106th Street, NY<sup>3</sup>

From the country  
to a slum in Río Piedras  
to Comerío, Naranjito, San Juan, Cuba  
New York, Washington, New York  
and as a corpse back to Puerto Rico  
two months after collapsing  
on 106th Street, in Harlem.

Julia  
thirty-nine years old in fifty-three  
when her liver exploded in verses  
against exploitation  
her liver exploded in boleros  
that acclaimed dissipating ritual  
in other words  
she died in midair  
a bird in flight  
but thud dropped like a stone  
on 106th Street.

The Caribbean also shook  
female clerks operators  
rural schoolteachers  
saleswomen tilted their hats.  
The bureaucrats  
always on edge  
scurried around their offices.  
They decided to implement  
fabulous strategies to prevent  
her light-skinned slum body  
her enormous poetic liver  
from quickly reproducing.

“Cirrhosis” they yelled  
“this is the drunk woman’s certificate”  
and they still grumble:  
their worst mistake was  
returning her to the island  
because not even the legend  
of a martyr lover  
could kill her  
and they tried  
changing the street number  
to silence the echo  
of thud Julia dropped on sleeping  
tongues that turned the archives  
upside down.

---

3 On July 5, 1953, Julia de Burgos collapsed on 106<sup>th</sup> St in Spanish Harlem, New York, and died a day later from pneumonia.



# Calle 106, NY

Del campo  
a un arrabal de Río Piedras  
a Comerío, Naranjito, San Juan, Cuba  
New York, Washington, New York  
y muerta de nuevo a Puerto Rico  
dos meses después de caída  
en la calle 106, Harlem.  
Julia  
de treintainueve años en el cincuentaitres  
cuando le explotó el hígado de versos  
contra la explotación  
se le explotó el hígado en boleros  
es ese celebrado rito dispersivo,  
es decir,  
que se murió en pleno vuelo  
como un corito  
pero pún cayó cual piedra  
en la calle 106.  
Igual tembló el Caribe  
se le cimbronearon los bombines  
a las oficinistas vendedoras  
operarias  
maestras de escuela rural.  
Los burócratas  
siempre asustadísimos  
corretearon por las oficinas.  
Se decidieron a emplear  
estrategias fabulosas para prevenir  
que se reciclara en brío  
su cuerpito de grifo arrabal  
su gigantesco hígado poemático.

“Cirrosis hepática” gritaron  
“aquí el certificado de la borracha”  
y todavía se lamentan:  
lo peor que hicieron fue  
devolvérsela a la isla  
porque ni aún con la leyenda  
de mártir amorosa  
aquella no acababa de morir  
y hasta intentaron  
cambiarle el número de la calle  
para acallar el retumbe  
de pún cayó la Julia hasta las lenguas  
que en solaz les ha dejado los archivos  
patas arriba.

**A Conference Report from the Archives:**

Vol. 12, No. 46, Pages 80–83 (January–June 1968)

*Anne Walmsley*

## FIRST C.A.M. CONFERENCE

C.A.M.'s formation, aims and objects were reported in the last *Bim*. I wonder how it sounded to *Bim* readers outside Britain: just another small, cosy talk-in of the elite of West Indian artists in exile? Certainly when Eddie Brathwaite outlined his plans for C.A.M. to a few friends in his Bloomsbury flat, at the end of December 1966, even when the first publicity material came round inviting membership, it was hard to guess the dimensions of what was in motion. For from the first monthly Friday evening meeting at the West Indian Students Centre, C.A.M. has roared forward. Always the seats go early, many stand. Always the questions press on to one another; 10.45 p.m. (when the bar is about to close) brings the session to a pause, not close, for it continues in the hall, the bar, and then on into members' flats, way into Saturday morning.

After January to July of such evenings, and a break in August, C.A.M. has started the new season with a consolidation, a concentration of its forces: a week-end conference mid-way through September. At Eliot College in the new University of Kent, outside Canterbury, ninety people met from Friday evening to Sunday evening for the first conference of the Caribbean Artists' Movement.

Who were the ninety? Caribbean artists themselves at the core, of course, and, in giant-like dominance, C. L. R. James, George Lamming, Michael Anthony, Andrew Salkey and Eddie Brathwaite; Aubrey Williams, Ronald Moody and Clifton Campbell; Marina Maxwell, Doris Harper, Lloyd Reckord, Horace James and Bari Johnson; Peter Figueroa, John La Rose and Gordon Rohlehr. Then there were the distinguished West Indian academics: Professors Elsa Goveia and Douglas Hall from U.W.I., Brian King from Cambridge, Kenneth Ramchand from Edinburgh, and two academics non-West Indian but almost honorarily so—Arthur Ravenscroft from Leeds, editor of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, and Louis James, formerly at U.W.I. and now at Canterbury—and a foremost critic of West Indian literature. There were writers non-West Indian too: Awabena Tmoako from Ghana, Calvin Hernton from the U.S., and Margaret Lawrence from Canada. Then there were West Indian sociologists, one indeed engaged on a sociological study of the Caribbean artist in exile; West Indians teaching in Britain,

and Britishers who had taught in the West Indies; Trinidadians recently returned from Nigeria, a Nigerian girl, and an Englishman specialising in the study of French Creole. Four British book publishers were represented: Faber, Heinemann, Macmillan and Longman.

The ninety met—and they talked. What they talked about was structured around a programme of lectures. Saturday morning led off splendidly with Dr. Goveia speaking on the Socio-Cultural Framework of the West Indies, followed by Kenneth Ramchand on Claude McKay and *Banana Bottom* in particular. Saturday evening, after tea, Clifton Campbell and Aubrey Williams talked about their paintings: Campbell with slides of his paintings, and Williams with a highly articulate account of his approach to painting. Saturday evening after supper C. L. R. James and Michael Anthony talked about Trinidad at different periods: James on West Indian Literature in the '30s, Anthony on lug development, or *Growing Up* as he called it, in writing: about Trinidad, in and out of Trinidad. Sunday morning was given to literature, critical and creative. First Louis James posed questions, gave and invited answers, on the poetry of the West Indies. Then George Lamming presented a preview of his new novel, *Natives of My Person*. For the afternoon, the last session of the conference, Bari Johnson, Lloyd Reckord and Horace James performed, and spoke about performing in the West Indies and in Britain.

Of these lectures I've given a catalogue only. To attempt to summarise would inevitably falsify, distort. Luckily—if it's fair to call luck what is a regular efficient feature of C.A.M. sessions—all that was spoken by the lecturers and in discussion afterwards was recorded. The spools turned quietly. There was no need to take notes. We are promised early publication of the entire proceedings. Everyone must have his own private record library of statements, sounds, pictures from these sessions. Mine include C. L. R. James intervening in a hot to and fro between speakers who were trying to discover why Michael Anthony felt he could not write novels set in Britain. With the characteristic James gesture, the inimitable timing and authority: "The artist must write what he wants to write when he wants to write it, no matter how much you tell him what he ought to write." Then there was Aubrey Williams' classic phrase, slipped in with a sort of muted burning, talking about West Indian painters: "They're going to change the real seeing of the world"; George Lamming's "All my novels are natives of my person"; Clifton Campbell's quick reply to yet another pert, senseless, literal question about one of his paintings; "You don't understand my Cockney accent".

These sessions, then, were the centre of the Conference—and they were expanded on every side. Both nights, far into the night, there were readings of the literature that was analysed and discussed by day—with boundaries far broader than the strictly West Indian. Doris Harper enacted her Samaan Tree Story, George Lamming read part of Penelope's Diary from *Of Age and Innocence*, and poems by Martin Carter; Eddie

Brathwaite, Peter Figueroa, Knolly La Fortune spoke their poems. But also we heard Marina Maxwell read translations of Cuban poets, C. L. R. James read Aimé Césaire and St. John Perse; Kwabena Amoako and Calvin Hernton read their own London and New York poems. There was, too, ample chance for people to read and acquire what was read aloud and discussed. John La Rose ran a bookshop, which had a wide and comprehensive collection of books of Caribbean interest. Then almost unnoticed in the bookshop was a small wooden sculpture; an exquisite Ronald Moody head, contemplative amidst the books. Other examples of the visual arts were less easily unnoticed; large canvases by Aubrey Williams and Clifford Campbell lined the corridors, each with their own colour-range and style, each complementing the other. Musical sound burst rarely; the background of steel bands, Belafonte, Edric Connor behind the barbecue dinner on the first evening seemed outrageously phoney and tourist image. Best was when discussion of West Indian verse forms, following the Louis James talk, broke into two Sparrow calypsoes.

It's a truism now that in Britain more than anywhere is the West Indies a reality, the separate territories seeming only ingredients of the whole. Dr. Goveia's opening talk ranged over the entire West Indies: discussing, elucidating, pointing to its common social, economic, political pattern. But one of the over-riding themes of this conference was the vision of a wider pattern still. No longer is the talk of the West Indies, the former British colonies, united in relation to Britain, or even seen in relation to the States—there was, surprisingly almost no mention of the States. The feeling was rather of Caribbean awareness. The talk was of how we must look round to Spanish, French, Dutch-speaking neighbours; how we must look to the past of Central and South America for our roots, as much as to Africa, Europe and the East. Here is to be found the identity, the destiny of the West Indian. In discussion, in readings, this was the concept which gathered support and rolled larger and larger through the week-end.

Closely allied to the concept of thinking Caribbean were two other recurrent themes of the conference: communication and commitment—to over-simplify drastically under those outworn umbrella words. Communication was discussed primarily in relation to the West Indies themselves: freer communication with the population in the press and on radio, despite the politicians; communication by the right use of the right language. And behind the necessity of communication sang out the strong sense of commitment; by some overtly to the West Indies, but others primarily to their own art—and clearly no distinction can be drawn here.

I must finally just say a word about the setting of this C.A.M. week-end. No old stones, groaning with history and tradition, but a new college at a new university. Eliot College was exciting and challenging architecturally: it gave the right sort of dimensions and perspective to all that happened. It was also very confusing and easy

to get lost in but, as someone pointed out, this led to unexpected encounters and conversations. The lecture hall was a windowless box, which provided an atmosphere both concentrate and unlocated. The Junior Common Room was roomy, relaxed. And it pleased me, anyway, to think that C.A.M. held its first conference at Eliot College: shades of another exile who came from a new country to an old, another man who drew widely and boldly from all traditions and cultures, another artist whose concern was the revitalising of his tools.

A Poem from the Archives:

Vol. 12, No. 46, Pages 103--4 (January--June 1968)

**Slade Hopkinson**

## The Mad Woman Of Papine

*Two Cartoons with Captions*

(1)

Four years ago  
In this knot of a village outside the university  
She was in residence.  
Where a triangle of grass gathered the mountain road,  
Looped it once and tossed it to Kingston—  
Where grampus buses, cycling students,  
Duppies of dust and ululations in light  
Vortexed around her—  
Ritualist, she tried to reduce the world,  
Sketching her violent diagrams  
Against a wall of mountains that her stare made totter.  
Her rhythmic ideas detonated into gestures.  
She would jab her knee into the groin of the air,  
Fling her sharp instep at the fluttering sky,  
Revise perspectives with the hooks of her fingers,  
And butt blood from the teeth of God.

She cooked and ate anything. But being so often busy  
She hardly ever cooked or ate.

What of her history?  
These are the latitudes of the ex-colonised,  
Of degradation still unmodified—  
Imported managers, styles in art,  
Second-hand subsistence of the spirit,  
The habit of waste,  
Mayhem committed on the personality,  
And everywhere the wrecked or scuttled mind.

Scholars more brilliant than I could hope to be  
Advised that if I valued poetry,  
I should eschew all sociology.  
Who could make anything of a pauper lunatic  
Modelling one mildewed dress from year to year?  
Scarecrow, just sane enough occasionally  
To pick up filth and fry it on a brick,  
And then renew  
The comic mime of her despair.

Clearly something was very wrong with her  
As subject. Pedestrian. Too limited  
For lyric literature.  
I went away for four years. Then returned.

(2)

One loaf now costs what two loaves used to.  
The madwoman has crossed the road  
And gone behind the shops,  
Nearer the university,  
The light of scholars rising in the west.  
She wears the same perennial dress,  
Now black as any graduate's gown,  
But stands in placid anguish now,  
Perfects her introverted trance—  
Hanging arms, still feet,  
Chin on breast, forehead parallel  
To the eroded, indifferent earth,  
Merely an invisible old woman,  
Extremist votary at an interior altar,  
Repeatedly rinsing along her tongue  
A kind of invocation, whispered, verbless:

“O

Rass Rass Rass  
In the highest.”

Humroy Whyte

## i-land Dub roots *for* Mikey Smith

take for instance—  
three days ago  
*“before-day mawnin”*  
it was as though  
your presence  
pass through  
between where  
i was sitting  
on the verandah  
thinking it was you  
i looked around  
yet you were nowhere  
to be found—except  
the drum-rollin’-riddim  
dubbing in your wake



## Market Vendor

Market was empty today  
More sellers than buyers  
This year drought meant  
No rain for months until  
Sudden heavy showers

I spent all day talking  
On my phone to a machine  
I was on the receiving end  
Countless voice message recordings  
No one returns calls like they used to

Weather report predicting  
All-night rain to make music  
On my old rusty zinc rooftop  
And I will find warm comfort  
In my warm bowl of soup

## Warner Woman

(Reconnecting Caribbean Links)

On a walkabout,  
Through New Kingston,  
From Caribbean Avenue  
Along Antigua Avenue, Knutsford Boulevard,  
To Barbados Avenue, Dominica Drive, Grenada Crescent,  
On to Trinidad Terrace and Tobago Crescent; St Lucia Avenue  
Warner Woman wailing.

Jamal G. La Rose

## With Wings

Her hands in the suds,  
washing dirty dishes,  
as his tiny fingers tug  
at the dressed-up frame—

resurrecting

her thoughts of his cooing  
in a secondhand blankie.  
Now, at his toddler-aged joy from  
frilled things flying in the wind—

frolicking

beyond the reach of her purse  
the lady of means isn't mending,  
beyond where his mind could fathom  
that innocence is a child at Easter—

with wings.

Pamela Mordecai

## Another Meditation on Yellow

tiz zwazo is not  
a yellow bird  
she don't belong  
choucouné yes  
but not she

neither  
canaries  
but for mutual  
expendability

the yellow  
shouldered  
grass quit does

and the beautiful  
almost-all-over-gold  
Jamaican oriole

spindalis  
with splendid  
gleaming  
throat

*sunflowers*  
*are not ours*  
*neither rudbeckia*  
*nor jonquils*  
*nor daffodils*

ours are poui  
and acacia  
showers  
gilt poinciana  
glorious  
and rare

we'll share  
the flesh of  
avocados  
pineapples  
oranges and lemons

(bells of St Clements  
finally on hold)

egg yolks and pee  
jaundice and pus  
and tawny teeth  
belong to all of us

# I-and-I Defend the Bird from Beyond

*“Doctor bud a cunny bud,  
hard bud fi dead”—Jamaican saying*

*Eupetomena  
macroura*

I sight you  
bredren  
and you are  
pretty splendid  
I admit

but feathered one  
you roam  
from the Guyanas  
and northeastern Brazil  
down south to Paraguay  
and across to Bolivia  
and Peru

so never mind you  
cut a fine figure  
you not exactly  
exclusive

and even if you  
and our Doctor Bird  
fly under  
the same sobriquet  
*Swallow-tailed  
Hummingbird*  
and come from  
the same family

*Trochilidae*

our *Trochilus*

*polytmus*

live in one

small place

on earth

land of my birth

island of wood

and water

Xaymaca

in Taino

long-time

Arawak lingo

so know

our wee

birdie is

*rara avis*

and yes

I-man

allow

I-and-I

prejudice

another thing

*EM*

your tails them

kinda stiff

while Doctor Bird

have tails so long

them stream behind him

when him fly

I know  
in nature nothing  
not supposed to be  
in this kind  
of competition  
nevertheless  
I-and-I wasn't  
amused  
when I find out  
our national bird  
was likely  
confused with you  
never mind  
your glittering blue  
head-and-tail feathers  
and your green  
shoulder and forewings

you see  
    our feathered one is  
        a dramatic  
                                emerald

not often  
seen  
in birdland

behold  
    as well  
        a revelation  
            of subtle  
            pink-mauve  
            tints  
            when  
            him  
            open him  
            wings

and is  
    for sure  
        a plus  
            our healer  
                have a  
                    curvy  
                        arch  
                    of a  
                orange  
            beak

while  
(I-and-I  
observe direct  
and not askance)

yours is

    a ordinary straight black lance...

One last dread  
    thing

our medical wonder  
have magical powers

for him is

    the reincarnation

        of souls  
    of the dead

**Opal Palmer Adisa**

# The Harder They Come Suite, 3 Voices

## **I. Love Is a Load: Elsa Opens Up**

ivan is de first an only man mi love  
ah love de mango sweetness of him  
wha ah see him is  
not wha him become  
hard life and dream  
will machette de best of man

as a oman mi was taught  
fi small up miself  
bite mi tongue  
hang mi head  
swallow de poison  
den run guh corna  
an vomit eh up

mi mod ave 13 of we  
so she gi mi to de precha  
who promise fi learn me  
but as soon as hair start grow unda me arm  
as soon as de red gal visit  
is like man dem can smell mi  
suh mi draw up miself smalla

den ivan come an mi heart find wing  
ivan come an suddenly mi body  
a blossom like hibiscus  
mi couldn't resist him  
de devil an temptation  
bigga an stronga  
ivan wan wha him want hard like stone



an maybe is wha him deserve  
mi alone not enough fi hold him  
mi want him fi get wha him want  
but dat life not fah me  
even wid ivan love  
covain mi heart  
like banana leaf  
mi tell yu de truth  
love can blind yu

but den mi realize  
ivan dream is movie idea  
an if wi follow it  
all ah wi gwane perish

mi kudnuh stand by  
let dat appen  
love or no love  
but is love  
love dat bigga  
dan mi an ivan  
love jus like how ackee  
will kill or nourish yu  
love...

## **II. mi ahfi jump ova fyah: pedro reflects**

ebi whe mi go  
fyah ah chase mi an  
ebi bucket full a hole

mi study anansi  
fi suvive in dis  
dog-nyam-dog world  
man heart ahfi hard like  
dutchie pot  
but mi reason wid miself  
i man nah starve

i man nah guh empty-handed  
i man nah nyam de fyah  
dem let loose pan de downtrodden  
i man aguh anansi dem

dem name mi bad man  
gwane like wha me do is wus dan  
de uptown man dem  
who tief de likkle man song  
buy big cyar  
an mek demselves rich

de ground nuh lebel  
so de suffara ahfi mek  
de rules as him guhlang  
suh nuh boda mi bloodclat  
wid yu righteousness  
i-man a-go survive  
nu matta wha

### **III. Pull It Back and Come Again: Ivan Speaks**

me know de songs  
dat grow in mi heart  
is healin balms  
dem lift a man head  
restore a oman dignity  
set pickney pan de rite path

dem tink country bumkin  
fool-fool  
but mi neva was nubodi's fool  
mi granny teach  
mi a ting or two  
before she shet she eye  
and fly back  
to kimet to she people  
she tell me

yu is great grandson of  
de big man garvey  
who see beyond  
de waters to de before

*righteous is de man  
who walk steadfast in him own shoe*

wi ahfi ave hope  
wi ahfi believe  
we will cross de river  
an hopefully get home safe

so me stick by de words  
*you can get it if you really try*  
a barefoot man will walk  
a hundred mile wid de promise  
of a pair of shoes

*you can get it if you really try  
but you must try, try and try, try and try*

success nuh easy  
you ahfi try wid all yu heart  
an yu ahfi believe while yu tryin  
an even when failure look like  
it fall down pan yu an pin yu down  
yu ahfi keep tryin  
even when everyone round yu  
seh yu stupid  
yu ahfi try even when sufferation  
a nyam yu skin and salt yu soul  
yu ahfi try  
yu might succeed

dat is i man ilosophy....

# My Mother Gifted Me

Pulling the hose from the vegetable bed  
to the flower bed while racing against the  
ascendant dusk  
my mother's presence washes over me  
(although she has been dead 3 years now)

*Hi mommy* I say to the evening air  
I sense her smile and just as quicky she is gone

People used to say my mother had a green thumb  
she could pick a leaf plant it and it would grow  
when our neighbours plants were near dead  
they could bring them and mommy would nurture  
and revive them  
others literally dragged her  
to their yards  
laughing her eye outshinning stars  
she would say *I am not an agromist or an aboritst*  
but mommy knew the language of plants

As I yank the hose to water the ferns  
that circle the mango tree  
and the Joseph Coats near the veranda  
I'm pulled back to my childhood  
our verandah chock-full  
of African violets with  
fat furry green leaves  
purple white and pink blossoms  
in clay pots that covered the entire  
circumference

My child-self sees you coming home from work  
and me running to greet you at the gate  
often you never went inside before  
reaching for the hose  
putting your purse on the step  
then watering your colourful beds of gerbas  
then pulling the hose to the right side of our large yard  
you watered the banana and plantain trees  
the callaloo and cabbage  
all the things that you grew  
all the while teaching me about the greenness of life  
how to beautify my yard and grow what I eat

Ian McDonald

## Song-Birds

in Big Market  
he sold song-birds  
big burly black man  
Rex Hardsure  
passing by never failed  
stall “Music of the Forest”  
soon got to know him well  
sit-down visits while he sold his wares  
songs from such peculiar birds  
one a golden parrot type  
and one seemed a kiskadee  
but was a vivid red  
mostly they were forest green  
small and nondescript  
all sounded lovely-sad to me  
“I know you—you can never buy  
you think it is a cruel thing”  
“true” I said and hit my heart  
“but I love your work my friend”  
“well think of that” he said

## Gus Perrystation

Gus Perrystation famously fixed clocks  
got to know him because he did  
my grandfather's gold fob watch  
silent for decades in a silken pouch  
why not make it work again  
he looked at it intensely interested  
consulted me about a patient sorely ill  
can't be done ancient screws are missing  
will have to change the whole insides  
then you lose the heart and soul of it  
thanked him the start of fellowship  
grizzled eighty years very much my senior  
saw him often in his run-down widower's home  
he liked his Scotch knew my taste for El Dorado  
"basically my life has stopped I like it so  
still fix clocks talk with friends and wait"  
he had an optimistic view of things  
leave it to the generations life always had  
"look at us my friend are we not good enough?"  
best friend was Monsignor at the Cathedral  
had shriven him of all his many sins  
"I was a famous jewel thief" he laughed  
I grew to love the man he saw what's good  
sometimes he recalled his three sons in their prime  
all had died the hands of God are not gentle  
tears came to me who has living sons  
one day he was not there no signs of him  
the Monsignor did not know where he had gone  
"in time to come you will know where to find him"  
I think he meant heaven but I do not know

## The Red Kite

red kite climbing the wind  
dancing in the falcon-flighted air  
followed down the long connecting twine  
to the playing field next door  
golden pouis blooming now  
little boy is with his dad  
think he must be four years old  
father helps him hold the cord  
looks up such wonder in his eyes  
on high the red kite dives and dances

## A Glass of Drambuie

just after a pleasant dinner  
enjoying a glass of Drambuie  
the grandchildren were reporting  
Zoey painted the moon  
Jacob giving his view of Heaven  
suddenly in the distance  
a long terrible howl  
somewhere in the world  
someone was dying



## The Silk Handkerchief

walked slowly outside the gate  
inspecting the white water lilies  
young girl red ragged skirt hurrying  
on the hot road carrying a baby  
could have been her sister don't think so  
how she looked down tenderly  
smoothed the baby's hair sheltered her  
dashed my silk handkerchief in the water  
wait wait come wet the child's head  
stopped she gently wiped the sleeping face  
go go get home don't walk in the sun  
sick and sad and old in my world of gestures  
saw her go wordless not looking back  
using the cool silk softly again again

## The Singing

opened the window wide one morning  
a bird was singing out its heart  
right there on a bougainvillea bush  
not disturbed by me at all  
went on singing bigger than it seemed it could  
small golden bird gleaming in the morning  
I'd never seen a bird like that  
and no one knew of such a bird  
I did not want to look it up  
didn't really want to know  
I just want to be sure  
should there be no such bird  
there is that singing

# Night Falls

old man waits at the bus stop  
looks at his watch looks at the setting sun  
blood red over the earth

**Mac Donald Dixon**

## Aging with Grace

I leave the dumb country to live in town  
close to the nice nurse, Miss Grace, that helped me  
cope with my fickle rheumatism.

There is no line marking town from country  
nowadays, it's all a blur with transports  
stopping at every corner, and fewer trees.

A wind groans between their leaves as they get  
chopped down to make more roads.

It's hot every day of the week, include  
Sundays, when the air is free from insect  
bites—the church will not buy fans—so I stay

in my section and moan while pollen takes  
flight on cedar-seed wings and soars. Old age  
my friend, is another pain in the butt.

# Sahara Dust

I stumped my toe on a stone, the doctor  
gave me powder to stop the wound turning septic.  
Next morning the bruise was gone, yet the sky  
was black and unhappy as hell.  
Not being superstitious, I chalk it down  
to circumstance, discounting witchcraft.

I wanted to write a poem about blue skies  
borrow colours from the rainbow and paint  
horizons bright. My mind swells  
thinking of landscapes about to shape in “Word”,  
marveling at a keyboard’s power to transmit  
through fragile fingers, thoughts brittle as clay bricks  
fashioned in the mind, but not in the clouds outside.

A dirty dawn greets the year’s first month, its haze  
lingers until May. Rains gather to dance to fresh songs  
on flutes of wind whisking dust through bamboo groves  
on nights I am pressed to sleep.

A nervous sky distorts the balance.  
When heaven is angry, everything goes on hold.

# A Few Leagues from Shore

*(Remembering millions lost in the depths below.)*

The sextant declares a few leagues more,  
yet still no land in sight.  
Just then, a squall swoops down on the rigging

smothering hull and swamping deck.

Winds rip sails, split masts—night, pitch black,  
lost sight of toes, everything soaking wet.  
Blind, shackled to spars, I writhe in the hold below.

Thirty-seven, all that is left of two hundred  
and fifty, who boarded with me at Goree, on  
a voyage we never undertook.

Someone should have heard our screams in the toss  
and tumble of lifeboats overboard,  
in the green wink of the starboard lantern

substituting for the pole star on a rough night.  
The winds wailing loud. Listen, you can hear them  
tossing us around like cargo from stave to stave.

Rolling and tumbling, spars creak, beaten  
by tidal surge—every move secured, reminded  
by chafing chains; action timed like a pulse.

Clanging and banging, the frenzy of pans; skin taut,  
bound to the ship's broken ribs, yet still they leap  
overboard. It's only a few leagues from shore.

Eyes pass over dawn, coastline bright, looking all new,  
sick bowels purge on Sargassum, while a hull  
with a piece of mast holds the mizzen in place,

to limp like a white cloud over the new horizon.

A sound like links comes tinkling with the tide,  
waves dance and cavil with dice and surf,  
the reef's jaws open like a shark's, wide to receive

us bait. Why can't you hear the wailing, loud voices  
piercing through dawn to reach the shore a few leagues off.  
The storm is over, we're still dying, though

no longer night. Can you hear us? On this strange  
coast? Can you see us tunnelling through the coral?  
Only a few leagues off, a few leagues from shore.

# Waiting for the Pelicans' Return

Pelicans lived in the bay somewhere, I read  
but packed up and gone before coal overtook sail.  
Oil is boss now polluting the water and  
making things worse; slick flows in with the tide.

On a bollard painted green, the colour of hope  
I sit waiting for a feather to flutter down  
from the sky to signal change; *twi twi* and *karang*  
have comeback to hatch, nobody asked them.

Who will coax the pelicans back to dead coral  
reefs in Bananes Bay, pockmarked in raw sewerage?  
Fish eggs hatch new species, inedible like  
*bochay* and *canmo*, blame it on development.

The new economics of direct foreign  
investment favours rich outsiders with gift  
of the gab to bramble naïve politicians  
to allow them to export every black cent

of profit disguised as loan repayments  
leaving my poor country poor—oh what horrible  
waste, wasting years on education, while waiting  
in peace for the pelicans' return to the bay.

Iana Elizabeth Phipps

## Made in Her Image

Watchers undress budding petals—drop  
rot and ruins, recycling her blight  
into tempting trees—Edenic crops  
under dust’s cursed canvas, Lilith writes  
Eve, womb’s crimson, “*Go Paint Destiny*”.  
She glazes light to lingering lines,  
shadows add depths to man’s legacy,  
her choice blends shades of day over soft night.  
Watchers savour textured beauty, plant seeds,  
blood flows, bleak flowers bloom, and black fruits fall.  
On both sides of the struggle, sweet flesh feeds  
lost souls who’ll never hear judgment’s call.  
No heaven nor hell for their deeds  
You roam, for Sin freely shattered garden walls.



# Vita contemplativa et mors activa

A vice I welcome  
when pillows invite  
me down  
to tired sheets  
that sheathe  
like second skin.

I breathe me  
in  
my fleece flannel world  
warmth softens shards of  
judging stares.

I tremble  
but comfort awaits  
in bed that caresses  
just enough  
no space needed—  
another unwanted.

Why the fuck would I  
want to be  
anywhere else?

Real terrors lie  
beyond blankets  
hiding behind

dull eyes  
and ice-block smiles  
they show teeth that chew  
the heart  
which lived on my sleeve  
once upon a time.  
Lucid dreams feed  
my tired soul  
worked to death by  
the hate faced  
solely for being.  
I want to be  
Alive. A life  
untouched by the outside  
thrives  
behind my eyes  
closed  
but open to the freedom  
I create in repose.  
Where else am I to be?  
I live asleep.

A painting.  
5 words.  
A poem

The smell,  
the sound of all the seasons.  
Layers of bodies  
rising on crimson,  
hard, black and bruised.  
You don't hear yourself.  
All around, you see the other.  
Up and down, there—another.

Jacinth Browne-Howard

## TYR: Ode to My Grandfather

*(in essence the Norse god of heroic endeavour)*

The tallest tales were yours.  
The man who would put his hand  
In the mouth of a wolf, even if it meant  
He'd lose it there; he'd take that chance.

You, a family man to any human,  
Would purchase kindness, forget the cost.  
Then extend the only ruddy hand you had left  
To any "wreck of a Hesperus".

You were no "fart in a cane bottom chair",  
A master of the mouth from birth,  
Could sell bibles to a priest, produce to a market,  
You might even make God buy the Earth.

You, set all your Dixie biscuits straight,  
Like little suns, laid in the safety of a sturdy drawer,  
Like your arms have always been—stern and strong,  
But with care carrying the smallest flower.

Despite your twilight years, your bright wit  
Showed that even a one-handed god  
Could do damage with a spear, for you  
A flip of the tongue was wielding a sword.

We watched you,  
Maneuver a walker, with quiet might.  
We watched you,  
Take our children, hold them tight.

We watched you,  
I think you despised  
That we watched you,  
With pity in our eyes.

We do not know just when you turned.  
Time always will, without permission.  
We prayed behind our smiles that any  
Ill would fall prey to remission.

Still you, last of three, holding on in-between  
Time and eternity, you, the last man standing,  
Twisting in your bed, like limbo dancing.  
Up and down stairs, wandering.

Wondering if you'd escape  
The mortal's fate: a low, slack tide.  
Your dictums find the will to live.  
Truth is "we live until we die".

**Sarah Venable**

## Ascent

I dreamed us in a Baroque city  
strolling a maze of empty streets.  
Worn satin-smooth, the stones  
gleamed in emerging moonlight.

We discussed a piece of music,  
how its sober bass line underlay  
a descant spun to tinkle  
high above it, a spider's filaments,  
silken and suspended,  
unperceived until  
a light ray strays  
and there it is, before your face,  
a whole mandala.

You understood exactly,  
so a peony appeared,  
the size of a cantaloupe,  
voluptuous and fragrant.

Soft as its fainting petals, your hand  
touched my cheek, then floated off,  
pointing to the sky  
where newly fallen night  
revealed the brilliance of three stars  
inching over ancient ramparts.

We hushed and watched the trio climb.  
Had they been high in the inky sky, there would be  
no earthly register to measure  
their ascent, no reason for the eye  
to mark their presence  
or their passage.

Close as the stars were to an edge,  
we could see them move  
right now before they merged  
into a spangled velvet  
vast as no beginning,  
as will we, perhaps, at our ending.

## The Laureate

(on hearing Derek Walcott at UWI)

Freighted with years  
his loose-lip pants suspended,  
the weary poet rises  
from his front-row seat  
proceeds slowly  
to the stage

endures the swelling of applause  
settles  
like the contents  
of a sack of grain  
into the spotlit chair, where his weighted words become miracles turning  
into tendrils  
crossing an expanse.

A Poem from the Archives:

Vol. 13, No. 52, Page 216 (January–June 1971)

**Mervyn Morris**

## YOUNG WIDOW, GRAVE

A wreath of mourners ring  
the grave. It gapes.  
The people sing.  
The service isn't meaning anything.

His secretary's legs look sleek in black.

The widow's looking farther back.  
Across the gap, now flower-choked,  
her swollen eyes have stumbled on  
another man she lost; who poked  
the fire, and when it stirred was gone.

That was another death.



Millicent A. A. Graham

## Immemorial

Is long time now  
from before “whoppie kill fillup”  
from before eye deh a knee  
before the crofts of Carty and McCarty  
left their tartans in the Minho’s tributary.  
What we call first-first time  
when turtle deh a Crawle river and sea  
before street light reach Kellits market, when women knew  
how melastomes and ferns and sedges grew  
and took straw baskets to  
pick sundew, bloodworts, orchids  
mountain guavas, wild strawberries  
purple coco plums plucked under dark  
branches, laden with stars—  
Before we had our clay pots broken  
we who carved homes in stones for our mothers  
and their mothers, and set their jabas  
to our feet  
begun the whispering weep  
*Mean ar well, mean ar well*  
chameleonic song that cautioned sons  
*Mean ar well, mean ar well*  
mothers who felt the teeth of teething daughters  
and could not hold their tongues.  
Banana rose, blooming  
she knew the stain of green fingers, and counted  
*Mean ar well, mean ar well*  
sung from hand to hand and loaded  
on husband’s back and sold from this island.  
Before they that come here come see we, and  
hear the warm warning, should have been siren  
song they ignored, and anchored ship to shore.  
*Mean ar well, mean ar well*

Not all men are tyrants.  
Not all are gentle, to  
take the soft palm  
of your schoolteacher hand, and whisper  
worldly words, that flutter your tee-hees.  
Not all men bring death and disease  
to blight bark and wither coco plum leaves.  
Is from them time there  
that mother germed this seed  
rooted it in the canal of our ear  
Our heirloom spiritual  
*Mean ar well, mean ar well*  
note struck in the heel of our shoe  
as we travel, the men hear  
her woven faith that the right kind of man  
with mind to mind you, listens and  
figures himself the kind to lift  
the jaba high, up on his shoulder  
and answer  
I mean her well  
I mean her well  
till time immemorial.

# Transformation

Wide-eyed, my lips recall  
a thirst: I open its bud  
no word—

better we jump-up than speak  
better tongues be wingless and wait  
invisible in their cages

better we learn this language of street  
the chip chip chip away at asphalt  
to the plenke-plenke metallic  
sound of the steel gut's drumming

find me unmasked, flora  
gyrating astonishment

in the mass  
if you touch me  
let my green stems  
dance in a wind  
instrument's trance

We are birds  
of paradise, long  
as the music lasts  
mek we whine and whine  
and whine

we now suppose we free  
we now believe we fly

# Paradise

A thatch broom takes the rubbles sepia spice  
dust billows, chokes and blinds. Together land  
and sea procure our rot. Fragments of paradise  
fade to a vacant lot, as memories can.

In one-time harbour, labourers drink and dine  
extending ministry's plan to plot black lives.  
We dance in tartan frocks on the pearl sand  
content to lose our tongue and free waistlines,  
take basket carry water to preserve  
postcards of coconut fronds and waterfalls.

Sedated by lessons, hard as the rod that taught—  
shelves of Britannica staged behind glass  
transplanted in living room, read as our own  
when wood and water offered no advantage.  
We made masks, forgot our faces, hid mirrors.  
Poverty became novel, not a page  
to scorn and turn. We played it up to blend,  
used it to lace our pockets, curry friends,  
mark gardens and estates separate from pens  
and worked for little, smiles and dignity  
together building easeful slavery.

The warner warned this rootlessness would come,  
our gods would go and all that would remain:  
ruins from that other land we blame  
whose actors curtsy in our proscenium.  
I memorised their stories line for line  
and clothed myself with all that they had named.  
I admit I have profited—  
Poor minstrel who envied scholars  
and milled the excuse of not knowing better,  
that it was human heart that taught me metre  
so learned audiences would judge we kind  
for all that I have dealt for this bleached dollar.

# Mirror

I never know him either  
this eye-colour and hair texture don't go  
with skin. The jaw, the nose I cannot name  
not like lips of Akan or Igbo

I wonder where these features from.  
Strange as an island you see on the news  
with street names, same like yours  
Glebe Ville, Dunrobin, Waterloo....

Celia A. Sorhaindo

# Cultivating My Own Tropical Garden

*For and after Olive Senior*

Saturday 5pm, heat & light start their slow slink into earth. It is time to turn keen attention & tend to fiddling with my entropic backyard garden again. A recent health hobby, made climate- & life- change essential, in order to sustain us—I believe. I pick up my tools: small cute red-handled scissors, sharp as hell, but bad design forever traps & pinches skin; cheap old Chinese store serrated knife, with broken-off handle. I have made separate beds for herbs & vegetables; corralled them within squares & rectangles of old wood boards so that nothing runs wild. I start to wind & work my steady way through; stop, stoop, pickup limes & passion fruit; premature windfall. This is not Moore's

imaginary garden, it is wildly real—although there are no toads, it still bears useful fruit. The peppermint has been acting up; playing attention-seeking feeble; but I discovered it has been sending strong scouting roots underground. I humour it, pretend I don't know, give the usual calm pep talk. The lemon balm? Constantly role plays a perpetual reincarnated martyr; dramatically suicidal, then returns from seed over & over. Time to move the marigolds to bigger containers. Seed grown in trays, to be bug-deterring companions to the vine tomatoes. I try to gently tease out each one, but root-bound they cling stubbornly to corners of their constricted space, so I'm forced to use more force; drag them out & push into their new homes.

The broad leaf thyme, maybe it's oregano, is pretty-patterned holy; I don't know what creative creature so artistically feeds on its leaves. There is so much I don't know yet. I don't trust the stilted stinging nettle; on the surface two stem-straight tall plants dare me to touch too tiny leaves; never enough for even a small china tea cup; but I suspect a whole waiting army of activity forming under soil. I am shocked a brazen fat slug lounges out in the open. Now my suspicions about which sneaky culprit has been eating the Chinese cabbages have been confirmed. I have tried most of the new & old ways of stopping these voracious slow slimy slob, none has worked so far. I pull a disgusted face, grab grub with finger & thumb & throw it as far away as I possibly can.

I hope it takes a long time to make its way back or gets lost. My neighbour, who's been dead a year now, told me the best way to deal with these pests is to come out at night & stab them; skewer & build up like a kebab. I go over to the comfrey; grown purely to sacrifice & feed other plants. I snip off some fat flat leaves; chop them into pieces & place at the base of struggling herbs. I have some rotting nicely in a bucket of rainwater; stinking the place out like a shitload of cow manure. I go around. Survey which plants need scissor clipping to right shape or down to right size. Top the scrawny basil & spindly vervain so they bush up. Sigh—this is supposed to be a relaxing ritual, but each time I feel such anxiety, filling me up. Overwhelming. What should I cut back, cut down, encourage

or discourage? Do plants feel pain? A vine & lemon sage stalk are in a tight embrace—entangled. Is this mutual healthy attraction or is one trying to chokehold & feed off the other? Should I interfere or is there a natural balance; will they work themselves out?

I try not to raise my voice, talk soft, simple, but no-nonsense stern as I order plants around; chop some; stroke others. Trying to control, coax out good old-fashioned compliance. What's best for all of us. The ant regiment are on their own mission too. They ate the small but thriving bird pepper plant to death; a gift from Mum.

Last year they devoured all the sorrel seedlings. The moon & month are just right to try again so I'll have for Christmas. Now, I bend down incredulous

as I spot a trail of ants single-file transporting tiny green aphids all over. I know I will soon find fluorescent masses huddle-hiding & dotting curling yellow leaves. I ask the ant leader to cease & desist. I shout, command them all to stop. I plead. Tomorrow I will hunt their nests out & pour boiling water down. I will search for the aphids, scrape them off with point tip of knife & spray with soapy water. Environmentally friendly extermination. The newly planted fragrant shado beni, from a friend, hangs a little limp; looking sorry for itself; not quite settled in as yet, I guess. I touch each of its slender spiked long leaves & try to reassure it. I say, All will be OK. I say, It is safe here; you can take root & grow...

but just don't take over; leave room for the others. I have learnt over time that carrots would rather die than be moved; so, to give the new ones some more space, a chance to thrive & reach full potential, I thin & throw at least half into the compost. Sigh. The spinach & tomato have my mouth open in surprise; yet again they have popped up to invade a different place from where I want them to grow. I pluck them out & put them in the compost too. As for kale, they have formed a pretty-frilled colony in a quiet clear corner & seem to self-control, so I let them be. Don't ask me about the beans. I accidentally

killed some & since then most appear to have stubbornly refused to sprout

their bent green necks above ground. I am locked in a perpetual battle  
with weeds over who has land rights here. I set to solicitous work  
uprooting those taking over. I am careful not to put them in the compost,  
to start colonising the soil all over again; so, collect into a pyramid pile &  
fling into the ravine, where they can run riot; do as they please. I am a  
meticulous weeder. No shortcuts. Painstakingly digging deep to ensure  
not one tiny piece of pest root is left. Sigh. I feel a little sorry for weeds.  
No one seems to love them...oh, except my sister. She, I'm sure, would  
strongly plead their case; would tell me their value & purpose. I should

make an effort to find out more sometime, but right now, I just know,  
I don't want them here. It is hurricane season so I clear & deepen the  
ditches & drains so water can be controlled; stream fast off the land,  
not flood. The sun has gone. I worry one day it won't return. Then  
what will we do? I think it's time to leave the garden. I turn & go.  
Time to tend to things to nourish me inside; but there is so much  
still undone...perhaps so much I have undone with my well meaning  
meddling. I take a last look at the tall pink torch ginger & red heliconia  
that have commandeered the back boundary & invaded the adjoining

field. I am exhausted. One hand holds a few surviving cabbage leaves,  
spinach & old carrots. Sigh—I start to feel the cuts & bush scratches;  
various stings from different things; the busy work of insects; mosquito  
bites on arms. I scratch slow rise of *bête rouge* itches inching up backs of  
legs. I know the intimate regions they will reach & welt, if I don't piping hot

shower, scrub & soap. I see tiny blood ink bubbles on back of hands. I pinch  
three bergamot leaves for a headache I sense is brewing. I hesitate at the back  
door for a second. Sigh—despite everything, I sense an existential underground  
bliss rooting; obsidian sentient seed somewhere I should know well; observant  
at heart of excruciating ordering rituals—wildly attentive. I go inside to eat.



# Priceless

Saturday morning Roseau Market the air feels light fresh clean hot the river flowing unhindered to cool waiting sea. Birds hover then dive down pecking up thrown out food. After years of being an immigrant I am now living back home re-navigating rediscovering reconnecting still familiar childhood terrain. I feel threaded into the madras of my country of birth but know I am viewed as materially apart—*English—Diasporic—Different*.

All around me is free flowing meeting greeting chit-chatting easy communing and communicating.

People mix mingle flit and flutter from fresh produce overflowing stall to stall.

A hummingbird choreography of commotion conversation transaction.

The man in front buys his produce from the elderly female huckster. They seem to know each other well exchanging smiles and laughs and asking about the wellbeing of so and so.

My turn. I smile. Politely ask the price of a hand of carrots. Her face goes blank. No smile back.

Hi, how much for the carrots please?

What you say? I not understanding you!

I repeat. The carrots. How much? I smile.

The young woman behind positions her body in front of me and picks up what she wants. The interaction is quick price given money taken and she is gone.

I smile. I repeat. Slowly. The carrots.      How much?

\$10!

\$10? \$10?

The price is double what the young woman paid. But: I hand over the note. Pay what is asked. She takes the money silently. Our hands do not make contact. Our eyes do not make contact.

I am learning the gaping memorial cost of being away for so long—but I'll be back next week. Being back home is priceless.

Others dare to navigate; return; go back even further trying to recover a past home.

# Matryoshkas

Me, PTSS afflicted small island state, a late developer  
with a mendicant Cinderella complex, swollen with fear  
and self-loathing, sell myself for cents and nonsense.

Desperately showing off newly traded status symbols  
of development; stumbling several steps behind my  
bigger teens' shadows, sniffing their nauseating sillage;

playing dress-up and tripping in fake Jimmy Choo's, when  
once I ran barefoot free through virgin forest; glancing  
back to check what I dropped, before moving forward.

Me, small girl with high hopes, battered  
to low self-esteem; hiding in playground  
shadows, trying to catch escaping breath.

Irregular heartbeat skipping, while pot-  
bellied boys with thick ears and bruised  
lips catapult insults from small mouths;

and clench-kneed girls with marble eyes snigger *we have  
smart phone doh* behind fake-hair-masked fractal-faces;  
Donne's purpled blood, beneath my bitten nails.

# CrossIn (XIn) Into—Over the Kármán Line

until all clock turnin hands tick still, time  
    will tell one thing or another. now  
        the news is a friction  
    of flyinspark opinions.  
we clap or cringe  
    awestruck or incredulous:  
        a further giant leap;  
            or million \$ fuelled, tourist trip;  
        or colonisin expedition crossin the line  
    again, for a potential, brand shiny new, uninhabited?  
kingdom. we winkwink at richard, the english call him dick for short,  
    and the other two white knights. their phallic rocket ships longin to penetrate this

dark virgin space; men breakin  
more barriers; comin  
back our heroes, havin  
sown essential seeds  
for our future—  
they say.  
another trinity  
of untethered  
wizened men  
tickin the bucket  
list; followin a fast fleetin  
childhood dream, deemed  
to be beamin in outer space.  
our focus is on these  
three rub-a-dub-dub men.  
now, and then  
a few track the invisible,  
original blueprint inspiration;  
the incubatin and involved,  
anima-tin, archetypal eves.  
i wonder—who is not lookin  
out—cravin some piece  
of pie-in-the-sky;  
searchin.  
devinin  
a twinklin  
blinkin true-  
eyed way  
to follow?

\*  
\*\*

tonight, outside,  
three contrary amazonian sistas look  
up into the clear bright dark; join

stardots, with fingers  
crossed for the future  
they imagine and blissfully

intone for themselves  
and others. they laugh, debatin  
the bright spark above: venus;

wakandan or alien ship, golden  
doge grails; sirius or satellite. good  
glowin god. it rains. heads down and

focused, they go inside.  
our precious currency:  
priceless familial

fuel—our humblin hotblooded kin-  
ships survivin here on earth—is all  
these three can shoot and root for—right now...xox...

# Child on My Back

*After Matsuo Bashō, W. S. Merwin and Michael Ratcliffe*

do some think poetry is the most  
important thing on earth and  
wilfully witness mortal beings  
and their lonely tears  
abandoned by a raging river  
and leave them  
with only a morsel then later  
feed their hungry  
poem with  
skeletal remains  
go on living just  
carry on becoming?

if no one will  
see hear those  
(not) carried away  
does the wind still  
carry in autumn air  
our leftlongoutside  
children's insidecries  
for ever?

a shortlife war raw child  
ignored husband wife relative friend  
all can live long  
preserved forever resurrected  
on a frigid page or a  
silent pixelated matrix of matter  
only seen on a meta screen

but look here  
all now there  
are still life less  
bodies waiting  
undiscovered dead  
cause not uncovered  
and  
blood

blood  
hands

*this under heaven is the wretchedness  
of our birth and all we can do is cry*  
out loud like this  
long and long  
and  
long?

Joanne C. Hillhouse

## When Did You Become Black?

I became Black when I was born  
On an island in the Caribbean  
Where most people were some version of me  
So many shades of brown  
A mix of textures, features, colours  
All Black  
Blue to Red-shenky  
Our ancestry inked into our DNA  
Because though race is a social construct  
Scientifically irrelevant, so dem say  
Africa is historically, socially, culturally  
Part of my identity  
From a seed planted in Africa  
I grew, diaspora-sweet  
And let it be known, IF the trauma is the marker  
We endured “hundreds of years of slavery and colonialist domination”  
The slave ship stopped here first  
They perfected their villainy here  
But, this not no pain Olympics—  
Mary Prince to Frederick Douglas to Papa Sammy  
The narratives tell the tale  
Read *The Book of Night Women*, see the *Roots*  
And stop the erasure of Caribbean Blackness  
We are foundational to this  
An entire hemisphere of us  
As far as that story goes  
It was the Americas, NOT just “America”  
North and South, Americas



A whole hemisphere  
Bathed in ancestral blood and tears  
Built with ancestral sweat, steeped in ancestral hope  
That their children would someday know freedom  
And find their way home and while I remain  
Here, remain Caribbean  
Every brick of  
My Black is non-negotiable

**Nancy Anne Miller**

## White Cap

Like a tiara made of diamonds  
her ancestors toiled for in dark  
African pits under colonial rule.

Like the tip of a wave that pulled  
them down under a salt bitter sea  
in the transatlantic slave trade.

Like the white napkin she folds  
each evening for a dinner table  
folds her past into an envelope.

Forms into a bishop's hat like  
the one worn when the Church  
of England trafficked humans.

Shapes a tooth on a china plate,  
a fang to feed on all the untruths  
guests will swallow with polite hate.

# Descended

He is descended from slave owners. The Bermuda National Museum records show the names of slaves: Sussanah, Alice, Jonathan, domestic, washer, joiner, 39, 8, 20, recorded in thin columns, like the space allotted an African taken from their home, confined and bound to a sea voyage. Neatly inscribed as if logged in by

a Somerset Sea Captain. Doubly captive, by space, Anglican name. The wash of history drowning a past as the boat tumbled waves to maintain a balance. The 1714 diagram of the ship, the shape of a whale tooth, slave quarters, an inked-in pattern, the scrimshaw scribbled on ivory by a whaler now night-watcher on his long journey across the Atlantic.

What can become of this reckoning when such knowledge resurfaces like a large mammoth circling the deep, sounding a journey beneath sunlight and oxygen, floating currents, until it must breathe? What could change as a spout of water rises when a whale exhales, causes semitropical seas to form into a Bermuda Easter lily?

# The White Cliffs of Dover

Are composed of chalk,  
like the white chalk writing out  
of history on a black blackboard.

Like a white chalk filling in  
sentences of the black experience,  
scratching the surface, but proud

to see such cursive penmanship  
flowing across the dark. Like  
the wine dark sea of slavery when,

like red wine captured in the vials  
of bottles, blood was shed. The bottles  
emptied so prisms light might bob

around model ships. The White Cliffs  
of Dover where a White Homeland  
rolled out its banner, a peace flag

waving, a white lie rising up from  
the deep. Nursed by the white  
milky mouth of the mother country.

# Shocked

Like a cobra springing to bite the back,  
devour flesh, rip it open, the line of the whip

curls and reneges, falls to the ground, before  
striking again. What might one ask was

harmd in the slave owner holding the  
the handle of a whip in his fist, like

the sleeve of a light bulb as it crackled  
with currency? What in him was shocked?

What vibrated in his head, broke in pieces,  
like a shattered GE when a terrible regret

occurred? What bled from his heart in the noon  
sun, as his dark shadow puddled beneath him?

# Scramble

Just like the Scrabble game of wit and chance,  
there was a scramble for Africa. When

alphabetized names begin to dominate  
a land. All dependent on a knowledge

of etymology, origins where a word  
carries meaning on its back like a camel

carrying cargo across a desert. So, we  
see the whim of it, just like ivory

squares tossed form a game-full  
destination, as if un-toothing the mouth

of the local, like an elephant barren  
without a tusk. The way Scrabble

forms a path, the lettered force of  
naming, the ticker-taping of a country

with a new history, claiming it by a throw  
of the white/blackness of rolling dice.

**A-dZiko Simba Gegele**

## Salt

We salt, we brine, we perfume from  
the ocean's stinging breath.  
We go, we flow, we ebb, we come  
until nothing is left.

At night we dream of sequined gowns  
electric pinks and blues  
that flash like streaks of coloured light  
through skies of changing hues.

We take our ritual daybreak flight  
and float down to the seas  
then scour buckets back to white  
the stink, it never leaves.

It follows us to market street  
squats amongst the flies  
swirls in whorls of fetid heat  
and mounds of glassy eyes.

It is our lot to rip and gut  
and scrape away at scales  
with fingers calloused dry and cut  
and broken brittle nails.

We salt, we brine, we perfume from  
the ocean's stinging breath.  
We go, we flow, we ebb, we come  
until nothing is left  
but the shadowed depths ten fathoms deep  
that dwell beneath our lives.  
We dream of elegance asleep and  
awake as poor fish wives.

# Life Rafts

They are bouncing off the walls and bouncing off one another like boats in rough seas.

The grandmothers sit shipwrecked and shell-shocked alone on the sofa marvelling at the youth  
washing by

the way that they, too, were once marvelled at.

When the skies storm, they will offer frail hands and pull them ashore.

# Flowers

The cats who live around me  
adorn my porch with body parts  
head of lizard, tail of galliwasp, belly of snake.

The Cat People claim they are  
love offerings.

Who can know for sure?

Strange to me  
to bring dead things  
as signs of life and love.

They come; they go  
these cats,  
like whims.  
I hesitate to call them mine.  
I give them crunchy kibbles and water.  
They purr; I smile.  
It seems to work, this arrangement.

You bring me cut flowers  
their legs bound with rubber bands  
their heads wilting even as they bloom.

I consider the arrangement  
and hurry them to water  
dying.



**Henry Fraser***From the Bathsheba Sonnets*

# Atlantis

Bathsheba, beauty of the Bible  
Reminds us of another fable  
Atlantis, once on legends fed  
A sunken city, living or dead.  
The names inspire strong affection  
Atlantis Hotel, bay house possession—  
Culdoon, Dan, Syd Marie  
Survey the shimmering sands and sea.

Salubrious air, a health resort  
Drew visitors from way up north  
In days of old, by luxury ship.  
But now it's jumbo jets that skip  
The finer points and pack them in  
For music, jet skis, rum and gin.

# The Power of the Sea

Eons ago, we think, came the big bang  
Explosions, explosions, and planets began.  
Thunder and lightning occurred  
And life from the elements stirred.  
Mountains and lakes and oceans were born  
Volcanoes and earthquakes the norm  
Barbados a product of just such a story  
And Bathsheba boasts its amazing beauty.

Craggy cliffs gave rise to giant rocks  
With great waves crashing against the shore—  
But at night there's music of soothing surf  
Healing tensions and fears to the core  
For the power of the mountains, the land and the sea  
Is a healing balm to set us free.

**Lysanne Charles**

# Hurricane Déjà vu

Tonight is quiet  
Eerily quiet  
Déjà vu quiet  
Except the tree frogs and crickets still battle for supremacy in nature's symphony  
And that night they didn't  
A few hours before I had closed the last door  
Secured the last shutter  
And stuttered my way to my mother's  
With a heart heavy and all over the place  
Casting energy to the universe for grace  
For grace  
For grace  
She was coming  
And whether we were ready or not  
She was powerful and hot  
Sucking all the air before her  
To her order  
We felt the weight of her  
All through the wait for her  
As she churned up land and water  
Across the Caribbean  
And we an archipelago of family  
Worried about cousins and aunties  
Uncles and parents  
Grandparents and friends and children  
And children  
And children  
Scattered at all ends of islands  
Not ready  
But prepared  
For another round of... Resilience  
We hoped for the best  
But feared the worst  
Long before she burst her destruction upon us

That night many of us set differences aside  
Across divides that had seemed for lifetimes  
Went seeking for lifelines for survival and hope  
And hope  
And hope  
And in the minutes between darkness and dawn  
That felt like death  
Many held our breath  
And hoped that we would make it  
As we stood powerless before the fullness of... God  
And silence

And when she took the roof  
In the cold grey light of morning  
And sent water to wash away our mother's things  
We thought not of sin, but salvation  
As she wailed and groaned with the awfulness of a cyclone  
We could only pray  
Each of us to powers that we could only understand in our own way  
And me  
Yemaya please, please, please, ease, ease, ease  
Easy, easy...steady now... spare us...hear us, crying out to you...  
No more no more no more  
Until she was gone  
Just as strong

That morning I became an aunty mother  
Waiting waiting waiting fighting plotting to evacuate my niece daughter to safety  
And we became mourners  
As in the days ahead  
The region counted its dead  
And named those that would remain unaccounted for  
What's more we became waiters...  
As downed lines limited contact with loved ones  
And we across the waters  
Lived in limbo about whether they were there or had moved on  
On a badly bruised, never beaten Soualiga  
We had to become believers in

And then news of survival came in waves  
First this aunty  
Then that uncle  
Then the cousins in Ebenezer, Dawn Beach, Union Farm  
Friends accounted for in Belvedere,  
Family and friends all over, no cause for alarm yet

Then winged air  
Winair missions  
And they are here  
And we can breathe...again...somewhat  
And some things remain nameless  
When everything changes  
Except us  
Survivors  
Rebuilders  
Soldiers for islands that are always both  
paradise and peril

**Mervyn Morris**

# Forgiveness

O Lord, who can forgive us  
when, stumbling, we fall,  
may we forgive each other  
as you forgive us all.

We know that we can never  
repay our debt to you;  
but there's an intercessor  
who knows the debt is due

yet makes an intervention  
pleading for forgiveness,  
trusting you to understand  
our fretful sinfulness.

O Creditor Eternal  
forgiving all we owe,  
may we reflect your mercy  
in every way we know.

# Paradigm

friends fall away

some die  
some simply  
disappear

and you  
a little sad  
perhaps  
a little guilty

keep on  
moving  
on

# Evening Time

*Do not be anxious about anything.*

Philippians 4:6

soon after dark  
he shuffles to the gate  
with panic button  
padlock  
and the letter box key

then back inside the carport  
clicks another padlock  
on the grille  
tests washroom door  
bathroom door  
and the door into  
a sort of storeroom  
stuffed with boxes  
files and books

then he inspects  
the hasp lock  
on the backyard door  
and shuffles in

clicking the kitchen door  
shut



## A Blessing

When lonesome Pastor Singleton  
requested a companion  
the Lord said, "Claude,  
I have a blessing for you, man,"  
and pointed him towards Dionne.

Was many months before  
the blessing took him on;  
but hopeful Pastor went on wooing ....  
Until she whispered, "Thank you, Lord.  
Thank you, Lord: for Claude."

## Angler

Anancy, angling,  
is luring fish;

casting  
for the chance

to hook one  
on a glance!

# A Thread

Listening to Cecilia Bartoli  
sing Mozart, I remember  
Archie recommended her.

An actor to remember, he  
was riveting as Derek's Afa  
and many decades later  
the perfect radio voice  
delivering Selvon and Naipaul.  
He had some books by them,  
inscribed. He also owned  
at least one Barrington  
and knew a lot of painters  
personally.

He was a friend  
of many artists.

A Poem from the Archives:

Vol. 15, No. 60, Pages 259–261 (June 1976)

**Victor Questel**

## FATHER

Father I remember your sweat seasoning  
the dry earth

fertilising the iron decks  
you scraped with devotion  
in the dead-  
ly sun

swelling the seas  
you have travelled.

Pacing water  
chipping rust;

a boatswain to small island  
sailors  
without pride or purpose.

Now you hobble through simple tasks  
that crack  
your heart.

I can still smell your sweat in the air  
from your weekend's returning  
armed with stories, jokes and complaints  
about the men.

I can smell your distant letters buried  
in the shit of mice, roaches

and  
the stench of your decaying suitcase anchored  
below the bed.

Today  
I confess my love  
for you

though we seldom exchange  
more than nods

a quiet smile over the cricket score

but we know  
and  
acknowledge each other's burden

sharing the occasional outburst of  
anger  
as communion.

Remember  
there was a day you  
quarrelled with mother  
and pulled at the clothes lines  
and uprooted them  
from the waists of trees  
weeping a rage that spelt murder.

2

Father  
talk to my woman  
for I can still untie that  
knot

I too can uproot lines.

She must  
thread my isolation  
carefully

for already she has broken too many promises.

3

Look woman  
the knots in my hair are real

my touch could stab as  
sure as my tongue  
don't try to tell me  
who I am  
for  
there are rages beneath my  
skull  
that only amnesia can  
cool

so don't fool with powers you  
think  
you know.

See father, a man whose  
feet are swollen like  
his pride;

control over self almost gone;

that beautiful wreck is what  
commitment can bring one to

love of home before self

so don't tell me about

faith

one must draw the line somewhere  
or else  
grow old  
and blind for causes that are not  
one's own.

Respect that sailor's shipwreck  
that child marooned off  
his own waters  
is me grown old and almost  
harmless

don't drown him in your tears

honour him  
by your silence  
and silent devotion to a future  
we all share.

**Lawrence Scott**

*From a Family Album—In Memory*

## A Father's Kiss

My old finger tips scoop out nothing now.  
The ivory soap once stirred to a lather  
in this wooden bowl melted away long  
ago. Smooth, I stroke it with my finger,

the natural grain in my dead father's  
old shaving bowl. Yardley's, his one perfume,  
rubbed hard into his stubble, softer,  
with the bristles of his brush stirred to foam;

Father Christmas' beard! His Gillette razor  
pulled through the lather, mowed the stubble,  
whisked it to a soup of hair shavings' suds.  
I read Armitage on the white basin.

It then became a bowl for odds and ends,  
once the creamy, waxy soap had vanished.  
He had scraped away the ivory remnants  
with his sharp penknife. It was ready now

to stand on the wooden-slatted shelves  
of his cedar press, with a tie pin, cuff-  
links, rowing medals, where stacked Aertex shirts,  
khaki pants, hankies lay in khus-khus grass.

It's an empty urn now, this clean soft wood,  
its roundness worked by a lathe on this plinth,  
circled with this groove, covered with this lid.  
It clicks and echoes as I let it drop.

I let it drop again. I pick it up.  
I play with it on my desk, filling it  
with stubs of pencils, erasers, paperclips  
my gold ring. I shake and throw my odds

and ends as dice. What chance have I left  
to resurrect him? The bowl to my face,  
I inhale the fragrance of his good night  
kiss, and my fear of bristles in stubble.

Just here, a murmur. What does it now say?  
Listen: his rough cheek rubbed on my boy's  
soft cheek. "Good night, son." I tried to avoid  
him, running off to bed, with, "Good night, dad."

## Infrared

I kneel to peep through the lowest jalousie  
at where he lies upon the bed, naked leg,  
my father's, under the infrared lamp. I free  
my fingernails to peel the paint away, and, beg

that he does not move. I learn the word  
*urticaria*, the welts upon his skin,  
like nettle rash I know, and have heard  
the doctor, my mother and him whispering.

So, this daily pilgrimage, when no one  
is watching, is to revere the fallen hero,  
the horseman unmounted, a god's son,  
a crucified one in the *Pietà*, aglow.

How do I think of him now, my father,  
having found him, not looking any further?



# Motherland

At three o'clock in the afternoon  
of my childhood, the hot pitch road

burns my feet; the wind kicking up the dust,  
the dry season trash in the sugar cane-fields

taking me home to my mother  
at her siesta.

The soles of my feet are soothed  
by the cold terrazzo tiles;

pink anthuriums in a vase.  
I skid along the polished floor

down the long corridor.  
I have to push and push

against the closed door,  
a gale blowing.

I lie next to her,  
my arm across her breasts

hurting her,  
knocking off her spectacles.

My mother sleeps in her siesta,  
then wakes: *Darling...*

at three in the afternoon  
the wind singing in the sugar cane-fields.

# Remembered Spots

*"dear appropriated spot"*

William Wordsworth

My father whistled his favourite tune,  
*A bicycle made for two*,  
in the morning, opening up our home.

His music was the tinkle of a spoon  
in a glass of Andrews Liver Salts;  
the running water in the bathroom shower.

His smell was of Anchor cigarettes,  
that mix of tobacco smoke and his ablutions  
with Palmolive soap.

There was in his footfall, his limp,  
*Cork foot*, his men on the estate called him,  
a relic of childhood polio.

His boy's voice, from the past,  
trails across the water from  
the coxswain at Shrewsbury,

crouched in the stern  
controlling the rhythm,  
the pull and splash of oars;

a chevron on the River Severn,  
where I, alert,  
fish with this heron.

# That Morning

There was a breathlessness  
at her departure that morning,  
a fearfulness at her absence,

magnolias the colour of her linen.  
So old, her bones had become  
like the handles of her coffin,

her knuckles fixed, clasped,  
marrying her to death;  
she his bride, he her groom

taking off her flesh,  
laying her out.  
The creak runs dry.

The high cypresses  
whisper casuarinas  
in a wavering voice,

a sibilance in the wind.  
Her sheets are quiet now,  
the pillows sunk

into the shape of her head,  
the nape of her neck.  
The room is as she left it

with the odour of her last smell  
from a crumpled hanky  
tucked under the mattress;

a stale perfume of *eau de Cologne*.  
We had to untwine  
the rosary beads from her fingers.

Virginia Archer

## Sunday Mornings with My Father

the woollen carpet of the 70s living room  
the sideboard tight against the wall  
and record player, the 45s in crisp sleeves  
stacked high  
my father, standing middle of the room  
ironing board cradling work-shirts and steam  
he says  
“dance for me Jeannie”  
puts on Elvis, Brenda Lee, Shirley Bassey, Ray Charles  
all the notes hanging on the Sunday air  
and there  
his hands outstretched  
i stand on his feet, as he teaches me  
intricacies of foxtrot, waltz and jive  
my little feet picked up by his  
as we whirl around through the sunlight of the large bay windows  
until we both smell burning  
the iron’s imprint now a reminder of our dance  
and we laugh

music was there too  
when my grandmother died  
her darkened flat filled with bottles and records  
“pick one Jeannie” he said  
a song to carry a memory  
the Jamaican ska, baseline heavy with the islands  
they had both left behind  
i carry that reminder in the beat of every lyric  
i’ve ever met since

i have stood on stages  
the worn wooden boards  
carrying the scuff marks of dances new  
lakonmèt, kwadril, widova  
chak chak and tamboo beating out rhythms my feet followed  
as if born to them  
my father's feet  
always somehow under mine  
like a song of Sunday morning

# Lost Luggage Is Always Beaten Up by the Time You Find It Again

Lost:

Some spare change that the couch swallowed and one grey sock that disappeared between the wash and rinse cycles.

Lost:

My glasses, every thirty minutes, that evaporated from the desk and end up on the bathroom counter.

Lost:

The feel of your thigh under my palm as we drove in the dark, the stars bigger than I'd ever seen them, because love makes everything larger. Until it leaves.

Found:

Pieces of my heart. There's a lot of duct tape and it stutters on some days when it feels cold. But it beats.

Lost:

One dream of home.

Found:

A way to cling to love. Poetry, stories of corny Netflix princesses, my side of the bed.

Lost:

Love.

And I have no more change for the bus

And my palms have never felt colder

And I don't know when there will be star-filled skies

And poetry, where you stay.

## Small Fissures of Light

when my mother says that she doesn't remember  
ever being hugged by her father  
i wonder if she realises that the legacy  
has dropped into the silences between us  
the one cushion over space  
where our quiet sits and builds walls

i don't remember the comfort either  
only the britishness of the era  
of children should be seen and not heard  
that she borrowed from the echo  
between her father's harsh words and the roof of her mouth

i don't remember when i chose to break that silence  
between my enwombed child and me  
but i knew even then  
that my body would cradle the feathers of all her sentences  
gather them  
soft between my teeth  
so they could come out in the laughter  
that would spill between tickles and strong arms  
always soothing  
lightening her wings  
so she could soar away from me

and now i sit  
listening to the distant insistence of all that she is becoming  
breathe  
and know that she will one day remember  
that she was hugged

Patrick Sylvain

## Gaia Africanus

Gaia, how could I mourn something  
I never truly knew? My father  
told me of his delight after drinking  
clear cold water from pristine brooks,  
and how mists hid the Afro-like mountains.

I wish I could reverse time,  
erasing years of unbearable summers  
with brooks and streams drying up—

I'm in mourning, Gaia, for you, my father,  
and my younger son who will never  
see how beautiful you were  
with hibiscus flowers in your hair.

Last night, Gaia, you came  
to my dream again, still wearing  
your burning blue dress.  
You smelled like acerbic ash.

Gagging, you begged me  
to hunt the tie-wearing  
vampires who slowly drained  
your blood through metal straws.

Why me, Gaia? I'm nothing  
but a poet with a foreign tongue  
searching my way like a lost leaf  
drifting against a river's flow.



Unable to speak for yourself,  
you placed your burning index finger  
on my tongue like a eucharist.  
I smelled roses in the morning air.

My father is with you. He is moaning  
the loss of his land—acres filled  
with breadfruit, mango, coconut,  
and orange trees. His tears, like yours,  
are acid rain mixed with uranium ash.

## Amazonia

I'm lost in the world of poetry in search  
of Amazonia's old emerald green heart. Ancient  
arteries forming labyrinths of towering canopies,  
gone. My eyes shocked by a sea of desolation.

The Amazon, once a concerto of life, now moans  
beneath the weight of endless bulldozers,  
and chainsaws hacking and plowing earth's organs  
for tie-wearing tycoons thirsting for progress.

The verdant expanse of arboreal lungs hacked  
by Wall Street maestros conducting a ceaseless  
profit orchestra—ignoring the clean and warm breaths,  
the rustling leaves, the murmurs of unseen creatures,

the natural symphony of life that thrived in the medley  
of hues. They desire mêlées. The splintering of ancient  
worlds, the booming sounds of fracas when grounds  
shake like the crashing derbies that excite the masses.

Nature cannot remain untamed, unbridled, unmolested.  
Molestation is in their DNA sequence. They are bothered  
by the pulse of the rainforest reverberating through earth's  
veins. They are vain, they want gold, they thirst for progress.

The verdant expanse of arboreal lungs is a bother.  
They want black lungs—excited by hacking coughs  
as they wield merciless axes against a natural sanctuary.  
To Wall Street maestros, nature is a bore, unsymphonic.

Biodiversity is too complex. They are against DEI\*.  
The forest's sprawling canvas must be terminated.  
They want grazing cows, they want hamburgers, they want  
a cacophony of buzz saws, a metallic symphony of annihilation.

I'm lost in the world of poetry in search of Amazonia's  
old emerald green heart. The verdant expanse of arboreal  
lungs are a bother. Biodiversity is too complex. The moneyed  
maestros are titillated to the bones by harsh metallic symphonies.

*\*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

## Amazon Villanelle

As the Amazon burns, my love, my words  
choke on the morsels of a world in strife.  
The knife, my love, Bolsonaro is burning logs.

Grab your Stop & Shop bags, the price  
we pay for a rump of beef, my love, we pay  
for melting ice caps and oceans rise.

My love, we dimly shop at Stop & Shop  
for Brazilian beef, nuts, and Amazon soy.  
Amidst the red dancing flames, I vow

to renew our vows to love earth, love life?  
The knife, my love, Bolsonaro is burning logs.  
Drunken spectres are revelling for a world in strife.

My love, the price we pay for a juicy rump,  
and *grande* cups of matcha latte with soy.  
We cheer for more green spaces, our boy

already a naturalist with green thumbs;  
he also loves sinking his teeth into Brazilian meat.  
As the Amazon burns, my love, my words  
choke on the morsels of a starved world.

# Amer Ick KK

(for TB)

America is a pinball machine,  
hungry eyes tracking a silver ball.  
Red, white, and blue Frankenstein lights  
flicker in tunnels.  
Electronic, circus-like music  
screams hypnotically, urging  
higher scores—  
scoring,  
as the round-mouthed clown  
devours every silver coin.

## November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024\_USA

It's fitting, like a cold ricochet of grief,  
I'm here the day the clocks fall back.  
After years of shelter, when I fed you  
the empty promises of a quieter world,  
holding you steady,  
after years of fire and solitude,  
I'm here, staggered, as time retreats.

You are uneasy.  
Your new lover—soft-spoken,  
with knowing almond eyes,  
presses silent keys on a distant piano,  
searching for her voice,  
for freedom beneath hands  
that once promised harmony.  
Today, the clocks fall back.

Fragile on the worn leather couch,  
you try to shift the weight of this day,  
cracking a quiet joke  
that curls into a half-smile—  
a gesture that glances past me,  
past the gathering shadows.  
But the falling leaves won't stay ignored,  
nor the fires sparking in dry, brittle piles.  
The flames burn on,  
and today, darkness comes early  
as the clocks fall back.

We drink, watch the flat screen flicker,  
red and blue numbers climbing,  
falling, dancing like spectres.  
The commentators—  
slick, smug in their crimson ties—  
smirk with the return of the orange magician,  
promising to spin the world backward.  
Promises of walls, of silenced voices,  
of darkness over light.

Your glass clicks on the table,  
the ice trembles but doesn't break.  
I stare up at the white ceiling,  
its blankness blaring,  
and realise how simple it is  
to rewind the clock—  
how easily hands can turn time  
when stained with the past's ash.

# November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024\_USA

Tonight, a peculiar wind prowls the streets,  
restless as my mind, which hungers for sleep,  
yet lingers on the jagged edges of fractured dreams.  
“Look toward the horizon,” you always said,  
“even when it trembles like a distant mirage.”

The puckered lips of the news spit half-truths,  
while the dark waltz of curtains,  
thrust by the wind’s indifferent hands,  
casts shadows like ghosts across my room.  
At two AM, I turn off the TV,  
its drone silenced,  
and reach for Douglass—my refuge.

Smarter than all his former masters,  
he writes with a voice carved from stone,  
each word a clobbering hammer.  
Through unfallen tears, I trace the lines:  
“Power concedes nothing without a demand.  
It never did and it never will.”

Father, one day I will leave this earth  
and seek you in the realm of water—  
but not yet. Tonight,  
the stars fall like splintered light,  
as if the sky itself were unravelling.  
You know I will not run; I will be dragged,  
and the defiant pulse of my heart will beat  
through the engulfing dark horizon that lies ahead.

Nicola Hunte

## In Translation

Over the paling  
The words were flung through the hot afternoon air  
Like missiles.  
“You know dat?”  
All the force in the last word could have been a wet body hitting the pavement.  
No answering volley.  
Perhaps muffled by reluctance  
Or an attempt to mollify.  
“You know dat?”  
A shadow of the former salvo, but still...  
“You understand?”  
Meant to arrest attention,  
Take the listener hostage.  
It did.  
Beyond the intimacy of the paling,  
Collateral damage.  
—You understand?—  
I did,  
At least, I think I did.

I felt myself,  
Translating.  
“Yuh know dat...?”  
*This grievance will not be  
Dismissed.  
Look at what it has brought me to  
Standing in the hot sun  
Quarrelling with you.*

“You understand...!”

*We have been here*

*Before*

*How many times?*

*So many times*

*And I’m tired of this*

*And you.*

“Unfair me...”

“Dig up inside me...”

*Oh God,*

*To have to bear your weight*

*Physical and otherwise*

*And you on top of me*

*Not with me.*

“Alright?”

*Let this be.*

“Alright!”

*Let me be.*

“Alright...”

*Hear me*

*Not just my anger.*



**Kacy Garvey**

## Can We Go Back?

Can we go back?

To before history was written with white hands  
on white pages  
telling white lies about our worth?

Can we go back?

To when history was written with black hands  
in black ink  
traced with black ashes from our phoenix rise?

To a time before parched lips, thirsty for justice  
would chant anthems of  
bodies sold  
worth gold  
history old  
pain told  
memories cold  
but hope bold  
and we have awakened.

Can we go back

before molasses were drawn from more lashes  
before whips tattooed hatred on our sons' backs  
and made their mothers' wombs churn for their deliverance?

Can we go back

to when what lay in the belly of a black woman  
was a powerful prince instead of a political pauper  
or a sad, statistic waiting to fall prey to a world  
unready for the revolution he embodied?

Can we go back to when  
blackmail was love letters sent to a Nubian princess  
black market was where suitors would buy jewels to adorn her  
black magic was the spell she cast with just once glance upon her beauty?

Can we go back to when  
black meant more than...not white  
more than “emancipated slave”  
more than oppression wrapped in passionate, ebony defiance?

But the road to redemption is never easy  
and sometimes the only thing harder than going forward  
is going back.

## São José

December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1794

Portuguese ship leaving the coast of Mozambique

7,000-mile voyage to Maranhão, Brazil.

Names, faces, jobs, talents, goals, skills, ideas, hobbies, friends, families, hopes, dreams

...now slaves

loaded like cattle and sold like chattel

to live, work and die in an unknown land.

The São José.

Buffeted by strong winds, the ship

the São José

rounded the treacherous Cape of Good Hope

and came apart violently on two reefs.

Storms reduced White sailor and Black slave

to mere mortal men

clawing at turbulent, blue water

desperate not to drown.

Only half of them survived the shipwreck that day.  
And there, within two days, they were sold again.  
So this is for you, the slaves of the São José  
who saw through salt-stung eyes  
the rocks that chewed through man and ship  
the struggle of arms too weary to tread water  
and brothers, whether through blood and bondage  
sink and flail to an ocean's grave  
but you survived—for better or for worse—  
and washed upon the shore.  
To see the sun rise  
on dark brown wood and dark brown bodies  
all floating lifelessly on the face of the sea.

This is for you, the slaves of the São José.  
Even with nothing left to lose and nothing known to live for  
something pumped your chest for one more heartbeat  
pushed your arm through one more wave  
pried your mouth open for one more gulp  
of salty, raging air.

Something that whispers  
when the finality of death  
and the waves lapping greedily at your face  
are more choking, more haunting  
than the slavery that lies before you.

Something that sings  
from the lips of faceless descendants  
who see you in their mirror  
in dark brown skin that defied a ravenous sea  
reminding them of the crazed resilience  
the desperation  
the salt-stung eyes and the broken ship  
the children ripped from their parents' arms  
the homes ransacked and friendships betrayed

the chilling ache of a last embrace  
the fear of strange lands and no return  
the whip-cracked backs and the bodies beaten  
the despair of being owned  
and, despite all of that  
still swam  
still fought  
and still carried on to shore.

## Fat Pigeons

Ever notice how, on any given street in Europe  
you'll always find fat pigeons?  
These vagrants  
roadside, power-line squatters  
always seem to be well fed  
and hobble, mockingly ignorant  
with round, taut bellies dragging on the ground.  
Pâtisserie afterthoughts  
scatter in front of a park bench audience  
inciting a crass, avian brawl  
while beggars sit helplessly, homelessly  
looking on.

The pigeons will say it's easy for them to pick up crumbs  
because of beaks built to peck away at food.  
The pigeons will say that beggars can't pick up crumbs  
because their fingers are too thick  
lips too full  
hair too curly  
noses too broad  
skin too dark.  
Beggars are just not built  
for a certain lifestyle of dignity  
and freedom  
and bread.

Mother England  
round and rosy  
from gold and blood pecked from our soil  
with wings fluttering, squawking  
jabbing pointed beaks  
over land that was already governed  
over people that were free  
over bread baked by beggars' hands  
chained to her flagpost.

Mother England  
who sang our patriots to sleep  
with lullabies that were full of lies  
gave us building blocks and trading blocs to play with  
and nursed us into lofty political paradigms  
only wings could reach.

So when crumbs stop falling from idle park benches  
when European Unity turns stale  
and faces, pale  
no longer sing of home and glory  
Mother England, like fat pigeons  
will simply fly away  
and leave us beggars  
plucking helplessly at crumbs  
and hoping for bread.

# Memories

Long, lazy lunches  
months and years of moments and memories  
rising with the steam from curry chicken  
and white rice and “food”  
since yuh never fly back fi eat nutten but boil dumplin and yam.  
Your locs  
thick, loose, free-born  
groomed on rainwater and sunlight  
tucked under your favourite tam  
while mine, stretched from crochet needles and wrapped tight in a bun  
show the relative realms of our corporate worlds.  
Topics ebb and flow through the palate of identities we walk through  
of church  
of God  
of how the two don’t always intersect  
of relationships  
of classism and social politics  
of being in Jamaica, but not of it  
in the strange way that homeless-less-ness creates  
when you leave bits of your heart in too many places you can’t visit or live in again.

Memories lounge on a tilted passenger seat  
during a parked-car therapy session  
outside your sister’s house in Vineyard Town  
after another night of embracing the italism and natural mystic  
the art and vibes and flow  
that traditional church spaces never held in their wineskins  
sitting shoulder to shoulder  
like soldiers in the barracks  
suddenly engulfed and ambushed  
silently braving the new age spiritualism that started summoning ancestors  
during what should have been a simple poetry show.

Memories of you  
stronger than I  
seeing the torn garter and the pulled hem  
the stained lace and loose thread  
under the bride's frock  
and choosing to stay and serve when my patience wore thin  
and how we still "kept the link"  
even though Sunday mornings  
would no longer see us together.

Memories chew, savour, swallow  
another bite of curry chicken  
that tastes as warm and as mellow  
as a good medz  
and a clean heart.  
Missing you my friend,  
missing you....

# Hope Gardens

Moonlight whispers of war.  
Slashed backs sheath plans of ambush  
leaves drop on secret strategy covered by bamboo and courage.

The brothers have assembled.

Dawn will roar fire and spear  
of knives and grass  
blades drunk with anger and dew.  
Gunpowder clouds great house  
floods fields with screams that do not see skin.

Justice fights  
but Hope plants language under tongue  
adópé, nyame, obia  
jukka, dokono, mbakára  
Hope carves name into memory  
Hope harvests beauty from cane-row  
bantu knots and dreadlocks.  
Hope sews calico over curved hips  
and anoints curls and coils with castor oil.

Massa can see torches burn  
but him cyaa see roots grow  
cyaa see riverwater flow from belly bottom  
cyaa see mountains kiss sky til dem turn blue  
bloom  
Jablum.  
Steam escape coffee estate  
faster than Quackie run lef him shirt.



Massa hear when chain clank  
but cyaa hear records break  
cyaa hear wi turn metal to medal  
how wi change auction block to Olympic stock  
when neck hang low with shackles  
but rise with ribbon and gold.

Massa mek whip fling  
but lip sing.  
Sting.  
Sumfest.  
Sunsplash.  
Lyrics stretch history over tenterhooks  
taught tender books  
from wombs awakened from silence.

Massa mek blood flow from brown skin into brown earth  
but red dirt creates wealth that does not summon bones  
factory to foil  
seeds to soil  
trees that stand taller than man  
the way time longer than rope.

Hope cultivate  
irrigate  
pollinate  
marinate.

Hope gardens.  
Hope sings one last Sankey that calls all of us home.

**Amílcar Peter Sanatan**

## Dead Names

Port-of-Spain	this city is no port of spain & spaniards
Beetham	i've only known governors of dew
Lady Young	could colonialism spew romance?
Picton	deserving of books and libraries about capture
Nelson	since i'm not in the business of admiring admirals
George, Charlotte, Henry	scrub every monarch on this island's tongue

# Unnaming Beetham

make this the last  
colonial governor's fixity  
in place

last of its kind

from the country

that dug holes

for our bones

for gravediggers

after breaking

seasons

loves

languages

in the brokenness

we made our own

is it facetious to think

we could have it

any other way?

sweet tea

in chipped cups

dwelling in home cupboards

dark insides

polyvocal histories of

cracked plates

it's strange

how names have

all that space

highways

and estates

signs that fall

into our own hands

# A Decolonial World of Poetry & Prose

for colonisers so loved their colonies

they painted churches white  
and their heavens

erected poles for us to dream  
of flags, not lands

carved hills for forts  
named and renamed forts after battle victors

beatified abolitionists, we *must* be thankful  
for their benevolence

while the Ministry of Education debates  
[African] hair in school policy

and O'Level students read a world  
of pommecythere & hurricanes  
but grow to gag colonial countrysides & sonnets  
in BIPOC/minority/diversity publishing

like the calypsonians' whose jackets and sobriquets  
could not alleviate days ketchin

dey ass to be somebody on this island  
is best i stay out of any Great House & Tradition

**Linda M. Deane**

## To a Palestinian Poet Who Berates

To you, a Palestinian poet who berates,  
I try to walk a mile in your poems,  
to read the world in your shoes, feel  
your fear as though transplanted  
from the shifting soil that is Barbados  
into your own strip of turmoil,  
oceans away.

I pore over diaries, words; raw  
outpouring of what it is like for you,  
your children and families.  
And too many others like you, what you be doing  
while bombs rain down like...well, rain.

Poet, I carry your world with me  
into classrooms, read the stories  
to children who, after they've got through  
scraping their chairs and my nerves, listen—  
they really do. They want to know  
this is going on right now, ma'am? And yes, I saw it  
on the news pun my cell phone and you know, ma'am,  
all this in the Bible, it now coming true is all and I can't imagine  
living where bombs falling and this tiny Buhbayduss  
couldn't survive that, could barely stan' hurricane.  
Others just listen and their understanding and lack of  
understanding is like a next bombardment, fleeing, a flight  
of thought and words.

Sometimes there is nothing to say or write or do, is there?  
Sometimes all you can do is feel.  
Poet, I signed a petition for you.  
Safe route for your family and you to the US,  
to sanctuary. And you get through. Give thanks,

you get through! I am pleased but not about being told off:  
you wanting to know where our words, our poems are!  
I call myself poet, like you, but sometimes, words scatter,  
take flight, run for cover, shelter in place, waiting.

Apartheid I have yet to write about, Rwanda, the Sudan,  
Haiti, Middle Passage, George Floyd, and me, too. Waiting  
for word on reparations. Are you any less of a poet  
because I do not hear from you  
on these things?

A third-former says all she recalls of our sessions together  
is an entry from a diary about a man and his sister fleeing  
bombardment, safe house to safe house in Gaza, backpacks  
with only the essentials—money, cell phones, chargers,  
a bit of food and water, change of clothes, maybe—and, wait for it,  
two cats! In crates. Two terrified pet owners running, without knowing  
for sure, for shelter.

A child an ocean away  
where we dodge hurricanes,  
not bombs, remembers this.

Poet from Palestine who berates, I must tell her when I can that they gained more cats  
and lost some, last I heard. That the diaries have ceased though the war goes on.

I have not written until this, until now, but these thoughts as words, and therefore deeds,  
are for and with you, and another of your poets since killed, and the little girl aged six,  
trapped in a car under fire, and the aid workers mistaken for the enemy, and the refugees  
in schools and hospitals turned burial grounds. For all the children, everywhere, starving.

Poet, have I planted a seed, a star that can do more than this poem? Brought one  
glimmering speck, a firefly lighting up the dark across oceans, while man and Mother  
Nature do their worst on either side?

## What? How?

Did they tick the box marked “Home” for “lay me  
beneath blue sky on forever overcrowded rock”?  
Or did they tick the one marked “Away” for  
“bury me where any old sky finds me”?

What were they thinking when they signed here.  
And here. Lef’ one mudda behind, set sail  
for the next one’s swatch of greys, tuh mek it home  
when they can, over four decades or so?

How was it, without fail, they stamped and sent  
airmail letter, crate, barrel, postal order?  
Holding two sets of lives together. One  
pun de rock, the next in a hard place. How

“away” does mash-up into “home” after  
all de ticking? How return come like exile?

# Return to Me: Eccentric Outlier Chants for Reparations

Give me back my maiden name  
and words for wonders that were mine:  
bearded fig, sacred silk, forest, chalky mount and gully.  
Let mine ancient baobab be, seed spanning  
a sky of sea. Give me back mine own,  
my name, my nyam.

Return to me my coral reefs,  
limestone sweet with noises, secrets traded  
in her dreams, wading deep in otherworlds  
and other tongues  
she's been. Feel her rhythm in the winds,  
how she sings clear of the shore of sargassum.  
Be not afeared, be not afeared.

Give me back my red clay soil,  
my virgin state before the trafficked goods  
and chattel, great house, hut, cut stone, wood  
and concrete jungle,  
give me before the cane arrowed  
and mills overran like giants tilting  
at the sweating, the sweating sun.

Take back your plantation yard,  
your hell-plantation-nigger-yard,  
with its bodies, blood, buried, and the bawling tamarind.  
But leave the tree, its fruit, the flesh. The tongue tie-up  
but the seed is just a seed to suck clean—  
is not, is not a haunting.

Take back your twisted plot,  
your subdivided fields and hills and tenancies,  
your terrace, heights, lows christened for massa and the massacre  
and the long-remembered ones that once roamed,



put down root and were uprooted—  
my offspring, offshooting.

But let me  
Not mis-chant....

I dig, I do  
the deep dive,  
the archaeological find,  
the archive of fragment, bead, comb.  
Ceramic pot, mine history in layers, the overlap  
I like, admire, want, desire, alas I fear,  
I dig there can be no mosaic, no me  
without the broken pieces,  
without the shards,  
the sharp end  
of the stick,  
the whip,  
the crack—  
crick....

But still....

Give me back this rim of earth  
before the first spill of blood, return me  
to my unsettled self, as I was found, return to me  
silence born not of fear or of haunting,  
nor to keep the next ones safe or in the dark,  
but to keep them, just to keep them....

Repair to me my stolen goods:  
my Self, a dreaming stone,  
continent coralled to a crowded dot, outlier  
in an arc of sisters rousing from sleep—repair me  
to the rem of possibilities  
and not back, not back into nightmare

and,

I swear,  
I will reset  
the run of days,  
the seasons 'til nighttime catch.  
Give me back the centuries, the single shot  
to get it right, rewrite the bold experiment, all you  
damn arrivants, a do-over, a chance  
to fail better this time, fire  
better, next time...  
not to crack,  
to crick

until....

I chant  
my dreaming self awake. Remember me:  
my forest, red clay, gully, gleaming teeth, remember me,  
my caves slick with the drip-drip, the trick-  
trickle down of ages,

remember, remember me,

the name  
they say was mine,  
is mine.

Ichirouganaim, Ichirouganaim  
And what came  
Before the name  
And what lies  
Beyond the name?  
Ichirouganaim, Ichirouganaim?  
Los Barbados  
To be Barbados  
Or Barbadosed  
Wuhloss, Buhaybaduss!

Little Englanded  
Bimmed, shired  
Wuh de 114, muh 246?  
What de history books seh?  
What fake fact Google an' de Chatbot seh?  
Eccentric outlier at the edge of an arc—  
first & last port of call to & from the Motherland?  
What came before and what lies beyond

Ichirouganaim?

My name. My nyam.

I am.

I am.

**Earl McKenzie**

## Silent Songs

I joined the carolling in the museum,  
And sang with my hosts  
As we sat on the carpeted floor  
Under the giant totem poles.

I wondered what dialogue there could be  
Between these songs, mostly from Europe,  
And the mighty and silent creations  
Of these ancient peoples.

I had read of one of them,  
Now nicknamed an “Indian”,  
Who had challenged a preaching missionary,  
And insisted that there was no way that this Jesus he was talking about  
Could have been a white man like him;  
He surely was a Cherokee or Navajo,  
Or some other native of Abya Yala,  
Their name for their land.

And I remember now, a painting by Georgia O’Keeffe  
Of a church in New Mexico,  
Built in the adobe pueblo style of architecture  
And with a cross on it.

I wondered what this Jewish genius,  
Member of another ancient, subordinated and invaded people,  
And of whose birth we were singing,  
Would say to these massive but silent presences  
Hovering behind us,  
With their own silent songs,  
Sung only in these images of power.

# The Dinner Boy

A loved errand  
was, on some evenings,  
taking portions of my mother's dinners,  
in a white carrier,  
to my grandmother and my aunt;  
and after enjoying offerings of their dinners,  
—now a total of three under my belt—  
taking their reciprocated dinners  
back to my mother and father.

I remember some of those dinners:  
my mother's red pea soup with smoked pork,  
yellow yam and cocos;  
green gungo peas during the Christmas season,  
cooked down in a coconut sauce with saltfish, tomatoes and  
boiled green bananas,  
or turned cornmeal with cow peas, okra, onions  
and tomatoes.

My grandmother's pepperpot soup with calalu,  
the heart of tender dasheen leaves,  
turnips, carrots and dumplings;  
and my aunt's pineapple chicken Chinese style,  
with rice and peas.

Since persons elsewhere seldom recognised them,  
I realise now that some of my mother's meals  
were her own creations,  
as inventive as her artistic embroidery  
on our pillowcases, placemats, tablecloths and curtains;  
the hats, handbags and belts she made from straw for sale,  
along with the clothes she designed and made on her sewing machine,  
and which,  
like the dinners that came from her hands,  
I carried to recipients in the village,  
who happily welcomed me  
as the carrier of my mother's good tidings.

# Black Cross

Through the car window,  
A towering black cross  
Threatened us.

A predecessor  
Of gallows, electric chairs and lethal injections,  
It was once an instrument of imperial power.

It now proclaimed the price its famous victim paid  
on the roofs of churches,  
And was worn by his followers as pendants on chains  
around their necks;  
It has inspired thousands of paintings and hymns.

But I quickly realised  
I was really seeing a light post  
Silhouetted against the morning sun.

An object of another kind of power.

# Of Animal Bondage

I idly turned on the TV  
And saw them taking horses  
To the starting gate.

A mare refused to go in:  
You can take a horse to the racing track,  
But you cannot make her run.

The announcer was getting impatient;  
The stands and betting shops were full  
Of punsters eager to transfer the money of the losers  
To their own pockets.

But the mare did not want to be spurred and whipped,  
And fiercely ridden to the possibility  
Of serious injury or death;  
So, she refused to go in.

When the pushing, coaxing and threatening failed,  
The race began.

And the cameras followed it,  
Not her lonely and ignominious return  
To the silent stables.

Such losers and delinquents, I had read,  
Could end up as dog food or glue.

I wondered if she could hear  
The noises celebrating the winner  
At the finishing post.

# The Wounds of Parents

*"...he should approach the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father..."*

Edmund Burke

After studies overseas in a green and pleasant Canadian city,  
At a university whose motto is "It is up to you",  
Against my mother's advice,  
But to honour my agreement with my homeland,  
I set off on a journey home.

The plane was nearly empty:  
After the civil war  
No five flights daily in this direction.

No one welcomed me back,  
For all saw it as an imprudent decision;  
I was on my way to understanding Walcott's dictum:  
There can be homecoming without home.

There had been an election,  
But there were still gunshots in the night.  
Frequent power cuts made me long for  
Kerosene lamps and moonlit nights.  
Unscheduled water lock-offs  
Shamed the little dripping spring in my district  
That no one had ever seen go dry.  
Waiting for hours for the disordered arrival of minibuses  
Made me remember the control I had felt  
Riding my bicycle to school in the hills.

I saw my aunt's shop,  
The main enterprise of her life,  
Now in smoke-stained ruins,  
After the political arsonists  
Had also destroyed its name that I had painted on it  
At my godmother's request,  
In my eager schoolboy's artistic triumph.



I heard an echo of the island's pain  
In the screams of a pig being slaughtered on the ground;  
Security guards with giant dogs  
—I had not noticed them much before—  
Were now everywhere, including in front of ice cream stores  
And supermarkets where angry shoppers prowled.  
And I heard a man joke loudly  
That the island was now a den of thieves,  
Including him.  
There was a new suspicion in people's eyes  
As they peered at me trying to detect my politics;  
And on discovering that I was a returnee  
Pressed me for American dollars.  
I overheard students exchanging chilling tales  
Of their time of terror and dread.

When my used car broke down,  
Men sitting in front of a shop refused to help;  
I had grown up with the tradition  
My father's cooperative morning works  
And corn-shellings at our home,  
First urged, the historians say,  
By Baptist preachers at the new beginning,  
The end of slavery.  
So I felt I did not know these new people at all.

I had left hearing reggae gold on the radio;  
Returned to the hot bronze of violent  
And hedonistic dancehall.

The Big Political Stirring Up  
Had brought the dregs of history  
Floating to the brim and overflowing;  
The bad duppies had been let out of the island's Pandora's Box  
And could not be put back in.

I soon came to find  
That there was no place here  
For a scholar of my kind.

And yet against all the logic I was taught  
I stayed in the country ranked  
The second most fled in the world.

The answers are more varied  
Than the light of the sun shining fiercely on the grassy patch  
That survives the decayed house in the hills in which I was born;  
And could be etched on a bit of Taino pottery,  
Carved on a slave's calabash,  
Or written in water on the wattle-and-daub walls  
Of a peasant's hut.

But most of all I stayed hoping for some balm  
For the wounds of my parents  
And country.

**A Short Story from the Archives:**

Vol. 10, No. 38, Pages 78-88 (January–June 1964)

*Austin Clarke*

# Early, Early, Early One Morning

**Suddenly, I could hear my mother's voice bombarding the small room in which I slept. "Get up get up get up! boy, you too lazy! you think the morning waiting on you? get up and get! the sun almost half-way up in the sky, and you in there still sleeping? This is Easter Morning! blessid Easter. The Lord rise-up outta Hell long long time, so you get up, too!... and don't forget to clean out the pig pens and the sheep pens. 'Cause yesterday morning you didn' clean the pig pens proper, and you left back all my precious milk inside them sheep breasts. Come, boy! half the morning gone already! So get up!"**

She had hardly taken a breath in all this time. I listened to the beautiful mountains and valleys of her surging voice, and laughed inside my heart. I was already awake. I had been awake for about three hours. I could not sleep. I could smell the fresh delicious smells seeping under my door from the kitchen: the roasted pork, the great cakes, the fruit cakes, the sponges, the bananas, the golden apples, the rum and the sweet drinks and the new coats of varnish and polish on all the furniture in the house. This was Easter in our house. Everything was cleansed. Even the pig pens were given a clean white resurrection coat of freshness; and the front of the house was sprinkled with white marl. Everything was new, was clean, was virginal. My new clothes had been bought months before; and my mother had pressed them many times over, and had hooked them on a hanger on to a nail, high in the ceiling of her bedroom—where they could be seen, but not touched. Every chance I got, I would watch them: the seams in the short grey-flannel trousers, keener than a new Gillette, the sea-island cotton shirt pressed without a wrinkle or blemish and, rich and creamy as milk from our sheep; my cork hat, white as snow, (although no one in our Village knew what snow was, except having seen pictures of it in a book; or in the foreign Christmas cards which trickled into the Village from Overseas), and stiff as a dead man with Blanco; and my shoes like two mounds of black pitch, and shining, Lord Lord Lord! like nobody's business. And the tie. My mother never trusted her fingers to tie my tie: and she never trusted mine either. So, I always wore ties, ready-tied, with an elastic band around my neck. All my ties had a savage stripe in them. This was my Easter outfit: new and clean from my underwear out.

I would be wearing it to church this morning, at five o'clock. This was to be my first day as a choir boy in the Cathedral. No achievement of mine, in my eight years, had made so great an effect on my mother! Not even when, at seven, I had successfully fought off five girls, all sisters, with a thick piece of sugar cane. Not even when I won the long-distance race at the church outing. Not even when she and my step-father came home tired as dogs one afternoon, to find that I had cooked a meal for them—a meal which I wanted to stand out as a single landmark; but which they interpreted as a boast, with the result that I was cooking their meals, every afternoon since then.

“Jesuschrist, boy! You heard me say morning here? Well, get up!” And then I heard her opening the window of her bedroom, and talking to the darkness outside. “Lavignia! Lavignia? You sleeping, too? What time that clock o’yourn saying, darling? This blasted boychild I have in here still sleeping, thinking that the morning waiting ’pon him...the sun all up in the skies already! What time it saying? Thanks.” And she closed the window with a bang, and suddenly, I could hear Lavignia’s voice no more. And the barking of the dogs stopped: and the cackling of the hens ceased, as if someone had shot them dead.

I searched around in the semi-darkness for my clothes. I put on the ragged cap, now too old for me to remember its original colour and shape. Next, the shirt, patched expertly in many places and looking like the quilted robe of Joseph; and then, the trousers, my step-father’s, which my mother forgot to reduce to fit me, and which wobbled about my legs like a school girl’s bloomers. And then I rolled the crocus bag and the straw mattress from the floor, took them under my arms, and went into the Yard to hand them over to the sun, to dry. I had wet my bed again. But she found it out, nevertheless. “Pissing pissing pissing! Looka boy, you don’t know you too old for that? You not shamed?” I was glad it was only three o’clock in the morning; that none of the girls in the Village was awake; that nobody could hear her reproaching me for this normal behaviour. And there must have been something about this morning, this Easter morning, which held her silent, in crippled awe. For she did not strike me with the back-hand slap which she had perfected with such speed and accuracy, that it landed always, in the same fat spot of my face.

Again, the pigs and the sheep were on my mother’s side: they had filled the pens with mountains of their droppings. And all the time I cleaned the pens, and washed the pigs, I wondered if it was like this in Bethlehem in that stable where Christ was born; if that stable smelled half as dirty as this; and whether God had purposely made that the birthplace of Our Saviour, to remind Him always to be humble. Or whether it was to give him an inferiority complex. And I was glad that I was not born in a stable. The pigs smelled evil. And after the pigs, the sheep. Rank rank rank sheep, whose perfume would take a soap-factory of scrubbing to wipe off. And then I began to think of my first

day in the Cathedral Choir. This morning, when Christ was supposed to have come out of the grave somewhere in a country so far from my little Village, I was going to walk up the aisle of the beautiful church to the sacred chancel, and send my prancing voice all over the church in a solo, in praise of Easter. And all the boys in the choir would envy me. Particularly Henry, who was only my substitute.

“Them pigs clean yet? You ’tend to the sheeps? Yesterday morning the sheeps had my milk lef’ back inside their bubbies! And you forget to sweep-up the Yard. Boy! You think you is a man, becausing you is this big Cathedral Choir-boy! But lemme tell you something. Your backside ain’ so mannish that I can’t give you a proper tarring this bright blessed Easter morning, yuh!” I could feel the sting of the whip in the threat of her voice. And I knew she meant it. I hurried through my work, making sure that my eagerness to wear the rich linen ruff, the crimson cassock and the pearly white surplice did not cause me to be inefficient. The sun pretended it was going to come up above the tops of the sugar canes. But when I stood and waited for it, it changed its mind, and continued to give a golden glow over the entire Village. My work done, I bounded into the house.

“You don’t intend to bathe? You intends to go in the people’ church smelling like a pig pen? Looka, boy, get outta my eyesight and go to the Stand Pipe and get a clean bucket o’ water and cleanse yourself with, hear?” Who could argue with a woman like this? Who would dare?

Across the pitchlake of the road, the canes were grumbling, and shaking their fists in my face. I imagined monsters coming out of them. Only last week, a boy had been beaten up by the Man in the canes. And as my head was swollen with monsters coming at me, I heard a rustling in the canes, and I dropped the bucket. And when I stopped running, I was beside our paling. My dog, Rover, came panting at my side. Again, he had frightened me. And I wanted to kick his head. But I only looked at him; and was very glad he could not talk. Holding on to his collar, I went back across the road to recapture my bucket, and get the water. A few malicious windows with heads and lights in them, were open. And I walked in the shadow of the canes this time—my dog was my guardian angel now!—so they would not see me.

“I thought you wasn’t coming back!” my mother said. “Is four o’clock. You not riding that bicycle outta this house today, bright Easter morning. You walking to church. ’Cause I slaved

and slaved on them clothes o’yourn and no damn bicycle seat and bicycle spoke’ going to mash-up my labours, you hear me?” And so, it meant walking two miles, two miles of canes, two miles of Men in the canes. In all that distance, I would pass only two houses, until I approached the Square in which the Cathedral was built. I would pass only two street lamps, which seemed to have been burning since the day the Island

was discovered, and which were never repaired, and which seemed ready to go out. I would be alone all that time, all that terrible distance, with only the brightly lit church in my heart, and the rich beautiful music in my ears. *You not riding that bicycle outta this house today.* No passenger buses ran in my part of the Island on Easter morning. At least, not at five o'clock in the morning. And the Villagers were so poor, that only one family was rich enough to own a broken-down car. But since that family was not a Christian-minded family, I could not hope for a lift to church. I was the only one in my Village who belonged to a big church, who belonged to the Church of England. My mother, who was brought up in that church, had recently started to attend the Church of the Nazarene, because she felt its services were more like a part of life: were more emotional, more exciting, more tragic and more happy—something like that holy day when “those mens gather’ up in a room in the upstairs part of somebody house, and talk’ and talk’, Lord! in so many diff’rent kinds o’ language’ and dialects, that you wouldda think the world coming to a’ end!” There, she could stand up in her large congregation and open her heart to God and to them, and tell the world that yesterday, God step’ in, and Satan step’ out, Amen! and she was brought through pretty and nice. There, she could testify how God helped her, when she didn’ know how the hell the day would end up. There, she could clap her hands, and stamp her feet till the floorboards creaked, and she could jump up in the air and praise God. And for all that, feel as if God was really listening. But in the Church of England, she was regimented to a sit-and-stand exercise of dull droning religious drilling. And she always complained that she did not understand *one word* of the Word the minister was preaching. He used words that simple common, poor people like my mother, could not understand—as if there was some conspiracy with the Word of God. And never, never, had anyone stood up in the Church of England and said, “Amen!” to God. It was such a strange church to her!

My mother then began the careful ceremony of dressing me. My hair was ripped by the comb, which this morning seemed too fine to plough the tough roots of my rebellious head. And each time the plough stuck, my mother cursed and said she didn’t understand why the hell I couldn’t have good decent black people hair like everybody else. After the combing came the greasing. My hair would shine like the stars in the heavens. Then the powder under my arms, and the Bay Rum to make me smell “nice and proper.” And the new silk vest with the price tag still on it. And then the underwear. And all these things she herself dressed me in, suspicious always, that I would destroy them. At eight years of age, she did not think I was fit to dress myself on an Easter morning to venture into the powerful Church of England’s God. On went the three-quarter grey stockings, with a rim of blue and black. When I reached under the bed for my shoes, I heard her warning voice in my ears: “No no no no! You not mashing-up them shoes! You putting on them shoes, *last* thing! I want them shoes to return inside my house without *one* bruise, you hear? Things too damn expensive these days, boy!

And if I see a mark on them, well, God help you, hear?” And she meant it! I had suffered because of this, before. And all I had been guilty of, was that I had walked in a pair of new shoes, and a pebble had scratched the tip of one. But she had examined the soles of the shoes, and had decided that I had not walked in them “proper”, that I had walked too much on the right side of the heels. This time, she would take no chances.

My shirt was the next piece of vestments in this ceremonial robing. I was made to stand like a piece of wallaba tree-trunk, not breathing, while she put my arms through the shirt, and buttoned every button herself. I could smell the richness of the cotton, and feel its warmth on my washed body. The ready-tied tie went on next, and then the trousers. Carefully, I put one leg through, and then the other, making sure not to touch the trousers themselves. She pushed the shirt gently into my trousers, and snapped the belt. Only my shoes remained! But I knew what to expect. For weeks she had made me drill about in the house, walking on old newspapers so that the soles would not be soiled, stretching the shoes which she always bought too small. I could never understand why. And even although she insisted that my feet were too big, that “big shoes don’t look nice ’pon a little boy’ foot”, I could not really imagine that my mother would purposely force me into these undersized shoes, just for the sake of this belief.

But I inhaled deeply. I rested my hand on her shoulder as she commanded me, balanced myself on one leg, and got ready for the punishment and the torture. The shoe was too small. But that was not the point. It looked neat. My toes went in. I could feel a savage sting against my instep. My heel suddenly became as long as a cucumber, and it refused to go in. And as I touched the back of the shoe to see what could happen, my mother shrieked: “Good God, boy! Don’t step on the back o’ the shoe! You want to throw my money down the drain? You mashing it up. And suppose I have to take them back!” But I knew she would never take them back. Intransigence would never permit her pride to allow me to take them even to the Shoemaker across the road for a stretching. I would have to make my feet get smaller. Not the shoes stretch bigger! “Come come! Eat this little food.” I pulled a chair out from the table, and was preparing to sit, when I heard her voice again. “Good Jesus Christ! Boy, I didn’t tell you to sit down and eat! Not in them trousers what I slaved and slaved so hard over, to press and make look nice for you, like if you is somebody decent! Stand up! Stand up and eat. It can’t kill you!”

And so, I had to stand up and eat the *little food*: about two pints of green tea, warm and thick and rich with sheep’s milk; a loaf of bread as big as a house, and a wedge of roast pork, enough for two people; and a banana. My mother believed in bananas. They “make your skin nice and smooth”, she would say. I could soon feel the heavy load in my belly; and I felt good. I would wear any shoe now. Even a size Seven, instead of a Nine. “Come come!” she said. “Belch! Belch! You belch good and proper’, while you

home. 'Cause I don't want to hear that you belch-out in public, in the people' church, or in the street, like if you don't have no manners, hear?" And I granted her her belch. A smothered, respectable belch, which although it did not quite satisfy her, yet it made her say nothing, since it was some assurance that I had already belched at home.

Now, the shoes! My hand was resting on her fat shoulders. I was balancing all my weight on my left foot. My right foot was said to be slightly larger than my left foot—although she never told me why. I knew the shoe would never fit. But I was not such a fool as to tell her so. "Put your weight on your instep, boy, do! Don't put all your weight on the whole shoe, 'cause the shoe won't go on, then!" Exasperated, she grabbed my foot, and forced it into the pincers of the shoe, while I remained silent, and in agony, "Hold there! Don't you move!" she commanded. And she left me. Coming back with the large pot spoon which we used as a shoe horn, she said, "Push! Push hard! Don't mash-down the instep. Push hard boy, like you have life!" The more I pushed, the smaller the shoe became. My face changed from black to blue to purple. Still, my judgement warned me not to comment on my pain, and certainly not on the smallness of the shoe. She would never believe. "Push! You pushing? Or you standing up there with your face like some ram goat?" At last, through some miracle, the foot went in. Never to come out again! Lord have mercy, I prayed in my heart, as the pain was already whizzing through my body. When the other shoe was rammed on, I was sweating. The perspiration stuck my sea-Island cotton shirt to my back. And she noticed it, and wanted to know why I was sweating. "You intends to sweat-up this clean shirt I just put on your back, boy?" I tried to stop sweating, tried hard, as if to stop it, I had only to turn off a faucet. "Walk off! Walk off, and lemme see how the shoes look on your foot, boy!" I held my breath, pushed my chest out, and asked God for strength. The shoes crucified me. I would never be able to walk on the smooth marble in the Cathedral. But I wanted to be at church this Easter morning. This was *my* Easter morning; and a simple thing like a biting shoe was not going to stop me.

"Okay! You ready now," she proclaimed. And she dusted my handkerchief with some perfume, tucked it into my shirt breast pocket and secured it with a gold-coloured small safety pin. "Now, turn 'round, and let me see you. Christ! Boy, you look real good! You look just like the white man at the Plantation' son. Just like a little doctor. Now, I want you to grow up fast fast, and be a doctor, hear?" And I knew that if I did not answer, she would want to know why. "Yes," I said, wishing that I was already grown-up, and was thousands of miles from there. She looked at me again and again, and then she took me into her bedroom, and showed me my reflection in the life-sized looking glass. Back in the living room, the white, sparkling-white Blanco-cleaned cork hat, with its green undersides to field the driving rays of the sun, was clamped on my head. I was now ready for the Easter world!



“Since you not riding that bicycle outta here this blessid Easter morning, I going to give you twelve cent’, to put in your pocket. Now, walk down. I want you to look fresh when you enter that Cathedral church, so that when people look at you, they could know you is somebody’ child. Now, seeing that it is Easter, and you have friends, you must buy a penny in sweets...no, you hads better buy losengers to make your breath smell nice, and a pack o’ sweeties... Every child like sweeties. And you ain’ no damn diff’runt. And keep the rest for bus fare *back* home. You could afford to climb in a crowded bus, *after* church. It don’t matter then, if your trousers crease-up a trifle. Now come back inside this house, looking tidy. Not as if you went through a pig’ mouth. You hear’ me?” She put the twelve-cent piece into my hand, as if it was the last part of her inheritance, which I was to cherish for the rest of my life. I looked up at her, so large, so beautiful, so lovely and so black—a mysterious African Queen—with her hair braided neatly and long; with her white dress clutching the feminine twists and turns of her full body. She looked down at me, and she looked into my thoughts; and she smiled. She drew me close, close to her breast and her rolling soft stomach where I could feel the love and the blood pumping through her body. And she kissed me on each cheek, and said, with a voice that came from the depth of Africa: “I praise God that I didn’ throw you in a blasted dry-well when your father left me pregnant with you, in this terribul world, with not even a half-cent to buy milk with! Lord bless yuh, son. You is mine, and I proud o’ you!”

I was ready to go now. Outside, the morning was glorious. The sun had eventually decided to come up. And I could see its rays setting the tops of the canes on fire with a golden flame. The birds were scavenging for food. And the dogs and the chickens and the small children were quarrelling for their breakfast. My breakfast felt good and heavy and safe in my insides. “When you go ’cross the road, and you see Jonesy, say Goodmorning. Say Goodmorning to Stella. And to Lavignia. I going call Lavignia now, and let her see how you look.” And she moved away from me, and went into her bedroom, and called out for Lavignia.

“Why you don’t let me say my prayers to God, in peace, this blessid morning, eh, Mistress Carlton? I here bendding down on my knees before God asking Him who the hell he going send to lend me a shilling to buy milk with this Easter morning.”

“He coming out now,” my mother said, with pride.

“Who? God?”

“The bridegroom coming. Come outside, and see how he look’.”

And Lavignia, apparently convinced that her prayers would be in vain, left her spiritual complaining, and came out in front of her house to see me, *dressed like a little doctor*.

“Oh Christ, Mistress Carlton! this boychild o’ yourn look first-class! like something to eat! Boy, you should be grateful you got such a nice mother. I hopes, to-Christ, you don’t intend to forget her when you come to be a man, eh? ’Cause, if so, the birds o’ vengeance pick-out your blasted eyes!”

And I had to answer Lavignia with as much respect as I would have answered my mother, and say, “No, please, Miss Lavignia, I won’t never forget my mother.”

“Good!” she said, and adjusted my tie although it was already adjusted properly. “Now, you go on down in the name o’ the Lord, and sing that solo like if you is a born angel. Mistress Carlton!...but wait!...you give this boy some fresh crispy biscuits to help out with his voice? Biscuits good for the voice. If you don’t have fresh ones, I have some. Come, boy, these biscuits does do wonders for your voice. Eat them whilst you singing, and the people in that Cathedral-church going think you is Michael the Archangel.”

I took the biscuits and munched on them all the way down the road with the canes bordering it, mumbling mumbling, trying to take my mind off the torment of the shoes, and the threat of the canes. But the canes moaned, and the shoes burned. I walked in the middle of the creaking road, forcing my mind from my present predicament, and focusing it on the musty-smelling Changing Room in the loft of the Cathedral. I could see the ruffs, sparkling white. I could smell the starch in them. And they were ironed so many times by Henry’s mother, that they shone; and when you ran your fingers over them, they were as smooth as glass. And the crimson robe! And the white linen surplice—all of them made to fit me, so long as I remained with an unbroken voice in the choir of this heavenly Cathedral. And I could see myself coming down the steps from the Changing Room, with the other choristers, and standing at the entrance of the church, while the Lord Bishop and his assistants waited for a few late worshippers to settle in their pews. And I could see the faces of that vast congregation: almost half the population of the Island, who came to the Cathedral in droves whenever the Bishop was preaching. Some came to church, as they would every Sunday, because they like to come to church: others, because they like the resplendent robes and the university hoods of the ministers—all colours under the sun, so pretty and so impressive and so learned! And more than once, I myself wanted to become a minister in God’s Church of England, to swish my long flowing robes, and adjust my hood and hat, and large ruby-Cyclops ring every second of the service, and pour Communion wine at the rails, and mumble those few important indistinguishable words, while the sinners knelt before *me* and prayed to *me* and asked *me* for forgiveness, because they could not see God, or talk to Him, unless they had first asked *me* for forgiveness, and recognized *me* as His disciple. Now, I was walking up the aisle, so long and so smooth with its marble shining from the long-underpaid hours of scrubbing by the church Sexton; my voice warbling;

and the men and women at the ends of the pews nearest the choir, nodding their heads and complimenting. How they raised their heads from their unmelodic hymn books, and nodded, and turned slightly with their eyes to locate the voice; and I, seeing them, raising my voice even higher and sweeter, until the organ seemed silent and voiceless as the dumb man who opened his mouth and sang aloud his soundless praise to his God, every Sunday at Matins. And then, my solo. The old heads nodding, and smiling, because they could not applaud in God's presence, in God's Church. And the organist, like an English spy, glowering at me, anticipating a wrong key or a blunder...and Henry, my solo-substitute, envious with praise. And then, when it is all finished, the choir and the Lord Bishop and the ministers walking down the washed-out, chastised church, with the congregation dumb and whipped by the sermon and the presence in the church of Christ's body, come from the dead...rejoicing, because this is Easter. And then, the Benediction said by the Bishop, and the sign of the cross which he always made as if he was chasing flies from his face; and the limp people kneeling to say a last something, a last word or two, in thanks, to their God.

I passed the first street lamp, and continued into the desolate, black morning, cramped by the thick unsympathetic fields of canes which refused to let the sun through, to keep me company. On and on, in perpetual misery from my shoes. At last, I had to give in, I took them off. I tied the laces together, and strung the shoes around my neck. The stockings, I pushed into my pocket. And then I ran, hurrying to church before the street should be crowded before I could be seen, and detected, and laughed at. But nothing happened all the way: I reached the vicinity of the Cathedral: the tall tomb stones like diminutive skyscrapers, and the trees in the grave yard of the church, and the blackbirds playing hide-and-seek unmannerly from tree to tree, and the houses coming alive...and finally, the Cathedral itself, facing me like my mother, unapproving. I would have to put my shoes and stockings on before I could cross the threshold of the West Portico. But I had to find some place to sit.

The bells were ringing now. I looked up to see them; and their laughter and rejoicing filled my heart with joy. And I yearned to be in the choir, in the chancel, singing my solo.

The congregation was arriving. Women were dressed in the white of angels, white hats, white shoes, as if they were proud to be part of this great resurrection morning, as if they had remained all their lives, new brides, new virgins. They were standing at the West Portico, waiting for the service to begin, waiting for the men to pass and whisper little controversial words for their ears. And most of the men, in the black of the funeral, wearing their suits of long-ago-black-now-purple, which fitted them like coats of armour, and walking stiff and proud in the morning sunlight spinning through the lazy mists, hovered around the North Portico, talking about the Test Match which had

ended in a draw. I could see Henry, my arch enemy, standing near them, loading his head with facts which later he would claim as his own; and with him were some of the boys of the choir. I lingered near the tall wall that kept the Cathedral from the fish cries and the whore-cries of the nearby Market. How was I to get into the churchyard and sit on a tomb stone and put my shoes on my feet again?

The organ began to rant and swell like a stormy sea swept by gales of Bach, breathing its powerful chords into the ears of the uninterested congregation. Everything was fresh. Everything was new. The organ was breathing now like a monster. Somebody important was arriving. From where I stood, looking over the tops of the short croton trees, and over the head of the white angel, silent and stationary in polished marble, I could barely make out the roosters sitting on the helmets of the Governor and his party. The Lord Bishop, his robes fluttering like the Union Jack in the breeze, came out to meet them at the North Portico. I could see the Prime Minister of the Island, his eyes red with sleep and rum; and his ministers standing uncomfortably in their official clothes; and the lords and ladies of the Island, all untitled, but all rich and white, coming to this old Cathedral so early in the morning. And they all seemed half asleep to me. As they disappeared into the church, I threw my shoes over the wall, and jumped behind them.

They were coming towards me now, coming up the aisle, towards the East Window. The important people, and the choir. I saw Henry, grinning into the pages of his hymn book. I saw the choir pass the multitude of people of all colours: the black, brown, light-skinned, light-brown and yellow-skinned and coolie, and approach the front pews of the church where the Governor and the poor white people and the rich black people always sat. And as they fled into their seats and into their stalls, all that was left was the wide white aisle, like a swath through a cane-field, running straight out into the road, through the West Gate. There was a beggarman standing in the silhouette of the Gate, in the road, drinking from a paper-bag with which he was conducting, as the music romped and played.

And all the time, my tears fell on the clean, freshly-ironed cotton shirt, and into my shoes as I struggled to get them back on my feet. And when I looked up, and saw Henry step into the middle of the aisle, in the chancel, my heart broke. And straightway, I thought of my mother, standing at the entrance of the gate of our Yard, waiting; waiting for me.

*Cherie Jones*

## Blind Date

**For dinner with the wolf I wear the green dress, the one that sparkles. Our waiter's fingers wobble as he scribbles—2 rib-eye steaks, rare. The wolf orders for me, confident I share his love of bleeding meat, and smiles without thought to his incisors.**

Your dress is gorgeous, says the wolf, I love that colour on you. His tongue swirls around “love”, reluctant to let it go.

Our orders come trembling as I wave the compliment away, careful to make sure the sweep of my gaze does not light on his eyes. It's suicide to look a wild animal square in the eyes, they consider it a challenge or something.

After dinner we dance. The wolf knows a disco place, and we walk there and people on the road scatter, not looking at the wolf like they heard the suicide thing, too.

I shimmy in the middle, and the wolf jerks around me in wide arcs. He isn't that great on his hind legs to begin with, and 70s disco makes things worse.

Maybe it's the Earth, Wind and Fire, or the rosé still warm in my stomach, or the disco ball reflecting a thousand shrieking evacuations. It could be any of those things that makes me dizzy. The kind of dizzy where you have to stop and fix your eyes on something to steady you.

The wolf's eyes are scary. I sense him drop on all fours and start to circle closer.

# A Hand Came Through the Wall

**A man's hand came through the wall behind our bed, made a web of cracks around it and shuddered a minute before it was still, bruises starting to set on the fingers. It was a left hand, with slightly curved fingers hanging loose and limp.**

Geoff insisted I call the police. That's what you get for choosing a dinky hotel no decent tourist had ever heard of, he said, now, thanks to me, we'd be in the middle of a murder investigation. Who said the guy was dead? I wanted to know, and Geoff rolled his eyes like unjustified optimism was why we were there in the first place. Geoff hadn't wanted to come, 13 years or not.

I dialled in the shadow of that hand, my eyes on my ring. Geoff didn't wear his anymore. On our first night, we'd heard the fighting through the wall, instead of the ocean, and Geoff had used the noise to explain his lost erection, and I had kept my eyes on the pale band of skin where his ring used to be.

Of course, he's dead, said Geoff, they really should refund you your money, for all this ruckus.

Geoff didn't notice when I replaced the receiver, he was busy dusting flakes of plaster from his hair, but he startled when I reached for the hand. This hand wore its ring, too, even with all that fighting.

You probably shouldn't touch it, Geoff began. He grumbled something about fingerprints, but I held that cooling hand, intertwined its fingers with mine, and waited for us to be rescued.

*Keith Jardim*

# The Atlantic Cemetery

Winter, and it's three a.m. in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Late January. Icicles hang from the apartment's eaves. He shivers, his teeth clicking faintly, reminding him of when he was a child on a beach and came out of the water, shivering in the rain. His mother wrapped him in a big blue towel and gave him biscuits and cheese.

The cemetery outside is net-shaded with skeletal trees, and full. Moonlight stirs among its headstones like shoals of minnows. The scene is a bosk without leaves. He hiccups, thinking the dead may get up to dance. He sees it all from the young woman's apartment, from her living room, despite windows misty with dust, and delicate, white curtains.

They sit and fumble on the couch, giggling, clumsy with little sleep and much red wine. The couch is deep and soft. His shoes slide on grains of dust along the frozen, wooden floor. The cold tightens his knees. He clutches her gently between her thighs. Heat.

Doesn't anyone kiss anymore? she says.

I will—kiss, you—my dear! he says.

They kiss, and the couch engulfs them for a while. And there, he would, if he could, drown in its folds with her.

They met at midnight, in a bar in Cambridge, and she lives here in this haven, she'd said, for mostly West Indian refugees. *It's so cheap*, she said earlier. *Especially near the dead!* And winked, tossing her red hair. She bought him many drinks. She's from a milk farm in Wisconsin, wants to be an actress, studies at Emerson College, and even has a part in a Beckett play at the Huntington Theatre! She's very elegant, very pale, and says good night too soon.

And goes to her narrow bed.

*Stay! Let's talk. Look at the world. Drugs, war, famine, disease.  
We must live as if there is hope! More wine! Some more kisses!*

Hiccupping, he's glad at least for the couch, but not the dead. Their lair tonight looks surreal, as if, well, expecting something.

He waits, hoping she'll return.

He waits.

Can't he just have her warmth, her perfume—perhaps her  
nest of long red hair?

It's four forty-five a.m. in Dorchester. The now windy haven of drab, wooden houses and apartment buildings offers him only the deep kingdom of winter night. The trees' bare branches play their shadows across her bedroom door, his face, and the blankets wrapped up around his neck and ears.

He is alone. Near five a.m., he begins to nod off; and  
then the abundant dead, wrapped in silver scales, for their gowns are made of  
minnows, gather round his huddled limbs—and waltz—against all his tomorrows.



# Ghostland Insomnia

Unable to sleep, he leaves his studio on Cape Cod just after midnight, not far from the sea, and steps down the steps. There are birch and maple trees stark against the sky. It's so quiet he can hear surf in the distance, the lush sound of his own emptiness. The air is moist, like the breath of a lover.

There is mist tonight. On the quiet marsh it sits silver-still in April, like a thick blanket lumpy with sleeping bodies. He's going toward it, barefoot across the grass, and now onto the road. His walk is tender, slow; he moves to no tune. He imagines his bones and flesh flying to places made of dunes; it's wild. No reason he knows, except such thoughts chose him when he was a child.

The marsh, the mist, everything remains silent. Pale houses, sleeping, seem ethereal, seem to pass him by. During the day, they don't: harsh and lavish, they stare at him, taking note of his movements: their garages enclose Volvos and BMWs.

There is a star-laden solitude above him. He stops, looks up, and thinks: If they could, the stars would pull me into their depths. He wonders if that is what they have been doing all along, since he was born.

The mist is moving now, fading, the blanket already worn, and there is a definite absence of heat, like the last breath of the moon.

Then an odor of floral decay, a faint whiff of lovers' sweat. He wishes. He retreats. Back up the road, which inclines and winds through clusters of pines seeming attentive to him.

He's on his way to the coast, where silver surf breaks on the beach, and passing his studio, leaving the way he'd gone, he walks faster and faster, hoping to see one or two ships go by.

# A Brief History of the New World

The wooden villa is on a steep, hibiscus-and-azalea lush hill. A concrete drive, engraved in bricks of faint red, takes you upward from the winding access road, through the shadows of tall trees swaying above like ballerinas in a slow pirouette. It is late afternoon, off-season, cheap in August. You have some reading, writing and relaxing to do. Your mother's friends in Trinidad have arranged a few days for you alone in the villa.

Trinidad, where you left more than willingly, escaping its blather and pollution, its violence and corruption, has begun to fade from your mind; already you're feeling something like a balm behind your eyes. You realize you need this.

The villa is two-storied, its roof's edges are frilly with fretwork, and the couches and chairs are cushioned in flowered patterns of red, white and green. Durable mats and rugs shade the floor here and there, their colours matching the walls' pale tans. You settle into rooms that are pitch pine and teak fragrant.

There are arched doorways and high, triangular ceilings full of cool sea air. You sleep in the bedroom upstairs; it has a spacious bathroom. Your room faces east. On mornings the sun sets the jalousie-shutters aglow in silver light; soon they yellow to the colour of corn.

The hill that slopes away from the steep drive and the villa has a grove of fruit trees, many of them towering breadfruit trees. Birdsong gushes from them in the mornings. There is even the lusty squawk of the cocorico, rufous-tailed guan (*ortalis ruficauda*). When you hear the cocorico, you go downstairs to breakfast. There are so many birds here; their colours are wildly imaginative, as if bits of rainbows had been used to paint them.

On the balcony off the upstairs bedroom, or on the verandah below and outside the dining room, you can hear the sea and see it. It is not the ruthless pounding of some dark sea, hoary and immensely melancholy in its vast expanse. The sound here is one of weather at ease with itself. The waves, sluggish and green, collapse on the beach. You sip your coffee and munch your toast. The light is bright and pleasant, striking deep blue above.

For the rest of the morning, distracted only by sudden brief rain, you write in a quiet that makes the world feel new. For most of that time, the sound of

human voices is absent; they exist only in your mind, where you create them.

During a stroll to the beach you encounter the swimming pool, just beyond the shaded access road to the villa and adjacent to the large bar. The bar is part of the villa, and you have the keys. You make yourself a vodka tonic with lime, sipping it as the brilliant blue of the pool dazzles the air, your eyes. The pool blue fills you, somehow, despite its suggestion of artificiality, with the promised serenity of the hours ahead. The temptation to stay and savour the variety of beverages at the bar, to glide in the pool, is removed by another, by a glimpse of sea blue through an opening in a cluster of rubber plants (*ficus elastica*) and tall trees.

As you enter the shade of the trees and rubber plants, the sand here soft and deep, a tang of sea spray drifts by. The August-fickle sun, in early afternoon, casts silver light on the shore and glints the rainwater in fallen, dish-shaped leaves, dips in the sand, and drops falling from rocks and trees.

The beach is wide, and its pale beige sand meets the edge of the forest's dense vegetation whose roots curl with an almost gnarly menace. There are eleven tourists further along the beach in sun chairs; five of them lie sprawled on the sand, as if beaten down by the sun. Four have been reddened into a sad-looking foolishness, while others appear bewildered and pained by their new skin colour.

Little sandpipers (of the family *Scolopacidae*) skitter along the waterline in time with the up-and-down of swash. Their fine, elegant beaks and sleek heads can endear you to littoral strolls. Robust pelicans glide confidently in the distance, just above the water, now and then rising and banking sharply to dive. At night, you remember, large cumbersome leatherback turtles plod up the beach to relieve themselves of hundreds of eggs.

Late afternoon comes swiftly while you're reading and idling away the hours with rest and swimming. Sometimes lunch is a heavy affair (the sea air makes food taste much better), so the dozey post-meal effect, combined with continued doses of sun, induces a state allowing you to slumber through the remaining heat of the day and to rise when the land is cooling. When the promise of dusk is in the sky.

You return to the villa and sit with your Earl Grey tea and book on the balcony. You watch the end of the afternoon, and the evening begins. You listen to the rhythm of the sea, still at ease. You think, for some strange reason, possibly because the sea is so big, so near and you are alone and far away from anyone you know, that maybe Columbus saw some of the landscape you saw today. Perhaps he watched leatherback turtles laying eggs on the beach, eggs the colour of moonlight, of stars and surf. You remember a movie you saw about Columbus's discoveries in the New World in which he describes these islands as Eden, as Nature having more imagination than humanity has

in its dreams. Such a statement leaves you wondering about Columbus, about the kind of man he was. You wonder, too, about the men who came after him, and what they, too, said and did, and didn't say and do. You think of brave Bartolome de las Casas, and sigh.

Did the Dominican Friar really try well enough to save the world? Did he know what history was doing, and would later do? Do we? Or maybe the question should be: Did we?

There is too much history of people and the sea.

You stay where you are, reading and glancing at the fading light, at the sea. Sometimes you read until night comes, until the pages of the book are the colour of eggs and moonlight.

Then you sleep.

*A. L. Dawn French*

# Anansi for Dinner

The atmosphere was thick as folk contemplated the gala dinner date of the decade with ever-increasing anticipation. Mama Glo had signed the summons but everyone knew that Mami Wata, Madre de Agua and Watramama would be in attendance too. Such an event was too auspicious for any of them to miss it; and if the Mamas were going to be there, no one invited dared to be absent.

The Mamas were respected by all. Their upper bodies were human with the lower portion being eel. Instead of hair, they had tiny eels that hung low to cover their human torso. Added to the exotic nature of the women was the fact that they were also shapeshifters: they could become fully human or fully snake but seemed to prefer the half-and-half status.

Over the following weeks, the dinner and ball became the sole topic of conversation among the population. It was all the creatures could talk about. Everyone was excited to go. Everyone had an invitation. Everyone.

Except Anansi.

The spider could not understand why he'd been left out. "Come to think of it, I'm never invited," he realised.

"You used to be." Rekat, a fellow spider, had heard Anansi's grumblings.

"Not anymore."

"Your fault."

"Meeeee!"

"Yes, you—oh, how quick you forget."

"I'm the best guest that has ever been."

"Really?"

"Really!"

"Anansi, over these decades you have damaged Magical Artifacts and property, and at the last event you got into an argument with other invitees."

"That wasn't my fault."

"Oh, so you DO remember!"

Anansi didn't reply.

"Since you do remember, then you will also remember that because of what happened with the Queen of Junkanoo you were banned!"

"Was it my fault that she passed by me as I was smoking my cigar and her hair caught fire?"

"It was your fault that you were smoking at a no smoking event—in direct violation of the event rules and etiquette."

"I still say that wasn't my fault."

"Assuming that is true, you went on to annoy the entire royal party."

"It's not fair! They picking on me because I'm small!"

"You can appeal the order."

"I did. They said no."

"Therefore, it is what it is—you remain banned and you would do good to stay out of the way of The Mamas."

"You going?"

"Of course! I'll tell you all about it after." And with that Rekat spun a web and floated away.

"This year I'm going!"

With the decision made, Anansi made his preparations. He realised he could not just walk up to the door and announce, "I am here!" so he set his trickster mind to the problem and devised a solution. He would accompany one of the invited guests as an accessory.

The night came and the anticipation for the lavish dinner was palpable as guests arrived from far and wide. Each mythical creature was eager to partake in the rare feast that was held once every ten years. The elaborate preparations had spanned months, ensuring that no two beings would dine on the same delicacy, a testament to the exclusivity of the occasion. As the banquet commenced, the air was filled with a symphony of exotic scents and flavours, each dish tailored to satisfy the unique tastes and dietary needs of the eclectic assembly. And so, amidst the mingling of creatures both wondrous and strange, the decadent feast unfolded with an extraordinary culinary artistry that bound them together in celebration.

Usually, at such highfalutin affairs, guests would present their invitation at the door and waltz in. But not this year. Noooo. This year, The Mamas had installed new security protocols—a magic mirror. It would discern the true self of the arriving guest.

Everyone had to face it.

The mirror's greeting was the same for all:

*I am the magic mirror, my purpose clear,  
Testing all, both far and near,  
Reflecting truths, no room for fear,  
In my sight, intentions clear.*

Phantome stepped forward, a hand came down and presented the invitation. No one had ever seen the face of Phantome. Phantome was so tall that all anyone ever managed to glimpse was his knees.

*Phantome tall and free,  
From Saint Lucia's sea,  
Knee-high for all to plea,  
Moon's lone gaze, his decree.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

With one stride the tall one was gone. Now it was the turn of the Shadow Killers. These fearsome creatures were under strict orders for the event. This was no place for the assassins to be targeting victims by stealing their shadows.

*Shadow Killer, dread's own seer,  
Obeah's servant, Jamaica's fear,  
Clutching shadows, his command clear,  
Hunts you down, his oath sincere.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

Then Longman. In the land of creepiness, Longman had to be the creepiest. With no head that anyone could ever claim to have seen, the headless man handed over his invitation. How he managed to see ever, magical creatures could not tell.

*In the Longman of Dominica's deep,  
Headless that one, secrets keep,  
No head to ponder, no thoughts to sweep,  
In stillness, silence, mysteries creep.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

Then Frog Woman. The Kalinago deity arrived full of the power of nature and its life-giving properties. After all, she was the embodiment of fertility and she was the one who brought the rains.

*In Grenada's misty night, she's seen,  
Frog Woman, mysterious, serene,  
With croaks that echo, enchanting scene,  
In her transformation, secrets glean.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

Followed by May Cow, Rolling Calf and Steel Donkey. The three herds arrived together, mooing and neighing and rattling their chains.

*May Cow of Cayman and guardians, they stay,  
Wandering on their nocturnal way,  
Guiding lost souls along the bay,  
In their watchful care, fears allay.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through*

The partygoers could never get used to Latjé Pwél and the arrival usually caused a ripple through the guests. The tail was never bothered. Who needed a body anyway when a tail would do?

*All hail Latjé Pwèl, homage we unfold,  
Tail sans body, its might untold,  
From Saint Lucia's lore, its story enfold,  
With swift justice, its power controlled.*



*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through*

Somehow, the Ti Djabs and the Jab-Jabs always managed to arrive together. Arriving in their hundreds, covered in either molasses or tar, they'd threaten to dirty everyone in sight but never dared, for they all knew that The Mamas would have their skin! That didn't stop them though—the squeals were too delightful!

*From Grenada, Jab-Jab, they arrive,  
In their vigour, they truly thrive,  
Alive is the dinner they'll contrive,  
Striving souls their passions drive.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

The soothing smell of Nonm Bwadenn preceded him and announced the arrival of each of them. Festival protocols meant that he kept his evil eye under control, but he still made many wary—party rules or not.

*Nonm Bwadenn, welcome, amen,  
No foe here, just kin to commend,  
By The Mamas, invitation extend,  
In their care, no trauma to fend.*

*'Tis true.*

*'Tis true.*

*You can go through.*

Then it was the turn of Papa Bwa. The guardian of the forest did not realise that he had a passenger hidden in his fur. His upper half was human but his lower half was goat and his fleece was thick and luxurious as befitted a deity. He approached the mirror, respectful no one was exempt from its scrutiny.

*I am the magic mirror, my purpose clear....*

The mirror paused and the halting of the ritual immediately got Mama Glo's attention. She slithered over, her serpent-like movements graceful yet purposeful, every muscle coiled with readiness for the unexpected. The mirror resumed. But now it refocused. It had sensed a second presence: now it announced Anansi, not Papa Bwa.

*I am the magic mirror, my purpose clear,  
Testing all, both far and near,  
Reflecting truths, no room for fear,  
In my sight, intentions clear*

*An uninvited guest, bold and free,  
Crashes the party with no decree.  
With manners amiss, causing a spree,  
The invader disrupts the harmony.*

*Not for you.  
Not for you.  
You cannot go through.*

Something moved.

"ANANSI!" May Cow had spotted the movement in the fur.

"INVADER!" Jab-Jab announced.

Anansi's sudden appearance caused a stir among the distinguished guests. With authority befitting her status, Mami Wata issued a decisive command to apprehend the disruptor and maintain the soirée's decorum. "GET HIM!" she ordered.

May Cow's powerful strides closed in on Anansi, while the Jab-Jabs' agile leaps propelled them forward with relentless determination. Anansi, however, proved to be a master of evasion, darting between tables and weaving through clusters of startled guests with effortless grace.

Anansi zoomed past Latjé Pwèl as it swung in a swift arc, but it fell short, barely grazing the trickster. Despite their nimbleness, even the Ti Djabs, renowned for their speed and agility, struggled to keep pace with Anansi's elusive manoeuvres. With each twist and turn, the devious spider seemed to effortlessly evade capture, leaving his pursuers grasping at shadows in frustration as the chase continued through the maze of guests.

The chase led through ornate corridors and grand chambers, the clatter of pursuit mingling with the gasps and exclamations of the onlookers. Anansi's mischievous grin

remained ever-present, taunting his pursuers with the promise of further mischief. The spider's nimble movements seemed to defy capture at every turn. With each fleeting glimpse of Anansi, the chase intensified, the thrill of pursuit driving both predator and prey onward through the labyrinthine halls of the grand estate.

"Enough of this confusion and chaos. This requires a woman," Watramama growled, and she summoned forth Frog Woman.

From the depths of festival, Frog Woman emerged. With a graceful stride, she approached Anansi, her eyes ablaze with a primal intensity that sent shivers down the trickster spider's spine. Anansi, caught off guard by Frog Woman's arrival, felt a twinge of unease prickling at the edges of his bravado. After all, to a frog a spider was a delicacy.

"Frog Woman," Anansi greeted her, his voice laced with false charm as he attempted to mask his apprehension. "What a pleasure it is to see you. To what do we owe the honour of your presence?"

Frog Woman regarded Anansi with a steely gaze, her expression betraying no hint of amusement at his feigned politeness. She saw through his façade with the clarity of one who had witnessed the ebb and flow of centuries.

"Your presence here is unwanted, Anansi," Frog Woman declared, her voice carrying the weight of ages past. "We know your ways only too well. What mischief do you intend to unleash upon this gathering?"

Anansi's grin faltered, replaced by a flicker of uncertainty. He knew better than to underestimate her. A flick of her tongue, and that would be the end of him.

"My dear Frog Woman, you wound me with your suspicions," Anansi replied, his voice tinged with false innocence.

The crowd groaned.

"I am but a humble observer, curious to witness the unfolding of this momentous occasion."

Frog Woman's eyes narrowed, her patience thin as she saw through Anansi's deception. Everyone knew his reputation all too well, and she had no intention of allowing him to disrupt the sanctity of the gathering. Without warning, Frog Woman did what the others had not been able to—she caught him.

She lunged forward with lightning speed, her tongue flicking out with deadly accuracy. In an instant, Anansi found himself ensnared within her powerful jaws. As Frog Woman's jaws closed around him, Anansi's reflexes kicked in with a desperate urgency. With a burst of agility, he wriggled free from her grasp, narrowly escaping. He tumbled to the ground, scrambled to his feet, his heart racing.

Realising that the danger had taken on a new twist, Anansi knew he had to act quickly. With a flick, he shot a strand of webbing towards the nearest window. The sticky silk found its mark, anchoring firmly to the frame, and Anansi hoisted himself upward with all the speed he could muster.

With a final glance back at the gathering below, Anansi smirked defiantly, his eyes gleaming with mischief and determination. “See you next time!” he shouted, his voice echoing through the night as he disappeared into the darkness beyond the window, leaving behind a trail of chaos, frustration and irritation.

And the mirror said:

*I am the magic mirror, my purpose clear,  
Testing all, both far and near,  
Reflecting truths, no room for fear,  
In my sight, intentions clear*

*Edison T. Williams*

## Lessons from the Stand-pipe

**“We live on the main road across from the stand-pipe.” That is how I learned from my mother to direct anyone to our house. We were country people, my father an agricultural labourer, my mother a seamstress. I was the firstborn. We lived in a small two-bedroomed chattel house. The house was originally a deep red but had become faded over time. It had a little verandah, just big enough to hold two chairs. As a little girl growing up in 1950s Barbados, I often watched my world from one of the chairs on that verandah. I was allowed to sit at the window, but I preferred the verandah, and my mother gave in to my wishes after a while, because we lived in a safe space in a small rural village where everyone knew everyone.**

Those were interesting times. Major social and political changes were in process in Barbados and across the region. New labour parties were challenging the domination of the conservative planter class. We now had one man, one vote. Across from that stand-pipe was my introduction to my community, its life, its politics. I learned that in the upcoming election, people were planning to “drink up all o’ Walcott rum and vote for Labour”. And they did.

At that time, most people did not have piped water in their homes. They fetched their water in buckets from village stand-pipes. From early in the morning, my neighbours moved back and forth to the stand-pipe across from our house and in front of Mr Roett’s shop. It was a small shop attached to the side of what we used to call a wall-house. It was a bungalow, built with concrete blocks, painted cream and a mellow green. The Roett family lived there, Harold Roett, his mother, wife and four teenaged sons.

Mister Roett owned a piece of land which stretched behind the house down into the gully and another piece on the other side. He grew sugar cane, bananas, plantains, sweet potatoes, yams, eddoes and cassava. The Roetts were better off than just about anyone in our village, and I am sure they could have afforded piped water in their house, but the stand-pipe right in front was so very convenient that they came to think of it as theirs. Mister Roett’s wife never queued for water. The person at the front of the queue would always cede to *Mistress* Roett. *Mistress* Roett had never asked for this privilege; it was conferred on her automatically by people who knew their place.

You see, the Roett family, in addition to being better off, had a little “colour”, and *Mistress* Roett was a married lady. Anyone else who broke the queue would be

unceremoniously pushed out of the way and roughly asked, “Wait, who you t’ink you is?” And if it was Bertha Greenidge in the front of the queue, my mother would come and drag me inside to protect me from the “rassholes” and “God-blind-yuhs”, cause when you start Bertha, like a hot engine, she took time to cool down. In the meantime, the interrupter would learn “where she mudder get she from, why she can’t help juckin’ in and how she ain’t got no effin manners”, among other things. But that same Bertha deferred to Mistress Roett whenever she came out to fetch her water.

Conversation would abate while Mistress Roett filled her bucket. When she stepped back into her house, the submissiveness ceased, and things returned to normal, with more spirited exchanges amongst the women. It was almost always women or children who fetched water, rarely the men. Sometimes there was the occasional comment: “Them fair-skin people feel because they got a li’l colour that them better than the rest o’ we.” But no one ever challenged the status quo. That was until Gladys Forde came to our village.

Gladys was a young woman of, it was said, only twenty-five, a strapping country girl, tall and strong. She came from St Andrew to be the wife of Beresford Bishop, a man twenty years her senior. Beresford was a quiet, hardworking, God-fearing man. He raised pigs and fowls, and he had a plot of land. He worked from sunup to sundown six days a week and served his Lord on the seventh. He had lost his first wife tragically; she had had a heart attack, quite unexpectedly. He was left to raise their five children. He met Gladys through the Pentecostal church. Some say it was an arranged marriage. “The Elders give she to he to help raise them children.”

Gladys had arrived just as school finished for the long summer holidays. In a very short time, the stand-pipe gathering was talking about how she took care of those children and how she helped Beresford in the land. “She ain’t frighten to get she hands dirty at all.” Her new neighbours came to consider her “a very serious woman”. What they meant was that she was businesslike in all her dealings. The Bishops’ house was about two hundred yards uphill from the stand-pipe. The Bishop children rotated water-carrying duties weekly during the vacation. But when they returned to school in September, Gladys took over the task.

One morning, as Gladys got to the front of the line, Mistress Roett stepped in front of her. “Excuse me. It is my turn. Go to the back of the line,” said Gladys in a firm tone. Mistress Roett looked Gladys up and down, looked away, and then proceeded to put her bucket under the tap, as if she had not heard or even seen Gladys. Gladys Bishop shoved the bucket away. There was some pushing and Mrs Roett slipped on the wet, mossy cement surface, fell to the ground and cried out, “Oh, God.”

Somehow, I knew that this wouldn’t end there, and I called out, “Come and see this, Ma.”

Harry Roett appeared and, seeing his wife on the ground, asked, “Wha’ happen?”

Mistress Roett jabbed a finger in Gladys’ direction. “She push me down!”

Harry’s right hand flew back, and he delivered a swift slap to Gladys’ jaw. The slap rang out; Mrs Gaskin from down the road would claim, weeks later, that she heard it from in her house, one hundred yards farther along. Gladys stumbled, but she didn’t fall. She recovered, looked around at the rest of the gathering, listened to their silence, turned, and strode toward home.

My eyes followed her, then returned to the stand-pipe. Mutterings, steupsing and quarrelling had broken out at the stand-pipe. “But she ain’t had no right pushing down Mistress Roett, though....” “She deserve wha’ she get.” Harry Roett joined in, his voice raised: “She just come ’bout here and feel she can disrespect people.”

Suddenly, Harry became aware that the rest of the group was looking past him. He turned and saw Gladys striding toward him, an axe handle swinging from her right hand. The crowd backed away. Harry advanced toward Gladys, raised a finger of admonishment, and said, “Now listen....”

The length of carved pine, weighted at the end, rose up in the air then quickly came down, missing Harry it seemed at first, but it turned suddenly, horizontally, and hit into Harry’s left side with a thud. The blow bent him over sideways and there was a loud escape of air from him. Before he had time to recover, the axe handle rose again, came down and curved into Harry’s right side. He hollered and collapsed. I started to cry. Mistress Roett wailed and begged the Lord for mercy. My mother hugged me tight, tight. Gladys Bishop retrieved her bucket, placed it under the tap, turned and cast defiant eyes around the gathering. With her bucket full, she turned and headed back up the hill, bucket in one hand and the axe handle swinging in the other. That woman didn’t say a word to a soul.

The stand-pipe crowd remained silent for a moment. My mother told me, “Don’t move from here,” as she dashed across the road. Mistress Roett put out a hand to her husband who cried, “Oh, Lord, muh ribs, muh ribs.” My mother and two other women helped to get Mr Roett up on his feet and into his house. He moaned all the way. The crowd tripled in size as neighbours ran out of their houses to find out what was happening. Voices buzzed as witnesses told their stories simultaneously. “He did want some licks ever since, you know,” someone said, to murmured agreement.

The following day, a plumber arrived at the Roett household and started to run pipes into their house. Mistress Roett was never seen at the stand-pipe again. In time, Mr Roett recovered from his injuries.

The events of that morning were etched into my four-year-old mind. I had witnessed brutality for the first time and was repulsed by it. But I had also witnessed a woman

standing up for herself. I had seen how people responded to power. I had seen courage, I had seen cowardice, and I understood that one person could achieve change. There were times in my career when the memories of that morning came back to me, as I faced challenges, as I competed with some who had a better start in life than this woman who was schooled at the stand-pipe



*Joanne C. Hillhouse*

## Along the Loco Line

Eulalie wore a broad-brimmed straw hat; Ellie favoured a headtie. In their pauses, Eulalie would fan with her hat; Ellie would remove the headtie to wipe down the back of her neck and her forehead. She would skilfully retie it into a pattern determined by her mood in the parlance of headties perfected by her ancestors forever ago. Bakkra could never suss out the many non-verbal ways nearga found to communicate between the cane stalks.

The men cutting and packing cane alongside them would find reasons of their own to pause when the sisters did, thankful that though they had to break their backs in the brutal Antigua heat, they had something pretty to look at. The only other woman at this particular cane-packing station was Toothless Rose, who ran the cook shop. Rose had exactly two teeth and talked and cackled the whole time she cooked and served, causing the men to joke that one day they'd be fishing one of her two remaining teeth out of their red bean soup.

By contrast, Eulalie and Ellie were uneroded by hard living. They looked like they belonged in a dress shop or a bank; if only they were lighter than the brown of coconut husk. They could probably get work cutting cloth in one of the Syrian shops or doing laundry for the Portuguese, but they both rolled their eyes at such suggestions.

"And give up all this sunshine," Ellie, the bolder of the two, would respond, always with a laugh that sounded like a crowing cock; it was a scandalous laugh. Ellie was don-care-ah-damn. The men wondered sometimes if her older-by-one-year sister wasn't there doing man-work at this stop along the loco line to keep Ellie out of trouble. If so, Eulalie did it without complaining, and it wasn't unusual to hear the sisters laughing over some joke or harmonising something benna-ish while they worked.

*Sweet to listen to and sweet to look at.*

Today, they wore matching pink dresses that fell about mid-thigh, allowing for glances, some furtive, some boldfaced, at calves that seemed both firm and soft, making many a man tempted to touch if only to prove which. They didn't dare. Ellie had a temper and Eulalie, too, *when she ready*; neither would hesitate to fire she foot in smadee backside if provoked. Both worked barefoot. Eulalie said she preferred to save her shoes for Sunday morning mass, and Ellie quipped that her "Sunday shoes" also got a workout at the jook joint.

She soaked and oiled her feet every night to keep them soft. Soft but tough. Neither sister was slowed by her feet nor feminineness as they stacked cane alongside the other packers. The little hill of cut cane would diminish as the sisters worked and the sun rose, and when the sun was almost directly overhead they would retire to the shade of the nearby tamarind tree, sucking on its bittersweets if in season, as the loco pulled off down the track.

Sometimes bakkra, all dem so was called bakkra, would come by. On horseback, though, the overseer station was close enough to walk. “Lub Lord dem position over smadee,” Ellie would grumble. Everyone knew to get back to work when they saw him coming in his long white jacket and broad-brimmed hat. Ellie would push it, though, taking her own sweet time. “Ah nuh God almighty,” she would say.

“The cane isn’t going to pack itself,” he said this day, and Ellie choopsed and said, “Slavery done long time.” And he turned red. “What you say?” Work stopped. The men who worked alongside the sisters liked to think they would jump in but knew there was no shame in hol’ing your side. Bakkra wasn’t above making the horse rear up and trample them, leaving the body for the rest to deal with, or wielding the whip coiled at his hip. Slavery might done long time, but bakkra still ride high on horseback, and Black man and woman was still barefoot in the cane-field.

Ellie knew that, too, and when Eulalie gave her a look she dropped her eyes and said, “Nutten, sah.”

But as he rode away, taking the win, she cut her eyes at him as she sopped her face, which was hot. When she retied it, the front was flat, but the stiff ends were pointed upwards on either side of her head like the horns of a bull.

# Black Gregory

**Ineta an' me does meet up at night, the only time nearga free, under a black Gregory midway between Jonas and Sea View Farm estates.**

The black Gregory, wha dem call whitewood and now tun mek national tree, was near the centre of the island, in an area now called Clarks Hill, near a village the people would come to call All Saints, because St Peter, St Paul, St Mary, St John, St George—five of the island six parish—meet up there. The obeah people mark it as a big criss-cross road, and the Christian folk say ah the holiest of holy grounds.

Where we meet was nothing but bush and date palm. The palm plentiful there because of Dr Freeman, who Freeman village, nearby, name for. He did plant the palm an' dem there, south ah de village. He did bring camel fu work de plantation and he plant the palm fu dem nyam. But the camel an' dem never take to Antigua. Too damp, so dem say, if you can imagine that of this dry-dry place. Dem dead off and the date tree add up and multiply.

Life funny.

Plenty date tree still dere, more than anywhere on the island, though some kind of fever now taking them and the land now clear down to build big house, not like the likkle wattle and daub from before.

Me yah whole time.

Under the black Gregory below the curve near the first street light, since well before street light ever invent. Long before anyone ever dream of cutting through this bush, but sometime after Freeman's folly. Me watch the land graze down and surveyor come in fu mark um up. Watch house grow laka well-tended pear...sorry, avocado. Ka dem smadee yah, dem ascending; is not a village this, is a residential area. Me nah mind. Me like fu see smadee wha look laka me rise up...after everyt'ing. Seen dem build dem dream; seen some of them lose um too. But nothing nah wrong with dreaming still.

Is dreaming used to bring me and Ineta here up under the black Gregory, wha grow like shrub wid plenty plenty limb and leaf. Laka all whitewood, e base thick thick and e sit high on the ground laka anthill. But before e get any height, e stem an' dem branch off from each other, from the root. Me and Ineta whitewood have five ah dem shoots, the two thickest veering off from each other like bad teeth, leaving enough space for two young lovers to cosy up in, and shelter and kiss and dream that dem too ah smadee, though bakkra might hab odda ideas.

We didn do no sexing. Ineta was ah decent gyal. Me mean min fu marry she if me

coulda ever get permission from fu-she bakkra an' fu-me. But me neva ask she ka me nah-in ha nutten fu offer she, not yet. But she gi me purpose. And so it was mi greatest delight fuh meet she there and mek sweet talk under arwe black Gregory, which was wide laka umbrella. The ground might rough and bumpy, and full ah all kinda critter that waan tickle or bite you, but de tree spread out an' gi um plenty shelter, even when e rain.

One night when Ineta finally say yes to more than a kiss, one adventurous biting ant crawl all the way up the inside of mi leg, and that min be one real battle of wills. When the little tyrant reach close-close to m' manhood, it had me ah wink up an' ah rub meself. Laka man wid no broughtupsy. And me couldn't even confess why to Ineta, who den think mi blood was too hot fu she. She take back she yes and tek off and me min so bex me root out every ant me could find and crush them with one of the rock pile up round the tree, the same hill of stone arwe min ah sit under as we lean up 'gainst the tree. All now, though, the memory of that bite still come like phantom pain that have me rubbing the area before me could catch myself.

When Ineta nah come back fu days, at first me did think she still vex, and me get bex because fu vex over subben laka dat is stretching vexation. After all, *ah nah me ah de injured party?*

It tek me a while fu realise that maybe is not dat Ineta nar come, ah dat she cyaarn come. When the thought hit me, me min in the cane-field with a hoe in mi hand. Cold sweat ha me ah tremble in the afternoon heat. An' me tan up tiff tiff 'til bakkra flick he whip pon de groun' near me laka me a john bull an' he waan me fu dance. Night couldn't come faas enough.

Ineta belong to Jonas Estate and me nah in ha no pass; not like me coulda jus' beg off and go mek sure she okay. Bakkra yeye pan me, so me hoe an' hoe whole day but me miin na min pan de work. Me couldn't stop t'ink *wha coulda mek Ineta stop come meet me if ah nah vexness?*

Could be whole heap ah t'ings.

Could be she still vex, yes, but, no, she too sweet fu hold grudge so long.

Could be she find 'nother man; she pretty and bold enough. But, no, she nah ha nah meanness innah she an' wouldn' lef me jus' so.

Could be she tek sick, though me couldn't t'ink ah nuh sickness that could keep she a way, except if bakkra lock she up in one ah dem dungeon and rat piss pan she an' gi she leptospirosis.

Yeah. Could be lookout spy she an' think she dey run way and dem tun she back raw then stash she in a dungeon fu ratta nyam she up; or wussura still....

Could be she get sell off.

All kinda worst case scenario ah haunt me laka jumbie, itching at me laka dem damn biting ants. But ah dat last thought that put fire under me foot. It take me likkle an' no time fu reach Jonas Estate from Sea View Farm. Bout the same time it usually tek both ah we fu walk to arwe tree when we did meet there, lingering as long as we could before leaving in time to walk back to arwe quarters before cock crow. But me nah innah t'ink bout any o' dat as me ignore the main carriage route and cut through footpath well worn by bare nearga foot, cane on all side ah me making me all but invisible. Moving so faas de stalk an' dem 'cratch up mi skin.

The lookout spot me still and me did ha fu convince he me nah min up to nuh mischief. "Jus' ah look fu mi cousin Ineta."

Lookout, laka driver an' horseman an dem wid special skill laka cooper an' potter, wha plentiful pan Sea View Farm plantation, ha privilege an' some ah dem lub show off pon dem own people. Jonas was a rough estate but mi never hear Ineta say nutten bad 'bout de lookout an' dem.

An' dis one ha some sadness in he voice when he say, "Ineta sell off."

Mi heart crack like when dem does pound big stone fu make gravel for the road, just pieces falling off with each blow; ka it feel laka smadee ah bang me wid wan bullbud.

"Sell off, sell off where?" me ask when me find mi voice. And he look pon me with pitifulness me couldn't miss even in the dark, because who is me fu put dem kinda question to anybody. Wha me go do?

"Cyaarn say for sure," he say. "Could be Buckley, could be Bolan, de cart go south, but you know how e go, dem coulda well circle roun' and tek she east to Betty's Hope, north to Weatherhills. Dem na tell arwe nutten."

Me na know nothing bout dem place he ah talk bout, barely been anywhere in all mi 19 years. Me know Jonas because ah dat time me help Ma Elvie tek she donkey cart of clay pottery dere fu sell. She son Pilgrim who does help she was confined again with bakkra threatening fu hobble he if he na leave he cane alone. Pilgrim min ha wan sweet tooth. But massa did ha wan sweet spot for Ma Elvie. So he lock he up, again, instead of whipping or hobbling he. While Pilgrim lock up, massa assign me fu tek the donkey cart and go wid she. Furtherest me ever go all dem time dey.

Ah den me see Ineta fu the first time. She go pond go draw water fu de animal an dem. She was a hale woman and shapely. She dip an' lif de clay jug, settle um pon she head, and walk up de path back straight, hip ah swish, an' batty jus' ah roll. Ma Elvie ha fu nudge me, me min so transfix. Me get she set up den go go chase dung dis vision while Ma Elvie do she business. Me put story to Ineta an' she na choops an' cut eye,

so me figure she na mind. When she meet me under the black Gregory, like me did beg she, me know she didn't mind. And is so we start.

Me fantasize sometimes how fu get she to Sea View Farm or me to Jonas, though me know plenty couple ha fu mek out wid long distance ka bakkra nah le go slave easy.

Dem lub dem money. Dem will even tek money fu slave buy dem freedom if dem done mek all de money dem cyan an' de price nar cost dem nothing.

Ineta plenty young and she strong.

If she sell off, the price min well good.

"She coulda in Barbuda all now so for all we know," de lookout still ah talk, but me feel like me cyaarn hear he, ka inside me head get loud loud, like hurricane wind ah blow in dey.

Me feel me mek one sound like one wounded animal the way he cut heself off and just stare pan me wid long face, that make me feel like likkle boy wah hurt he self, likkle laka when me min in de small gyang wid de ole woman an' dem ah pull weed. Not likkle but small. Small laka pickney up under skirt.

Ineta gone.

Ineta gone.

Ineta gone.

And me na know wha fu do wid me self.

So me jus' tun wey an' lef he dey widout so much as a thank you.

Me pause on the way back, by the tree. Me tell me self, *just in case*.

Me hol' a leaf and caress um and cry to m'self right there under de ole black Gregory.

Me nah know how me mek it back ah Sea View Farm before sunup, barely, and work mi rows all day before taking off again nex' night, but the places de lookout di' name might as well be on the moon.

Fu most slave, de plantation we born and dead pan was the whole world. Sunday market was as much opportunity to socialise with smadee from other estate as there was, an' dem time dere bakkra was passing law to outlaw Sunday market. Some 'llow it here and there to calm t'ings and is dem places me frequent as me search fu mi missing Ineta. Me ask after she but never hear a whisper. Me start wander further. Which way to Buckley, *which way to Bolans, which way to Betty's Hope, how fu get to Barbuda?*

Smadee try discourage me and dem dat tek pity was just as lost as me; blind leading de blind. Me get lost plenty. When me didn't make it back on time, bakkra do what bakkra do and lace up mi back.

Still me nah stop wandering; like me did haunted, 'til dem take one ah me toe an' dem. Not the big toe, dem didn't want me off balance, just hobbled enough that me couldn't run. Me could still hoe, plant, and haul. Me could still walk. It tek me longer to get there but me start going back to de black Gregory because wasn't nowhere else to go, and she might be there.

Me know, me soun' like me tun foolie pickney who cyaarn accept reality. But all when mi dead me cyaarn rest. Me plant m'self right yah so-so, hoping that Ineta jumbie will find me and we can kiss one more time and hol' hand go home where we people come from.

So come me still here under the whitewood, the same whitewood, which ah wan kind of comfort when so much else change.

E na easy, especially wid everyone and everything me ever know gone long long time. Except me an' ole Gregory. Me does pluck leaf n' run me han' over um like me did that night the lookout tell me Ineta sell off, de night me cry laka pickney. Me does run me finger over de leaf smooth waxiness... but even sensation ah memory walking 'way from me.

Some days everything cloudy like when sky overcast and rain looking to fall but don't, and the cloudiness hanging there whole time. Dem days, me t'ink me finally getting ready to disappear but other days t'ings clear clear and memory sharp sharp and is like me cyan even see Ineta face, kissing distance from mi own. Me nah really know wha fu mek ah all dem fluctuation. West Indian weather funny.

An' de people same way. Ineta love nothing more than to laugh. She say is da mek she take notice ah me first time, how me did think me hab lyrics an' ting, an' me didn't mind; me woulda pappyshow me self fu she ah million times. Me love de sound ah she laugh, de fact dat me could mek she laugh just by being in mi skin. Me wish me could hear she laugh again. It was like music. An' me nah hear music so sweet since she gone. If me t'ink bout it, it vex me but mostly it make me sad. Sadness ah the worst feeling for endure dis waiting though. Wha fu do wid sadness but siddung inna um, wid yuh chin in yuh han' like yuh lost yuh mother? Joy does feel fleeting but sadness have ah all the time all the time all the time all the time feeling 'bout it. E does mek me waan shake me self laka mangee dog and shout mek smadee see me and come chat to me. But even when me make a spectacle of myself me invisible to most people.

More people through here now. Clarks Hill. All e curve an' dem have street light. They not on all the time, only when heavy foot smadee walk under them or one of them motorised carriages that so popular now go whizzing by.

Me yah so long me lose all sense of time, cyan mark it only by how t'ings change 'round me, how when me wander east or south, just in case, no cane there no more, not

even a couple stalks. Like them decide fu bun down all the cane-field an' dem fu good, and me cyaarn say me blame dem; plenty time over mi cursed long life me waan bu'n dem cane-fields meself for the way dem suck up nearga life and chop off arwe dream laka wan limb.

But dream nah dead easy, ka though Ineta never come back, me ha fu believe she still looking for me because she wouldn't leave me jus' so. Me can't countenance the possibility that she find smadee else fu love over dere pan Barbuda or wherever and build a life with dem, make pickney and in time gran'pickney. Wid dem. Wid dem an' not me.

Don' get me wrong, me want it fu she, me do; but me did want um for the two ah we first and in all dem years me na able fu let go ah dat.

When smadee say slavery done long time, me t'ink how me slave all mi life, an' til yah under ol' black Gregory; slavery not so long gone that slave jumbie nah still bout de place, whether smadee waan see we or not.

Light drive out shadow and all de light nowadays—car light, street light—make we harder fu see but arwe still yah. Me still yah. An' if me still dey bout, me know cyaarn me one, though arwe nah keep company wid one anodda. Me cyaarn speak for the rest of them but, as for me, me soul still ah cry long water.

Day and night.

Jumbie not vampire; arwe nah sleep, sun nah bu'n we. But only some cyan see we. Like maybe dem can catch arwe shadow out of the corner o' dem eye but dem dismiss it as illusion.

Me does see the way dem look back an' look wey. Maybe tell demself, when dem pass the whitewood and spy me under e shadow high day, ah just wan labourer taking a likkle ease-up. An' dem not all de way wrong, if dem thought go dat wey dey.

But me na t'ink dem t'ink 'bout me at all.

Under the whitewood, where only speckles of light reach me, dem eyes never really settle pan me, even when dem ah seek shelter right nex' to me, from drizzle rain.

Children now an' again will see jumbie; the likkle likkle ones too likkle fu know any better does even wave sometimes before dem adult pull them on. Some can see. Some does hear. Me tell one wan time that me ah wait fu smadee.

He wasn't like the other children. He was older, wearing school uniform with long pant, but more of a loner, who in he wandering come up on the whitewood tree. Me tell he me come from Sea View Farm estate and me waiting for Ineta from Jonas estate, an' he tell me no estate not there no more, an' me tell he me know that, me nah foolie, but ah so we call them back then, wasn't really no village back then, you belong to an estate



or you don't belong. And if you nah belong, dog better than you; well, if you were slave, dog better than you anyway. But he get a look like he understand.

Me tell he, "Mi name Nankeen," and he laugh and say, "Like the cloth?" Me tell he bakkra name all de pickney born back then and dem carry bakkra last name too. He ask me mi last name and is so me realise, "Me na memba," dat me memory flickering again like the street light when the bulb waan change. When dat happen me does tek it to mean me been here too long.

And maybe Ineta, *wonder if she died Ineta Jonas*, nar come again.

He, the boy, Lisa, *na girl name dat?*, decide he waan help me. He was an industrious boy who like book an' t'ing and he go archives all the time trying to find me but slave hard to find in de document white man leave behind, unless them do something spectacular like King Court and try blow up de governor.

Me na min do nothing spectacular at all in mi life, especially after Ineta gone.

He say he could probably still find me with time but me tell he no worry 'bout me, look for Ineta.

He say he did find a Ineta Codrington in the records for Barbuda but who's to say; he only take note of it because me mention to he how the slave cart coulda taken a round and round route to the largest sugar plantation on the island. We agree it probably wasn't her since that Ineta was probably born Codrington.

It was unusual for grown slave to have dem name change.

Me na min do nothing spectacular at all in mi life, especially after Ineta gone.

Still me ask, what happen to she, this Ineta Codrington.

She wasn't in the registry when Emancipation come, he say.

And me feel bad for that, that Ineta mebbe never taste freedom. Me m'self was already too old when it come to pick up the search for fu me Ineta, especially widout me missing toe, so me continue fu pass me time here under black Gregory figuring if she was goin' go looking for she-people, like plenty smadee did when Emancipation come, is right yah so she would come an' look for me.

Maybe me shoulda try harder. Me na know.

Me na know plenty of nothing. Like where the boy gone, maybe he grown now, hard to keep track of time. Maybe he gone or maybe is me that gone. Me na know.

Only thing me know is this. Me love Ineta an' ...an' ...an' ....

Comes a time of year, not every year, mind, but some, when Ineta an' me black Gregory hab flowers fu so, flowers like rain in June when weather jus' off the coast

looking to blow through or blow by, the season of mango blossom and gynep blossom an' everything flowering. The birds does keep up a racket dem time dey as dem nyam dem belly full. An' the flowers is the prettiest thing. Not pretty like Ineta, not even pretty fu so but when they all laid out on the grass like that, what a pretty pictcha. Was a year like that when the flowers plentiful, falling with every wind blow only for the tree to make more, so much more the ground round the tree tun fancy carpet that does sof' sof', sof' enough fu sleep pan. An me dream me see Ineta, ah kneel dung over me wid she pretty self, she voice sof' like breeze when she say, "Come, Gregory, is time," an' me answer, groggy, "Me name ah nah Gregory," an' she smile at me like me foolie an' me t'ink, cah me yah so long, long long time, maybe ah dat me name in truute but me na memba.

*Christine Barrow*

# An Excerpt from The Rainbow Window

## 1: Place and People, 1945-1956

**The island of St Augustine is shaped like a gigantic prehistoric fish, tail fin stretching and thrashing against the tempestuous waves of the Atlantic, head resting in the calm waters of the Caribbean Sea. On the hill at the cliff edge, where the eye of the fish protrudes, stands an ancient coral-stone edifice. It was erected three centuries ago by seafarers from England who swaggered ashore and colonised.**

The walls, porous yet solid, support a spire that soars above the tallest mile tree and fades into the clouds until only the bell tolls from on high. Beneath the roof, rafters hewn from a variety of timbers crisscross—those English settlers having axed the dense rainforest to make way for the planting of cane on plantations and the enormous profits of sugar for the high teas of their lords and ladies at home. The arched door was cut from tamarind wood, the pews carved from the trunks of mammee-apple trees and decked with mats woven from the aerial roots of the bearded fig. The altar is of the finest mahogany, polished with reverence, and bears a simple cross of bamboo. On the wooden floor alongside stands a large clay pot containing a scarlet poinsettia representing the blood of the Saviour. The pulpit, also of mahogany, is engraved with the image of a sea serpent, tongue on fire.

The stained-glass window above the altar is enormous—it would take thirty little children holding hands to ring around the rim. Secured in its lead frame are five thousand, three hundred and twelve exquisite discs of glass in varying sizes—each one in place around the central moonstone. A rose window, though there is no pink—instead, the colours of the rainbow display their brilliance in concentric circles. It is as if a deity from on high had flattened the universe by laying an imperial hand onto the white light of the full moon and, pressing down through the indigo of the night sky, the blue of the sea, out to green fields, golden shower bloomed and the border of flamboyant blossomed in flaming red.

The origin of the church and window have outlived all memory—the people who live here have no record of when they were constructed nor by whom. And, perhaps, they

prefer that to remain an enduring mystery. As descendants of enslaved Africans, they renounce the past—let bygones be gone, let old-time memories be interred with the ancestors.

How they would rather forget the history of exploitation and injustice, though it persists—all too evident in The Master's Great House, a whitewashed concrete fortress overlooking their rickety, two-little-room wooden huts perched on coral-stone blocks. Massa, the old folk still call him, for to them he owns not merely the land on which they live but their very being.

The people, numbering no more than two hundred, squat outside his pitiless gate. As tenants, they cut his cane and eke out a living by cultivating plots on the fringes of his plantation. Rab land, they call it—stony with a thin layer of topsoil and often parched, for there are no rivers or streams on the island, the ponds sink and stagnate during the dry season, and springs from underground offer a mere trickle.

Still, they have named their village Good Hope and look forward together—England's war is over, as loyal colonialists; their own young men have returned with the King's medals pinned to their chests. Never mind one was on crutches with half his right leg gone and another had lost his left arm, they were honoured as heroes at the grandest ever Empire Day celebration in Parliament Square in Charlestown, the capital. The Royal Commission Report has been published, at long last, and the Mother Country pledged to make good on the recommendations therein—so they have been given to understand from news that trickles down. There will be progress—a new school, a health clinic, proper employment, decent housing with sanitation. A glorious future lies ahead. All that is required on their part is patience, so colonial officialdom informs them, for such large-scale developmental endeavours require extensive planning and preparation—a commission of enquiry, task force and working party, deputations and delegations.

The people have adopted the church as their very own place of worship, Christianity as their faith. The Rainbow Window is the heart and soul of the community, the symbol of solidarity and survival and, like the all-seeing eye of their God, the custodian of ethical principles. Everyone is aware, though that should the slightest spark from a cane-fire find its way in, the age-old timber would catch and blaze, the glass discs melt in flames ten times higher and hotter than any from hell.

\* \* \*

Every Sunday morning, just after the early blackbird chorus, the man in black shorts, a vest that once was white and a yellow crochet tam sits motionless with his back against a gravestone, elbows on knees, hands dangling, eyes alert and fixed on the Rainbow Window. He is slim and sinewy, possibly in his late twenties—no one

has asked, to do so would be disrespectful. Dreadlocks hang over his shoulders, his complexion is dark—as dark as the midnight sky that tinges to blue. A purple birthmark obliterates his left cheek. “Not he fault at all, at all,” the people agree. “Coulda happen tuh anybody, just so, when the mother expect’ing and craving jamun plum juice.”

Neither do they know his real name—Birdman, they call him, for his yard is a sanctuary to birds with wings buffeted and broken by strong winds or limp and flapping, having been snared in chicken wire. He shelters cattle egrets, gaulins, yellow-breasts, sparrows, and doctor-booby hummingbirds. There’s a scarlet ibis blown off course by the trade winds; a frigate bird with spiked feathers drooping, too exhausted to fly further; a pelican, its throat pouch ripped open by jagged black coral as it flew over shallow waves; a wood-dove, slow to take flight on creaking wings and easy prey to the pebble from the guttaper of a thoughtless boy.

He lives alone in the gully on the outskirts of the village, preferring the company of his birds—understanding their language, imitating twitterings of contentment, calls of greeting, mating coos and the occasional squawk of alarm. No woman, no child and whatever family he has far away on the island of his birth—no one remembers which, or when it was he arrived. His voice has a singsong lilt, though few have heard it—his thoughts are private, feelings unknown. “Cuh dear, like he neva had nuh mother tuh teach he how tuh talk,” the people say.

His solitary existence is strange, yet he’s not seen as snobbish or standoffish. No matter he is “from foreign”, his naval string buried elsewhere, he is a man of the village—well-respected, without pity. He is their champion stick-licker, winning the village competition, every year, and it is to him that the people bring essential items to be fixed—pan-carts and bicycles, pipes and drums, hoes and brooms loose on handles, chairs with seats to be recaned, washboards to have notches recarved so that sheets can be scrubbed clean and white. He it is who invented the gadget that exterminates mosquitoes—saving many from high fevers, chills and shakes

And he is the guardian of their Rainbow Window. Beside him is a harness and a bucket filled with pure spring water. A white cloth of the softest sea-island cotton is tucked into his back pocket. He twists his locks into the tam and slips off his sandals—just leather strips attached to old tractor-tire soles. He straps himself onto the wooden bar of the harness with the coconut husk ropes and secures the bucket, then tugs on an elaborate pulley system and winches himself to the top of the window— agile as a green monkey.

Wind saturated with sea salt is the main peril—it erodes everything, even glass. There is also mould and cane-ash, the droppings of birds, lizards, ants and cockroaches, dust upon dust from the digging of graves beneath. He soaks the cloth

and polishes the discs, one by one, until their colours shine and sparkle like sunlight on seawater. At last, he spirals towards the centre—to caress the white moonstone.

It's as if he hasn't seen the raggle-taggle children sitting cross-legged ten feet below, sleepy-goggle-eyed yet spellbound, peering up at his dangling feet. Pearlita Jones at eleven, the tallest among them and as ungainly as a fledgling emerging from its nest, clasps the back of her neck with both hands. Just as it's about to crack, he flicks water onto her upturned face—highlighting the glint in her wild brown eye as bright as one of the polished discs.

She half-stands—he's chosen her, she is the first. But he turns away and twirls the wet cloth to shower the other children, too. They shriek with glee.

He spins the bucket overhead and around—not a drop spills.

The children clap hands then fall silent.

He cocks his head—eyebrows raised, a tease on his lips. He knows what they are waiting for.

The children hold their breaths in readiness.

He kicks against the wall of the church, swings upside down like a trapeze artist, soars high into the air, somersaults and lands on his toes—light as the breeze itself.

The children jump and cheer, “Again, more, gi’ we more.”

“Yes, Mista Birdman,” Pearlita whispers, “please tuh fly high one more time, jus’ fuh yuh chosen one.”

But he bows with a flourish, untangles his harness, empties the bucket and loops the handle over his arm. The children scramble to their feet, ready for his next move.

As the first rays of sunlight appear over the horizon, he raises a finger to beckon them into the church. They run ahead and stare up above the altar—hearts beating double time.

Lo and behold, the sun beams through the Rainbow Window, flickers along the rafters, down the walls and across the pews, onto the children's outstretched hands—blessing them with a profusion of multicoloured lights.

They stare, enchanted, and whisper in wonderment, “Like magic.”

Not even Pearlita notices Birdman disappear down one side of the hill—just as a tirade of mothers, aunties and older sisters march up the other to haul hard-ears children home to bathe, dress in their church best and return for the tedious-as-ever Morning Service and Sunday School.

\* \* \*

Christian Religion and Moral Education are the twin pillars of local culture, the very lifeblood of the community—instituted by the Church of England for the purpose of teaching all future generations to know their place, with a mandate to prohibit critical thinking that might initiate upliftment or even, God forbid, foment rebellion. Morning Service and Sunday School are led, respectively, by the two icons of Good Hope—the Priest, Father Pilgrim, and Headmistress, Miss St John. Attendance is compulsory for every man, woman and child—not to be present is evidence of ungodliness and potential nefarious dealings, perhaps even a pact with the devil. Only Birdman is absent, excused with knowing nods—“Causen he got he own kinda worship wid rosary and incense, holy water and prayer in Latin.”

Father Pilgrim is short and rotund as a pufferfish with a peaky face and pointy red nose. “Like a mongoose,” the people say, their lips twitching with mirth, “when he did a baby, he mama mussee roll over in the bed and lie down ’pon he ear.” A young man fresh from theological training at The Trinity Seminary in Charlestown, he wears a black cassock and white clerical collar. Word, that he does not deny, has it that his fore-fore-forefather had captained the expedition that claimed to have discovered the island, christened it St Augustine after the founder of their faith, named the main town after their King, Charles I, and brought civilisation with them.

He mounts the coral-stone block he’s had placed behind the pulpit to raise himself by a foot and a half, then pulls a large white handkerchief from under his robe to cover the fiendish sea serpent carving. He puts on wire-rimmed spectacles, leads the congregation in the Lord’s Prayer and a reading from the Bible, then raises one hand, palm open to the heavens, to begin his sermon. As prolonged as ever, this one targets carnal knowledge and begins by cautioning against the evils of polygamy and matrilineal lineage, and the eternal damnation that ensues from coveting one’s neighbour’s wife and donkey. This is the signal for Miss St John to gather up all fifty-three children for Sunday School. They follow her out to the Good Hope School, a wooden shed, a few short steps away.

A charity school—though established by the Church, it was branded a “ragged school” by the island’s clergy. Miss St John dismissed the epithet in no uncertain terms and also ignored official protocol to exclude the “ragamuffins”—those children in tatters, barefoot and born illegitimate. “That,” she retorted, “would reduce my attendance by over seventy percent.”

The school’s one room measures thirty by twenty feet, less than half the size of the church, and is divided into sections by age—three in all. The little ones aged five to six are on mats on the floor, those from seven to eight kneel beside low tables, while each of the nine-plus-year-olds has a desk with a chair attached. As Class Monitor, Pearlita sits at a table at the front, next to Miss St John at her high-up desk. Behind them is the

blackboard, above which loom gold-framed pictures of Jesus, the King and the Governor with the words: THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.

Miss St John takes her seat and draws the children to attention with a gentle shake of her tambourine, she has no need of a whistle. Sunday School begins—after a quick prayer and a happy-ending version of Joseph and his coat of many colours, there’s a hymn, “Jesus loves me, this I know...,” during which she drums her fingers on the edge of her desk as if it’s a piano keyboard....

...Miss St John is thirty-four with a honey-toned complexion, voluptuous bosom and a strong will, all inherited from her mother. Her father bestowed short stature, five-foot-two, hard hair and dark eyes along with an incredibly insistent sweet tooth—the upper right incisor that would be her undoing. Her ever-busy, never-sit-still, always-in-a-hurry temperament is of her own making, and her short afro ahead of its time—most women still straighten their hair with heated combs that scar their scalps. She wears a navy blue skirt below the knee and a long-sleeved, high-necked cream blouse, nylon stockings and sensible lace-up shoes, as befits her status, though totally inappropriate for the local climate. On her wrist are three silver bangles and, over her shoulder, the strap of a large satchel— black leather with two golden buckles and crammed with all essentials along with the most mouthwatering treats.

Unlike Father Pilgrim, she is highly regarded and deeply appreciated, although that doesn’t shield her from a little fond repartee. “Eye sharp like cane-blade, she does guh sleep wid all two both open,” the people say, and the old folk add, “She got second sight.” The children, too, are well aware of the uncanny ability of those ever-watchful eyes to see whatever goes on behind her back, to predict their every intention.

Like so many others in the village of Good Hope, Miss St John was an outside child—her father having subsequently married a woman who’d left for America and with whom he had a son. No stigma there and, indeed, nothing outside about her—the family pedigree on her mother’s side being high-brown respectable. Yet her mother spurned the primary code of middle-class propriety—she would have nothing to do with marriage, not even after the father of her child was promoted to the Good Hope village policeman. PC Humphries, having expected her to be honoured by his proposal and fall into his open arms, had been totally flummoxed by her response. “Matrimony,” she’d said, stepping back and folding her arms, “represents a form of submission akin to bondage.”

Oh, but how he’d been captivated from the moment he set eyes on his daughter—his firstborn child. There, lying in the crib and reaching her tiny hands up to his, was the sweetest cherub, glowing with energy and intelligence, eyes so alive with curiosity—



just like his. He signed the birth certificate without hesitation—accepting, most reluctantly, the fact that, as a result of the mother’s stubborn stupidity, his daughter would not carry his surname. She would, however, thanks to his own brand of manly obstinacy, be christened Beulah after his much loved grandmother.

When she reached the age of twelve, he arranged for her to be tutored in town, at Miss Forde’s Private Academy for Girls, where the pupils were of fair-skin complexion and the curriculum embraced refinements such as piano and ballet, embroidery and crochet—thence to England for teacher training.

Miss St John had returned to Good Hope with tangible evidence of the successful outcome of his enormous investment in her hugely expensive education, at home and abroad. Her accent, for all to hear, was proper posh—the King’s English to perfection sprinkled with “gosh”, “golly” and “goodness me”, the vocabulary boundless. “Like she nyam the full-English dictionary fuh breakfas’,” the people said with warmhearted admiration.

His daughter, light of his life. How proud he was when she assumed her position as Teacher and later, Headmistress of the Good Hope School. Unbeknownst to him until some years later, though, was her conviction derived from courses on early childhood development that children should be raised without corporal punishment. When he found out and expressed his misgivings in a scowl that said, Right, le’ we see how that going work, she pontificated, “No such thing as wickedness in a child. All are born pure, naughtiness merely a matter of innocent immaturity” —to be handled with empathy and reasoning, supplemented by moral guidance every Sunday morning.

Duty done, Miss St John ushers the children back into the church, by which time Father Pilgrim has calmed down, though his nose is even redder. “It could pick a chigoe flea from under he toenail,” the people quip, “doan’ mind it could never reach pas’ he belly.”

He mops sweat from his brow with the sleeve of his cassock and begins to draw his longwinded sermon to a close. Talk-yuh-talk—the congregation sighs in unison, stifling yawns and pinching arms, for in this sacred space nodding off constitutes yet another transgression. The children, too, fight sleep—they have, after all, been up since first light.

Father Pilgrim raps his fingers on the pulpit—a prelude to his ultimate admonition, “Spurn the sins of the flesh.”

Whatever they are—Pearlita knows not and, being motherless and raised by her Great Aunt Myrtle, a virgin and as upright as a broom handle, has no one to ask.

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

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*John Wickham*

# Some Reflections on the State of Theatre in the Caribbean

*(An address delivered at the Second Conference of Caribbean Dramatists, Barbados, December 1978)*

When I was asked to speak, my first reaction was, naturally enough, intense pleasure and gratification, that I had been asked to talk to such knowledgeable and concerned dramatists as you, and then having accepted the invitation, very quickly, lest Ken thought twice and withdrew it, I could not suppress an overwhelming feeling that in fact I had bitten off more than I could comfortably chew. For what did I know about drama or Caribbean theatre that I could talk about, and that you could profitably listen to?

I had no insights to offer which you did not already have yourselves; it is true that I have ideas about the subject; I've seen a number of plays up and down the Caribbean. I was part of a stage-crowd in Port-of-Spain in the old Whitehall Players days in Ibsen's *ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*; I remember that Errol John was in that, so I too had my touch with greatness, and I mouthed my "Rhubarb" as effectively as anybody else. But really, what did I know about the art that I could present for examination or discussion? All I possessed was interest, curiosity, and I had a sneaking fear that neither of these would carry me or you very far.

But as I reflected on the theatre in the Caribbean, and began to make an inventory of the assets that it has, and the feelings I have about it and art in general, I found myself thinking from time to time "If only, perhaps, one day". Then I realised that if I lacked everything else, at least I have hope—it is not extinguished. It does not perhaps burn as bright as it did thirty years ago when I saw Trinidadian Phyllis Shepherd dressed in widow's black in O'Casey's *JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK* walk across the stage in Port-of-Spain, and bring tears to my eyes—just walked across the stage.

I do not think I have had a single goose-pimple of awe since Slade Hopkinson shouted on Combermere School stage in Derek Walcott's *DREAM ON MONKEY*

MOUNTAIN—"Kill her, kill her," as Corporal Lestrade. But yet my hope flickers on, against all odds.

And then when I began to think seriously, cheered by that hope, about what I should say concerning the art and theatre, as always happens when push comes to shove, I found that there was, in fact, a great deal to be said. There is for instance the matter of Government support.

For years now, the provision for a Centre for the Performing Arts, sometimes called an auditorium, has engaged public attention: and only last week, the producer of our annual National Festival of Creative Arts had words to say about the inadequacy of our facilities. We keep hearing pious noises from on high that something is on the way, and we keep our fingers crossed thinking that somehow, if we had wanted the thing badly enough, we should have had it...and then suddenly, Christmas morning, we awake and find that in fact Santa has indeed left a Cultural Centre joined to the Bank complex in Bridgetown...but we don't even know for sure...perhaps in due course somebody will tell us.

It occurred to me that the aficionados of motor racing managed to get a racecourse pretty quickly in Barbados; the flower people have a headquarters, never mind the unfortunate name of the old plantation, and the athletes have a stadium—but what is wrong with the theatre people? What have they done to deserve the neglect that they suffer? It may be possible that although they make a fashionable pretence of declaring how nice it would be to have a place to accommodate the crowds for visiting artists, they would really like to have an underwater park, or an underground cave, or new beach facilities, or buses, or burial grounds.

Maybe what we want is what we get.

Maybe lurking deep in the popular subconscious is the fear that an auditorium is not really what we need.

In a very carefully worded review of the arts in Trinidad in 1977, Judy Stone argued the case for Government support of the arts. "For Trinidad to achieve the highest standards in the arts, an essential factor will be vibrant Government support, manifested above all, in realistic subsidies, and in plentiful and unencumbered scholarships for writers, actors, directors, painters, dancers, musicians, and other creative talent; and the cry for a National Theatre or Arts Complex as a platform for that talent is more urgent than ever—such a centre could prove to be the key to professionalism in the Trinidad arts." And yet in spite of this *cri de coeur*, and in spite of the fact that popular Carnival gets assistance with the minimum of delay, it is fairly certain that the theatre complex will have, even in the circumstances of a country where money is no problem, to wait at the end of a long long queue.

There is a moral there somewhere.

As I said, I could use this opportunity to add my voice and yours to the others in the Caribbean for more Government attention; but on reflection, I do not believe that any good will come of our efforts. *No one is listening to us...least of all those in whose name and on whose behalf we profess to speak...the arts in the Caribbean have simply not been able to secure the respect of the controllers of our destinies—I mean neither the politicians nor the large mass of people; and we must wait until they do.* It has still not been possible to convince either of these groups that independence is first and foremost a matter of the spirit and only afterwards, long afterwards, a matter of economics; in fact, I'm coming round to the notion that it never is a matter of economics.

Let me tell you a story of old Craig in Port-of-Spain.... Old Craig, for those who do not know Port-of-Spain, is or was an old boy who lived in Woodford Square where he lived, cooked and mumbled to himself. He is one of the large band of eccentrics who have opted out of society in the Caribbean, but who exert a very powerful effect on the popular imagination and popular will. Craig, I'm told, went up to the Savannah on the night of Trinidad's Independence, there to mingle with the crowd and watch this whole thing happen; and as the people shouted, "Hurrah, Independence!" and jumped up, Craig was heard to say, "Eh Eh, but dey celebrating what I always had."

There are other discoveries that I made in my search for a subject for discussion. There is, for example, the need to examine the reasons for the general poverty in the quality in theatrical productions, the banality of the treatment, the childishness of the language of statement, the behaviour of theatre audiences, the refusal to treat the dialect with respect. We could usefully spend our time on the effect of the University on our creative output—I have myself noticed the increasing volume of academic writing which pours out of the various campuses—writing about writing, theses, examinations, a kind of intellectual incest at the expense of writing itself; and much of this writing is of a depressing naiveté much effort going into the discovery of the obvious, the enunciations of platitudes.

We could have talked about the need for expertise in our newspapers and popular journals and radio stations, of standards of judgement more rigorous than those presently in existence.

"Why," I asked myself, "are all these criticisms valid, and why do the various defects that give rise to them exist?" And then suddenly, in the middle of my thinking of what I should say to you, I went to one of the final rehearsals of Michael Gilkes' production of SWEET TALK. Now I must make it clear I'm not here advancing any claim about the quality of the play, or the production, but you're at liberty to draw your own inferences. In discussing this play with an acquaintance who is very knowledgeable

about production and plays and the theatre, (I shouldn't be surprised if this knowledge has some accolade of a degree of some kind) I found that my enthusiasm for what we had both seen and heard before—bedsitter, West Indians in exile, angry young man radical—was not shared: the subject had been examined in depth, and nothing new had been added to the mixture. I had to agree, and could not deny the details of the criticism; and yet I remained unconvinced, and yet there was something about what I had seen—the dingy cheerless room, the despair, the choking hopelessness of estrangement from one's landscape, the despair of life in a hostile climate, the utter failure of relationship between two young people, which I knew in my guts to be the living truth.

Somehow out of the facts, inexpertly assembled though they might have been, truth had been achieved, and I recognised it. I could not in all conscience disagree with my friend, but all I could say was that the thing I had seen was true; and that was enough for me. I did not mean that it was factually accurate. *Facts, I knew from my own experience, have little to do with truth.* I have known and still know people who have all their facts meticulously right, who make a point of getting them right, but who invariably succeed in getting the whole picture wrong.

The day after that exchange with my friend, with the disagreement still ringing in my ears, still nagging me, (because I really do not like to disagree with anybody, although I'm always doing so) the very next day I went to see the exhibition of Ivan Payne's which the Arts Council was running down at the Pelican Gallery. For those of you who are not Barbadian, and may have never heard of Ivan Payne, he died a year ago, a painter best known for his floral pieces, masses of hibiscus, frangipani, and delightful treatment of green foliage, and his scenes of Speightstown. Again I make no claim for the man as a painter; in fact I noticed among the comments in the visitors' book at the exhibition one to the effect that the writer of it was "not impressed", and I could not help noting the arrogance of tone in the handwriting, as if the fact that he or she was not impressed was a final and irrevocable judgement. Another comment, whose writer was evidently unaware that the exhibition was posthumous, was that the painter would "probably be good someday". The point I wish to make here is that it is a fair bet that whatever verdict the future delivers on Payne's work, it will by his Speightstown canvases that he will be long remembered. And this will be because the pictures, semi-primitive as they are with considerable shortcomings of balance, perspective and undeniable mismanagement of the human figure, have nevertheless caught the authentic spirit of the town. Payne has managed somehow, with the perception and skill which only artists have, to put on canvas the distillation of his native place, which has very little to do with a factually accurate rendition of the houses and shops and narrow streets and overhanging balconies—thus a Payne Speightstown is, in a way, truer than the original.

A couple of months ago I had the good fortune to see a play in Jamaica—ANANCY AND THE UNSUNG HEROES OUT WEST by Stafford Harrison. I found it a moving and most exciting experience—vigorous dance and music, a really first-rate performance. Most of the time it was really very hard for me to understand what was being said—the mixture of Jamaican dialect and Rastafarian idiom combined to defeat me; but this is the point—I knew that what I was seeing and hearing was the truth. I have no means of knowing if the facts were accurate, but I knew the truth was there.

These notions of the relationship between facts and truth gained added support when my thoughts ran to those gems of short stories—the parables of Jesus. Let us take one of them—parable of the Good Samaritan. A certain man went down to Jericho and fell among thieves who beat him and stripped him of his raiment and left him half-dead. Now Jesus told that story in response to the question “And who is my neighbour?” and when he had finished it the question was answered. Now the validity of that answer does not depend on whether there was ever in fact an incident in real time on the Jerusalem to Jericho highway, the J.1, whether there had ever been a man with a name, address, ID card, who was ripped off on that road, and if there was such a man, what was the day and date on which he met his misfortune, were there witnesses—these police questions are only to be asked for us to realise that they are quite irrelevant to any truth that resides in the parable, and to realise that it is *entirely possible for a work, play, novel, concerto to be accurate in every painstaking detail, and yet to be a downright lie.*

There is a story of Oscar Wilde who went to an art exhibition and came up against an enormous painting called THE SEASONS, painted in detail of every blade of grass showing, every granular detail of snow as the seasons moved from Spring to Winter; so Wilde looked at this thing, astounded, for a long time, and then turned to his colleague and asked, “Was all this done by hand?!”

By now you may have caught the drift; if not, let me be as blunt as I can be to you; I mean that *we in the Caribbean are in a perilous condition, and we are not going to be saved by the provision of cultural complexes, auditoria, festivals, or any of those artificialities.* I have been as vocal as anyone else for Governments to provide things, and am all for prodding them into action, but the continued reluctance to do so (and when they do they insist in control of these facilities) has made me think again.

How is it that I do not see in the Caribbean art around me very much of what I see myself? Every morning I go for a walk, and I take the same route every day, and I never fail to see something which I had not seen before—very simple things—dunk trees in blossom, and the man coming out with his cow, and the street lights going out, and yet when I read I seldom find anything to match this experience.

What I’m trying to say is that there is a life which I live, an interior kind of life (and

it must be true for most people), which I do not find reflected in the work of Caribbean artists. I do mean the recital of the facts, I mean the truth which resides in these facts. I must conclude that our artists have sold us short—there are perfectly valid historical reasons for this, but these do not make my disappointment any less keen—you see that we have fallen into the error in thinking the politics and economics will save us, and they will not. George Lamming makes one of his characters in his SEASONS OF ADVENTURE say that he did not care who makes his country's politics, so long as he was allowed to make its music. It is a profound statement.

If, for illustration, we in Barbados got the finest theatre complex in the world tomorrow, what would we do with it? If we got it in the next ten years, what would we do with it? It would be empty and unused for most of the time, and would have to wait for the Commodores, for NIFCA fortnight, for the ten days of the BIMSHIRE pantomime, to fill it up. The rationale for such a complex is that we must have some place for visiting artists to perform.

Many years ago, I heard Philip Sherlock addressing an audience in Port-of-Spain talk about Caribbean theatre. He pointed to the fact that the theatre was all around us—ride in a bus in any Caribbean town and listen to the dialogue, go into a market and hear the sharp repartee, the drama, and ask yourself if a big theatre complex is what we really need. Watch cricket from the Kensington public stands, and listen to the ol' talk, and ask yourself what relevance an imitation Broadway or West End production can have for us? Should we not be using our church-yards, these steps we're on right now, and if we did, should we not find that what we put on there would have more meaning?

It is no wonder, therefore, that our artists find themselves estranged; it is no wonder that a bill is scheduled in the Parliament, where it provides for certain professions; when they come to "artists" they are defeated—they have "Artists (including commercial)".

It is more than 40 years since I heard my father's voice, and on the last occasion, he talked to me about the folly of "waiting for something to happen", for sweepstake or bequest. Most people, if they get the money, will buy a house or a car and then will "start to live"; and they forget, that while they are saying all this, they are still living too, I presume.

Should we not be looking now at what we have, assessing it and using it? Would it not be more honest to do so, than continue crying for the moon? For when the moon comes we shall not know what to do with it! Is there not a truth which is in our lives now? Think of the development of the steelband, for example...some genius saw a lot of old pans lying around; he had an idea, and he used it...if he had continued saying, "If I could afford a guitar, or a piano, or a violin," where then should we be now?

Governments like their artists to cry for the moon, politicians do not go to plays, except when they are specially invited. The Prime Minister of Trinidad was a visitor to a literary club in Port-of-Spain, in the early 50's; and he once gave a most absorbing lecture on Edgar Mittleholzer, but he was not a politician then.

If I have not by now made my meaning clear, I'm sorry that I wasted your time; but I assure you that I have done the best I can. I am a convinced and unrepented regionalist, and I'm sure that *the eventual integration of the West Indies will come about only after the recognition and acknowledgement of a Caribbean cultural identity, (for there is one) and not from any political or economic arrangement.*

More than most people, Naipaul has said, Caribbean people need their writers (and he might have said their dramatists), to tell them who they really are—for *only those artists who are able to recognise the truth among the dross of facts are going to set us free.*



*Nisha Hope*

# Angela's Appointment

## AN OFFICE

A Psychologist's office. There is a single entrance into the room with a bay window that lets in some light. The walls are painted old navy with three inches of white skirting. The stained wooden floor is covered with a contemporary-styled square area rug. Two white leather single seat chairs with blue cushions are on either side of a grey couch. A wooden book case is set against the wall, stage left with various books. A wooden table with a lamp on stage right. Two abstract paintings line the walls.

*(It's late afternoon. ANGELA is brought into the office of Dr Adams. She is offered a seat.)*

## SECRETARY

Mrs Prescod, make yourself comfortable. The Dr will be with you shortly.

*(She opts to sit on the couch but the Secretary signals for her to sit on the patient's chair at the Doctor's desk. She moves to sit at the desk. She glances at the Doctor's desk and plays with items like a child, knocking over things, which makes noise. She hurriedly fixes the items back neatly and tries to compose herself. She glances at her rose gold MK watch then at the door. No one has been alerted by the noise. She crosses her legs and turns open the Doctor's chair to face her, then rehearses what she's going to say.)*

## ANGELA

Dr Adams! Good afternoon, my name is Angela Prescod. I am thirty years old. I have been married for two years. I don't have any children. I work at the Ministry of Tourism as a human resource manager. I am here because my husband thinks I have a drinking problem. I don't have a drinking problem. I have only passed out once, just that one time, and he's obviously overreacting. I had but one bottle of Lamothe Parrot. It was the week we were doing evaluations at work, it was pretty hectic and I wanted to unwind a bit....

...I told him I had worked through my lunch hour and forgot I didn't eat.

*(She nods confidently, looks at her watch and goes to the door. She presses her ear to the door then composes herself.)*

OK, let's try this again.... Hi, Dr Adams! How are you? So nice of you to agree to meet with me.

***(Her phone rings.)***

Hi, Joseph! . . . OK, but now is not a good time, I can't talk now. I'm in the Doctor's office waiting.... No! No! Joseph, I'm not pregnant, I just needed to see the Doctor about something. Let me call you later. Hotel Casa Maya?... OK, I will make my way by taxi. See you when I get there.... Yes, see you.

***(Kisses)***

Ooops! Joseph, did you say the 25<sup>th</sup>? I won't be able to do that, I just remembered that I have something very, very important on the 25th . . . I can't tell you now, I'll call you later.

***(The door opens and the Secretary enters.)***

## **SECRETARY**

Mrs Prescod, the doctor will be with you shortly.

***(The Secretary leaves.)***

## **ANGELA**

Joseph, the secretary has just walked in, I got to go.... Yes Joseph, I'm fine, I will call you later.... Me, too.

***(She ends the call and rushes to the door. She takes her phone and places it into her bag, takes up her bag and goes towards the door. When she gets to the door she turns around and starts over.)***

Hi, Dr Adams! So nice of you to agree to see me. I had to take off early from work today and I am really tired. Is there any way we can reschedule for an earlier time next week, say, Tuesday? I don't know what to do. I have this relationship with this man, that I know I have to stop but I don't want to. Sex with him feels right, but sex with my husband does not.

***(She gives a hysterical laugh and composes herself. She sits on one of the single seat chairs. Wanting something to occupy her time she takes out a half-eaten pack of chocolate out of her bag, breaks off piece and eats. After a few seconds, she glances at her watch. She is a bit uneasy; the Doctor still hasn't arrived. She goes to her bag and takes out a piece of tissue and wipes the corners of her eyes.)***

I've been feeling a bit down lately. I'm here because I think my drinking is affecting my marriage. I have all these deadlines at work which I have not met, I try to put in over-time, and by the time I get home I'm drained....

...It's hard to talk to Marlon, because he hears me but doesn't really listen. I am not an alcoholic, I only drink red wine. After a long day at work, all I need is a nice warm bath and some quiet time, is that too much to ask for? But he wants to make love. I don't mind if it's just plain sex, you know, something quick, but he wants all this foreplay.

***(Goes to her handbag)***

I can't make love when I'm tired.

***(Takes a compact and lipstick from her bag.)***

I love my husband and want my marriage to work, but sometimes I feel as though my marriage is a chore.

***(Closes compact and replaces it in the bag.)***

Truth is I hate what he does.

***(She takes out a pack of cigarettes.)***

Last week he brings home this lacy, edible lingerie.

***(Takes out a lighter from her bag.)***

That man makes me put them on. He makes me lie on the bed, and then he starts to kiss me all about my body. He kisses my inner thigh, and at the moment his tongue starts to enter my vagina my entire body just shuts down, completely frozen. I must have been unresponsive for about a whole minute. When I caught myself, I was in tears. Marlon asked me what happened, and I told him I had no idea. I couldn't tell him, I just couldn't. I just hate when he kisses me like that there.

***(She crushes the cigarettes in her hands.)***

Uncle Carl, from the time I was little, would stay with us when he comes on vacation from sailing. And mommy and I would be very happy to have him home. He would put me on his lap and show me all the beautiful pictures of all the places in the world he had travelled to. He promised that when I grew up he would take me on the ship to see all those beautiful places.

And then, on my thirteenth birthday to be exact, he brought me a pretty pink lacy nightgown, which really was a negligee. He called me to his room and asked me to put it on. He said he had another surprise for me: he lifted me and placed me on his bed then he asked me to close my eyes. He and mom know I love surprises.... So I closed my eyes. And then I felt his lips, he kissed me from my feet to my inner thigh and then my vagina, and I didn't know what to do so I just sat there with my eyes closed. Everything went quiet. It made my body tingle, then I felt him stop. And I opened my eyes.

When I looked at Uncle Carl, he was stone still and staring at the door. I turned and there she was, my mother, staring at me, motionless. I looked at her, frozen. After a few seconds she turned around, closed the door, leaned her head onto the door and cried and cried and cried.

At the sound of the door, Uncle Carl got up from between my thighs. I just sat there not knowing what to do. Uncle Carl went to her, but she walked past him and came straight to where I was on the bed and slapped me across my face. She was very angry, she dragged me off the bed, told me that I was a disgrace to my family and I felt I was a big woman. She made me take off the negligee. I looked at Uncle Carl, but he just stood in a corner quietly, he had turned his back to us. I put back on my clothes and mom watched me as I dressed. Then she sent me to my room.

The next morning when I woke up, I saw Uncle Carl packing. He came into the kitchen as I was making breakfast, and just as he was about to approach me, mom came into the room. They looked each other in the eye, then he turned, picked up his suitcase and left. She watched him from the window and cried as he went through the gate.

***(She goes to her bag and takes out a canister and takes a swig.)***

My mom took me to the clinic that day. I didn't know where I was going at first, she just told me to get dressed and we left in a hurry. Throughout the entire journey, my mom never spoke to me.

I couldn't remember the last time I went to clinic. When we got to the clinic, everyone was staring at me. I felt as though I had the letter A on my dress.

***(Takes another swig.)***

I don't know what my mom said to the nurse, but I had to undress and she examined me. She was very rough, and she took two of her fingers and inserted them into my vagina. When she was finished, she called my mom into the room and told her that I was fine. Mom looked at the nurse and clasped her hands and cried. Again.

***(She corks the bottle and replaces it in the bag.)***

When we returned home, mom took me to my room and told me never to talk about this incident ever. She packed my things into a little suitcase.

***(She takes a cigarette from the pack.)***

Then she took the negligee...

***(She takes out the lighter.)***

...placed it in an old galvanised bucket, poured kerosene on it...

***(She ignites the lighter.)***

...and burnt it in the yard. That evening, we took a bus to Aunty Hilda's house ten miles away. I stayed with her until my eighteenth birthday.

I never saw Uncle Carl again.

***(She glances at her watch and is in disbelief that the Doctor still hasn't arrived. She takes a fan out of her bag and fans herself. After a few seconds she checks her watch once more then goes to the door. She goes to the desk and takes a pen and writes on a notepad.)***

Dr Adams, I'm sorry, but at this moment I really need to go home. We will have to reschedule for another time, I will make the appointment with your secretary.

Goodbye.

***(Angela takes her handbag and leaves the office. Halfway to the door she pauses and returns to the desk. She writes in big letters on another page.)***

HAVE A NICE DAY!

Angela.

***(She leaves.)***

THE END

*Sasky Louison*

# Rayn's Song

## Block I

### GRIOT

**The music. The children were playing. Fanfare. People were dancing. Food. Drinks were pouring. Laughter. It was a wedding reception. Everyone was decked out in their Sunday best, celebrating the union of Francis and Beulah Joseph. It was 1937.**

And in walks this beauty. No one knew who she was. She was tall, slender, curves in all the right places. She wore a beautiful lily white, broad-brimmed hat that sat effortlessly on her long, black, curly hair that bounced up and down, down and up as she walked. Her bright, red, long, mermaid dress covered what would seem to be cute petite feet. It was almost like she was walking on air. Her brown, mysterious eyes said, "Hello."

It instantly seemed like the music got louder because of her presence. There was more happening on the dance floor. The children spun around in circles, circles, circles, more circles. The portions of food grew on plates. The laughter got louder, and the drinks kept on being poured.

The men grinned like children waiting on their ice cream cone from the ice cream man. The women turned up their noses and pulled their husbands away. Still, she danced with whomever asked her to. It was one of the best receptions the village ever had.

Then came time for the speeches and while friends, family members and well-wishers said their congratulations, a little girl, who was very mischievous and would not keep still, not even if you paid her, ran up and down, skipped and hopped, did everything she was told not to do. Then she began to crawl under each table looking at the grown-ups' feet and giggling to herself at their toes.

Then she got to the mysterious woman. Her dress covered her feet. So, the little girl decided to be very quiet and very careful as she lifted the mysterious lady's dress, slowly, slowly, slowly.... What was that?

On her left foot, she wore a dainty, red, high-heeled shoe, but the right, it looked like a hoof...a cow's hoof. Why did she have two different shoes on her feet? The little girl inspected the shoe, even going as far as to touch it, only to realise that that was not

a shoe. It was the mysterious woman's foot... her actual foot. She literally had one hoof and one foot.

The little girl opened her mouth to say something, but the lady, who knew that she was there, looked at her under the table with eyes that said, "Keep your mouth shut," and her eyes were no longer pretty. The eyes she showed her signalled death.

The little girl realised that the woman was a djablès. She opened her mouth to warn everyone, but the djablès kicked her in her mouth with its hoof. Soft enough to not raise an alarm but hard enough for the little girl to say nothing.

The little girl tried to cry but could not. She tried to ask for help but could not. The little girl knew from then on to say nothing.

## Block II

***(RAYN IS WIPING A TABLE. THE PHONE RINGS. SHE LETS THE VOICEMAIL PICK UP.)***

**DONALD**

Sorry, Rayn. Can't make it tonight.

***(RAYN IS UPSET. SHE GOES TO THE BROOM CLOSET. SHE COMES BACK TO THE ANSWERING MACHINE AND PLAYS THE MACHINE AGAIN.)***

**DONALD**

Sorry, Rayn. Can't make it tonight.

***(RAYN BEGINS TO SWEEP AND THEN SING.)***

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around

Turn me around, turn me around.

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around.

I'm gonna keep on a-walking, keeping on a-talking

Marching up to Freedom Land.

Ain't gonna let no wicked people...

Ain't gonna let no jailhouse...

***(CELL/TELEPHONE RINGS.)***

**RAYN**

Hello. I'm sorry. Yes. I'll keep it down. I know...I know...I should know better. You are right. Okay. Thank you. And a great one to you also.

***(RAYN CONTINUES HER SONG, LOUDER.)***

Ain't gonna let no neighbours....

## Block III

***(RAYN IS UNPACKING GROCERY FROM BAGS AND PUTTING THEM IN SHELVES. SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)***

**RAYN**

At the airport. I am eighteen years old.

So it is August 1st, 2003, and I am furious. I am sooooo upset! I swear, I hate that man!

Now, I want to go on Caribbean Star. It is leaving at noon and the fare is \$190 but that man wants me to use LIAT because it is leaving at 8 a.m. and that man says he has work to do and don't have time to be hanging around doing nothing until 12:00 o'clock.

I say to that man that LIAT is charging almost \$400.00 but he does not care about that.

I explain to that man that I need to save as much as possible. But that man does not care. He has work to do and don't have time to be hanging around doing nothing until 12:00 o'clock.

I have to remind that man that I am the one paying the ticket. Not him. Oh, well, that man says that if I do not go and buy that ticket from LIAT, then he will make me, and don't make him have cause to embarrass me at the airport.

Defeated, I take my suitcases, careful not to grab the handles with too much force, because that man will say that I am being rude and will shout at me or slap me in front of people.

I begin my walk over to the LIAT counter. I cannot wait to leave that man's house and be on my own. I cannot wait! When I leave, I will never come back.

And, suddenly, right there, it comes to me. Rayn, you are eighteen years of age and you are moving. That man cannot do you anything!

So instead of LIAT I make my way to Caribbean Star and that man comes quickly towards me, rushing me, asking, "Are you not going on LIAT? I told you I have work to do and don't have time to be hanging around doing nothing until 12:00 o'clock"

People stop what they are doing to look at the commotion between Daddy and me but I do not care. The day I have waited so long for is finally here. I look him in his eye and I say, "I am going on Caribbean Star. If you have work to do, then go and do it. I am not asking you to stay here until 12:00 o'clock»

He lifts his hand to slap me and I say, "You really want to slap me? Slap me!"

I wait. He does not slap me.

I pay for my flight.



## Block IV

*(RAYN IS TYPING ON HER LAPTOP. AT SOME POINT SHE STOPS AND SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE AND POURS HERSELF A DRINK. IT'S A MIXED DRINK.)*

**RAYN**

At my family home. I am fifteen years old.

I hear a cracking. I glance around. Daddy has a long piece of PVC pipe that he was breaking to fashion it into a whip. My knees buckle. He is going to kill me. "I want to pee," I squeal. "I need to pee." I had already thought of an escape plan in half a second. It is how my brain works. Quick exit plans. But Daddy knows me. He knows I had already thought of an escape. "Pee on yourself!" he shouts. "Pee on your blasted self!"

"Let her go pee," Mummy says. "Do not let her dirty up the place."

Daddy listens. "Go and come back," he says. I go to the bathroom. The bathroom that is in his bedroom. We live in a two-storey house. We are on the upstairs. There is bush towards the side of where the bathroom is. There are big, large toilet pipes that lead to God knows where. I figure if I climb out the window, I can hang onto the pipes and then drop into the bush and run away.

I climb onto the pipes but it is dark. I cannot see where I will fall, so I decide to wait for a passing vehicle that may eventually flash its lights so I can see. But Daddy walks into the bathroom before the vehicle comes. He looks out the window and sees me. "Bitch!" he screams. No, he shouted. I drop myself to fall into the bush but he holds onto my shirt. I am hanging from two storeys up. I do not care. I do not have the time to think of how dangerous that is. I just want to get away from him. I try to wiggle away from his grasp but he holds onto me and begins to slap me all over my head. My brain lights up with every slap. "Come up! Come up! Come up!" he repeats, and then there goes my conscience. I hate my conscience sometimes. It says, "Honour your mother and your father."

I let myself up. As soon as I am in the house, he flings me onto his bed. I try to run but he grabs my ankle. I try to kick but he slaps me. It stings. We wrestle and wrestle and wrestle. I try to get away and he tries to keep me in the room. I try to get away and he tries to keep me in the room. I try to get away and he tries to keep me in the room. Finally, I give up. He is my father and I must obey him in the name of the Lord for this is right. He's huffing and puffing. I am huffing and puffing.

He puts me on my belly. He sits on my back. He lifts my skirt. Pulls down my panty, and I feel the first lash of the PVC Pipe on my bottom. Fire, pain, I scream... he keeps on hitting. I can't tell the lashes apart. I can't describe the pain. Mummy

comes in with the phone in her hand. “Tyrone is on the phone,” she says to Daddy. She is blocking the receiver. Daddy stops. My bottom is pulsing. “Tell him,” Daddy huffs, “that I am busy. I will call him back.” I feel his beads of sweat dropping on me. Mummy leaves to deliver the message. Daddy continues doing what he does best.

## **Block V**

***(RAYN IS DOING HER LAUNDRY, TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)***

### **RAYN**

At my family home. I am fifteen years old.

I get off the bus and cross the street to go home. I’m in my school uniform. I open the door and Daddy is waiting for me. He grabs me before I step inside and flings me across the living room. “Where were you today?”

“School,” I lie.

He asks again, “Where were you?!”

“School. I was at school.” I lie again.

He slaps me. My ear rings. Little shiny dots dance in front my eyes. “I will ask you again,” he says, raising his voice. “Where-were-you-today!?”

Again I lie. “I was at school, Daddy. I was at school.” I am prepared to say I was at school even if he kills me. I cannot let him know that I went to see my sister, because he will torture me and then kill me. He grabs me and throws me to the other side of the house. I do not know exactly where I am anymore. I don’t have the time to think of my surroundings, but a wall and I are about to become best friends until I feel him grab me again and throw me across the room. “You will make me murder you!” he shouts. I do not cry. I am not afraid. I have no time for my emotions to respond. Mummy comes in. “Stop!” Stop!” she screams. Daddy grabs me with his left hand, slaps her with his right. “Do not tell me how to discipline my children.” She does not respond to his slap. She looks at me. “Your cousin called and she said that you went to see your sister. Rayn, tell your father the truth.”

My heart drops. How could she do this to me? Why did she do that? She knows how Daddy is.

Daddy asks again. “Where were you?” Maybe if I stick to my story of being at school, then there will be a slight chance he will believe me. A one in a millionth chance, but I think it is worth the risk.

He does not want me speaking to my sister because she ran away from home at seventeen. She said she could not take it anymore. One day he came to her office after 4:30 p.m. No one was there, and in strolled Daddy. Most girls would be happy and excited to see their father, but she froze in fear when she saw him. “Why did you leave?” he greets her. “Daddy, you beat me all the time. I go to work with bruises, it’s embarrassing.”

“I will not hit you anymore,” he assures her. “Come home,” he urges. “I do not want you staying with your cousin. She is not a good influence.”

Sister said she liked the new agreement and she and Daddy went to get her clothes, but instead of going home Daddy drove two hours to the south of the island. Sister thought he was going to do business, but when they had passed all the places he usually did business with she got scared. He came to a cart-road and drove in. They drove for another thirty minutes in silence until she began to smell the sea. Then he stopped. “Get out!” he ordered. Sister said she quickly got out. You had to do what he said or your punishment would be greater. “I brought you here to beat you,” he revealed. “Because when I beat y’all at home, people hear and y’all call the police. I don’t have time for that. You can run, but I’m not running behind you. You can scream as loud as you want. There is no one there to hear you. Now I brought a piece of two by four to beat you with, but you cooperate so nicely I’ll beat you with the belt instead. Kneel.”

He brought her home that night and from the time she walked in I knew something horrible had happened. I opened my mouth to protest but her eyes said to me, “Don’t. Just leave it alone.” But I couldn’t help it. My words burst out. “What did you do to her?!” I screamed. “What did you do?!?”

He was laughing. “Ask her. She not on TV.”

He continued laughing and simply said, “Go to bed.”

## **Block VI**

**(RAYN IS FOLDING AND PUTTING AWAY UNDERGARMENTS IN A CHEST OF DRAWES.  
SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)**

### **RAYN**

I am at church. I am sixteen years old.

An elder in the church found out how badly Daddy beat me. He told me that I needed counselling, and he was the man for the job.

We sealed a date and time. Then I didn't feel good about going, especially when he showed up at my school "to ensure that I was coming", so I went home with my friends instead. He's a nice guy, but something about him rubbed me the wrong way.

For a year after he made me feel bad for not going with him. He harassed me at least once a week, every week, for an entire year. An entire year until I was sixteen and writing my CXC exams.

I said yes.

He told me to walk on one side of the road, and he would walk on the other. I asked him why, and he said because people talk. He told me to catch one bus and that he would be coming up on the one right after. He told me to wait for him in the park, and that next to the park is a motel. I told him that I thought we were meeting in the park, but he told me that he did not want people to see us talking and that I could get in trouble if Daddy knew where I was.

So we went into the motel.

I was embarrassed at the way the office workers looked at me as I walked by. I was in my school uniform, and they were looking at me like I was a whore.

He told me to make myself at home.

The room was small with a bed, a TV, a bathroom and a closet. I sat at the edge of the bed and he asked me to tell him about Daddy, so I just giggled and said, "Oh, well, my father has his ways, and I am just working on finishing school and leaving home."

His next question was "Do you have a boyfriend?" And I giggled because I was uncomfortable. He asked me, "Have you ever kissed a guy?" I giggled again and said, "No." Then he reached over and placed his mouth onto mine. His tongue was wet. Then he started telling me how he saw me looking at him at church, and he knew I liked him.

He undid my hair and tried to remove my overalls. I began to think of a way out. I was not screaming. I was not pushing him away from me. I was not scared. I was calm, just thinking of a way out.

Then I got an idea. I told him that I had forgotten that I had to meet my uncle for 1:00 o'clock and I needed to leave to get there on time. He said, "Oh, no! Can't you be late?" He was still struggling with my overalls. He did not know how to remove them, and I was not showing him how to. I told him that I could not be late because if I was, my uncle would call my father and I would have to tell my father why I was late and he knows when I lie.

He lifted my overalls over my head, turned me around and onto the bed.  
It hurt. And there was blood.  
He preached at church that Sabbath about forgiveness.

## Block VII

### (RAYN IS IN THE SHOWER.)

Wade in the water  
Wade in the water, my child  
Wade in the water  
God's a-going to trouble the water  
Who's that young girl dressed in red  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Must be a child that Moses led  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Wade in the water  
Wade in the water, children  
Wade in the water  
God's a-going to trouble the water  
Look over yonder, what do you see?  
God's gonna trouble the water  
The Holy Ghost a-coming on me  
God's gonna trouble the water  
My Lord delivered that lady at the well  
That lady at the well  
That lady at the well  
My Lord delivered that lady at the well  
Why not me as well?  
Wade in the water  
Wade in the water, children  
Wade in the water  
God's a-going to trouble the water

## Block VIII

(RAYN IS HANGING CLOTHES ON A CLOTHES LINE. SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)

RAYN

I am at the beach. I am twelve years old.

Today, I am seeing my cousins for lunch at the beach after church. I breathe deeply when I see them. My older cousin sees me and grins. I know why. I smile back and wave like I am happy to see him, but I am not.

Lunchtime comes. All the food is placed at the back of Daddy's twin cab. My plate is filled with all my favourite dishes. It is Sabbath. We always have the best of foods on Sabbath. But I cannot eat. I am nervous. It's about to happen. I force a forkful of food into my mouth. I am standing at the side of Daddy's van. My cousin comes next to me, and he motions for me to ease closer to him. I know what he wants. There are people all around and, as usual, he does not care. They never see, anyway. The van reaches me above my waist. No one can see what is going on from my waist down. I ease closer as he instructs me to, but then I whisper to him, "I'm seeing my period now." I think I can use this period thing to my advantage, because boys do not like periods. They usually run away at the thought of blood dripping like a tap from a woman's vagina, but my cousin shrugs and says, "So."

I feel like I am on a treadmill. I run and run and run and run some more, but still I get nowhere. My cousin takes his hands and reaches for my vagina. I run and run, but still I am standing in the same spot. I am screaming, but no one hears me. My armpits feel hot. My body gets the chills. My stomach feels like a merry-go-round, making circles, circles, more circles. My heart is pounding so hard that I feel it through the tips of my fingers and my eyeballs. I want to run away, but I stay. I do not know how to walk away without him feeling embarrassed. I am afraid he would not be my friend anymore. When he is not your friend, he laughs at you. He is a good-looking guy. He is popular. Everyone likes him. When he laughs, everyone laughs, too, and when he laughs at you, they laugh at you, too, and you get embarrassed. I hate being embarrassed.

I take another forkful of food and chew hard. I taste nothing. My soul has left my body. Physically, something horrible is happening to me, but in my soul I am anywhere but here.

Daddy makes a joke. My cousin laughs loudly at it with everyone else. He sure knows how to multitask. He is so skillful at what he does. No one ever notices. I laugh at the joke, too. Someone is taking advantage of my physical body, and I hate it but I'm laughing. My mother looks over at me and smiles. I smile back at her. She thinks we're bonding.

## Block IX

**(RAYN IS IRONING CLOTHES. SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)**

**RAYN**

I am in Sunday school playing I Spy with my friend. I am ten years old.

**TRICIA**

I spy with my two little eyes.

**RAYN**

What do you spy with your two little eyes?

**TRICIA**

Something that begins with "T".

**RAYN**

T?

**TRICIA**

Yes. T.

**RAYN**

The New Testament?

**TRICIA**

No.

**RAYN**

The Old Testament?

**TRICIA**

No.

**RAYN**

A throne?

**TRICIA**

No.

**RAYN**

Give me a hint.

**TRICIA**

Crooked.

**RAYN**

Crooked?

**TRICIA**

Yes. Crooked.

**RAYN**

I don't know. I give up.

**TRICIA**

You sure?

**RAYN**

Yes. I sure.

**TRICIA**

I don't believe you. You lying.

**RAYN**

Faith to my believing God. If I lie, I hate God. I give up.

**TRICIA**

Sister Sharon ugly, crooked toes.

**(RAYN AND MANDY GIGGLE IN CHURCH....)**



## Block X

(RAYN IS WEARING UNDER GARMENTS. SHE IS HAVING A GLASS OF RED WINE. SHE IS TYPING ON HER LAPTOP.)

**RAYN**

I am at home with my mother. I am eight years old.

Act One, Scene One, day, exterior, dash, backyard. Mother is laundering clothes in a concrete sink. Rayn hangs the washed garments on the line for her mother.

**RAYN**

Mom?

**MOTHER**

Yes, Rayn.

**RAYN**

I have been thinking. When I grow up, I want to be an actress!

**MOTHER**

Oh. You can't be an actress. Acting means you are lying, and the Bible said, "Thou shall not lie." Remember?

**RAYN**

Well, what about in commercials. Is that lying, too?

**MOTHER**

Well, the actresses in the movies are the same ones acting in commercials.

**RAYN**

Well, what about singing? I could be a singer, couldn't I?

**MOTHER**

Well, you will have to sing only gospel music. You couldn't sing any banja music. You have to be in the world but not of the world.

**RAYN**

Well, what about radio announcing?

**MOTHER**

You would need to work at a Christian station. Anywhere else would be a sin.

**RAYN**

Dancing?

**MOTHER**

No. Dancing leads to sin. You know that. All that rubbing plus touching equal sin.

**RAYN**

Writing?

**MOTHER**

That's nice, but you can't write fiction.

**RAYN**

I can't be anything I want to be?

**MOTHER**

You can be a journalist. They only report the facts. That's not a sin.

**RAYN**

I guess. I guess I can do that.

**MOTHER**

But remember you can't work on Sabbath.

## **Block XI**

**(RAYN IS SELECTING WHAT SHE IS GOING TO WEAR. SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)**

**RAYN**

I am in my bed, its early morning. I am six years old.

I grew up in your typical Christian nuclear family. Mother, father, sister, brother and myself. I am the middle child. Every morning Mummy woke us up at 5:00 a.m. to worship as a family.

**LITTLE RAINBOW**

Mummy. I'm tired.

**MUMMY**

You can go back to bed after, but we need to worship.

**LITTLE RAINBOW**

Gentle Jesus meek and mild

Gentle Jesus meek and mild

Look upon a little child

Pity my simplicity

Suffer me to come to thee

## **Block XII**

**(RAYN IS PUTTING ON MAKEUP. SHE TURNS ON HER RECORDING DEVICE.)**

**RAYN**

I am at our family home. I'm four years old. Daddy and Mummy take Sister and me to a concert. We pose for the camera. The flash scares me. I hold on to Sister as tightly as I can.

Daddy and Mummy are drinking a drink. When we get home, Daddy begins ranting and raving and he picks up Moses to beat Sister and me because he didn't like the way we looked at him as he drank his drink. He said that we made him look like he wasn't feeding us.

Mummy is screaming. "You're not beating them! Not tonight! Not tonight!" Sister and I are in our bedroom, holding hands, afraid that he would come in to beat us, but he does not. Mummy saves us this time.

When he goes to work, she dresses us and takes us to the policewoman who lives close by. She and the police woman chat, but we cannot hear what they are saying. She comes back to us and says, "One more chance." She says, "One more chance."

We wash away the pained tears. It has happened before, ripped apart, torn, shattered, left to self-destruct. I tasted blood this morning.

## Block XIII

(RAYN COMPLETES HER DRESSING WHILE SINGING.)

(OH FREEDOM)

Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me

And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in a my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free (over again x3)

No more weeping, no more weeping, no more weeping over me

And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in a my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free

There'll be singin' there'll be singin', there'll be  
singin' over me

And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in a my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free

Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me

And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in a my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free

THE END

*Iana Elizabeth Phipps*

## Suoso<sup>1</sup> Rice

**DAWN:** 65-year-old Jamaican grandmother with white hair, but face not older than 50

**KELLY:** Dawn's 13-year-old granddaughter

**MALIK:** 15-year-old neighbour

*The verandah of a small house and its front door are upstage left (soft lights illuminate the verandah). Street lights and trees outline a path/small road leading from stage right to center stage. In the front yard, there is a small garden, just three wilting flowers on stage left. DAWN bends over, watering and tending to her small garden. Her head is wrapped in a brown turban, and she wears a tired nightgown that sweeps the ground. She hums "Rivers of Babylon".*

*Enter KELLY, stage right. She hurriedly stuffs candy wrappers into her pockets. A chime sounds. Kelly is walking backward along the path/road very slowly towards Dawn, who is in her front yard. A chime goes off every four seconds when Kelly bends over, picks up something small off the road, and drops it in a brown paper bag. She is barefoot, and her legs are unusually muddy.*

**DAWN:** *(Stomping her feet to the rhythm and singing loudly.)* When we re-mem-ber-ed Ziiiion. When the wick-ed carried us away in cap-ti-vity *(pauses and steps away from the flowers)* required from us a song, now how shall we sing the Looord's song in a straaaaaange land? By di rivers of Baaaaaabyon, where we sat doooow— *(Long pause; Dawn turns to notice Kelly walking down the road strangely.)*

**DAWN:** Gyal pickney<sup>2</sup>, what di<sup>3</sup> *(pronounced "dee")* hell you think you doing?

**KELLY:** *(Frightened)* Mama!

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1 Pronounced "so-so", meaning bland or served alone.

2 Child.

3 The.

*Kelly turns around quickly and straightens up, hiding the paper bag behind her back. She walks towards the house slowly. Chimes end.*

DAWN: I never tell you to reach back here before mi spit dry pon the ground and is like you gone fi<sup>4</sup> five years now. (*Holds up her hands indicating five.*) You taking your own sweeeeeet time, while we deh yah a starve. Is duppy<sup>5</sup> you a walk wid?

KELLY: (*Looking down at her feet, says meekly.*) No, Mama.

DAWN: Gimme di money you bring back from di shop, is fi pay my tithes in church tomorrow. *She turns to walk inside the house but realises Kelly is still three feet away from her.* Pickney, come inna<sup>6</sup> di yard. Mi know you love road but at least try fi hide it, man.

*Kelly shuffles in the same spot.*

DAWN: Dawn puts her left hand on her hip and shakes her right leg fiercely. Kelly?

KELLY: (*On the verge of tears.*) Yes, Mama.

DAWN: Give mi di bag.

*Kelly shakes her head “No” six times quickly.*

DAWN: Mi not asking you little gyal. *Kelly steps back.* Kelly, nuh tell me say I give you di last dime inna mi pocket, and you left gone to shop for God knows how long (*pause*) and you bring back not a rass<sup>7</sup> thing?

KELLY: Mama, me bring back something. (*Dawn tries to grab Kelly, but she jumps back quickly.*)

DAWN: Hey, gyal, don’t bright yourself<sup>8</sup> wid me bout “bring back something”. Show me di bag!

*Kelly gently throws the paper bag to Dawn’s feet and jumps back twice. Dawn laughs and takes up the bag and reveals a small clear plastic bag of rice. The bag is torn and rice spills to the ground.*

KELLY: (*Frantically.*) Mama, it wasn’t my fault. When I reach the shop, you see...the money just...di money just...vanish from my pockets.

DAWN: Last time mi check, Kelly, you was no magician. Bout “vanish”. You take mi fi idiot, you know. The money vanish and leave back just enough to buy only rice? Where

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4 For/to.

5 A ghost or spirit.

6 in to.

7 An expression of shock, surprise, frustration, or annoyance.

8 Don’t be disrespectful.

is di flour? Di sugar? The salt mackerel? The stick-ah-butter? Di seeeeeeaasoniiiiing, Kelly? Is suoso<sup>9</sup> rice you expect we fi eat for three (*pronounced tree*) days if dis (*pointing to the small amount of rice in the bag*) can even make a spoonful.

KELLY: Mama, mi not making up no story. The money lost, and I don't know how. I did my best with what was left, Mama.

DAWN: Kelly, come here.

KELLY: You ago beat me, Mama. I not coming to you. (*Kelly shakes her head.*)

DAWN: You see unuh<sup>10</sup> new age pickney. (*Hisses/sucks teeth and shakes head.*) Gyal, (*pauses and sighs*) mi never ask you what you want or what you think mi ahgo<sup>11</sup> do. (*Starts pacing forwards and backwards.*) Ten pickney. I grow TEN, (*emphasizes by holding up both hands*) and you is the ongle<sup>12</sup> one that seem to enjoy getting pan my nerves, and giving mi бага<sup>13</sup> talking. (*Shakes hands in the air and holds head up to heavens.*) Every single night I pray and bawl on my knees, asking Father God to deliver me from you. And now, I feel like the more you round me, is the more God stop pay me mind, cause dis is the longest any prayer of mine ever go unanswered. I am sure you are my test. If I survive you, my heavenly home is certainly guaranteed, and as di Bible say, the devil comes in many forms, and sometimes I convinced you is the living Antichrist. (*Kelly starts weeping.*) Look at you! Standing there lying wid crocodile tears a drip-drop pon the ground. I duh fraid <sup>14</sup> of your tears, Kelly! How you so wicked, gyal? No, sah. (*Dawn chuckles. A pause.*) So, Kelly, (*puts hands on hips*) I have to ask this. Is di rice that you pick up off of di dutty<sup>15</sup> road you did expect me fi eat? You think me never see you, a pick-pick like sensei fowl?<sup>16</sup> (*Dawn mocks Kelly picking up the rice off the street.*)

KELLY: I fell, and the bag burst, Mama. The road was muddy, and I slipped cause *someone* let me rush out the yard with NO slippers pon my foot. You always think the worst of me, eh, Mama? I can't wait until my mommy comes back for me. As you say, I bound to kill you, so maybe it's for the best.

DAWN: (*Softly.*) Kelly, I'm so—(*A low beat and a pause.*) You know WHAT, I want fi see is whose house you ago sleep inna tonight. Bout "someone". Go find (*pronounced "fine"*) you mumah<sup>17</sup> then. Go find her. Because from the time she tell me say you just here for

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9 Bland/mediocre/plain.

10 You (plural)/you guys.

11 Going to.

12 Only.

13 A lot.

14 I'm not afraid.

15 Dirty.

16 A hairless chicken.

17 Mother.

a summer, so many things gwaan dung<sup>18</sup> inna history. We get independence, Marcus Garvey now national hero instead of a criminal, you pupah<sup>19</sup> ketch<sup>20</sup> strokes and mi hair tun white. So...so go find her, Kelly, cause I sure she just lost. So—go. Take out the map and start your quest. (*Dawn points towards the road/path.*)

KELLY: (*Long pause.*) I have nobody else, Mama. (*Dawn points towards the road again.*)

*Kelly shuffles in the spot and starts to weep. Dawn pretends to throw something at Kelly, and she jumps. Kelly turns and begins to walk away, sobbing toward stage right. Dawn gently puts down the bag of rice and begins to creep up on Kelly, slowly. Chime. Dawn tackles Kelly from behind.*

KELLY: Help! Help! She going kill me now. Jesus Christ, help! Daddy! Daddy!

DAWN: You a call for daddy. My son can't even help himself. Gyal, open your mouth or I'm going to open it fi you. (*Kelly struggles against Dawn.*) Kelly, mi not asking you again. (*Kelly refuses. Mama pries her mouth open with her fingers.*)

DAWN: Pupah Jesus! (*Laughs loudly.*) I never know say I have grand pickney born with blue tongue. Mi tell you father from you born, ennuh,<sup>21</sup> dat you MUST be jacket.<sup>22</sup> (*Dawn cackles.*)

KELLY: I did lose the money, Mama. (*She says this with a sheepish grin.*) But there was enough for rice and...and the sweetie that you promised me.

*Dawn gets up and pulls up her granddaughter. Dawn shakes her head, laughing. Both are panting.*

DAWN: Child, is so you licky-licky,<sup>23</sup> man? You could have at-least buy some seasoning AND rice. (*Sucks teeth.*) Well, you had your dinner in sweets, and now I will eat my spoonful of dutty<sup>24</sup> suosoo rice. It better than nothing.

KELLY: (*Wiping tears.*) Mama, sweetie can't full belly.

DAWN: You shoulda think bout that before you spend my money. Go inside and go bathe, you smell like the dog...or...or your father. Hard fi distinguish between the two of them these days.

*Kelly laughs. Kelly exits stage via upstage left door.*

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18 Went down.

19 Father.

20 Caught/catch.

21 You know.

22 An illegitimate child.

23 Greedy.

24 Dirty.



DAWN: *(Starts to clean up the rice with a grass broom and begins singing another spiritual.)* Gonna lay down my burdens by the riverside, down by the riverside, down by the riverside. Gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside, ain't gonna studyyyyy war noooo more. *(The sounds of fingers snapping are heard.)*

*Dawn starts humming as lights on stage start to dim gradually. The sounds of showering.*

DAWN: *(Shouting to Kelly, who is offstage.)* Pickney, empty your piggy bank so I can pay my tithes. The Lord has been good!

*MALIK enters on the path/road holding a paper bag to his chest. He is walking towards Dawn, who continues singing.*

DAWN: I ain't gonna study war no more, I ain't gonna study war no more, I ain't gonna studyyyy war no mo-or-ore, I ain't gonna study war no more, study war no more. I ain't gonna study war no more.

MALIK: *(Says timidly)* Mama Dawn?

DAWN: *(Dawn jumps.)* Bwoy!<sup>25</sup> How you fi creep up pan a woman like me inna di evening yah? You want me fi ketch heart attack? I swear unuh possess.

MALIK: Sorry, Mama Dawn. I thought you saw me coming.

DAWN: Malik, I might just tump<sup>26</sup> you. *(She punches him gently on the shoulder.)* You see me have eyes addi back of mi head, young man?

MALIK: No, Mama Dawn. *(Stretches out the bag to her.)*

DAWN: *(Confused tone.)* Who dis belong to?

MALIK: Oh. *(Pauses and scratches head.)* Kelly left it at the ball field this afternoon. Someone had took it up by accident, and so she couldn't find it when she was ready to leave. So, I stayed back and looked for it for her. Sorry about the butter—it melted, Mama D. *(Malik smiles proudly.)*

DAWN: *(Mouth ajar. Silence for five seconds.)* Thanks, child. Tell your mother I will see her in church on Sunday.

*Malik waves goodbye, turns, and walks towards the exit right. Dawn starts to hum, and the stage goes dark. There is the sound of a dangling belt buckle and a shower curtain being pulled open.*

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<sup>25</sup> Boy.

<sup>26</sup> To punch/hit down.

KELLY: (*Stunned.*) Mama?! Is what?

DAWN: (*In-between whips.*) Mi. Nuh. Tell. You. Fi. Stop. Romp. Wid. Di. Baga. Boy-Boy.<sup>27</sup>  
(*Stops the beating.*) Go play ball inna yuh Bible!

END SCENE

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<sup>27</sup> All the boys.

*V. S. Naipaul*

## Critics and Criticism

It is often said of critics that they are people who have failed in making creations of their own, and my own beginning as a critic was due to a failure—a failure to get a suitable job after leaving the university. I believed at the time that I would have liked to go into big business, but the people who interviewed me quite rightly rejected me; and after a few months of uncertainty I was offered the part-time job of editing a literary programme for the BBC Caribbean service. It seemed to me then that I was perfectly qualified for such a position—I had after all studied literature at the university, but now I wonder at my audacity in accepting.

For now I see I fitted into none of the accepted categories of critics. I was not a gentleman, to whom criticism meant a display of sensibility and polished prose: an accomplishment, like a knowledge of pictures and wines, which might grace one in society. On the other hand I had no priest-like dedication to criticism as such. At the university I had been made aware of this attitude. But it did not attract me. I felt that it removed pleasure from reading. It was, moreover, heavy with a suggestion of duty, duty not to books but to an ideal of criticism. And since my knowledge of books at the time was limited anyway, I can see now that I became a critic under false pretences, trusting only to an unformed taste.

Literary knowledge and scholarship is one thing, but critical judgement is another. Judgement is, as I hope to show, a very complex business and is sharpened by experience, experience of books and experience of life. In criticism there can be no boy wonders. For the critic's gifts, I believe, are those of the artist, and the good critic is as rare and as valuable as the good artist. Much nonsense has been spoken about criticism in this century, and a tremendous amount of damage to taste has been done by the introduction of Literature as a university course. One has only to compare the writings of Hazlitt, say, with those of any contemporary critic to see the change that has come about. People like Hazlitt and George Saintsbury wrote of their response to books in a very personal way; reading the critics of today is like reading the results of a scientific experiment. In an age when more and more stress is being laid on science, it is not surprising that the professor of literature, who after all makes his living from

the subject, should attempt to introduce this atmosphere of the laboratory into the study of literature. We hear, for instance, of the “critical apparatus”, words which suggest that sensibility and judgment can be measured like temperatures. We hear of definitions of the novel— when really everyone knows what a novel is—and we hear of rules for the novel. We hear much talk about “technicians” and “technique”. Such talk has its effect on the young man whose taste and judgement are necessarily unformed and who, puzzled by the intangibility of his response to literature, is only too willing to lean on the tangible props authorised by his professor and the critics. I remember, at my university, a young man rising from the library table after reading a book of criticism and saying with perfect seriousness, “Now I know what makes a good poem.” The statement was of course absurd, for there is no one person who can say what makes a good poem: he can only report his own response to a particular poem, and the value of his response depends on the value or depth of his sensibility.

When I say that this approach to literature has done a tremendous amount of damage to taste I mean that this approach creates a whole lot of spurious attitudes, in which the true exercise of the critical faculty is forgotten. It encourages the suppression of the genuine response, and encourages the creation of artificial attitudes.

Not so long ago, when I was in India, I picked up a paperback edition of one of Jane Austen’s novels. The most important point made by the blurb, the publisher’s note, was that Jane Austen’s use of simile was splendid. Now Jane Austen’s use of simile has no importance at all in any assessment of her worth as a novelist. What matters is her analysis of certain human relationships, the depth of her insight, and whether her work is in some way illuminating of certain aspects of the human predicament. That the publisher should have chosen to speak only of Jane Austen’s use of simile shows to what extent he had been conditioned by the semi-scientific study of literature; he read self-consciously, looking for certain approved things to admire; and in so doing missed the entire point and value of the novel. And again. Thomas Mann’s novel *The Holy Sinner* in an English paperback edition (is offered to us) as “a work of stark horror”, “an epic of arch-sinfulness”. It is of course no such thing. It is in fact a ridiculing of hagiographical writing, and a ridiculing of the whole concept of sinfulness: it is a richly comic book. But the writer of the publisher’s note, doubtless influenced by the current critical talk in England about good and evil, and its importance in the novel today, has seized on this aspect because it is recognisable. No novel, he has been told, which does not treat of the problem of good and evil is important. *The Holy Sinner* treats of this subject; it is by Thomas Mann, a notoriously serious and sombre German writer; hence the talk of “an epic of stark horror”, and a failure to grasp the essence of the book.

Such critical attitudes would not matter if they did not affect the writer. But they do. When critics and a fairly large section of the intelligent reading public look

for recognisable marks of quality—it might be the use of simile, or the noticeable technique—it is not to be wondered at that the writer tries to make the task of his readers lighter. Take this business of technique. Consider it at its lowest level: the use of the flashback. It is instantly recognisable and can be handled in all sorts of tricky ways, so that the reader, who is told that such and such a writer is a good technician, instantly seizes on this and self-consciously reads a book taking a spurious delight in what he considers to be technique. Hence the number of stylish approaches to the novel nowadays. Some of these have no intrinsic validity but they can always be relied upon to impress those who, because of their training at the universities or their reading of critics, find it difficult to approach a book unselfconsciously, find it difficult to expose themselves purely to the experience, which is what a reading of a book should be. There is the Conrad technique, the story within a story within a story, about which so much has been written. There is the current fashion for having various narrators, each section headed perhaps by the name of the narrator. In fact technique is precisely the absence of such mannerisms and such showing-off. Technique ought not to be noticeable except to the practitioner or the percipient critic; for true technique consists in a number of unnoticeable things, the most important of which is the ability to reduce to a simple, even, easy flow a series of fairly complicated observations. If there is one rule about the novel it might be this: that the moment anything on the page, whether it be language or technique, calls for admiration and by so doing isolates itself, as it were, then it must be treated with suspicion.

The novelist's craft is a complex one; every novelist has his own way of writing a novel; but his aim is always to communicate, and the critic who tries to break down each novel into neat compartments of language, plot and characterisation is not really doing his job. Language is indeed important, as is plot and characterisation, but these things must be regarded as no more than the necessary disciplines of a writer. It is no use mentally awarding marks to the writer for his success in each compartment. What is it that we look for when we go to the work of a favourite writer? It is, I feel, a peculiar type of adventure—an adventure with a mind, a sensibility, that appeals to us. A certain way of looking and feeling, which we think amusing or illuminating. We do not go for characters or for language so much as *for the writer himself*. A writer stands or falls by his sensibility and our assessment of his work depends on our response to his sensibility. For, make no mistake, nothing is so revealing of a person as the fiction he attempts. From his fiction we can see his attitude to the human predicament; we can see what he thinks is funny, what he thinks is sad: and we can see how he sets about achieving his effects. He might be subtle; he might be ponderous. The writer who can only tell us that it is terrible to be poor, and will write stories in which he will try to break our hearts by descriptions of poverty and sickness, really has very little to offer us.

How often it occurs that intelligent people, successful in their own affairs, become dreadfully vulgar when they attempt fiction! For this sensibility of which I am speaking is not a quality of intelligence but a quality of feeling. The ancient Greek dramatists told stories that were well known, the pleasures of characterisation; they offered instead the adventure of their analysis of a well-known situation, and in this analysis the quality of their own feeling, their sensibility, was what mattered. So with Shakespeare. His plots are all borrowed, and many are quite ridiculous; but in his plays we are always aware of a special type of feeling, a special type of sympathy at work. It matters little whether there is a purpose behind this sensibility; it is so easy to write moralities; much harder to illuminate certain aspects of the human condition. The simple detective novel has very little to give me; very little too the romance or western.

The critic's response to any work has to be direct; his analysis complex. For his analysis must embrace all the disciplines of language and technique as well as his response to a writer's sensibility. The simple or vulgar critic will respond to the simple love drama; he will be unable to distinguish between the good and bad. I use the word vulgar—meaning here a cheapness of thought and feeling—because for a critic truly to appreciate the sensibility of the writers whose greatness is universally acknowledged, for a critic to do this, he must in some way partake of the sensibility of that writer.

So often, in his response to a book, the critic passes judgement as much on himself as on the book. And just as the most difficult thing for the writer is self-knowledge—without which his writing will never cease to have some element of the artificial and even the dishonest—so too the critic must have self-knowledge. He must learn to trust to his own feelings, to analyse them for their truth and sincerity; for without this his judgement will also be dishonest and artificial. This is why I feel that great critics are as rare and valuable as great artists. For the business of both is truth.

Rayne Affonso

## The Colonial Legacy of Sexual Policing: Intersectionality and the Heterosexual Requisite of Citizenship in *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008)

Intersectionality, a term coined by African American lawyer and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights the interdependent nature of social divisions such as race, class, and gender in reinforcing systems of prejudice and inequity (140). This concept has become central to Black feminist terminology and in West Indian literary studies; however, it remains largely absent in Indo-Caribbean academia. That Caribbean women of East Indian descent have also been doubly disadvantaged in the colonial past is indubitable, and their experiences with disempowerment are significant to the woman writer's engagement with history. Shani Mootoo, a Trinidadian author and visual artist, addresses several underpinnings of colonially established conventions in *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008). The novel takes place in San Fernando, Trinidad, and traces the sexual awakening of Viveka Krishnu, the daughter of a well-known local Hindu doctor, as she unknowingly follows in her father's footsteps to confront the boundaries of a heteronormative society. Through an incisive exploration of intersectionality and the heterosexual requisite of citizenship, Mootoo suggests that the restrictions imposed in the colonial past are compounded in our modern social structures of family and community that continue to limit the scope of individuality.

It is of utmost importance to place *Valmiki's Daughter* in its sociopolitical context in order to aptly address the intersectional oppression that targets non-heteronormative female bodies. In the post-independence era, the middle-class elites who formed the nationalist parties demonstrated a gendered approach to patriotic duty. Alexander (1994) points out the major contrast between the men's sole responsibility towards public service and the women's role to defend the nation by "protecting their honour, guarding the nuclear conjugal family, guarding 'culture' defined as the transmission of a fixed set of proper values to the nation's children" (13). Therefore, the construction of a postcolonial civility was achieved by an intentional distancing from the colonisers' perspective of a savage, profligate sexuality among the descendants of enslaved

Africans and East Indian indentured labourers. The policing of sexualised bodies became increasingly common to establish oneself as a member of a so-called progressive society. Since compliance with a heteromasculine system of governance still proves to be an unspoken requirement for citizenship—as evidenced by the criminalisation of certain forms of non-procreative sex—the restrictions put in place by the colonial past continue to affect those individuals who deviate from the norm.

Racial tensions between the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian populations further emphasise the inherent prejudice in the contemporary socio-political structure. Although class divisions abound within both of these ethnic communities, cultural fusion is most often rejected as a nationalist goal. Certainly, Mootoo's novel exemplifies the Indocentric desire to maintain their ethnic identity within a framework of ethnic pluralism (Mahabir, 287). The novel begins with a lengthy description of San Fernando's vast landscape from the central location of the hospital, moving throughout the town to illustrate its varied geographical and cultural richness. Valmiki and his family belong to the burgeoning Indian elite, among whom they enjoy economic power and upper-class status in the well-to-do neighbourhood of Luminada Heights. Membership in this society relies upon fulfilling gender-normative ideals of masculinity and femininity. Valmiki's infidelity with multiple women allows him to simultaneously reinforce a false hypermasculine identity and shroud his homosexual liaisons in secrecy. That he only philanders with white women who have little to no sociocultural ties with Trinidad indicates that sexual policing is reserved for the ethnic communities, and it foreshadows Viveka's coming-of-age love affair with Anick, a white French immigrant. With these intersectional oppressions shaping the society that frames Mootoo's novel, it is irrefutable that the non-heteronormative, non-white woman faces multiple levels of disempowerment.

The novel first signals Viveka's desire to contradict the dictates of Indo-Trinidadian womanhood with her persistent interest in joining a local women-only sports club. Her choice of hobbies not only meets with parental disapproval and her mother Devika's chiding over her mannish and ungainly figure; the reasons for their rejection demonstrate conflicts regarding racialised and classed identities. Devika refuses Viveka's request to join the club because of her preconceived notions of "those brassy Port-of-Spain Indians from the North...who have no respect for their origins" (Mootoo, 78). Arguing that there are no other Indian girls in the club, Devika illustrates an emphatic opposition to racial intermingling that characterises the parochial social sphere. Moreover, Valmiki's cause for concern is the thought of his daughter being at the park during the late evening, as "young men idled there, men of African origin in particular" (Mootoo, 80). It is noteworthy that, despite his own affiliations with blue-collar Afro-Trinidadian men, Valmiki is content with portraying such racist hypocrisy as it obscures his true worry about team sports: that same-sex physical contact will result



in an illicit sexual awakening. The possibility of voicing his own queer experience to Viveka is so unthinkable in the limiting postcolonial society that it is more acceptable for him to uphold a patriarchal role that adheres to the norms of the Indo-Trinidadian family.

The effect of her parents' policing on Viveka's self-image must therefore be assessed. As a result of constant snide comments about her body and unflattering clothing from her mother and sister, Viveka's physical insecurities are conveyed by her attempts at masking her individuality. She tries on a skirt and a pair of black heels, only to be repulsed by the unfeminine appearance of her "shapeless torso" and "thick, naturally muscular legs" (Mootoo 168) in the clothing. At other times she self-projects into the imagined physical form of her deceased brother Anand, noting the angular hardened features of her face and fantasising about their resemblance. Rather than openly confront her homosexual attraction to Anick, Viveka even considers her brother's phantasmic presence in her body: "Anand's spirit lived inside her, was pushing himself upwards, through her" (Mootoo 461). The interrelation of gender and sexuality allows the female protagonist to adopt a non-binary self-conception as a protective means of dealing with parental criticism and regulation over her behaviour. It can be asserted that Valmiki's repressed impulses and Devika's critical maternal gaze function together to reinforce a family structure that oppresses their eldest daughter along the intersecting lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, it is crucial to define the term "comphet" in order to compare the contrasting experiences of Valmiki's and Viveka's heterosexual relationships.

Adrienne Rich coined the term in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), in which she theorizes that heterosexuality is enforced upon individuals from birth as compulsory, and that the male-dominated society pressures women to cast their romantic allegiances with the opposite sex (13). Even in an increasingly liberal world, it cannot be denied that the default sexual orientation is heterosexual. In the Caribbean, transgressive sexualities confront colonially established gender norms, which still accord a level of taboo to the female body in a comphet relationship. For instance, Valmiki's "cultivated urge to fool around with women" (Mootoo, 301) has earned him a reputation as a womaniser. He faces no repercussions for his infidelity from the community, and his own wife is more comfortable with the public being aware of his affairs rather than his homosexuality. By consciously engaging in frequent casual sex with foreign women, Valmiki protects himself from homophobic abuse and the potential loss of his upper middle-class status. The sexual policing of men in postcolonial Trinidad thus only refers to what is seemingly monstrous and unnatural, and there are no social qualms for infidelity so long as it is heteronormative: "...philandering had never been a shame in Trinidad—a badge it was, rather" (Mootoo, 42).

By contrast, Viveka's comphet relationship with Elliot is not nearly as acceptable to social norm. She breaches the parameters of Indo-Trinidadian femininity by engaging in intimacy with him in spite of his black, white and Carib mixed ancestry. He is adamant in his intentions to have sex with her, but their intimate encounters are devoid of pleasure for either party. It is undeniable that Viveka attempts to be physical with him purely out of Rich's concept of the enforced societal pressures to be with a man. However, although her half-hearted efforts denote a similar sense of self-preservation to Valmiki's affairs, Viveka recognises her own "subversive fantasy" (Mootoo, 166) of publicising her relationship with Elliot. Their racial and ethnic incongruence would be scandalous in the face of her family and community structures, and she delights in the possibility of this outrage, thinking about how she would "love to have this battle with her parents, for their true colours would show then, and could only shame them" (Mootoo, 167). The thought of provoking the intersectional limitations placed upon her provides some inward delight, but even that fantasy is empty of real determination. The performance of Valmiki's and Viveka's comphet relationships is not a source of empowerment for them both. In fact, it only heightens Viveka's awareness of the multiple oppressions that are stacked against her in the heteronormative, patriarchal, and racist society.

While Mootoo underlines the relevance of the past by drawing parallels between colonial and contemporary policing, she also demonstrates the repetition of history that plays out in the intergenerational space. The heterosexual requisite of citizenship is illustrated by the parallel that both father and daughter have actively chosen to relinquish love in exchange for inclusion into an ordered community. The prologue occurs throughout a mere twenty-four seconds as Valmiki observes his daughter surrounded by wedding presents. Flooded by memories of his decisions and lost opportunities, he grieves the lives that he and his daughter have abdicated. Analeptic references reveal that Valmiki left his first lover, Tony, whom he met studying abroad, and returned home to "turn into a man who was dead of spirit but whose physical body was trapped in everyday Trinidadian limbo" (Mootoo 69). Engaging in sexual intercourse with Devika was undoubtedly a comphet act that resulted in an unintended pregnancy and cemented his role as a father languishing in a loveless marriage. His own surreptitious affair with the Afro-Trinidadian electrician Saul further forces him into this double-consciousness that provides only brief respite from the everyday façade. It is for this reason that he silently recognises Viveka's and Anick's relationship for what it is and allows it to continue, only to later be complicit in his daughter's ill-fated acquiescence to societal rules.

Similarly, Viveka's major hindrance in exploring her sexuality is the fear of losing respectability, and this is no surprise after years of being conditioned into a preordained future to be "a good girl in the house" (Mootoo, 249). She never exists

as her own person, rather as an extension of her family and community. For instance, before attending dinner with Anick and Nayan, Valmiki warns Viveka to “remember whose daughter you are...don’t do anything foolish” (Mootoo, 301). As a French white woman, Anick occupies a liminal space in Trinidadian society, having recently married into the Prakash family. Viveka seems, like her father, to be attracted to the white woman’s lack of ties to the sociocultural space. Anick is comfortable in her bisexuality and is therefore capable of straddling the bounds of heteronormativity and offer Viveka an erotic, satisfactory encounter with sexual pleasure. She expresses her desire plainly and is unafraid to do so: “You look delicious...I want to devour you” (Mootoo, 349). They go beyond homosocial bonding temporarily in the refuge of the forest, and O’Callaghan (2012) points out that Mootoo uses the wild, unrestrained forest space to juxtapose the controlled community (247). However, it is inevitable that Anick’s naïveté regarding the inflexibility of Trinidad’s social structures can only provide Viveka with a taste of freedom for a short time. As such, she follows in her father’s footsteps and enters a heterosexual marriage.

It cannot be omitted that the minor character Merle Bedi also cements Viveka’s decision to conform, as she serves as an allegorical omen regarding the reality of queerness in their community. A childhood friend of Viveka’s, Merle Bedi came out to her parents and was consequently exiled from their home for expressing her non-heteronormative desires. Forced to roam the streets of San Fernando, homeless and engaging in sex work for survival, Merle Bedi’s ostracization from the upper middle-class social circle highlights the rigid value system that does not allow defiance from the collective norm. Her character appears in the story when she approaches Valmiki’s younger daughter, Vashti, on the street to ask for money. Despite knowing her for years, Vashti is ashamed to be seen speaking to her and promptly ignores the request. She ponders that Merle Bedi’s lifestyle must not be so bad, as it contradicts her same-sex desire. “It can’t be so that she is a buller. If is woman she like, how come she doing it with man?... That might cure her” (Mootoo, 23). Vashti’s sentiments are reflective of the larger Trinidadian narrative surrounding homosexuality as a malady that can be resolved by heterosexual intercourse. That Vashti succumbs to this insular line of thought and reinforces the gendered binary within her home is a stark reminder to Viveka that discrimination within the family structure is only the beginning of the ostracisation she would face should she choose to embrace her true identity.

Mootoo postulates that the intersectional oppressions in the Indo-Trinidadian community are too insurmountable to allow the non-heteronormative, non-white woman to live a fulfilled life. Viveka’s recognition that “...she could never do what Merle Bedi had done to her family” (Mootoo, 326) fortifies her decision to leave. It is for this reason that Trevor enters the narrative as Viveka’s means of escape. They meet at one of her volleyball matches, and he is at once romantically interested. Having spent

considerable time abroad, Trevor demonstrates a level of open-mindedness previously unseen in the Trinidadian social space. He recognises Viveka's and Anick's relationship for what it is, and Viveka is comfortable enough to confess her same-sex desires to him. However, it is not romantic interest that draws her to him, rather her own vulnerability following the wedding anniversary celebration of Anick and Nayan when they announce Anick's pregnancy. Mootoo masterfully evokes the visceral trauma that Viveka experiences at this news, and Trevor utilises the opportunity of the women's terminated relationship to act as agent of family and nation, physically and psychologically severing Viveka from Anick and herself (Garvey, 17). For instance, their first sexual encounter on the beach is unpleasant and forced, causing her to dissociate from the act and the inhospitable environs. Although divorce is already the presumed outcome between them, Viveka's impending marriage and Trevor's and their migration to Canada grant her the opportunity to find potential belonging in a tolerant nation state.

This issue of heteronormativity within national borders is also addressed in the marriage between Anick and Nayan, namely through the latter's sexual policing. McCormack (2011) asserts that Mootoo's exploration of cocoa history is integral to the portrayal of Nayan's need for control (25). Certainly, the historical relationship of the French and the Indo-Trinidadians through cocoa production is reminiscent through Nayan's struggle for the upper hand in his marriage. Anick's French father subverts Nayan's own claim to his multigenerational history when he demonstrates more knowledge about cocoa production than his son-in-law. His embarrassment regarding his ignorance of history drives Nayan to embark on an entrepreneurial change in the cocoa business as a means of defining his masculinity in accordance with classed and gendered roles. The pressure causes Nayan to buckle down on his homophobia towards Anick, as his masculinity is further dependent on her compliance with the norms of the Indo-Trinidadian family structure. Although in Canada he was intrigued by her same-sex desire, the boundaries of his local social sphere have led to his "disgust" and "torment" at her sexual deviance (Mootoo, 232). He can only assert power by policing Anick's sexuality in adherence to social practices. Anick's pregnancy allows Nayan to succeed in enforcing heteronormativity as a requirement for citizenship.

*Valmiki's Daughter* is an exceptional work that places the concept of intersectionality in the Indo-Caribbean literary canon and addresses the multiple oppressions faced by women of Indian descent in Trinidad. By portraying the colonially established restrictions of gender, class, race and sexuality in contemporary society, Mootoo explores the policing that occurs among members of the family and community structures in order to enforce the sociocultural norm. She identifies the heterosexual requisite of citizenship and suggests that migration is the only way to assert individuality away from the intersectional limitations of Trinidadian society.

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Patrick Sylvain

# HAPPY, OKAY?

by **M.J. Fievre**. Coral Gables: Mango Publishing, 2019.  
ISBN: 978-1-64250-136-0. 237 pp. paperback.

M.J. Fievre's latest work, *Happy, Okay?*, is described as "poems about anxiety, depression, hope, and survival." On the one hand, labelling it as poetry might deter some readers who claim they "don't read poetry". On the other hand, labelling it as poetry might affront poetry purists. While it possesses poetic qualities, *Happy, Okay?* transcends traditional poetry by offering a prose-poetic narrative that feels like a pseudoliterary meditation, an exploration of depression, and a lyrical self-help form of resiliency. It is truly a "story" for those grappling with anxiety or depression, providing a vocal echo for their unspoken struggles, and help for loved ones who wish to understand and offer support.

Fievre's voice, through his characters, is direct and sincere, emphasising that happiness is a state of being that should be embraced, even amidst life's difficulties. The prose poems (I am referring to them as such) are thematically organised, guiding readers through moments of meaningful insight and vulnerability. In *Happy, Okay?*, readers are immersed in the inner world of Paloma, a woman grappling with mental illness. While the prose poems vividly portray the struggles of anxiety and depression, they are also layered with themes of hope and joy, suggesting the possibility of salvation in the end; thus the self-help quality of the work, as in: "I've learned to embrace/ the loneliness of being Catholic" (163). Or: "And I am free to create/ my own place with my own rules,/ separate from what / has been handed down to me" (134).

The book's structure is reminiscent of a Greek play, featuring a chorus of three characters engaged in a call-and-response format. Paloma and José Armando, two of the characters, are lovers striving to navigate their shared life while combating the shadows of Paloma's depression. The third character, Shadow, serves as a kind of a foil—or an unclaimed spirit in the Haitian Vodou tradition—sometimes reflecting Paloma's confusion and at other times celebrating her humanity despite her mental challenges.

In *Happy, Okay?*, Paloma's words often resonate with poignant simplicity and a contemplative utterance that borders on the descriptive qualities of a troubled character's inner thoughts:

The water opens,  
swallows me,  
& I am drowning,  
dropping, dropping,  
the force of the water  
dissolves my flesh  
& leaves my bones  
polished, white  
—until I mirror the sky...  
If I am to be brave  
I want to learn  
to swim  
in these waters,  
in their irresistible  
chiaroscuro,  
in the weight,  
of their insistent  
turbulence. (60–61)

This passage encapsulates Paloma's internal struggle and yearning for a kind of psychic endurance. The imagery of water symbolises her overwhelming emotions, with the desire to learn to swim reflecting a quest for strength amidst chaos. The mention of "chiaroscuro" an art term for the contrast between light and dark, underscores the complex interplay of hope and despair in her journey.

The deeper psychological component of these prose poems—which I will explain later— revolves around the themes of dependence, self-discovery, and emotional turmoil. José Armando's "poems" reveal a psychological struggle with dependency and the need to care for someone despite the personal cost. Paloma's poems explore the journey towards self-empowerment and the reclaiming of identity, while Shadow's poems reflect on the consequences of intense emotional entanglement and the necessity of letting go. A deeper psychological component emerges as each voice reveals their struggles and desires, creating an affecting pastiche of human experience. The following lines uttered by José Armando are indicative of such emotional turmoil: "Silence swallows / the apartment we share / & I'm suspended / in the dark / warmth of its throat" (85).

Throughout the first part of the book, balancing Paloma's wistful voice is José's grounding yet enabling presence:

I'll help you  
see beauty in things  
you never  
noticed before  
that are all around you.  
Look: a tender  
sickle of grass bending  
under the weight  
of a bead of dew  
with the moon  
in its eye  
a suggestion  
of moonlight,  
the Hialeah sky tiled  
with rows  
of rippling white. (65)

José's lines offer a counterpoint to Paloma's turmoil, emphasising the small, often unnoticed beauties of the world. His observations invite Paloma to find solace in the everyday wonders, suggesting a path towards healing through a renewed appreciation of life's simple yet profound moments.

In Fiebre's collection, José Armando's long poem on Pages 37–40 captures a turbulent relationship marked by intense emotion and a desire to protect a loved one despite her volatility. The enjambments and line breaks, such as "When you're furious / at me for no good / reason", emphasise the instability and fractured nature of the relationship. The imagery of "deep grooves / carved under / your eyes" and "begging / it for the mercy / of an embrace" evokes a powerful sense of despair and vulnerability. The emotional tone shifts from desperation to a tender hopefulness, as evidenced by the yearning to taste "sun-ripened fruit" together, symbolising a desire for shared joy and sustenance.

In the poem on Page 45, José Armando expresses an overwhelming love, almost to the point of self-erasure. The line "I love you more / than a person ought / to love one thing" hints at an unhealthy intensity. The desire to "loosen the knot / between your brows & find / the soft place / within you" speaks to a longing to alleviate the loved one's pain and connect on a deeper level, suggesting a psychological need for emotional intimacy and validation. By the time we reach the end of the first part of the



book, we encounter José's voice with a deeper vulnerability, with a sense of inevitability (85). The poetic quality is in the raw expression of emotional pain, and we are provided with the depiction of a relationship's dissolution. The tone in that poem is somber and resigned, reflecting an impending and painful separation. The imagery of something "grown over, / tangled, / uncared for" conveys neglect and the difficulty of untangling long-standing issues. Even the line breaks emphasise the pain and inevitability of the separation, as seen in "I am also a fierce, / frayed knot / you are ripping / out at the root."

Paloma is ensnared in a tumultuous relationship with José Armando, struggling to untangle the complex threads of her depression and anxiety. By taking a closer look at a few exemplary poems in Paloma's voice, one notices a being who is reflecting/ deliberating on a kind of existential debriefing and a quest for purpose. In the poem on Page 41, the enjambment in "What was it / we wanted? / What were we / looking for?" emphasises a sense of fragmentation and confusion. Her yearning for "militance, / to strength, / to solace" and a manifesto that will "tingle / my bones" reveals a desire for empowerment and transformation.

Whereas in the poem on Page 45, Paloma contrasts her partner's affectionate promises with her own need for a more profound, self-determined sense of purpose. The line "Your words are pretty, / but they don't ring / from within / me" starkly illustrates the disconnect she feels. The metaphor of words clanging "off-key, / like a bell / that's been dropped / on a hard surface" powerfully conveys her inner dissonance and dissatisfaction.

Paloma's subsequent poem, on Page 47, delves into the theme of self-discovery. The metaphor of the "blank canvas" and the need to "dip my own / brush into a palette" suggests a reclaiming of identity and agency. The shift from allowing others to define her to taking control of her own image signifies a critical psychological shift towards autonomy and self-definition. The quest for autonomy and self-definition are at the core of Paloma's self-healing journey. Contrastingly, the poem on Page 49 captures Paloma's sense of being trapped between conflicting desires and realities. The buoy metaphor, "tied in the calm water, / just beyond / the breaking waves", vividly depicts her liminal state. She is neither fully committed to deep self-exploration nor to superficial engagement, embodying a profound sense of stasis and potential.

The shadowy figure, the foil, the spirit, or the inner voice of Paloma, Shadow, uses second- person perspective, addressing an unspecified "you", creating an intimate connection between the speaker and the reader. However, in the context of the book, that "you" refers to Paloma, and it establishes a complicitous sense of knowing. On Pages 45-46, Shadow's poem describes an intense, almost invasive intimacy. The detailed description of the physical and emotional closeness—"you've

ridden / the waves of his veins”—creates a visceral image of interconnectedness. The foreboding tone, however, suggests an inevitable unravelling, highlighting the fragility of such deep emotional investments. In a sense, “Shadow” could also be read as the embodiment of Paloma’s depression that never lets her rest.

In the following poem on Pages 50-51, Shadow advises letting go of a relationship marked by instability and emotional volatility. Shadow becomes a psychologist, a mediating voice of reason who uses metaphor to illustrate his point of view. The metaphor of the river “forging / a new map / after a flood” suggests the uncontrollable and transformative nature of emotional upheaval. The imagery of the loved one as a “barometer” for peace underscores the unhealthy dependence on the other’s emotional state for personal stability.

In the first part of *Happy, Okay?*, which is also the best part of the book—for it can be considered the most aligned to a relatively decent literary work—holds a deeper psychological component with lines that are in some instances very poetic. These poems revolve around the themes of dependence, self-discovery, and emotional turmoil. José Armando’s poems reveal a psychological struggle with dependency and the need to care for someone despite the personal cost. Paloma’s poems explore the journey towards self-empowerment and the reclaiming of identity, while Shadow’s poems reflect on the consequences of intense emotional entanglement and the necessity of letting go.

The quality of the poems—prose poems, really—is marked by their emotional depth, some vivid imageries, and the intricate interplay of voices. Fiebre employs a resonating language and a call-and-response structure effectively to convey complex emotional terrains and psychological struggles; although more could have been done to show instead of tell. The use of enjambments and line breaks enhances the reading experience, creating pauses and emphasis that reflect the content’s emotional intensity. Overall, the prose poems in the first part provide a productive and nuanced exploration of human relationships and inner conflicts.

In the second part of the book, set two years later, the author continues to channel Paloma, now presenting powerful “I” statements that form a manifesto of 26 numbered articles, reminiscent of commandments or self-necessities. This second section serves as a kind of personal “bible” (How-To) for those grappling with mental health issues. Fiebre’s poems are lush with spiritual imagery, reflecting her unabashed Catholicism and frequent allusions to Church teachings. For instance, in Article XII: I Will Embrace Loneliness, she writes: “I’ve learned to embrace / the loneliness of being Catholic... / I am awed by centuries of ritual—& loneliness. / It rushes me with something dark & heady. / & I embrace it because I am / not alone in my solitude” (163-164).

Fievre's use of "I" statements in this section signifies a shift from a collective experience to an intensely personal journey. Each article functions as a declaration of self-acceptance and resilience, offering readers a roadmap for navigating their own struggles. The spiritual imagery throughout the poems, particularly in Article XII, underscores the deep connection between faith and personal identity. By embracing loneliness, Fievre acknowledges the duality of solitude as both a burden and a source of strength, particularly within the context of her Catholic faith. The line "I am awed by centuries of ritual—& loneliness" highlights the paradox of finding community and connection in shared rituals while also feeling isolated. This tension between connection and isolation is a central theme in Fievre's work, reflecting the complexities of mental health and spiritual practice.

The essence of these revelatory prose poems, or affirmations, is the understanding that self-compassion inevitably fosters compassion for others. According to Shadow, these poems transform Paloma "... into something / greater / than herself" (92). This transformation is rooted in her humanity and its inherent mutability: "She is human—mutable. / Nothing / in the world / is ever otherwise" (93). Ultimately, Paloma, Shadow, and José all disappear, leaving the reader with narratives that serve as guides (prosaic self-help) through life: "There's a pain in the world / that follows people / like their shadows, / despite reason / and proportion. / But stories, / even sad ones, / keep the darkness / from wrapping us / in its long, barbed sleeves. / They spin us out / and back into their embrace. / We glide in their magic, / beaming, breathless..." (198).

In certain parts of the book, Fievre's language, reminiscent of Sappho's, is marked by its sparse essence. Her poems magnify "... the smallest things / a thin wind across a wire. A single leaf / in unsuspecting light, star-shaped, / with a pointed lobe, swaying" (205). In this literary medium, "poetry" transcends mere words, offering readers an interesting exploration of the human condition, spirituality, and the transformative power of storytelling. Together, these contrasting yet complementary perspectives create a discernible array of emotional depth and "resilience", illustrating the transformative power of love and hope in the face of mental illness.

*Happy, Okay?* feels deeply personal despite being a work of fiction. Much like a memoir or personal essay, it invites readers to connect and breathe through its poetic form, offering them the space to relate. The story centers on Paloma, a young Haitian-American woman from Hialeah, Florida, who appears normal and healthy to her friends and co-workers. She maintains a façade of normalcy, yet internally she battles overwhelming anxiety and depression. Her physical symptoms, such as a churning stomach, aching spine, and difficulty breathing, reflect her constant state of near-panic. Fievre's skillful characterisation draws readers into Paloma's and Jose's lives, eliciting empathy for both. We experience Paloma's torment and recognise Jose's futile efforts to help.

Despite its raw honesty, *Happy, Okay?* is neither depressing nor self-serving. Paloma remains clear-eyed and unsentimental, determined to overcome her depression. She seeks stability and refuses to succumb to hopelessness. Readers could gain a profound understanding of living under the tyranny of uncontrolled emotions; however, this is not a book of poetry. This book, while important, is too much of a self-help guide, too didactic, too deliberative.

Poetry, according to Terry Eagleton, “is something which is done to us, not just said to us. The meaning of its words is closely bound up with the experience of them.” He elaborates that poetry is an active, transformative experience: “Poetry is language in which the signified or meaning is *the whole process of signification itself*” (21). By this, Eagleton means that, in poetry, the meaning of words goes beyond their literal definitions; it encompasses the entire process of creating meaning through the rhythm, sound, and emotional impact of the language. Poetry engages readers in a way that elicits a deeper, more visceral response, making the act of reading it an experiential process.

Poems are not natural linguistic occurrences or historically unique verbal acts. In fact, a poem cannot be considered an event at all and cannot be said to have transpired in the conventional sense of an “occurrence”. When we read a poem or hear it read aloud, our response to its linguistic structure is guided by specific conventions. Recognising these conventions is what differentiates a poem as a verbal artwork from ordinary speech or prose. The main point here is that poems exist in a realm separate from everyday communication and historical events. Unlike natural occurrences or spoken events that happen and then pass, poems are crafted works that do not “occur” in the same way.

Their significance and meaning come from a set of unique conventions and rules that govern their interpretation and appreciation. According to Eagleton, poetry “is a kind of phenomenology of language—one in which the relation between word and meaning (or signifier and signified) is tighter than it is in everyday speech” (21). When we engage with a poem, we do so with an understanding that it is a constructed artifact, distinct from natural or spontaneous speech. A poem shows, it does not tell. A poem suggests and gestures, it does not dictate in a didactic way. This understanding is crucial in distinguishing poems as forms of artistic expression, setting them apart from regular discourse. In Article IV, “I Will Reparent Myself,” the narrator presents us with a series of longings or mis-opportunities for a father-daughter connection through a storylike narration structured in poetic forms, yet the language offers us a discourse which is regular: “I am happy / for this moment—my father breathing the same air / I breathe, our hearts beating to the same rhythm” (119).

While Fievre's work is largely original in its assemblage and thought-provoking in its essence, there are moments where the language veers towards the familiar or clichéd. The repeated references to butterflies in Article III might feel overly symbolic to some readers. However, these instances are rare and do not significantly detract from the overall emotive impact of the collection. What works really well in Fievre's collection is the emotional honesty and the vividness of some of the imageries. The author's willingness to confront painful memories and complex emotions head-on is both courageous and compelling. The use of cultural references and personal anecdotes adds a bit of depth and authenticity to the work.

On the other hand, the collection occasionally suffers from a lack of cohesion. The transitions between different articles can be jarring, and the shift from highly personal themes to broader cultural reflections is not always seamless. Additionally, the experimental form might not appeal to all readers, particularly those who prefer more traditional poetry. The poetic scarcity is evident in the following poem slated as a manifesto:

Whether you stay or not,  
You can love them.  
Whether you stay or not,  
—people are born, people die,  
people eat, drink, sing in the shower,  
clip their nails, wipe their asses,  
do the everyday things people do  
as they live. Petunias nod yes, yes  
to the wind. Brown-winged butterflies  
mingle, & bees scribble  
over the pistils of hibiscus flowers.  
The sun shoots black spots  
into your eyes when you forget to blink,  
while the wind moans  
like a low fire. (127)

A poem does not simply mirror reality; instead, it crafts its own context within which its meanings are shaped and understood. This places a significant burden on its linguistic structure. Poetic language is inherently richer, more suggestive, and more evocative than everyday language precisely because it invites the reader to actively engage in the creation of its meanings. The reader is not just a passive recipient but a co-creator of the poem's significance. What Fievre has presented above is pure telling, pure rapportage.

Given this, the poet must push the boundaries of language to its utmost limits. Poets will leverage every expressive resource available and, at times, innovate entirely new ones to convey their vision. This relentless pursuit of expression means that poets are constantly experimenting, stretching the conventional uses of language, and inventing fresh, impactful ways to communicate complex ideas and emotions. The takeaway here lies in understanding poetry as a dynamic interaction between the poet, the language, and the reader. Unlike other forms of writing that aim for clarity and directness, poetry revels in ambiguity and a multiplicity of meanings. Each word, each line, is carefully chosen not just for what it says, but for what it suggests, what it evokes in the reader's mind. This is what makes poetry so powerful and enduring: its ability to transcend ordinary communication and touch upon the universal human experience in a deeply personal way.

By immersing themselves in the nuances and intricacies of poetic language, readers are offered a richer, more profound engagement with the text. They are encouraged to explore their own interpretations and emotional responses, making each reading a unique experience. This collaborative creation of meaning transforms poetry into a living, breathing art form, perpetually evolving with each new reader who encounters it. In this way, poetry serves as a manifestation to the limitless possibilities of language and the boundless creativity of the human mind. It reminds us that the true power of words lies not just in their ability to convey information, but in their capacity to inspire, challenge, and transform our understanding of the world and ourselves.

A poet must transport their readers to a context that is not only distant in space and time but might also be entirely fictional. This imagined world is crafted through the poem's words, allowing the reader to build it in their minds. Additionally, the poet must convey the experiences, attitudes, and emotions—and even the identity—of a speaker unknown to the reader, relying solely on the poem's linguistic structure. This includes indicating its pacing and intonational features to ensure that the essence of the poem is conveyed accurately in performance. “A poem,” Eagleton reminds us, “can be the *occasion* for an emotion, as when those who are grieving the loss of a child find comfort in some lushly sentimental verses. But ‘literary’ feelings *responses* to poems, not just states of emotion which occur in the presence” (114-5).

A poet's challenge, then, lies in her ability to evoke vivid imagery and deep emotional resonance within these constraints. By meticulously selecting and arranging words, a poet creates a bridge between the reader and a world that exists purely within the confines of the poem. This world can be as rich and complex as any real or historical one, teeming with nuanced emotions and diverse experiences. The poet's skill in suggesting the subtleties of a speaker's identity and perspective, without explicit description, adds layers of depth and engagement for the reader. The rhythm,

intonation, and pace prescribed by the poet shape the listener's experience, making the poem not just a static piece of writing but a living, evolving art form. The poet must craft his or her work with an acute awareness of both the silent reading experience and the auditory performance, ensuring that the poem resonates across different modes of engagement.

*Happy, Okay?* is a courageous work by Fievre. Through Paloma's journey, she illuminates the impact of mental illness on personal relationships and the arduous path to healing, involving therapy, medication, and time. Fievre guides readers to a point of relative clarity amid darkness, portraying Paloma's authentic journey toward recovery. The narrative emphasises valuing small, joyful moments, avoiding any sense of contrivance.

*Happy, Okay?* offers an unflinching look at depression and anxiety, making it an important book for anyone seeking to understand these conditions. However, this is not the book for someone who wants to enter into a literary landscape with awe and wonder. Instead, it serves as a raw and honest exploration of mental health, providing valuable insights and fostering empathy. Ultimately, *Happy, Okay?* is a powerful resource for those looking to deepen their understanding of the complexities of mental health issues.

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Stewart Brown

# All He Ever Tried to Paint Was the Light

*Looking for Cazabon* by Lawrence Scott.

London and Trafalgar: Papillote Press, 2025. ISBN: 978173930367. 85 pp. paperback.

*Looking for Cazabon* is a fine collection of poems: measured, beautifully crafted, quietly passionate, and often very moving. Lawrence Scott is, of course, well known as a fine novelist and short story writer, but this is his first full-length collection of poems. His interest in poetry as a medium is longstanding, though: a selection of his poems was included in the anthology *Caribbean New Voices* as long ago as 1995, and occasional poems have appeared over the years in journals like *Wasafiri* and *Agenda*. *Looking for Cazabon* is a much more sustained undertaking.

The collection was written, as the poet explains in his preface, during a period of three years he spent living back in Trinidad (after a childhood in Trinidad, he has lived in the UK for most of his adult life) while he was researching and writing his novel *Light Falling on Bamboo*. That book imagines and explores the life of the nineteenth-century Trinidadian painter Michael Jean Cazabon. Cazabon, whether he knew it or not, was making history in a very literal sense: his images would come to define future generations' visualisations of that time and place. Scott's poems, mostly sonnets, are not so much responses to particular paintings but are written almost incidentally as he tries to engage with Cazabon—his travels, his ways of seeing, his technical expertise, and the emotional struggles of one kind and another that inform the ways he regards the landscapes and the life that he is portraying. Scott's poems draw, in words, a view of twenty-first century Trinidad informed by his engagement with Cazabon's sensibility:

An oriole startles the dawn with gold,  
a ground dove taking me into the brown shade.  
The last of the parrots fly in. Screams unfold,  
while shadows skim the pitch road and rough verges fade.

(From "Saddle Road")



In subtle, unanticipated ways, the twenty-first-century writer comes to empathise with his nineteenth-century compatriot as he discovers crossovers between his own story and that of the painter:

...those mile posts on the heart's journey  
the beat of the ocean, the beat of the heart

The most direct evocation of Cazabon is in the sequence of seven sonnets that opens the collection, "After Cazabon: On the Road," which imagines the painter at work in a landscape that—like the poet—he recalls but is now reseeing in the process of making art:

The foreday morning broke through the sea-mist  
in the distance beyond Saut d'Eau Island.

It was just him and his brushes, the bush ticking,  
the engine of the cigale screaming in staccatos,

(iv)

.....

Michel Jean worked, forgetting where he was,  
as in each painting he reclaimed his home.

*I leave you? So, I come back. Always like*

I just come back, he said to himself as he speckled  
the bushes, croton hues. He captured the balata tree,  
in the foreground, the razor grass, gri-gri palms

(vi)

The poet's descriptive language is as vivid as the painter's colours, as alert to the variations the changing light effects:

The slate-grey sea was beginning to shine through  
into a blue, not quite cobalt. The sea rippled

(vii)

So, the poet is imaginatively positioned as Cazabon's partner in this artistic quest to see and resee the island. (Indeed, the region, as later in the book Scott retraces some of the painter's journeys to other islands, and to Guyana and the South American mainland.) The image of two Caribbean artists, tramping their island, seeing things afresh, fascinated by the light and the sea and the landscape that they encounter, inevitably calls to mind the young Derek Walcott and his partner in painting "Gregorias"—Dunstan St Omer, exploring Saint Lucia as chronicled in Walcott's long autobiographical poem, *Another Life*. Scott refers to Walcott and *Another Life* in his preface, but more in terms of Walcott's own aspirations as a painter. One way

and another, though, Walcott is quite a presence in this book. The collection is in part dedicated to his memory, and we learn that Walcott had seen drafts of some of Scott's poems and offered encouragement. And, of course, Walcott had played with a similar kind of theme in *Tiepolo's Hound*, in which he engages with the life of another nineteenth-century Caribbean-born painter, Camille Pissarro, but in an entirely different way. In poem (XXV) of *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott refers to both painters:

Cazabon and Pissarro: the first is ours,  
the second found the prism that was Paris

He is contrasting Cazabon's re-engaging with the Trinidad of his childhood with Pissarro's seeming abandonment of the islands for the life of an artist in Paris. Stylistically, too, *Tiepolo's Hound* is very different from the ways Scott writes in *Looking for Cazabon*, so there is no direct comparison; but in ways that seem to me entirely positive: one has a sense that Walcott's example, his ways of thinking about form and metaphor and the things that poetry can do in the Caribbean, informs Scott's practice as well.

The main dedicatee of *Waiting for Cazabon* and the other presence that informs some of the most tender and moving poems is Scott's long-time partner, Jenny Green. In another echo of Cazabon's experience, Scott was physically separated from her for periods during his stay in Trinidad, just as Cazabon was painfully conscious of having to be separated from his wife and family at various times. In a recent reading he gave as part of the Bocas at the British Library event, when he was asked about this, he read the poem "ii" from the "After Cazabon, On the Road" sequence, which, after passages of vivid description of the tropical weather sweeping across the view from his verandah, concludes:

All this in an afternoon,  
while I wait for your call to startle me  
with a voice at once familiar and new.

In the discussion that followed, Scott contrasted the two or three weeks Cazabon had to wait for letters sent from France by his wife with the comparative ease of modern technological communication. But still that sense of dislocation, "a voice at once familiar and new", the sense of her being "elsewhere" is magnified by the ordinariness of a phone call that might begin with a discussion of the weather. There are poems throughout the collection on the poet's feelings about absence, loneliness and love that are focused by these long periods of separation. The sequence "Departures" includes several. Perhaps the bleakest is "Alamanda Court":

Two portraits stare at me, those years with laughs  
then ourselves now, old age, when faces sag.

We have risked farewells before, interludes,  
rehearsals for that final departure  
when I, or you, will introduce the prelude,  
the other present in the past's rapture,  
to the final act. And then, that too will lapse,  
present, past, future, fade away, collapse.

But perhaps that isn't so bleak, rather a truth that can be/needs to be confronted,  
made easier to address in the context of this extended exploration of separation.

Although there are passing references to the darker facets of life in twenty-first century Trinidad, this a joyful and celebratory collection. Scott is at home in the vocabularies and rhythms of the island: they seep into the seemingly formal English in which these poems are written. The conceit of seeing *with* Cazabon, as it were, allows Scott to play with the local/stranger issues unselfconsciously and to engage with the island as he uncovers/recovers it. It is a fine collection in its own right but will also add a dimension to a reading of *Light Falling on Bamboo*. Altogether a book to celebrate.

*Esther Phillips*

# Hanging on a Thread

***Last Reel*** by **Mervyn Morris**. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2024.  
ISBN: 978-976-8339-06-5. 45 pp. paperback.

In his most recent poetry collection, *Last Reel*, Mervyn Morris dedicates his “Movie Poem” to Jimmy Cliff. This suggests that the poet has borrowed the title from the acclaimed 1972 Jamaican movie, *The Harder They Come*, in which Cliff plays the lead role.

The reader familiar with Morris’ work knows that he is inclined to select his titles very deliberately in order to flesh out meaning. The title of this collection, therefore, peaks one’s curiosity. What is it, for the poet, that is being unwound or unravelled? What “threads” have been spun in order to create some kind of pattern or design? What is the final picture, and who are the characters (including villains or heroes), that emerge? Ultimately, why are we told that there are no more reels to follow?

It is evident that a major reel on which several of Morris’ poems turn is that of memory—the poet presenting us with one character or scenario after the other. This he often does in what one feels to be a mood of quiet or sombre reflection. Time is a persistent thread in these recollections, and one notes how the distance time affords allows for the poet’s shifts in perspective.

Two such poems come easily to mind: “Second Master” (4) and “Moving Up” (31). Binks, in “Second Master”, is a figure of fun for the small boys for whom the teacher’s physical characteristics are paramount:

we sprinkled powder on our heads,  
stuffed pillows in our waistlines  
and, scratching our behinds  
said gruffly, *Clean the board*.

In later years, with time and distance, the adult persona is able to recognise and appreciate the qualities of this “unassuming paragon” that, as a small boy, he could not.

“Moving Up” is another example of memory and perspective. The persona remembers very vividly the hurt and confusion he felt at the rejection of his lover. Now, years later, he is “long past grieving” and is able to say, half-humorously, “Thanks

again for everything/especially for leaving”.

Morris’ collection touches on the religious as well. Through one of his characters in the novel *Of Age and Innocence*, George Lamming advances the Hegelian view that the prayers of the aged are the prayers of their childhood. This comes to mind on reading Morris’ poems “Harvest Hymn” (28) and “At the Altar” (29). The poet’s use of the iambic meter with its consistent rhyme scheme is reminiscent of the verses many of us recited innocently and with simple faith in Sunday School.

One may judge whether this faith is undermined to any real degree by the skepticism evident in “Churchical” (30) and the subtle ambiguities of “Two Hundred Years” (27).

Morris, though, is not always reflecting on the past. He is on occasion very much engaged with the goings-on around him. It is here that his tone becomes critical and even caustic. He has, for example, a sharp rebuke for his Jamaican people abroad who thrive on bad news, passing it along “like a virulent social disease” (16). Additionally, he thinks it worth his while to engage with the conversations of fellow Jamaicans, albeit by radio or television. He is passionate in his advice to the talk-show host: “Keep on irritating / every samfie, every clown... Do not let the bastards grind you down” (17).

Similarly, Morris’ satirical intent is clear in “Yes, Minister” (–) by his adopting the title of the British comedy. It is no less so when he questions the wisdom of the politician whose pompassetting has only made a sexually suggestive situation worse.

A particularly significant aspect of Morris’ poetic style is his proclivity for presenting the reader with a dilemma in lines that are compact and sometimes enigmatic. Arguably, this style works effectively to reveal the poet’s feelings, not only about the brevity and fragility of life, but also its complexity and unpredictability.

One such example is “At Every Border” (26) that consists of only two short stanzas. Yet much is conveyed. The persona remains unidentified (Everyman?), and perhaps it is for this reason that we easily empathise:

He burrowed in the dark, a blind  
adventurer. He surfaced. Wall behind.  
Before him stood another, higher.

It is clear that the wall is a metaphor for hindrances and obstacles. Moreover, Morris’ uncharacteristically prolific use of punctuation reinforces the idea of the sudden and unexpected obstructions being confronted without respite.

The death of the young speaks to the brevity of life, and may seem as arbitrary as it is unexpected. In “A Drowning” (2), Morris manages the tensions beautifully through his use of contrasting images: “lively boys” and their “noisy talk” as opposed

to adult minds that are “shivering, worried, weak”. In addition, a school’s stability is undermined by the extended sea metaphor he employs throughout the poem. The “splash”, “bubble”, “swells”, and “waves” are sinister reminders of the sea’s present reality and its power to disrupt and destroy. The finality of the words “Marriott is drowned” is potent in its conveyance of grief. Marriot is still just a young boy.

From free verse to haiku to iambic metre, the reader cannot help but be aware that loss is a recurring thread in *Last Reel*. How, after all, does one measure the gains of insight and wisdom against the loss of innocence, youth, relationships, love, hope, even the loss of life itself?

It is not surprising that Morris’ mind should be occupied by the question of mortality; the final loss, as the title of the book suggests. One also notes the season of life in which he now writes. While in the collection some young lives are cut short, one senses the poet’s greater affinity with the older characters who have lost life-long partners, as in “Funeral”, “Widow Poem”, and “His Widow Thinks”. Morris’ “End Notes” is conclusive.

It is with this awareness that we turn to the last lines of “Movie Poem”:

Hero cyan dead  
till de last reel (33)

Is the poet pointing us to his future passing? While we cannot pinpoint the day or hour, as implied in the question “but how we know / is when?” (33), what we do know is that an end is inevitable. The last reel *will* run out. What is Morris’ stance, given this reality?

One may surmise from “Dodging Potholes” (45) that there is something of the hero in the poet’s refusal to focus on the holes in the ground (with the possible implications), and the fact that he has managed so far to dodge these potential dangers. Ultimately, however, Morris draws on his faith, choosing rather to look inward and upward:

I turn inside.  
*The flag is at half-mast,*  
*but not for me.*  
I will lift up my eyes to the hills.

**A Memoir from the Archives:**

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*Jacqueline Mittelholzer*

# MY HUSBAND— EDGAR MITTELHOLZER

I met Edgar on a coach—on the way to the Writers' Summer School in Derbyshire (the school is an annual event). He said: "Is this seat taken?" and I said: "No." Our first conversation included graveyards and old churches; reincarnation, in which we both believed; and writing, in which I too was interested. He told me how he liked to make some characters in his novels "a little nutty", for he felt that this would excuse any extraordinary views they expressed, or any extraordinary incidents he invented. In one of his books, "The Weather in Middenshot," there is an old man who believes—or pretends to believe—that his very living and present wife is dead; whenever he needs to communicate with her, he stages a spiritualistic seance.

I remember being impressed by the way Edgar (who, in 1959, when we met, had fourteen published novels and one non-fiction work, "With a Carib Eye", to his credit) behaved at the school with all the modesty of a beginner—or with the modesty a beginner *should* have.

Born in British Guiana, he was living in London—Maida Vale—when I met him. He had been previously married, and had four children, but was divorced. His first wife was a Trinidadian Naval Reserve, he lived for six years in Trinidad. Then, when he first came to England, he worked with the British Council, until he began to try to live entirely by his writing.

Another job he once had was as a meteorologist. He was fascinated by weather, and at home we had—I still have—a number of charts, thermometers, barometers and hygrometers.

He had always had a chequered career with his writing. Perhaps not more than have a number of people, for surely it is a chancy career for anyone, but he felt that he was fated to be unlucky. His first novel to be accepted, "Corentyne Thunder", was published (in 1941) only after a lot of ups and downs, and there was a nine-year interval before the appearance of his next novel—the much better known "A Morning at the Office". Yet at

the time when I met him he was publishing two novels a year; he could write very fast, straight off the typewriter, seldom making a rough draft before the fair copy.

In spite or because of a very religious family background, Edgar found no consolation in orthodox religion.

Of recent years, he had written two books very important to him, as if they must be written before too late. “A Swarthy Boy” (autobiographical) and “The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham”. The latter contains much of his thoughts and feelings—from his political opinions, sociological ideas, to his belief in Yoga and the occult.

He had composed several versions of this novel before the published one.

For the five years of our marriage we were living in a rented cottage in the grounds of a larger house. We used to collect wildflowers. We didn’t have a garden of our own, although in the time of our first landlady we were allowed to use part of the garden. My husband planted some of the flowers in a pot just outside the cottage.

Edgar used to make dandelion wine and blackberry wine.

He loved the countryside. We went for country walks (rather circumspect ones by my standards because he didn’t like mud and, in any case, from where we lived it was difficult to get farther into the wilds than fields and lanes). He painted watercolours mostly of trees—and we had several of his paintings in the cottage, of views we could see from the window or nearby. And in one of his lighter novels, “Of Trees and the Sea”, his sketches of Caribbean trees are the most delightful part. He had a deep feeling for beauty, as shows too in the descriptive passages in his novels. His love of this kind of thing was part of the softer side of him.

His death was, in a sense, violent. He has been described as having this streak of violence which found its outlet in demanding that violence be used against violent criminals. This may be true. In writing and speaking, he expressed his views strongly, even violently. Certainly the conflicts between softness and hardness [were] even stronger in him than in most people. Edgar stressed so much the theme of strength versus weakness (i.e., the need to fight strength with strength; not with “weakness”, into which category he would put, for instance, non-violence), and it may be significant that he himself has been described both as “strong” and “weak” according to the viewpoints of the people who have spoken to me.

But, to return to the views he held on crime, there is an obvious logic in these quite apart from anything else which may have been going on inside him. He was far from advocating violence for violence’s sake. The aspect he stressed was that the law should see, unsentimentally, certain (homicidal or potentially so) criminals as incorrigible, and put them to death for the sake of protecting society (he recommended cyanide as more merciful than hanging). He was in favour of sterner punishments altogether, seeing



them as deterrents. He realised that the majority of ordinary people were on his side; but he knew that the fashionable intellectuals were against him, and guessed that this was why he had difficulty in finding publishers for some of his latest books. Notably “The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham” and “The Piling of Clouds”.

A passage from “The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham”:

“Every day we read in our newspapers of some ruthless thug or band of thugs attacking decent people, injuring, murdering, robbing. Well, surely, we have to look at the matter realistically. If we simply take these men and put them in prison for a few years and then release them, isn’t it obvious that they are going to return over and over again? What really effective means of curbing them

have we got save extermination? ... Prison doesn’t cure them ... And they keep escaping.”

Psychiatrists and their attempts to cure homicidal lunatics? N.B.G., according to Edgar.

I have chosen that “Mrs. Chatham” passage for the way it puts across the logic of his views, rather than for vehemence of expression. There are other, more vehement passages; Edgar’s readers will know what I mean. Not only may he have found, in expressing these views, an outlet for the conflict in himself; but he may quite simply have hated the violence in others (criminals) all the more because of his own conflict. Many people, by the way, have been struck by the gentle aspect of his nature—an aspect very apparent to me.

As a husband, he was gentle and protective. Domestic. He used to be a familiar sight in Farnham where we lived, a tall, thin figure, striding rapidly, doing the shopping with his holdall. In the early days, of our marriage particularly, I—being much younger, and less strong-willed, than he was, and not very confident or practical—used to be afraid that I would never have a chance to learn to do things for myself. I have explained that he was gentle, but he also liked to have his own way, and was extremely argumentative. The other person always had to be the one to know where to stop in an argument (being fairly argumentative myself, I had some difficulty in learning this). Yet he could evoke great affection and sympathy. He could make me enter into his world—his own peculiar way of seeing things.

He was also a marvellous lover.

What I call “his world” was individual—unique—like Edgar himself—giving rise to the very individual style of writing, as in the unusual similes.

“She had a wide face and hair the colour of dead bracken, yet alive with wispy waves and unexpected lights like spiritfuzz or lint in a sunbeam.”

“She had full breasts and they bounced vibrantly beneath her pullover like young pumpkins electrified by elfin lightning.”

Those are two descriptions of the same character in “The Wounded and the Worried”.

Did Edgar have a sense of humour? A friend of ours wrote about him:

“An ascetic who likes his electric blanket—he is genuinely different, really modest, and the only person I’ve ever liked who entirely lacked a sense of humour.”

“Entirely lacked” is not really true. But he did have a knack of being on a different wavelength from anyone else in company so that he would miss the humour of something. I remember, once while we were having dinner with another friend, he told her in a shocked way about how he had found out that I didn’t know what black pudding was. Our friend teased him: “But, *Edgar*, do you mean to say you married Jackie although she didn’t know what black pudding is?” (her italics; she talks in italics). Edgar replied, still quite seriously, merely stating a fact: “I didn’t realise then that she didn’t know,” and couldn’t understand what we were laughing at.

In fact, it would have taken much more than black pudding to keep Edgar and me from marrying (to him, by the way, I was never “Jackie”. Always “Jac” or “Jacqueline”. More feminine, he said.)

Many of my memories of how his sense of humor did function concern intimate things, jokes between the two of us.

Over these things he was a lively and delightful companion. At school apparently he was noted as a humourist, but one gathers that was schoolboy buffoonery. He would repeat over and over something which had gone down well the first time, and on one occasion the master had to tell him: “Mittelbolzer, the point of that joke has deteriorated.”

I don’t think Edgar saw much humour in the ordinary annoying things which go wrong in life, and which can make one laugh afterwards (which is a lot of what is meant by a sense of humour, of course). Even as I write this, it occurs to me more strongly than before that this may have been one of his great misfortunes.

The cottage we lived in had trees—beeches and elms—around it in the grounds of a bigger house. It was quiet. Was it too quiet? But Edgar loved his routine. He got up before I did and prepared the breakfast; shopped and went to the library in the mornings; wrote in the afternoons; read or listened to the radio in the evenings. He also liked to have a brief afternoon rest. In the evening we sometimes listened to records. Wagner perhaps. Sometimes we went to the theatre, usually the Farnham repertory. Our visitors were close friends. And relatives—Edgar’s brothers and sister-in-law, my mother and aunts.

People didn't serve a[s] distractions to Edgar's worries as I—though far from madly social myself—hoped they might have done. I am not thinking so much of the times when he avoided going to see people as of how—even when he was with them, and even when they were the sort of people with whom he could discuss literature, ideas, etcetera—one could see they were not serving as distractions (this in the period when he was particularly worried). Perhaps this was natural. It is not my purpose here to discuss these “worries”—except to say that he had a strong sense of responsibility which did not go easily with an artistic temperament. Another of the contrasts. Part of the contrast between the poetic streak and the love of discipline and order.

It wouldn't be true to say that he disliked people. He liked women particularly. He told me how, when he started work with the British Council, he was delighted to be working in a roomful of women—to the surprise of the very English man who offered him the post!

My husband had a way of not listening to someone with whom he strongly disagreed. He really was not interested. He felt, temporarily, that such a person was beneath contempt. This could give an impression (unusual in a novelist?) of Edgar not liking or being interested in people. And yet when people were in trouble, as when some friends of ours suffered a serious misfortune (or when he heard of people starving; this seemed to make a great impression on him), nobody could be more sympathetic than my husband; nobody could more sincerely and unselfconsciously feel for them. He was considerate in the presents he gave. An umbrella was obtained promptly for my mother when he noticed hers was broken. And he sent money presents, whenever he could afford it, for his parents, sister and aunt in British Guiana.

Edgar had a catalyst effect on people. Once he cured a woman who had a neurotic fear of going out alone. He cured her simply by arguing with her. By the extreme honesty he had about things, his integrity to something *at least as how he saw it*, he could make people see themselves without his necessarily having understood them. He did not dig deep into *motives*, but could frequently hit the nail on the head about the *facts*. Or even if he got the facts wrong, he could still do something.... Often when he criticised my work for me, I felt he didn't understand what I was trying to say—even when other people could understand it! Yet, if ever I make a success of my writing (and I came to realise that he himself thought I might), I shall probably feel that Edgar helped me a great deal.

He was keenly observant, as a novelist, or any kind of artist, needs to be, and he has taught me something that way, too.

Edgar thought that one became part of the “rot” (which he felt had set in on British society) if one kept animals as pets. Yet more than once he brought home a bird for me to feed and look after—a sparrow or a chaffinch which had been knocked down by a car.

And he took great interest in feeding the birds which came on to our windowsill.

He himself, in talking to me, and in “A Swarthy Boy”, spoke of the conflict in him between “the warrior” and “the idyll”. My insistence on the conflicting “soft” and “hard” streaks reminds me of the well-known “Kaywana” trilogy of novels in which the old plantation family, whose history Edgar traces, have a dominant “strong” streak battling all the time with the undercurrent of a “weak” streak. I call this trilogy Edgars great “strength versus weakness” epic.

He had been experimenting recently with a style of writing in which he eschewed “stream of consciousness” and, in fact, what the characters were thinking was not mentioned directly at all. “She seemed to be thinking” would be used instead of “she thought”. The effect was supposed to be of the story unfolding objectively, as it would be seen through the eyes of a perceptive observer. I think this worked. Most of the characters’ reactions had to be seen through the dialogue, as in a play. My husband had, without finding a market for them, written a number of plays, and at one time belonged to a play-writing circle.

Edgar’s hero—perhaps his greatest hero—was Wagner. I like Wagner’s music tremendously myself now, but—not having noticed it much before I met Edgar—I shall perhaps never know how much my liking for it is straightforward and how much connected with my memories of my husband. Though I do know what I like about it. It is the range from power to tenderness—and also the descriptive power of the music, as in the leitmotifs. What I am trying to lead up to is another kind of experimental writing which Edgar did in the last few years. It was to make use of the Wagnerian leitmotiv system in writing. You really need to read the books to understand it. “Latticed Echoes” and “Thunder Returning”. Especially “Thunder Returning” as this contains an explanatory foreword! The two books are novels—with readable stories easy to follow because of the dialogue; the leitmotiv technique is all contained in the descriptive passages.

Edgar loved England. Yet, once settled here in England, I believe he felt he might have been still more at home in Germany. As with many people who have German blood, the German fought with all the other blood, trying to come out stronger. From the German in him came the great admiration he had for discipline in any form. Perhaps the romantic streak, too. It is his contrasts which make him so interesting.

He never liked to have the label put on him of “West Indian novelist”. And all his more recent novels have been set in England though the early ones were, naturally, of the Caribbean; he always liked to write about a setting with which he was familiar. As it happens, one of his favourite among his novels was a Caribbean one—“Shadows Move Among Them”.

We spent our honeymoon—beautiful, romantic, not very disciplined—on the Rhine (German part of the Rhine). Oberwesel; Boppard, where bells were ringing nearly all the time.... We picked a sprig of privet in Boppard. We brought it home, and Edgar planted it just outside the cottage where we lived, and it flourished. I don't live there anymore, but I still have a cutting.

Other contrasts in our life together were the actual contrasts between Edgar and me. The difference in our ages and extent of experience. And Edgar pouring scorn on “idealists” or any “progressive” movements. Me interested in the C.N.D. and similar movements, and having marched from Aldermaston (even a few days before our wedding) and done other hopeful things. Me hating everything I hear about apartheid; Edgar always putting the case for the whites in South Africa. Edgar voting Conservative for want of something better. Me voting Labour for the same reason. And I am very fond of animals, while Edgar preferred them at a distance. But we liked many of the same kinds of books, almost all the same kinds of music. Edgar introduced me to some. And we were both very interested in the occult; read books about Yoga, astral projection, reincarnation—and a sprinkling of ghost stories among our fiction reading. We both liked, too, Omar Khayyam and T. S. Eliot.

Sometimes scolded by Edgar for not being sufficiently orderly, I found it rather steadying to live with someone who liked a strict routine. Of course, the routine changed a bit after the birth of our son—whom we called “Leodegar”, a family name of some kinsmen Edgar discovered, the Mittelholzers who had lived for centuries in Appensell, Switzerland.

When Edgar first saw Leodegar (who[se] very dark eyes, in particular, are unmistakably Edgar), he pretended to be appalled at how much the child resembled him. “He scowled at me, man!” The baby had its thumb in its mouth; Edgar took it out; the baby put it back. Foretaste of battle of wills in the future? He was very fond of Leodegar. Called him “Boy”; used to give him his bath; feed him if I went out; teach him German phrases. But “the future” only went on for a little more than two years after the baby's birth.

*Kim Robinson-Walcott*

# Grandma's House

(An Excerpt from a Collection of Memoir Pieces in Progress)

Grandma's house was on Central Avenue, a few gates up from the intersection with Constant Spring Road, and a mile or so north of Half Way Tree, the geographical centre of the sprawling city of Kingston, where my little brother and I went to prep school. My mother used to take us there after school on some weekdays. She would buy a tin of Vienna sausages, some soft white rolls and butter from the supermarket across the road, and we would sit on the broad cool wraparound verandah of Grandma's house, eating our meal washed down with sour orange lemonade or cold Milo sweetened with condensed milk served in purple or blue or green aluminum tumblers, while Grandma busied herself inside the dark house sewing or cooking or directing the ancient maid, skinny and hunched over and shrivelled up and miserable, Grandma towering over her portly and tall, though she was probably just as ancient, and while my grandfather, small and diminutive, sat far away in the shadows on the side section of the verandah, in his rocking chair reading quietly.

Grandma scared me, while my grandfather was a nonentity. My grandfather, whom my father called Dada, never said anything to us, he just sat there reading or looking dreamily at the garden. Grandma, on the other hand, always greeted me sharply with "Cat got your tongue?" because I was shy and mumbled hello hiding behind my mother's skirt. She was always sharp and hard and no-nonsense. As I grew older I figured it must have been because she had to raise seven sons (and a daughter, but I figured the daughter didn't really count, at least in terms of giving worries); controlling them and disciplining them while my grandfather was at his drugstore downtown during the days before he retired, concocting liquid potions which he sold in bottles with cork stoppers, like a frothy pink emulsion for stomach disorders, and ointments which he put in cardboard tubs with handwritten labels, like the naseberry-green one for liver spots that he named "Skin-O". And raise them she did, in her sharp no-nonsense way, steering each and every one of them on career courses that led to success and distinction in this small island of ours—the first a barrister who became attorney general, the second an army man who became brigadier, the third a prominent dentist, the fourth a prominent administrator, the fifth a prominent architect, the sixth another prominent army man, the seventh a prominent lawyer. (The sole daughter also achieved distinction as a preservationist, but I suspect that, given the times, less

energy would have been put into directing her career path.) Maybe Grandma chose the bar for her first son because he loved elocution and the stage. I heard she selected architecture for son number five because he was good at art. I got the impression from my mother that my grandmother was the one who had done all the steering, which was easy to believe, because my grandfather was always just sitting quietly in the background, reading his newspapers, reading his books, sitting by himself on the side verandah.

Grandma's garden that we looked out on from our verandah perch had the lushest, greenest crab grass I have ever seen, lush and green even in the dry summers, on the front lawn fringed by the thick myrtle hedge that all Jamaican gardens seemed to have in those days, and in her backyard, the best fruit trees ever. She had coolie plum and hog-plum and red-coat plum and yellow-coat plum, and the yellow-coat plums were huge and juicy; she had Otaheite apple and she had star-apple, she had sweet-sop, and she had soursop which she used for soursop drink with condensed milk and nutmeg and wonderful soursop ice cream made in a wooden tub sitting in dry ice with a handle that had to be turned and turned; and she had East Indian mango and Julie-mango and the best Bombay mangoes, firm and deep yellow-orange and fragrant, that I have ever tasted. When the fruit were in season they were too plentiful for her or her ancient maid, or her children or her scores of grandchildren, to handle, and they rotted on the ground, filling the air with a thick sickly-sweet smell and encouraging flies and bees. A gutter ran beside the house carrying blue-grey waste water from the kitchen into the garden, and that arrangement of my grandmother's, my mother told me, was what made Grandma's garden so lush and so bountiful.

Inside Grandma's house was dark and cool. The bedrooms had huge mahogany four-poster beds with enamel chimnies under them, and enamel jugs and basins on side tables for hand and face washing, and intricately carved mahogany bureaus with multiple drawers, and a mahogany wardrobe which my father later told me held a secret compartment. In one room was the sewing machine that Grandma had used, my mother told me, to sew and darn and alter clothes for her eight children, taking in the waist or taking up the hem or patching a tear so that clothes could be passed on from son Number One to son Number Two to son Number Three and all the way to son Number Seven or as far along as they could go before they disintegrated. The bathroom had a huge deep white bath with legs, and black and white tiles on the floor, and Pears soap in the soap dish. I would timidly venture down the passageway to look at these wonders, hoping not to encounter my intimidating grandmother on the way.

I think my mother may have been scared of Grandma, too. Maybe that was why when we visited on those afternoons after school we sat out on the verandah, just like my grandfather did. As I got older I gathered that my mother thought that Grandma did

not approve of her as a daughter-in-law, because she had a job as a teacher rather than staying home and keeping our house spic and span and making mango jam or baking shepherd's pie like two of her other daughters-in-law did, or making homemade ice cream like she did. I think my mother suspected that Grandma blamed my mother for my father's wandering eye.

It wasn't just my father who had a wandering eye, though. Even as a child I understood that some of my uncles also had wandering eyes; and one uncle's wandering eye had led to a scandalous denouement and unpleasant divorce that took my favourite aunt, a no-nonsense woman like Grandma but with a soft smile for her niece and a soft lap for me to sit on, out of my life, and out of all of our lives. Come to think of it, she was a woman with a profession, too. But Grandma loved her, and according to my mother she was heartbroken when my aunt left the family.

My grandfather died before Grandma. Eventually, Grandma had to sell the house. She took her mahogany four-poster bed and two mahogany bureaux and mahogany wardrobe to the newly built home of son Number Seven designed by son Number Five, where a bedroom had been assigned to her. I was older then, and less afraid of her. She no longer seemed a martinet, more a spirited woman with a keen sense of humour. We exchanged letters while I was away at university, and I visited her when I was home in the holidays. When she was moved in to a residence for the elderly, her unhappiness distressed me. I imagined her missing her mahogany four-poster bed, and remembering her mango trees and that lush green grass in the front garden of her Central Avenue house. That house had long been demolished, to make way for a dreary shopping plaza, but her furniture and belongings with their attached memories were now in her new home, her son's home. She wants to go back home, I said to my father. They can't manage her, he said. Well, how about your house? She wouldn't be able to manage the two sets of stairs, he said. Well, how about one of her other children? There were good reasons why it could not work for any of them.

Years later, after Grandma had died, I said to my father how difficult it must have been for Grandma to raise him and his six brothers and his one sister, to exert all that discipline, and what an achievement to have seen such success with all her children. Well, yes, he said after a while. He supposed so. It was Grandma's achievement more than your father's, wasn't it? I asked. He seemed surprised. I always got the impression that it was Grandma who was the forceful one, the one who raised you all and ran the house and organised that lush beautiful garden, I said. I never got the impression that your father was very involved in the household, I said.

My father was terse in his response. It was Dada's garden, not my mother's, he said. He planted all the fruit trees. He was the one who organised that ingenious way of irrigating the garden with the waste water so that the garden was always watered,



even in the long summer droughts. It was Dada's money that built and ran the house, remember, he said. He worked long hours in his drugstore to feed his eight children.

He was silent for a while, then he added: Dada was a poet, you know. He was a poet and a songwriter.

I was visiting my father at his home at the time, and he got up and went into his study. A few minutes later he returned with a yellowed music sheet. This was one of his songs, he said. He sold a few songs to American music publishing houses, he told me.

My father was obviously proud of his father.

Music was his love, he said. That was what he had wanted to do with his life. He taught us all to play the piano, he added. Dada would always sit at the piano after a long day at work and play his ballads and jazz to unwind, he said. Like father, like son, I realised: my own father had done that very same thing throughout my childhood, fixing himself a gin and tonic then sitting at the piano and playing his favourite jazz pieces every night when he came home, trying to relax after a hard day of building an architectural practice that may never have been where his heart lay.

I thought of my grandfather sitting on the side verandah, looking out at his lush irrigated garden, staring at his fallen dreams, while inside Grandma disciplined her eight children, forced them to get professions, bullied the maid, ran the house.

"My husband was a good man," Grandma had once said to me. At the time I had stared at her blankly, murmured politely.

Now, my understanding of my grandfather's goodness lit up my memory of him sitting quietly in the background, gentle guardian of his family and his house.

## Robert Edison Sandiford

### If (An Excerpt from *The Last Self*)

We'd sit on the verandah, my Dad and I, and it wouldn't be a dream. Either here in Barbados or in white plastic chairs by the front door in LaSalle. The way our neighbours the Zelenskis do in front their garage soon as the weather's good, late spring into late fall if the earth holds enough heat. Sometimes, it'd be just Andrei, the youngest of three boys, and Mr Zelenski, almost ancient-looking from the years he smoked. We'd be a father and son, like them. Reasoning, but without any herb. Nothing like that was ever my Dad's thing, far as I know.

We'd drink something *soft*. My Dad was never a hard-liquor man or even a beer drinker. It would have to be an occasion for us to drink wine. (This what-if scenario could be an occasion.) He'd have a ginger ale, or cream soda, I'd have an apple juice. Allen brand, like we bought when I was a kid. And we would watch the fields abutting the house, if in Barbados, notice how quiet they are you could hear cats cross in the tall, dry khus-khus. We'd dissect the street I grew up on, where he taught me to ride a bike and watched Paddy and Kelvyn play hockey and Sahara take her first steps. We'd sip and smile and watch the grey green street where only the Zelenskis are left of the first families to own homes here, whose lives we used to know and be a part of.

We'd talk about what it was like when he was a boy in Barbados. About Pappa, his old man, and Granny, his mother. Separately, never quite linking the two (they never married, still a tender issue for him decades on). Though both fell from his lips with care in the stories he told about the roving Synagogue Lane cobbler and the steady, folk-speaking homebody. We'd shake the ice in our drinks. Watch the glass sweat. Nod, nod.

We'd look up at the sky. Speculate about rain. Talk kitchen garden crops, backyard apples and the raspberry surrounding the pear. We'd count the squirrels high in the trees, maples to the left and the right of the house. Wonder which corns they had earmarked as their own. Laugh at the shredded stalks the squirrels had already left for us like detonated bombs or disassembled rifles, having hopped through a minefield of coloured plastic bags, our failed scarecrow tactics.

I'd ask him about things I hadn't thought until that moment to ask him.

*Were you really the only one from Montreal, out of all your brothers and sisters, to attend Pappa's funeral?* (That's what Cynthia says.) *Why didn't you get along*

*with Uncle Wadmel? (He was your eldest brother.) What were you sick with that you were measured for a coffin as a baby? (How could your wife not know?) And then the hot ones: Was my Mom the only woman you ever, ever had? Did you regret leaving Barbados, later on? How bad was the racism in Belleville or St Catherine Street in the 1950s?*

And my Dad would listen. He may not be forthcoming with all the answers, but he'd listen. It seemed he was always listening. Even when he was giving advice. Even when he must have been impatient with us or his soul was embattled with the world, tired of it all. He was a hardworking father. He'd hear what I was saying and would say something back that made sense. That was the teacher in him. He was a quiet man. Quiet as the rainy-season field or summer street we'd be surveying. I'd ask him how to be calm. Or maybe I'd still take it all for granted. Not ask one thing. Because he would be here with me, alive and whole, and there'd be no reason to ask anything more.

*C. M. Harclyde Walcott*

## The Fit

C. M. Julius had just leisurely driven three miles of empty, quiet road and had arrived at the driveway to his home, or more accurately put, the place where he currently resided. As he turned in, he saw that he would have to stop, straighten up, reverse, and then there just might be enough space, and the way might be clear for him to drive down the fifty or so yards that led to his front door. This was not the first time that he was required to perform this manoeuvre and, much to his regret, from all indications it probably would indeed not be his last.

The practice had long been established. All tenants had been assigned parking spaces. Mr Grey's was at the very top of the driveway, and on days when he was meticulous about how he parked, C. M. Julius did not have to worry about performing this manoeuvre. But those days were few, and again this morning his car did not quite fit, hence he found himself once again reversing onto the main road, blind. The two large high walls on either side of the narrow driveway rendered it impossible to see oncoming traffic in either direction, when driving out. And the ever so slight bend in the road did not make the task any easier. But it was three fifteen in the morning and he had not seen a single car along the way.

C. M. Julius could have spoken to Mr Grey, and maybe asked him to park just a couple feet further down, but alas he had never had the good fortune of meeting the goodly gentleman. Their goings and comings never seemed coincided.

He did, one Sunday morning, have a discreet word with his landlady about the matter, but it was a Sunday and he had not meant to cause her any more worries than she already had. So, in the end, he assured her that he could live with the inconvenience, that he only drove occasionally anyway, and that it would be okay. Then he calmly walked the fifteen or so yards to his door, and with every step he came to the realisation that it was not okay.

No. It was not okay.

C. M. Julius had been fortunate to have seen the advertisement early. It was the rent stated that attracted his attention. He had to find a place. He could no longer pay the rent for the house in which he lived. He urgently needed to find accommodation that was considerably less expensive. This was a matter about which he could not be complacent, for in a few days he would either leave voluntarily or suffer the humiliation

of being tossed out. It was with this prospect vividly looming in his immediate future that he paid the rent in cash; the landlady had said she no longer took cheques. He had accepted the keys, smiled, said thank you and moved in five days later.

He was uneasy even then.

He realised that in a small society, seemingly small things could sometimes take on monumental significance, and these significances mattered. For C. M. Julius, the number of small things was multiplying. He had been without a full-time job for some time. In fact, in three months it would be five years since he had last received a cheque as a full-time salaried employee. Since then, he had started a couple businesses of his own, he had made some money, but he had lost a lot more. His ventures, one after another, had failed. And he often thought that he had been brave, though fortune seemed to have withheld its favour. Now with a small unreliable income generated principally from part-time teaching and the odd consultancy, he found life unbearably difficult. The constraints on his ability to exercise choice were becoming greater and greater, and it was in this recognition that he experienced his deepest darkness.

During the day, the area was usually noisy. The sound of traffic was omnipresent, the roar of the engines of the big trucks and the buses could be heard as they aggressively fought for dominance on the roadway. The scream of tires, screeching from vehicles suddenly braking on the asphalt, was commonplace, followed by the brief moment of silence when one waited to hear the dull thud of an actual collision. Then the arguments would start. Then sometimes the crowd that gathered would inflict further pain on the unfortunate souls trapped in the mangled metal by separating them from their possessions. The dead were not spared and were often picked clean: wristwatches, earrings, bracelets, bangles, chains, shoes. All were taken. To rob the dead was easy, it seemed. Then the police would come, followed by the ambulance. And then if a little luck held, in a day or two the rains would come and wash the blood away.

During the night it was quieter.

And it was best when it rained. It was then that C. M. Julius felt most reassured about life and about what he liked to refer to as the “genuine goodness” of the world. He was never quite sure of exactly where to locate the centre of this feeling, what its origin was and why. These were questions he had tried to answer over time, but he was never quite content with the kind of conclusions he arrived at, so he kept searching. He thought, though, that somehow it all had to do with the essential primordial nature of wetness; the possibility of cleansing and renewal, the fact that after the rains, colours seemed somehow clearer, brighter; in fact, cleaner, really. That life had begun again.

But an even more important component of his conviction about the basic wonder of nature was the sound of the crickets and the frogs and the myriad other insects

that chorused in the dark after the rain. And if life was really good, and one was truly fortunate, there would be an electrical power failure, and the dark would be really solid, and in it would be families, multiple families of fireflies lighting up and making one entity of the land and sky. And he would say to himself, “All of this has to be good,” and that would be enough to allow him to consign the indecencies of life to something transitory.

Transitory—the home of all those bits that did not quite fit.

His apartment fitted neatly into this category. It was a flat really, a roomy, spacious place, but somehow he and this place just did not quite fit: the kitchen with its cupboards and countertops covered with reddish-brown, imitation woodgrain Formica that revealed a history of former tenants, and its deep dull red tiled floor, felt as though it was hostile to light. His refrigerator did not quite fit the space allocated to it, and remained jutting out, taking up half of the doorway. His landlady had already expressed her unease with the idea of having a carpenter come in to alter some of the cupboard space so as to allow the refrigerator to fit against the wall, so for the moment it remained a peninsula with its electrical cord languidly hanging across the space to the wall outlet. The same was true of the stove. There was a bath where he preferred a shower.

All these little things kept adding up. It was not that he lacked space; there was more than enough, even on the outside, though here again there was discomfort. The whole place had been paved with that now mossed and weathered dull grey concrete that had become the material of choice in the construction industry. There was no lawn. There was no garden, just some rusting discarded oil drums cut in half in which the representatives of botanical life seemed to struggle. He supposed that this helped to keep the energy and capital expended on maintenance low, but for him it just did not quite fit.

Each day he felt, more and more, that his being was constantly under attack. He sensed that his aesthetic self was contemplating exile. And a slow, draining weight of acquiescence seemed to be making its presence felt.

And here now, at three fifteen in the morning, he found himself having to decide what he ought to do about Mr Grey and his vehicle.

It had come to this.

C. M. Julius slowly reversed the car, straightened it up, drove down the driveway and parked in his designated spot. He went into the flat, turned on all the lights and packed. At dawn soon after the rain stopped, he left.





Arts for the 21st Century

## Submissions

*BIM*, seminal Caribbean journal now revived as *BIM: Arts for the 21st Century*, is published twice annually. *BIM* accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and other cultural expressions within the Caribbean and its diaspora. Short fiction, poetry and critical reviews of high quality are particularly welcome.

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